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He's helping others to get some help

■ Eastlake resident aiding youth with mental illness

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For much of his life, Eastlake resident Matthew Mikolic felt like giving up.

Suffering from bipolar disorder, depression, attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Mikolic found that just getting through each day was a struggle.

Today, however, the 18-year-old sees his illness as a gift.

As a recent appointee to the state of Ohio's Mental Health Transformation Working Group, Mikolic will be helping other youths suffering from mental illness.

The cabinet-level group is working to evaluate and improve the state's approach to mental health care.

The group was formed by Gov. Bob Taft after Ohio received a \$12 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Mikolic is serving as the group's youth representative.

"My role is to give my opinion as a consumer and a youth," Mikolic said. "I am one of the people that are able to say I have an illness and not look at it as an issue, but as a gift to help others. I would like to take all my experiences and learn from them and teach others what I have learned."

Part of what Mikolic hopes to show others is that there are

alternative ways to cope with mental illness.

Mikolic said he has benefited from traditional treatments, such as electric shock therapy.

But he also has benefited greatly from a change in lifestyle.

Mikolic's mother, Susan, said Holistic Practitioner Keith Jordan of the Optimal Wellness Center in Lakewood has helped her son tremendously.

"The whole family changed its belief system," Susan said. "We stopped investing our energy in being upset about things, so our bodies have that energy to maintain wellness. It took a couple of years, but we had a whole shift in our thinking."

Susan said Jordan put Matthew on a better diet from which she, her husband, Donald, and the couple's other son, 17-year-old Brian, have also benefited.

"Now we eat whole foods," Susan said. "We try to stay away from processed foods because it gunks up the body. We also try to add in sunshine, fresh air and sleep."

Although Matthew, who graduated this year from North High School in Eastlake, does not criticize traditional medications and therapies, he found the holistic approach worked for him.

Prior to being treated by Jordan, Matthew was missing about 60 days of school a year.

"I would go from high energy to major depression," he said. "I wasn't mentally or physically able to go to school. I didn't see myself ever graduating high school or even getting through a whole year in school. Now I'm more well than I ever thought I would be."



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Matthew Mikolic, 18, of Eastlake, was recently appointed as the youth representative to the state Mental Health Transformation Working Group.

Matthew also credits his parents with helping him progress.

Susan has become an advocate for emotionally disturbed children, working with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Department of Education, among others.

She is founder and president of Stepping Stones, which offers juvenile mental health consulting and seminars.

In addition to his work with the Mental Health Working Transformation Group, Matthew hopes to reach out to those dealing with mental health issues

with his two new DVDs.

The DVDs, to be released soon, are titled "A Journey Through Mental Illness – an Open Dialogue" and "My Gift to Others – What I've Learned from Mental Illness."

Whatever treatment people seek for mental illness, the overall message Matthew wants to get across is to keep up hope. "Don't give up," he said. "It always gets better."

To learn more about Stepping Stones or to order Matthew's DVDs, visit www.steppingstone-mentalhealth.com or call (216) 513-6098.