The Diverse Minds North State Journal is a collection of art and writing that strives to honor and showcase the passions and talents of people who have been impacted by mental illness and other life challenges. Our hope is that sharing these works can help to increase community understanding, empathy, and awareness about the diverse experiences and faces of mental health recovery and wellness.

This collection is brought to you by the Iversen Wellness & Recovery Center in Chico, California, and includes submissions from communities throughout many counties in Northern California. The Iversen Center is a program of Northern Valley Catholic Social Service, supported by Butte County Department of Behavioral Health and the Mental Health Services Act.
The Iversen Center is a program of Northern Valley Catholic Social Service, and is supported by Butte County Department of Behavioral Health and MHSA funding.
Introduction

The Diverse Minds North State Journal continues to grow and invite people from all over Northern California to participate and celebrate their creativity. This year we have contributors from seven counties despite having a new Editor/Outreach Coordinator.

In the year since our last Diverse Minds Journal, our community has experienced huge losses. The Camp Fire began on November 8, 2018 and ravaged Butte County, causing mass destruction in our communities of Paradise, Magalia, Pulga, Concow, Centerville, Butte Creek Canyon, Berry Creek, and Yankee Hill. 52,000 people were evacuated, at least 85 lost their lives, and more than 14,00 homes (and 5,000 other buildings) were damaged or destroyed.

Prior to the Camp Fire, the North State was already reeling due to the significant destruction and trauma from the Carr Fire in Shasta County, the Mendocino Complex in Mendocino, Lake, Glenn and Colusa Counties, the Klamathon Fire in Siskiyou County, and the Delta/Hirz fire in Shasta County.

Recovery will be a slow process. Our community continues to grieve and grapple with the lasting trauma.

At the Iversen Wellness and Recovery Center, our previous Editor (and creator) of Diverse Minds North State has stepped down as she has been spearheading a project with the Butte County MHSA Coordinator to develop the peer workforce and serves as Access Ambassador for Butte County. I would like that thank Andrea LaVoy Wagner for all the help and advice she has provided me as I attempt to fill her shoes.

Our previous Director, Jason Tate, has also stepped down. He has moved out of the area, and is on a new adventure.

Another Assistant Editor, Daphne Kenney, has passed away after a medical emergency. She had been working on her
Master’s Degree in Social Work and did not have the time to contribute this year. She was a bright light, and she is gone too soon.

What I have learned in Recovery is that even in the worst of times, joy is possible. There is no situation that cannot be bettered, and no unhappiness too great to overcome. Furthermore, hope is the building block of Recovery, and as long as we continue to have hope and support, taking responsibility for doing our part, learning as we go, and asking for what we want and need, our lives will improve. It will take time and effort, but it will happen.

The stories and art in this collection reflect that journey.
From the Director

It is with great pleasure and gratitude that we carry on the visionary legacy of Jason Tate, our outgoing Program Manager, and Andrea LaVoy Wagner, our outgoing Editor, by continuing the publication of the Diverse Minds North State Journal. I want to voice special appreciation to Denise Peterson, our new Outreach Coordinator for wholeheartedly pulling this project together.

In this world of soundbites and smartphones, it is easy to stay at the surface of life’s challenges. But in these pages of the Diverse Minds North State Journal 2019, you have the opportunity to dive much deeper and celebrate the creative offerings and unique insights of people throughout the north state grappling with the challenges of mental illness. You will discover wonderful examples of love, hope, perseverance, trust, and gratitude—amidst great pain, illness, neglect and adversity. Herein lays the power of transcendence.

Share it widely, as everyone will greatly benefit from reading it.

Corla Bertrand
Program Manager, Peer Support Services
Northern Valley Catholic Social Service
Acknowledgements

This journal is a collaborative effort by all of our contributors and by Wellness & Recovery Centers throughout the North State who got the word out.

We’d like to recognize the Wellness Centers credited by our contributors:

Iversen Wellness & Recovery Center in Chico (Butte County)
Oroville Drop-In Center in Oroville (Butte County)
Hope Center in Eureka (Humboldt County)
Helping Hands of Lompoc in Lompoc (Santa Barbara County)
Six Stones Wellness Center in Yreka (Siskiyou County)
Vista Way Wellness & Recovery Center in Red Bluff (Tehama County)
Milestones in Weaverville (Trinity County)

As well as the Brain Injury Coalition and North State Writers.

A special thank you to Andrea LaVoy Wagner for continuing to reach out to contributors and for providing support during the editorial process.
Editorial Team

Our editorial team was comprised of Denise Peterson, Corla Bertrand, Meghan Anderson, Nicole Thomas, and David Andrek, with consultation by Andrea LaVoy Wagner.

TRIGGER WARNING

The works contained within have content that some may find triggering, including frank discussions of suicidal ideation, grief, and loss. If you believe that these topics may be difficult for you to read, please proceed with caution and make a plan for self care.
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Ethan Adams

“For this picture, I was trying to be funny.”

Milestones, Trinity County
Norma Rae the Cow
Monique AKA Momo

“I myself am struggling, just as we all in some way are.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Memory of Mandi Marie Riley

7/3/19 (R.I.P 3/22/18 In memory of my sister
Mandi Marie Riley)

As many days that go on by, just as many tears, have I cried.

   Learning to let go, and hard to forget.
   Still your memory, never has it ever left.

Missing you like crazy, knowing not to return to past regrets.

   Still knowing I can never bring you back.
Wishing still on every shooting star, if only I could trade your place.

   I would save you from the cancer that ate you away.
   Now I am standing right in the same place, cancer is now growing inside of me as well.
Sister to sister, family through family, knowing all the pain,
   our family has gone insanely crazy,
But I know this fight as well as you had fought, still through learning to fight the evil of this illness.
It’s hard to let go, and forgive, and forget, but knowing I am able to forgive, but may never forget.

   I wish you were here.
Angela Armijo

“I grew up with schizophrenia and right now I don't know anything else. I am learning how to manage my disease and not let it manage me. There is no magic pill.”

Hope Center, Humboldt County
Don’t Let Dad Get You
Steven Bridenbaugh

“As a child, I decided that I would become a nuclear physicist. I dreamed that the prettiest girl in third grade was my secretary, as we rode around in a spaceship. I read all the Hardy Boys mysteries. About that time, my parents started saying that I talked too much, and I was sent to a prep school on the East Coast. For me, it was a lonely and sometimes cruel place. It didn't bother me that often. As Barney has said, ‘Our Imagination is a very good place to be!’ In 1985, I remodeled a kitchen, and used the money to buy a bicycle. I trekked to Sun Valley, Idaho, and became a ski bum. I now am somewhat arthritic, and I read a lot of theology books. My soul is decidedly triangular.”

Hope Center, Humboldt County
Moon Rabbit

So much is on my mind now
I can't tell you all of it
It's complicated
I would need to tell you a new story
Completely rewritten
It's so hard to do
My thoughts can't escape
Words stumble, my voice falters
But your way of thinking
Turns my doubts inside out
It forces flowers to bloom
By counting the hours of darkness
And other occult knowledge
The moonlight is everywhere now
These walls cannot isolate us
When love sets the rules
My Bad

In her final years
My mother sought kindness
She followed a friend to Ashland
Fleeing the wolves around her
Myself among them
I scarcely knew why
She was so angry with us
He too, grew cranky
With Alzheimer's
I see it now
The losses of old age
They hunt you down
The worst of them
Is the loss of love
I am learning how
To befriend a wolf
They can love you quite well
But it is vital
To understand them
They are just as conflicted
As your own soul is
You will adore those steel grey eyes
I'm always watching shadows now
More than anything else
I miss taking everything
For granted
Forest Mask
Popiel Device

I would like to own a Popeil Device
But mine would be of the mind
It would not dice or slice things
You would say it's digitized
Just as the Calculus
Was a calculator made of algebra
My Popeil Device will exist
Philosophically
A mental machine that actually works
I'll consult it when I'm down and out
And it will help me heal
When I'm searching for a better path
Like Osho, it will illuminate the way
When my mind is ceasing to function
It will guide me through
A yoga of the soul
And every time I think of you, my love
It will connect me with your heart
We'll sort it all out
And smooth every wrinkle
With my Popeil Device.
Tracy Bright

Iversen Center, Butte County
Hello readers:

I want to show you a story now. His name was anonymous. He passed last Wednesday, June 17, 2019. He died alone, on the concrete mini bench with the inlaid chess pieces on the top. I knew him for around five years. Every time I passed through on my way to the restroom, Jack in the Box, the post office across the street, or just walking through...

