

#10 A story of positive relationships



We have seen from many people's stories that relationships go through immense difficulties when someone experiences psychosis. Almost everyone said some people left their lives when they became unwell, especially friends. It is hard to avoid the negative impact of psychosis on relationships, but there were examples of positive relationships in some of our stories, and how these protected people's sense of self and mental health.

One storyteller was asked who the important people in his life were:

My mum, my brother, even though he didn't believe me at first, he did come and see me in hospital that time. So my brother. My little sister who's autistic. My older sister as well and my older brother. They had a positive impact on me because we talked. My dad as well pretty much. My friends. My two best friends, J and R understood what I was going through and kept on visiting me in hospital, so it wasn't too bad. So there were things that were positive.

They helped me a lot. They brought lots of things for me as well while I was in hospital so I couldn't have asked for better people. It's just when you go through these type of things, depression, psychosis, one thing that should be hammered is that with good people around you, you'll probably get through it. Especially if you have that – it doesn't matter if it's five or six people, if you have one, just that one person, it'll get better. You just need that one person to help you and obviously it gets better. [Storyteller 3]

He cites positive relationships as one of the things you need to get better.

My mum is very important to me. She is my inspiration. She gets all my things and she is the number one woman to me in my life I guess. She helps me through thick and thin and has always been there for me. She took me to my first football game and came to watch me when I was [unwell]. It's stuff like that. It's always the little things that you remember and the big things and all of it can never be replaced I guess.

Then I have got two great friends, J and R. I have known J for about sixteen years so it's a big... he helps me a lot I guess. He is the one who invited me to the football team on Sunday. He is the one that when I got locked out of my house and I left my keys he said, "Come over to my house. I am not going to leave you locked outside. Come round" and I said, "Thanks." He said, "You would do the same for me" and I most definitely would.

Friendship is a two-way thing and this man was able to see what positive things he could provide in a relationship.

I feel I am a good friend. It's a strength I guess... I'm funny and caring. I'm sensitive... I guess I am always there to listen to other people's problems in a way. I don't really judge anyone because you don't know what they are going through so that's why I feel like I am a good friend. I am not being egotistical about it. I am just saying that I wouldn't hate someone just because they are different from me I guess because they are still the same person really. Nothing really changes.

He talks about what he can do for his friends:

What can I do for them I guess? I always invite them to my house. I can cook for them because I can cook so I could cook for them. We will watch something on TV, maybe a movie or a TV show together and if there is football on we will definitely watch football I guess. I think that is pretty much it. If they were in any trouble or had any illness I would honestly help them as well. I would go and see them. It's like a family thing really.

He highlights how his own experience helped him become a better friend.

Interviewer: So if you could meet someone who was going through similar to what you went through, what would your advice to them be?

Storyteller: First of all I would support them and then I would help them... There's one friend who's, kind of, going through a depression but it's not as worse as mine I guess, but I don't know, maybe it is behind closed doors, but it's not as bad as mine. Because I've told her to go to therapies, talk to therapists. I've done a bit of counselling. Told her to do some activities like staying fit and all that stuff. She's been doing that and it's been going okay since I last checked with her.

One of the people who have had the biggest positive impact has been his mum.

I think even when I was ill I thought she had given up on me but she didn't. She said she could never give up on me. She has done a lot for me really. She is always fighting for me. She just wants the best for me. She taught me how to drive as well. Then again I don't know what more to ask for to be honest. She does spoil me a lot. I don't really care about the gifts and all of that. I just care more about her love.

He emphasises the importance of having uplifting friends and protecting himself from negative people to keep well.

I always surround myself with positive people and not people who are bringing me down. If I stayed with

those types of people who are bringing me down, I am only going to go down with them.

When he was in hospital he found a friendship that continued after they were both discharged, one in which they supported each other and wanted the best for each other.

I did meet one good person when I was in hospital. A good friend. I saw her yesterday as well. We spoke a lot actually and we were socialising a lot. We were talking about 'EastEnders' because we both watched it a lot in hospital when we were there. It was nice talking to her. She had gone back to university and so we were just talking. I said, "I hope everything goes well for you as well." She said, "Yes. You are looking healthy and better" and I said, "Yes."

He has an encouraging and reassuring network of family and friends, which he says are essential to his recovery. He also acknowledged the support he got from healthcare professionals.

I also needed to work on myself as well but yes, the help's been great because I've spoken with a psychologist, I've spoken with my care co-ordinator, both of the doctors as well so it's been supportive.

Among all our storytellers, this young man's experience of relationships was the most positive and the beneficial effects were manifold. Having strong relationships reduced isolation and created a sense of connection with other people and the world. They helped keep him engaged with activities such as sport and cooking that filled his time and gave purpose and

structure to his days. Support, care and encouragement were vital in giving a reason to work on getting better and a sense of hope that it was possible. We need to feel part of the world to have the fight to rejoin it.

His story shows the importance of positive relationships when trying to regain a life after an episode of psychosis. It is the flipside of the other stories in our study that demonstrate how negative relationships can aggravate psychosis and make recovery too hard and isolated a journey to begin or stay on. As this storyteller says:

Glad I didn't kill myself. I'd have hurt a lot of people, I guess... I didn't think it would make a big difference but a lot of people said we would miss you.

THE IMPACT OF RELATIONSHIPS GOOD AND BAD

Dolly's perspective

“ When I have been in difficult relationships, whether it be with family, friends or partners, my mental health has suffered; being in supportive relationships has helped my mental health.

Yet relationships are ignored mostly in the mental health system, unless there is a service like Family Intervention on offer. This is the problem with trying to fixate mental distress purely in the brain, when it is more to do with the heart. ”