

## Joann Gilbert's Integrated Health Care Story (video transcript)

Good afternoon,

I'd like to take this time to welcome you here today and thank you for your interest in my story. I must say that I was surprised when I learned how representative my story is of other patients that have benefited from Integrated Health Care.

Our reasons for seeking medical care may be different, but our new outlook on life, our diagnosis, whatever it may be, and how we view our future are healthier because of the teamwork approach that three agencies and a Care Manager took. Each with their own expertise joined forces to help us get better physically and emotionally.

I was diagnosed with diabetes in 1998. Initially, I started taking medication but not for long and I wasn't emotionally stable enough to accept this kind of diagnosis. I had always been in pretty good physical shape and was an athlete. I did not fit the profile of a diabetic. I was working and I had good insurance, then things changed and reality started setting in.

Then I had pancreatic surgery – you'd think that would have been a wake up call, but it wasn't. I stayed compliant with doctor follow ups and medication for a short time. But instead of educating myself on the diabetes, I went further into denial and when that didn't work, I went into what I NOW know as depression and anxiety.

I started seeing a psychiatrist at my doctor's recommendation. I was resistant at first, but went anyway just because I didn't know what else to do. I saw the psychiatrist for a couple of years, but I became more and more negative and our visits became totally unproductive. I decided that I didn't need to continue going because psychiatrists were for crazy people and I wasn't crazy.

By then, I was no longer taking care of the diabetes. My depression got so bad that I started to let everything go. I stopped taking my medication. I was always so anxious that I couldn't handle the pressure from my work as a human resource manager anymore so I quit the job I once loved and got another job. I went to work for the Rescue Mission and was doing well... or so I thought!

In 2006 I started noticing that my vision was very blurry. I started a downward spiral--- I lost my job; I became separated from my husband; and almost became homeless. I was a mess. My eyesight was so bad that I had to see an eye doctor. The doctor informed me that my eyes were bleeding because of my diabetes. She ordered me to get to my health care provider immediately. I had no money and no insurance, no support systems. I couldn't even afford my regular doctor anymore. I was ready to give up. I would pray to God to just remember me and let me die. I wouldn't kill myself because I knew that the bible say I wouldn't go to heaven if I did. I was at the lowest point in my life and I was angry!

I came to Project Vida and registered and got an appointment with Rebecca Oliver. At sign-in, I was given PHQ and OASIS screeners to fill out. I felt very offended and refused to fill them out – I thought, "I'm not crazy and I didn't come her for mental illness". But then I was told it was just part of clinic procedure so I did it.

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Rebecca saw my high scores and referred me to the Care Manager. I was not happy and was getting ready to leave, but then Rachel came into the exam room to talk to me. She explained the IHC program, explained what depression and anxiety are and she let me know there was help for me.

I think that was what made the difference – she was talking about collaboration between professionals. She asked me to allow them to help me get my life back. I asked her if she thought I was crazy and she smiled and told me right away that only if I continued the way I was when there was help for me, because only a crazy person would not take advantage of this program.

I liked the confidence that she spoke with and I felt that she really cared. I poured my heart out to her and she explained how CBT would help me. She introduced me to my therapist, to her assistant Mark, and before I left she referred me to diabetes classes, to the housing department, and she called her friend, the director of VOLAR Center for Independent Living, and she referred me to General Assistance to help with my bills --- all before I left that day.

I continue with CBT and Rachel continues to follow up with me. I hear from her or Mark regularly, especially if my PHQ or OASIS scores are high. In addition, I check in with her every time I come to the clinic. I call her “mama Rachel” because she’ll keep calling until I return her calls. Rebecca always knows what’s going on with me because Rachel keeps her informed. Rachel also checks on my therapy with Family Service of El Paso like she does with Isabel regarding my medications. And I know that they’re getting advice from Dr. Gaytan, who also keeps an eye on my medication.

I had never, ever seen anything like this at another clinic. In closing, I want to say that I came to Project Vida with lots of issues besides my diabetes. My attitude was awful! I know it was. I wish I had a before and after picture so you could see the difference in me.

I’m not saying everything is perfect because it isn’t. I’m still working hard with the CBT to change my negative way of thinking. Living with my blindness isn’t easy. As Rachel says, “It’s not for sissies.” But I can’t imagine where I’d be now if it weren’t for the great team that pulled together to make sure I didn’t fall through the cracks.

It reminds me of a setback I had recently. Rachel happened to call to check on me just when I had decided to just give up and stop therapy and everything. I didn’t even want to come here anymore. She did some emergency CBT on the phone and told me to come in right away. I did. But I was just fine after the phone call. It made a big difference.

Soon after that, I caught my hair on a fan and after I wrestled it down and managed the situation, where before I would have sat there and had a pity party of one, I composed myself and went and changed my hairstyle to a shorter hairstyle so it won’t happen again. That’s CBT at its best.

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The critic in me wanted to come out and cuss me out but I didn't let her. Lots of us rely on community health centers and programs such as the one that Project Vida was able to set up through this wonderful grant from the Hogg Foundation.

I'd like to think that you all here today will take all this back to your communities and start using Integrated Health Care. I'd especially love it if my presentation here today motivates you to do just that. Thank you for your kind attention. I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have for me. I'm the one up here with the cute short hair style.