He was always there or on the black metal benches facing the fountain next to the stage. He was a shining example of a very kind, humble, strong, great human being, soul and spirit. His heart was always full of laughter and joy. He always had something inspirational to share, whether it was a few words, a laugh or sharing his and the life of the streets/plaza of downtown Chico, CA.

He always waved at me and I went over to him for a hug, or to hug him. Our encounters were brief, but regular enough to see he lived and died a great and good man. He was protective of the weaker, and females, he was not overwrought with drugs or alcohol (he did drink perhaps?). He was never impolite, rude, crass or inappropriate in his interactions with me or others. He brought light into my life and all who knew him. Sometimes he saw me, sometimes I went to him but it was always the same. I was never ignored, pushed away, or treated like I didn’t belong in anyway. He got along well with everyone from street, to police, to visitors in the plaza.

Toward the end of his days, it was winter and he was in a tent outside the safe house downtown. There was a crack in his voice when he recalled how they were all thrown out into the winter, because neighbors complained about their presence there. I saw him sitting in the rain, hunched over, trying to sit up straight,
and at other times bent over with exhaustion. I remember last summer I gave him hope about a tiny house, but it did not materialize in time to save him. He died from exhaustion, of living too much directly in the elements, the cold, the wind, the heat. Until the end he was a warrior.

It makes me cry and scream inside, that he basically died of social neglect (a fall through the hoops person)... without any support or help. I cry now realizing the last couple times I saw him I was in a hurry and couldn’t go to him and ask or offer help. I knew in the back of my mind he was seriously weakening, though hoping for help until the end (from what the street memorial folks said was a failure of the lungs/respiratory failure).

Therefore, it was not too big a surprise, though a shot in my heart to find he passed away last week! I heard people saying he died alone sitting on the bench/table he was taking a stand on, like a vessel tossed in a wild sea hoping for rescue. Sadly, Grant did not have to die this way! He never complained to me or others about the great all body/mental pain, he was suffering through. In fact, I never heard him ever complain once about himself or others.

He was like an angel with his blue eyes that winked and sparkled with life. I am sooo sorry. He lived and died without shelter or physical/mental help he needed so badly. I am sure he now is in the eye of providence, and that his life and death won’t be a meaningless, empty and forgotten experience. He had for his plaza memorial, one vase of flowers, and one picture, also a scrap book to sign for him. Other than that, he was my friend whom I loved dearly.

My hope is this letter fuels or sparks your spirit, like his life and death has mine, to fight for the homeless, houseless, often vulnerable, not knowing about help, or being offered it to them. I also hope one day society creates mental health and homeless outreach. My desire is that one day we can literally pick up human beings and take them to housing, wraparound services tailored to their needs (substance abuse, homelessness, mental
illness) and restore societies castoffs and “lepers” into the communities to live and heal as they deserve.

My wish for him and others is one day, we can reach up under wings for love, and help him, and his memory and other lives, to continue to life, health and prosper!

He isn’t the only one who died recently, as I heard, another fell by the wayside in death last week in the plaza area. This happens often because the body and mind get so worn out from the elements, sometimes overdoses or exhaustion, and death may follow. He will always live on in my heart, and the hearts of all who knew him, mostly plaza street folks.

My spirit is resparked almost daily as I see persons of interest who are jailed for being homeless, or being moved around up to 3-4 times a day/night, or their belongings taken to a landfill. I believe in the dignity and sacredness of the human spirit in all of us, and I believe in outreach these little ones (no matter what age) who are not taken care of. This all reflects a very ill society (or uneducated at the least).

Thank you much for your interest and for reading this. My hope is that through letters like this, that things may one day very soon change, through a spark activated in your heart too.

Tracy Bright
Tracy Bright & Daniel Lipe

Iversen Center, Butte County
ModernRomanticPoems

Guido Pavloni

Truly thou art my precious magical being, you make my cup (heart) overrunneth with all things good and sacred.

We are meant for each other complicated matter we be, not to be understood by the rest, therefore, we are the best and brightly we shine!

I love and like you my dearest, through the thick and thin baby!

D/N/G.

Tracy Leaf

You are so sweet, thank you! Yeah, you too baby are there the sacred sound of my heart and you resoundedly really continue to resoundedly ...

Drum to the heartbeat love, your love and metric midtedly metric and

Unmidtedly, and I appreciate all of the kindness that you have in you...

And I hope our love keeps growing,

In the glen and caroling on Mt. Everest,

Where the unbidden winds of our life n love have to be...

The future of loves’ forces within and without reservation.

Wink wink nod nods he hey hah!

Behan ho ho ho

The best of goth
O day,
My handsome and pretty one!

You take hard and take good sport,
In the care of yourself,
My love and hardy har har running in the Bel jar hehehe!
I do love and like you d n g! We are one!

Guido Pavloni
Such kind words from the sweetest of hearts, I kneel to thee!
I thank the holy ones every day for your presence in my life,
As you are the antidote to all the horrid things of... (And not)
Of this world.
You turn the sorrow and grief to mirth and joy!
You take the burdens holding me down.
To a head held high,
Walking hand in hand with you ecstatically-
Wherever we may roam.
May we continue to have a unique and awesome union burning,
Like mystical fire to soothe every realm of existence on every plane!

I love you Tracy Leaf!
And wish wellness in hand with you...!
And wish wellness in hand with you...

Alas! You are the bananas to my banana boat, you are the supreme-
A godlike entity in my life,
You are the sun and the moon and the rain and the fog,
You are everything!

Please know that you mean everything to me, I’m in it for the
Long haul, eternities await us launching a cosmic spirit,
For all life to feed upon and thrive and dwell!
I love you, baby! And like you too!

Tracy Leaf
Hi a baby, baby, baby, sweetie, sweetie, sweetie, honey, honey, honey
Hi Guido, my dearest and only love of mine. I was just drinking in the pleasures of o you,
In my heart of hearts, and beingness of our oneness. I can hardly believe we came upon one year already of when we remet (from first year met and lost touch) ...this is anniversary two 04-05-19 of us being together (remet)!
I feel complete and awesome in the awesome and joyous reunion of us.
I joy in the relish of you. You are my heart space, and
My deep fountain of life,
U r the things of now and before and again to me.
I can’t believe how lucky I am for u,
and all that u r my lovely banshee.
I repose, I suppose, for the lingering essence of thee.
U r my everyone and everything for all of time, to me

In addition to all of the celestial and stuff of above... r also my saving grace,
My angel vampire, my gorgeous and sexy one,
Courageous and compassionate young man.
U r my practical and my patient sides, my other half-
And my lovely husband man child.

I am so glad u r in my life, and your heart is often in me,
and I too am yours, in every way...
After all, how can I live without some humor too... he he he?
Now, congratulations to us, three years in the incubating seeds of the universe,
Three years in each other’s hearts,
And two years in each other’s realities!

I love you baby babu with all of my heart, and I too...
Am glad to tread the portals, wormholes, co-existing realities,
Of this life and all life, n of things of heavens too with you!

PS I am also ecstatic we got married Halloween day at the creek...with eyes of close family/friend witnesses-
For our true love and wellbeing included too!
Creator’s bless mucho much always my dearest one,
Who I truly really do actually love and like immeasurably~!

Blessings and peace, wellbeing, laughter, and joy,
Be always yours and ours to share my love. Amon’s

Guido
Merrily splashing the juice molecules rejoice as young
Whippersnappers contemplate salt shaker blues jams inside the head,
Of an albino mustard packet frothing sunny orange trips to the inner
Realm conducting a crescendo of laughter...merrily indeed.

You’re #1! And I love you fiercely baby!

Tracy Leaf
Hi and wowww! That is definitely a fierce topper alright...and it tops much in sayings and tripping laughter too!
I hope divinely and fiercely you’re my #1 lover and friend always,
Baby...

