



November 16, 2018

Dear Friends of Mental Health America & Christmas Gift Lift,

My name is Joe Breedlove and I would love to share my story with you. I have struggled with mental illness my entire life. I was only 8 years old the first time I tried to commit suicide. Over the years, I have been in and out of hospitals and have been on countless medications. My road to change began one week when I was in a group home.

It was just before Christmas and I received a Gift Lift Bag from Mental Health America (MHA). I had no idea who they were. They packed that bag full of all kinds of stuff, from hygiene products to gloves and socks. There were also puzzle books, paper, pens and most importantly chocolate. I can remember feeling genuinely touched. I could not believe there was an organization out there thinking of someone like me at Christmas time. I was only there for a week so I did not look into MHA at the time.

I left the group home after one week; I was placed in the state hospital. At the hospital, I found myself occasionally thinking of the Gift Lift bag and wondered who would do such a nice thing for me without knowing anything about me. I was released from the state hospital in Richmond in June 2007.

After my release, I was struggling to get situated. I attended lots of groups every week, and would hear MHA mentioned from time to time. That Christmas, I received another bag from MHA Gift Lift. Again, I felt extremely appreciative. This time I made the decision to do something about it. I found out that they ran something called Social Club. It was a place where people dealing with mental illness, developmental disabilities or physical disabilities could come together for a couple of hours each week to enjoy food and entertainment. I spent a lot of time around Rick Dillman and eventually got to know Jill and Cindy as well.

I volunteered every week for 10 years. For the first couple of years, I volunteered primarily at Social Club. I was then asked to assist during Gift Lift. During this time, I began to feel more confident and had a sense of pride. In 2017, MHA hired a new director, Brandi Christiansen. Brandi took a chance and asked me to come on as an employee.

I am now the Outreach Specialist for MHA. For the first time in a long time, I can see myself with a future. If it were not for my family and MHA, I probably would not be here today. MHA does so much for people dealing with mental illnesses, but it was a simple gesture of a Gift Lift Bag that was the catalyst that changed my life. I went from hopelessness and despair to having a job I am proud of. Here in Kokomo, Mental Health America of North Central Indiana is a small team with a group of loyal and hardworking volunteers, which make MHA possible.

Your donations do make a difference in people's lives. It may just seem like a small gift, but it can make a large impact on one person. We need your assistance to continue this valuable program in our communities. Please consider donating to Mental Health America of North Central Indiana.

We urge you or your organization to join us in helping to make Christmas a special time of year for those members of our society that are in need. Please, call the Mental Health America office at 765-459-0309 or visit our website at [www.mhanci.org](http://www.mhanci.org) to donate. Or, you can mail a check to MHANCI 700 E. Firmin St. STE 263 to aide us in providing Christmas cheer to our brothers and sisters who would not otherwise receive one. The deadline for specified needed items is November 30<sup>th</sup>. The needs list can be found on our website or our Facebook page.

Thank you again for your continued support!  
Joe Breedlove, Outreach Specialist



***Mental Health America is a United Way funded partner agency and a Center Township Trustees community partner***