

# Alison's story

ask

two





## ALISON'S STORY



## INTRODUCTION

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I first started to be supported by Turning Point Scotland in 2006, in order to find a service that would meet my needs. That service has now been identified.

In May 2007 I attended the Recovery event held by Turning Point Scotland and during the last session which was based on solution circles. I agreed to write my story of recovery so far, paying particular attention to the recruitment process.

Alison is not my real name, it was the name of my imaginary friend when I was growing up, I have only used real names where I have had permission to do so.

*And so the story begins...*

Previously I was in supported accommodation before coming into hospital, but it broke down. It was out with my control and not my fault.

I have been in hospital for over six and half years and I am not proud of it. I am ashamed to say I wasted that amount of time of my life in the hospital. I feel in hindsight I must have needed that time or I would not be here today to tell the tale. I know it may sound dramatic but that is how bad things were at times.

I was sectioned for nearly three years, being sectioned wasn't nice. You have no control to leave also it caused problems with family etc. I can't remember everything from back then because I am feeling 100% times better now. I couldn't get washed, dressed, eat I had no motivation and cried all the time. At that stage I wanted to die every day. I could not see a way out of it all.

Now I see a spark that says maybe you'll make it! Before I did not care, my thinking was so negative I would have hated being around me. I must have been so depressing to be around, and I struggle to understand why staff put up with me.

At my lowest ebb I refused to eat which made me ill then I had constant thoughts of setting myself on fire which terrified me. Eventually I gave into my thoughts at which point I was on constant watch for my own safety.

I think people (staff) thought I would not do such a horrific thing. It had severe consequences including needing a skin graft on my leg. I still suffer in pain. I was on constant watch for one and half years which I benefited from as I was kind of safe but it became not nice, I would just lie in bed with someone watching me. I wanted off it all the time. When I did come off it they had meetings and decided to lock the front door for a few weeks.

Also, more importantly, I was put on what you call interventions where someone came and checked you every 15 minutes and asked if you wanted to talk. This went on for a month then it was cut to every 30 minutes then every hour, then every shift.

At least I knew someone was not watching over me but coming saying “do you want to talk?” At times I did need to talk and at other times I didn’t. I found I coped well, coming off the constants to interventions alright. Interventions were more beneficial than constants. Now I have learned to try and go to them (ward staff) and approach them before things escalate.

What the hospital psychiatrist and ward staff did do was a very well thought out way of helping me. I was given 3 line workers who were fully trained who had been there for a while, also a key worker and an associate worker. They were the ones who mainly dealt with my care. If any concerns or issues were needed to be passed on these link workers would inform the other staff members.



I found all the interventions and link workers more beneficial. I wouldn’t be as independent as I am today if they had not taken it slowly and never given up on me and showed real patience.

I started to get time out with my two link nurses who had built up a trusting relationship with me. We would go to the bingo, shopping, lunch etc. It gave me some freedom back, I did not feel scared because they were both there.

The suicidal thoughts never went away, I talked about them. I felt safe out with the workers. Then I went down to one staff then after a couple of months I sat on the bench outside the ward for 15 minutes by myself with a member of staff observing me, it was hard... not to just go away. Eventually I was able to sit out on the bench without staff observation and started to go out with my friends and also on my own. The process was far from easy, it was slow and took over a year to achieve.

Now I have full unaccompanied time out by myself. Looking back 3 years I would have said “no way! can I go out on my own to get a train and such” I am glad I did it, I am glad my doctor took the patience and time to allow me to do it at my pace.

Sometime I struggle with feeling unsafe and I want to buy pills, go in front of trains, buy razors but I have **CONTROL** now.

I can see myself going from here to my flat, some days it feels quite scary, other days it even feels quite exciting. I want a life on my good days. I don't want to be stuck in hospital.

I am glad my doctor never gave up on me even when I did. Hospital can't do any more for me. I will have a better life in my own flat, a place I can call home. I am not going to say that it will be easy sailing but I will give it my best shot. I really never want to go back into hospital as I will feel a failure. I will miss some of the staff and my doctor, but the hospital environment is not reality, out here is reality and I will need to deal with it with the help of Turning Point Scotland and the hospital staff and my doctor. I will try very hard.

Hospital has its place for people who are very unwell and need to be in a safe place either as they are a risk to themselves or others. Lots of patients you see coming and going get better with medication and other things. Other patients come in and out of hospital on a regular basis and it appears that there is a lack of appropriate support services and not enough supported accommodation or there is not enough places for people with complex needs like myself. It is very sad. I feel guilty that I am getting help.