Is what I will always “see” the right d n g-for it is thee,

And it is I, as thou wilt.

Ps thanks much for sending it. I just read it now d n g! How lovely to my

Eyes are thee!
Donna C

Donna works as a peer advocate at Vista Way and loves what she does. She loves leading groups. She finds it fun and challenging to prepare for her groups, but loves it.

“I have numerous mental illness diagnoses. I’ve dealt with depression since I was a child. I’ve lived with mental health issues all of my life, and am still adjusting to a new diagnosis of bipolar II. It came as quite a shock.”

Vista Way, Tehama County
Suicidal Revelations

I have suicidal thoughts all the time. I have them numerous times a day. I have a plan; well, a few plans. I’ve attempted suicide numerous times by cutting my arms and wrists. I’ve driven towards an overpass pillar, but swerved before hitting it. I guess I don’t have the guts to try to kill myself that way.

I’ve had a few different therapists. They’ve all had varying degrees of concern over my continual and constant thoughts of suicide. Some seemed to want to ignore it; others wanted to solely focus on it. A couple had tried to find the reason for those thoughts. They thought it might be from my severe depression, but they weren’t sure.

I had an appointment with my current therapist and I was suicidal. We talked for about fifteen minutes before she brought up my going to the crisis unit. I didn’t want to go. I knew I’d be hospitalized, and I didn’t want that. She came up with a way to basically shock me out of my suicidal thoughts.

She asked me to think about things that are important to me. To think about the people in my life that are important to me and how they would feel if I was no longer there.

I thought about it and came to the conclusion that my death would have a large impact on the people that I knew. I thought about how they’d feel, how they’d miss me.

That was a big step for me. I’d never thought about that before. I figured my family would miss me, but that no one else would. I thought that everyone would be better off if I was dead.

What she said made me stop and think about how my life is intertwined with other people. My death would impact my family, my friends, and the people who know me at Vista Way.

My death would have a wide impact. I’d never thought about that before. I didn’t think that I’d be missed by that many people. My therapist was the one who pointed out that I’d be
missed by many people. I didn’t think that my life impacted many people.

When you are in that frame of mind, being suicidal, you don’t think about other people in your life. At least, I didn’t think about it. My mind was solely on how I could end my life. I didn’t think about who it could hurt. I didn’t think about that. I thought only about the pain I was in and how much I wanted it to end.

I’ve found that being suicidal or having suicidal thoughts all the time can take a toll on me. Those thoughts make me more depressed, but I don’t know how to stop them. I’ve tried thought stopping, but it doesn’t work very often.

Sometimes with the thought stopping the thoughts will stop for a short period of time before they come back stronger than they were beforehand. Still, thought stopping can be a fantastic tool. Thought stopping has helped me tremendously with my PTSD. I continually have flashbacks from my marriage. The thought stopping has been an effective tool in my WRAP Toolbox.

WRAP has been effective in my recovery. I know what my triggers are so I can try to avoid them. I try to avoid them, but I’m not always successful. One trigger is having someone or something moving quickly near me, like someone raising a hand. Another trigger is someone throwing a punch.

Both those triggers can happen repeatedly during the day. I find that I’ll react to something and be in a flashback before I know what happened. I find that hard to deal with.

I think some of my suicidal thoughts are because of the PTSD. I have some thoughts about my marriage that trigger me. When those thoughts come up I notice that my suicidal thoughts are more prevalent.

The suicidal thoughts are something that never leave me. Those thoughts are constantly with me. They draw my attention away from more important things. Being suicidal all the time is a
major draw on my energy. It leaves me drained. I’m tired all the time.

Feeling this way all the time can’t be good for me. It’s got to be a major downer for my mental health. I’ve never looked at it that way before either. Maybe it’s one of the reasons why I’m always so depressed.

Over the last few months I haven’t had to work on this article; I’ve been less suicidal. I’m not sure why. I’ve been in a better mood. I’ve been cheerier. I don’t know what’s changed. But I’m glad it’s changed.

I’ve had some med changes and doctor changes over the past few months both at the clinic and at mental health. I think they have been good, positive changes.

I still have the suicidal thoughts periodically but they aren’t like they used to be. They aren’t a daily occurrence. I’m thankful for that. But I still have my plan in place.

I have my good days and my bad days just like everyone else. One positive thing that works for me when I’m suicidal is writing. It seems to focus me on something else. I write romance/mystery novels and fantasy novels. I like writing them. I’m able to get out of my mixed up mind into a clearer space and focus on a life that is happy.

The person in the book can have problems like I have, and I can write about them. Then I can delete them, and they are gone. Just like that. Poof. They are gone. For whatever reason it works for me.

For the last four weeks or so I haven’t been as suicidal as normal. It feels weird to me. I’m not used to not having suicidal thoughts all the time. I feel so different. I feel so free. I feel so light. I feel so carefree.

I never knew how suffocating suicidal thoughts could be. It’s like a blanket being thrown over you.
Being a person who has gone from daily suicidal thoughts to occasional thoughts is remarkable to me. I’m feeling better. I do still have my depression but it’s not as bad as what it has been in the past. I’m grateful for that. I’m improving. It’s a step in the right direction. Everything seems to be improving for me. I’m grateful for that.
Self Reflection

This day started just like any other. I got up with my migraine and headed for work. I have migraines pretty much every day. I don’t like them. I hope that they will go away, but they never do.

Work went well. I had my work evaluation. It went well. I have things to work on. I have new objectives to work on throughout the year. I wasn’t looking forward to my evaluation, but I’m glad that it’s done.

I have a problem with picking my skin. I pick at scabs until they bleed. I don’t know why I do it; I’ve done it since I was a kid. I don’t know why, but it seems to comfort me.

When I was a kid I’d see my mom picking at her lip, so maybe that’s where I got it from. I pick at my lips too.

I don’t like picking, but I can’t seem to stop doing it. I don’t like having sores on my hands and arms. I want them to heal, but I still pick at them. Eventually they heal, then I’ll find somewhere else to pick.

I’m guessing that the picking comes from my anxiety. I don’t know that for sure, but it’s a guess. It seems logical.

I’ve also been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, severe depression, PTSD, OCD, bipolar, and dependent personality disorder. I’ve had these since I was a child. I never knew I was different from other people until I started realizing that I couldn’t make friends very easily. It took me a long time to warm up to people. It still does.

I find that I don’t like to be around a lot of people. It’s fine when I’m working, because I’m only there for three hours.

I enjoy being a peer advocate for NVCSS. I like leading groups and teaching different things. It gives my life purpose.

I enjoy coming up with topics for the groups. I like learning new things.
My days are just like other people’s. I get up in the morning, do my morning routine, and start my day.

I have a different outlook on my life than other people. I see myself as being a failure. My mental illness prevents me from having the confidence to go out and find a full time job. I don’t think that I could handle being a full time employee. I don’t think I could handle the stress of a position like that.

Being a part time employee is hard enough. I find that I don’t like to be stressed out about my groups. I tend to fly by the seat of my pants when coming up with writing topics for my writing group. I need to put in more time and effort into planning my groups.

I like planning groups. I like teaching groups. I think it’s something that I’m good at. My co-workers teach groups as well. I find that I enjoy listening to their groups and being a co-facilitator.

We’re trying to implement new groups here at work. We’ve submitted them for approval, so we’ll see what happens. If they are approved, I’ll be starting a new group in July. I’m going with the assumption that it’s going to be approved, and started planning for my first group so I don’t have to scramble to have something prepared the week before the group.

There’s a book that I want to use for the group that I’ve forwarded to my boss so that he can get it for me. It comes with exercises. The book covers both anxiety and depression. I’m just worried that it’ll be too therapy based for what I’m looking for. I think I’d still be able to use it, and just put my own spin on it. I guess I won’t know until I try.

Some of our groups are favorites. To me, my favorite is my Writing Group. It’s one I want to see continue. Two other groups I like are Living with WRAP and Hope Group.

