

*drin adferiad  
a afiechyd  
meddwl difrifol*

# hafal

*for recovery  
from serious  
mental illness*

# 12 Lives

*12 people talk about their experience  
of serious mental illness*

*in collaboration with:*  
Mental Health Foundation



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**As Hafal's National Service User Champion in Wales I am delighted to introduce *12 Lives* which presents the stories of people with experience of serious mental illness.**

**The original aim of *12 Lives* was simply to present people with a serious mental illness as individuals.** There is little information or media coverage that deals with mental health patients as people. Even worse, services often fail to recognise them as such. By contrast these stories set out personal perspectives on mental illness based on lived experience. But *12 Lives* has achieved much more: not only do the stories give an insight into what real people with mental illness have to live through; they also point to the solutions to many of the problems in care and treatment. Following the stories we introduce a methodical care planning approach to recovery which reflects the achievements of the people featured in *12 Lives*, and which is based on the experiences of over 500 people with serious mental illness supported by Hafal.

**When I first read the 12 stories I was profoundly moved.** What touched me most was that while the stories cover periods of extreme adversity and often poor service provision, the people interviewed for this guide are surprisingly good-hearted. What the stories demonstrate is the inconsistency, lack of process and failed opportunities in the delivery of mental health services. Despite this failure, the people featured in this publication have made strides towards recovery, largely through their own efforts. For most of these people much of the painful struggle was unnecessary. I know from my own experience of mental illness that if they had received methodical, holistic care and treatment in the first place their lives could have improved much faster. Are the people featured in *12 Lives* typical? No. All twelve have made significant progress in their recovery thanks to their own initiative. Many more have been less fortunate: around one in ten people with a serious mental illness take their own life and many live lonely and unfulfilled lives because services have not supported them towards hope and recovery.

**What also emerges clearly from these stories is that everyone is different and everyone wants to be treated like a human being.** Why did services fail to listen to so many of these people when they needed to be heard? And why wasn't this dialogue followed up with an agreed care plan? Surely this is a commonsense approach to supporting someone with a mental illness. Only when services genuinely see people with a serious mental illness as human beings with individual needs can there be any progress – as these 12 stories testify.

I would like to thank our colleagues at MDF the Bipolar Organisation and the Mental Health Foundation for supporting the concept of *12 Lives* and for introducing us to two of their clients in order to provide a broad cross-section of stories.

*Sue Barnes*

**National Service User Champion**





## Colette's story

**Hafal volunteer Colette Dawkin says her illness was triggered when she gave birth at the age of 18 to her first child. She says living with bipolar disorder put a huge strain on her family life and personal relationships.**

**“There's nobody special in my life but things are going well now,” she says. “For example my driving licence was revoked in 2005 because I was so ill, but I had my licence back last year so I'm more independent now.”**

### Here Colette tells her story...

“When I had my daughter, Louise, I had a difficult birth and nearly died. When I came out of hospital I was diagnosed with postnatal depression. I was prescribed Mogadon and Valium but I managed to wean myself off them by the time Louise was one. My life was OK again until I had my son four years later. The doctor said it was the sight of the babies that triggered my depression. It wasn't until 12 years later, when I was hospitalised after showing signs of mania as well as depression, that I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

“When I was finally diagnosed with bipolar I was put on Lithium and within three days I felt much better. I stayed on Lithium for 19 years but unfortunately one of the side-effects of this medication was chronic psoriasis. My medication was changed to Risperidone four years ago and I've since become diabetic. This means I have had to control my diet. I'm managing but I've also had to take medication for blood pressure

and cholesterol. I've still got the psoriasis but I'm in control of it now.

“In 1986 I divorced my husband and I lost my job as a Refuge Worker for Women's Aid. I had to move out of the house and sell the car. Then, after 18 months, I lost custody of my children. To help myself get back on my feet I attended a training course on helping people with learning disabilities. I began to feel I had conquered my illness and was quite well for the next few years. After five years my children came home to live with me.

“Everything was going well until four years ago when my father died of a heart attack. It initially made me manic and not depressed which was difficult for people, especially my mother, to understand. When I'm manic I'm quite arrogant, different to my true nature. I wrote to my mother to apologise for some of the things I said when my father died, to say that the shock had sent me manic, but she never replied.

“At one point after my father's death I was psychotic, overspending, paranoid, crying all the time and unable to cope. When the manic period ended I became very depressed. I literally lay down on a settee for about five months. I couldn't cook, shop or clean and I felt suicidal. I developed agoraphobia and was sectioned. At the time of my father's death I was living with my fiancée whom I'd been with for 18 months. He couldn't cope with my illness and eventually he visited the hospital and said he didn't want me back, so I became homeless as well.

**“Bipolar is such a difficult illness because it affects your mood, personality and, in turn, your relationships. Looking back I really wish my husband and I could have had family therapy**

**when our children were small. It was never explained to them why mammy was ill.** My daughter used to say: ‘I'm angry, mam, not with you but with the illness.’ She was a tower of strength to me through the years. My son was affected differently. He couldn't accept it.

“After my father died I was in hospital for four months and I began to have nightmares about something the Consultant Psychiatrist said. He wanted me to go into shared accommodation which I thought would be dingy and hard to cope with. It was actually my Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) who spoke up and said that I had shown I could be independent in the past. She found me a flat where I could live on my own. I've since relearned how to shop, cook and budget for myself and I see my family regularly.

“After moving in I had 18 months of help from my CPN but it was coming to Hafal that really helped me recover because up until then, **in the 35 years I had bipolar, I was never offered psychological therapies, I only had medication.** At Hafal, any time I need to talk I can. If I've got a problem I can either talk to the staff or I can talk to my peers. Within Hafal I feel totally accepted.

“I'm in control now. A few weeks ago my CPN said I no longer need help from her. And after some difficult times I've also got good relations with my children; I've built bridges with them and over the years they've come to understand my illness more. I've conquered my agoraphobia as well and I also have a good social life now. My volunteering work with Hafal will continue and I would like to do a counselling course in the future. I really feel I've turned my illness on its head and that I'm giving something back for all the help I've received.”



