

# I'm here too

**Insightful, inspiring, truthful:**  
Carers share their thoughts,  
feelings and experiences of  
looking after a family member  
or friend who has mental  
health problems



GLASGOW CARERS FORUM  
MENTAL HEALTH



Welcome to this  
booklet of mental  
health carers'  
stories.

The idea behind this came from carers themselves who were keen to raise awareness of issues affecting them and the people they support.

Over a period of 8 sessions including one for information and one for editing, carers were supported and encouraged by the Village Storytelling Centre and the Development Worker. The sessions enabled carers to explore creatively attitudes towards mental health by providing an opportunity to share their stories, create poems and artwork. Various themes were covered, including their experiences of stigma and its effects and how their strength and resilience has overcome these and other challenges they have faced. Participants hope that the booklet will support and encourage other carers in similar situations as well as being a training tool for staff in mental health services.

The process proved to be an emotional journey at times for the carers involved, however, the group developed a strong bond and everyone supported and learned from each other. All the carers felt that they too had benefited from their involvement.

Everything included in this booklet including poems and artwork is entirely the carers' own work. **Enjoy!**

**Rosemary Nicolson** Carers Development Worker  
Mental Health – September 2011

*To a degree we are all carers.  
We look after our children  
when they're small, we look  
after our homes, we take an  
interest in our wider family,  
friends, neighbours etc.  
We lend a hand if someone  
asks us to help out but...*

When ill health strikes, particularly mental ill health, it's a different ball game. It's like entering another world. You don't understand. Others don't understand. You feel shame, guilt, fear.

Alongside this you discover strengths you didn't know you had – persistence and stubbornness. You aren't going to give up, not when it's someone you love.

Sometimes it's hard to look ahead and see a positive future, but it WILL and CAN pass. Life may not be exactly the same as it was before, but with support and perseverance it can and will get better.

*I always thought mental illness was  
people who killed or could harm you  
until my boy took ill. It took years for  
me to come to terms with it because  
I had no-one to help me.*

My family must have had similar worries, because when my son was hospitalised not a single one of them went to see him for a whole year. And deep down, maybe I thought that I didn't want them to see him ill, that it was better for them to stay away for a while until he was well again. I thought it would pass, I didn't know his illness would always be there.

I love my boy very much, but it's hard to do things on your own. No matter how strong you are, or how strong you think you are, everyone needs support from somewhere.

"Overnight I was suddenly catapulted into being more than just a mother. Being his mother wasn't enough anymore."

## Causes

Why is my loved one like this?

Is it me?

Is it her?

Is it me?

Is it school?

Is it me?

Is it college?

Is it me?

Is it work?

Is it me?

Is it EVERYTHING?

Is it me?



**“We’re tied together, me and him. If his quality of life improved, mine would too.”**

*Dear Carer,*

You probably think the world has just collapsed around you. How could this happen? What has happened? Sarah has just been admitted to a psychiatric ward, and no-one is talking to you, or telling you what you need to know. Please remember...

it's OK to feel sad, it's OK to feel numb, it's OK to feel ignorant. You may feel that somehow this is all your fault. IT'S NOT.

Don't blame yourself. And remember to look after yourself too. It's really important that you get all the information you need. Ask the psychiatrist, the CPN, the social worker, the support worker. Find out everything you can about the illness and the medication. Even if she says she doesn't want you involved, the staff should listen to you and give you general information.

Talk to your family and friends. Try to get them to understand that she hasn't changed, she just has an illness and both of you need their support now more than ever. Try not to be defensive or hesitant. Try to make them understand that it's nothing to be ashamed of – get the information and share it.

Don't stop doing the things you always did. Find out about mental health carer support services, meet other carers, it can help you to feel less alone.

Have hope. It can, and will get better.

## I have learnt:

Persistence  
Acceptance  
Respect  
Stubbornness  
Strength from within  
Value of family & friends  
Patience  
Protectiveness  
A passion for justice  
Importance of sharing.