My mental illness has been a part of me for many years. For a good many of those years my illnesses were undiagnosed. As a child and teen I knew I was different from others.
I was constantly bullied and picked on by my sister at home and other kids at school and on the bus to and from school. When I was a sophomore in high school, another student attacked me with a shovel. The student swung the shovel at my head. The teacher stood there and watched and did nothing to help me. A third student stepped in to help.

By the time I was in high school, I didn’t care if I lived or died. It just didn’t matter. In fact, I never thought I’d live to be eighteen. I was thoroughly shocked when I turned eighteen. I never thought it would happen.

Being a person with numerous mental illnesses has me on a number of different medications. I also take meds for diabetes, a heart condition, blood pressure, and migraines. In total I take about twenty pills a day. Some days I take more because of over-the-counter migraine pills or as-needed prescription ibuprofen. I hate taking the meds, but they keep me stable and keep me focused.

Being a mental health patient is scary for me. I’m always anxious and depressed. I always have PTSD symptoms.

Mental illness isn’t a drawback to life. Yes, it can be a challenge. Especially the anxiety, PTSD and depression. I find that in my current job, which I’m very lucky to have, that I’m a good fit. I work well with my co-workers and boss. There is a good team morale and cohesiveness. I’ve never had a position where everyone gets along and works well together. It’s like we all think like one person, from the boss down. It’s amazing. I love coming to work.

My mental health illnesses cause me some issues, but so do my other health issues. I’m trying to take better care of myself. I’m seeing my doctor regularly and following her directions.

Trying to determine if I’m healthy enough to keep working is nagging at me; but I keep going to work. My current health concerns have me quite concerned. The constant chest pains and dizziness are quite worrisome. This has been going on for
the last month for the chest pain, and for the last two months for the dizziness.

My doctor is sending me to specialists for both problems. I did go to the hospital for the chest pains and was diagnosed with nonspecific chest pain. Not a very helpful diagnosis, but I found there is nothing wrong with my heart.

All kinds of problems come and go in life, and we need to find a positive way to deal with them. Mental health issues are some that I've lived with since I've been a child. Given time we deal and adjust.
Bev Carlson

“I was walking in Paradise looking at the destruction and this tree gave me hope for Paradise.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Paradise Hope
Cece

Iversen Center, Butte County
Beginning

This strange story the experience of a real person,
My heart is hidden under a veil of fear.
Secret passages, winding, twisting and turning into an abyss of darkness.
Stony, scolding faces glare at me as I awake into a new day of turmoil.
That must have been the day I was born.
You Are Perfect

I don’t care what you’ve done or what you haven’t.
I care about who you are,
What is in your heart.
I don’t care about your failures or your past ruined relationships.
I care about your successes, your accomplishments.
I don’t care about the ones who hurt you causing great pain and anger.
I care that you are still able to love and be loved.
I don’t care about your faults and imperfections.
I care that you made amends.
For in my heart and soul
You are perfect.
White BG Mask
The Search

We are all looking for it.
Some of us have been looking our whole lives.
Most don’t even know what they’re looking for.
But we all feel it.
The unexplained emptiness that can only be filled by one thing...
The Truth.
Each One is Wonderful

We’re each going our own way
It’s good to see you today
From here to there we go
Your story i do not know
However i can tell you this
If you weren’t in this world you would be missed
Sometimes when i’m not how i want to be
i make snap judgements about you That only hurts me
Most of what you are i would like to be
i absolutely love and am fascinated
By your unique and interesting – self related
To a world advertising humans to be perfect
In reality does not and cannot reflect
The individual beauty that every human bears
Material and physical on the heart wears
Take care and awareness and delight in who you are
Because you are noticed and recognized like a bright shining star
Israel Conrad

“My name is Israel Conrad and this is a painting I painted. It means I love you in sign language.”

Butte County
I Love You
Dana D

“i have been working on my road to wellness for 7 years. i am not who i was, but whom i chose to be. i am a poet at heart. i use poetry to help me cope with life and express myself. i just wanted to show even just one person that the road to wellness is possible and that there is hope.”

Tehama County
My Recovery

It is messy and full of hard work, but I find it rewarding. It’s not pretty at times for I do fall, but I always dust myself off.

The adventure is full of twists and turns, heartbreaks, joy, and love.
I am the only one in control of my destination and how far I decide to go.

I decide on who I bring along on my journey and who gets left behind.
I must honor my road to wellness and choose wisely whom I let in.

My spiritual path is one of my many tools I use to become a better version of myself.
I find solace in prayer and meditation for they have been great coping tools.

I would never change my journey for the world.
Denise Davis Peterson

Denise a peer provider who entered recovery about 8 years ago. Life keeps getting better since. This year she accepted the Outreach Coordinator job for Peer Support Services, covering the Iversen Center & Northern Valley Talk Line.

Iversen Center, Butte County
Nothing Perfect

Collage reads: “Nothing We Do Will Be Perfect”
Receptionists

The first time I walked through the door, he was at the desk. Evil radiated from his pores. My skin crawled. My hair rose. I walked out.

Weeks later, I returned, recognizing that I needed help and couldn’t let anyone get in the way of my recovery. A member showed me around and gave me a calendar, thrilled to see me. The second receptionist ignored me. An improvement.

The third receptionist said hello as I arrived for group.

The fourth receptionist spent most of her time improving her typing skills, celebrating 25 words per minute. She helped me belong and encouraged me when not on the clock.

I let the fifth receptionist know that someone had walked away with a coffee cup. She said that kind of thing happens here and dismissed me.

The sixth receptionist kept abandoning his post to chat about parties.

The seventh greeted people, stayed at his post, chatted about movies and video games from the front desk, and intervened with intoxicated people. He gave me hope for recovery.

Management changed. I didn’t get to know the eighth.

The ninth was amazing. Warm, cordial, orderly. Sometimes I dropped in just to say hi to her. We became friends and she encouraged me to apply for promotions and expand my skills.

The current receptionists are compassionate, knowledgeable, helpful, and accepting. They help newcomers feel welcome and want to return. It’s obvious they care.

Sometimes I fill in. I greet people by name, welcome them, and serve coffee. Sometimes I’ll joke that I’m serving chicory, but only to people who already know me.
When I’m at the front desk, I know it’s my job to accept everyone who comes in without judgement, to be welcoming and cordial, and to encourage everyone in their recovery. I get to suggest resources and lead people to groups. It warms my know-it-all heart.
Collage reads: “Few are those who see with their own eyes and feel with their own hearts.” Albert Einstein
Disarm Yourself

Collage reads: “Disarm yourself of the need for comfort. Go lightly into places where you are a stranger. Disarm yourself of loyalty to what is normal, but false. Pledge allegiance to the tree outside your window, to your neighbor’s children, to the speed of light.”
**Eden DW**

“This house, an old, never finished, grand piece of architecture was mysterious. Around every corner the past was there haunting it. I felt so alive there next to the decay and dust and my mind came alive with possible stories about the ones who use to live there.

“Growing up in the woods, surrounded by old and crumbling buildings, I would visit the old man who lived in a house to the left of this shed. He seemed solid and permanent, like he has lived there in the woods his whole long life.”

Plumas County
A Tree in the City
Contemplation
In the Woods
Archaic Window
The House of Mysteries
Sean Erickson

“I'm a 41 year old Eureka resident. I have been drawing since before I can remember. I have belonged to Humboldt's art for life program for 6 years. My inspiration for my art stems from video game fan art. I have created my own studio where suggestions from my family and friends determines the work I produce from it.”

Hope Center, Humboldt County
Dubble
Debra Lynn Freese

Submitted by Tracy Geary, daughter of Debra Freeze

It is a heartfelt rendition of how Debbie lived her life. She was kind and caring. In loving memory, 9/16/1960-4/8/2019.
Forgiveness: To Top with Me

Come friend, I'll tell you about My little plan. Together we can make it. To the top as far on Top as we possibly can. We'll leave the pain Behind. That never let us gain in life. We'll Wipe our hands of these hard times. Shame We felt and the love we'll find. For so many Times we were left behind. With miles of hills We've had to climb. Working hard time after Time. To get ahead only to fall further behind. We've had our share of bad times. Now we can Put them all aside. We're going to try to live a Better way of life. To the top with me; feeling Happy and free. Where you can be you and I can be me. Just come my friend. Regain your hope; all things can be and never must you not believe.

