To Tell, or Not to Tell:
Asking for Help Takes Courage!
By Megan Pilatzke

My name is Megan and I am a payment services officer with the Employment Insurance call centre in Sudbury, Ontario. I began my career with Service Canada on November 9, 2015.

When I was fifteen, I began to notice changes in my moods. I did not feel happy, but at the same time I did not know why. I often felt worthless and I felt like I did not have any life purpose. When I tried to talk about it with friends, I felt like no one understood and that I was just "weird," which furthered my feelings of worthlessness and isolation.

Following my high school graduation, I began attending university. By my second year, I was barely passing my courses and rarely attending classes. It was not until this time that I was approached by one of my professors to attend a meeting. She informed me that she was going to fail me due to my lack of attendance. I recall shaking uncontrollably and admitting the moods that I had been experiencing. She suggested that I see my doctor.

When I consulted with my family doctor, he advised me that there was nothing wrong with me and nothing that he could do for me. Thankfully, this family doctor retired and I was assigned to a new doctor. This new doctor instead took my concerns more seriously and I began taking antidepressant medication in 2010. It helped, but only for a while. Within a few months, I had to increase the medication's dose again… and again…

In 2013, I saw some even bigger changes. I began to cycle through jobs and I spent money frivolously. Some days I woke up feeling good, but my mind raced throughout the day. Everything and everyone seemed to irritate me. On other days, I woke up and was unable to get out of bed. I experienced worsening symptoms of depression compared to before I started taking medication. When I told my doctor, he dismissed this as being "my normal."

When I began my career with Service Canada, this was my situation. The sick days started adding up. I worried daily that I would be let go due to a lack of attendance or due to performance issues. I decided to be honest with management and to tell them what was going on. This was difficult for me as I had done this once in the past with a previous employer - who suddenly found a reason to let me go.

I was surprised by our management's reaction and attitude towards mental health and towards what I was experiencing. Regardless of the fact that I had only been employed from November 2015 until May 2016, management encouraged me to take sick leave in order to address my health concerns. As a result, I went on leave effective May 4, 2016.

I attempted to seek help from various sources, but my recovery was going nowhere. In June of 2016, on my last glimmer of hope, I went to a different walk-in clinic with telemedicine access. The doctor referred me for a full medical evaluation in addition to two referrals. The same month, I finally saw a psychiatrist for the first time in my life. He listened to my entire story before concluding that my condition was not just depression, as my doctor insisted, and it was not normal - I suffered from bipolar disorder (type II) and the medication I was taking was actually making me more susceptible to mood swings. I was immediately put on new medication.

Within two weeks of starting the new medication, I was a new person. I returned to work on July 11, 2016, on a reduced schedule and returned to full-time hours August 2, 2016.

The moral here is to please not be afraid to reach out to management. Please do not give up in seeking help either — however hopeless it may appear. I hope that by sharing my story, I can help to bring even more positive change to our department and to anyone reading this.