



# Powerful. minds

Stories of recovery from psychosis



With all of us in mind

## Foreword

When I first met with the early intervention in psychosis team, I was in a room on a ward with a doctor. I wasn't aware the team existed; I didn't know what it did or what it could do for me.

I was scared and didn't know what was happening, I just wanted to get away and get services off my back. After a while I began to feel more confident and was meeting up with the team more regularly. I could then see more clearly how this was helpful.

Looking back, I think it would have helped if I had been able to read about other people's experiences; to read something that I could have identified with. That was when I first thought of developing this booklet, with the hope that it might help other people feel less alone, and feel more hopeful about the future.

I also hope it will help family members, staff and members of the public to understand more clearly what psychosis can be like.

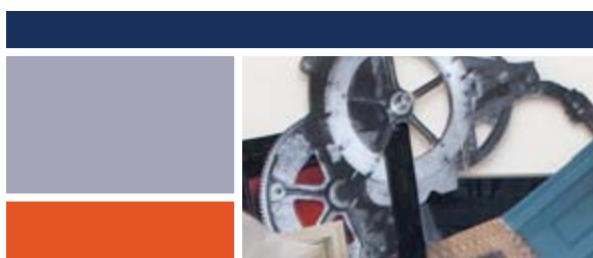
In the booklet you will find individual stories, poetry and pieces of art from people who have experienced psychosis and their family members. Thank you to everyone who contributed, without them this booklet would never have happened.

We'd love to hear any feedback you have about this booklet, and you're welcome to email us via [comms@swyt.nhs.uk](mailto:comms@swyt.nhs.uk)

***Thomas Morris***

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This booklet has been created by Thomas Morris, H. J. Pearson, Tracey Morrill and Darryl Thompson.  
All artwork contributed by H. J. Pearson.



# About psychosis

**Any one of us can experience psychosis.**

This can include having experiences such as hearing voices, or seeing, tasting, smelling or physically feeling things that others can't.

It might include worrying about or thinking things that are different from our usual thoughts, or that others might struggle to understand. For example, feeling suspicious about people who we'd ordinarily trust or seeing special meaning in such as newspapers or television programmes. It might also include feeling that we have lost our energy or emotions and feel like withdrawing from our social, work or family life.

The experience of psychosis is very individual, so any combination of these or perhaps other experiences might be present. It might be frightening, but at other times it might be exciting. Of great importance is the impact of the experiences on life.

Everyone's journey of recovery is different; what works for some won't for others. It's about finding the right thing for you and we'll work with you to find your path. Everyone is different, and these stories are unique to each individual.

Some of the names used in this booklet have been changed.





The Wakefield Insight team is one of four 'Early Intervention in Psychosis teams' within South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. It offers a service to anyone from the age of 14 upwards who lives in the Wakefield District and has a Wakefield district GP, when the person is thought to be experiencing psychosis or thought to be at risk of this developing. Our aim is to improve the long-term outcomes for people experiencing psychosis, by improved early detection of psychosis and providing good quality support to the individual and those close to them.

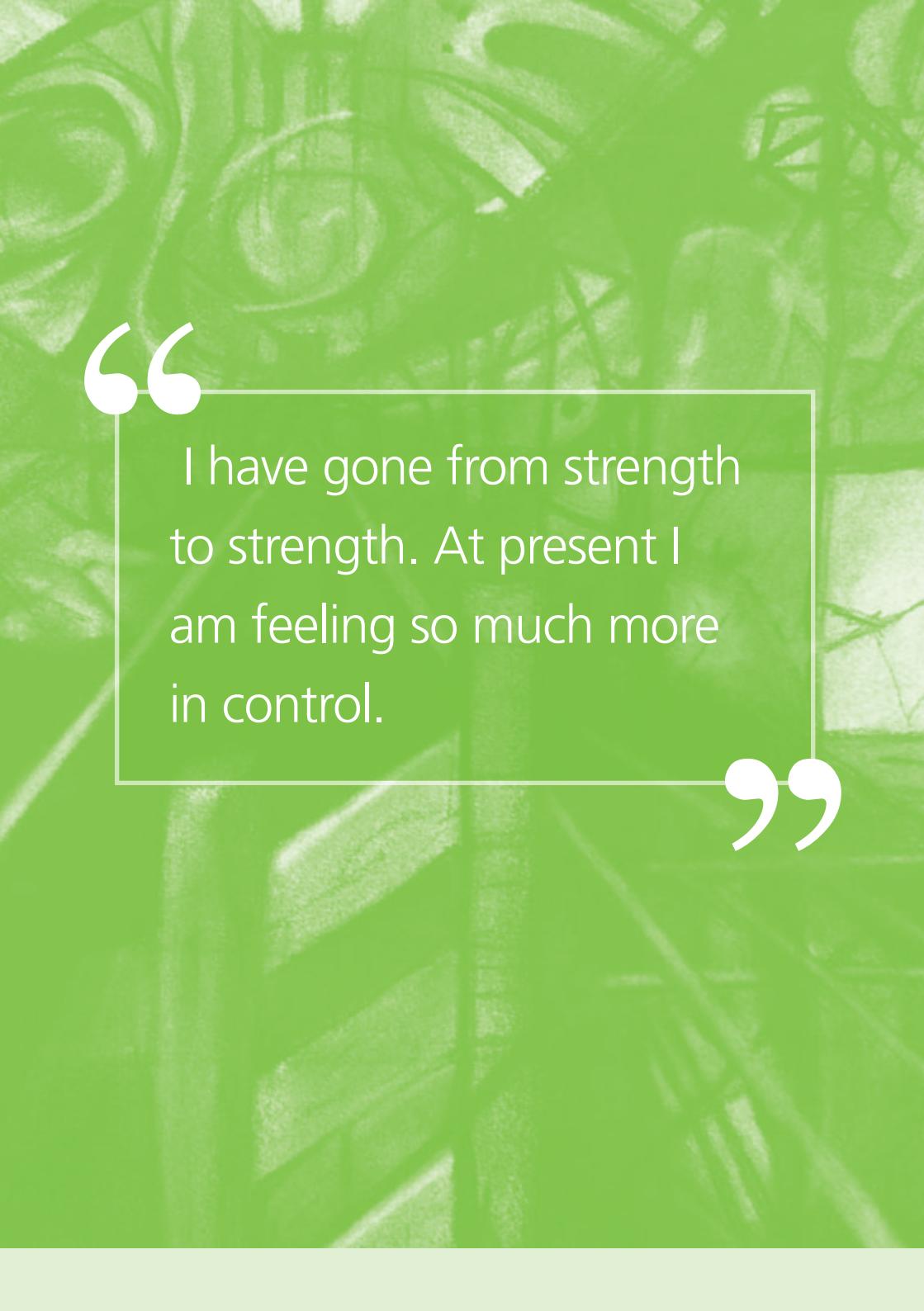
**If you would like to talk to or meet with someone about any of this, please feel free to contact us on 01977 465820.**

**Alternatively, talk to your GP and ask them to make a referral via the Single Point of Access on 01924 328628.**

**Wakefield Insight team  
11 Flemming Court  
Whistler Drive  
Castleford  
WF10 5HW  
Tel: 01977 465820  
Fax: 01977 465821**

**For out of hours support, please contact our crisis team via NHS Direct – 0845 46 47**





“ I have gone from strength to strength. At present I am feeling so much more in control.

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# Jessica's story

I gave birth to my son in February 2010. It was a difficult birth; I was in labour for three days, and looking back I can recognise that there were changes pretty much straight after the birth.

I did not feel like myself. I felt really low and after discharge from hospital I just couldn't seem to pick up. I brought my son home but didn't have the energy to look after him. I remember the midwife calling to visit and asking me if I was OK. *I told her I was fine, but I was putting up a front. She seemed to know that I wasn't and my husband also told her that I wasn't OK.* The midwife seemed to pick up that I wasn't the same person that she had met before and I broke down and told her how I was feeling.

I was advised to go to my GP who prescribed me anti-depressant medication. I was also referred to see a counsellor. I thought this would help but the counselling did not go well. They said things to me that seemed to feed into what I was already thinking and feeling about myself.