Written August 7, 1999
In memoriam: Debbie Lynn Freeze 9/16/1960 to April 8/2019
L Lee Gonzales

Lee is a mental health patient from BCMH who writes in his spare time and converses with other patients.

“I wanted to write a song, though I decided not, but to make it into a poem.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Sing Along

It is impossible
That's what
I
Used to know
For
Me to sing

Know
What I wanted
To say
That’s what I
Said
To you
When you said
To me
All of your dreams
That it’s
Impossible
For me to know
What to sing
Mary Jane Gordon

“Hi, my name is Mary.

I work hard on my poetry. I have a son. This has always been my dream... to have something published in a real book. I like to read. My favorite author is Stephen King. I love watching movies. I love to journal every day.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Pooh Bear

Pooh bear sits and counts his honey pies, climbs the trees for more honey, being stung by the bees, and chased by them... buzzing buzzing.

Always going off on great adventures, with Christopher Robin, Piglet, Eeyore, Rabbit, Owl, Miss Kanga and little Roo.

But most of all don’t get pounced or bounced upon by Tigger. He is quick as a trigger.

To my son,

Joseph Porter

Love Mom

11-21-11
Kermit the Frog

Kermit the green frog, for he longs to sing and dance, hops from lily pad to lily pad living in the swamp, it’s the life for frog.

Did you know such a frog could be so much in love with a piggy? That is so pretty and has so many friends and fans too. One of his best friends is a big yellow bird named Big Bird.

How about a green Oscar the Grouch that lives in a garbage can, and so many more as well.

For these are all my great friends too as well.

I grew quite fond of them as I was growing up, and still love them.

Dedicated to my son,

Joseph Porter

11-21-11
Puff the Magic Dragon

Puff Puff The Magic Dragon, wouldn’t that be so freaking awesome, to ride on the back of a dragon, a Pegasus, a unicorn and a zebra would even be so cool.

Puff Puff The Magic Dragon look out for that tree.

5-17-18

Puff Puff the Magic Dragon, have you ever seen such a thing?

He flies so high above, he helps children that are in need of help, then he goes to the next child to help.

Puff Puff the Magic Dragon, living in a cave. It’s not easy to be with a dragon. Tears and raindrops for the one you love. Living in a lighthouse as well. It ain’t so easy.

Puff Puff the Magic Dragon, treat him good and love him as much as you can. A magic dragon would be so cool to have for my own.

5-25-19
God Soars

God soars the galaxy, and into the universe he goes, the stars, the moon, the planets, the Milky Way and mars and so much more.

God soars throughout the galaxy, the sun, the flowers, the beautiful mountains, God’s such beautiful things.

God soars throughout the galaxy, not just a one night stand, God is always with us.

God soars throughout the universe. Is there really a Heaven and Hell out there?
Rus H

“I’m a ‘Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda, Didn’t. Now what?’ person, who could shoulda all over his day if it wasn’t for the Iversen and support groups. Recovery [helps] greatly”.

Iversen Center, Butte County
Compilation of Work

1.

2019

There is a member named Jack who would give the grumpy members a little flack.

With a gleam in his eye,
he would tell of a scene.

Instead of getting mad he asked for help.
That’s all I’m going to say now about that.

2.

Hoody who and Miss M. too
Would go to the taco truck
just for the burrito in town,

Rain or shine,
Fun in the sun.
Butch Hastaran

Iversen Center, Butte County
Indiana Jones
Intergalactic Headbutting Contest
Jedi Episode 2
Superman Collage
Thor’s Helm
Hope Hill

Hope is a former foster child who's battled PTSD for most of her life. She uses her writing to make sense of the world.

“[My work] tackles an aspect of mental health in a very different light. Reminding people that just because something can be seen as bad doesn't mean it has to be.”

Butte County
Stutter

I love my stutter
Each word it trips over
Is a reminder to breathe
It's way of saying
You are still alive
I do not stutter often
But when I do I'm glad
I stutter through panic attacks
My stutter means that
I am struggling
When my stutter arrives
I am not silent
I speak quickly
Knowing each word
Is a victory
Every repeated syllable requires breath
And each syllable
Brings me closer to safety
If I stutter in your presence let me
Do not try to make my words come out pretty
Know that my failure to speak properly
Is proof I'm still alive
Still fighting
If you listen to me stutter
You will hear my words
Return to normal
Know my heartrate did too
Someday you may hear me stutter
If you hear me stuttering
Let me
I only stutter during panic attacks
But when I stutter
I am breathing
And that is what matters most
Kim Holmes

Kim is a 61 year old Navy veteran struggling with PTSD who copes with it by writing, crochet, and painting.

Iversen Center, Butte County
Calming Exercise I
When Lorenzo Tried to Fit In

Lorenzo the Sparklebird was a unique bird who was proud of both himself and his job. He was proud of himself, because he was gifted with not only the most magnificent crest feathers anyone had ever seen, but blindingly bright chest feathers, scintillating wings, and extremely long, luxurious tail feathers. Even his talons and beak were extraordinarily attractive.

As a result, it was his job to make sure that sunrises were so spectacular that people couldn’t wait to wake up early to see them; that rainbows were so beautiful that they took one’s breath away, and that sunsets were so heartbreakingly gorgeous that folks wept at the dying of the day. This he accomplished with aerial acrobatics that were stunning to watch and caused reflections from his feathers to add sparkle and shine to these daily events and cause them to glow.

Some of the creatures and birds, the more drab and ordinary ones, became jealous and the hatred in their hearts began to grow. They began to mock and taunt him.

“Your parents must really hate you,” they would say, “to give you a name like that.”

“Where did you get those feathers? The trash bin?”

“Nobody wears their feathers like that these days. What a stupid looking bird.”

One day, when he could take it no longer, he ripped out his crest feathers. No more pride and joy for him! He cut his wing feathers short. No more spectacular flights. He cut his tail feathers short. No more fancy plumage for him. He rolled in the mud and painted his breast feathers a dull red. In one final act of self-hatred, he changed his name to Robin Redbreast.

The more ordinary birds loved this, and welcomed him eagerly, throwing him a big party. Lor-er, Robin thought this was great and had a great time. He was happy.
Sunrises, were pretty, rainbows were nice, and sunsets were lovely. Their magic was, however, gone.

Moral: If you are unique, don’t try to fit in with the ordinary. The world needs you just the way you are.
Janet

“I love to bring peace in nonverbal ways.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Peace
Gary Jennings

Gary grew up in a fearful and abusive family. He grew up in Southern California in the 60’s and 70’s with all the prosperity, intensity, and optimism that went along with that.

“I’ve been running from myself all my life, while the pain inside kept dragging me down. By the time I was in College I had an extremely double life (two masks surgically attached); living with the best of people during the day, and the best of drugs through the night. Needless to say, it all came crashing down. At fifty-eight, I finally began taking off these masks to see what’s left of me inside. Now I make a science of living with what is really going on inside and outside of me.

The amazement I have for life and everyone else has given me a whole new self-image that doesn’t depend on anything I do or do not do. It’s like a safety net that I can always step back into and find rest, motivation, and enjoyment each day.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Realistic Wonder

Tell I’m crazy to live in constant wonder of our lives;
Looking at one end of the night sky to the other
From one breath of mine to the next,
And now looking at all of you—whoa!
Life itself, whatever we may think, is such a finely tuned array.
It is to me a vast comfort and value for all of us who have a place in here.

Even our pain is a wonder;
Whether it trains us, shows us our depth,
Twists us into evil, or possibly ends us.
It is all so convoluted within our lives.
The contradictions and the mystery are all so vast,
Amazing in themselves—going on and on...

We must be awfully important to be aware here in the midst.
How could light be light if we were not here to see it.
How could the ground be here if we did not stand on it and give it purpose?
Never mind the gravity, growth, and colors.
And what of silence, stillness, and space?
How valuable we must be looking
into this kaleidoscope of things both material and invisible.

Every moment is a miracle of being coming at us from every direction.

We duck from many thoughts and feelings
And chase hard after others.

Thoughts and feelings are ever moving;
Rising and falling, being born and dying.

