



The Digest

Charlie's Story

From childhood chaos to recovery

Hello, I am Charlie. I am 28, a mom and a wife. I have autism, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and complex PTSD. I have been coming to Sinnissippi on and off since I was a teenager. My childhood was chaotic and unhealthy.

I was raised by a mentally ill single mother who was going to school and work full time with three kids. She loved and loves us very much, but was pushed past the point of breaking on a daily basis and didn't have much support or connection. She was verbally abusive, and parentified (fulfilling roles that would normally be filled by the actual parent) me as the oldest. As an inherited gift, my mom is a hoarder and our home growing up was overflowing and dirty. We never had people over. I grew up intensely scared and isolated.

I am autistic, but I am incredibly smart, and I learned early to ignore my needs and was being neglected so somehow, I fell through the cracks and wasn't diagnosed until the age of 19. Growing up even in a normal environment without appropriate attention to a disability would be damaging.

As I got older life became unbearable. I did not know how to interact with the world in a way that wasn't damaging to myself and others. I had been depressed since first grade, but in high school it reached a new peak. I began self-harming, and first attempted suicide at 15. I was constantly suicidal. I hated being alive. I thought I would kill myself before I turned 25. I was frequently hospitalized for suicidal ideation, self-harm, and emergency medication adjustments.

I had mild success with Sinnissippi therapists back then but I was not genuine in my sessions so there's only so much they could do. When I met Alex, I felt so comfortable and safe. I have had lots of intense relationships but he was so mellow and genuine. He loved me for who I truly was, not who I tried to be. He made me believe love was real. I still struggled greatly with my mental illness and still attempted suicide twice but I felt like I could figure out how to heal.

I wasn't seeing Sinnissippi when I had my daughter at 23. She is the light of my life, and gave me a reason to get out of my head and care for someone else. But about a year after she was born, my mental state took a dark turn in a different direction. Thinking was foggy and scary, and symptoms of schizophrenia increased until January of 2023



Story Title - continued on page 2

Latest News

- Charlie's Story pp. 1-2
- Sinnissippi Milestone pp. 1-2
- Gather With Us for Good p.3
- Save the Date - Golf Open p.3

Events

- Blood Drive at Dixon-Route 2 office April 21, 2026
- Gathering for Good, May 16, 2026, Dixon Elks Lodge
- Culver's Share Nights - Rock Falls June 16, 2026, Dixon June 23, 2026
- Sinnissippi Centers Golf Open, August 13, 2026, Deer Valley Golf Club

2026 Marks a Major Milestone for Sinnissippi

On May 31, 1966, Sinnissippi Centers was incorporated as a non-profit organization under its original name: The Sinnissippi Mental Health Center. Shortly after, on July 1, 1966, Sinnissippi began providing services to a four-county area from two office locations: Dixon and Sterling. 2026 marks a major milestone, the agency's 60th year of providing behavioral healthcare services.

In the first fiscal year Sinnissippi Mental Health Center served the mental health needs of 847 individuals with a staff of 16 full and part-time employees. During fiscal year 2025, Sinnissippi Centers served over 9,000 clients with 313 full and part time staff.

"Over the years, we have added many programs and services and



Sinnissippi Centers' original Dixon office on Galena Avenue. While no longer an office, the building stands there today.

Major Milestone - continued on page 2

What's New?

Prindaville Recognized

Larry Prindaville was recognized by the Sinnissippi Centers Board of Directors for his long service as a board member and board chairperson. Prindaville also worked for Sinnissippi Centers over several decades. The presentation was made at the October Board meeting.



Prindaville, left, and Sinnissippi Centers President & CEO Stacie Kemp (right)

Staff Accomplishments

Several Sinnissippi employees received new credentials and degrees recently. HFI Program Manager Nicole Bluer obtained her LCSW. CST Clinician Gabby Fossett, Behavioral Health Clinician Michael LeBlanc, Intact Supervisor Olivia Shaffer, and Behavioral Health Clinician Madison Wallace all completed their master's degrees. Finally, Internship Coordinator/Clinical Trainer Michelle Pauley completed her LCPC.



Self-Harm Awareness Month

March is Self-Harm Awareness Month. Unfortunately, self harm is on the rise, particularly among youth. There isn't one single cause of self-harm, but it is often associated with mental illnesses like depression, confused sexuality, or rejection. You can get involved in Self-Harm Awareness Month by increasing your awareness of self-harm, reaching out to loved ones you are worried about, and spreading awareness to those around you.