I started to feel desperate and I did not know what to do next. I can remember walking out of the house not knowing where I was going. I knew I needed help but I also felt despair. I thought about going to Accident & Emergency but ended up walking to the train station. I had thoughts of ending my life; I could not switch off my thoughts. I felt guilty confused, terrible. I cared for my son but could not care for him. There was lots of stress in my life. My relationship was not as good as I thought it would be and my husband had lost his job so we were under financial pressure.

## University

It's hard to truly recall what happened but my mood did pick up. I am not sure why or how; maybe it was the medication? I was a student nurse prior to my pregnancy, and around July time I felt ready to go back to university to re-start my studies. The transition back to university wasn't an easy one. I returned back to the placement that I had been on when I found out I was pregnant but I didn't feel supported at work and I dreaded going back. On top of this my husband and I had conflicting ideas about child care.

I felt stressed at my placement and started making excuses and phoning in sick as I couldn't leave my shifts early (I was stressed about how the child care was going so wanted to get home). I started to feel on edge, keyed up and I couldn't settle.

The stress increased and the placement was getting harder.

*One night I was driving home and I started hearing voices. At first the voices were in my head. They were muffled and I couldn't really work out what they were saying.* There was no pattern; they seemed to come out of the blue, anytime anywhere. Over the weeks they became stronger, to the point where I could hear what they were actually saying. The voices were telling me to hurt myself.

Other odd things started to happen. I believed that there was somebody watching the house. I thought people were watching and getting ready to take my son away. I also thought somebody was going to hurt him. I was questioning if he would be taken off me because I did not care enough about him. I felt really scared and frightened; I didn't know what to do. One night I drank a bottle of vodka, with the hope that the voices would go away. By this stage I had stopped going to university, I just couldn't cope with everything that was going on.

My mum was really worried. She contacted NHS Direct and told them what was happening. I can recall two people coming to my door saying they were from mental health services. I thought, "this is it, they are here to take away my baby." I was absolutely terrified, and mum later told me that I was hysterical. The crisis team became involved. I was told that their help and the medication would make me feel better. I didn't believe what they told me and I thought the medication they gave me was poison and the voices were also telling me that the medication was poison.

On one particular day I thought the back door had been kicked in and somebody had tampered with the tablets. I flushed them down the toilet and phoned my mum to tell her what had happened. When mum came to see me she said that I had no evidence to prove that somebody had been into the house to tamper with my medication. I was confused and wondered who was playing tricks on me? Were my husband and my mum part of this? The voices were telling me that they had involvement in what was happening. However, my mum was the one who seemed to understand, and despite what the voices were telling me I maintained some trust in her.

## Hospital

By September I got worse and was assessed by doctors and social workers. They wanted me to go into hospital on a voluntary basis but my husband did not agree with what professionals were saying; he wanted me to stay at home. My mum was the one who talked him around, she knew it was in my best interest to be admitted to hospital.

I knew from my nurse training that if I didn't go in on a voluntary basis I would be sectioned. Even though I was really paranoid by this stage I knew I didn't have a choice. I was given the option of admission to a mother and baby unit in Leeds where my son could stay with me. However, I didn't like the thought of my baby being admitted to a psychiatric unit so I refused.

Whilst in hospital the doctors changed my medication. I started to feel more relaxed. My voices were still present and at times I would phone my mum and tell her I was frightened. She phoned the hospital to let them know I was struggling. *The nurses on the ward would come and talk to me and listen to the things that were troubling me.* I was only in hospital for a week and left feeling so much better. I think the medication helped but also taking some time away from the stress at home made me feel better.

When I was admitted to hospital I was very scared but the nurses put me at ease. They encouraged me to take time out of my room to be with people. It was better than I thought it would be. One of the things that stays in my mind is having cup cakes with glitter on them for supper. It was a nice gesture, you don't realise how really simple things can make you feel comfortable. I was also able to see my baby. We were given a side room, again this was nice and made my stay so much easier.

## Going home

I was discharged back home but worried about the stress I was returning to. My husband and I started spending money when we already had financial problems but we were living the high life as a way of making us feel better. I started taking out loans at Christmas and we spent money we didn't have.

Just before Christmas I split up from my husband but found that I could not cope without him. The separation was a short one and we got back together. Emotionally I felt like I was all over the place. After Christmas my mood changed again and I was feeling down, in despair. At the same time we had a temporary house move. I was also away from my mother who was my main source of support. The voices started to get bad again – telling me to cut myself – so I did.

I felt like I was at my wits end. Then I would sit on the steps of our temporary accommodation watching the cars through the windows in the door. I wanted to see who was coming in and out of the cars. The crisis team became involved again I was encouraged to deal with what was happening but felt unable to. My medication was changed. I felt calmer and the strange ideas reduced, but my emotions were still all over the place and I felt unwell.

By March I still had occasional paranoid ideas but I was not feeling as bad. I had become very isolated and I struggled to leave the home; I couldn't go to the supermarket without having a panic attack. I was extremely dependant on my husband but at the same time our relationship had many problems.

I ended up separating from my husband finally in June 2010 and initially I felt down. *However, I was able to recognise that each time I felt down the voices would return, and then the next stage was suspicious thoughts that people were watching me outside.* I felt able, though, to talk to my mum and the Insight team about what was happening to me.

## Recovery

Since I have separated from my husband I have faced many challenges but overall the stress has reduced. I have gone from strength to strength. At present I am feeling so much more in control. I am a better mum, I can spend time on my own and go out alone using public transport. I have completed two courses at a local Children's' Centre and take my child on a daily basis. *I have made friends and feel less isolated.* I still get occasional voices, especially when stress increases, but 9 out of 10 times I can dismiss them.

*The combination of support from my mum and the Insight team, as well as medication, has helped me.* Medication would not have worked alone. I am also developing an understanding of my voices and am able to see the links from early life and why they may have started.

## My future

The future is far more positive. I am due to go abroad to see my family in a few weeks time. I am travelling with my son who is now two. I don't feel the need for support.

I am also considering work options but want to take one step at a time. Returning to nurse training may be a possibility in the future.

I really would recommend letting the Insight team help. Speaking to someone you can trust and not feel judged by is important.

I would also suggest attending their groups as you get a chance to meet people with similar experiences. Let people help. Services are there for a reason.

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# Paul's story

Age: 31

In March 2010 I started to feel depressed. I was under a lot of stress at the time. Work was my main source of stress as we were very busy and understaffed. The more under pressure I felt the more cannabis I smoked. I was using cannabis as a way of coping but looking back the cannabis contributed to my depression.

## Work

Work continued to be stressful. Again, the way I coped was to increase the cannabis use. However, the strange experiences also increased and became more intense. There were also other changes; I started to believe that cameras were being installed to monitor my movements. We had security cameras at work that had never bothered me before, but I started to feel convinced that people were watching me through them. I then started to believe that cameras were hidden elsewhere as well, and I even believed they were hidden in my home.

I started taking days off sick from work. However, when I returned to work I would get really paranoid because I thought nobody would believe that I was unwell. It all came to a head in November 2010. I lost my temper at work, was verbally aggressive towards my manager and as a result of this I ended up losing my job.

After losing my job things became worse, my mood was very low. I had been working for years for the same employers before getting the sack, and prior to the stress I had enjoyed my job. I was left with too much time on my hands which meant I had too much time to think. I continued smoking a lot of cannabis, and by this stage I believed that I was being watched all the time. I also started to believe that other people could read and hear my thoughts, like my thoughts were being broadcast.

## Questioning

My family noticed that my attitude towards others had changed. Simple, day to day things, like them asking a question such as, "how's your day been?" made me very irritable because I thought, "why are they asking this?" From my perspective they already knew how my day had been because they could see my movements and hear my thoughts.

I became withdrawn, spent most of my time in my bedroom, but even then I didn't always feel safe because I thought that there were hidden cameras in there as well. *I felt scared. I didn't know what to do or who to turn to.* At this stage I stopped smoking cannabis in the hope that the experiences might be in my head and if so, was the cannabis making them worse? When I stopped, the experiences were still there and if anything got worse.

About a month after I stopped using cannabis nothing had changed, so I decided to seek help. *It took a lot of time to pluck up the courage to go and see the doctor.* I wondered if what was going on for me was not normal. My GP referred me for counselling but I had to wait two months before the assessment. This wait was awful and during this time I felt scared, alone and isolated. I considered ending my own life; this seemed like the only way I could get away from the future. When I spoke to the counselling service they said they couldn't help me but would refer me to a service called the Insight team. I was losing hope, I thought I would just be fobbed off again.

