

Testimony Presented To House Federal and State Affairs Committee

By Kelsey Thomas, Member

February 13, 2024

Hi, my name is Kelsey. I'm here today to share a brief part of my story. I'm a living testament to the success of the Breakthrough House clubhouses, known as Lotus House in Topeka, and how they can inspire change within a person struggling with their illness and position within the mental health system.

I'm educated, have thrived and been a leader in the workplace at large hospitals in both Kansas and Missouri. I've successfully lived independently and managed all my own affairs. But about a year ago, I was falling through the cracks. I had fallen into almost total isolation from the world; cut ties with family, friends and coworkers. I found myself requiring an acute mental health hospital stay and to be rehoused. At the advice of others, and not knowing differently, my family decided to place me within a facility away from my home in Kansas City, in Topeka. Once there, I floundered. I couldn't find my voice, felt powerless and without purpose. I grasped on to any person who walked through the facility doors. One day I was able to connect to a local case manager and then to a counselor who would come and see me at the facility. At my counselor's suggestion, I began researching a place she called Breakthrough House, and through a lot of effort, I was finally granted permission to begin visiting the clubhouse.

I suspected I would enjoy myself, purely for the reason of getting out a couple times a week, but never knew the change that it could encourage from within. I

began, almost immediately coming five days a week. I was able to involve myself in the “work-ordered day,” and felt almost as if I had a job again. Suddenly there was a reason to get up out of bed each day, people to see and things to get done. I had a reason and the determination to keep on living again. At the clubhouse I was able to educate myself on the alternatives to being warehoused within a facility, job opportunities for the future and fun ways to involve myself within my new community. I am eligible for scholarship money to refresh my nursing skills, and help implement wellness activities within the clubhouse for fellow members. To my amazement, my family and those around me noticed the change too. I have now been able to transition out of the facility last week and into a Breakthrough House group home. I couldn't be happier. I hope to attend one the intensive trainings at a fellow clubhouse in Utah and bring back their culture to my clubhouse. My hope for the future is now very bright and fulfilling. I have friends around me each and every day that embrace my flaws and celebrate my achievements. I now consider myself a success and part of the future here at Lotus House.