

A Carer's Perspective

An account of the Yorkshire Centre for Eating Disorders, written by the carer of a former service user.



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Becoming a carer for a family member with an eating disorder is very difficult. It challenges your attitudes to mental health conditions and above all, will test your love and patience for someone dear to you.

It happened to us almost overnight. Our loved one who had been living and working in another part of the UK, suddenly asked if she could come to live back home and by the time she arrived 3 weeks later she was seriously ill.

It was only 6 months since we had last seen her, but now she was thin, her skin was grey, her hair was falling out and she would only eat tiny amounts of fruit or vegetables. We had entered the unknown and gradually discovered that we were carers.

After 6 months of wrestling with everything that an eating disorder could throw at us, including eating problems, deceit, under and overreactions to minor events at home, and a variety of unexpected challenges, our loved one was admitted to YCED at Seacroft Hospital in Leeds. We were unsure what was happening and to test us even further, we were met with a confidentiality wall of silence because our loved one was over 18 years old.

Gradually from books, online searching and a carers' workshop we began to understand why some things had happened, and more importantly how to react. Our loved one received fantastic treatment from YCED and was eventually discharged after 7 months with a safe BMI and most importantly the knowledge of how to maintain it.

From our experience, there are 3 main things to be ready for when you become a carer of an adult with an eating disorder. First, expect the unexpected; remember it is a mental health illness not a fad! Second, be prepared to quiz the professionals caring for your loved one until you understand what is happening. Finally, never give up, lose hope or doubt that a recovery is possible!