## I wasn't the only one

When I met the Insight team I realised I wasn't the only person who had these experiences. Finally, it wasn't just me. I was seen by one of the doctors who came to my home and prescribed medication. At first I didn't think the medication would work; how could the medication work when what I believed to be happening felt so real?

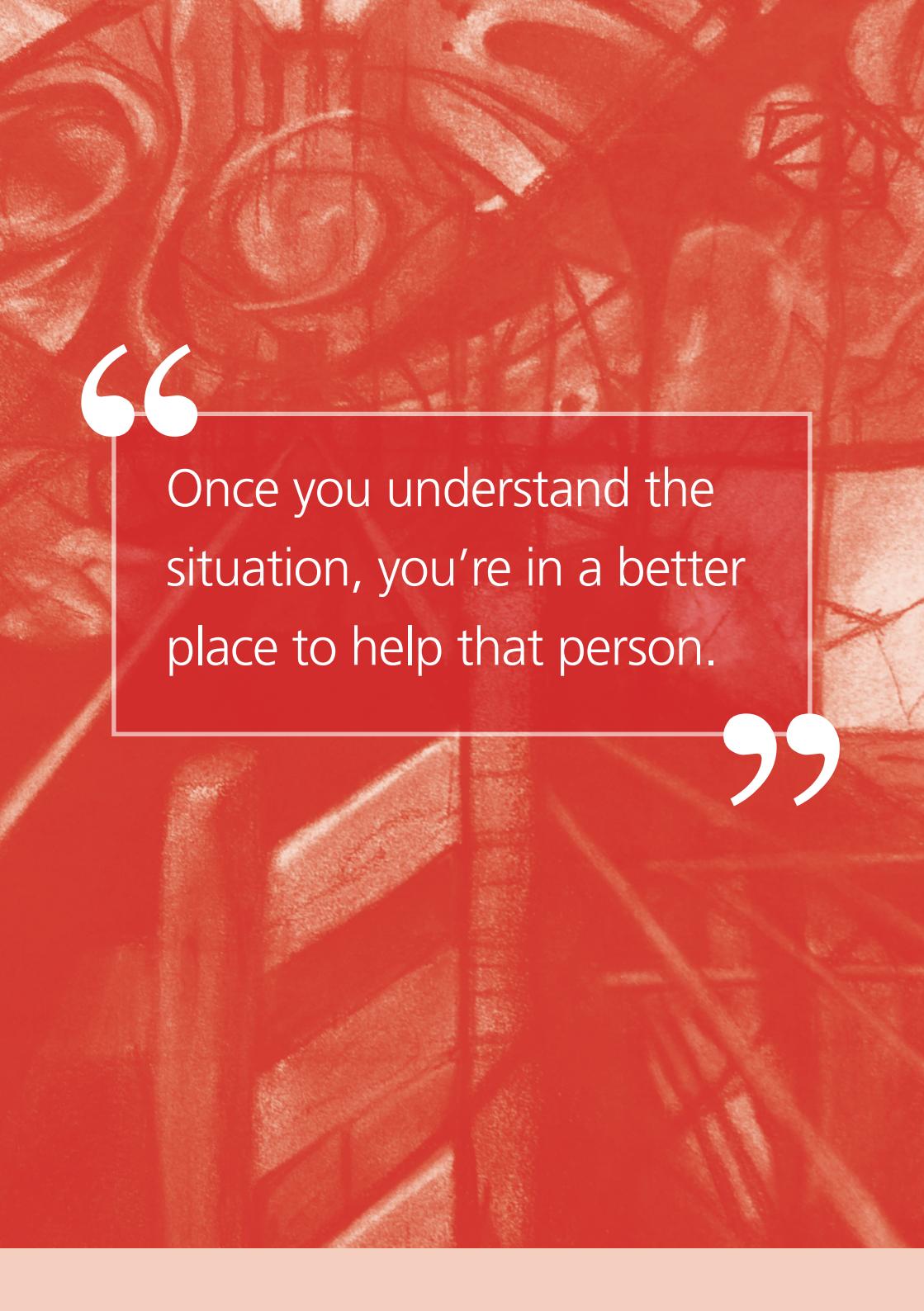
After a while the medication did work, the 'stupid thoughts' started to reduce but I was left with feelings of anxiety. The anxiety symptoms were awful. I was glad that the 'stupid thoughts' had stopped but the anxiety was having a huge impact on my life. It was stopping me from leaving my home or being in public; the anxiety seemed to take over where the psychosis had stopped.

I have now started to deal and work on my anxiety, and I have started exposure work, putting myself in situations that I was avoiding. I now realise that when I face situations that I would have avoided, my predictions are not always correct and my symptoms are not as bad as I thought they would be. I now realise that anxiety can be dealt with and I can get control.

Now, I want to get back on track with my life, doing normal day to day things without having to worry about it. My main goal in the future is to find employment. This feels like a big goal at present but one that I think is achievable in time.

One of the things I have learned from my experience is the importance of getting help. When it first happened to me I did not think that anyone would be able to help, but being heard made me feel less isolated.

I think it's important for people who may read my story who are in a similar place to know that you are not alone. There is nothing to be ashamed of; seeking or accepting help can give you the ability to cope with the situation. When I first started to have these strange, horrible experiences I thought they were real. Now I realise that they were not real and I am back in control of my life.



“Once you understand the situation, you’re in a better place to help that person.”

# A parents' viewpoint

## The long road

As a young boy our son was loving and feisty, a caring lad who loved football and playing outside. He got a job as soon as he left school and worked hard. Things began to change when he was in his late teens. He became more aggressive, was fired from work and began to worry about things that he hadn't worried about before. We thought he was depressed. He was sleeping at funny times, wasn't looking after himself as much and had stopped eating. We met someone who said that it sounded like he had psychosis. The bottom dropped out of our world on hearing this, but at least we could then piece together what had been happening and it all made sense. The word psychosis was frightening, it was terrifying.

This period of time was like a black hole, a dark tunnel with no light at the end of it. We felt that no-one could give us any help or anything. It was horrendous. We felt isolated, didn't see a way out, didn't know who could help us, didn't know who could help our son, or what that help would be. We tried to talk to our son's GP to get him some help we felt like we were treated as interfering parents (through what we've learned we would push harder and not let this happen again). After this we were even more confused.

***We were totally blind for about two years, knowing that something was wrong with our son, not being able to get him help, and having no help for ourselves either.*** We found out about the local community mental health team and went there. We also managed to get our son there, but he would tear the prescription up that the psychiatrist gave him. We then found out about some carers' meetings at a new team called 'Insight'.

## Things that have helped

As a couple we have been regularly meeting with two members of staff from the Insight team. Our son was always invited but never wanted to come, he was only prepared to meet with his care co-ordinator.

*We found it helpful to be able to speak to people who understand what you're going through, and who give advice that might not solve the problem, but still helps.* One of the big things we learned was about confrontation and conflict. We learned not to cause conflict, realised that our son had an illness and tried to take this into account when we spoke to him. This took a long time.

The dad in this family has always been able to solve problems for the kids and this situation was the first time that this wasn't possible. It was a weight on his shoulders; he couldn't see straight and didn't have a clue where to start.

Contact with the Insight team helped him to feel less isolated and to not blame himself. Also, becoming involved with carers' groups helped him to feel like he was doing something; he could feel useful again. It also helped both of us to talk to other people in the carers' groups, listening and learning all the time.

The mum in this family initially buried her head in the sand, as the problem with our son was too big to cope with. We were fighting each other about what would be best for him; the mum wanted him to be always at home. A turning point was when we both agreed that he needed to be in hospital. We felt better when he was in the place where he needed to be.

## Things that could have been better

We went through a period of time when our son was in and out of hospital. This was hard, as each time he was discharged it felt like we were back to square one, that the problems he was admitted with were no better.

***We have learned that communication between families and staff must be maintained through such times.*** There have also been times that because our son takes drugs his mental health problems felt dismissed. It needs to be recognised that people who use drugs can also have mental health problems.

Another difficult aspect of all of this has been never knowing if and when our son's problems are going to end. Even if someone had said it would be 10 years and then things will be OK, that would have been easier to deal with.

