

Mary Abe- Biography

August 2009

At an early age I suffered from depression and also I learned that I liked to be alone. As I grew so did my depression and my aloneness. When asked a question I was afraid to answer since I was certain that my answer was wrong. There were many things that I wanted to know but was always afraid to ask so never learned. Now at this time I am able to ask questions to learn what I need to know.

Mary Virginia is my name and I am homeless.

A friend told me about N Street Village and I came here. I met with the staff and was able to get into the night shelter. Before arriving at N Street- I was living with 3 roommates and one roommate decided to open credit cards in my name using my personal information. I knew nothing about any of this until the bills were \$800 or \$900. When I called the companies, I was told it is your information so you're required to pay. Working part time didn't give me enough money to pay on the cards or money to pay rent, so I became homeless with no idea what to do.

I stayed in the shelter from September 2006 to July 2007. Then I moved to permanent housing in the group homes on the 3rd floor at N Street, where I currently live.

Luther place night shelter and Bethany Woman's Day Center are under N Street Village. Groups meet throughout the day and there are different groups, yoga, bingo, dance party, autobiography, women's health. There are groups to be in and not sit around all day playing cards or doing nothing. And you can stay safe inside all day long. In the shelter we have chores to do to keep us busy plus groups to be involved in to help us feel useful and important.

In December 2006 I got a job which I did like and enjoyed, but lost the job in February 2007. In January 2007 I was diagnosed with cancer, I had surgery in March and went through treatment. This was rough on me because all I wanted to do was lay in bed all day but living in the shelter we had to be out at 7:30 each morning, so I couldn't lay in bed all day. One lady in the shelter took me under her care and made sure that I got up and dressed and got out on time. I completed treatment and am cancer free and have been since June 2007.

When I came to N Street I was told staff is available to talk with you and I found that to be true. While going through the cancer treatment I leaned heavily on the staff, as I just needed to talk and to have someone listen.

Now to give back what has been so freely given to me, I volunteer 3 mornings a week as a receptionist for N street and 1 day each week I volunteer at a local school helping a friend doing administrative work.

N street has given me dignity and self respect. I don't know where I would be without N street.

Mary Virginia

Community

A sense of community is important to me. It is important to me, to feel that I belong. Most of my life I felt like an outsider, not a part of anything. Not knowing what to do or how to do it, I did what I thought would make me belong but nothing seemed to work. I never thought about asking for help for my struggles—just kept on trying but never feeling that I really belonged any place. When I come to N Street I got a culture shock! I always thought homeless people were white people who didn't make enough money to have permanent housing; however, most of the people I met were diverse and not Caucasian, like me.

While listening to everyone's stories, I found myself relating to what was said and began to feel that I belonged. Finally I was among a group of people where I felt at home and felt comfortable. N Street Village is home. It is a community of people sharing the same goal and wanting the same thing.