



Christiana's Bridgehaven Success Story

Why Health?

Metro United Way is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income and health. These are the building blocks for a good life—a quality education that leads to a stable job, enough income to support a family through retirement, and good health.

Metro United Way works to ensure everyone in our community enjoys lifelong health and independence by:

- Increasing the availability of quality health care information.
- Providing health support services through agency programs.
- Helping seniors and people with disabilities envision and achieve maximum independence and a high quality of life.

Measuring results...2018 Goals and Indicators:

MUW Goals:

People get needed physical and mental health care.
People are practicing healthier living.

Indicators (Why this is important):

- Mental illness affects 1 in 5 Americans, meaning that 20% will experience a mental illness or behavioral health problem in this lifetime.
- 11% of Americans have severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder and severe recurring depression.
- In the Louisville Metro Area, as many as 75,000 people are living with a severe mental illness. Of those 75,000, at least 30,000 are not eligible for Medical Assistance and have no health insurance to pay for the services they need.

When people in our community are safe, practice healthy living, and get needed physical and mental health care, they will live longer with a higher quality of life.

Christiana's Bridgehaven Success Story

My name is Christiana and I was born in Alaska in 1986. I was raised by my mom and my grandmom. I was a happy and smart child-I was reading at a 4th grade level in Kindergarten! My world came crashing down after my mom married an abusive man when I was eight. We moved a lot and my life was constantly disrupted-we lived in five states total: Alaska, California, Nevada, New Jersey and Kentucky.

I spent my high school years in New Jersey where I was severely bullied. I was pushed down stairs, verbally attacked, beaten up, even the butt of large, cruel and elaborate jokes. Around ninth grade, I began my downward spiral into depression. I have always had a problem with feeling insecure and inadequate, and this behavior just made it worse. I became a self-proclaimed "goth" and began cutting as a means of release from pressures. I also made a point to write dark stories and poetry to help ease my anguish. The guidance counselor, after observing my grades, my behavior as well as the behavior of my peers, felt that it would be best if I skipped a grade, allowing me to start fresh with a new group of people. My last two years of school were less painful; the experience forced me to look outside the box for friends in lower-classman and church members. I even started dating my first real boyfriend and received a scholarship to Johnson and Wales University in Colorado.

During the end of my junior year, my mom was laid off-her company crumbled after a great number of its clients and contacts were destroyed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. After the loss of her job, she was diagnosed with Agoraphobia so I had to begin working at the local Walgreens to keep our home intact--as well as take on a full load at school my senior year. I began feeling isolated again since the rigorous work schedule prevented me from many of the average senior year activities (prom, trips, lock-ins, etc.) I began turning to over the counter medication to help soothe my depression. I began abusing laxatives, cough syrup and sleeping pills. During this time, my life became hazy.

When I awoke from my hazy nightmare, I was three years older, eighty pounds heavier and medicated at Bridgehaven in Louisville, KY. I looked around and began wailing. My counterparts made my lamenting known to the therapists, and when asked why I began sobbing, I admitted that I had just wasted three years of my life. My boyfriend was gone, my friends were gone, my scholarship was gone, my looks were gone...I had hit rock bottom and I didn't even remember how or why I got there. Bridgehaven then helped me to pick myself back up and work on my illnesses and personal goals after this "epiphany."

That was a year and a half ago, and even though my grandmom--a priceless confidant--passed away in that time, I have made a complete 180 degree turnaround in my life. I am engaged, I am attending college and carrying a 4.0, I have been pursuing my dream career as a singer/actress and establishing myself

as a role-model for all young adults who have felt the brunt of bullying, who have emotional/mental disabilities or unhealthy addictions.

I know my life has more wonderful things in store for me, and I am blessed to have gotten help for my illness at a young age. I am a walking example that nothing can stand in the way of greatness. I have turned from a scared, floundering teen to a beautiful, confident butterfly with wings outspread and ready to fly.

Thank you for your support!

Christiana

Bridgehaven, a Metro United Way funded agency, provides psychiatric rehabilitation, recovery, and community integration services for adults with serious mental illnesses.

Here's how you can help:

- Become an advocate. For more information, please call (502) 292-6142.
- Give. A donation of \$200.00 per week provides a year of services to a person with severe mental illness at *Bridgehaven*, reducing hospitalizations and allowing them to live independently.

Suggested Props/Visuals

- A picture of Christiana



Christiana Obey, singing "Love Can Build a Bridge" at the 2008 Metro United Way Showcase event

To live united is to understand that we are all interconnected. Metro United Way is working to advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. For more information, volunteer opportunities or to make a donation, please visit us at metrounitedway.org or call 502.583.2821.