Charlie's Story

Continued from page 1

when I reached a breaking point and jumped off of a train bridge into the Rock River. I was hospitalized and diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, bipolar type.

I started services with Sinnissippi while I was in the hospital. I joined the Community Support Team program and eventually started seeing Mikaela Keeney at the Rochelle office. All of the support staff were incredibly helpful in helping me navigate the very difficult time after a severe mental illness diagnosis, but Mikaela was especially helpful.

I have been seeing Mikaela for almost 4 years, and she has helped me in numerous ways. From helping me find shelter, food, transportation, and clothing, to helping me file for disability, and providing constant support in helping me create a better life for myself. She

connected me to the Substance Use Prevention and Recovery program where I met Diane. I haven't been seeing her as long but she has been incredibly helpful as well in managing and figuring out the huge complex problems that I have. She has been so real and understanding.

I have gained so much in the time we've been working together. From my experience, everyone at Sinnissippi including clerical staff is kind, supportive, and patient. They are truly listening when I speak, and as someone who has felt so incredibly alone, that is more important than anything.

Today I am a more engaged mother and partner. I feel at home in my body and life now. I continue to improve every day, and it is a blessing just to breathe. I am so grateful for all of the support that I have, and I am so excited to be able to keep growing!

Major Milestone

Continued from page 1

expanded from mental health into substance use treatment, individual and family counseling, early childhood mental health, as well as many more programs and services," said Sinnissippi Centers' President & CEO Stacie Kemp. "We changed our name in 1988 to reflect that evolution, from the Sinnissippi Mental Health Center to Sinnissippi Centers."

"More than 2,600 individuals have worked for the agency over our 60-year history," said Kemp, "fulfilling our mission of behavioral healthcare services."

"Sinnissippi has grown from the original two small offices to seven locations: Byron, Dixon, Freeport, Mt. Carroll, Oregon, Rochelle, & Sterling. Sinnissippi added four residential living apartment sites and two recovery homes over the years," said Kemp. We also have a living room/drop-in center in downtown Dixon," said Kemp.

Federal legislation led the way to the formation of Sinnissippi Centers and agencies like it across the country. It was in 1963 that the U.S. Congress passed the Community Mental Health Centers Act, which was then signed by President John F. Kennedy. The law authorized construction grants to build community mental health centers. Three years later Sinnissippi Centers came into being.



In 1968 Sinnissippi moved its Dixon office to the present location at 325 Illinois Route 2. The original building has been added on to several times over years.



Page one of the very first issue of The Digest Newsletter Jul-Aug-Sep 1979

Gather With Us for Good

Sinnissippi Centers' staff and guests will "party like our mental health depends on it" at the second annual Gathering for Good fundraiser on Saturday May 16, 2026, at the Dixon Elks Lodge.

Back by popular demand is How2GO. They bring a world-famous dueling pianos show to the event. It's a high-energy, all-request-driven event.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m., and the event runs from 6 to 9 p.m. with music, hors d'oeuvres, a dessert auction, and a silent auction.

Advance-purchase admission is \$30 per individual or \$50 per couple. Tables of eight are available, as are sponsorship opportunities.

Information has been sent by mail and email, and details are posted on Sinnissippi's website: sinnissippi.org

under events: Look for Gathering for Good. There's a link there to purchase admissions or a sponsorship online, or download the admissions and sponsorship form. You can use the QR code (below left) as well to get to the online form.



Proceeds from Gathering for Good benefit unmet needs of Sinnissippi Centers' clients through a variety of programs.

If you would like more information, please contact Marketing Manager Andrew Jackson at 815-284-6611 or email info@sinnissippi.com.

Red Cross Blood Drive

Sinnissippi Centers will host an American Red Cross blood drive on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at our Dixon office Conference Center. The Dixon office is located at 325 Illinois Route 2, Dixon, IL 61021.

The blood drive will be from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. To make an appointment, call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or you can visit online at www.RedCrossBlood.org. Appointments are preferred. More information is available on our website at www.sinnissippi.org under events.



Save the Date - Golf Open

The 34th annual Sinnissippi Centers Golf Open will be held on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2026, at Deer Valley Golf Club in Deer Grove. Tee-off will be at noon, followed by a dinner and awards banquet after 18 holes of scramble-format golf.

"Our staff who work on the course that day strive to make the event fun and exciting for our golfers," said Sinnissippi Centers Marketing Manager Andrew Jackson. "They really go out of their way to focus on the golfers' experience."

Registration information is now available on our website under events or scan the QR code at left for online registration and payment.