## Achievements

Meeting up with staff and talking has lessened the burden for us. A major achievement for us was learning how to respond to our son. We didn't realise the conflict in the situation but it was there. We realised that we were talking to someone who was unwell at the time and couldn't take in what we were saying.

Over time, we became able to walk away from situations without adding to the conflict, and this calmed things down. We learned that we had to change as at that time our son was unable to change. ***From our point of view, family members need to be taught and trained at an early stage in how to best support their loved one. Once you understand the situation, you're in a better place to help that person.***

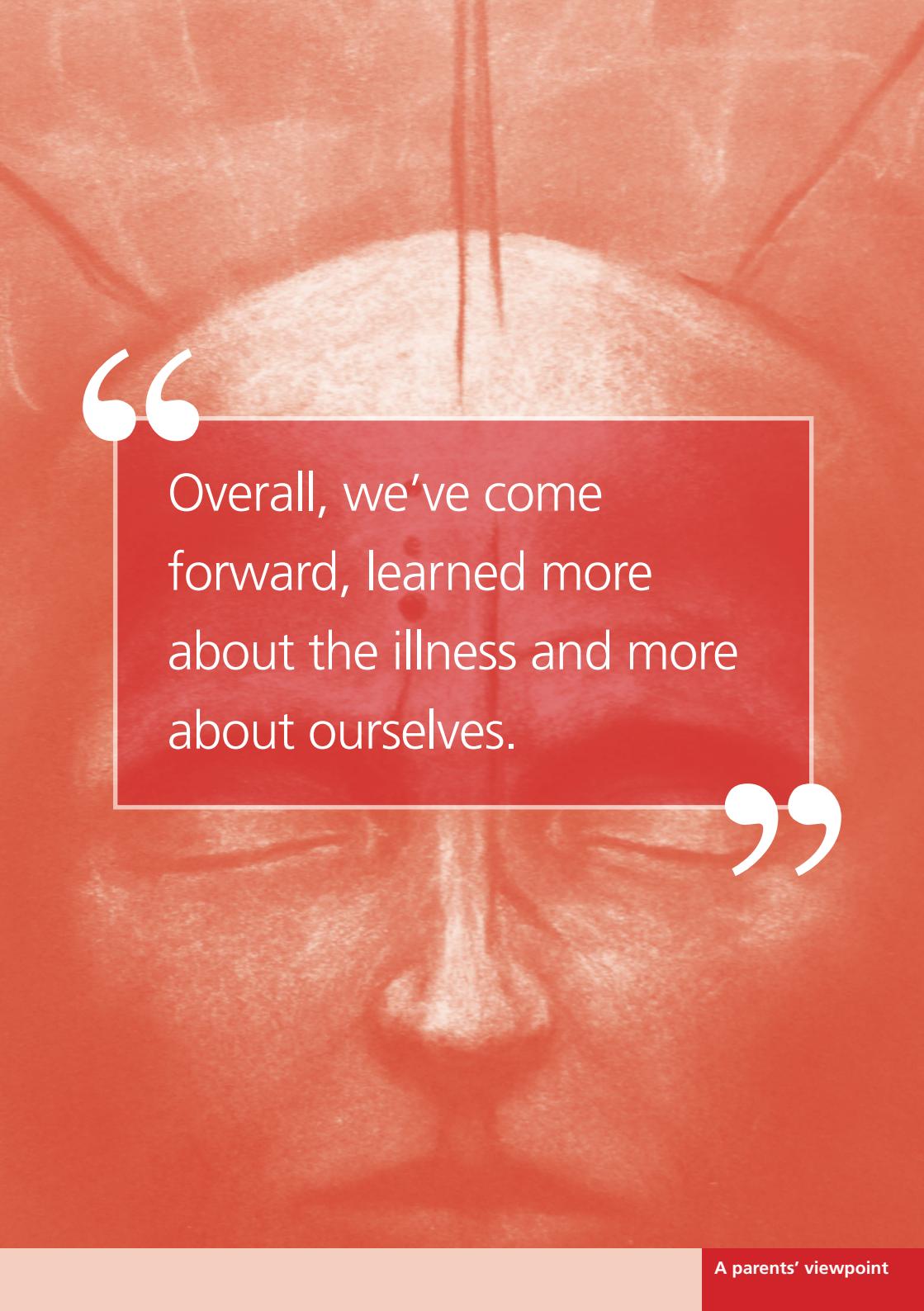
We couldn't bear to think that our son's freedom was taken away from him. However, if we had to give any advice, please make decisions (about such as going into hospital) with the best interests of the person in mind, rather than being influenced too much by your own emotions. One thing that we're particularly pleased with is how we held on to being able to still admire the skills and qualities that our son has, and how he has used these to help manage the situations he has found himself faced with.

## In summary

When we first came to the sessions we couldn't see the point of it, talking and going over the same things. We thought the Insight team would have a magic formula and eventually staff would put things right. After six weeks we were still going home to the same situation; our son was still poorly and nothing was changed.

After a while we realised that we had to change. This only happened after meeting with the staff and looking at how we were handling the situation. As a result of the level of stress we were under we were doing the wrong things, saying the wrong things, confronting him, but for all the right reasons.

Overall, we've come forward, learned more about the illness and more about ourselves. Putting into practice what we learned, in our own way, having more of an awareness of what our son was going through and understanding what he was coping with, has been a big part in all of us moving forward. We've come on a long journey and it isn't over yet.



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# Jane's story

Life before my illness was really good. I was not scared of trying new things and enjoyed doing some volunteering work. I was happy and had confidence. I didn't know how great it was to be well and I enjoyed doing lots of things with my family and friends.

In 2010 my life turned upside down. I became unwell, *it was like being in a bubble, the land of make believe*. It was the most frightening thing I have ever experienced.

The first thing I noticed when I became very unwell was when I was late for an appointment at the hairdressers. I would not listen to anyone at the time; I would not get dressed or put on my makeup. This was very out of character as I am always early for everything, it was like I was somebody else, chaotic and confused.

My family knew there was something wrong. I have a learning disability and doctors initially thought it was part of my disability. *I was smiling to myself a lot as the voices were really nice and complimentary, but then they would be nasty and destroy my confidence, saying really bad things to me.* I became scared of everything and believed I was being watched. I did not want to be left in the house alone. However, I was very lucky as my family supported me and made sure I remained safe and dignified.

