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Meg's story

Shared Lives and mental health



Following a traumatic childhood Meg spent most of her youth in and out of hospital. This cycle reached its peak when Meg spent a four-and-a-half-year spell in a psychiatric unit.

When she was finally ready to leave and didn't know what to do, she stumbled upon Shared Lives largely by chance after finding the organisation online:

"I found Shared Lives after a lengthy online search one day. I took the information to my consultant, used my voice, and told her: 'this is what I want'."

Her consultants had never heard of Shared Lives but following their research they gave Meg the all clear to start the matching process. Following this process Meg moved in with Hayley who was Meg's carer for seventeen months. Meg says Hayley massively helped her deal with day-to-day problems as well as the interpersonal problems she had previously experienced.

"When I moved in, she had to support me around getting on public transport, helped me understand budgeting and cooking for myself, and I think the big thing was just understanding relationships. I was quite sensitive, I guess I'd been living in this kind of fishbowl world for such a long time. So yeah, it was all about teaching me regular life skills but whilst having that support at the same time."

Though Hayley was Meg's carer, she believes their relationship has been mutually beneficial:

"We have similar interests, although our personalities are the complete opposite. She's very kind of 'bull in a china shop' and goes head on, quite fiery, and I'm more gentle and thoughtful. But you know we went on this journey together, and in the end, we've sort of balanced each other out. She taught me to toughen up a little bit and I taught her how to soften up."

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Shared Lives Plus www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk www.homeshareuk.org

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Meg has been living independently for just over three years and still receives day support from Shared Lives carers, including Hayley. She thinks that because of the stepping stone Shared Lives provided, the process has been relatively easy. She is eternally grateful she even has the chance to have her own house.

“For most people it seems pretty normal to live on your own with your dog, but my home means everything to me – it’s a massive achievement and something I never thought possible.”

Meg is now an ambassador with Shared Lives Plus. She says her motivation was simply to spread the word about Shared Lives.

“I feel like there’s so many people out there that could benefit just like I have, and I don’t want them to miss out on that because it’s obviously life changing. It was for me. It changed the course of my life definitely.

“So, I just share my story from where I was, to meeting Hayley and how that was and where I am now, just to show these professionals that it can be done and someone can be in such a dark place and you know the outcome doesn’t look great, but if someone is willing to take that therapeutic risk it can pay off.”

Meg is now looking to the future and is hoping to both improve her life and that of others. In the coming years she wants to create a new and more exciting vision for social care.

“I just want to keep sharing my story on more and more platforms but in a more empowering way, I just want it more powerful. I’ve just got to this place where I believe in myself so much, and I’m so grateful for my journey, even though it’s been hard at times. Now I’m all about power and believing in myself and I want to teach everyone else that as well.”

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