

Mike's Story: Cost Sharing Addiction Recovery Program & Back to Work Supports

BC Hydro 

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- Mike Ferguson

BC Hydro is the largest provincial Crown Corporation in BC and generates and provides clean, reliable and affordable electricity safely to 95% of the population, or 4 million people. As a Crown corporation owned by the people of British Columbia, they want their workforce to reflect the diversity of their province. To achieve this, BC Hydro supports employees who are experiencing physical or mental challenges. One example of this is through their Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Program.

Mike Ferguson has worked for BC Hydro for 28 years, most recently as a Manager, Apprentice Power Line Technicians Program. He oversees the education and evaluation processes for the power line technicians, both in the classroom and in the field. There are currently 110 Apprentices in the program. Mike has a Power line technician Red Seal Trade Certificate, a BC Provincial Instructor Diploma from Vancouver Community College and is currently working towards his Masters in Education in Adult Education. He is currently over 11 years sober.

Mike describes getting up on the morning of January 4, 2006 and walking past the mirror to see a version of himself he wasn't familiar with. At 6 feet, he only weighed 140lbs and looked exhausted. It was on that morning that Mike decided to check himself into an Alcohol and Drug and Recovery Program in Edgewood, Nanaimo. He went into work to ask if he could use all his overtime and sick

time to get time off for the program at attend. He went into this conversation fully expecting to pay for treatment himself, and was taken aback by BC Hydro's response.

BC Hydro not only gave him the time off, but offered to partner with him on the cost of the recovery program. Mike was in treatment for two months before returning back to work.

He recalls this time as a learning experience, much like going to school. He describes the program as not only a place where an individual can go to abstain from substances, but also a space to be educated on how they arrived there in the first place. He learned about the functions of the human brain, the power of thoughts and emotions, what was driving him to where he was, and the underlying causes of addiction for him. He attributes part of his recovery to developing a love for learning.

When he went back to work Mike met with someone at BC Hydro whose role is to help him integrate back into the workforce. Together they set a plan to determine what this would look like for him. Three weeks after his return, he was asked to be a union representative on the BC Hydro/IBEW Joint Apprentice Committee. Six years later, he was asked to manage the apprentice program. He also took on the role of Senior Manager of the Safety Advocate program for 1 year before returning back to the Apprentice program role. Mike was constantly developing at work by taking on more responsibility, and spending his time outside of work studying and gaining the necessary skills to continue to expand his career.

"Learning and being challenged in my career is what has kept me sober. I realized that I needed to replace the lost social environment that the alcohol and drug lifestyle provided me – and that replacement became lifelong learning. Someone was counting on me to be sharp when I came into work. I work for an organization that has faith in me, and has given me the opportunities to learn and expand," comments Mike.

BC Hydro supported Mike's learning and development as his roles continued to evolve. They also supported him to complete his Provincial Instructor Diploma at Vancouver Community College and take courses like project management and many other management learning and development programs at BC Hydro. These skills led him to work submit a case for developing a new school for apprentices. The school has since been built with support and hard work of many individuals and teams and Mike has also been instrumental in developing new the curriculum and new instructional process which include problem or process based learning for competency based learning programs.

"Recovery is a two way street. The organization offered me support. But then I worked hard. And as I put in more, so did they. BC Hydro offered me a way to constantly learn new things, and I'm using that knowledge to be better at my job," said Mike.