Medication is part of my recovery but I also need to communicate, talk about what's going on before things escalate and I self harm. I self harm as a way of coping but some ward staff still see it as attention seeking or they take it personally but I don't hurt them. I hurt me.

I feel I have taken back some of the responsibility for my own life as I feel I am growing as a person, gaining confidence and seeing a future. Now it is hard to be treated as an individual and not a label, but I am very grateful for what hospital has done for me.

The downside of being in hospital with other patients who maybe off load their issues on to me, seeing others more distressed, feeling guilty.

I am doing **OK**, I fought hard to try and get what will work for me and help me get a better quality of life. It's been a struggle to get what I needed. I am very grateful to get this chance as others don't. Moving on with Turning Point Scotland's support is a start.



I think labels are horrible and demeaning to people, especially personality disorder. Who doesn't have a personality disorder? If they were brought up differently they would turn out a different person.

Doctors give you labels and don't tell you what it means or how it affects **YOU**. Staff don't get training in it and think that you are manipulative, attention seeking, promiscuous they make up their own minds. Luckily Turning Point Scotland never judged me on my label but got to know me first.



My social worker fought for 24 hour support funding as Turning Point Scotland quoted a price. The top social worker said no. I had a major set back, harming again. After much discussion and me writing to the head of social work the approval was given for my support package.

Some good news at last! Then we had to cross the bridge of trying to get a flat... nightmare. After a year and half finally a flat was offered to me. Turning Point Scotland carried out this thing called a service design which was a fantastic thing to do.

*A service design is a person centred planning tool that provides information on the person, their needs, what needs to be in place to keep them safe, accommodation needs, skills of a staff team, staff training etc.*

*It is not labour intensive and can provide the start of service specification.*

TRACY LUNDIE, SERVICE MANAGER

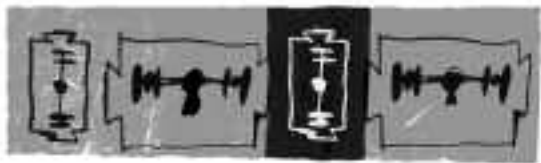
I did all the work for it. The process allowed me to explain what things I can and can not do, what my risks are and what I am like. I think it is a very useful thing to do. Turning Point Scotland work with me as an individual and not someone who they have got to know by my community care assessment and diagnosis and issues I had in the past. They took me as I am and still do.

## RECRUITMENT

It was important to me that Turning Point Scotland got the right people to apply for the job and that people applying for the job knew what issues they would be working with.

I was involved in the making up of the advert that would be placed in the paper. I asked that it only be made available to females as I relate to them better.

I wrote additional information about me that detailed a bit about my background and self harming and abuse history to be included in the application packs, (downside of providing the information was it left me feeling vulnerable **BUT** trusting people is very important, if you don't trust it is hard to let workers know how you feel).



## RECRUITMENT

I was involved in the information nights, meeting the applicants, making up two questions that would be mine to ask. One of the questions was about self harm so that we could judge their reaction.

*As part of the short listing and recruitment process applicants are invited along to an information session.*

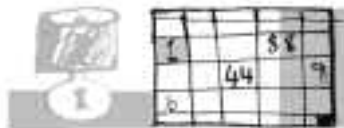
*During this information session they are given information about Turning Point Scotland, the service and the expectations. They are observed by the interview panel and are expected to complete a group exercise that will focus on values.*

*Applicants are told that this is part of the formal process and final short listing and selection for interview takes place at this point.*

TRACY LUNDIE, SERVICE MANAGER

I sat down and discussed the interview process with Tracy. She made it clear that she would have the final say as there was policies in place, but she helped me to understand what to look for, and that I needed to look past appearances, how they dressed, how they talked etc. I knew what the boundaries were and I also knew that my opinion would count in the final decision. I was told who else was going to be on the interview panel and I was able to have some time with them before the first interview.

## RECRUITMENT



At the service coordinator and support worker interviews, I had a worker there for me if I could not cope and needed a break, which was a very helpful idea.

After each interview we would discuss and mark how the person did.

It was so good to be involved in the interviews it made me feel like a person and important. No one belittled me, I was asked my opinion as an equal adult and we all made the joint decision as to who got offered the jobs. I was made to feel at ease and not to be nervous.

The first interview I did was difficult and I did have to leave the room but Tracy and I had agreed a plan and everyone who was being interviewed was told at the beginning that I might leave and come back in, they were told to carry on and not be put off. This helped me because I knew that I could do that.

