



HAKEEM RAHIM, Ed.M, M.A.

Biography

[Hakeem Rahim, Ed.M, M.A.](#) had the distinct honor of being the first African-American male valedictorian in Uniondale High School's history. From his professional to academic to community life, Hakeem places an emphasis on change and transformation. After graduating cum laude with a BA in psychology from Harvard University, he began working in local government, for two years, under the Deputy County Executive for Economic Development. In 2007, Hakeem graduated with an Ed.M and an M.A. from Teacher's College, Columbia University, with a focus on higher education and multiculturalism. In 2006, Hakeem co-founded the Uniondale Foundation for Educational Excellence, a 501(c) 3 non-profit that supports the Uniondale School district via supplemental financial and creative means.

True to this same ideal of personal progress and transformation, Hakeem founded Live Breathe, LLC in 2007. [Live Breathe, LLC](#) is a consultative services company that focuses on educational consulting and mental health advocacy through providing speaking engagements, professional development workshops, trainings and mentorship sessions.

In 2012, Hakeem began speaking openly about his 14 year journey with bipolar disorder. Inspired to address the stigma of mental health, he became a certified National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) In Our Own Voice speaker. In 2013, Hakeem became the [NAMI Queens/Nassau Let's Talk Mental Illness presenter](#). Through his speaking and advocacy work, Hakeem has spoken to law enforcement officials, individuals with mental illness and their family members and to over 4,000 high school and middle school students. For his work as a mental health educator and advocate, Hakeem was selected as a 2013 Honoree by New York State Office of Mental Health for the "What's Great In Our State" Award.

Prior to starting Live Breathe, LLC, Hakeem worked in higher education for six years. He is certified in de Bono's Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking methodologies, a [de Bono Group, LLC consultant](#) and a graduate of iPEC, an accredited life coach training institute. He has years of experience mentoring and counseling youth through designated programs as well as through unofficial mentorship. Hakeem is also a poet and recorded spoken word artist. You can find more about him at hakeemrahim.com.

Hakeem Rahim has been described as:

"Hakeem is a young brilliant and visionary figure whom I support wholeheartedly. Don't miss his vision and insight!"

– Dr. Cornel West

Emeritus, Princeton University

"Hakeem is a man of great compassion, who possesses a wisdom and eloquence beyond his years. He has my utmost respect and support."

– Mickey Melendez, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

"I strive to live for causes greater than me; that desire, that drive to live to help others, will continuously sustain a well-being far superior than focusing on myself." –Hakeem Rahim

My Story

My journey with mental illness began in 1998 during my freshman year at Harvard University. That fall I experienced my first terrifying panic attack. In that episode, I experienced heart palpitations, sweaty palms and dizziness, yet I did not know that it was an anxiety-induced state. What I did know however, was the deep terror I felt.

My journey continued when I had my first manic episode. During the spring of 1999, I roamed the streets of Hempstead, NY possessed with a prophetic delusion that I had to share with any and every one I met. Out of love and concern, my parent sent me to my father's country of origin, Grenada, to be with my family and to relax. However, there in the sunny Caribbean, I plunged into a deep depression. I returned to Harvard that fall and struggled through the year battling anxiety and depression.

In the spring of 2000, I was consumed by my second manic episode. This time I experienced a break from reality, otherwise known as psychosis; I had visions of Jesus and heard car talk. My parents picked me up that same night and took me to a psychiatric hospital the following day. I was hospitalized for two weeks. The first week is a blurred due to my mental confusion and the psychiatric medication administered to me. Yet, during hospitalization, I accepted my illness and began my arduous road to recovery.

It has been 14 years since my diagnosis, and 16 years since my journey with mental illness began. I have embraced and integrated bipolar disorder as part of my life. I have embraced mental health awareness, advocacy and education as my vocation.

Currently, I am NAMI Queens/Nassau's Let's Talk Mental Illness presenter. Through the Let's Talk Mental Illness presentation I have shared my story and provided much needed awareness to over 4,000 high school and middle school students at 35 schools. I have also spoken to audiences ranging from people with mental illness and their family members to law enforcement officials, teachers and mental health professionals. I feel empowered to be able to raise awareness, address the negative effects of stigma, and at the same time openly promote the benefits of seeking mental health care.

Millions of people in America desire to give voice to their struggles, but cannot because of the stigma. I am fueled by the desire to break the silence. I am inspired by students who want to learn about mental illness to help a friend or a struggling parent who is hurting. I am strengthened by people who have decided to "out" themselves in an effort to normalize having a mental illness.

I will continue to speak up for mental health and mental illness education in all schools. Why? Well, I am certain the 17 year-old Hakeem would have suffered less if he knew what anxiety-induced panic attacks were before I had my first in 1998. I know the 18 year-old Hakeem would have suffered less depression-induced pain the summer of 1999 if he knew what bipolar mood swings were. And I am certain the 19 year-old Hakeem would have experienced less difficult through the arduous, draining process of pulling my mind and health back together. Mental illness education and awareness is essential to combat stigma, end suffering and make it okay to talk about mental illness.