## Barry's story

**Barry Dix started hearing voices when he was 17 but it wasn't until his mid twenties that he was finally diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. For the last three years Barry, 41, has found employment**

**working as a roadie for an Elvis tribute act. "It's a job that gives me a lot of satisfaction," says Barry, "as it means I have some responsibility. It makes me feel good because over the years people have controlled my life: now, by working again, I feel like I'm controlling mine."**

### Here Barry tells his story...

"I was put in care when I was six. I was abused while in care and began taking drugs. I started smoking cannabis when I was 13, taking tablets when I was 16, and taking heroin and cocaine when I was 19. At first I took drugs because they were an escape route from the bad experiences I was having in care. When I was 17 I started hearing voices and that was really frightening. **At the time I didn't know anything about schizophrenia; I used to get stoned and drink heavily to block everything out.**

"I left care when I was 18. I was put into a flat and the services I received ended. I started getting gigs in the post but they went on drugs because all I was concerned with was getting stoned. Leaving care was tough. I didn't know anybody (I have no family at all) and because I spent my gigs on drugs I soon had rent arrears. I couldn't pay the arrears so I was

evicted. I was made homeless and spent six years on the streets.

"The first year or two was really frightening. I had no money. I used to steal to feed my habit. I slept in bus shelters, telephone boxes, graveyards, everywhere. In the winters I'd stay awake all night by walking because I knew if I fell asleep the cold would get me. The next day I'd try to find a library, sit with a book and get as much sleep as I could before I got kicked out. Having said all that I met a lot of lovely people on the streets. A lot of the public misunderstand the homeless. There are a lot of men and women out there on the streets through no fault of their own.

"I found my way off the streets when someone discovered me lying on the pavement. I was unconscious after 'jacking up'. I was taken to hospital and almost died; that's when I decided I wanted to kick the habit. It was at this time, when I was in my mid 20s, that I was finally diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. When I left hospital I began to get support. I was given a flat and a Community Psychiatric Nurse. At first I found it difficult to get into a routine of normal living. I remember I couldn't sleep on the bed in my flat because, compared to the streets, it was too comfortable. So I slept on the floor for a while. I was put on medication when I got the flat. It took a while to find medication that worked for me; it was trial and error.

"I had a drink problem after I left hospital; I'd get up in the morning and drink through the day. I still had a lot of hurt inside but I didn't want to replace it with drugs. However, one of the problems with drinking was it would affect the medication I was on. I finally managed to cut down on my drinking nine months ago; I don't drink much now, just the odd pint. I'm

managing my schizophrenia very well at the moment. I've been steady now for about six years. I'm still in and out of hospital, I have relapses but I haven't been in for a while. In terms of my medication I have one injection a fortnight and that helps me keep things in control. I've still got a lot of hurt in my life; people say I should talk about it but I find that hard. I love walking and I talk positively to myself about the future when I walk. **Walking has helped me a lot. If I feel stressed I don't go to the pub anymore, I go walking through the country instead; it's good for my physical state as well as my mental state.**

"The Mental Health Foundation has helped me a lot with my recovery and building up my confidence. I've learned to take on challenges I never knew I could do like talking to people in public about my illness. This has helped me believe I can give something back to society. I've also been going to night school for five years. The Community Mental Health Team sign-posted me to classes. I couldn't read or write for a long time, I used to think it was a disease but somehow I blagged my way through situations. For example, if someone gave me something to read I'd look at it for a few seconds and then ask: 'What's your opinion on that?' Now I can write my name and my address. I'm good at maths, too.

"In the future I would like to become a facilitator for the Mental Health Foundation. People with schizophrenia get bad publicity; I want people with serious mental illness to realise that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. **A lot of people with a mental health illness think they're no good. If only they could accept that they are good, that everyone's equal and no-one's bigger than anybody else."**



**Jason Norris, a 37-year-old service user from Bridgend, was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in prison. Since leaving prison in 2000 Jason has achieved many goals, transforming**

**his life in the process. His next major target, getting a place of his own, is well underway.**

#### **Here Jason tells his story...**

I was a heavy user of drugs and alcohol in my early 20s. I knew something was going wrong with my mind and that I needed help but there seemed to be none available. In desperation I began committing petty offences, mainly theft, hoping that I'd be arrested, charged and sent to prison. I felt that at least I'd be away from the substances that were having such bad effects on my mental health and I assumed the help I needed would be there in prison. Eventually I got my wish and was sentenced to 18 months in prison; that's when my problems really started.

**“Prison is the worst possible environment for someone experiencing psychosis.** By now I was hearing voices and the fact I was being locked up in my cell for 22 hours of the day meant I had nothing to distract me from them. I'd sit there with my head spinning. No-one in the prison tried to help me address my problem; no-one even seemed to recognise that I had a mental illness. I was so desperate to stop the voices I tried to hang myself in my cell. It was pure luck that the chair I was standing on didn't break.

“This experience did not alert prison staff to my mental health needs. Things went on more or less as before. I wasn't referred to anyone for assessment and I didn't receive any medical help to identify what was wrong. I was still on my own with the voices but I realised that in order to survive I needed to spend more time out of the cell, doing something constructive. Being locked up on my own was making my condition deteriorate so I made the effort to get myself a job in the prison laundry. This helped take me out of myself for a part of the day and that made the voices quieter. This was all done on my own initiative – I didn't know I was mentally ill, I just knew I had to help myself or I wouldn't survive in there.

“When I served my first sentence I walked out of prison with no support systems in place, no recognition that I was ill – I was worse off than before. I immediately threw myself back into my old habits. I'd hoped to get away from alcohol and drugs in prison but I found the substances were rife in jail. I tried to join an Alcoholics Anonymous programme inside but it was oversubscribed so all my attempts to address my problems within prison failed and I was back out on the streets in an even worse situation than before. It was only a matter of time before I was behind bars again, for another theft offence.

“My second experience of prison was different from my first because I realised I couldn't expect my illness to be recognised, that medical help would be forthcoming. But I was lucky to realise, within myself, that I was ill. Although I was experiencing hallucinations and hearing voices I was somehow able to get beyond the strange things I was seeing and hearing to glimpse the truth, which was that I hadn't always been like this. That meant I must be ill, which meant I needed to see a doctor. It took an effort of will to reach

this understanding but it enabled me to get myself seen by the prison psychiatrist. I was then diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

“I felt a sense of relief. After all this time of walking through the wilderness, trying to understand what was happening to me, to finally have a diagnosis brought some comfort. **It's easier to deal with your illness when you know exactly what you're dealing with; it meant that I could begin a course of treatment. Finally I could see some hope.**

“When I left prison in 2000 I went to live with my mother. My doctor referred me to Hafal six months later. When I started Hafal's Recovery Programme I wanted to reduce my medication, do some maths and English courses and get my own place. I also wanted to sort my money out and get fit by going to the gym. The only one of these aims I haven't yet achieved has been getting a place of my own but that's coming together as I've applied for a flat and I'm on the council's waiting list. I'm also registered with an agency and they're helping me find work. I'd say I'm 90% recovered now and when I come off my medication – which has been drastically reduced over the last ten years – I will be able to say I've finally done it.