### The Family

The family  
Only want what's best  
But who decides?  
When will they understand?  
A cure is wanted  
Recovery is hoped for  
Together we will overcome.

### Carers

So do you know who I am?  
Do you even care?  
No-one seems to listen  
But I'm always there  
I am still a person  
Full of hope and fear  
Try to walk in my shoes  
Would you be prepared?

When I left my ex-husband I really thought that I was free. I had my two children, my new house, and I had my mum and dad to help me. Everything in my future looked positive. Then one night I put my wee darling daughter down to bed and when she woke up the next day she was a devil from hell. I don't know how else to describe it, and after all these years I still don't understand it.



My house was smashed up so many times, my girl ran away so many times I had to call the police on my wee girl time after time. All the police could do was bring her back and put a report in to the children's panel, but nothing ever changed, people kept saying "It's just her age" – but I knew it wasn't. I felt like my life wasn't worth anything at all. Then I heard about Glasgow Association for Mental Health. They assigned me a support worker, and she helped to pull me back from the brink of the black hole I was headed for. Things had got so bad that my support worker could see immediately that this wasn't normal adolescent problems, but that my daughter needed serious professional help big time. We took her to the doctors, but the doctor didn't know where I should go to get help. In the end we were referred to social work, and they provided me with some support, but it took five years, and during that time I would have lost the plot if it wasn't for my support worker, and her help.

I pray to God that one day I'll wake up and overnight she'll have turned back into the happy, healthy wee girl I remember again, but until she does I feel I have more of the support I need. I have a new GAMH support worker, I go to support groups, I am on the carers forum group to help others in similar situations. The help I got from GAMH was a life saver. I still have bad days, but there are more and more good days now. I feel like I have a life now, and the support I get helps me to support my daughter.

"Every time he goes out I'm left sitting here with my heart in my mouth"



When I was at my lowest, I was so low I didn't know where to go, who to talk to. I felt I didn't want to be here, the place I was in was so dark and bleak. I used to sit by the window and watch the people outside smiling and laughing, and I used to wish I could be there.

It was my pal who helped at first. She took my wee boy to a young carers group. He loved it. My girl didn't want to go, and Oh, how I wished she would. Even just for a little while. My son came back with a phone number for me to phone the next day, and that was when I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I called the number, and spoke to GAMH. I found someone to watch the kids, and I went to a meeting.

I still remember the feeling that it was not just me, there were other people in the same boat as me, or even worse than me. From that moment on I got stronger and stronger, felt less and less alone. I actually wanted to wake up in the morning. Of course things still go wrong, and there will always be bad days, but I was never again as low as that time at the beginning, and now I have people who will help me to deal with things when they go wrong.

Dealing with my frustrations regarding my son's illness was a long, hard battle. I knew as I watched him sit for hours staring at the wall, or writing about things he was inventing, or telling me about a poltergeist, or outer space, that something wasn't right. I got him to see a doctor, who sent out mental health nurses who got him into hospital. The carers support group is a great source of advice.

The one thing not to do is panic.

Sometimes you feel you are stuck in the quagmire, but with help from the hospital, who put me in touch with support services, it got better. It will get better.

**Since I have become a carer I have made a lot more friends.**

I've met people who have daughters and sons, husbands or wives with different illnesses, and you don't feel so lonely or depressed when you know you're not alone. There are always people to talk to. Before I had no-one, but now there are groups that I can go to when I need support, and it does help me a lot.

"It doesn't matter how difficult things are, there is always something to laugh about."

Right. You're noticing that your son is behaving strangely, not like himself. **Trust your instinct** that something is happening to him that is not quite right. You don't need to know the reason for this, just be assured that something is happening and seek professional help.

