

'I'm an active member of the community – thanks to JET'

An Islander who lives with schizophrenia says that having a job, with support from JET, is a vital part of him being an active member of the community.

Luke Canavan has been an administrator at the Government of Jersey's Strategy Policy Planning and Performance department for two and a half years, the longest he has stayed in a job.

'I came to JET because I was having a lot of difficulty obtaining employment,' he said. 'I found it difficult to explain myself in interviews especially when it came to telling them I had a mental illness. And usually by that point, along with gaps in my CV, the functionality of the interview would be over.'

Only around 13% of people living with schizophrenia in the UK are in any kind of work (livingwithschizophreniauk.org). With the right treatment and support, people living with the condition can manage their symptoms and perform meaningful work but stigma, discrimination and lack of support continue to be barriers to employment. Luke said: 'I think there is still a stigma about schizophrenia but I'm in a bit of a bubble now as I have friends who are fine with it. They don't really see the ill side of me now that I can contain it with medication and I have support from JET.'



'This is often what JET support looks like' –
Emma Burns and Luke Canavan catch up over coffee

Luke has suffered from anxiety, depression, and hebephrenic (or disorganised) schizophrenia, and he is partially deaf.

'One of my symptoms which has been lifelong which I've struggled for employers to accept is sleep issues, which can flare up,' he said. 'Being in a demanding, stressful environment will only make things worse. For example, being told that your benefits will stop unless you attend a meeting at 9 am will only cause stress and in turn make my sleep worse.'

'My first Employment Co-ordinator was such a calming influence and there are lots of things that JET have done for me.'

One of those things is asking the employer to make reasonable adjustments, such as allowing Luke to start work later in the day or allowing him to attend hospital psychiatry appointments without having to owe the time back.

'These things help reduce stress, which means I have the capacity to go the extra mile for work because I have the energy levels,' he said.

Luke's Employment Co-ordinator Emma Burns checks in with him every two weeks, usually over a coffee at a town café.

'It's an opportunity for Luke to get things off his chest if he needs to,' she explained.

'We help keep him on track. We are a safety net, and that gives him security. We do regular case reviews but this will continue for as long as he needs it.'

'This is often what JET support looks like. It isn't always about the job searching, it's about talking through things that could prevent a situation or issue in the future. The pastoral side of our job is huge.'

Luke added: 'It's helpful for people who have an illness and medical symptoms in the background to have someone who's passionate about supporting people like me, so I can have a conversation in a way that I might not be able to have with my mum or my friends. It really is therapeutic. It might be hard to quantify but if you look at the fact that I have stayed in work, as of February or March this year, I surpassed the longest I have ever been in employment, so it's clearly working.'

'JET is vital. Had I not been referred to JET, I wouldn't be as well as I am now. I have a much healthier life, and I am making better decisions. Other departments, organisations and professionals have helped me as well, but had JET not been there, the whole lot would probably have collapsed.'

'It's a bit like a bolt in the steel girders. If you take out the bolt, the rest might support the structure, but it would be a bit wonky and over time it may end up collapsing.'

'Being in work is a vital part of me being an active member of the community, to volunteer outside work, to pay my taxes, to take part in sport and to have a social life.'

Hebephrenic schizophrenia

Hebephrenic schizophrenia typically develops in people aged 15 to 25. It includes auditory and visual hallucinations, delusions of control, false beliefs, withdrawal of thoughts and an element of religious-based delusion. It is often characterised by shallow or inappropriate emotional responses, or bizarre behaviour.

According to a survey by Focus on Mental Illness:

*The majority (75.4%) of people severely affected by mental illness who took the survey reported discrimination as being widespread in Jersey.

*87.5% reported that the fear of being stigmatised or discriminated against had stopped them things they want to do.

*57% of people severely affected by mental illness said it stopped them applying for a job or a promotion.