**“Looking back I was lucky to survive prison. But if there were better systems in place for recognising and treating people with mental illness, it wouldn't be just a matter of luck.”**



## Afzol's story

**Afzol Ali was born in Bangladesh but has been living in Wales since he was ten years old. Afzol, who married in February, says if he lived in Bangladesh he would have had to pay for hospital treatment. Afzol says the care he**

**has received for his schizophrenia in Wales has been very good.**

### Here Afzol tells his story...

"I was born in Bangladesh but I've been living in Wales since 1989. I came to Wales with my father when I was 10. I went to school in Swansea, I did my GCSEs and then went to college where I passed an NVQ in community care.

"I didn't hear any voices until I was 20. My problems happened very suddenly. I tried to hit my cousin and because of that I was admitted to Cefn Coed Hospital in Swansea. It's a place for adults of working age who have a severe mental illness and are experiencing an acute episode. I hadn't shown any symptoms before this time; I'd never heard voices or tried to hit anyone.

"I was in hospital for four months. **I received injections to help me recover but unfortunately I experienced some side-effects from this type of medication. I put on a lot of weight and the injection made one of my legs shake.** Thankfully, the weight came off naturally when I finished taking the injections. I don't have this form of treatment anymore and I've had no side-effects from any of the

types of medication I've taken since. I take five tablets a day now but I still hear the voices sometimes. I get headaches but fortunately they don't last a long time.

"When I came out of hospital I apologised to my cousin for what had happened. Thankfully she was very understanding: she accepted my apology and I felt a lot better. I had support when I left hospital. I went to a place called Connect which is similar to Hafal in that it helps people who have a serious mental illness. After leaving hospital I was also assigned a social worker and a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). They helped me with my medication and assisted with my benefits. I haven't been in hospital since my first time so in terms of my recovery I've done quite well.

"I see a psychiatrist and my CPN every two weeks. My psychiatrist helps me with my medication. If I feel sad he tries to find out what's wrong and looks for ways to make me feel better. He helps me with my benefits, too, particularly with filling out forms. Hafal and my CPN also assist me with these kinds of things.

"I discovered Hafal about five years ago when my CPN informed me about the work that Hafal does. Coming to Hafal has been very good for me. I like the people I've met in Swansea, they have been very kind. I like to visit Hafal and let time pass, I feel comfortable and happy when I visit the project. I enjoy relaxing, reading the paper and playing pool with the service users.

"There isn't a Bangladeshi community in Wales which I'm part of but I don't find that a problem. I get on very well with the people in Wales. **There aren't any mental health hospitals in Bangladesh. If I was ill at home there would be no specialist hospital for**

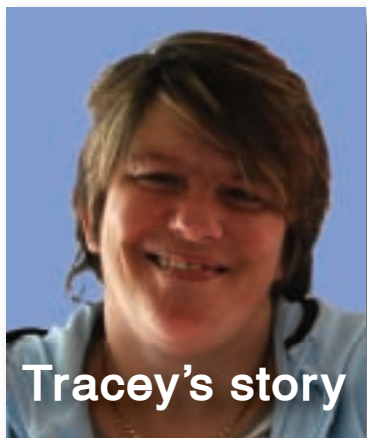
**me to go to; all I would have would be medication.**

The services available in Bangladesh would have been alright but I would have had to pay to go to hospital so I would be in a lot of debt if I was back there.

"I think Wales is a good place to be for someone like me. I feel that the people who have helped me understand my illness, background and culture. That's not always the case with people with a serious mental illness who are from the black or minority ethnic community but my CPN and psychiatrist have been very understanding, so I have no complaints.

"I don't work at the moment. Because of my illness I've never been able to get a job. My mum and dad live in Swansea and they help me out with money and benefits. I would like to work in the future, perhaps in a restaurant as a kitchen porter. However, I'm worried that if I do go to work my benefits will be stopped. Maybe the best thing for me to do would be to do some voluntary or part-time work or some training.

"My friends in the area haven't got mental health problems themselves but they know about my illness and they understand. I haven't encountered any fear, prejudice or stigma at all in Wales. I've never felt bitter or angry about having my illness either. If I could give myself a mark out of ten for being happy and healthy I would give myself five. To be honest, I'm not sure what I need to do to improve the way I feel but I think that there are people – my CPN, my psychiatrist and Hafal – who will help me out with this."



## Tracey's story

**Tracey Saunders says that it wasn't until she was assigned a Community Psychiatric Nurse – seventeen years after she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder – that she thought her illness was**

**taken seriously. Although Tracey says she is still looking for answers that will help her recover she finds learning about other service users' experience through the Mental Health Foundation has helped her a lot.**

### Here Tracey tells her story...

"When I had my first baby I became really ill. I was told I had postnatal depression and because it took a while to be detected it got much worse. You know when you just want to scream and scream? I felt that low. From the day I had my son, Daniel, I had bad thoughts in which I could see my boy dying.

"My son had attention deficit disorder and I began blaming myself for his behaviour. He wasn't a happy baby, he kept screaming and crying. I kept thinking I was doing something wrong. At times I wanted to get hold of Daniel and throw him out of the window. On one occasion, when he was two months old, I put him outside the front door because he was screaming so much. I felt rejected by my son, and that he didn't like me. I just couldn't bond with him.

"It took another two years following Daniel's birth, when I was 23, before I was diagnosed with bipolar

disorder. Personally, I think my bipolar began as soon as I had Daniel. I didn't know what bipolar was initially. I wasn't actually told I had the illness in person by my psychiatrist, I had a letter instead. I was given Prozac to start with but that made me feel worse. I was told to give it time to work but six months later I was thinking, "What's the point of taking it if I feel the same?" **No one helped me after I found out I had bipolar. I just went back home and got worse. When I was eventually given support I kept going back and forth from a local mental health service unit.**

"About three years ago I took a massive overdose following a row I had with my then partner. When I came round I had a one-to-one with a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). She gave me a list which asked questions about how I felt. I started ticking off the list. It was the first time I realised I had all the symptoms of bipolar. **I was amazed at what I read: I couldn't believe that everything on the list was a symptom of the illness.** I thought: "Christ, there is something wrong with me!" Before I saw the list I used to think it was me, that I was mad and that I make everybody unhappy.

"My CPN helped me a lot with things like how to understand the illness; however, I couldn't help feeling that so many years had been wasted. When I met my CPN I felt I was taken seriously and since seeing her I've started doing things differently even though I still feel the same inside.

"My CPN gave me information on relationships and how to relax. She helped me with a lot of things, for example I have nightmares where I think both of my children will die. I asked my CPN how I could stop the nightmares. She said I couldn't, that I have to learn to

deal with them instead. My CPN and I go through the list she gives me every six months.

