

MY STORY



The Ray of Hope that is Julian Support.

On the 30th of June 2015 at age 34 and having been clean from drink and drugs for five and a half years I found myself in a police cell where I had wept desperately for eight hours solid.

Since the age of 15 I had suffered from depression and anxiety, however I was always suspicious that something more was going on. The last two years of my life had been my most difficult; I was fighting a losing battle with some pretty nasty PTSD symptoms, I had separated from my husband, become homeless, and had taken on a job that had finally brought me to my knees.

So there I was, in a cell, very quickly losing what I had left of my mind. I think one of the officers must have taken pity on me as they said they'd called someone for me to speak to.

This was my first introduction to Julian Support's Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion team. My memory of my meeting with them is somewhat lacking, however, what I do remember were safe, reassuring voices asking me if I was ok, and if I needed any help. I think I mumbled no and yes through the tears, just grateful that someone was treating me like a human being and could see how terrified and lost I had become.

I was kept for twelve hours by the police and finally released on bail. Within ten days my mental health had dropped to interminable depths; I had lost everything I had worked so hard to achieve, I couldn't understand why my life felt like a constant struggle and I certainly couldn't see anyway up or out of the darkness that had swallowed me up; my last hope of relief was to stand in front of a fast moving train and end my life.

At this point I was admitted into a psychiatric hospital where I was kept safe for the next three months. During my time in hospital I was visited by a member of staff from Julian Support, and what a relief it was to meet someone

who listened to me, who wasn't judging me and who genuinely wanted to help me through the mess that I had found myself in. We discussed my situation, my housing needs and the police investigation that I was central to and she told me that she could help. I think that was the first little spark of hope that I had felt for a very long time.

I kept in contact with that staff member via email during the rest of my time in hospital; she advised me on my housing options and gave me information on legal aid. She also supported me with my referral to the Woman's Aid Freedom Programme and Suffolk Rape Crisis so I could begin to heal my emotions and gain some understanding around everything I had been through. I was discharged from hospital in September 2015 and had gained a new diagnosis of emotionally unstable personality disorder, which finally gave me an explanation of why I had been finding life so difficult. Together we got my name on the housing list and JS staff helped me with supporting information for the application.

I was still feeling unwell and struggling with suicidal thoughts on a daily basis. I tried as I might to hide away from the world but I kept getting these texts through from JS staff asking how I was and if I needed any help. I finally gave in, asked for help, I very slowly let staff into my life and began to trust. Meanwhile the police investigation carried on. I was kept on bail for over seven months and was re-bailed five times during this time. Each time the bail date got nearer my mental health got worse, to a point of paralysis. I couldn't function and suicidal thoughts were always at my side.

JS staff was always there to support me, we would meet up and they would help me prepare myself for what was to come, often helping me to focus on the practicalities which always slipped my mind and helping me see that my situation was not worth ending my life over. All the time keeping that tiny flame of hope ignited, the flame of hope which carried me through.

I finally got charged on the 6th of February 2016; JS staff supported me through this two -hour ordeal and ensured that I was in the safe hands of my partner afterwards. After this the hard work really began, I was facing a three year custodial sentence, I had no idea how the justice system worked and where to begin with my defence. JS staff supported me at my solicitors appointments, which were incredibly difficult for me and organised supporting letters from all the services I had been getting help from. During this time I eventually was re- housed which was a huge relief, I had finally got somewhere safe to call my own and for that I will be forever grateful.

I had to attend magistrates court once and crown court on two occasions, I was part of a very frightening world which I knew nothing about and JS staff helped through it all, normalising it and helping me cope. We even had a few giggles along the way. I found I was not getting the help I needed from the mental health team and JS staff was only able to help with the criminal justice side of things so I was referred to the Julian Support Pathways Recovery team and also began work with that staff team. I would see them once a week at my home, we would discuss how I was coping and work towards a plan of positive changes that I wanted to make in my life. This empowered me to take up voluntary work and make choices that were right for me. The date of sentencing was fast approaching and my head was in a mess, I had been told to prepare for prison which meant packing my bag, sorting out my finances and saying my goodbyes. Again CJL&D staff helped me with the practicalities, what to pack, who to inform and how to keep myself safe

on the run up to court. They also worked closely with the mental health team to ensure I was given the support I needed. The date of my sentencing, the 26th July 2016 came around too quickly. My family and partner attended court with me which I found even more difficult however JS staff were there to keep my head level and help me put one foot in front of the other. The day was absolute hell, but I walked out of court with a suspended sentence, an outcome I never ever thought possible. I was so relieved and totally exhausted, I think I slept for a week.

Once the dust had settled and I had been handed over to probation it was time for my work to end with CJL&D, but I was so grateful to have had that support when I needed it. It took me several months to recover from the whole ordeal and I have continued to work with West Suffolk PRT. During this time, I have secured benefits, changed voluntary jobs and my mental health is beginning to improve little by little, some days more than others. My work with PRT is coming to an end but I am continuing to put myself first and seek out the treatment I need to help me deal with my past and my illness and what's more I will celebrate seven years clean and sober next month.

I cannot begin to explain how much Julian Support has helped me through the most difficult time of my life. In a time when the mental health services are less, this amazing charity has helped me not only survive but shown me hope for the future; they have taught me to put myself first and never give up no matter how difficult things get. As I write this now I can finally say that I am enough and that for me has been a lifetime struggle. I know for sure that had Julian Support not been active in my life I certainly wouldn't be here today, from a lady that wanted to die I can finally say that I have a life worth living now and this is testament to Julian Support's hard work and dedication, thank you so much.