



Enjoying today, looking forward to tomorrow

Johnny-Angel Eneliko Laulu, mobile support worker

Johnny-Angel knows what it's like to deal with the curve balls that life can throw. With personal experience of mental illness, Johnny's an excellent role model to the many people who use Pathways' services and in fact, the community. He's a man that has faced adversity, but with support, friends and family...and a love of art and drama, he's come through it flourishing!

Born in New Zealand and from a family of seven, Johnny describes himself as New Zealand/Samoan/Chinese. He was raised in Grey Lynn, Auckland and throughout his teenage years he was involved in many extra-curricular activities. From church choirs and musical dramas through to youth outreach programmes and outdoor sports, Johnny was significantly a part of his community.

In his third year of study at teacher's training college, Johnny became mentally ill and retreated from the community he'd been such a big part of. "I didn't know what was happening to me," he says. "I remember I could not sleep and it was the first time I stayed up overnight and watched the sun come up." Johnny had many more months of not sleeping. "I looked like a zombie. I didn't shower or brush my teeth. I gained weight then I lost weight. I quit teachers college. I left my church. I didn't want to see my friends or even my close family anymore."

Johnny went through some pretty hard times and started talking negatively to himself. "I blamed everything and everyone for being like this. I became suicidal...that's when my sister rang Auckland District Health Board's Crisis Team."

Under 24-hour supervision, Johnny began to feel safe again. "I was monitored and given routine, medication and support in my sleeping patterns," he says. Johnny was diagnosed as having manic depression or bipolar affective disorder. A time he describes as the "most horrific time of my life".

It was the support of Johnny's family and friends that made a big difference to his recovery. "While in hospital my sisters and brothers came and talked to me about how much they loved and missed me – the old happy, singing Johnny," he says. Johnny's elder sister gave him a place to live, cooked his meals and took him to his clinical appointments. "The psychiatrist and occupational therapists were helpful," says Johnny, "I was able to love my life again and appreciate who I was."

In fact, it was the significance of this support Johnny received during his wellness journey that sparked one of his highlights of 2010. Johnny has been a large part of the *Like Minds, Like Mine*

Pathways People
Johnny-Angel Eneliko Laulu

antidiscrimination television campaign. "The focus is on the importance of family and friends to be there and stay involved," says Johnny. It's something he knows only too well.

During this time of being unwell Johnny was also supported by Pathways' peer support programme where he was introduced to Workwise Employment Agency. "I told him [Workwise employment consultant] I was an artist/actor/singer," says Johnny. "He didn't put me down, tell me to be realistic or that acting wasn't a real job. I had the courage to tell him I had bi-polar...he encouraged me and told me I had done a lot in life and had good skills."

With the support of his family and both Pathways and Workwise Johnny went on to create a comic book - *The Adventures of Afi the First Samoan Superhero*, as a way of creating a role model for young children and encouraging them to make good decisions. He was also selected to perform in the TV2 *Stars in their Eyes* singing competition, he's been involved in animation of the *Bro Town* television series, and he's had acting roles on *Shortland Street*, *Sione's Wedding* and *Underworld 3!*

Soon he was working with a Workwise employment consultant to find employment.

In 2005 Johnny trained and graduated as a Pathways peer support specialist and in 2008 he was offered his now full-time role as a mobile support worker. "I was unemployed for 13 years. I used to say I was happy, but I never knew the happiness employment gives...poverty happiness I know, employment happiness I live," says Johnny.

Now Johnny is supporting others through their journeys – and art, singing and acting continues to play a big part. Johnny has been key in forming a Pathways band called the Open Music Group and has supported many people to achieve their dreams including recording albums or doing training "Listening and creating music with people who have a gift in music is something I love doing. It's so rewarding seeing a person share their dream," he says.

Knowing he's been in the shoes of the people he's supporting makes a real difference too. "The highs are seeing the persons face after I have supported them, and the smile and handshake when they say thank you for being with me today," says Johnny. "Because I have helped myself, it's great to give back and support another person in the community."

Johnny has been through a lot, and he's supported others through a lot too. He doesn't do things in halves and makes the most of every day. "I'm glad to be alive. I live life to the fullest and enjoy my family and friends," he says. "I've heard a saying that tomorrow never comes, but I have learnt that tomorrow does come. I enjoy today and look forward to what tomorrow will bring."