

Eric Smith's Story

Eric Smith was a talented and gifted student until severe bipolar disorder took over in his teens. Addiction followed, then psychosis. He ended up living out of his car. After an arrest for a low-level offence, he spent a month in jail without any treatment for his diagnosis.

Then a Bexar County probate judge, Oscar Kazen, intervened -- transferring Eric to the San Antonio State Hospital for stabilization, then stepping him down into a court-ordered Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program. Eric credits what he calls "the black robe effect": a judge holding the whole treatment team accountable -- not threatening punishment, but holding everyone's feet to the fire on his behalf.

Eric is open about why he needed the court order: like so many, he couldn't perceive his own illness -- anosognosia -- and couldn't understand his need for treatment.

Stability changed everything. Eric went on to graduate magna cum laude in psychology, earn a Master of Social Work, and become a licensed social worker, public speaker, consultant, and a mental health commissioner appointed to the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health. He now shares his story publicly to fight for the same court-ordered treatment that saved his life.

His verdict on assisted outpatient treatment: it saved his life.