

## Patient Profile:

**Jim Kolko's** problems started when he woke up and his arms were numb from the elbows down, but his problems didn't end when the diagnosis was diabetes. Homeless for three years, he left the emergency room that day with a prescription that he had no money and no insurance to fill.

That was two years ago, and Kolko will tell you now that his diabetes is stabilizing, as is his health in general, thanks in large part to Heartland Health Center – Uptown. A regular patient at Uptown since he was referred to the site for a TB test by a local homeless shelter in 2004, Kolko was able to get the medication he needs through the health center at no cost to him.

A lot of his progress is due to regular appointments with his nurse practitioner, Teresa Savino, who is in her 20th year of working with homeless patients at HHO. With time and patience, the two found the right medication regime for his diabetes. "I was getting high [glucose] spikes when I was on the once-a-day stuff, and they changed it to twice a day," he says. "It's working for me."

Kolko, who is bipolar, also receives his psychiatric medication through Uptown and has monthly appointments with a mental health expert at the health center. He even got his glasses at Uptown, and plans on having a dental exam as soon as that new capacity is up and running.

What did he do for health care before having a "medical home" at Heartland Health Center – Uptown? "I pretty much didn't do anything for my health," he says. "If it got too bad, I went to the emergency room."

Thoughtful and candid, Kolko became a member of the Health Care for the Homeless Consumer Advisory Board last year, and now he is the chair. In June, he went with several Heartland Alliance staff members to a national conference on homelessness in Washington, D.C., and he spreads the word about the medical help available at the center among the homeless population in Uptown.

"I'm comfortable with everybody I work with here," says Kolko, who is living today in a one-bedroom apartment through a program run by a local shelter. "A lot of what's happened to me is like a snowball rolling downhill. I feel like the system is working for me, instead of me working against it."