

# KAYLEIGH

Kayleigh suffered from many difficult physical symptoms and from ME. She has generously written something of her journey for this edition and shared her artwork.

'I was born into the world on the 8th December 1990, the fourth and last child for my mum, a very caring woman with a soft heart. A few days later I was brought home to meet my three siblings. Not only was I the youngest of my siblings I was also youngest of ten cousins; so I had a lot of family members to spoil me. My early childhood was very enjoyable I definitely had a lot of love coming my way from my mum and siblings; it wasn't until a few years later that I started to notice the cracks in our family.

'My dad was a very hard working man, he definitely kept a nice roof over our heads but to my dad this was the beginning and end of his parental duties. When I was about seven I noticed that we went from a family of six down to a family of four. Graham and Kim (who were ten years older than Shaun and me) were never around; they did everything they could to avoid being in our family and house. At the time I did not comprehend why. I found out as I got older.

'At ten I was very confident, but as soon as I went into secondary school I turned into a very anxious, self-conscious girl, who suffered terribly with intimidation and shyness. I was so shy I would hardly talk. When I was thirteen I started having trouble with some of my friends who had turned into my bullies. This situation caused me to start suffering with depression, depression so bad that I had two years off school; I spent the whole time in bed. My mum and my doctor were extremely concerned about me but no one else in my family believed I was ill. They would make horrible comments and ignore me. They don't talk about their feelings so they expected me to be the same. When you're suffering with severe depression and you feel like the world is against you, you really need your family's support, I didn't have this and I felt so much worse for not having this.

'When I was sixteen I had slowly started to climb out of the black hole of depression back into the normal world. I decided to get into work as I didn't want to go to college; I didn't want to be around anybody my own age as I didn't trust them. Unfortunately when I went to work I started to suffer really badly with anxiety and depression again. This time was different as I felt I was unable to have time off, so I suffered and struggled through every day. I was basically on a knife-edge 24/7 which was no good for my health but I felt I had no choice. Everyone in my family works no matter how ill or bad they feel and they expected me to do the same. I had already been labelled a skiver by my family. The mental torture I got was a lot worse than the physical pain I was in, so I carried on working.

'A few weeks before my eighteenth birthday I had to have a week off work because of a throat virus, but when I returned to work my health was never the same again. I started to suffer with irritable bowel syndrome, extreme fatigue, tiredness and a general feeling of being unwell. I had test after test done at the doctors but nothing came back and the doctors conclusion was there was nothing wrong with me. I felt there was no way my family or anyone else would believe I was ill. I also felt like the doctor didn't believe me so I kept working until I couldn't take it anymore. I felt like I had been pushed into a corner and either way I turned I would be wrong. I couldn't take it no more so I tried to commit suicide. It's sad, but after my failed suicide attempt some people, but regrettably not my own family, started to believe me and I was referred for further tests to try and find out why I felt so ill.

'A year later I was diagnosed with ME. The professor suggested a special kind of therapy to help with my depression, anxiety, tiredness and stress. I welcomed this as I knew I wasted a lot of time worrying about things I shouldn't. I knew that my childhood affected me a lot in ways I didn't understand. Before I had cognitive analytic therapy I truly believed that negative thoughts and negative thinking was simply a fact of life, been there since day one, going to be there until the end and that we had to put up with it in-between. It wasn't until I started having CAT I realised this wasn't the case.

'Ever since I can remember I've experienced problems with my self-confidence. My dad would constantly put the whole family down with horrible degrading comments, and everyone suffered with confidence issues. My dad had a tough upbringing and suffered with low self-esteem so the way he made himself feel better was to pick on us so we felt worse than him. This horrible trait was passed down to my siblings Graham and Kim. This meant that not only did I have my dad putting me down, my siblings did it as well and as the youngest me and Shaun seriously got picked on.

