

Just over a year ago I was in a mess.

Years of mental anguish were about to culminate in a trial against my historic abuser. I was suicidal, scared to go out alone, could barely look after myself and my children, was self-harming daily and was on the verge of admission to an inpatient ward. That admission happened, but when I came out, I was ready to work with a therapist. She really listened to me and for the first time I felt understood and believed. We didn't really talk about the abuse, just how it had affected me, and she gave me strategies to help calm myself and recognise my feelings.

She helped me build an imaginary compassionate friend, a lioness called Miracle, and the three of us worked together to overcome some of my difficulties.

A year later I am in a completely different place. I still have the odd bad day, but I rarely feel alone or afraid now that I have Miracle. I joined the recovery college, did some courses, and met some lovely people.

I started attending Slimming World groups on my own and now go to an allotment once a week.

For so long I felt like I was in the darkest cave and couldn't see who I was meant to be.

Now my family have me back and that's the greatest gift we could have given them.

To the special person reading this,

I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you've been dealt really difficult cards in life and are feeling like this is the only way out.

I'm not going to tell you that this isn't the answer, that it's wrong and things will get better. I won't tell you all them things because I've been there. I've had people tell me to have a hot drink, to take a bath and 'just distract yourself' to get through it but we all know that's a load of rubbish, right?

We all know when we're in this place nothing is worth it, nothing is worth fighting for that this is where our story ends. Just take one moment, what are we running from? What do we really want to end? Are we running from the pain we feel, someone who's hurt us or traumatic events of the past?

Sometimes all it takes is just one person to believe in you, to take the time to listen and not judge. Someone to tell you that you're valued, and you DO have a place on this earth. You know, if you were to be gone, I'd miss you. Sure, I don't know you, but I know for certain you're damn right amazing.

Someone once told me that sometimes you must just stop fighting. Stop fighting the thoughts and just sit with them for a moment. Just sit and be. Let the pain flow and I promise it will go. I can promise you that it does get easier! The only reason I can promise is because I'm here on the other side. I was so very close to ending it all, but I took a little time and it passed. It hurt like hell, it was so intensely painful, but I can tell you it's worth it Don't let anyone who's hurt you, upset you, past trauma or anything define you or your life! You hold so much value, you're special and there's only one of you! You hold the key for whatever life you want to live. Hour by hour, day by day. I believe in you.

A true warrior

It's hard to know where to begin!

When I thought about writing a letter of hope for others who may have been in the place I once was I thought about what might be helpful.

Certainly I have been in some dark places and felt my life was over more than once. I stopped caring for myself and about anyone else who tried to bother with me.

I had suffered a lot of loss in a short space of time, especially when my partner suddenly died unexpectedly.

He had been the strong one who looked out for me and managed the money and paid the bills.

Although it was not always a positive relationship, I felt that anything was better than nothing and when I had no belief in myself, I just went along with things. When someone tells you that you are a no hoper and useless you believe it.

When I got involved in the mental health service, I was very resistant, often not wanting to see my support worker (she would not take no for an answer, even when I was rude to her, I know it was because I was in pain and shock).

I tried to avoid going out or doing anything. Instead I turned back to using alcohol and street drugs. I could not see a way of getting out of this mind set and kept blaming myself.

With help and support I began to find some self-esteem and my confidence began to grow.

It took a while but I started to see my life could be different but it meant I had to really take a look at myself and make some choices about how I wanted my life to be if I continued with it.

After about 18 months I started to see a more positive side of life and began to make a real effort to change. I managed to start going to hospital appointments (with support) for physical and mental health appointments and sought support from GP and the community mental health team.

I still have the odd bumpy day but mostly I am feeling stronger and that I can manage my life and do things. If there is anything I have learnt it is to be at peace with who I am, and to believe in myself.

I find parenting difficult at times and the things that my teenager constantly challenges me with, we are still trying to regain our relationship from our lost years when they did not live with me.

But I have hope that things will continue to get better as time goes on.

I hope this is of help to someone, someone who is like I was.

I have been a service user for 7 years.

I had my first hospital admission when I was 28, this was a relief as I had lost the will to live and the capacity to think rationally. I became a danger to myself and others in the most harrowing way.

I struggled to accept treatment and wrongly thought no one could or would want to help me. My own demons made me feel worthless and empty.

After a period when I was sectioned under the Mental Health Act. I truly felt I had hit rock bottom and from that point onwards when the only way was up, I began to find a positivity in my life and was able to utilise the support and help from the mental health service on the ward and in the community mental health team.

Once I opened my mind (and the front door!) I was able to begin the healing process.

At first it seemed painfully slow and tedious but I was on the road to recovery, and became more focussed on getting well and staying well as time went on.

I did see that I was gathering skills and gained a network of support options and was able to manage my intrusive and debilitating thoughts in a more healthy way.

Though my journey was tough at times I am now in a happy place, writing this to you reminds me of how far I have come.

Please take advantage of the help you are offered and know that these feelings will subside and you will find a way to deal with negative thoughts.

I hope you find your inner peace.

February 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

### **HOPE – THE PATIENT’S PERSPECTIVE**

I am writing on behalf of the current service users of Frome’s Hearing Voices Group about our hopes for the future of the group.

I, like many fellow members, have been attending the Hearing Voices Group at Frome Medical Practice regularly for a few years now (over six years in my case). It is an important part of my routine and my support network. It is reassuring to share experiences with other patients in an informal and social setting. The knowledge that there are health care professionals on hand to guide and advise us is also a significant part of why the group works so well for the members and brings us hope.

I would like to share with you why these hopes are so important to us as patients and what these hopes are.

Hope is a basic human need, which we all have a right to freely and equally.

Hope is my right as a patient entering the mental health system and should be part of the culture of the service. It shows the patient they are being treated with respect as a fellow human being.

Hope is an important element of treatment for all patients. Hope is warm and comforting, something we all have examples or memories of receiving. Patients should be offered hope at the earliest opportunity when entering the service.

Hope is a joint commitment to be offered by the service and believed in by the patient. The patient needs to know that there is hope for their future, part of which is based on the quality of the support they will receive. It will give the patient the best possible chance out in the community, the belief that hope can exist in the wider world.

As patients, we need the service running the Hearing Voices Group to understand the importance of nurturing our hopes.

Hope should exist within care planning and be integral to service provision. There should be staff awareness at all levels of the importance of hope to each patient. This should be part of staff training and the ability to offer hope integral to staff development.