



Sharing hope ...

Fleur, 37, Christchurch

After living through depression, complex PTSD, seventeen years of self-harming, and numerous long-term hospital admissions, Fleur Eveleigh says she was “at the end of the road.”

At any given time, she had 80-100 stitches in her legs. She’d received multiple blood transfusions and was operating on half the amount of blood a person should have. Her doctors said that her behaviour was “incompatible with life.”

Then, in 2016, she was given the opportunity to go to Te Whare Mahana. For Fleur, this would be the turning point she desperately needed.

She spent 53 weeks participating in the intensive DBT programme, and says it’s the most challenging and rewarding thing she’s ever done.

“You have to be ready to do the work, because it’s really hard. It’s constant, and I wanted to quit at times. But you get the support and encouragement you need.”

Having spent so much time in hospitals, both in emergency rooms and acute mental health units, Fleur says Te Whare Mahana is completely different.

“You don’t get better in a ward. They’re there to contain you when you’re unsafe. It can be very “them and us.” But at Te Whare the attitude towards mental illness is different. They treat you like a real person.

Ending up in a ward is one of the hardest things ever. I’m determined not to go there again. I’ve got the skills now and I’m in a better space.”

Fleur says everyone would benefit from learning the DBT skills taught at Te Whare Mahana, not just people with mental illness. Those skills include emotion management, distress tolerance, and developing healthy interpersonal relationships – all things that she feels are at her fingertips now.

“I don’t have to think about it; they pop into my head without trying.”





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During her time in the programme, she learned to build confidence and practice the skills by interacting with fellow residents, leading group lessons, and being part of the Golden Bay community. Far from being institutionalised, she was encouraged to play an active role in running the house, from planning the shopping to cooking meals.

“The first six months is basically learning the skills, the second is implementing them. The skills don’t fix your problems, but give you a different way of coping so you don’t go down a destructive route.”

That pattern of destruction almost cost Fleur her life, and has left her with permanent physical scars. But, she says, she’s not ashamed of her journey.

Since graduating from Te Whare Mahana in November 2017, Fleur has returned to her home community and her busy job. During the first few months, she was supported by ongoing contact with staff at Te Whare, via phone and Skype.

She has confidence she didn’t feel before, and hope for the future. She says her time at Te Whare made “an enormous difference” to her life.

“Twelve months on, my friends are still telling me I’m a new person. That’s because before TWM I was more dead than alive – and now I’m very much alive.

“It’s an amazing place, and there should be more like it in New Zealand.”

