

HUG INVOLVEMENT – KAYE

Almost five years ago I had what I can only describe as a complete breakdown both mentally and emotionally. For about six months I was more or less a recluse, apart from going to Cairdeas Cottage, which is a drop in centre for any one who has experience of mental ill health. Thanks to the support of an excellent GP, appropriate medication, and a degree of natural healing, I began to feel that I needed to do something with my life, but I wasn't well enough to work. I shared how I was feeling with the Support Manager of the Cottage, and she sign posted me to The Highland Users Group (HUG).

I was quite nervous initially, but I plucked up the courage to phone the Group, and spoke with Graham Morgan. We arranged to meet in person at the HUG office, and all I can say is I was overwhelmed by the warmth and understanding with which I was met. Graham asked me what areas of HUG work I would be interested in, and I told him that I really only felt up to doing things that were very much in the background, and Graham said that would be just fine. I felt absolutely no pressure to do anything I didn't feel up to doing.

Within a very short space of time however, I found my self homeless. It just so happened that HUG had been asked to deliver Awareness training to the council's housing department, which meant the production of a film of a personal testimony about homelessness and mental health. I jumped at the chance of giving my testimony as it's an issue that was, and still is, very close to my heart. This film was a fantastic opportunity to have my voice heard, but without the potential stress of being at the training in person, and it was the beginning of my emergence from a very closed shell.

Since becoming a member of HUG just over four years ago, I have taken part in quite a few HUG DVDs. I have done some background work such as editing reports, and I have also taken part in a fair amount of HUG Awareness Training delivered to professionals, which involves HUG members giving their personal testimony. The work I have taken part in that has surprised me most is Emma's work with young people as I said to Graham on our very first meeting that the only area of HUG's work that I would never consider was just that, working with young people. The reason for this was fear. I was afraid of teenage youths because I was badly bullied by my peers as I was growing up. Getting involved in this work has proved to me that I can face some of my fears and overcome them, and it has also proved to me that teenagers can be FANTASTIC to work with. No..... they do not bite!!

No matter what HUG work I have been involved with, I have always been hugely supported by the HUG workers and also by other HUG members.

Being a member of HUG has meant that I am now so much less socially isolated because I meet so many people from so many different walks of life. HUG workers keep in touch with me as a matter of course, and I have made some very close friends through HUG. My confidence has come back to a degree, and I even think I have gained new confidence in some ways, for example, working with the young people at Millburn academy. I have regained a sense of purpose in my life in that I can help educate professionals and also the general public through the media, just by sharing my own life experience and my grapples with mental health, what has helped, and what has hindered. The personal testimonies of HUG members is always hugely appreciated by trainees in Awareness training sessions.

The work of HUG is invaluable. It ensures that the voices of people with mental health problems is heard, it educates professionals by the power of personal testimonies as part of Awareness Training, and informs the public through working hand in hand with the media. All of this work helps towards a world where the stigma of mental illness would cease to exist, by dispelling many of the myths that surround it.

Like myself, HUG has become an integral part of a social network for many of our members. The camaraderie we experience together, and the shared understanding and empathy we get from each other is priceless, bringing in to being what really is a kind of support network as a by-product of being a part of HUG.

For many, HUG has become a lifeline.