



## **Diverse Perspectives on Mental Health**

### *Identity and Relationships*

**Narrator:**

*“The Orphans of Beulah” is a theatre group consisting of mental health service users and survivors. In the following interviews, they talk about their backgrounds, their concerns, and their visions for the future.*

**Narrator:**

*In this section, the Orphans talk about how their experiences have affected their view of themselves as a person.*

**Andrea:**

I was first hospitalised at the age of seventeen and didn't really know what had happened to me when it did.

**Narrator:**

*This is Andrea, who played the advocate in “An Untimely Death on Passchendaele Ward”.*

**Andrea:**

And I remember at that time writing a piece saying that I felt it was the best and also the worst thing that had ever happened to me.

**Chris:**

I had a couple of experiences of mental distress.

**Narrator:**

*This is Chris, who arranged the music.*

**Chris:**

What was diagnosed as er mania or manic depression or bi-polar or high-energy episodes, as I call them. A short time after that when I was maybe recovering um I found my confidence was very very low because I felt like I wasn't able to handle myself properly; I'd felt like I'd done these things which I'd regretted um so it affected my confidence and my energy and my enthusiasm for doing things as well. Um I just felt, not exactly worthless but going towards that.

**Miranda:**

I started suffering from mental health issues, well that I first noticed, when I was about thirteen, about ten years ago now.

**Narrator:**

*This is Miranda, who played Maria.*

**Miranda:**

And I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. I was self-harming and I was suffering with anorexia. I was monitored and I had a family CPN for a while and then um I ended up getting put in an in-patient unit at Highroads Hospital when I was fifteen and um now I've had a baby nine weeks ago, and, I'm dealing a lot better with it than I thought I would do.

**Terry:**

Well, my experience of mental distress began really just after I finished university.

**Narrator:**

*This is Terry, who wrote the play.*

**Terry:**

The summer after that I think it was very depressing to me because I didn't really quite know what I was going to do so I, I would say at that time I got, I got very depressed for several months. Eventually I did get to my GP and I got some anti-depressants and, and kind of got through that phase all right, and, and I was fine then until um the the spring of nineteen seventy-five when I had a, what got diagnosed as a, as an acute paranoid schizophrenic episode. I was in hospital for about three months and that repeated itself some years later um and, and over the next ten years I had four hospitalisations really.

**Andrea:**

I think it has dented my confidence, maybe stopped me from doing things that I might like to do, particularly travelling for fear of horrendous kind of circumstances that would be really horrible, but I think I am learning how to put coping strategies into my life, not take on too much, um and deal with things in a better way.

**Terry:**

It, it really fractured my life, being taken into hospital. It felt as if I'd stepped through into another world really, because all, all my life up until then, um, I'd been told about people who were mad, you know, over there somewhere, apart from the rest of us, the normal people, and then overnight it felt like I'd stepped through the looking glass into that world and suddenly I was one of them forever because once you're over there you can't ever get back because you're, you've got that label of someone who has been on a psychiatric ward so, it it was a complete change at that point, and I think I felt that stigma for several years.

**Miranda:**

My experience of mental distress has affected my life in different ways. Um, while I'm mentally distressed I feel, well distressed, obviously and it it seems to be very damaging to my life but because of the experience that I've been through it in the past and suffering for so long with mental health problems it's, it's given me a strength to get through things and so while I'm suffering I know that the next day I can be fine, and every experience I go through is making me stronger, and when I look back it actually makes me feel proud that I've actually got through experiences. Um, so, in that way, I can look upon them as positive, even while I'm going through distressing times.

**Chris:**

Obviously it's affected myself in that I have been through that experience so I can recognise that that's a part of life, it's not something that I can measure and say definitely it's made me a much better, more wholesome person, but it's given me that insight.

**Andrea:**

And if things do go wrong I kind of go back and try things again. I don't particularly give up easily. Um, I am kind of more up-front and will actually say 'hey yes, I do have mental health issues or have had', um, probably not great always to do that but I feel more comfortable with other people and with myself not hiding that sometimes I am not very well and I think that's positive.

**Narrator:**

*A diagnosis of mental illness can have a profound effect on a person's social standing. We asked the Orphans what effect their experience had had on their relationships. Here's Terry.*

**Terry:**

Having mental distress and being in hospital has changed my relationships with people profoundly. I lost contact with almost everyone to be honest, apart from my family, so my new set of friends was really people I'd met in hospital, or their friends, so, so that was a big change for me.

**Miranda:**

When I first started suffering with mental health problems, um my experience had a really negative impact on my family and I ended up going into foster care because of it.

**Narrator:**

*Miranda*

**Miranda:**

I kept running away from home. It made me feel like desperation to get away from myself and get away from others. The impact that that has on your mind is that nobody else likes you, I couldn't trust anybody else, especially not psychiatrists and CPNs.

**Chris:**

When I was going through a high energy a manic or whatever phase, being up all night and that kind of thing um obviously it annoyed a lot of people.

**Narrator:**

*Chris*

**Chris:**

The only surviving member of my family was my mother at the time and it was very difficult, extremely difficult for her; difficult for me a bit later on but it kind of, in a way, coming out of that it made the relationship more honest. I felt we were able to talk more as people, if you like.