



## **Nealia'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.**

## **Nealia's Bridgehaven Success Story**

Dear Metro United Way Donor:

My name is Nealia Harper and I'm honored to share my story with you. Amazed, might be a better word actually. You see I live with several mental illness diagnoses, and I often suffer from anxiety. In spite of this I asked to be able to tell the story of my life's journey with mental illness, and the role Bridgehaven has played in my recovery.

I attended North Hardin High School and to an outsider looking in my high school life was grand. I was Junior Class Vice President, on the student council, was Senior Basketball Homecoming Queen and received five scholarships to attend college! What nobody saw was on the inside- as a young child I had suffered abuse and neglect from other family members. This abuse no doubt contributed to the problems that began to develop while I was in high school and became too disruptive to ignore during college.

I attended college at Troy State in Alabama and it was two friends who first noticed that I was depressed and it was getting worse. I began to hear voices and was nervous, paranoid and scared of everything. I got counseling from a therapist but not medication and the counseling did not help. I was hospitalized that summer for the first time when my grandparents noticed my odd and obsessive behaviors. After a 2 ½ month hospitalization, I began to understand my mental disorders and was given effective medication that allowed me to return to college and graduate.

After graduation I could not return to my Grandparents home because of my grandfather's poor health and was forced to live with another, abusive relative where I was denied sleep and physically abused. Before long I was at the end of my rope; I left my job and fled my "home" in search of some kind of sanity that I had once known. I found myself in eight short years going from Homecoming Queen to Home-less.

I arrived in Louisville with nothing more than a few clothes and my car. I lived in my car and ate meals at the homeless shelter while working at a local Mall. I was a naive 27-year-old; alone in the city and afraid. I had minimal income and the first thing to go was refilling my prescriptions.

I rapidly became ill again and hopelessly sat on a bench day after day. I finally begged a worker at one of the shelters to refer me to a hospital because I knew this was the only way I could reach back out of the darkness and get back on my medications. After another 2 ½ month hospital stay I was referred to Bridgehaven. I had absolutely no money and no way to pay for services.....but Bridgehaven just opened their door wide for me to enter, and I never missed a

day. I found what I had been looking for since college and could never find. I found support at an affordable place where there were peers who became friends, and I found the hope for a more lasting, meaningful life, instead of the quick band aids I had received in the past.

With the support I've received from Bridgehaven since 1998, I've become involved in my church, gone back to work and live in my own apartment again! In 2006 I went back to my studies and became certified as a Peer Support Specialist with the State of KY. In November 2008 I became an employee as a Peer Support Specialist at Bridgehaven-the place that gave me my life back so many years ago! I absolutely LOVE my job. I can just feel my own depression lift as I help others in their recovery process at Bridgehaven. It's the most indescribable feeling being able to give back like this to the place that helped give me back my life.

Thank you for hearing about the difference Bridgehaven makes in literally saving lives, like mine, in our community! It feels so good being part of it now. You are part of it too because the Metro United Way funding Bridgehaven receives allowed them to provide the services I needed when I could not pay for them. No place else would do that. Thank you for offering me assistance when I most needed it. I want you to know how much your gifts to Metro United Way helped me.

*Nealia*

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 Nealia



**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](http://metrounitedway.org) or call 502.583.2821.**