I was disappointed when people did not attend for their interview and I could not help but to take this personally even though Tracy explained that it was normal and that there would be some reason for them not turning up. I felt a bit vulnerable as they knew my information that was sent out and then never came to the interview.

Applicants had good eye contact with me when answering my questions and they all wished me the best when going out the door... they did not need to do that.

## RECRUITMENT

*I was invited to join the interview panel for the Service Co-ordinator post for Alison's team.*

*This was the first time I had been part of the interview process where a service user had been fully involved from preparing information/application packs to final selection of appropriate person for the post.*

*The interviews were planned to involve both informal and formal elements to allow Alison to be as involved as she wished on the day.*

*I feel that this was very beneficial for the service user, other panel members and the candidates attending interview.*

LINDA WEIR, SERVICE MANAGER

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I have asked a few of the successful workers a few questions to find out how they found the recruitment process...

- How did you find the personal information I wrote in the application pack?
- How did you find the information nights?
- How did you really feel about me being on the interview panel?
- How did you feel about me asking my two questions?  
One being how would they be able to deal with the self harm aspect. I feel I got honest answers.
- After the interview how did you feel?

## RECRUITMENT

### WORKER 1

“After getting the information on you and meeting you I hoped that I would get the job. You gave me valuable insight into who you are. The information was very articulate and you personalised it.”

“I did not know how useful the information session would be, but it WAS helpful. I met other potential colleagues. The folk I was sitting beside I thought were nice and would be good to work with!”

“At the interview I was very nervous, it helped that you were there and I got to see you as a person”

“I was glad you asked questions it helped put me at ease. I knew that you had a say on who got the job and that’s a dynamic that’s not usually there”

“I was relieved after the interview that it went ok and I hoped that I would get the job. After meeting you, I wanted the job very much.”

### WORKER 2

This worker was not at the interviews that I sat in on, but I asked her for quotes on how she found the information that was sent out in the application pack and what she thought of my two questions. I did meet her before she was offered the post and was able to spend some time with her.

“The information sheet on you did not sway me not to come for the interview. I think that it was very helpful because I then knew what

## RECRUITMENT

I was coming to, what type of person to support, it is a good thing. The wording was good and honest”

“The questions were positive and a good idea and I made sure I answered them truthfully.”

I did ask how she would have felt if I was on the interview panel, she said “I think it is a good idea to know who is going to support you. I would have not been any more nervous. I think it is a very positive a good idea that service users are on the interview panel.”

### WORKER 3

“Getting the information was very useful. It was emotional but good. It made me more determined to do the job. Without information people could have put in for the job without knowing what kind of job it is. I had admiration for you being honest, it must have been stressful, but for the better of the recruitment process”

“The information night was very useful, Turning Point Scotland gave more information to make sure people were interested in the job. I think they should definitely have information nights, as it gives opportunities to ask question. It gives people a chance to see if the job is for them. It’s uncanny out of the group I was in, three of us got the job!”

“I have great admiration for you being on the interview panel and admire Turning Point Scotland for putting it in place”

## RECRUITMENT

I was nervous that you were on the panel but excited to meet you. It made me feel better on my first day that you had a say in me getting the job. It is a good thing as you have the right to be on the panel as it is you that will be receiving the support. This may set a precedent for future service users being involved in recruitment.”

“I felt fine about answering the questions and it was only right that you asked them.”

“After the interview I felt good, relaxed, at interview I was made to feel relaxed. I walked into the room and every one smiled, you don’t get that a lot at interviews. I found the panel and you to be considerate people.”

I also asked this worker a burning question that I had, why would she take a drop in salary for this job? Her response was “the salary is a drop but it is worth it, as a cpn I never got to spend time with patients, I wanted this job. It is a unique job and I had never seen an advert like it and that’s what attracted the job to me even more so with your information.”



## RECRUITMENT

### WORKER 4

“I never received the information on you until after the interview, but when I did read it I found it to be an honest, helpful open account of your life. The information never made me think I would not like to be involved with you.”

“I found the information night very good, lots of information available. Turning Point Scotland were upfront about what the job entailed. I was more aware of you feeling uncomfortable. I had admiration for you to walk into a room full of strangers. I was anxious.”

“Personally the service user being on any interview panel was a new experience. I found it very positive. Positive because the interview panel would not be working with me, you would, so it was very important you were there. All in all it was a very positive experience and made perfect sense.”

“I felt fine about answering your questions, I answered them honestly. I guaranteed you that I would not run away screaming if you self harmed, which was one of your questions, I would be there for you 100%.”

