

## **CONOR'S STORY – the impact my mother's illness has made on my life.**

It's hard to know what your parents were like when you were a child. The way you read or perceive them along with everyone else changes as you grow, mature and learn to read other people's personalities. The memories I have of my mother as a child vary depending on the period of my childhood.

My earliest memories were of a very outgoing and passionate woman. I can remember her singing and dancing around the kitchen and teaching me the words to the song. This must have been when my siblings were at school. I remember we spent a lot of time together alone when I was younger because I was the youngest. She was always there in the early period of my childhood.

The next period was when I was 7. I recall lots of fighting between my parents. Sometimes I would go into the hallway and tell them to stop. It wasn't a pleasant environment and it seemed anytime they were alone, they fought. This period was different for me more than anything. I think being so young protected me from certain things, as I didn't know fully what was happening. I think if I were to see anyone close to me have a mental breakdown now I would take it much worse. There's a list of things my mother did during this period which I could list and probably much more which I didn't witness but none of these things were my mother so I see no point in talking about them.

After the initial break up things were up and down for a few years. It was quite an unsettling period, chopping and changing from one house to the other. Good things came from this also though as we made more friends living in two different areas. I also realised from YPBE how lucky our situation was compared to other kids. Most of them had parents in different counties and countries. I remember going to America when I was 14 and seeing a child younger than me on the plane alone going to see his other parent.

It used to annoy me how much her personality changed but I realise it's the medication that has done that. I remember as a kid thinking of going to the Amazon rainforest and finding a cure for schizophrenia. It angers me the lack of education and funding given to the mental health sector, people are still sweeping it under the carpet and it's a problem that is not going to go away but worsen if things stay like this. I won't tell people about my mother's condition unless I deeply trust them for the simple fact that they will think she is insane and think no more of it, this is due to lack of education.

I know that I had a tough childhood but I also acknowledge how unbelievably blessed I have been with the hand I have been dealt. I have a great life with amazing friends and family. The more I talk to other people about their parents the more I realise how selfless mine are. My mother would do absolutely anything on this earth for me and knowing that is a comfort many people don't have.

The impact the illness has made on my life is huge. I feel mentally stronger and much better at dealing with situations than a lot of my friends. I am also a lot more aware of my mental health and work on myself everyday making me a stronger, more approachable and loving individual. For me the good most definitely outweighs the bad. I love and respect my mother so much for what she has been through and for where she is today. She has shown unbelievable strength, character and courage in rebuilding a life, which was shattered by this illness. Working with Shine is proof of this. I often think of what my would be if she never got sick but now I really don't think it matters because I am extremely happy with where I am now and where I'm going.

## **Aine's story – How has my mother's illness had an impact on my life.**

When I was 10 my mother got sick. The first time I realised something was wrong was the day of my friend's birthday party. My Mam was throwing fresh mandarins into the bin and speaking differently than she usually would, saying that we wouldn't need the food and talking about Baha'u'llah.

All I wanted to do was go to the party so I was trying to hurry her along so she could drop me off. Eventually she did. Thank God. I could now try to enjoy myself. I just thought everything would be back to normal when I got home. It wasn't.

From then until the age of 17 my mother was in and out of hospital. She recovered and would live her everyday life and then she would get sick again. Don't get me wrong she was probably in good health more than she was in ill health but I found this unsettling and was never fully convinced whether or not she would ever make a full recovery.

When ever my Mam got sick I didn't want to talk about it. I sometimes felt ashamed and just wanted to get on with my life. Soon after my mother got sick, my parents separated. I was then living with my father and two brothers. I didn't have a stable female role model in my life, which I found hard at times but didn't pay much attention to it. Looking back even though I knew there was nothing she could do that this was an illness after all. I felt as if my mother had abandoned me. That she had, in some way, let me down by not being there for me.

Slowly throughout the years, I have been building a better and stronger relationship with my Mam. As I get older it definitely gets easier. My Mam's illness has had both a positive and negative affect on my life.

We live in a small community where everyone knows everyone's business so when she moved to a different area, in the beginning it was tough. But very quickly I made new friends, which I still have to this day. Also as my Mam suffers from a mental illness I feel I have more knowledge on mental health than the average person and I have also realised how so many people suffer from mental health problems these days and why it should not be taken lightly.

My Mam has a positive influence in my life. She has fallen in the past but has always gotten back up again. She is always there for me and always will be. She is a determined woman who uses her illness to her advantage by creating awareness about mental health and sharing her story.

## **Diarmuid's story – The impact of my mother's illness on my life.**

I didn't get to spend as much time with my Mam as I would have liked. It hasn't affected the way I feel about myself, or my goals I would like to achieve.

When I was younger, I acted like it hadn't happened. I never talked about it because it was something negative that happened in my life. It hasn't affected the way I feel about my Mam. When my peers talked about my Ma 'acting up' I felt embarrassed, ashamed and disappointed. I believe my Mam accomplished a lot with her disability and it has taught me that I can achieve anything I want with my full health.

At the time my parents separated it was unusual and a hard topic to discuss, coupled with my Mam's illness. One of the lowest points of my life at that time was when my Mam was living in a flat and my siblings and I couldn't go and live with her.

On the positive side, I got to know a whole new circle of friends. I have more knowledge of mental illness and how it affects people.