



Press Release

Immediate Release

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**Crewe Hospital Shares Eating Disorder Patient Story
“It reaches into every corner of your life”**

A specialist eating disorder hospital in Crewe is highlighting the recovery of a former patient to mark Eating Disorders Awareness Week.

Reflecting on the early stages of her illness, Ella, 27 said her eating disorder began during her late teenage years, although she did not recognise it at the time.

“I think it probably started towards the end of my school years, but I was very much in denial,” she said. “I wanted to lose weight and if I lost weight, I felt proud of myself. And at that time in my life, I didn’t feel proud of myself about a lot of things, so I clung on to that.”

Despite her struggles, Ella achieved significant milestones in early adulthood. She secured full-time employment and bought her own home, supported by her Grandpa.

“I managed to buy my own house, which grandpa helped me with a lot. I had a full-time job. Things were seemingly going pretty great, but I think that was a lot of me pushing all my issues down, thinking, ‘No, I’m fine.’”

Ella said the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdown accelerated the progression of her illness.

“Because we were in lockdown, everyone had to stay in, which for my eating disorder was amazing because it meant that I could hide everything. Restaurants were closed. We didn’t have to go for meals. I could keep everything a secret.”

Her condition deteriorated significantly during this period and she was admitted to hospital in Leicester before transferring to Cygnnet Nield House in Crewe, a 29-bed specialist eating disorder hospital run by Cygnnet Health Care.

“An eating disorder slowly makes your whole world feel smaller,” Ella said.

"It's not just food, it takes your energy, your friendships, your thoughts, your future. Most people don't see how deeply it reaches into every corner of your life."

Her mum, Christine, explained: "I was terrified the day she went to hospital, but we soon realised she was in the right place and she was safe."

Her Dad, Jon, added: "Somebody said to me, 'just be there for your daughter'. Just be yourself. You can't fix what I was going through. If she had a broken leg, you wouldn't try and plaster it yourself. You take it to a professional."

Ella spent two years receiving care at Cygnet Nield House, working with the staff team on her recovery.

During her admission, she experienced the serious illness of her Grandpa, who she describes as "my best friend, my favourite person."

"It really set me back."

Cygnet Health Care staff arranged for Ella to visit her Grandpa in hospital, accompanying her to ensure she was supported.

"It brought me closer to staff, I found it comforting that they had met him," she said. "I felt really supported at a really low point and it meant I began to trust them a lot more."

When doctors later confirmed her Grandpa was unlikely to recover, staff again supported Ella to visit him.

"We were told he wasn't going to make it. Support workers took me and I just sat on the bed with grandpa," she said. "I'd written a letter to read out to him, but I couldn't read it. I was too upset and John, a support worker, was in the room and he just looked at me and he said, 'Do you want me to read it out for you?' He read it as I held grandpa's hand, and that is going above and beyond his job, really."

Alongside processing her grief, Ella continued working on her recovery from her eating disorder, including learning how to manage panic attacks.

"Staff always knew how to calm me down when I'd be having panic attacks," she said. "They'd learn the things that would help me, which made me learn myself as well."

"That included pillow sprays and calm, soothing music. That was a big comfort to me."

Explaining how her relationship with food changed during her time at the hospital, Ella said: "Mealtimes were the hardest for me so staff gave me distraction techniques like playing wordscapes and other games on the iPad at the table to keep my mind occupied."

"Sometimes I'd be sat at the table for an hour and take one bite of my food. But slowly things started to improve."

"I don't remember the exact moment it happened but one day I realised I was eating what I wanted, when I wanted, and it wasn't bothering me.

"I always thought I'd have a problem with food, I never thought that part of my life would get better. I'm very grateful it did."

After two years at Cygnet Nield House, Ella was discharged and returned to living independently at home.

She recently travelled to Samboja Lestari in Borneo to volunteer with BOS Australia on an orangutan and sun bear conservation project.

Reflecting on the difference in his daughter, Jon said: "It's a different person. These two years at Cygnet and the treatment she has had, she's a better person for it.

"We have to thank Cygnet for giving us our daughter back, and an even better version."

Her mum added: "The best part for me is to see that her planning her future and getting excited about things that she wants to do.

"We have our life back now, and with Ella in it."

Ella is now working as an Expert by Experience, supporting people receiving inpatient treatment by ensuring their opinions and voices are heard and considered by their service management.

She explained: "There's so many things I can now do that I never dreamt I would be able to. Going out for meals with friends and family, socialising without fear of it involving food, going on holiday and enjoying it, laughing without guilt, planning a future that isn't dominated by the illness.

"I've got my confidence back, I love chatting to people.

"Without Cygnet Nield House, I potentially wouldn't be here. They kept me safe when I was at my absolute lowest.

"I'm looking ahead to my future now and it's in large part to the support of the team, I can't thank them enough."