

## Georgina:

I am 31 years old and living in South Devon with my partner. I work part-time as a Community Mental Health Worker with the Primary Care Mental Health Team for Devon Primary Care Trust. I am very lucky to have this job and owe this mainly to the personal experiences I have had over the last twelve years. Since my first episode my aim was to work in Mental Health. I have had four major episodes of a depressive illness with psychotic tendencies, which causes me to become catatonic and mute, not eating or drinking and responding to very little! I have also attempted suicide on two occasions. I had my first episode in 1995 at the age of 20, then in 1997, 2000 and again this summer. All have been very terrifying experiences and have caused me to be hospitalised and on horrible amounts of medication, with the exception of my last episode in 2006, whereupon I was very ill, luckily escaped hospitalisation and did not take any medication! This was a real shock that I could get better, so well, without the need for medication, quite a shock! But very positive, in fact I was better within a month of falling ill.

This summer I was officially diagnosed with Bipolar. However I have thought this since about 2003, when I decided it was time to seek help with my episodes and to go down the alternative route of homeopathic treatment. I was determined not to take any medication; I took lithium for 15 months following my hospitalisation in 2000, and was told I would certainly have to take it again one day! I was so determined that I would not, that I did all I possibly could to find alternative ways to stay well...I firstly met with an amazing man who is a master of Homeopathy and after a four and a half hour consultation and being asked simple questions like "do I drink caffeine", I found the alternative to Lithium! His magic pillulars have helped me dramatically and focus on the immune system as opposed to the mind; staying physically well is a good key to mental well being! I have to self manage a lot to stay well, I stopped eating dairy, don't eat meat, don't touch caffeine, exercise daily and get plenty of sleep. These are all the ways in which I stay well and prevent me from having to take the likes of lithium.

I have discovered that too many stressors are key to triggering off an episode and to that end following this last episode I have taken full responsibility for my illness and decided I can only manage with part-time work for the foreseeable future. This has made such a difference to my general well being. I have always worked full-time and done additional part time work too, but I seem to be able to cope with so much more now I don't have the stress and worry of having to work full time.

I also took a big step in sorting out my finances last year and this has helped me dramatically. My excessive spending got me into all sorts of trouble over the years, and it feels such a relief to now have this under control, no more credit cards or loans. I entered into a IVA (independent voluntary agreement), not only do I now only pay £200 a month for over £20,000 debt but I can't get myself into any further debt as I can not obtain a credit or debit card for at least the next 5 years.

My life is the best it has ever been and I feel in control for the first time in years and years. I couldn't have done what I have done without the ongoing support from my friends and family. I have lost friends over the years through my behaviours, and sadly they had enough, but I am very lucky with my family and a few very close friends who have always been there for me. My illness and actions through my illness have also cost me loss of residency of my daughter who has lived with her father since 2000, but I have always seen her and I hope one day she will understand all about my condition.

When I lived in Brighton through my research I discovered a Manic Depression self help group. I arranged to meet with the current co-ordinators who said they had had enough of running the group and I took the opportunity to take on this role and went onto facilitate this self-help group for service users and carers of Bipolar. This was something I hugely enjoyed doing and it was received so well by lots of people who loved to come together as like minded people to share thoughts and experiences.

Having returned to the South Hams and discovered there is a distinct lack of services I have decided to set up a similar group and I am currently in the process of setting this up...watch this space!! I believe the best help we can give is to each other as we are the living experts of our condition and

this knowledge and experience is paramount in helping to support each other. I also aim to further my career starting with STR training, which will hopefully lead to my getting a place on an NVQ course and then who knows possibly a degree...I am a very determined person and believe that anything is possible. I fully support service user involvement in the fight against stigma and helping to educate others on mental health and well-being.

Being Bipolar has never been something that I am ashamed of, in fact my major episodes always have a positive lining and have given me so many opportunities to have another go at my life. They have led me to have confidence invaluable at times, helping me to secure good jobs and meet some great people, having the energy to stay up all night and party and to be the life and the soul of the party! Generally life has always been fun and now I have found a way to keep the depression at bay I am far steadier and happier than I have ever been. Life doesn't have to be over because of Bipolar in fact it only just begins...enjoy x