“I enjoyed the interview, Turning Point Scotland should have service users on the interview panel.”

## REFLECTIONS

I think it is so much better for service users to be involved in the interview process, asking questions, giving feedback having a voice etc. I have more control as Turning Point Scotland is involving me in the process.

My recovery journey right now is going from a semi protected hospital setting to going into a community setting. It has been slow but I want it to be right so does the social work department and the psychiatrist. I do not want to end up back in hospital again. I know I can make it out there with support. I will be involved in most of the flat stuff like decorating, choosing my own furniture which is exciting.

I do see a future in my flat with my support team; other days I struggle to deal with moving, meeting new workers it stresses me more when I am down.

I know things won't be great when I move, I am still Alison with the same issues, depression, wanting to die etc, but the difference will be that we have picked people who for some reason do want to work with me. They include Tracy, Diane and Kate who already care. Sometimes I think I am going to wake up and it was a dream.

I have a long way to go but I know I am on the right road, I see a future and I am being given a chance. Deep down I believe I want to live, it's just at times it is unbearable. I hope at these times staff don't give up on me when I do. I need to learn to trust and let people know what is going on in my head. I trust Turning Point Scotland workers but it will take time to build up trust with others as I have been hurt a lot.

## REFLECTIONS

I will always be eternally grateful for everything that the hospital has done for me, as they have helped me to be the way I am today. Giving me more independence and confidence. They never gave up even when things did not look like they were getting better. They helped me get my life back.

I sometimes feel that I don't deserve help as it is my fault that I am the way I am today, but I would not choose to feel this way at times, so suicidal.

I would choose to wake up everyday feeling good.

It is how I deal with the very bad days that count and I am sure Turning Point Scotland will help which they have already done a great deal for me so far even though I have not left hospital yet. They are still here for me, they never judge me, they always listen and care. You don't need to be a qualified psychiatric nurse to make a difference in someone's life.

I think the manager Tracy who is handling my care package has been excellent, nothing has ever been a bother when you ask or say something she always has the right answers and cares (no she never paid me to say all that, she is a bit mad though!).

I have done my own risk assessments and identified what the risks are, what staff need to know and how to support me and what I need to do. I am hoping to be involved in my own support plan, something you never see in hospital or are part of. I think it is vitally important

## REFLECTIONS



that service users are involved in their care whether it be a support plan or an interviewing panel. Let them feel that they have a voice and feel important.

I have also only recently started having CPA's (care programming approach), which I wish they had done before. I think it is a good way for everyone working with me and each other to share information, to discuss openly what is happening, who's doing what, where we are at and what else has to be done. It helps me because I get confused very easily as to what people are saying etc.

I am really wanting to make a go of things outside. I could try and set goals but put no time limits on it as if I don't do it I will feel as if I have failed. I would hopefully like to go onto help others who are less fortunate than me. Maybe in the future I can do volunteering so I can feel as if I have achieved something. But I will not put myself under any pressure and will take every day as it comes.

Sorry I have prattled on in the story but I would really like to highlight because you have mental health issues or learning disabilities it doesn't make you daft.

I would like to impress the fact that I got so much out of all Turning Point Scotland and how they have done so much for me over the last 6 months. They did not need to. I was made to feel good with other Turning Point Scotland workers. I think it is something that every Turning Point Scotland service should consider, as it makes you feel part of things and gives you a confidence boost.

## REFLECTIONS



I hope my story can help others, workers even. If service users are in the same boat, let them read it. At least it can show them if you keep trying there is hope that things can get better. I am walking proof of that.

I know I am very fortunate, I have great insight into my issues, it doesn't make it any better. If anyone would have said I would have been in hospital for this long I would have laughed at them. Also at times I never thought I would have been able to leave hospital to a flat the state I was in.

I am grateful to be going into my new flat and I won't be on my own, I will have support and hopefully not have a time limit imposed on when I should be settled and the support reduced. I am not attention seeking I have just always tried to fight to get the right support and I have got it. On my good days I really do genuinely look forward to moving into my flat, having my independence.

Turning Point Scotland is such a great organisation it is such a shame it is not widely recognised, but I am glad I've got them.

I was involved in the whole process which made all the difference. I am proud of my team and I know they will work well together. I would like to say a very big thank you to my doctor for helping me get this far, the commissioning officer for helping out with the funding and housing it was very much appreciated, my social worker who never gave up on me and Tracy, Diane and Kate who have been great.

ALISON



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