

In My Own Words

In My Own Words is an emerging series of first-person recovery stories published by the **Center for Evidence-Based Practices** at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio with support from the **Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**.

www.centerforebp.case.edu



Kerri

Change is something that always seemed impossible to me. I felt imprisoned by my experiences in childhood, and there was no way out. The majority of my life was spent in abusive relationships. I was homeless, incarcerated, and had addictions to drugs and alcohol. Anyone in these circumstances would feel discouraged and hopeless about life. I can remember feeling that death would not come soon enough. However, life did change for me when a judge ordered me to receive mental health services at Neighboring*.

Continued on page 2



www.centerforebp.case.edu/stories/in-my-own-words



Link



Like



Tweet



Print



Share

Online
Offline

Free
PDF

SHAME & ADDICTION

Let me start at the beginning of my story. My memories of childhood consist of my sister and me enduring mental and physical abuse from family members. This instilled feelings of shame that possessed my thoughts every waking moment of life. All the abuse that I encountered had taken me prisoner and made life unbearable. At twelve-years old, I tried alcohol and life began to change. The abuse from my family finally became tolerable, because the alcohol gave me the power not to care about the circumstances. I felt that my problems had been solved, not realizing I had just thrown gasoline on a fire.

Drugs also came into my life at this time. I instantly felt more normal than ever before. I was so used to feeling full of shame. Alcohol and drugs made my insecurities go away and gave me a reason to wake up in the morning. My alcohol and drug use quickly grew into a daily habit. If I were to continue living, I needed to have something to numb the feelings of shame that were constantly in my head. Alcohol and drugs became a way of survival for me and an obsession that controlled every thought and action in my life, just as the shame had.

Using substances to quiet thoughts of shame was like trading one evil for another. There was a bigger problem, though. There were not enough substances to keep the shame from coming back. The shame always returned with more intensity, therefore, causing me to use substances increasingly. Every moment in my life involved seeking out alcohol and drugs.

Then, I had two beautiful children.

MOTHERHOOD

I never wanted my children to be exposed to the abuse that I encountered during my childhood. I was not mentally or physically abusive to my children in the same ways I had experienced, but I was neglectful and careless with their well-being. I intended to be a good parent; however, my own childhood circumstances were never dealt with. I became a functioning alcoholic/addict for the first five years of motherhood, and I chose to be with men who were physically and mentally abusive. Eventually, my substance abuse became unmanageable and my mother obtained custody of my children. No words can describe how painful this was



Another part of my jail sentence was to go to Neighboring for mental health services. ...There was a part of me that believed my issues were unchangeable. As this shame began to control my thoughts, I did something different. I finally started to utilize the services at Neighboring.

for me. Most people might think this would have given me the motivation to become sober. This was not the case. My life became a suicide mission. I was homeless, selling drugs, and involved in other illegal activity. Honestly, I cannot believe that I survived, because I had no intention to. Then, I was arrested, and my life began to change.

INCARCERATION

I was in and out of jails my whole life. Yet, my last time in jail was different. There was no bond set. I spent six months in county jail, four months in Neocap, and six months in Oak House. I would never want to relive those experiences, but I will always be grateful for them.

I was also on probation for four years. This really gave me the motivation to remain sober. Freedom was important to me. I did not enjoy the cement walls of jail. The first two years of sobriety were very challenging, and my mind was still in a fog. When that fog lifted, my shame came back with a vengeance. Staying sober became very hard for me because of all the unresolved issues of my past and because my mother still had custody of my children.