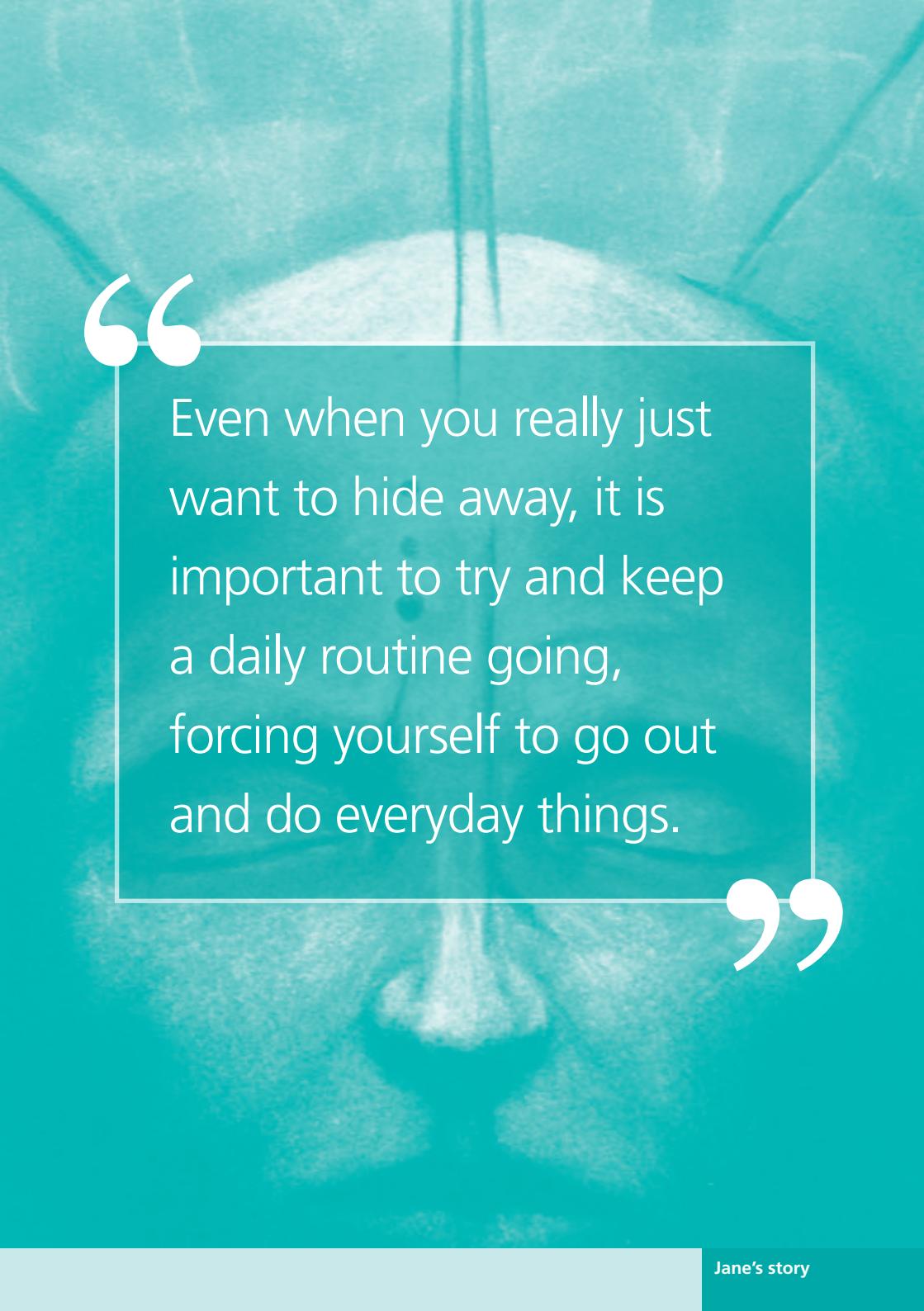
I took medication and although the side effects made me gain weight and feel really slow and tired, I did get better and started to enjoy life again. It is important to remain strong and positive and become stronger than the voices.

Even when you really just want to hide away it is important to try and keep a daily routine going, forcing yourself to go out and do every day things.

I thank my lucky stars every day that I am better. The Insight team have helped and supported me and my family so that we recognise the early signs of my illness returning. I have things in place so I reduce my chances of becoming poorly again.

I try to manage my stress level and not to become over anxious as this can tip me over into psychosis again.

I am always scared that my illness will return as it really does frighten me and has damaged my confidence. However, I have the support of the Insight team and my family to help me get through it.



“Even when you really just want to hide away, it is important to try and keep a daily routine going, forcing yourself to go out and do everyday things.



“ I have learned so much about the things in life that keep me well; sleep, medication and spending time with the right people helps with my recovery.

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# Tom's story

**Age: 21**

Being admitted to hospital was a total shock to my system. For several months leading up to admission I was finding it hard to sleep, only getting a few hours each night even though I was exhausted. The week before admission I was feeling very drained; I was getting confused and stressed easily, and I was making lots of plans to spend money that I did not have.

A feeling of high energy had kicked in, and one night in the early hours of the morning while staying at a friend's house I began to make lists and plans, of the past and of the future. I was desperate for him to understand my plans even though it was the early hours of the morning. It made no sense to him whatsoever but made complete sense to me. My friend and his wife had seen a change in my behaviour over the previous few days and contacted my mother immediately. They arranged to take me home as they knew something was wrong.

On arrival at home an ambulance was waiting for me. I couldn't make sense of what was going on. I was taken to Accident and Emergency where the crisis team was waiting to see me. I was told I needed to go into hospital, but I was still convinced they had it wrong and I didn't need to go to hospital. I thought, ***why are they doing this to me?***

## Hospital

This was completely new to me. I was convinced my dad (who has passed away) was guiding me into hospital, and with that thought alone I began to feel safe.

After seeing a doctor I was told I had mania but I did not believe it. I have always been a busy person and just thought they didn't understand me. Whilst on the ward I was told by staff to be careful and that my behaviour may frighten others; I was told I was too loud and boisterous.

I couldn't sit still; I had lots of energy and at times I was just walking around in circles. I couldn't calm down, I didn't want to, I had so many things to do and time was going too slow. *I can recall seeing someone in the corridor who was frightened of me, but I thought why would people be frightened of me? I had no intention of harming anybody.*

At times I wasn't sure how to interact as everyone on the ward had different problems. I had important things to tell people; I wanted to let everybody know that I was going to be a millionaire.

I became scared and frightened of the hospital and didn't want to stay any longer. I was given medication and felt very sedated – not a nice feeling. However, someone else was admitted to the ward who knew me from my childhood and he convinced me to stay. We became friends and talked about our experiences with each other, totally understanding what it was like for one another.

After a few days on the ward and seeing different specialists I was diagnosed with bipolar. I didn't know what this meant, but I thought to myself, "just accept it, it's a way to get out of here". I was in hospital for a total of four weeks before leaving with a false smiling face, back into the real world, unaware how serious my illness actually was.

A few weeks after discharge my medication was stopped by a psychiatrist to see if I would be OK, and a few weeks after this I was re-admitted to hospital in a manic state. The same symptoms occurred again I was desperate to get all my amazing ideas out of my head. I had ripped up the flooring of the accommodation I was staying in and the laminate underlay was a perfect canvas for me to write down all the ideas I had.

As this was my second admission I was a lot more relaxed, as I knew what to expect from it. I enjoyed my stay much more. I was given medication again but I didn't feel as sedated as the first time. From my first experience I was able to tell them what I did or did not want. I knew for sure this time that staff were on my side. After only a short stay I was happy that I was ready to leave, this time wearing a big, genuine smile.

## The Insight team

I was introduced to a team called 'Insight' while I was on the ward, who would come and give me home visits to see how I was coping at home after discharge.

At first, I was having weekly visits from my worker but I did not like the thought of getting heavily involved with services. ***I wasn't confident about sharing my experiences, if anything I wanted to forget them and move on with my life.*** I missed appointments, ignored phone calls and letters and eventually the Insight Team stopped chasing me around; I just could not face seeing mental health workers.

Several months went by and I started to feel stronger and stronger. I stopped my medication as I thought I didn't need it anymore (a major mistake). After stopping my medication I felt fine, the energy came back and I was back on track. I had started to live life at a fast pace again, not sleeping for several days at a time.

My relationship with my family wasn't easy; it had become very tense. I was telling people my plans again and tried making them understand in desperation. I was up in the early hours pacing around waiting for the morning to come, moving furniture around and playing loud music. This caused an argument between me and my mum, so I ran out of the house onto the street, crying, not knowing what to do next. My mum called the police and ambulance; they took me to hospital alone as it was my wish to be alone.

The wait to see somebody was a long one – a few hours. I was drained, I couldn't stay and headed for home. When I got home it was nearly morning. I told my mum that they let me go as there was nothing wrong with me (not knowing the hospital had already contacted my mum).

My mum arranged for the Insight team to come and see me without me knowing in case I became aggressive about it. The Insight team came, there was four of them, one being a doctor. I just knew I had to co-operate with them, and with lots of persuasion they convinced me to go to hospital as a voluntary patient.

I wasn't happy at all this time, I was very annoyed. I felt like they were holding me back, as if they were fighting against me. I had lots to do at home where lots of jobs and plans were incomplete, and I felt that nobody around me was listening to me and nobody could understand. I felt caged and wanted to leave as soon as I could.

On a walk with staff in the hospital grounds a few days into my stay the thought, "should I run?" entered my head. "Go for it", I thought, "just get away." I knew this wouldn't be for the best so I didn't bother, but later that night I packed up all my belongings, put them in the office and told the staff I wanted to leave. My tolerance was getting less, I wanted my freedom, everything got to me and when seeing the doctor on ward review I flipped out.

I was sectioned for 28 days and knew that I had to become calmer or I could find myself in there for a lot longer. After co-operation, my leave started to increase and my mental state began to improve. I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, my section was lifted and I was discharged after a three week stay.

