



Press Release
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Eating Disorders Week: Crewe Patient Describes Battle with Anorexia

A young woman has described life with an eating disorder and how support from a mental health hospital in Crewe is helping her to overcome her battle with food.

This week is Eating Disorders Week, a chance to shine a light on the various eating disorders and to raise awareness of support available.

Ella Clarke, 26, originally from Loughborough, said her battle with anorexia and personality disorder began in her teenage years.

She said: "I didn't really notice when it crept in slowly, one unhealthy habit at a time. I wouldn't admit to myself or anyone else that I had an eating disorder.

"It got in the way of relationships. I avoided social gatherings and any celebrations involving food. Instead I isolated myself, felt more and more alone, and missed out on so much. When everything felt too much, what I did and didn't eat was something I could control.

"My mum noticed the change long before I did but no one knew the best way to help me."

Best friend Liv described the changes she saw in Ella: "I began to notice that if we went out somewhere for the whole day and I'd stop to get lunch, Ella would never get anything, and if I asked she would get defensive about it.

"She would avoid making plans to do with meals, and if I came to her house, we rarely had food there or she would get me snacks but wouldn't eat any herself. If we did eat I'd notice her mood crash afterwards, the same as if we watched films and there was any mention of food or dieting.

"I could tell sometimes when she had just made herself sick."

Ella was previously a healthcare assistant on an oncology ward. However, alongside her mental health, Ella's physical health declined to the point she was no longer able to work.

Ella added: "This was around the time of Covid, where the isolation fed into my eating disorder and allowed me to hide even more from others. Even after getting

admitted to an acute ward, I was still in denial about how much my eating disorder was affecting me and if I needed help for it or not."

After spending nine months on an NHS acute ward, Ella was transferred to Cygnet Nield House in July 2023, a 29-bed Cygnet Health Care hospital for women in Crewe.

"When I first arrived I was truly terrified," she said. "I'd hide away in my room, be scared to talk to anyone and I didn't want to engage with staff or my therapy. I was scared of eating in front of anyone, I ended up eating the same meal everyday for more than a year, and sometimes just looking at my plate of food would send me into a panic attack.

"I didn't see a way out, I didn't see how things could change. But slowly I've overcome hurdles, one small step at a time, with the help and support from all the staff."

Ella said that sitting in the dining room was her first fear to overcome, something she hadn't done for years.

"At Cygnet Nield House they provide meal support, either 1:1 or in a group. I was encouraged and found it helpful to play games or word puzzles during meals as a distraction. I then continued to make progress with the help of the dietitians. I couldn't have made the progress I have without my dietitian, Justin. He has a firm but fair approach and always has our best interest at heart. He's helped me get to the place where I can eat what I enjoy, without thinking too much about it."

Describing how thankful she is for the care she has received at Cygnet Health Care, Ella said: "The team here have all worked together to keep me safe, look after any physical health issues, advocated for me and have always been there for any support I've needed.

"A couple of months after I arrived, my beloved Grandpa passed away. The team here went above and beyond in helping me to manage this situation. They drove me to see him in hospital, took me to see him the last time, and took me to his funeral. On the day I went to see him for the last time, I sat and held Grandpa's hand but was too emotional to read him the letter I'd written, so a support worker sat beside us and read it out for me. That moment is one I will never forget and will be forever grateful for.

"I've developed skills since I've been here like accessing outside the ward environment, going for walks, going on group leave into the community, and teaching various life skills like cooking.

"I've also engaged with a range of therapies and they've helped me to realise that I've got to face the fears of my past to be able to fully move on with my life.

"I finally feel like I can live life without food holding me back. I give my body the fuel it needs, which enables me to carry on with day to day activities I was previously too unwell to join in with. I keep myself active, but because I enjoy doing it, rather than being forced into it.

"Last Christmas I went home and ate Christmas dinner with my family for the first time in years. I recently made my Grandma and I lunch and we sat and ate together. That's something I wish I'd have been able to do sooner when Grandpa was still around."

Offering her advice to any eating disorder sufferers, Ella said: "The biggest and first step is admitting you need help. From then, it will be a long journey, but with perseverance and courage you'll get through it and it'll all be so worth it in the end."

"Eating disorders don't magically go away, even when you're 'better', you're still battling thoughts every day."

"But I never thought I'd be able to get to the stage I'm at now, yes I still have a way to go, but being able to get through the days and make future plans without food getting in the way is something I never thought would be possible."

"My Grandpa used to say to me 'Never say never, each time it'll get easier, you just have to push yourself'. He was right."