

## Case Study

### Art, illness and recovery

Jillo Wisternoff has been an artist all her life and when she became ill it was art therapy that really helped.

Jillo was first ill in 1999 and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and treated at Barrow hospital. Having made a good recovery, she began working again part-time as well as volunteering in mental health and then working with the art therapy team at Callington Road Hospital.

Having stopped medication, a period of intense personal stress led to another psychotic episode in 2008 which required inpatient care again. For the next five years Jillo was a community patient.

“My self-esteem was at rock bottom, I felt that I had failed my life and was acutely embarrassed at being ‘mentally ill’ again. On anti-depressants and anti-psychotics my weight started to gain and soon I couldn’t bear for my friends and family to see me.”

Although under the care of a community mental health team nothing worked to bring Jillo out of her depression until she tried art therapy.

“I had spent five years in deep depression, visited only by one good friend and the mental health professionals – twice tried suicide – I was in a mess. Finally I started to come back to myself mainly through attending art therapy. At first I only used pencil and didn’t want to allow myself to enjoy the sessions. Finally I let myself use colour, and now I never stop. I thank the art therapy sessions for reminding me who I really was, an artist. Now I always have a painting on the way and have exhibited my work many times.”

Jillo works on canvas and with photographs and is particularly interested in exploring themes around music and computers. She is always willing to share her experience of mental ill health and is part of Bristol Mental Health’s service user groups. She has also volunteered with Time to Change and has taken part in research through the Bipolar Disorder Research Network.