"I still have trouble in my head, seeing negative things. It's like a nightmare. One minute I'm up, the next minute I'm down. I hate it because I can't be myself. I wish I could be without this condition but it's not going to go away, it's something in my brain and I have had to learn to deal with it rather than deny it.

"I go to a local unit for day sessions. I have been there overnight and I've seen the doctors in the morning. I can put a front on when I see them; I'm pretty good at hiding how I feel. I know what I've got to say and then I get out. I don't mean to do this but I just feel safe in my own environment. That's the only place I feel safe.

**"I've been told if I don't take my medication my illness will get worse. I've had the shakes when I've stopped taking medication so I know that's true, but what annoys me is that when I take my medication I don't feel any better. This is something a lot of people in my position get angry about.**

"Being part of the Mental Health Foundation's Self-Management work has been brilliant because it has enabled me to meet other people and learn how they cope. I found many of them have a lot more friends than family. That's something I haven't got. This project has made me realise that I'm not on my own."



## Dave's story

**Dave Smith managed much of his recovery by making good use of the Internet. When he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in his early 20s Dave, now 36, soon realised that managing his illness required a lot more**

**than medication. He says his life was changed for the better when he attended a two-day training course on how to manage his illness.**

### Here Dave tells his story...

"I had my first extended period of depression when I was 17. I lacked self-esteem, I wouldn't leave the house and I felt my life was futile. I was prescribed antidepressants for six months and thankfully the depression lifted. I had another spell of depression a few years later when I began working for a manufacturing company. I remember one day my dad drove me to work and I had to ask him to pull over. I was sick on the side of the road. Back then understanding of mental health was not good; my bosses thought I wasn't up to scratch and gave me a warning which only made me more anxious. A year later, when redundancies were required, I was asked to leave.

"When I was 21 I went to work in London in a homeless hostel. During this time I felt strange – I can't explain it in any other fashion. I saw my manager, tried to explain my feelings and asked for some time off. She agreed and so I got on a train as soon as I could and went to stay with my brother in Carmarthen. My journey to Carmarthen was strange. I am a

Christian and at times, when I'm unwell, I experience religious mania and do some odd things. On the train journey I made sure I sat next to people who I thought were Christian. I felt if I sat with someone who was a Christian they would take care of me. I was really frightened but I was fortunate to be seated next to three nuns as they were so kind and caring.

"When I got to my brother's place I felt really agitated. Later that night I locked myself in my brother's room and began to have an auditory and visual hallucination of an apocalyptic nature. I panicked because I couldn't see the door and find my way out of the room. Eventually I got out and my brother and his friend suggested I have a bath to help me relax. In the meantime they called the local minister and social services. My behaviour became very bizarre and later that night I was transferred to the local mental health unit for assessment. I was then taken into a general ward for observation. Some tests were done and I was transferred to the psychiatric unit.

"It wasn't until approximately a year later, after experiencing some more highs and lows, that I was diagnosed and started getting treatment for bipolar disorder. **For the first few years my medication (Lithium) worked but so many other things needed changing in my life, not just receiving medication. In the end I made most of those changes myself. In a sense it was a good time to be ill because the Internet was just starting.** I found the Manic Depression Fellowship on the web and discovered things about diet, exercise and medication.

"A few years later I discovered that working long hours in a stressful job was not good for me. **That's one of the cruel things about bipolar: sometimes you**

**think you can do anything and you will push yourself to the limit. In the end you have to fight against the very things you want to do.** I began working until the early hours of the morning which meant I neglected my wife and our new child; it all went beyond my control and I ended up in hospital. It was a very hard time for my wife. My bosses at the computer firm I worked for were very understanding but eventually the company moved out of Europe and I was made redundant. That made things very difficult for my wife and me because we had a new house and a new child. We had to reorganise our finances and we didn't know who to turn to. We ended up consolidating everything to one loan.

"A little while after I got better I became a Facilitator with the Manic Depression Fellowship. I was able enough to go on a two-day self-management training course with them and it changed my life. I learnt about a programme designed to help people manage their condition. It didn't have an immediate effect but it added to my knowledge of coping strategies and warning signs, and it allowed me to better know myself.

"I worked as a Facilitator for three years until we had our next child. Unfortunately our new daughter had some health problems so I had to give up this role. My wife had a good job, though, so I became a house husband until my daughter began school. I began working as a Recovery Practitioner for Hafal in November 2006. Sometimes I think of the opportunities I've lost through being unwell but you've just got to accept the hand you're dealt in life and make as many positive adjustments as you can. We've all got our little crosses to bear."



## Lee's story

**When Lee McCabe was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia his mum was told: "You'll never know the Lee you once knew." But with the support of mum Sandra and his Community Psychiatric Nurse, Lee made a full recovery. His experiences inspired Jonathan Morgan's historic Legislative Competence Order which gave powers to the National Assembly to create Welsh law on mental health.**

### Here Lee tells his story...

"I started to have what I now know were the first signs of schizophrenia in the summer of 1994 when I was 23; I began taking drink and drugs to block out some bad experiences. My family and friends began to notice changes in my character so a friend of my sister suggested I see my GP. I described my symptoms to him and he said I should go to the A & E department of the local hospital. I waited there for four hours until an ambulance was available to take me to a psychiatric unit. When I arrived at the psychiatric ward my sister's friend, who saw the GP with me, went home to tell my family what had happened. I was given a bed on the ward, I saw a psychiatrist and, ten minutes later, he diagnosed paranoid schizophrenia, an illness I knew nothing about.

"Being on the ward was very scary. After a couple of days I began ranting and raving. When my mother visited I started screaming at her, shouting: "What am I doing here?" My paranoid feelings and hallucinations

meant I started blaming my mother and taking my frustrations out on her. My mother had an awful time with the ward staff: they didn't give her any idea of what was wrong with me or any information on the medication I was taking. Shortly after I was admitted the ward manager told her: "You will never know the Lee you once knew." It was an awful time.

"I was in the ward for six weeks and then discharged. I was given a prescription but I had no support from the hospital when I went home. After a few weeks I began having panic and anxiety attacks, I felt paranoid, and I didn't know how to cope – and neither did my mother or my family. I tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose, the first of four suicide attempts I made when I was very ill. My mother phoned the ward and I was readmitted to hospital. After about six months I was discharged and for a while I was housebound: I thought people on the streets were spying on me, and that the IRA was after me. In the evening I'd be curled up on the floor; my muscles were so stiff I couldn't lift up my head. I didn't have the strength to pull my quilt up when I was in bed; I felt paralysed, terrified.

