

Kelly's Story

The Power of Prairie Harvest Mental Health

Prairie Harvest Mental Health helps people succeed on their road to mental health, wellness, and recovery.

The organization's work focuses on raising awareness and reducing the stigma of mental illnesses. They also work one-on-one with their consumers to help them set personal goals, find work, provide opportunities for social integration, and promote all forms of wellness.

Voices, creaks, and pops

"I lived a pretty normal life up until about age 20," says Kelly, a Prairie Harvest Mental Health consumer. "I was living in Seattle, Washington, and I started hearing voices, strange sounds, and scary creaks and pops. Everything started to get very frustrating to me."

Kelly dealt with the noises for about a year and a half before being diagnosed with and receiving treatment for minor schizophrenia. Three years after his diagnosis, he stopped taking his medication and things got much worse.

A life in pieces

Kelly had moved to Minot, North Dakota, to be with his mother who had been diagnosed with cancer, but being in a care-provider position didn't help his health situation.

"For about a week, I had all-day yelling, breaking, smashing fists where I would break things in my room and scream at the walls," says Kelly.

He went to the state hospital in Jamestown where he was diagnosed with severe paranoid schizophrenia, then returned to Minot where the diagnosis did not result in "better."

In addition to sporadic use of his medication, Kelly turned to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. A year after his diagnosis, Kelly was arrested.

"I had an incredible temper breakdown," he says, resulting in him smashing a window in his apartment. On his way to the hospital, things took a turn for the worse.

"I found myself screaming at a guy on the street, and basically I picked up a rock and broke the windows on six cars. This is when I was really starting to hit the bottom of the barrel," Kelly says.

After three months of incarceration, Kelly was released and life seemed to go back to normal. A year later, the voices returned and Kelly was arrested a second time.

"I lost my apartment, there was no way I could live with my mom because I was just way out of control, way too sick. There were no facilities in Minot yet, so I ended up going back to the state hospital in Jamestown," says Kelly.

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He spent eight hard months in Jamestown.

"I made my case manager promise me that he wouldn't kick me out until was ready to leave," says Kelly. "Literally, I said, 'Don't kick me out of the hospital. I don't have anywhere to go. Don't kick me out. I'm homeless without this place.'"

Refuge at the lodge

Seven months into his state hospital stay, Kelly's case manager learned about Prairie Harvest Mental Health and their lodge program, the only of its kind in North Dakota.

Kelly's case manager referred Kelly to Prairie Harvest Mental Health through Northeast Human Service Center, and before long, Kelly was invited to visit.

"I told them everything, that I have a drug problem, I went to jail, and was just having a really hard time, and I guess they liked me because a month later they invited me to Grand Forks to come and try out the lodge program," says Kelly. "I was relieved right off the bat because I wasn't going to be homeless."

This was a huge triumph for Kelly because his previous plan of action after leaving the hospital was bleak.

"When I got out, I was going to go and find my old guy, buy as many drugs as I could, skip town, skip probation, and go back to Seattle for as long as could. When I got caught, I would go to prison. That was my plan. That's all I had," says Kelly. "It's hard to describe how in the hole I was before I got here."

Positivity and structure

Kelly moved into Harvest Lodge, one of the two housing units that are part of the lodge program. He immediately befriended other consumers living there, and as part of the program, started attending group sessions. He began taking his medication as prescribed, and Prairie Harvest Mental Health lined him up with a packaging job at Amazon.

His time at the lodge also gave him the opportunity to start classes at Northland Community and Technical College. Today, he is six credits away from earning his degree.

The lodge program gave Kelly a home and structure. Each morning, afternoon, and evening, lodge residents take their medication together. Each resident has house chores and cooks a weekly meal for the other residents.

Lodge residents have people to help them pay their bills and shop, but largely, the program focuses on building independence.

"I never would have thought that I would like Grand Forks or the lodge program, but it's been a lot of help," says Kelly.

Since Kelly has been in the lodge program, his family relationship has started to heal.

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"I thank God, my mom, and my family for being there for me," says Kelly.

Purpose to impact

In addition to their basic services, Prairie Harvest nurtures other areas of their consumer's interests (for Kelly, this is music), celebrates birthdays as a group, hosts meals for the community, and takes a trip to Maple Lake each August for some relaxation.

"I've managed to quit using, drinking, and smoking since I've been with Prairie Harvest," says Kelly. "I feel a lot better about myself."

"If somebody looks different, that doesn't necessarily mean they are bad people or that you should be afraid of or mean to them. That's called stigma and it's unnecessary," says Kelly.