

Lenny - waiting for partnership

When pulling out evidence of how 'consumers' are under-appreciated, especially financially, by the system, (the term "yearly wage" \$3000 on my grant approval, Bill & June's poverty maintenance wages for the challenging work of running ACE, the aggravation of participating in the "Dignity" process etc.) my 16 year-old son commented, "Remember the plight of Lenny Bruce." He was referring to the Dustin Hoffman film where Lenny ended up obsessing inappropriately on stage about his court battles with the system. He lost. The frustration embittered him - sank him - killed him, in spite of his abilities and passion.

I acknowledged Dan's perceptiveness, recognizing the analogy between my rant and a movie we watched probably two years ago - and then started thinking of some ways that my situation is fortunately different from "Lenny's"

I'm lucky enough to have some financial stability. I have generous parents and a supportive wife who works half time and has benefits. I have a day job that makes me a modest living (precarious as gardening can be for someone with my disabilities). And where I interact with the mental health system I have a chance to get grounded - weekly. Because I invented my role and have had that financial freedom to make it happen, my own project, Movie Monday, gives me payback every week, independent and often in spite of the "system". It's inherently rewarding.

If I had waited around for support to help me, without my own backing, to make MM happen, I'm sure I would have been discouraged and never would have begun.

We 'consumers' don't usually have enough resources to wait out the process and to persist. We often leave discouraged and frustrated. Rather than working for a better mental health system, we'll find more rewarding ways to use our energies and abilities. We can avoid "doing a Lenny" while waiting for "partnership".

Bruce Saunders

Jan 24/96