



Please, tell us about yourself – where were you born and raised? What did you parents do for a living? Do you have any siblings? What was life like growing up in childhood?

I was born and raised in Basingstoke, but all of my family were from and lived in London, so I spent more time growing up there than I did in Hampshire. I still now consider myself to be a 'Londoner' and am very proud of my heritage and roots. My mum was a stay at home mum and my dad worked as a finance manager for a local company. They were part of the late 1960's London overflow and so moved here when dad was offered a job. I have one younger sister who I wasn't particularly close too when we were growing up, but we have a much better relationship now.

What education course did you follow? Where did life take you after this?

I attended a mainstream school and although I got 9 GCSE's I absolutely hated school. I didn't fit in; I was different to my peers and couldn't wait to leave. I then attended 6th Form College where I passed two A levels. To be honest though I always knew that I wanted to be a nurse, so 6th form was just a stop gap until I started my diploma in psychiatric nursing shortly after my 18th birthday. I worked from the age of 13years; started off doing a paper round, then moved onto cleaning jobs etc. as my independence was and still is very important to me and I wanted my own money ☺ I am currently studying for an open university degree in criminology/psychology which I will hopefully complete in the next 2 years.

What is the earliest childhood memory you can remember?

I have very few memories from my childhood and those I do have are quite dark, but I do have incredibly fond memories of my Nan and Grandad and just feeling very loved and safe. They used to take us on holiday every year to Hayling Island and those holidays were simply the best!. They both died in their 60's and that was a big loss in my life

Would you like to share about your mental health history?

I experienced a major psychotic episode shortly after I qualified in my nursing (about 6 weeks after I lost my grandfather). I was detained under the mental health act for approx. 9



months and was heavily medicated and labelled with paranoid schizophrenia. Over the past 14 years I have been under the care of my community mental health team and now live with the diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder and schizoaffective disorder. In hindsight, before I become unwell, I had always been very different to my peers; self-harming since the age of 3, although growing up I didn't actually realise that was what I was doing. BPD for me is certainly the Cinderella shoe that fits although I still feel embarrassed to admit that to a lot of people as the diagnosis carries a huge stigma.

Please tell us about your journey into recovery?

When I first became unwell, I lost absolutely everything; my family and friends, my home, my career, my purpose in life. I couldn't bear the thought of always being like this and quite frankly, I made several large attempts on my own life as I just wanted to die. I think for me the turning point of my recovery was when I finally realised I was never going to be the same person before the diagnosis. All the while I kept wanting to be the 'person that was' I was just setting myself up to fail. Mentally reaching the point where I felt I could embrace who I was now and live a meaningful life within the limitations of my mental health problems was huge.

Do you have any 'coping strategies' that you use?

Short and sweet but.....Acceptance, mindfulness and hope would be my three key words. Taking one day at a time, giving myself permission to have a bad day but also not just working within the limitations of mental distress. Believing that I can and will succeed at all the things I have wanted to do. I do not want to live my life having regrets



You are founder and coordinator of RAISE Ltd – please share how this came about? What is the Company all about?

Raise Mental Health Ltd is a *nationally unique*, 100% Mental Health Service User Consultancy and Training Company. *Everyone* at Raise has personally experienced mental illness – our Board of Directors, our consultants, our researchers, our trainers, our



administration team. Therefore we can provide a distinctive insight into Service Users' experiences and aspirations.

Raise is a 100% Service User Managed Social Enterprise that has been operational for over 7 years and employs a core staff of 12 at our Basingstoke office and an ever growing number of Service User Consultants and Trainers across the UK. We jointly have over 200 years' experience of mental health problems and subsequent journeys of recovery.

Raise is also a Social Enterprise, our very make up as a 100% Service User company means that social aims are at the heart of our business. One of Raise's key enterprising aims is to demonstrate the Service Users can wholly operate a successful commercial business.



Further, Raise is a signatory to the MINDFUL Employer along with many government agencies.

What has been the personal highlight(s) of your career in mental health?

I am fortunate to have had many highlights in my career; speaking at Westminster, meeting the lead of the National Personality Disorder program, working alongside some brilliant organisations, doing some brilliant work. But if I were to break it down, the highlights for me are always someone coming on one of our training sessions, feeling very demoralised and on the verge of giving up and then as a result of what we share, feeling very much more empowered to make a difference to someone who they are caring for.... That makes all my personal darkness seem more tolerable because it feels like I have been blessed with the opportunity to turn a negative into something positive.

"You met and exceeded all hopes, you've (yet again, no doubt) touched and changed a lot of lives, and the effect will resonate for many, many years to come." – M.M, Head Teacher, Prospect School



What do you have lined up for 2013?

Plough on with my OU studies as I am on a mission to get my degree and continue to focus on Raise. We have started to develop eLearning materials and resources which is very exciting and I am hoping that this year we will start to launch these products outside of Hampshire

And after that, what does the future hold for you?

I have always wanted to train as a counsellor so I would like to pursue this ambition but personally I am a very family orientated person. I love spending time with my son and partner.....I am turning 40 years old next year and you know what they say, life begins at 40, so who knows what the future will bring.

Favourite Quote?

Can I be cheeky and add two?

"...God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference..."

- Reinhold Niebuhr

"...Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes..."

- Mahatma Gandhi

Indian political and spiritual leader (1869 - 1948)