"Eventually, about eight or nine months after I was diagnosed, I was allocated a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). The information and support I got from her was brilliant. **This was the first time someone had sat down and talked to me about my medication, what schizophrenia was, how to cope with my anxiety and panic attacks and what services were available.** My CPN carried out an assessment and made sure a care plan was delivered. I was really fortunate to see her because not everyone with a serious mental illness is lucky enough to have a care plan.

"A lot of credit must go to my mum, too. She was my

lifeline. I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for her. Over time my mum helped me gain confidence to go outside. When it was dark and quiet in the evening she would watch me walk from the porch and to the end of the street and back. Eventually I was able to go into town to the National Schizophrenia Fellowship (NSF) in Pentrebach. The NSF (now Hafal) offered day services which gave my life structure and kept me busy. They helped me stop dwelling on my feelings and thoughts – the paranoia. After a while my confidence improved and, under the New Deal employment scheme available then, I spent a year working at a restaurant in Merthyr.

"In terms of medication, the first five years after I was diagnosed was a case of trial and error. Some side-effects were awful: the treatments caused dribbling, a dry mouth, a sedated feeling and weight gain – my weight rose to over 16 stone. When I finished working at the restaurant in 1999 I took a new medication which helped me a lot.

"From 2003 I started learning about computers with a tutor from the local college. I also started having certificates for catering courses. At the time Hafal service users were developing the charity's Recovery Programme and when I sat down to talk about mine I said my aims were to work full-time and come off medication. I've achieved both those goals: I became a Hafal staff member in 2006 and I've been off medication and fully recovered since February 2007. I now work with service users every day. They can see recovery is possible but you've got to put the work in and have the right support. **Looking back I wouldn't have been as ill as I was if an early intervention service for people with a serious mental illness was available.** My recovery would have been far quicker than the 12 years it took if there was one."



## Leanne's story

**Leanne Kelly was diagnosed with anorexia by her GP when she was 11. An award-winning volunteer, Leanne helps Hafal service users in Aberystwyth work through the charity's Recovery Programme. A keen**

**scooter rider, Leanne is currently in year two of a three-year course in Photoshop.**

### Here Leanne tells her story...

"I had the first symptoms of an eating disorder when I was eight or nine. I was a chubby kid and I got teased at school; however, as I got older I realised I could do something about it so I lost weight, the bullying stopped and I felt confident and accepted. Over time I began to develop an obsession with food and exercise. My parents became concerned so they took me to the GP. He said he'd never seen anything like it. Back then people didn't know how to treat kids with eating disorders. His advice was: 'Just go home and eat.' One night my dad put me to bed on the living room sofa because he didn't want me walking up and down the stairs because I was too weak. When he thought I was asleep he sat next to me and cried, which really shocked me.

"When I was eleven I was admitted to the children's ward of the General Hospital and then moved to the children's psychiatric ward. **The rules of the ward meant I was only allowed to see my parents for half an hour, once a month. Other children were allowed to see their parents and play while I was**

**on 24 hour supervision. I remember feeling lost because I'd never been away from my parents before.** I spent a year in hospital and throughout that time I felt frightened and incredibly lonely. I started eating again a year or two later because I was desperate to get out of hospital. It wasn't that I didn't feel fat anymore or was OK about food; it was because I wanted to escape the prison I was in.

"One of the reasons I stopped eating initially was because I was petrified of school. A child psychiatrist recognised this and she referred me to a remedial school for kids who had got pregnant or been expelled. There were only five kids at the school and there was no bullying. I felt a real camaraderie there; the next few years were bliss. My parents thought it was a miracle and I began doing normal teenage stuff. Everything was hunky dory until a girl from my junior school arrived. She was similar to me: she had ginger hair and an eating disorder. People with eating disorders are very competitive. When you're ill the competition to be the best anorexic takes on a life of its own. As soon as she came it was like someone flicked a switch, and my problems returned.

"I ended up in General Hospital again for seven weeks before being sent to a clinic in London. The clinic tried to make people better through a method of humiliation and punishment. The programme they ran meant I learnt how to hide food, count calories and have a fast metabolism, behaviour I never knew before. After three years of being in an out of this horrible place I finally left. I remember the person who ran the place saying: 'I've washed my hands of her now.'

"I went to the Priory in London when I was 18. They were gentler; if you had a problem they would talk you through it, which was an alien concept for me. I was in

the Priory for six months initially and then another six when I was 19 or 20. While in the Priory I heard about a care home in North Wales. I told my psychiatrist, wrote to the home and was given a place. However, because I didn't have a social worker, I couldn't go directly from the Priory to the care home so I was transferred to an NHS hospital while the paperwork was completed. I spent three weeks in a hell hole of an eating disorder ward with people just like me who were all focussed on being the best anorexic. This brought out my competitive side, things went downhill and I attempted suicide. I've tried to commit suicide a few times but I've never been diagnosed with depression. Maybe I haven't been diagnosed as I should have been. Perhaps it suited people to have me diagnosed solely as anorexic because they could treat me just for that – that's all I can assume.

"I was at the care home for two years and during that time I met my boyfriend, Evan. I decided to move to Aberystwyth in 2007 because I wanted to go somewhere quieter: the council estate I was living on wasn't nice and I was attacked in a nightclub in North Wales which stopped me going out. My housing officer in Aberystwyth introduced me to Hafal and that helped a lot: I talked to people and became a volunteer.

"I still get depression and anxiety but I'm more stable now. Hafal's Recovery Programme has helped me with my attitude to food; putting everything down on paper has clarified a lot of things for me. **Looking back I'd have loved to have had consistent levels of family support when I first became ill. I wish my situation in school had been addressed, too.** My eating disorder is not something I will conquer, it's a cyclical thing. I just have to be aware it's going to be difficult sometimes."



## Terry's story

**Gulf War veteran Terry Taylor was diagnosed with bipolar disorder well into a successful army career. Terry, who says playing sport and music have aided his recovery, believes the media's attitude to the word**

**'psychosis' does not help promote understanding of bipolar disorder among the wider public.**

### Here Terry tells his story...

"I joined the army in 1989, the Gulf War started the following year and I went out as a Combat Engineer. I saw some terrible things but what affected me most was six months of isolation in the Gulf, being stuck with a bullying corporal who could make life difficult. The army can be a good cover-up for anyone who has depressive symptoms as the culture revolves around working hard and being rewarded in beer. **Army life is full of "high highs and low lows", it can be a melting pot for people with a mental disorder and drinking covers up a lot of it.**

"Returning from the Gulf was an anti-climax. I went on big leave from a frenetic job to nothing. To fill the gap I developed an artificial love of the rave scene. I started taking Ecstasy and became hooked on the vibes and the music. The police caught me with amphetamines but I wasn't thrown out of the army because I asked to see a psychiatrist; his report said I had substance misuse disorder due to depression, that it wasn't in the public interest to prosecute me.