## Recovering

Since leaving the ward for the third time I am back with the Insight team, who I now feel very confident to share my problems with. It's been five months since I was discharged from the ward and I am feeling so much better now. I have learned so much about the things in life that keep me well; sleep, medication and spending time with the right people helps with my recovery. I've got someone to talk to who I trust, I can get things off my chest, the good and the bad, and make goals for the future. I look at what mistakes I have made and make sure I don't make them again.

From experience I feel that the best way to get the most help you possibly can is to be open and honest about your problems with staff and work with them. They are there to help you, not work against you, even though it might feel that way sometimes.

More importantly I have plans for the future. I have applied for a volunteer befrienders post at the hospital.

I have been invited to attend staff induction days representing service users, and if I enjoy volunteering I may look for permanent employment as a mental health support worker or even apply for nurse training. *I do feel like I am getting back on track with my life now. Over recent years I believe that I lost focus and at times I felt lost. Now, however, I have hope and this is my drive for the future.*

“ My mood started to improve, my energy levels increased, socially I started to get back on track, I was talking and friends started coming back to our house.

# Phil's story

I can't remember much about the lead up to my episode; it all seemed to happen so quickly. I recall having an argument at work with a colleague and this was out of character for me; I wouldn't usually argue. I had to leave so told my boss that there were problems at home. I felt very upset and worried about what had happened.

I went to see a friend as I needed somebody to talk to, someone who I could relate to. I also had important news to tell him as I had big ideas about a 'pyramid scheme'. I felt that I knew how to make money; it was a scheme like a chain mail, starting with one person at the top. These ideas had been in my mind for around a week. I had seen my friend the week before and told him how it worked but at the time he didn't understand. I can remember feeling really mad with him the first time when he didn't understand. The second time however he seemed to have more faith and feeling listened to was a big relief.

## Millionaire

I was really excited as I believed I was going to be a millionaire. Whilst talking to him I had this strange sense that I was already a millionaire; I felt absolutely fantastic, it was amazing. I can recall looking in the mirror in his bathroom and thinking "this is it, I've made it." I was in his garden throwing cigarettes on the lawn, thinking, "it doesn't matter, I've got money."

Unbeknown to me, my friend had phoned my family. They arrived whilst I was showing him how the scheme would work using pool balls from his games table. I was angry that my family had come and I was texting my friend, telling him to get rid of them.

I had plans for that night as I believed I was going to see Simon Cowell. I was also going to see the person who owned the company I worked for. My plans were to be revealed; shown on big TV screens to the people I worked with. My friend's daughter had auditioned for X Factor but did not get on; I could make that better. I had visions of my friend's daughter being the stewardess of an airline that was coming to pick us up. I thought that it was all going to happen that night and I didn't want to leave my friend's house. Not only was it all happening here but there was also something about his house that made me feel secure and safe.

*My wife talked me into going home. When we got home she brought me 'back down to earth' and told me I wasn't a millionaire and that I needed help.* I asked her to phone the doctor but I only wanted to go to my own GP. It was something about the sliding doors at the GPs that felt like they would keep me safe. Staff at NHS Direct spoke to me over the phone and asked lots of questions. I remember thinking that I just wanted to go to my own doctors.

I went to Accident & Emergency. I got transferred and was annoyed about this; everything was going too slow. *I was becoming agitated, pacing up and down. I felt that the staff were staring at me and I felt paranoid.* I gave them a deadline, and said if they didn't meet it I was going home.

I was transferred to Dewsbury and put on a medical ward. I thought that everybody had angina, so I walked down the ward telling them not to eat fish and chips. I was transferred to another ward and was very keen to tell a nurse about my pyramid scheme. I had a need to take control and turned the patients' lights off on the ward as it was getting dark. *At this point I was told I would be seeing a psychiatrist, and they told me I had to go to a psychiatric ward. I was so frightened; it was the stigma.*

When I got there I was assessed by a doctor and I told him I knew Tiger Woods. I needed to escape, I was scared, I needed out, but I was also facing a dilemma as I believed that I had been admitted to take over the role of doctor. After a short period I seemed to come back down to earth but I was still keen to get out of hospital. I requested leave and I came to the conclusion that I had to work with the staff not against them; this worked.

I remember my first leave back home, falling asleep and then waking up and thinking all that I'd been through was just a dream – what a dream! If I was to now win the lottery and become a millionaire it would be like an anti-climax because I have already lived this dream and nothing could compare. I wanted to do many different things like take my daughter horse riding and go on holiday. I felt I had developed a real spice for life – it was great, I was on an extended holiday. I was also doing lots in the house. When I returned back to the ward I was assessed again and my wife told them how I was manic. I was really upset with my wife; it was like I had taken a step backwards. I felt restricted, why were they doing this to me? I was put on medication that initially made me sleep a lot, but this was adjusted and I started only taking it at night.

I got to the stage where I felt less desperate to go home and hospital became very positive; a place where I could rest. I remember one occasion they had planned a pizza night and I wanted to go back and be a part of it. I could really relate to the other people on the ward. I wondered if maybe they were getting better because of me, if I had cured everyone.

Around four weeks after my admission I was discharged. I was glad to be going home. At the time I didn't think too much about what had happened to me, I just wanted to get back. We had a holiday planned and I felt OK.

## The depression was worse than the high

We went on holiday as a family, and initially it was all going well. Whilst away my stepson contacted me to tell me that I had received a letter from the DVLA stating that my driving licence was going to be revoked. When I heard this I felt really upset and I couldn't get the thought of this out of my head. When I returned back home I started feeling physically unwell, and after a series of tests I was told I had picked up a virus. I didn't seem to recover from the virus and I felt drained and tired. *I couldn't be bothered doing anything, I didn't even want to talk.*

On top of this I felt very emotional, crying a lot of the time. I remember the Insight team coming one day and they arrived five minutes late. In that five minutes I felt so anxious, had my worker forgot?



It felt like the whole world was against me. I was already feeling misunderstood, and started to become withdrawn, although I did manage to keep working. The Insight team arranged an urgent review with the doctor. I was relieved that somebody had realised that there was something wrong. The doctor told me I was depressed. Again - what a relief that a name could be put to what was wrong. I was prescribed anti-depressants and encouraged by the Insight team and my wife to do activities, but at the time I did not want to hear this.

I had the medication, viewed it as a magic pill and the medication did seem to take the edge off things. I wondered if it was like a placebo effect at the time but as the weeks went by I started to get better. Time frames became important again; the doctor gave me a time when he thought they would take effect, and I needed the time frame to work towards. My mood started to improve, my energy levels increased, socially I started to get back on track. I was talking and friends started coming back to our house.

*I do believe that if you have experienced mental health problems yourself, it helps you to have more compassion for people who may be struggling with similar problems.*



## Recovery

At present I feel a lot better in myself, even though I still think there's a way to go. I am not yet 100% my old self. I used to be the life and soul of the party whereas now I take more of a back seat. I used to be really sharp, getting across what I wanted in two or three sentences and I think this will come back. I think I now tend to analyse people, more out of curiosity than anything else, and since being in hospital I have developed an interest in people and how minds work.

I do have stress in my life at present with the threat of redundancy at work. I know that kind of stress would cause anybody to worry, and it was the thing I worried about prior to my episode. Now, however, I think that redundancies are possible where I work but I know there's nothing I can do about it, what will be will be. It's a good thing that I can now deal with this level of uncertainty.

I have told the friend who I have mentioned throughout my story that I am writing an account of my episode. He pointed out to me that when I was on a high despite having thoughts that I was wealthy it wasn't about me, it was about how my money would help others. I know this is something about my morals, the person that I am. I am not selfish I like to bring the good out in people; all I have ever wanted to do is to help people.

Yes, at times I do feel frightened that recent experiences may return. I also wonder if people will judge me because I have had a breakdown. I have found recently by talking to others that they have also suffered from mental health problems but I wouldn't have known that.

I have learned so much from my experiences. I have learned to take things easy and to not punish myself when I feel I have let others down. Where does worry get you? You can't always control everything in life.

*Read my wife Helen's story overleaf, to see how all this felt for her.*

“

I have learned to take things  
easy and to not punish  
myself when I feel I have  
let others down.

”



“ I remember one day him appearing so much brighter, I could see the old Phil coming back again.

”

# Helen's story

I'm Phil's wife; you can read his story just before mine. Here's how it felt for me.

