

#BehindTheNumbers – Mhairi's Story

How would you describe your mum Claire as a person?

MG: Funny. Annoying. Kinda just like...kinda like any mum she was just very...into everything you were doing, she wanted to know everything you were doing cause she just loved being involved.

She thought she was one of the kids, I think. Sometimes she was just always wanting to have fun, always wanted to come out with you. She was her own kind of special personality in terms of...she was just nuts, like she was just absolutely crazy.

She loved everybody though so, so passionately which was not always a great thing. Sometimes she'd forget to do things for herself and ended up doing too much for everybody else but she just loved her kids, her friends and that obviously is what helped her in life. But she was just...just happy.

How did you support your mum?

MG: I think just by being there emotionally, there was lots of times... 3 o'clock in the morning phone calls, having to jump out to her house to see if everything was alright. I tried to help her get involved with a lot of the services and things she was working with. Sometimes that was a bit of a pointless task.

We'd also... use to sit down with her, so as I said she used to do a lot of writing and stuff like that because she didn't feel comfortable sometimes speaking to people from other services. So it would be a case of sometimes just taking her out to get her to talk or sitting in the house and going through what she had written so that we could speak about how she was feeling.

Trying to make sure that she didn't keep to herself too much in terms of because...there was 5 of us, I'm the oldest of 5...trying to just make sure that... I was the one that was dealing with stuff so that she could have that relationship with the rest of them that was just kinda some sense of normality but at the same time... trying no to take everything on...so trying to teach her how to do things for herself.

What has been your experiences of the different services involved with your mum?

MG: Mixed...very little good, very much bad. We had lots of services... where you'd get one person that'd kinda come in and seemed that they wanted to make a difference and here was where we were going to go and then within 2 weeks of working with them it was just as if they were fed up and had lost all hope.

It was as if sometimes I felt that a lot of services were coming in from...this is was supposed to be something that happened overnight opposed to... the journey these people go through.

Lots of the times... I had issues with my mum was in prison quite a lot of the time when I was younger as well and coming out of these places...I seemed to feel a lot of the time she was coming out and just being flung straight back in to what she was taken out of and... she'd maybe been in prison for a year or two years and she'd made so much progress...to then come out of that and be flung straight back into you know the lifestyle that got her into this position in the first place.

So many workers would come in and just sit in the corner, not really wanting to engage and seem like they just didn't want to be there. I felt a lot of the time you had more people coming in and judging than you did not. There was so many times where I sat down with my mum and said to her why we are not going to the centre? Why we not going to see so and so that you're meant to be working with? 'Well I'm not going to see her cause she clearly doesn't want to work with me' and if you're making someone feel like that instantly then they're not going to engage, they're not going to come back.

Have there been times when these services have put your mum or yourself at risk, or caused harm?

MG: About methadone...and the kinda...like I totally understand there's gotta be some sort of strictness around about it so the odds of that can't be abused but I think that sometimes people are coming with genuine reasons to why these things are being missed but willing to then...you know I'm not saying I'm not coming to get it, can I come and get it later or can I come and get it earlier...there needs to be something along those lines because...there was times when she couldn't get it and that sent everything into a backwards spiral.

There was just no sense of...we can see that you're trying so let us help you out, it was very much a 'well if you don't want it and you're no gonna come and get it then that's you then.'

Are there things that could have been done differently?

MG: I feel like most things could have been done differently in terms of...how she was treated. And I think that's just so basic, you feel like it should be you know...that's such an obvious thing to treat somebody with a little bit of dignity and respect but it wasn't.

And I feel like if that had been done then...that would have made such a big difference on how she engaged and how she worked alongside with them because obviously...I'm not saying she was an angel to work with because you know...she most definitely wasn't but I don't know how I would work with someone if they had degraded me and made me feel like I wasn't worthy of getting help in the first place.

So I don't think she's fully to blame for how she handled working with these people. I think a lot of the time...time is another major one. People expect...you get maybe one visit a week with somebody who comes in and goes 'hi how you doing...like....okay this is what we're going to do now' and then leaves.

My mum was a very sociable person. I think if somebody had took the time...maybe she didn't want to go to CPNs or whatever...but for somebody to come in who was visiting her to just sit for five minutes, have a cup of tea, ask her how she's been....REALLY ask her how she's been, not just in terms of her recovery but ask her how's she been in terms of...day to day life, what she was doing outwith.

Nobody ever seemed to ask her what she was doing...outwith recovery or anything else. Nobody ever asked her what she was doing at the weekend or how's the kids or anything else, it was strictly

just based around that...and I feel you can make someone feel so much more human if you talk to them like a human.

You wouldn't walk up to anybody else and just be that straightforward about it, you'd have a little bit of compassion, and I think a lot of the time people working with people don't feel that compassion is something they're allowed to show.

How are things for you now?

MG: Now...I mean in terms of my mum. She passed away now three years ago on the 12th April 2016. Things are still...I think everybody has dealt with it in their own type of way. No one is obviously happy with how things were handled which I think is a universal thing with all of us. Every one of us realises that things could have been done differently. Not just with services...I think a lot of us feel some type of way about ourselves and how we handled things as well.

I'm the oldest of 5 so there's 4 other little girls who are...that have got...I've got a little girl that she never got to meet. She met my son, she knew I was pregnant with my daughter and luckily for me she was there when I got married. But I've got another little sister the now that's pregnant with her first child and my mum's not going to get to meet...

I've got...there's 4 other kids that aren't going to get to have their mum in important points of their life and they should have which you know...it sucks, it's crap...but I just feel that's why we're doing these kinds of things because God forbid that someone else should have to go through the same things...I mean I woke up a year after my mum had passed away, a couple of months after her year anniversary I was getting hit with you know...here's these drug-related death statistics and all of a sudden my mum had went from being nothing and not having a voice to being a number.

I think it's opened everybody's eyes a little bit in terms of...I think a lot of the time with my mum was very black and white like sometimes I was ragin' at her, sometimes I hated her for what she done, other times I was like no wait a minute, I have to understand that it's not as simple as that. And I think now that she's passed away and the time that I've spent with her...I actually wasn't talking to her when she'd passed away either so...I'd felt that sense of awk, like I wasn't talking to her, I'd gave up on her again, and one of the things now I think because I'm better at handling it, because now I can go no wait a minute, there's other like...things that were there between us.

We fell out all the time so why am I holding it against myself at this point.

So things are...they get better because you learn more as you go along and you research into other things and you start doing work in the types of things...like the types of things she dealt with you can see coming through...when you're working with other people. You start to realise that you know...she did deserve more and I think that's what it comes down to, she just deserved more than anything and that was...tough, so.

What would be your message for other families in a similar situation?

MG: Don't give up. Don't feel bad if you've needed to take a bit of time for yourself. I think so much of...if I'd of needed five minutes to myself without having to worry or whatever I'd felt like I didn't

deserve that and a lot of the time you need to have your own sanity before you can help someone else get theirs.

There's no point in... just giving your all, all the time because you're going to end up with nothing left to give. Don't stop fighting for things. You know people...if you've got someone who's working with you who you don't feel is fully helping or who don't feel really passionate about what you need then tell them. Tell somebody else, get somebody, because there is good people out there who will help, there is workers that do want to make a difference and you know they're not just going to come along, and that's the difficult part because you don't know who you're going to get. But if you're not happy then say you're not happy. Keep fighting until you get somebody whose gonna come and make the difference that you feel you deserve.