Don't waste time asking other people's advice. Everyone will turn into a would-be psychiatrist. **Trust your judgement** and the advice of your GP. You may have to go to the doctor about this problem several times, but again, be assured of your own judgement even though the doctor might say that you're imagining it, or that your son is fine. **Stick with it.**

First hurdle over – doctor agrees that your son is ill and requires an assessment by a psychiatrist. Appointment six months later. A diagnosis is given – schizophrenia! **Now don't panic.** I know that you are feeling confused – that's to be expected, you have never encountered mental ill health before and have been overwhelmed by your sons behaviour. It may not feel like it sometimes, but you will get the support you need.

Being a carer has made me realise how persistent I can be when it comes to finding the best available care for my son.

Although being a carer is very physically and mentally demanding I still found the time and energy to find out all I could about the mental health set up. The outcome of these enquiries was sometimes disappointing, but somewhere along this process I accepted the situation that we as a family were in. I was forced to treat my other two children with a great deal of care in order to help them deal with this situation we have found ourselves in. This in turn has helped me to get to know my children in ever greater depth. So this for me was a very positive experience which would never have come about if this illness hadn't touched our lives. I feel that this experience in some way has brought us really close as a family.

My advice? Take a step back from a difficult situation. Be supportive of each other. Get help. Especially when things aren't going well. Take time out.



"I like to think that as the weeks and months and years have gone by I have learned to take deep breaths when my husband and I hit those hard and difficult times."

*I am constantly looking for more ways to be positive and light hearted, as I know that this is the way I was before the sickness hit my family. Finding ways to remember who I was before, and to still be that person seems like a tiny victory over the circumstances.*

I know I deserve to give myself more attention and spend more time and money on myself. I can do this. And indeed, I have started to do this!

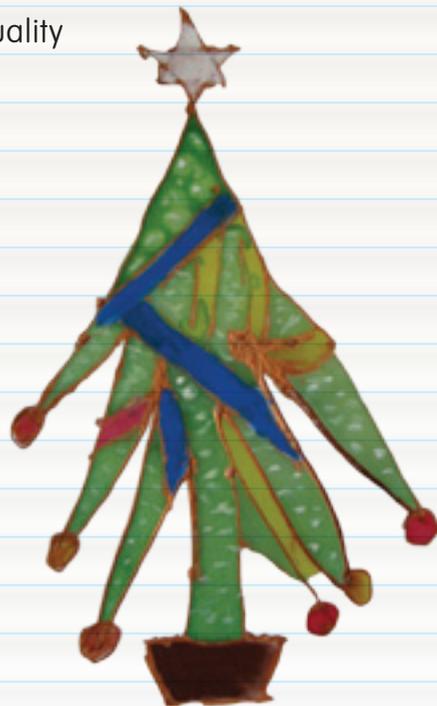
My hope for the future is that one day my daughter will be completely well and happy. She will be able to have a steady job, and she will believe in herself.

**“I used to drink to forget about it, but you’d get up the next morning and your problems were still there.”**

*I need support in my life as a carer. I need advice that is relevant and worthwhile. I need advocacy when dealing with professionals.*

I want to have respite occasionally. I want to be listened to. I want to be able to make mistakes without being criticised.

I wish I had the right to a private and family life. I wish I could get back to some sort of work, albeit part time, or voluntary. But most of all, I wish I could give my son a better quality of life. I wish he could be better.



"At my very lowest point my friend was always there. Any time, day or night, she listened to me, understood me, supported me, made me laugh, and sometimes when I really needed it most of all, she made me do ordinary, everyday, normal things."

## Trying to explain how mental health issues affects carers and those cared for is hard.

Putting feelings and emotions into words might not always enlighten people, and unfortunately there is still a huge amount of stigma associated with it. Some people will shun you, or even blame you, or see you as shameful somehow. Slowly, though, this is changing. Organisations like "See Me" are helping people to open up and talk about mental health, and helping to combat fear and ignorance.

What is it being a carer?  
Does it mean a lot of stress?  
Can anyone be a part?  
Does it mean always saying yes?