Looking back I had no idea that Phil was unwell. I seem to remember him being full of beans, really jolly. This was out of character for him. I did notice that his sleep was poor and I thought the lack of sleep was making him go 'high', it was the only thing I could put it down to. I wasn't really worried at first, I thought if he catches up on sleep he will be OK. He was carrying on as normal and going to work.

One night we received a phone call from my husband's friend as he was worried about him. When we got there Phil was in a state and it was difficult to make sense of what he was saying. He was talking about an elaborate plan to make money with a 'pyramid scheme', I couldn't understand him and this made Phil more agitated. *He was up and down, repeating the same ideas and I wasn't sure what to do next. We got him back home but I just didn't know what was happening to him.*

My instinct kicked in that I needed to protect him. I hid the car keys and followed him around the house to make sure he was safe. I couldn't talk him round, I tried to convince him he wasn't a millionaire but it didn't work. I contacted the out of hour's doctor and they advised me to go to Accident & Emergency. When we got there it was quiet, which helped. They did all the physical tests and asked lots of questions. Thankfully Phil accepted that he needed help, but he was obsessed by time; time limits were very important to him.

## Hospital

The structure of Accident & Emergency seemed to work well for him but we ended up being transferred between different hospitals and different wards. He couldn't control what he was saying and was making comments to other patients and staff as well as switching the lights on and off. *I was working on pure adrenaline, I was sat there thinking 'Oh, my God what next?'* I just wanted to get Phil sorted, and after 13 hours Phil was admitted to a psychiatric ward.

I went home to pick up some clothes and went back to the hospital. When I got back Phil was kicking off. He was saying "I'm not staying here" and I could see the doctors writing the section papers in the background. Phil was shouting at me, saying he wanted a divorce and the nurses in the background were calling for assistance.

The nurses were good, they told me not to take anything personally and that he might not remember what he was saying. By this stage I was really upset and wanted to get out of the hospital. My sons were also in tears. I just wanted Phil to get better. However, I had faith in the nurses and I knew they could handle him.

Following Phil's admission I didn't eat for a week, I just couldn't face food, in spite of support from my family. They were also offering to be with me when I visited Phil but I wanted time alone with him. I know looking back that my family were looking out for me.

The first week that Phil was in hospital was tough, because as well as not eating I couldn't sleep. I was doing two to three trips a day to hospital and was living on pure adrenaline. I took time away from work and went off sick. I also had my young daughter's needs to think about. She was upset; she is a Daddy's girl and really close to Phil. I tried to keep things as normal as I could for her sake, and made sure she kept to her usual routine. She did not visit Phil in hospital, he didn't want that. I told her Dad was really tired and he was in hospital to help him sleep and get better.

## Coming home

Over the next few weeks I took each day as it came. *I had not had any previous experience of mental illness, but I never thought that Phil wouldn't get better and the section didn't really bother me, I just viewed it as part of the process to get him better.* Phil seemed to improve quickly within days of his admission. At first I think just catching up on sleep helped him. The doctors were good and we had regular contact with them and I felt listened to. After a few days Phil was allowed to come home for a short period. However, when home I could tell he still wasn't right. He was still manic and was chucking everything out of cupboards. I was rescuing everything he was throwing out. He was cooking stew but putting things into the stew that wouldn't work, like rice.

I spoke to the doctors when he went back to hospital and they started him on an anti-psychotic medication. When they started him on the medication he slept a lot, but the dose was changed to stop this. By this stage the exhaustion kicked in for me; I was snappy and irritable but kept going. Over time, things improved and Phil became well. He was discharged home after seven weeks, was much better and it was nice to have him back. Also, having Phil home gave me the chance to relax and rest, but I knew I needed my escape; 'me time' was important. I started to go back to the gym and going swimming and started to feel better, more like my old self. *Looking back you just don't know what to expect and what is going to happen next.* It's like you have to have so much patience with the person but at times Phil really tested my patience.



## Depression

He continued to improve, went back to work full-time and we went on a well deserved holiday. Just when we thought everything was going well Phil became unwell again but this time it was different; he was low and wouldn't talk. Phil was depressed and the depression was awful. He went to see a doctor at the Insight team who put him on antidepressant medication. I wasn't worried that he would be taking more medication; I knew it was to help him and make him feel better. Again I thought it would only be a matter of time before he would start to improve.

Like before, we were going through a process but this time he was at home not in hospital. *One of the difficulties when somebody is depressed is how withdrawn they become.* Phil rarely talked and I could see the worry in his face. He had always been such a strong person, very protective of his family; this time I had to be protective of him. Throughout his depression I stayed working and so did he. I think work became my escape. Colleagues were very supportive and although Phil's depression wasn't nice I felt more able this time to stay at work and not go off sick.

It took around four weeks for him to improve; he just seemed to get better overnight. I remember one day him appearing so much brighter, I could see the old Phil coming back again. It felt great seeing him back on the up again. It's been about three months now since his depression. He is socialising, his energy is back and he is no longer withdrawn. One of the reasons why I know that he is back to normal is that he wakes me up when he comes back from work wanting to talk in the early hours of the morning. Phil has always done this, and I often wonder if his incentive is for me to get up so that he can have the comfy, warm side of the bed (joke!!).

When I look back on the experience, one of the things that kept me going was keeping in the back of my mind that there were people in a worse position than we were. I also believe that it is really important for the person to be aware of some of the things that may have contributed to them becoming unwell.

*Having time to yourself also helps and doing something that you enjoy; you have to try to stay positive when you can because I think this keeps you moving forward.* I think you also have to remember that the person has been independent before the episode, and that it's important when they are getting better to support them in regaining this independence. If you keep some normality in your own life and structure it will help the person return to their usual day to day life.



“It would only be a matter of time before Phil would start to improve.”



## The meetings

I attended, I listened, at times I shouted,  
I attended, at times I cried and I doubted.  
I thought, what's the point? What can you do?  
Thought – there's nothing here for either me or you.

Each week I came, with a heavy heart,  
I tried my best to take a part  
of each discussion, each debate,  
it was so hard for me to relate  
to the weekly meetings – my life was still the same  
and to me it felt like playing a game.

Then slowly, things fell into place.  
Those weekly meetings, they're not a waste.  
Insight saved my sanity, you made me understand  
I had some power, it was there within my hand  
To change my attitude, to make me see,  
Not everyone's mind works like you or me.

***Written by a parent about family work meetings***



“ I have learned that if I put my mind to something I can achieve things.

”

# David's story

Age: 25

I first started with the Insight team when I was about 20 years old. I'd been to see my GP as when I thought things in my head, it felt like people close by would be able hear them. This made me very paranoid. *I purposefully tried to blank things out so no-one would know what I was thinking.*

This was horrible, but because I thought it was real I accepted it, just like you accept you'll get wet when it's raining. It also stopped me from asking people if they could hear my thoughts, as whatever they answered would have been suspicious.

The paranoia built up from this. I thought my mum was trying to poison my food, so to prove myself wrong I would eat the food she made. However, I could always rationalise it when it didn't poison me, eg. maybe it's just this meal that's not poisoned. At around this time also, I began to worry that I had to breathe consciously or I would die; this was horrible, as I couldn't do anything else but breathe. I was also going to the GP up to four times a week as an emergency appointment, as I was panicking that my throat was closing and I would suffocate and die.

The worse all this got, however, and the more far-fetched some of the thoughts were beginning to seem, the easier it was to begin to challenge that it might not be real.

At the age of 15 or 16, I had watched some videos on the internet of people being beheaded. These were now much more in my thoughts. I had nightmares about being beheaded, and I also worried that my mum would be beheaded. Because of this, I followed her everywhere to make sure she was safe; I was never more than two or three feet away from her. As soon as she went

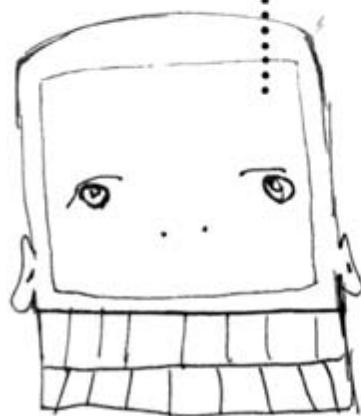
Sometimes not always

my ways are not your ways

and if they are

it's a different star

sometimes not always.



Communication  
breakdown

out of my sight, anxiety built up and I worried about her. The only way to help the anxiety was to see her and follow her.

