

## CLIENT PROFILE: My Journey to a Fellowship

By Lisa Hickerson, Member of the Recovery Learning Center at the Fellowship Club and MHA employee



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I was a wife and a mom. My husband was very violent, which was not a good environment for me to raise my kids. I lost my husband and I lost all three of my boys. My mother had breast cancer and had to choose whether to save her or save myself. All my identities were gone: mom, daughter, wife. I had no support system. I wandered into Santa Barbara and I was too psychotic to make my way into a winter shelter. Then, a homeless outreach worker had faith in me. It was my first step towards recovery.

When I spiraled out again, I started talk therapy and began coming to the Mental Health Association's (MHA) Fellowship Club. Soon after I got a job in the MHA's Care Closet thrift store. I now participate in so many groups and activities at the Fellowship Club it feels like a second home. I lead an Independent Living group, play guitar, attend a creative writing class and Monday through Thursday I work in the administration office as part of the facility maintenance crew. At the Club, I chat with my friends, I do needlepoint in the art room, and use the computer to look up information. I am also a part of the Sharing Our Stories Group sponsored by the MHA, the MHA has a program to train us in public speaking and it gives me and others the confidence to share stories — this helps educate people and bust the mental health stigma.

The Fellowship Club is a very healthy place for me. It is also a very serene place. You get to know and love all the personalities that are here. The people are genuinely kind and the staff is a great support team. I love that I can do these things, that I have a voice. If you struggle with an illness that can unravel on you, you really need this support system and a place to be safe, rather than being on the streets. Wherever you are in your journey, there's someone who's been there or who is experiencing the same thing you are. It really is a *Fellowship* — a community of people who have been in the same boat you've been in. You are responsible to do better and help the next one down the road. It really works. I'm proud to say the quality of my life has extremely improved. This place helped me to make friends with my illness. We, as a community — as peers — discuss ways to help each other with our problems. This is my family. I'm absolutely enjoying life. All the hard work... it's paid off.

