



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Mental Health Sufferer Joins Healthcare Company to Help Others

Cygnet Health Care has long championed and valued co-production across its services, using the voices of its service users to provide the very highest standards of care.

In 2018, Cygnet Health Care, which operates services for individuals with mental health needs, learning disabilities and autism, became the first independent provider of healthcare services to invest in a full-time Expert by Experience Lead. Cygnet now works with more than 300 Experts by Experience to help ensure the voices and opinions of service users are heard and considered across the organisation and that feedback is actioned upon to improve its 150 services.

After years of battling an eating disorder, former service user Emily Hale is now working for the organisation to help others also struggling with their mental health to ensure their voices are heard.

Emily, 23, from Maidstone, has begun working as an Occupational Therapy Assistant as well as an Expert by Experience - someone who has personal experience of using or caring for someone who uses health, mental health and/or social care.

Exactly one year ago Emily was an inpatient at Cygnet Hospital Ealing following a four-year battle with anorexia. She completed a four-month treatment programme for her eating disorder and it was there that the former support worker set her sights on furthering her career post-discharge.

She said: *"I saw a job advertised for an Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) at Cygnet Hospital Maidstone and I instinctively felt that it would be a good fit for me.*

"I knew I needed a job to come out to and it would be the added motivation to keep myself well. I was still an inpatient when I had the interview and was over the moon when I heard the news I had been successful."

Emily is now an OTA on Bearsted Ward, a 15 bed male PICU service at Cygnet Hospital Maidstone. She helps service users regain a sense of control and order in their lives, so they can move to a less restrictive care setting and ultimately return home.

"It is definitely challenging but I am absolutely loving it. It is great when you witness first-hand the positive changes happening and the difference you can make. The guys come in so unwell and within a couple of months they can have a normal conversation again. Seeing them get better and able to interact with peers and staff is really rewarding."

It is alongside this role that she will fulfil her Expert by Experience responsibilities, working with female services users at Cygnet Hospital Godden Green. Speaking about this aspect of her role, Emily said it was so important to have members of staff who could empathise with what service users are

going through. She said: *“I hope myself and other Experts by Experience can be an inspiration for our service users. It is important to give them hope for the future, and help them realise that things can and do get better.*

“When you are first admitted into a service, you feel like your world has turned upside down. But however stuck you feel, it’s important to realise that it is only a moment in time. It is not forever. This time a year ago I was constantly being admitted to A&E because I was so unwell.

“Things have turned around for me, and it can for everyone else. I want to show that to them and prove that life doesn’t have to be a cycle of mental health getting better and then worse again. There’s so much more to live for.”

Raf Hamaizia is the Expert by Experience Lead at Cygnet Health Care and he works alongside Directors to shape and enhance service user service user experience on both a local and strategic level. He relies on more local Experts by Experience like Emily to listen to the opinions of service users to ensure he is best representing their voice at Board Meetings, Steering Groups and when it comes to reviewing and developing policies.

He said: *“I am so proud to see our Expert by Experience programme growing and going from strength to strength. The programme is about bringing in a new lens regarding how we can work with service users and learn from them effectively.*

“Emily is the latest former service user who can help us drive real change and make a huge difference to so many people.

“In my experience, these roles are incredibly powerful. Being able to sit down with a service user and tell them you’ve been through and that you understand the place they are coming from is a real privilege. You see the moment their shoulders relax when they realise you have shared experiences.

“I definitely feel like I have meaning in my life by doing this job. I have a fire in my belly to want to change the status quo and I have no doubt Emily is the same.

“Having people believe in you and give you an opportunity really makes you want to not let them down and not let yourself down as well.”

Emily said her experience at Cygnet Hospital Ealing helped her to realise how important it is to ensure patients are treated as real people, not just as their illness.

“One of the biggest things you can give to a service user is your time,” she explained. “Often they just want to talk, whether that’s about their current situation or everyday things. You want to feel like a normal human being and feel connected to people.

“That’s what I really want to bring to this role when I work with the women at Godden Green. Everybody’s journey is different and everyone has a valuable insight into what could be done to maximise their experiences at our services. I want to sit with our service users, talk to them and really listen to what they have to say. If that helps them in any small way I will feel like I am doing a good job.”

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Notes to Editors:

For more information, please contact Gemma Attew, External Communications Manager, on gemmaattew@cygnethealth.co.uk or 07718 244811.

About Cygnet Health Care

Cygnet Health Care has been providing a national network of high-quality, specialised mental health services for the NHS and local authorities for the past 30 years.

Cygnet Health Care's pioneering services support people with complex and acute mental health needs across the UK.

As one of the best quality providers in mental health services in the country, Cygnet Health Care's focus is always on the best outcomes for those who use or commission its services. 85% of Cygnet's facilities are rated as good or outstanding, which is above the national average.

www.cygnethealth.co.uk