I can see my awareness go as far as the end of the universe;
A clear, still space inside of me;
It is the only thing constant about me;
Light in front of the sun,
And fire under the ground.

Awareness beyond my selfishness
Is colored with peace, joy, and love.

Do you call me crazy to live with this amazement all the time?
The appreciation is the sanest of awareness.
It kept me from suicide when a fall took my breath away
And darkness almost overcame my diamond spark.
I could see a massive star, if not only in my imagination.
They say the possible connections in our brain
Amount to the number of leaves in a hundred square miles of
dense forest.

I wonder which is more amazing;
The forest under my feet or the forest in my mind.
They both are so enticing;
To run and jump, and do cartwheels.

You are another landscape;
Another universe of comfort and value.
Together how rich this reality is.
At times our lives feel like a fantasy,
But this is as real as it gets.
60’s Optimism in 2019

I would certainly be old now at 61,

Thinking as I did at 16.

We’d declare, “Energy, man! That’s what it’s all about...”

Like sitting behind Sherry in Science carefully peeling apart her split ends,

Or like getting set free at three o’clock to work out until five.

We partied in the flow of friends and music into the still, far-out, expanse of late night.

Black lights, tapestries, Pink Floyd, and Strawberry fields;

Who sang “…hope I die before I get old!” and I believed them.

Growing up I craved Reality,

Taking drugs to sink my teeth in the profound Being of everything.

Studying philosophers with many times my brains;

So afraid to miss out on anything,

Pleading with God to show me how I fit inside infinity.

Even in love I was trapped inside myself,

Terrified by secret illusions

And ripped apart by “good” and “evil.”

I was kicking and screaming through my 20’s and 30’s,
Beating in my head in through my 40’s.

Thank God I looked far out to the moon through the bushes

Looking up on the ground with my cardboard.

In the morning I watched my shadow cast across the American River.

There was something solid about that shadow that captured my attention.

How beautiful just to see and be in the cool and calm.

So fine the rays from ninety-three million miles away!

Funny how much younger I grew through my 50’s

Reality has always been here and now

With Paul and Ringo getting even higher today

Telling each other “I love you” on stage.

It’s a habit of looking up in the constant company of Harmony;

The expanse seems endless inside me now:

Blue Stone, meditation walks outside, and Netflix anywhere;

It’s a supernova energy, man!
Connie Johnson

Milestones, Trinity County
Beach

Walking on a summer day
On a beach in play
Hear the sounds of wind say
To when I love this day
I write in sand every day
And the birds do fly
So high and by
The name that stay in
The sands play
Danny
Laurice Johnson

Laurice was raised by loving “Depression-Era” Parents who valued old fashioned common sense: The freedom to choose, freedom to pray to God by whatever Name, to bear arms, and not live in fear! Life wasn’t perfect but it offered her a tool for survival, along with a love for horses!

Having incurred an early childhood skull fracture, she was fortunate to heal. Her Mother’s love, care, compassion nurtured her innocent beginning. Throughout life she had many more head whacks, from just Living Out Loud!

“Now I’m SO grateful I witnessed Faith and strength. I love my Angels too! Again now I reach up and ASK that this beautiful Earth’s creatures, instinctual spirit’s and wildlife be offered a safe home to keep some of their innocence. As Innocence is the POWER to Faith making miracles. We were all Born worthy of Love.”

Brain Injury Coalition and Iversen Center, Butte County
My Beloved Gypsy Horse

Prayer to Great Spirit

My beloved Gypsy horse, I LOVE YOU still! We shared a relationship of trust. We were a team of Trust. We were Unconditional Love and Joy.

Oh sweet Gypsy I was so naive to what Bullies would do, and they would hurt you for your Love of me. I'm so sorry I was caught in a whirl of fear vs. save you from being stolen from me, legally conned. You gifted me a freedom to find my inner strength; to train you to Trust required me to BE YOUR PROTECTOR. And we were a Team from the heart of love and respect. You allowed the flag to twirl around you as you stood relaxed, even in the midst of chaos. I rode with my dressage whip and rode with my helmet because safety takes tools, not treats. You inspired others.

Oh Gypsy, you kept me strong in my Core. I hurt less when I rode you, keeping my back muscles strong, flexibility for my spine and Hope in my heart. You gifted me so much. You were so funny, I’d say you were a Quarter goat as you’d eat anything as a treat. A Quarter dog, because you loved people more than horses. And yes, you were a Tri-color Quarter horse! Groomed and loved from the day I saved you. And in the journey you saved me. Oh Gypsy I pray Angel Dreams for you to have Happy Horsey Dreams!

Remembering the soothing sounds, of your delight of eating GREEN GRASS! You helped to distracting me from my grief of a ripped open heart. Thank you forever my beloved Gypsy Horse.
Suzanne La Fleiche Chilow

Suzanne is a dual-diagnosed person who has found wellness.

“Simple thoughts from a simple mind. The grammar utilized is for Artistic Poetic intention. Lower case "i"s are intentional in reflection of less emphasis on self.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Each One is Wonderful

We’re each going our own way
It’s good to see you today
From here to there we go
Your story i do not know
However i can tell you this
If you weren’t in this world you would be missed
Sometimes when i’m not how i want to be
i make snap judgements about you That only hurts me
Most of what you are i would like to be
i absolutely love and am fascinated
By your unique and interesting – self related
To a world advertising humans to be perfect
In reality does not and cannot reflect
The individual beauty that every human bears
Material and physical on the heart wears
Take care and awareness and delight in who you are
Because you are noticed and recognized like a bright shining star
Brin LaMontagne

“I am a 53 year old Eureka resident. I grew up in Humboldt in the Victorian Ferndale. I first started drawing the fancy ginger bread houses about town and selling the drawings to unsuspecting tourists on Main Street.

“Trever the reluctant monk is the artistic expression of my yang energy. He has spent a thousand lifetimes trying to liberate his soul only to be filled by the beautiful sights and songs of the night.”

Hope Center, Humboldt County
Trever the Reluctant Monk
Andrea LaVoy Wagner

Andrea is firmly dedicated to reducing stigma and cultivating a community of support in the North State for mental wellness. She currently works for Crisis Services in Butte County Department of Behavioral Health and is a Superior Region Ambassador for ACCESS California, a program of NorCal Mental Health America. She started as a Peer Advocate in behavioral health in 2015, after struggling with depression, suicide attempts, homelessness, and psychiatric hospitalizations for most of her life. She helped to start the Diverse Minds program.

“I created this poem as a collage during a journaling/writing workshop at the Lassen Aurora Network wellness center in Susanville, Lassen County. It conveys some of my thoughts about the tremendous value of mental health peer support and reminds me of my friends in Susanville.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Peer Support
Joya Linn

Iversen Center, Butte County
Hobbit House
Shari Lucas-Herndon

“I’ve been doing art since I was seven years old. My art changed in recent years to multiple levels of creativity. Please enjoy my multi-media ‘Princess Warrior’.”

Helping Hands of Lompoc, Santa Barbara County
Princess Warrior

Princess Warrior is my name
I soar to the skies, to the
Heavens
To touch the grace of Your
Love
Reveal my heart forever in
You!
“All things are possible!”
Princess Warrior
Julie Matthews

“I have been involved in the wellness and recovery environment for 23+ years, however, when I began attending the Iversen Center gained a new understanding of wellness tools and how to implement them into my life. In addition to my 12 step program, I now attend and facilitate groups at the Iversen Center. Thanks to the center I now have a Wellness Recovery Action Plan to aid me in my journey. My life is enriched by the groups and activities in which I participate and my social interactions with those on this journey with me.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
At Last

I see the road ahead of me
Clearer than ever before.
No bars or gates obstruct my path,
Nor does the prison of self lock me away.
I am free to choose,
Free to explore,
Willing to learn-
I am finally free to begin to live,
Existing has been my identity for far too long.
Now is the time for new beginnings,
New challenges, new losses, new gains.
It is what I've searched for and finally found-
The gateway to unending mystery.
The chains have fallen,
They have rusted away.
I have only to hope, to pray, to tell my truth
And my path will be revealed.
It is what I've asked for
And now receive...
The wonders of what each day may bring-
I am grateful,
I am humble,
At last... I am alive.
John McMackin & Sage

Iversen Center, Butte County
Cup of Tea
Leprechaun on the Hill
John McMackin, et al

John is a Senior Adult, Artist and facilitator for Iversen, doing Home Care and Volunteer work locally. He organized this collaborative piece with:

Eddie Riley
Monique AKA Momo
Suzanne La Fleiche Chilow
Rita Molloy Doe
Sage
Robert Carver
David
Tracy
“Son of Lou”
Michael
Collaborative Drawing
Brian McNaughten

“I am a Survivor, A creative person on a better path.”

