

Painful life lessons become strengths for crisis counselor

“ I was so ashamed of my mental illness... that I wouldn't tell the doctors for fear that my care would change.

—Kay Roberson—

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Kay Roberson is a member of a crisis intervention team for Clark County.

Kay Roberson says her upbringing was one of poverty, family dysfunction, and sexual abuse. “There was rampant loss, people drinking. People struggling to make ends meet. It was a survival mentality,” she said.

As an adult Kay and her husband raised a family that lived with the same dysfunctions. They faced additional challenges as two of their children were born with disabilities, including a son with spina bifida who died at age seven.

Kay struggled with multiple physical and mental health issues of her own, which led to frequent

visits to the emergency room. She admits she was too stigmatized by her circumstances to share information with her various providers, though this limited the effectiveness of her care.

“When I would go to the emergency room I was so ashamed of my mental illness and being on my mental health meds that I wouldn't tell the doctors for fear that my care would change, their attitudes would change. Now my psychiatrist talks with my primary doctor and my primary doctor and all my specialists are all in the same building, which is

great so when you go to see your specialist he pulls up your records. That's how the system should work.”

With time and the right guidance, Kay was able to turn her life around and pursue a successful career in Clark County as a member of a crisis intervention team. She counsels families and clients facing many of the challenges her own family faced. Today she sees value in Medicaid integrating physical and behavioral health so that care is better coordinated.

“I've been working here for 10 years and I love my job.

I love the connections that I make with people. I'm successful at turning people around because I've lived it,” Kay said.

The Accountable Community of Health in Southwest Washington was an early adopter of the integrated care model for Apple Health (Medicaid) clients.

Healthier Washington Linkages:

A primary goal of Healthier Washington is to transform Washington's health system so that it delivers whole-person care; addressing the needs of the head and the body in a coordinated way. Treating the whole person (physical health and mental health) is a better way to help people get and stay healthy.



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