

Hello, my name is Jerri and I am in long term recovery from severe and persistent mental illness. It has taken decades for me to recover. But I have come a long way with the help of Charter House and Community Mental Health.

I lived an isolated life with my husband Tom for many years. I had no place in the community. I would yell at Tom, "You don't understand". I didn't have a life. Later in our marriage we bought our first home and I started a new therapy program called Dialectical Behavior Therapy or DBT. This taught me a new way to think which in turn helped me change my self-destructive behaviors.

I then chose to join Charter House. I was very nervous and anxious at the program, but I was determined to make it work. I now had a safe place in the community. There was no stigma and I was accepted by new Clubhouse Peers and Staff. Slowly, over time, we built mutual trust. That was so very important for the start of my recovery.

I thought I would never work again. But after three months of good attendance and support, I accepted a Transitional Employment position, or TEP, as a confidential document shredder right at my Clubhouse. I held that part time job for 5 years.

I also worked in the Charter House kitchen, called the Vineyard Grill. That taught me a lot of food safety skills and gave me great teamwork experience. By working all of that time at Charter House, it gave me the confidence to try a supported employment position at MSU Brody Dining Hall. This was a real job in the East Lansing Community. Those years working at Charter House set me up for real success. I worked at the Brody Dining Hall for 6 years before I retired. Late in life, I had a solid 15 year work history and it all started with my supported membership at Charter House.

Due to my illness, I had a difficult time speaking in front of groups. My experiences in recovery, attending Charter House, and working gave me the confidence to be a public advocate for Charter House and CMH. I have shared my recovery story on the steps of the State Capitol at Walk A Mile rallies. I told my story at the MSU Wharton Center for This Is My Brave, which is a non-profit stage show that travels throughout the country. I've also been on public radio three times advocating for people, like me, with mental illness.

My life has changed so much for the better because Charter House was there for me. At first I greatly needed the program and now I am paying it forward for others coming through. Sharing my contributions with others helps me in my recovery journey.