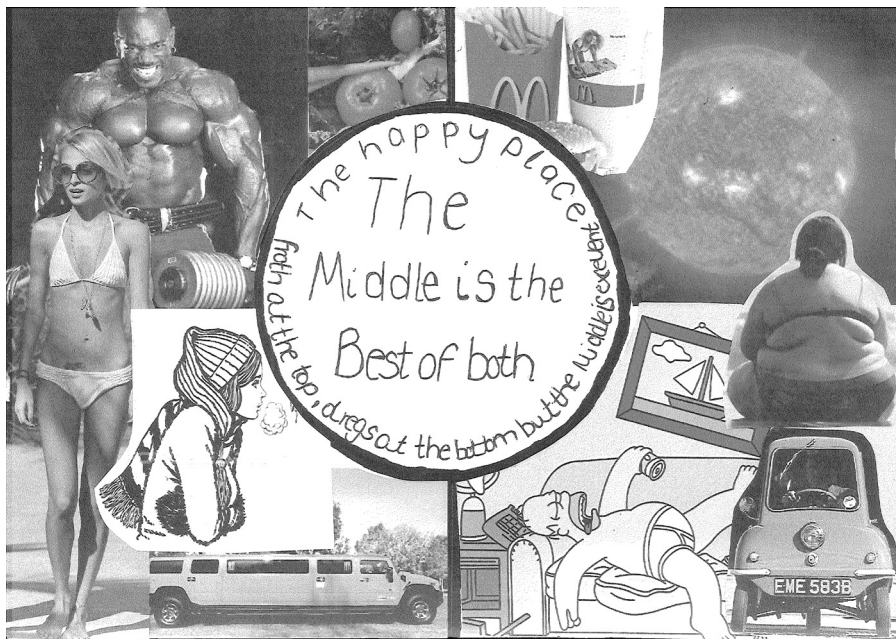
'I found it quite slow at the beginning of CAT but after a few weeks I started discovering things that astonished me. I had no idea how much my family and their ways affected me. Because I'd lived with them for so long I almost accepted that this was the way that everybody lived. It wasn't until I had CAT that I started to realise that this was not normal. It was not OK for them to treat me the way they did.'

## Goals of CAT

'When I realised that my family put me down to make themselves feel better I decided I no longer wanted this to happen, so I worked on not letting them put me down any more. I first needed to realize there was nothing wrong with me and that the problem lied [sic] with the person making the nasty comments. I also worked on answering them back. Before, my way of dealing with it was to laugh it off or put myself down. I didn't want to cause a fight with my reply I just wanted to stand up for myself, so I worked hard and found some reply that would do this. Being prepared helped me a lot. I would prepare myself for the comments in advance so I could come up with the right reply. It was hard to begin with but with each comment and reply it got a little easier.

'One day my sister-in-law Emma made a comment and my response came before I had the chance to think about what to say back. Afterwards I realised what a huge accomplishment this was, my prepared and quick reaction was my first example of how well I was doing with the CAT exits. What also happened after I answered my family back was that those who had put me down started chucking compliments my way and this just made me see how weak they were.

'Another thing I struggle with is I've always been a perfectionist. Mum told me when I was younger and colouring in if I went just a tiny bit over the line I would screw up the picture and start again (I must not have finished any pictures.) After talking about this I realised that being a child who never got any attention or praise from my dad I would work extra hard to try and get some. I never did get any praise but what this situation left me with was trying to be perfect in everything. It even affects my ME. I was advised to pace myself and walk a few yards a day, slowly increase until I can walk a far distance. But I would either walk really far and wear myself out so I wouldn't be able to do any more for the rest of the week, or I would do none. When I got to the point where I should stop for the day I would feel so disappointed, judging myself as pathetic that I could only walk this far. On the days where I felt exhausted and thought about walking the recommended distance I would think I'd rather sit here and do nothing than walk and feel like a failure.



**Kayleigh's poster**

'I started to find ways to challenge this bad habit. My therapist suggested doing some visual work, so I made a poster (see below). The poster is about two different extremes: fanatical exercise or too lazy; too hot or too cold. The poster helped me re-educate myself on how to think about extremes. Life is about finding a healthy balance; I discovered a saying which is 'froth at the top, dregs at the bottom but the middle is excellent'. I use this quote when I either find myself being too much of a perfectionist or when I'm being a lazy bum. It really helps; it reminds me of all the things I learnt during CAT.

'CAT has seriously changed my life. Although earlier counselling helped me cope with the here and now I still felt something wasn't quite right, something was still holding me back but I could never figure out quite what it was. I discovered the things that were buried deep inside me from childhood. I really did rediscover the innocent child inside and learned how to reconnect with her. I realised that I still had the right to be that child. We are all born free with a clean slate it's the people around us that make that clean slate dirty and make us feel like we have chains around us. My course of CAT has removed those chains and I now feel ready to achieve my wildest dreams.'