

## Helga's Story

Finding oneself unemployed can be an unsettling time for most people. Financial uncertainty coupled with negotiating the benefits system can lead to many people feeling overwhelmed and anxious about how they will provide for their families. When the Job Centre referred Helga to our Hopeful Families programme for support with her anxiety, Helga herself admitted she was struggling to cope. "I did not know how ill I was. I kept putting on a front I was at the end of my tether. I was so overwhelmed with my anxiety, signing on at the Job Centre and sanctions."

Helga has three sons and is a carer for both her mum, 91, and one of her sons who lives in sheltered accommodation. Juggling the responsibility of caring for family with the pressure to find work was affecting Helga's ability to cope, she felt stuck and didn't know where to start.

After meeting with her Hopeful Families mentor, Helga agreed to see her GP about help for her anxiety. She was prescribed medication which helped her regain focus and made her anxiety more manageable. Through regular meetings with her Family Mentor Helga learned to slow down her approach and take things step by step. This led to her feeling less overwhelmed by all the conflicting pressures in her life.

Helga said: "Since seeing the Family Mentor and the help from Hopeful Families I am more able to express my needs and feelings. I am putting things behind me, and letting go of the past. I am more focussed and not letting things get to me the same. I am still on a journey, it is still slow but now I feel normal. If things go wrong, I do not really panic, I know I'll deal with it. I am not crying as much."

As Helga's mental health began to improve and her confidence grew she attended courses to support her emotional wellbeing. The courses covered things like arts and crafts, as well as practical skills such as health and safety at work. As well as her emotional wellbeing, Helga's Family Mentor supported her in the practical side of her job search, helping her to write a CV and apply for jobs and offering financial support with bills and benefits.

Helga now works 10 hours a week in a paid role and is enjoying the rewards of paid work: "I love it. The people are nice and I'm left to get on with my work – there is no one telling me what to do. Before I didn't know what I wanted to do." In addition to paid work Helga now volunteers at Halifax Opportunities Trust on the Hopeful Families project and is working towards our volunteering certificate. She has also become more involved with the local community, attending her local church and helping with activities there as well as making time to volunteer in her local charity shop.

"Being on Hopeful Families has been the best thing ever, I have had so much help and support. I am so grateful and thankful for Hopeful Families, the Family Mentor and the staff at Halifax Opportunities Trust."

Well done Helga – we don't know where you find the time to fit it all in!



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