



# CASE STUDIES

## #KNOWYOURNORMAL

### MY EXPERIENCE – EATING DISORDERS



After creating routines and repetition around food, I was diagnosed with anorexia at the age of 9, despite not reaching all the diagnostic criteria. Three years later I was diagnosed with autism. Having so many labels at a young age made building an identity difficult, especially if it felt like labels did not fit. Eating disorder inpatient treatment was a relief as I could meet people with shared experiences and inpatient units have lots of routine and repetition. I became institutionalised and found it hard to cope in the ‘outside world’, so I started to want to stay ill, so I could be safe in the comfort of the inpatient hospitals. I could socialise with people who might understand a part of me and I found the confinement enjoyable, but looking back I lost my teenage years, hurt my body and have left myself riddled with the anxiety of not sticking to my routines and rules.

It is likely that I wasn’t anorexic when first diagnosed. I believe I was an autistic child with the need to control my exploration and learning about food. I enjoyed the experience of living in hospital because of the routines and repetition, leading me to repeatedly damage my body so I could go into treatment. Ultimately however, this severely impacted my development.

It is important to note that my autistic self liking the predictable hospital environment does not mean being autistic was supported in a mental health setting.

### WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED

- 1 If the professionals involved with me when I was 9 had known enough about autism to realise that’s what my diagnosis should have been and supported me with what I was actually struggling with.
- 2 Later, my time in treatment might have benefited me, had they acknowledged my individual needs and adapted my treatment to take these into account.
- 3 If I had been able to see the same professionals who understood me, my needs and my communication methods.

