



Transcript:

Wendy Davies:

I was married for eighteen years, had three children, and the marriage broke up. We just basically grew apart.

I met somebody else, and meeting that somebody else I got myself pregnant with my son. I had to fight for my children; I had to go to from house where I had absolutely everything, security, into going to living with somebody else in one bedroom. And in that relationship, just before I gave birth to my son I found out that the partner I was with was cheating on me, and then he started hitting me, all the money was going because he was gambling everything, But I bottled everything up, kept it to myself.

And when I gave birth, even then when they just give you the baby I didn't want him. People were coming in and he was just laying there crying, because I didn't want to hold him. And when the family came over I put on a front for them, and I did what I had to do, I looked after him and did what I had to do, but I completely rejected him. I remember the health visitor coming round and she got me to fill in this form, which I filled in and she said that there's signs of post-natal depression, did I feel fine? I told her I did, obviously I didn't, but I said "Yeah, I'm fine, everything's fine". And then because of how I was feeling I didn't like going out, so I never took Dominic to the health visitors for checks, I only took him for his jabs, where before, with my other kids, I took them every two weeks to get weighed, but with Dominic I didn't do that.

I thought I had nothing else, so I decided the best way out for me was to take my life. I tried it three times. On the third attempt my sister found me and then my family knew, so I knew I had to try and sort something out for myself. So I went to the doctors myself, told them how I felt, I still wished that I was dead, and the next day they sent someone round my house from Northover, so I thought that's it, they are going to take my son. But they didn't they helped me.

Narrator:

Northover is one of three community mental health teams in Lewisham, and over four months Wendy received weekly counselling sessions to help her with the depression. Stephanie Edwards is the Centre Manager for the Northover community mental health team in Lewisham.

Stephanie Edwards:

When parents with mental health issues come into the service at Northover for their initial assessment we try to take a holistic

approach to looking at their needs. And we will automatically look at whether the person is a parent and take the information about the child, if they are a child, and the needs of that child as part of our assessment. We don't see the person within the context of their illness; it's within the context of their whole family.

We referred Wendy to Building Bridges, because we could clearly see that she'd benefit from such an organisation, and knowing that Building Bridges would provide the support that she required, along with us working with her here at Northover.

Narrator: Children's Services commissioned Building Bridges and Bryony Hallam is Regional Manager at Family Action.

Bryony Hallam: Family Action is a national charity, whose whole remit is to support families. They've been around for a very long time, in fact since the mid-eighteen hundreds. Building Bridges is a specific model for work that Family Action developed about ten years ago. And the Lewisham Building Bridges was the very first Building Bridges in the country, so we've been going here for about ten years. And the idea behind Building Bridges is to bridge the gap between adult mental health services and children and family services, and to provide support for the whole family.

Wendy Davies: The first couple of times I went, I'll be honest, I hated it. I didn't know these women; I thought they were all going to be judging me. I did find it really hard; I didn't really talk at first. But after the first two weeks, when you start hearing other people, you start to realise, hold on, I am not the only one, that person is worse off than me. So I started to open up, and then I looked forward to going. Even sometimes I just went up at ... I used to bottle everything up, I knew I could go there on a Tuesday, I knew my son wouldn't hear me crying, he's in the crèche, and I could just cry and talk about anything that I wanted. And I knew whatever we said stayed in that room.

I lot of people think that they are going to take your kids away, all the time, but building Bridges aren't like that, they are there to keep the family together. And they didn't just support me with Dominic, even though he was the only one living with me; they supported me with my other kids as well.

Gareth had a lot of issues with his anger, he started having a lot of problems at school with bullying, he wasn't bullying, he was being bullied. And then he started making himself sick. I spoke to Building Bridges, they recommended Kaleidoscope and he finally got counselling, and it seemed to help.

Narrator: Lewisham is an implementation site for the Social Care Institute for Excellent Guide, Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family, which aims to improve the life chances of families affected by parental mental health difficulties.

- Bryony Hallam: One of the things that we'd like to see more of is multi-disciplinary training, for example. Here in Lewisham we have actually run some multi-disciplinary training, and we've got adult mental health workers, and children and family workers together in the same room. And that's been very, very positive, because they've been able to learn from each other. And once you begin to open up dialogue between them, once both sides have a sense of a person on the other end of the phone, there's far more chance that they will actually talk to each other.
- Stephanie Edwards: Taking multi-agency approaches is very important to ensure that the expertise from all areas is used.
- Narrator: It is imperative that agencies agree from the outset with families and with each other, what information is important, who it needs to be shared with, and how.
- Stephanie Edwards: Joint assessments with colleagues from children's services or from the voluntary sector, actually provides a larger picture, and it can ensure that families don't have lots of different care plans from lots of agencies, and that they have a plan that they are working to which is acknowledged by all agencies working with the parent and child.
- Narrator: The local authority in Lewisham is encouraging a multi-agency approach to resolve problems that may be near, or in crisis. Odette Ellis from Building Bridges is part of that panel.
- Odette Ellis: We are working with the Early Intervention Locality Panel, which is a pilot scheme based in one area, and if it works hopefully it will roll out across the Borough. What this is, is it's a panel of people that get together on a weekly basis, and we look at individual families that could possibly be near crisis point, and we work together multi-agency, so around the table there could be maybe the health visitor that brought the family, there would be a commissioner there. There would also be maybe YOTs are involved, which is a youth offending team, there would be a community mental health, health visitor, doctor etc. And what we would then do is we'd look at how we could support this family, but quite quickly, because it's got to that stage where they need some real quick intervention. And then what we would do is we then go back to the panel on the review date and look at what's worked and what hasn't worked. And also for the voluntary sector, because they can step in where maybe the statutory sector can't.
- Narrator: In Lewisham the impact of mental ill health on the existing family, or the family to be, has been recognised, and so a perinatal project has been set up.
- Odette Ellis: Perinatal work is where you work with the mother prior to the birth, and up to a year after.

- Stephanie Edwards: Lewisham is fortunate enough to have a perinatal service within the borough, that we can start working with that service even when woman are thinking about becoming pregnant.
- Odette Ellis: The early intervention works better. So within the perinatal project, if we start to offer a support service prior to the birth of the baby, then they won't slip through the net, and have to wait so many months after the birth to receive that service.
- Narrator: All of the referrals are from different services within the Lewisham Borough, including the community mental health team, health visitors, midwives, LA, children's and family services and schools.
- Odette Ellis: What we can do is work with that mother, as we would with Wendy, and look at how she feels, and then we can put a care plan into place up until the birth, and then up to a year after. And then work with other agencies involved to make sure she's got a plan in place for her and the rest of her family, including the new baby.
- Stephanie Edwards: With the perinatal service in Lewisham today, we'd hope that Wendy would be picked up at a far earlier stage, perhaps when she was pregnant, and she may never have been referred to Northover following the birth of her child.
- Narrator: As a result of Northover taking a whole family approach, and referring Wendy to Building Bridges, she now feels like she has something to live for.
- Stephanie Edwards: At Northover we've always tried to think child, think parent, think family. But I think the SCIE guidelines will help us develop our strategy in the future, to become a better service overall.
- Bryony Hallam: I think what the guide is going to do, is ensure that adults with mental health problems, and their children, are not going to be treated separately as they have been up until now. What it will do is to actually make people think about parents in the context of their family, and children in the context of their family as well.
- Wendy Davies: I needed that facility from Building Bridges to help with the family support. Not just for me, but for my kids. I needed the crèche for somewhere for the children to go, and I needed time on my own. So if it wasn't for Northover doing that, I don't think ... if they had just left me, I don't think I'd be where I am today.

[End of Recording]