Six Stones Wellness Center, Siskiyou County
Every Ending is a Beginning
Fearful Camping
Spotted Goose
Patty McReynolds

Patty McReynolds has suffered from depression all her life and has expressed herself through sculpture and painting for many years. “Screams” was created in 2001 while she attended Mendocino College, after a bout of depression in which she was suicidal. She was able to work through it with the support of her mother, Betty McReynolds.

“Screams” is dedicated to her mom.

Iversen Center, Butte County
Screams
Screams
Lyndelle Miller

Iversen Center, Butte County
Untitled
Suzanne Nichols

“This picture shows my culture and my love of roses.”

Milestones, Trinity County
Celtic Cross & Roses
Trinity Price

Trinity is a female who traveled over 3,000 miles to find recovery. It’s still a work in progress, but she’s a warrior.

“This poem is what I remember feeling as a child with a diagnosis that I now don’t identify with and the people who have helped me to stop running and start fighting for the truth.”

Helping Hands of Lompoc, Santa Barbara County
Just a Little Girl

I want to tell a story about a little girl.
It won’t be hard to tell, her spirit will send you for a whirl.
She can often see things that not many others do.
She can hear voices that she can answer too.
People judge her often, so she doesn’t have a lot to say,
People often ignore, they know no other way.
I don’t share this story often, I’m afraid of what you’ll say.
If you see my eyes wandering, just another typical day.
The fears of the past, no longer haunt me.
I am as happy as a pill; my tormentors no longer taunt me.
I have my own free will; my brain works a little funny.
Yet my heart stays true and strong, I may be just like you.
There is nothing really wrong.
So if you see me coming, don’t be afraid to give a hug.
Wrap your arms around me, and give a little tug.
I now have many friends, it’s very easy to see.
No more running from my life.
I’m happy being me.
Sage

“I am a member of The Iversen Center working on my wellness and recovery. I choose to do this with my writing and my drawing.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Asleep in a Sunset
Magalia in the Clouds
My Beautiful Broken Body

Pain at the thoughts and the hands of others.

Did you really expect me to be standing there staring back at you yesterday?

What? Did you really think I was faking it all those years, the pain in the tears?

You, the one that I loved so long. Good, all I wanted to be, perfectly normal, so I could stand, walk, and run beside you.

But you were the worst defender of the stigma. Standing around, seeing, hearing

The pain that seemed to creep in and steal my beautiful life from underneath me:

Going from able to walk anywhere, to work, to play, to make love, and see it all go away.

Yes, you never told your attorney that the Old Miss Krinsky was broken and wheel-chaired.

Let us not forget, we have this beautiful baby girl, whose life from start,

All she wanted to do was play like a normal child, you and I both watched her beautiful life fade

Into the Fate of boys’ shoes, leg braces, in and out of wheelchairs, and worst of all, our being able to see her not breathe.

Who wants to believe that pain could be caused by the thoughts and the hands of others?

In spite of it all, I try to make a difference in other people's lives, whether I'm attempting to walk, or wheeling
Or the multitude of hand braces and body braces, the straps holding together this Beautifully Broken body

Like a beautifully Broken porcelain doll that we attempt to put back together with baling wire and Gorilla Glue.

You may not see my scars every day.

All of the wraps and braces and chairs can never take away the pain that blossoms in my brain,

Because all I wanted ever was to be was what we call today normal.

No matter what happens to me physically, as long as I've got my brain and my mouth works,

I will keep fighting for my life and my rights a Beautifully Broken woman.

I used to care what you thought of me, but it doesn't matter anymore.

What does is that I matter, and no one can take that away from me.

Unfortunately, I still feel the pain from what others may think of me.
Nowelle Sinclair

Nowelle is a 43-year-old woman from Northern California. She enjoys poetry, horticulture, watching movies, cooking, baking, and drawing. Her favorite movie is still Nacho Libre. Her favorite music right now is Katy Perry and Iggy Azalea.

Butte County
My Mental Illness

Voices lie
Scattered thoughts
Pigeonholed ideas
Delusional conclusions
Anger
Frustration
Laughing
Sadness
Tactile sensations
Yelling conversations
Switched brain
Accusations everywhere
Insane
Crazy
Loopy
Psycho
Buzzing sounds
Kitchen attacks
Ruined ideas
Mental breakdowns
Lie
Cheat
Steal
Destroy
Hurt feelings
Weird relationships
Loud behavior
Guarded self
Ruin
Hate
Pain
Growth
Threats against me
Television talking
Neighbors spitting
Birds communicating
Coping
Watching
Hearing
Seeing
Evil people
Fallen angels
Creator God
Am I a god?
Peace
Wrath
Kindness
Power
Brain sections
Thoughts on top
Portions doing business
People inside
Religion
Persecution
Planets
Unicorns
Talking to self
Previous life?
Spiritual person
Enemies at hand
Controlled
Manipulated
Deceived
Related
Realm ideas
Protection within
Holy Spirit help
Wisdom speaks
Understanding
Knowledge
Strength
Discernment
Train is passing
Chico sleeps
I am writing
The devil creeps
Perverts
Weirdos
Blasphemers
Kids
My mind wanders
Schizophrenia abuses
Psychosis holds me
Mental illness is hate.
Mary:

“My family’s struggle with mental illness started with my grandfather.

I am fortunate enough to be able to find peace and serenity.

I am grateful for the Iverson Wellness and Recovery Center.

My granddaughter loves art and I value her input with my writing.”

The poems are from Mary’s heartfelt journey of recovery and are illustrated by Jada Belle.

Iverson Wellness and Recovery Center, Butte County
Shattered

How many shattered pieces are there?
Do I deny being put back together by man or nature?
I long to be free.
I am tired and lonely.
I am tired of pretending that everything is okay.
Remembering the very first time I felt this way.
The circle to end where it began.
I float through the door marked with the present.
As I enter, I find hope and a new freedom.
Missing Voice

Often I have looked out my window,
And seen you outside in the garden.
I am wondering if you ever noticed me.
I remember the joy I felt seeing you there.
I am wishing to sing a song with you again.
Our life goes on; but there is a voice missing!
Love

Over and over, He reached into my soul,
Opening doors of my heart
I never knew existed.
Reaching into my soul, I crossed the threshold of pain.
I found a new awareness to find love itself.
Mary Snoberger

Iversen Center, Butte County
Grief I

It’s not a dream
Made-up to deal with grief;
To soothe the pain away.
The day will arrive when we meet

Again in our home beyond time;
There where those who went before us
Hold open the door to a timeless realm.
They are waiting for us to cross over that threshold.
Into their arms again. From here it appears it's been forever;
From there it seems but a moment ago
Since we said our last goodbyes.
Oh the adventures we will share, and stories with one another,
When we awaken there on another summer day.

Grief II

In this moment I see you
My memories come and go.
The days are lonely without you.
Here in this loss;
I’ve lost count of the days without you.
The winds blow and bring a sweet reminder of you.
Through the hourglass of time;
I see your reflection upon the water.
A 4-Minute Book

Collage reads: “There is nothing more important to true growth than realizing that you are not the voice of the mind—you are the one who hears it.” Michael A. Singer
Laura Sorensen

Laura loves new friends she has at Iverson. The groups, membership, and staff work together to provide a rich environment for learning about mental health and leadership.

“I wrote this piece to myself. I read it every day to feel inspired.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
I’m Sensitive

I am sensitive.
I love deeply.
I am honest, loyal, and true.
I appreciate the simple things.
I will not change or harden to this world.

It is this sensitivity, perception, sincerity, awareness, affection and gentle grace that makes me who I am.
Jude Star

“I have a demon angel, confused and lost in this world.”