How does a carer cope?  
We wear these different hats  
Sometimes we need help too  
But how do we get that?

Looking to the future  
Can leave us feeling bleak  
With all the negative thoughts  
That can last from week to week

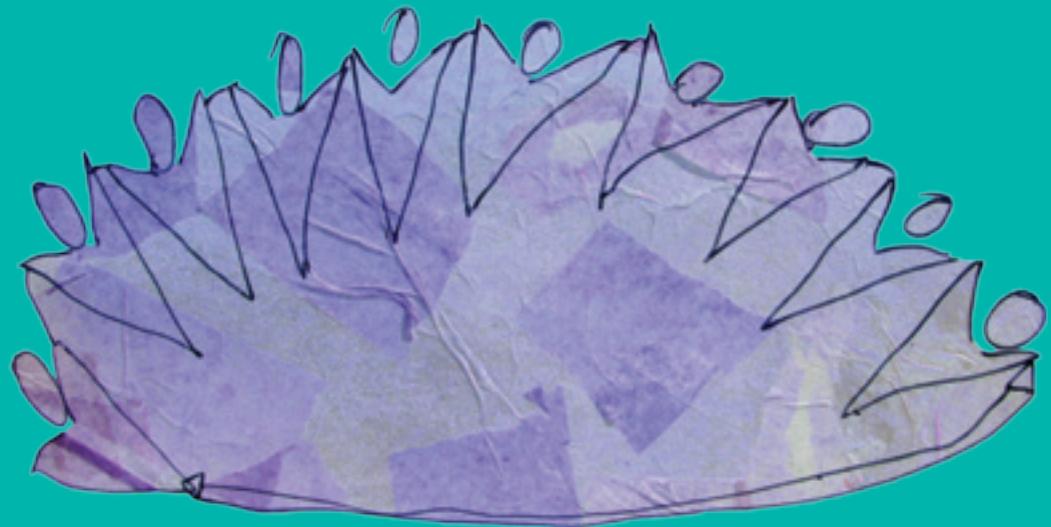
But let us not despair  
The future can be bright  
Then when we go to bed  
We'll get to sleep tonight

Another day has dawned  
The sun can make us feel good  
It's little things like this  
Which separate the trees from the wood.



"You will find comfort,  
understanding, respite,  
laughter, support,  
friendship and above  
all, hope for a light at  
the end of the tunnel"

"80% of people  
dealing with  
mental health issues  
will fully recover."



Glasgow Association for Mental Health (GAMH) provides individual and group support to mental health carers throughout Glasgow, including carers who come from Black and Minority Ethnic communities and other excluded groups.

**Head office  
GAMH**

Tel: 0141 552 5592 for details of your local service centre.

**Support in Mind** Scotland provides group and individual support and counselling to mental health carers.

The Charlie Reid Centre  
19 Elmbank Street  
Glasgow, G2 4PB  
Tel: 0141 248 9248

**Glasgow Carers Forum –  
Mental Health and Mental  
Health Carer Development  
Work in Glasgow contact:**

Rosemary Nicolson  
Carers Development Worker –  
Mental Health  
GAMH Head Office  
Tel: 0141 552 5592

**Glasgow Association  
for Mental Health –  
Young Carers Project:**

This Project is for young people between the ages of 12-18 years who live with an adult who has a mental health problem. Contact:

Young Carers Project  
Glasgow Association  
for Mental Health  
Pavilion 3A, Moorpark Court  
11 Dava Street, Govan  
Glasgow G51 2JA  
Tel: 0141 425 4850

**Carers Information  
and Support Line:**

Tel: 0141 353 6504  
Can give contact details for general Carers Centres in your area.

## **This booklet is for**

- » Training staff in health, social work and the voluntary sector – from the carers' point of view
- » Carers who want to know more about other carers' experiences and how to get support
- » Anyone with an interest in mental health

## **To find out more or make any comments about this booklet contact**

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