



"When I walked through the door all hope was gone..." Patient Lenora West, Cedar Rapids

## Up from despair, woman urges others to hope and seek help

Lenora West says she spent much of her 62 years in a "black pit," with no idea that her condition could be treated.

"There were days when I didn't even think I would wake up," she recalls. "I was on the couch all the time, sleeping all the time, and I just didn't have any peace. I couldn't give my kids what they needed; I didn't know how to take care of *me*."

West married at 21 and raised three children. Her husband filed for divorce after 33 years, in part, she says, because of her mental illness.

In 2000, she moved from Kansas City, Mo., to Iowa City to be closer to a daughter who lived there, but wound up in a shelter when that arrangement didn't work out. Still, she felt Iowa was where she should be. "I didn't know how but I just had a feeling that my life would change, that good things would finally happen."

In 2002, she moved to Cedar Rapids, where her other daughter and a son live. Soon after the move, she met a woman who was being helped at the Abbe Center for Community Mental Health. Before the year was up, West was getting help, too, and she was diagnosed with depression and bipolar disorder.

"When I walked through the door I was just in a dark pit like all hope was gone and this was the last resort." As things turned out, it would be "the best day of my life," she says.

An Abbe Center psychiatrist helped her find medications that worked, and she was helped further in the Adult Day Treatment program, which focuses on stabilization of symptoms and setting goals. After completing that program she enrolled in the Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation program where she focused on returning to school at Kirkwood Community College. There she took classes to learn how to use the computer. Currently she receives monthly visits through the center's Community Support Program, which helps her continue her focus on wellness and recovery.

Lenora has also been hired by the Abbe Center for several hours each week as a Peer Support Consultant to help mentor others in their recovery process. Next on West's list of goals is to learn how to drive, which she never thought she would do.

West says she wants to be an example of what treatment can do, and make people aware that mental health services are available to them. As an African-American, she says it is particularly important to increase awareness in the black community, where a stigma associated with mental illness remains strong.

"It prevents a lot of individuals from walking in that front door and getting the help they truly need," she says. "Instead they drown their pain with alcohol and drugs. But you have to have the courage to say to yourself, 'I don't want to be this way anymore and whatever it takes, I'm willing to do it.'"



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## Abbe Center also serves the needs of students

An agreement to provide mental health services to Cedar Rapids students through the Metro Care Connection (MCC) has proven so beneficial that it has grown more than tenfold since beginning in 1997.

In the first year, the agreement was for the non-profit Abbe Center for Community Mental Health to provide just 20 hours of service for students each week. Two licensed mental health professionals divided that time between Taylor Elementary School, Wilson Middle School and Metro High School.

For the 2009-10 school year, nine staff members will provide more than 250 hours of service each week, and all of the district's schools are included.

MCC was formed in an agreement between the Abbe Center, the Area Substance Abuse Council and the school district to provide mental health and substance abuse services as well as basic health services.

"We're working to try to add hours of service every year," said Rhoda Shepherd, director of student services for the Cedar Rapids Community School District, because the program makes those services more readily accessible to students and more students are able to get the help they need.

Kim Rimmer, MCC program assistant, added that having professionals such as therapists from the Abbe Center on site in the schools reduces the time students have to miss school for outside appointments.

A survey of teachers and other school staff members showed that "students are benefitting and well-served," Rimmer said. She noted that teachers and others sometimes notice behavioral changes, improved attendance, and improved relationships with others among students who are served through the MCC's mental health program.

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“We haven’t measured this,” she added, “but we believe their achievement probably improves as well when some of these barriers to their learning are addressed.” She said improvements often are most noticeable when students have been referred for help through the anger management program in which they can meet with an Abbe Center therapist.

Student needs most often are identified through their interactions with school nurses or counselors, but sometimes parents or even the students themselves seek out MCC’s mental health services, which are available to any student.

Kathy Koehn, Abbe Center’s Outpatient Services director, said health insurance coverage can be utilized for services to students, but grant funds help ensure that no one is denied service for lack of ability to pay. She noted that student confidentiality is maintained, and the center gets permission from parents or guardians before services are provided.



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## An overview of services...

The Abbe Center for Community Mental Health, a non-profit organization, served 8,598 individuals last year in Benton, Jones and Linn counties. Nearly two-thirds were under the age of 40.

### Here’s how the statistics look for a range of age groups:

- 27% were 3 to 17 years old.
- 36% were 18 to 40 years old.
- 31% were 41 to 65 years old.
- 5% were over the age of 65.

The center also served 128 individuals through Project Hope, its outreach program for homeless people. The Abbe Center provides its services with an annual budget of \$8 million and has a staff of 130; 58 of those staff have been with the Abbe Center five years or more.

# Providing a continuum of mental health care since 1949...

The Abbe Center for Community Mental Health is an outpatient treatment center where qualified and caring professionals utilize a team approach to provide services to meet the mental health needs of individuals and the community.

**Licensed professionals** work as a team to provide diagnostic and treatment services. Team members include psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, registered nurses, mental health counselors, and marriage and family therapists. This team approach facilitates the best possible outcomes for treatment of individual needs by making a variety of professionals with specialized skills accessible to clients. Abbe Center offers an array of mental health services designed to help clients of any age (children, adolescents, adults and older adults). Whether someone is seeking evaluation and support for adjustments to problems that affect personal, family or work life, or is in need of more extensive treatment for severe and persistent mental illness, the Abbe Center staff can help.

**Outpatient Services** – Individual/family psychotherapy, group therapy, assessment/evaluation, medication management, consultation/education, employee assistance programs, dual diagnosis, outpatient transitional living, school-based programs and emergency services.

**Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT)** – Abbe's multidisciplinary team provides comprehensive treatment to individuals that have complex mental health or mental health & substance abuse needs. Services are individualized to meet the unique needs of each client, are available on an on-going basis, and service intensity can be increased and decreased rapidly as treatment needs change. The PACT team provides psychiatric, nursing, rehabilitative and case management services.

**Adult Day Treatment** – Provides intensive individual and group treatments to individuals who would benefit from a supportive therapeutic environment designed to

stabilize symptoms, promote wellness and develop an individualized recovery plan. This approach provides a cost effective alternative to hospitalization and focuses on the development of natural community based supports.

**Transitional Living Services** – Designed to provide on-site supportive assistance and skill building services in a natural home setting to individuals with complex mental health or mental health & substance abuse needs. Skill teaching is provided in the areas of independent living, interpersonal skills and recovery oriented illness management. As individuals achieve self sufficiency, assistance is provided in developing follow up support services.

**Community Support Program** - Staff meet with individuals in their home, or other community settings to provide supportive assistance with meeting one's own recovery goals. Individualized services may include assistance with housing, illness education, community living skills, employment, and nursing assistance with medication education & set-up. Individuals may also choose to participate in group services such as STEPPS, anger management, men's group, etc.

**Case Management services** – A valuable resource in effectively coordinating care with other care providers, payers and human service agencies. Community collaboration ensures that clients flow seamlessly through a continuum of care that best meets their individual needs and maximizes treatment success.



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