Oroville Drop in Center, Butte County
Honorable Mention

It’s with Truth, Honor, and Respect that we live,
It’s with Truth, Honor, and Respect that we die.
I don’t consider me a failure, just lonely for those I love.
So it’s with Truth, Honor, and Respect that which we live,
That we die.
Catercorn
Abstraction = Feel the Pain
Yazmın Zofiah
Stars

Born Dec 22 1995, her mother named me after herself. She loves music and singing. She enjoys dancing, mostly in private. Writing is such a good way for her to express herself.

“I wrote about how the emotions can take ahold of me and it feels like I'm just a doll. I feel like it’s very sentimental in a way that I express how I daily have to deal with life: Do I want the attention? Do I separate myself from the attention? Is it real? Is it fake? I was in this deep place of sincerity with myself when I wrote this. When I look at it, it feels like I’m saying a lot, but then I read it again and remind myself the readers don’t know me, and I feel less exposed.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
The Attention

Emotions going up and down are they playing play pretend with me am I just a dolly no real smiles nor frowns probably fake sounds coming out of my mouth

I'm just sitting around waiting for someone to pick me up and toss me around I cry a lot but my face stays still

I want love near instead I'm feeling other feelings that don't feel real maybe too real in my mind that image of the bridge where I can finally help myself everyone moves on I'll finally free myself from wanting to be picked up and be put in your face like hey notice me then again you sucking up my energy you want a hold on me leaving your mark on me couldn't treat me with care your obsession became a self-inflicted curse

Should I appreciate the maneuver the drives of your eyes all over what's mine gets me content

I'm not alone this time.
Susie

“I’m an artist, and I have a bipolar disorder. I came down with it at forty, I’m sixty-nine now, good and feeling normal again. For twenty years I would have episodes, but I haven’t had one in five years. Now I’m in good spirits, I take my medication and that’s half the battle. I feel good about everything, now everything is going well. I started painting on canvas twenty years ago.

“Flower in Flight is about feeling good and stable. It means recovery from depression, it means freedom. I have been depressed in the past. I thought I would paint what I felt when I snapped out of it, which is a free feeling.”

Butte County
Flower in Flight
Racing Thoughts
Annette J Teixeira

Annette was born in San Diego, CA near the Pacific Ocean. All four of her grandparents came from the same two Azores Islands in the Atlantic Ocean. So, she figure it is OK to say she is an “Island Girl.”

She lived most of my life on the coast of California, but has spent the last 22 years inland, here in Butte County. It was here she ended a 24-year relationship, began a 12-year relationship and completed her education at the age of 56.

“I have now lived 3 ½ years in my first apartment, alone. And I know I am growing in confidence, social skills and self-responsibility. I so appreciate the idea and the reality of the Iverson Center, all the staff I get to meet, and all the members that have shown nothing but kindness and acceptance towards me.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Shell Shocked
Broken Shell of a Woman

I am.

Just that.

A broken shell.

No longer freshly picked up from the sand at the edge of the ocean,
With sparkly bright colors and curves.
But cracked and slivered, and carelessly tossed aside. . .
No longer mattering or needed in the world.

The years of struggle yielding wisdom, only valued by peers;
Seem to have become dim in my eyes.
The young will see one day, but I will be long gone.

What to say?
What to ask?
What to share?

Even frozen smiles mend broken hearts.
Three-Sided House Mouse
A Flower Close Up
Fire Dancers
TerraKarma

Iversen Center, NYSA, Behavioral Health, Butte County
Camp Fire Victim Art
Meds

I have finally realized I must take medication.
It’s prison or this sane path of dedication.
There’s no rhyme or reason for my bipolar illness.
It’s been 20 years of trauma and now finally wellness.
A WRAP plan, mood chart and the Iversen center.
Turned starving homeless into a five course dinner.
Wrong Notes: Camp Fire 2018
Jean Varda

Jean is a poet of fifty years, a licensed practical nurse, a collage artist, and a mother of three. She presently lives in Chico, where she works as a nanny. She enjoys her retirement and visits to Bidwell Park.

“I was visiting a dear friend in a county hospital after she had a breakdown and before they shipped her to a psychiatric facility. I wrote this poem for her.”

Butte County
The Rose

for Laura

One petal of the rose he gave
fell onto the hospital floor
and lay there
staring up at us
in a shock of color
As we sat and talked
about feeling and not feeling
darkness and light

Rain poured against
the city streets
splashed and pattered
against the air conditioner
in the window
As I looked across the room
into my friend’s face
into sorrow and despair
And I wanted to place
inside her a promise
of clarity
a great passing away
of sadness
But I am not certain myself
and there is nothing
I can promise
nothing I can do
but hold her and rock
rock us together
in friendship that
speaks in these raindrops
dripping and cool on my back
As I sit here and wait
for the bus home
thinking of my friend
and her sadness our sadness
BriannaVictoria

“I enjoy participating at the Iversen Center. My strengths are heard when I sing because I am a musician as well as an artist.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Raw Combustion
Raw Combustion

The Lights Flash,
My awareness kicks in fast,
How long can I stay, How can I last?
For I am the self-made manifestation of my past.

I know deep inside,
My life purpose is much greater than seen by the eye,
My lost destiny, I’m still searching to find.
I am to complete each goal and reach all heights,
It’s a mental battle and War I must fight,
Divine given knowledge of insight, self-sacrifice,
I believe we are all beautiful beings of light.
We understand what is wrong and what is right,
When things are loose we must make them tight.

I have walked through fire, I’ve swum through hell,
Struggles, pain, hurtful tales I could tell,
Living inside chaos and diversion I stood back up each time I fell,
Every battle we overcome we are to receive powerful knowledge
to pass on as well,
Wisdom to reveal the difference between the truth and what lies
this world tries to sell.
We will appear from the deep-dark-depths,
We will conquer the evil that taunts and tempts,
For it is life and death we must learn to accept.

Break those chains! It can be done with our own inner strengths,
Somehow someway we must accept others’ lives and own fate,
We must stand for peace, love and rid cruelty, end all hate,
Learn to appreciate the rising sun of each and every day,
Learn to preserve earned righteousness and respect, but actions must always match the words we say,
Then last, take our experience from our past to fulfill why we were made,
Rise up from the ashes, stand firm, Keep Faith.

When we’re in confusion, reality may seem like an illusion, nothing makes sense,
When we are in darkness and those moments that seem extremely hardest,
Forever remember, never forget, Failure is not an Option.
Reyna
Beholder of Beauty
Roja Death
Sue Waterreus

Sue is a person who loves challenges—because life itself is a challenge and she made it this far (with support from other people). She learned to knit in the Girl Scouts.

“I wanted to make this piece as realistic as possible and enjoyed the challenge.”

Iversen Center, Butte County
Fox Wrap
Jason Wegner

As a youngster, Jason found inspiration for art through comic books. He started creating his own comic books. 26 years ago, he started doing art therapy in Humboldt's Art for Life program. He has been a prolific artist ever since.”

Hope Center, Humboldt County
Lady in a Turban
Thank you for enjoying our North State Journal 2019!

*Diverse Minds* continues to grow as a regional program promoting wellness through the arts in Northern California.

As we grow, please continue to check in and perhaps join in on future events and projects. We would also love to hear from you and to know if you have any contributions or ideas for this very special endeavor.

Check out our website at:

www.nvcss.org/diverseminds
Hope
Support
Respect

Peers helping peers

Northern Valley Talk Line
1-855-582-5554

Iversen Wellness & Recovery Center
492 Rio Lindo Avenue • Chico
530-879-3311
The Diverse Minds North State Journal is a collection of art and writing that strives to honor and showcase the passions and talents of people who have been impacted by mental illness and other life challenges. Our hope is that sharing these works can help to increase community understanding, empathy, and awareness about the diverse experiences and faces of mental health recovery and wellness.

This collection is brought to you by the Iversen Wellness & Recovery Center in Chico, California, and includes submissions from communities throughout many counties in Northern California. The Iversen Center is a program of Northern Valley Catholic Social Service, supported by Butte County Department of Behavioral Health and the Mental Health Services Act.