"The next tour was to Cyprus. Signs I had bipolar disorder (which runs in the family) were lurking through my army career but they hit home there. The weather became warmer (people with bipolar can get high when the weather warms up) and feelings of a religious nature welled up inside me. I was raised a Christian and though I never fully bought into it I felt that God was talking to me. I lost all my friends by the tour's end, I was too much to handle: when I'm high I can be extremely talkative and intense.

"I got hit by a low when I returned from Cyprus. I was not receiving any treatment then but fortunately, at least for me, Bosnia came up; if it hadn't I don't think I'd be here now. I was in Bosnia for six months. Although the work was very hard I was promoted and the camaraderie was great. At the tour's end I was very high, we had a long leave and I needed something to do so I went to Ireland for an adventure on a motorbike.

"I made it safely back to camp from Ireland though I was behaving strangely. Army officials should have realised I was ill then because I was wandering round the camp in the middle of the night cleaning things. Eventually I went to the town's cathedral thinking I was going to get married. I bought a £400 ring for a bride I was convinced was going to come. Eventually I sat at the back of the church and collapsed, crying. A priest found me, called the police and I was sent to Catterick Military Hospital. The hospital's psychiatrist told me I had bipolar disorder, I was hyper-manic and that on a scale of one to ten I was 15. The staff tried to give me medication but because of my memories of the rave scene, I thought taking pills was wrong, so I refused.

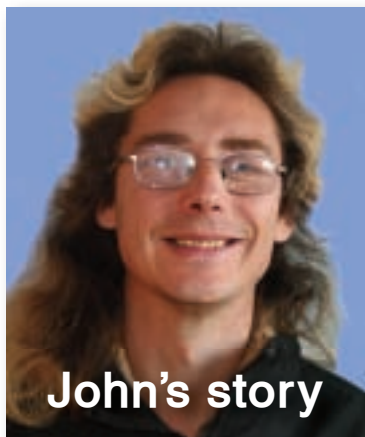
"After a few days five nurses waited until I was unaware and jumped me. Four held my limbs down,

the fifth injected me. That was the worst moment of my life. They gave me a massive dose of Haloperidol which did not agree with me; this meant that one second I was conversing with angels the next I was suffering the worse depression imaginable. Since then, when medics have tried to give me Haloperidol, I've tried to run away. During my last episode (in 2008) I tried to tell those treating me how bad it was but they wouldn't listen and tried to force it on me, so I ran away from a hospital in North Wales and ended up being beaten up in Cheltenham.

"The army accepted some responsibility for my illness and agreed the job made it worse. I was awarded £5,000 at a hearing. The army wanted me to stay but I left in 1997. Leaving was difficult as I missed the camaraderie. Since then, among other things, I've worked at an electrical company, backpacked around the US and I began an engineering apprenticeship.

"In all I've had six major psychotic episodes. **I've noticed that in the media the word 'psychosis' is rarely mentioned. It's as if it has become a bogey word used only on the rare occasions when somebody with a mental illness has hurt someone.** Not using the word propagates fear and mistrust.

"In terms of my recovery I'm building myself up after last year's episode. For a 45 year-old I'm in good shape physically but mentally I can feel vulnerable and shaky. Playing sport has helped counter this, while visiting Hafal has eased my fears of becoming socially isolated. Playing my guitar has helped a lot, too; the discipline of playing music has been a huge help to me many times. I'm now involved in a community film project as a volunteer workshop leader helping people with learning difficulties, mental health issues and probation service users."



## John's story

**John Hardy was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2007. John, who says he showed no signs of having a mental illness until his late thirties, moved to Hafal's residential home, Tŷ Hafal, in April 2008. Since living**

**at Tŷ Hafal John, who sings and plays guitar with two rock 'n' roll bands, has rebuilt his social confidence and independence. In January 2010 he moved into a flat in Haverfordwest.**

### Here John tells his story...

"I was diagnosed with schizophrenia when I was 37, it was shortly after I lost my flat in Milford Haven a few years ago. I missed a couple of rent payments and the landlord asked me if I wanted to keep the flat. I said 'no' but I wasn't in my right mind when I said this. I should have said 'yes'. Following this I went out, had a few beers and asked some people in the pub if they knew of any places available to rent. On the way home I was picked up by the police. I thought they were going to take me back to my flat but they took me to the police station and put me in a cell overnight. I wasn't frightened because it was a routine thing. When they realised I wasn't doing anything bad they contacted a social worker and he referred me to St Caradog ward in Withybush Hospital hospital (a Pembrokeshire County Council-run unit which provides short-term inpatient care) for three months.

"I was diagnosed at St Caradog. I agreed with the diagnosis because I thought I had better stay some-

where and I believed they could take care of me. To be honest I didn't think I had a mental illness but I did wonder if I had anywhere to go. I thought: "If I'm in the hospital they're bound to find me somewhere to stay, a place where I can have support." I decided to accept the label (being diagnosed with schizophrenia) because at least I'd get the support I needed. I thought it easier to agree with what they said rather than disagree.

"I'm not really sure of what I've got, to be honest. If I stopped taking my medication I'd probably be a fitness fanatic, walking and running a lot more. I don't feel as 'wandery' if I've taken my medication, I feel more relaxed. When I went to St Caradog I was given Risperidone initially but that didn't agree with me, it made me lethargic, so I changed to Olanzapine which I had been on previously. I also took Stelazine around this time but that gave me lockjaw so I had to take a drug to counter it. I'd eat a lot less if I wasn't taking medication; medication gives me an appetite so it's a good thing in a lot of ways.

"After St Caradog I was sent to Milford House Centre which provides services for people with mental health problems who need support. I stayed there for a week in respite. I was then moved back to St Caradog but they didn't have any beds so I went back to Milford House. I was then moved to an outreach house for a while, which was OK. The opportunity to stay at Tŷ Hafal, which is a supported housing project, came up after that and I took it because my roots are in Haverfordwest. I enjoyed my time at Tŷ Hafal. When I arrived I thought the house was very good: it was well supported and I had a certain amount of independence.