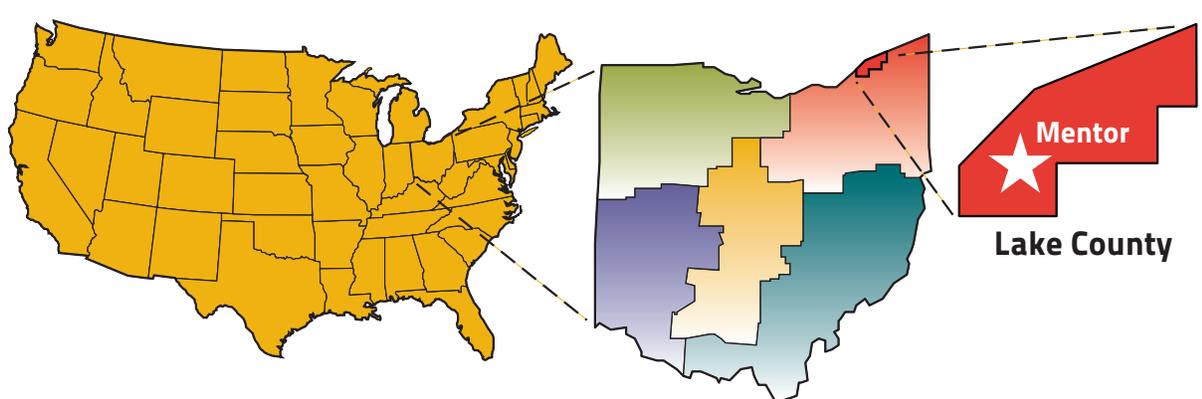
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Another part of my jail sentence was to go to Neighboring for mental health services. I did not see the value in this. There was a part of me that believed my issues were unchangeable. As this shame began to control my thoughts, I did something different. I finally started to utilize the services at Neighboring. With the help of dedicated staff there, I have been able to manage my mind with therapy and medications. This has been a slow and painful process but well worth the time and effort.

I have gradually started to think about my circumstances and myself in a better light. Now life has meaning for me. I am eager to wake up in the morning. I no longer feel imprisoned by the past. Because of therapy, I was able to forgive and understand that my abusers were sick, just as I was sick. The biggest blessing of all was regaining custody of my children. This was an important change. Unquestionably, the services at Neighboring encouraged me to think better about my circumstances and myself. As I have said, life keeps changing. . . . Now I can, too.

—by Kerri Varsetti

* Editor's note: Neighboring is now called Beacon Health.



Beacon Health is a behavioral healthcare organization in Mentor, Ohio that serves the residents of Lake County. It was created by a merger of two organizations—Neighboring and Pathways. Neighboring (and now Beacon Health) have implemented evidence-based practices and other best practices for people diagnosed with mental illness and substance use disorders.

Beacon Health
5930 Heisley Road
Mentor, OH
www.beaconhealth.us

In My Own --- *Words*

I have gradually started to think about my circumstances and myself in a better light. Now life has meaning for me. I am eager to wake up in the morning. I no longer feel imprisoned by the past.



ABOUT US

In My Own Words is an emerging series of first-person recovery stories published by the Center for Evidence-Based Practices at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. This series is supported by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS). We thank all the people who courageously share their success stories. You inspire hope. You provide evidence of positive changes that are possible.

Series Editors

- Nicole Clevenger, BFA, consultant and trainer
- Patrick E. Boyle, MSSA, LISW-S, LICDC-CS, director of implementation services

Contributing Editor

- Paul M. Kubek, MA, director of communications

Graphic Design

- Cravener | Holmes Creative

Photography

- Page 1: Nicole Clevenger; Getty Images
- Page 2: Nicole Clevenger; Getty Images
- Page 3: Nicole Clevenger
- Page 4: Getty Images

**GET MORE STORIES AND JOIN
OUR MAILING LIST ONLINE!**

The **Center for Evidence-Based Practices** at Case Western Reserve University is a partnership between the **Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences** at Case Western Reserve and the **Department of Psychiatry at the School of Medicine**. The partnership is in collaboration with and supported by the **Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS)**.

CO-DIRECTORS

- Lenore A. Kola, PhD, Associate Professor of Social Work, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences
- Robert J. Ronis, MD, MPH, Douglas Danford Bond Professor and Chairman, Department of Psychiatry, Case Western Reserve School of Medicine

CONTACT US

- Patrick E. Boyle, MSSA, LISW-S, LICDC-CS, Director of Implementation Services
patrick.boyle@case.edu

STAFF

- For a complete list of staff, consult our website.

www.centerforebp.case.edu

