

Meeting challenges

Hillary's story about meeting the challenge of change

My first experience with mental illness was back in the year 1976. I was 19 years old. What I remember from those days is that I felt so tired, but had great difficulty sleeping. I was struggling on a daily basis. It was then I first received treatment from mental health services.

In the year 1986, at the age of 29, I was really struggling to cope with the 'voices' that were really distressing and exhaustive. I had to leave my job as a factory worker because I couldn't cope. I was admitted to psychiatric hospital for a few weeks and then moved to supported residential accommodation. I lived in that atmosphere for twenty years. Then, in 2006, the supported accommodation facilities in my area closed and I had to move to independent living. I wasn't confident I'd cope. I knew there would be challenges that I had never done in my life. Because I'd lived in supported accommodation for a long period of time, my skills necessary to live independently were not so good. I was really nervous about how living independently would work for me. Due to the stress, I was worried about my mental state.

I was relieved when my clinical key worker from St Luke's Mental Health Services introduced me to Tomy - a support worker from Pathways. Tomy offered me whatever support I needed. This really boosted my confidence. I felt that I was not alone and help would be there when I needed. Tomy instilled hope in me and encouraged me to face challenges. He helped me with budgeting, grocery shopping, cooking skills, healthy eating and living a healthy lifestyle. He also taught me about personal care and healthy activities.

One day Tomy invited me to Pathways sports session. I was hesitant initially because I was shy and felt uncomfortable about meeting strangers and being in groups. But a few weeks later, after several friendly prompts and encouragements from Tomy, I decided to give it a try. I slowly started to engage with other people and felt so welcomed into the group. What I've noticed and been excited about is that while I play sports with the group, my 'voices' gets less intensive and sometimes completely stop. Now I thoroughly enjoy the sports session and don't want to miss even one!

Living independently is now easier as well. I do my weekly grocery shopping and my own cooking. I am quite capable of paying my bills on time. I feel confident about doing these things without support. Recently I've increased my part-time job at Work Foundations from one to two days per week. The Pathways Healthy Lifestyle Team has helped me set up a veggie garden in my backyard which I really enjoy. I've also been using public transport and going to my regular psychiatric appointment by myself. My psychiatrist has been happy to cut down my medication, which I never miss as I'm fully aware of the importance of it on maintaining my wellness.

I do still hear 'voices', but they're friendly now and I know how to live with them. I feel confident now about moving to receiving less Pathways support. My confidence, on a scale of one to 10, has moved from a two to an eight in the last couple of years. I thank Pathways and Tomy in particular for rendering valuable support in my journey to wellness.