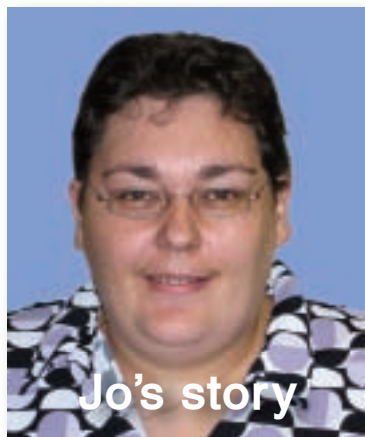
"When I went to Tŷ Hafal I began working again. I

have a background in printing but I hadn't done this or worked at all since 1990 because I couldn't find printing work in the locality. At Tŷ Hafal I began to work three days a week selling furniture and working on a horticultural project called Blue Skies. Working has been good for me because it meant I had to get up early, have dinner (important because it means I eat regularly and to a routine) and do a hard day's work. I've been learning new things all the time.

**"Working keeps me occupied and gives me great satisfaction. I feel as if I've achieved something with my day.** When it comes to selling furniture it's very enjoyable especially when I meet a new customer. There are a lot of things I didn't know about furniture before I started so learning this has helped me a great deal with my self-esteem. Coming to Tŷ Hafal has helped me socially, too, because I'm back in touch with my old contacts.

"Music is one of my great loves, in fact during the 90s I lived above a recording studio. I play guitar and sing in a rock band called "Dynamite Explosion"; I also play with another band, "West Coast Pirates". Making music keeps me calm, helps me think and gives me a better state of mind. One day I'd like to put my songs on the Internet.

"In autumn 2009 one of my Support Workers told me I'd outgrown Tŷ Hafal and that there was not a lot wrong with me. She found me a flat and I moved there in January. I'm still in touch with Tŷ Hafal though and I'm continuing with the work I've been doing. **I've made a lot of progress in the last couple of years. I'd like to thank all the people who've helped me recover, who've given me somewhere to stay and who have helped me relax."**



## Jo's story

**In 2008 Mental Health Consultant Jo Roberts set up a weblog which, along with the huge amount of feedback it received, influenced the Welsh Code of Practice for the Mental Health Act, giving it a strong patient focus. Jo, who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, says that when it comes to her recovery, "the sky's the limit."**

### Here Jo tells her story...

"I became ill when I was 18. I was a second year student nurse and I had just come back from a holiday with a gang of the girls. A fortnight after returning I began hearing voices, seeing things, and becoming paranoid. I didn't know what was wrong with me and I didn't tell anybody either. I began drinking a bottle of vodka a day to try and get rid of the voices and get some sleep.

"A fortnight later I couldn't take it any more so I took an overdose. My next memory is of waking up in a hospital ward with doctors and nurses around me. I felt very paranoid. I thought they were going to kill me or injure me in some way. I don't remember it but apparently I assaulted a nurse. The police were called; they could see I was ill but there was nowhere to place me. The best they could do was remand me to prison so I became a priority for a bed.

"I'd been in prison for two weeks, on the hospital wing, when a bed came up. They found me a bed at a

private hospital in Northampton which was a long way from my home. The ward I was sent to was a behavioural ward for teenagers which was run on a points system. I found this setting quite difficult. If you shouted, screamed or swore you'd lose points and be punished. **I spent a year on this ward and I didn't see any of my family for that time which was very difficult. The only contact I had with them was through letters and a phone call once a week.**

"From there I went to Caswell clinic in Bridgend. There were four beds there and I was often the only female on the ward. Time went on and unfortunately I assaulted a nurse. I've never forgiven myself for this assault. I know people say I was ill but there's not a day goes by when I don't think of what I did.

"After Caswell I spent a year at Ashworth Hospital in Liverpool. It was absolutely terrifying. I wouldn't drink a lot because if you went into the toilets you could see some of the girls trying to hang themselves. You'd have to shout: "Knife!" and the staff would come and cut them down. The only good thing that came out of that was being put on Clozaril. It was a new drug then and it seemed to work quite well.

"From Ashworth I went back to Caswell Clinic, to the rehab ward. It was a lot better, there was more structure to the day. I managed to get quite well on Clozaril and I was nearly back to my old self. It was while at Caswell I decided I wanted to live independently; however, the hospital wanted me to go to a hostel. I dug my heels in, stayed in a hospital a bit longer and went through a rehab programme which enabled me to live independently. I spent another two years at Caswell and I won a tribunal on conditional discharge. I was discharged to a flat which I'm living in now.

"A few years ago a new drug came out called Abilify. I discussed the possibility of taking it with my consultant and my care team. We decided I'd try it because by then I had gained a lot of weight and developed diabetes. Unfortunately, I tried the Abilify and became very ill again. I was taken into hospital voluntarily initially. Because I didn't want to stay the Home Office recalled me (I am subject to a Home Office section 37/41) so I spent another two years in Coity clinic which is a local hospital. That was very frustrating because I was unwell for about three months. The other eighteen months I spent there I was well but unable to be discharged.

"I'm still subject to a Home Office section 37/41 because of the assault on the nurse almost 20 years ago. Day to day the 37/41 doesn't affect me. If I could come off the section it would be the last piece of the jigsaw. I will appeal against it soon. I'm out of hospital now, I've got my job back, I've got a little car, and my flat is safe so everything has turned out right. I feel I'm living again. I've got a good quality of life but I still aspire to more. Where recovery begins and ends I don't know. How far can I go with recovery? The sky's the limit really. I've had my ups and downs in the last few years – I was in hospital with pneumonia for six weeks recently, and I went into a coma and on two occasions it was touch and go. But I came through and I don't give up! I'm happy with my life. I don't feel cheated.

**"I'd just like to add that throughout the years my family have rallied around me. My auntie Moira in particular has always been there to support me. She's been a rock. Whenever she's phoned and I've said I'm not well she's come down to the flat and helped me out. She's been marvellous."**



**Chris Eastwood, a client and carer from North Wales, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when he was 34. Chris, a recovering alcoholic whose story featured in the book “You Don’t Have to be Famous to Have Manic**

## Chris’ story

**Depression”, says: “Drink was my friend but I’ve other outlets now. A few years ago I started saving for a sports car. Now, when I feel lonely I get into my Mazda MX5 and my blues disappear!”**

**Here Chris tells his story...**

“There was nothing in my childhood to indicate I would become mentally ill. I had two loving parents and two brothers and one sister. Life turned upside down when my dad died when I was 16. My younger brother took this very badly and refused to go to school. After being let down by the system he eventually took his life when he was 21.

**“A psychiatrist who saw my brother some weeks before he died reckoned he should have a ‘kick up the bum’ which was a disgraceful thing to say. He should be struck off. My brother’s death left a deep scar on my family.**

“After leaving school I became a caterer. Living in North Wales meant it was hard to find work, especially for a non-Welsh speaker. Catering allowed me to travel. After working as a waiter in Switzerland I began a job as an Assistant Manager in a small country hotel. I enjoyed my job but after a while I

became so stressed I could not sleep. My thoughts became rapid and I started to link things that had no connection. I became emotional, nervy and, uncharacteristically, I began to lose my temper. I believed there was a conspiracy against me and that the radio and TV were having a laugh at my expense.