I had also been smoking a lot of weed (skunk) from the age of 17. Now, the more I smoked, the more symptoms arrived and the more symptoms arrived, the more I smoked. I then moved on to using cocaine, or occasional ketamine or amphetamines. The cocaine was an instant 'high' for around 40 minutes – I loved it, but I stopped it when I thought I was dying.

I was losing a lot of weight, was on a different planet most of the time, and after heavy cocaine use my lips went blue. I was also feeling paranoid and experiencing hallucinations (visual and auditory, eg. hearing footsteps, whispers, or seeing shadows under my door or people in my room). I also had illusions such as seeing lampshades spin or objects move. Seeing the people who weren't there was initially terrifying, but after a while they became comforting. I also remember not being bothered by anything.

*I had no emotions whatsoever.*



## Things that were helpful

- Stopping the drugs. I just decided one day that I needed to stop and went 'cold turkey'. I didn't want help with this, partly as I didn't want anyone to know, partly because this would have felt like admitting defeat.
- Going out bit by bit, even just for 10 minutes, to go outside. This was one of the things that pushed me forward the most, as it also opened other doors for me and made me think of new things. For example, going to the shops, to the pub, or meeting friends. Not going out for so long had felt like being in prison.
- Playing computer games and speaking to friends online. This helped my confidence and gave me a break, took my mind off things for an hour or two.
- Going to the music group, and playing squash and football with the Insight team, and also going on the Wales trip with the team. This trip reassured me that I can go away from home and feel OK, and the groups made it easier for me to be able to talk to people.
- In general, speaking with people, friends / family, explaining what I was feeling, reassuring myself that what I was worrying about wasn't real, or just for reassurance for small things. It always helped. *If I'd done something, even if I thought it was small, my care co-ordinator could always find something positive in what I'd done, regardless of whether it was small or not. This was always a confidence booster.*

## Things that were less helpful

- Overall, nothing has set me back or made it harder for me. Before, the drugs made what I was going through a whole lot worse. Although I thought that alcohol initially helped and gave me 'Dutch courage', when I drank to excess (around 18-20 cans of bitter a day for 10 months), it made me withdraw again and I couldn't go out; I was in no fit state. Also, my brain couldn't rationalise my thoughts when I was drinking (and also after drinking). Alcohol also made me more aggressive; after drinking I couldn't let things go so would become confrontational. It also damaged my liver.
- With the computer games, I became obsessed with them. I began to choose not to go outside. I prioritised playing games over reality, so became quite reclusive. I would even eat whilst playing and would sometimes stay awake all night. I would also be irritable if anyone disturbed me when I was playing.
- Initially, I didn't mind going to see the psychiatrist, but then it felt like I was seeing the same psychiatrist for only two or three times before I had to meet someone else. This got me down, seeing a brand new person and having to explain every detail again. Because of this, I would dread going, and panic and anxiety would build up. I hated it.
- There were times that I didn't feel the nurses in the Insight team were pushy enough with me. For example, when I said 'no' to things that I might have been persuaded about if the nurses had persevered. It might be helpful to ask people referred to the team which approach works best for that person.

## Mental health medication

I'm not taking any now. I've previously been prescribed three different antipsychotic medications, an antidepressant and a tranquilizer. Some tablets helped me to sleep but made me gain weight, others made me feel tired and in a dream world. Initially, the tranquilizer was my new best friend; I felt better within 15-20 minutes of taking it. After a while, they stopped doing anything so I stopped taking them.

The antidepressant worked well; with hindsight it stopped any feelings of depression being as intense; it dampened it a lot. When I was first put on medication I thought the psychiatrist was trying to trick me by giving me placebo tablets. However, they must have done something as after a while I began to feel they were being helpful. Simply being on medication reassured me that I would get better. ***It feels nice that I now have emotions and can empathise with people; I couldn't do this before.***

## Current experiences

Not a lot, nothing compared to what it was like. I do have some intrusive thinking now and again and paranoia occasionally; a worry, just for a split second. I do have a tendency to 'OCD', eg. rubbing the side of my computer mouse until it feels 'right', and rolling the volume up and down on my headphones. The way I interrupt these is to tense myself up and shake myself. Also, sometimes if I think about it I can still worry that I might choke on my food.

## Achievements

- Getting through it
- I'm much more confident and a stronger person than I was before, a lot more
- I feel like a better person
- I now feel confident enough to speak to people in the street
- I now like to see people happy and want to help people
- I now have more of an understanding about mental health problems, and also an interest in other health problems
- I have learned that if I put my mind to something I can achieve things

## Future goals

I want to make something of myself. I want to live a 'normal' life; job, partner, house, possibly kids.

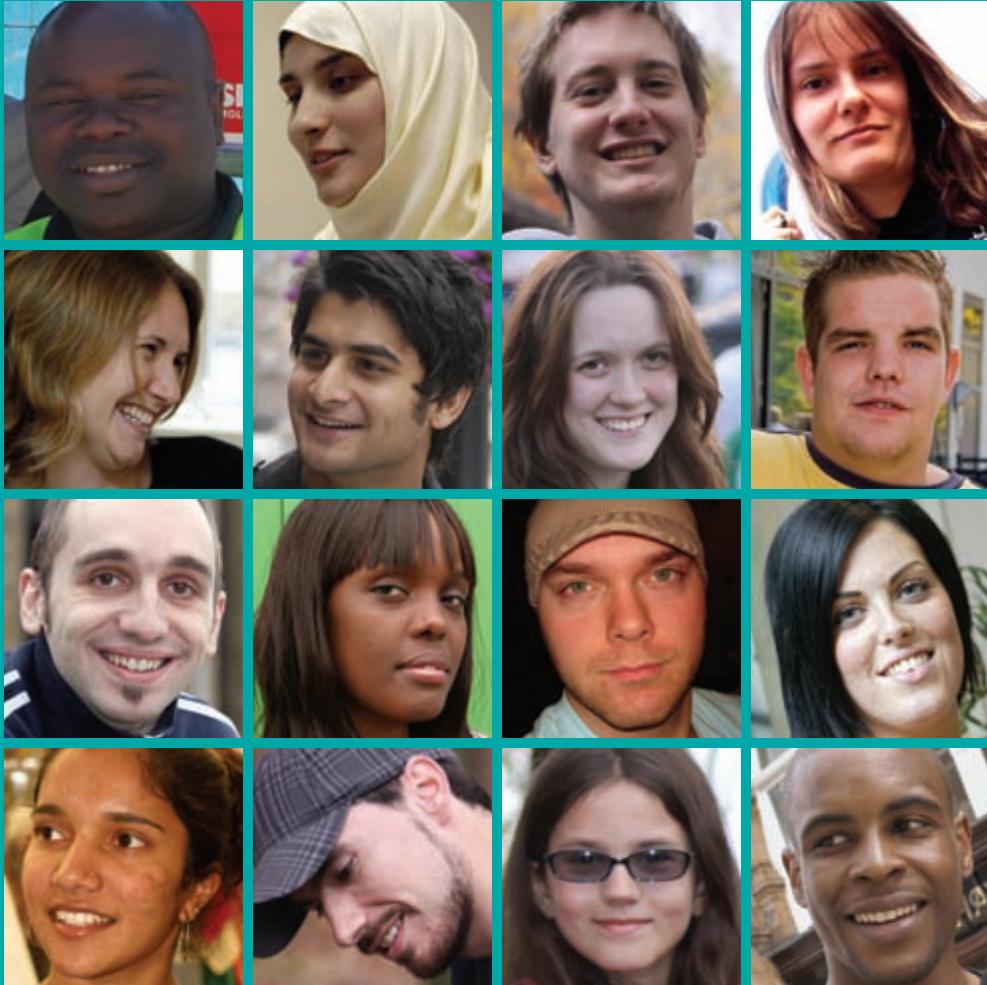
Beforehand, I didn't feel like I was able to take an opportunity even if I wanted to; I just couldn't. ***Now, if I see an opportunity I have the option to take it or not take it. I don't feel like I'm held back by anything now.***



With all of us in mind

South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Can you spot the people with a mental health problem?



## No, neither can we

That's why our services are developed with all of us in mind

1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem and may need to use specialist NHS services

**[www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk)**

Job no. 4810 March 2012