Morrison Community Hospital's 2025 team



More News

Thanks to Prairie Brome Solar

Sinnissippi Centers was excited to receive a Q4 community grant award from Prairie Brome Solar and Geenex Solar to support our operations. Local giving means better living for all of us! This grant will allow us to strengthen our Recovery Homes and positively impact those on their path to recovery in Lee County. Prairie



Brome Solar/Geenex representatives recently traveled to Sinnissippi's Dixon office to present the grant. Pictured on the left in the photo and ascending: Adam Czamanske, Director of Development at Geenex, Anne-Marie Williams, Director of Community Relations at Geenex, Teresa Good, Sinnissippi VP/Chief Financial Officer, Kourtnee Mezo Sinnissippi Recovery Home Manager. Pictured on the right in the photo and ascending, DeAnne White, Sinnissippi VP/Chief Administrative Officer, Tammy Stewart, Sinnissippi Chief Clinical Officer, Stacie Kemp, Sinnissippi President & CEO, Rebecca Johanning, Sinnissippi Director of Clinical Services, and Andrew Jackson, Sinnissippi Marketing Manager. Geenex is the company that is building and operating the Prairie Brome Solar power plant located in Lee County. The project is a renewable energy utility-scale project designed to try and preserve farmland for future use.

The Digest Newsletter Spring 2026

Editor: Andrew Jackson
Writers: Andrew Jackson, Charlie
Contributors: Stacie Kemp, Yariela Lopez, DeAnne White



SINNISSIPPI CENTERS
Together we inspire wellness

Sinnissippi Centers, Inc.

Administrative office
325 Illinois Route 2
Dixon, IL 61021
815-284-6611

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 57
Rock Island, IL

24-hour Emergency Phone Number

800-242-7642

www.sinnissippi.org

Office Locations

- Dixon
 - Illinois Route 2
 - Town Square Centre
- Byron
- Freeport
- Mt. Carroll
- Oregon
- Rochelle
- Sterling

Apartment Sites

- Dixon
- Mt. Carroll
- Rochelle
- Sterling

Recovery Homes

- Dixon
- Amboy



Sinnissippi Centers is funded, in part, by the Illinois Department of Human Services and is a United Way of Lee County and United Way of Ogle County Partner.



Sinnissippi Centers is accredited by The Joint Commission and recipient of the Gold Seal of Approval.



The Digest is a publication of Sinnissippi Centers, Inc.



Donations

Donations can be mailed to Sinnissippi Centers, 325 Illinois Route 2, Dixon, IL 61021.

You can also donate online, visit:

www.sinnissippi.org/donate

You can specify if you would like to give your donation in honor or in memory of a family member or loved one.

Dean & Tracy Ahlers

Anonymous

John & Patti Berge

Bonnell Industries

Boss Carpet One Floor & Home

CGH Medical Center

Eugene & Beulah Chaplin

John & Beth Nelson Chase

Chicago Food & City Tours

Circa 21 Dinner Playhouse

Clinton LumberKings

Robert Coats

Pastor Jeff & Mary Coester

First Lutheran Church ELCA

Carolyn Fitzgerald Sweeney

Laura and Edward Ford

Freeport Moose Lodge 162

Robert Hargrave

Hoof It Goat Treks

Mary Ann Hutchison

Hugh Knapp

Brad & Sharon Law

Joseph Lottman

Macedonia Baptist Church

Joanne Mayes

Andy & Sarah McFarlane

Hugh F. Miller Insurance Agency

Mt. Carroll United Methodist

Women

Navy Pier

OSF Saint Katharine Medical Center

Joyce Peterson

Prairie Brome Solar/Geenex Solar

Larry & Ann Prindaville

St. Louis Cardinals

Inger Sarver

Mark Scholl

Schmitt Plumbing & Heating

David L. Slick Trust

Susan Schroeder

Shaw Local Radio

Richard & Donna Siders

Sterling Federal Bank

Charles & Sharon Taets

Peggy Ulferts

Nicholas & Holly Westgerdes

Charles & Susan Winterton

In Memory of

...Edwin Ruh Coats
Robert Coats

...Thomas A. Cooper
Alan & Kathleen Cooper
Virginia Kettleison

...Michael Delp
Pamela Delp

...Laurie Meling Harris
Reed Harris

...Jeff Lovett
Don Lovett

...Jim Sarver
Kevin Marx
Larry McCormick
William Reigle

To sign up for the electronic version of The Digest visit sinnissippi.org/newsletter