“The same problems happened subsequently in two more jobs. Once, while working as an Accommodation Manager on a 550-bed oil support barge in Shetland, I became highly emotional, I lost my temper with the boss and was sacked. I had to sell my house but I made a profit on it so at least I wasn’t broke. I then set up as a portrait and wedding photographer. Three years later I secured a job in Dubai as a photographer but within a month I began displaying the familiar signs and went psychotic again. I ended up on the top of an apartment block trying to jump off; I believed I was the next Messiah.

**“I came back to my mother’s place in Criccieth and within a matter of days I was sectioned. After a month I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. When you’re sectioned all your rights as a human being are taken from you and you’re not allowed to leave the hospital for your own protection. I was terrified at the time because I did not know what was real and what was imagined. In hindsight if I was treated earlier and someone had explained how bipolar manifested itself – and followed my treatment up – I reckon I could have gone back to that job and my life would have been much different now.**

“After I was diagnosed with bipolar I tried to find work. I found three jobs but lost each one of them because of mania. In 1998 I managed to get my own house and from then I drank every night for nine years. It got up to a bottle of Scotch a day. During this time I

attended two Alcoholics Anonymous meetings but I didn’t feel I fitted in because their stories were different to mine. However, I did learn from Alcoholics Anonymous that the best way to stop drinking is don’t take the first drink – I can’t drink periodically. I had a Dual Diagnosis Nurse for about two years before I managed to stop; giving up drinking was a hard, start-stop process. Three years ago my doctor suggested I go to a detox unit. I thought: ‘God, has my drinking got that bad?’ That night, it was February 6th 2007, I returned home and thought: ‘I have half a bottle of Scotch left, I’ll finish it and that will be it.’ I’ve not had an alcoholic drink since.

“Giving up alcohol was a huge step in my recovery because when I spoke to my psychiatrist I realised that if I wanted my medication to work effectively I had to stop drinking. I stopped at the brink of death. I felt suicidal many, many times. However, because I know the effect my brother’s death had on the family, I’ve always managed to get through the bad times.

“I am a carer as well as service user now. My mother had a stroke 12 years ago and I’ve been looking after her since then. I’ve never married. I’ve had plenty of girlfriends but the illness always saw them off. I couldn’t produce the house, the car, the job; I knew it and I think the girls knew it, too. I think they had a sixth sense.

“On reflection the key to my recovery was seeing the Dual Diagnosis Nurse and wanting to recover for myself. For those trying to give up alcohol don’t give up on giving up. I’ve found that if you give something up you can get something better in its place. Remember that ultimately, though, the desire to give up has to come from the individual.”

## What can we learn from *12 Lives*?

The stories presented in *12 Lives* reflect those of many people who have lived with serious mental illness. The experiences of over 500 people with serious mental illness and their families have informed Hafal's approach to recovery from serious mental illness. In practice, Hafal clients have found that recovery is underpinned by three essential components:



### 1. Empowerment and self-management

*Empowerment* means exercising rights and responsibilities in making choices about life. *Self-management* means taking the actions required to lead a life based on those choices. Achieving empowerment and self-management does not mean having to make choices and take action alone and without the right support; the key challenge is to develop the *right relationship* with supporters, taking care to ensure that they do not take over responsibility.

### 2. Commitment to progress

Recovery depends on actively taking steps to improve life. It is vital to agree and act upon a step-by-step, goal-focused plan. A good plan needs to hold its focus on long-term goals but include the intermediary, less intimidating steps which allow a person to take action.

### 3. A 'Whole Person Approach'

Recovery requires a "Whole Person" approach (sometimes called a 'holistic' approach). This means addressing all key aspects of life which together contribute to well-being. By setting goals in all areas of life people can approach recovery more comprehensively. Below we set out the areas of life which should be considered as part of the Whole Person Approach:



For more on recovery please visit [www.hafal.org](http://www.hafal.org)

# About hafal

Hafal is the principal organisation in Wales working with people recovering from serious mental illness, their families and carers. Every day our 150 staff and 100 volunteers provide help to over 1,000 people affected by serious mental illness across all the 22 counties of Wales.

**Hafal is run by the people it supports: people with serious mental illness and their carers and families.** The charity is founded on the belief that people who have direct experience of mental illness know best how services can be delivered. In practice this means that at every project our clients meet to make decisions about how the service will move forward and the charity itself is led by a board of elected Trustees, most of whom have either had serious mental illness themselves or are the carers of a person with a mental illness.

'Hafal' means equal. Our mission is to empower people with serious mental illness and their families to enjoy equal access to health and social care, housing, income, education, and employment, and to achieve a better quality of life, fulfil their ambitions for recovery and fight discrimination. Hafal delivers key services to people with serious mental illness and their carers including: employment training; housing support; resource centres; befriending; arts projects; inpatient advocacy; family support, and carers' support services.

For more information please contact us at: **Hafal, Suite C2, William Knox House, Britannic Way, Llandarcy, Neath SA10 6EL**  
Tel: **01792 816600** Fax: **01792 813056** Email: [hafal@hafal.org](mailto:hafal@hafal.org) Web: [www.hafal.org](http://www.hafal.org)

## About the **Mental Health** Foundation

Founded in 1949, the Mental Health Foundation is a UK charity that provides information, carries out research, campaigns and works to improve services for anyone affected by mental health problems, whatever their age and wherever they live.

Our vision is a mentally healthy world where people are free from the suffering caused by mental illness. Our mission is to help people survive, recover from and prevent mental health problems. We do this by:

- learning what makes and keeps people mentally well;
- communicating our findings to a wide range of people; turning our research into practical solutions that make a difference to people's lives.

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Langstone Business Park, Priory Drive, Newport, NP18 2HJ**  
Tel: **01633 415 434** Email: [WalesMHF@mhf.org.uk](mailto:WalesMHF@mhf.org.uk)  
Web: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

## About



MDF the BiPolar Organisation is a user-led mental health charity which works to enable people affected by bipolar disorder (manic depression) to take control of their lives. The Organisation began life in 1983 as the result of an advert in the personal column of a national newspaper. The Organisation's expertise is rooted in the personal experience of our members: people with the diagnosis and their families and friends.

MDF has information on a wide range of aspects of bipolar disorder and provide a range of services for our members from legal and debt advice, through our 24-hour Legal Advice Line, to Self-Management Training courses.

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