

## Supported Employment Makes a Difference

A case study from the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE).

This case study has been compiled by The Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) to illustrate the difference that a job, employment support and a good job match between the individual and the work can make to someone. SUSE believes that more support should be available to people with long term health conditions and disabilities who want to work, and it hopes that stories like these will encourage that support to flourish.

Jane is enthusiastic and determined and had worked in a responsible position with a national company for over seventeen years. Jane had mental health issues, and in late 2009 had a break-down. This resulted in her being admitted to hospital, moving out of work, losing her confidence and spending a lot of time at home alone in her bedroom. However, in 2010 Jane started going to a Penumbra Project in Dunfermline, which helped her on her recovery journey.

Jane's psychologist referred her to The Fife Employment Access Trust (FEAT). When Jane met with her Employment Support Worker, Elaine, they got on well straight away. The majority of FEAT staff have personal experience of mental health conditions, and Jane felt the employment support worker's experience was key to providing Jane with the sort of support she needed. At the time, Jane says that she was "eager to work but not sure that (she was) ready".

Jane attended courses offered by FEAT including Living Life to the Full (Cognitive Behavior Therapy), which really worked for her. At first she "wasn't able to do groups", and wouldn't stand up and give her name when they started. By the end, she was a chatty group member.



*Jane receiving an employee award at the Scottish Business Diversity Awards 2011*

Jane was interested in "giving back" to the community because she felt that she had been helped by so many people during her recovery and she was interested to work in a care environment. FEAT supported Jane to volunteer for 3 hours one day a week in a care home, which she loved. However, she wanted to do more.

With the increase in confidence the support from FEAT had brought, Jane went around care homes in her area and asked about possible employment. A relative told her about a job with Kingdom Homes, who provide residential care for older people. She applied and was offered the full-time post. Jane decided to tell her employer about her history of mental ill health and the employer was supportive from the start, saying that Jane shouldn't keep any issues or worries back, but rather come to talk to her.

When Jane began work in the middle of 2011, Elaine from FEAT would meet up with her about every two weeks to talk about the job and how Jane was feeling. She was available if Jane wanted to call about work at any time. Over time, that contact has decreased significantly, although the Employment Support Worker remains in touch with Jane. Jane's job has brought her satisfaction, and she says she wishes she'd been able to move into it years ago. She is a committed and skilled employee, enjoys care work, empathises with residents and is a strong member of the team. She "feel(s) good" about being a member of the night shift team, who are supportive to her. Jane says that since starting work she "doesn't have time to think about herself", and it "puts life into perspective".

When Jane started work she was seeing a doctor weekly; a psychologist every two weeks; had a hospital appointment every two weeks and on the alternative week was going to the Penumbra project. Now, eight months after starting work, Jane sees her G.P. monthly and psychologist every two weeks. Jane is increasingly managing her own mental health and recovery: learning to spot the signs of a down patch approaching and taking action to go and talk to someone about it – including her manager on the night shift; and planning for changes at work, e.g. moving to the day shift, over time in line with her recovery journey.

The marked decrease in the support Jane now has from the mental health system indicates significant improvements in Jane's mental health and wellbeing. There is a positive impact on another level too, as a reduced use of services will provide virtual savings to the mental system. Jane's new job has improved her physical health, increased her independence and optimism. Before Jane started work she said she was lacking in energy but now she has lost a stone in weight and is enthusiastic about her work, and learning. She is being supported by her manager to study for a SVQ and is looking forward to palliative care and dementia training opportunities.

When Jane began working at the Kingdom home she was being driven to and from work by her husband. Recently, her anxiety about driving has decreased; she has a car and is delighted to be driving herself to and from work.

Jane says that the job has: "**changed my life**".

Although Jane worried she'd face insurmountable difficulties getting back into work, now she is in a job that interests her, her confidence is increasing, she is learning and is pleased with her life and her work.

