

Ashlea's story

21 year old Ashlea suffered from panic attack and anxiety related ill health in her late teens. She wanted to share her story because "If I had heard my story when I was younger it might have helped me realise what was happening to me."

TRIGGER WARNING: This story contains personal reflections of mental ill health relating to panic attacks, anxiety and depression.

I can't remember exactly when it started. I started to get really quiet. I felt self conscious. I was so uncomfortable being round people.

I stopped going to school more and more. I came up with every excuse under the sun. I didn't understand why.

It became harder to leave the house. I kind of lost touch with nearly all of my friends.

I eventually suffered from really bad panic attacks. I was hot, I couldn't breathe. I didn't know what was happening. I pretty much missed the whole of fifth year. I had to re-sit the next year. I thought this was a clean start and I could start again but it was worse.

That was when I started to cry. I felt sad. I felt really really down.

The first confrontation was when my Mum came back with a note from pupil support. She hadn't realised I'd been off school as much as I had. She was upset and confused.

I made a real effort to go in. I'd cut everyone out of my life though. People only listen to excuses for so long. I went to my beanfeast. It was probably one of the worst nights of my life. I had nobody to sit with, nobody to talk to. That was when it hit me I couldn't go to school anymore. I couldn't leave the house.

I was only 17.

We decided to go and get help. My Mum came to the doctors with me. Sitting in the waiting room was horrible. I'd gone from not going to school to not leaving the house to not even leaving my room. I had no interests. I slept all day. I cried all night. For months on end.

It was one of the hardest things I've ever done – sitting in that waiting room. My Mum led the conversation with the doctor. The doctor said I would be put on a waiting list. After all of that – working myself up and getting out to someone outside of my parents to be told I was on a waiting list was hard.

After months on the waiting list I got to see a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). You had to sign a contract so you understood what would happen. I was put on medication but I didn't really take it. I didn't attend appointments.

What helped me get better was everyone acknowledging there was a problem.

I started to get bored. I didn't have to leave my room but now I kind of wanted to. Tiny tiny little steps like I can't go outside but I could walk to the gate and back. I don't want to be out in the daytime but I could take the dog for a walk at night.

The support of my family was incredible.

That was about a year and a half ago. I got to that place that I'm fine. I eventually started going out and making new friends. They didn't know my past. I didn't have to tell them – I just got to know them.

Now, I don't have bad days. I have a job and I'm actively involved in voluntary work with Oxfam. I was the main organiser of Oxjam in Shetland last year. I'm proud of the fact that we were the most successful fundraiser in Scotland. I really enjoy continuing to be involved in Oxjam and I'm looking forward to future events.

I'm also looking forward to going into schools with Mind Your Head to share my story. I need to share my story with young people because if I'd heard it then it might have helped me realise what was happening to me.

Ashlea's story highlights how helpful it can be to talk to someone else. That can be friends, family, a colleague, a health professional, a helpline—anybody you feel comfortable talking to. For further information on anxiety and depression please visit www.mindyourhead.org.uk