

Jackie Hammond draft commemorative statement about Diana Hammond – 21.10.2024

My name is Jackie Hammond and I am the daughter of Diana Hammond, who was born 9th April 1945 and died aged 60, on 3rd December 2005. My mum died at Broomfield Hospital A&E after absconding from the Linden Centre in Essex, where she had been getting treatment.

I have two younger brothers.

My mum was always very loving, and everyone loved her. She was chatty and bubbly and always good with children. However, my mum suffered with Recurrent Depressive Disorder and Bipolar. She experienced very high highs and very low lows. She would have manic episodes and mood swings and would suffer from periods of no sleep. My first memory of my mum having a mental health crisis was when I was about 10 years old.

It was at this time that she tried to harm us so we went to live with my aunt for a year or so. We moved a couple of years after that. I recall my mum being well for the early part of the move, but then the stress of it all being too much for her and her mental health deteriorating.

My mum had suffered with suicidal thoughts and had multiple admissions into mental health facilities. She made multiple attempts to end her life, including one occasion when my younger brother had found her. I have found out since her death that she attempted suicide more times than we knew when she was alive, but I do not know how many attempts were made.

There were sustained periods in which my mum was well, the longest being 15 years. I was in my late 20s during this time and had gone to work in Australia, as I felt she was well enough that I could go, although I would come home every year to see them as I got homesick. During this time, she was on medication that seemed to fit her well. It was after I got back from Australia, around 2003, that her medication was changed.

I don't know why her medication was changed as she had been stable. At the time she was treated by a doctor in Southminster and my dad just told me that they had changed it but didn't elaborate on the reasons. We weren't told much when we were younger, as our dad dealt with much of the detail of caring and supporting our mum. He still finds it very difficult to talk about my mum and what happened.

In 2003, after my mum's medication was changed, she was treated on and off at the Linden Centre, mostly under section, but there were voluntary instances as well. I think the first time she was taken to hospital after the medication change was when she had been found in a park in Basildon after taking an overdose. She was admitted in Basildon and then moved to the Linden Centre from there. Mum's first admission to the Linden Centre led to a prolonged stay of a few months and we would visit her regularly. After that, she was readmitted on a few occasions when she was unable to cope at home. She was getting no sleep at all and was a risk to herself and her family.

On 16th November 2005, my mum was admitted to Finchingfield Ward at the Linden Centre as she was actively talking about suicide. I believe this was under section.

Whilst she was at the Linden Centre, the nurses would communicate to us what she'd done, or what medication they had given her. They would give her medication as well as try and do some talking therapy and group therapy. She had always been so chatty and bubbly, but when she was on the medication, she was drowsy and quiet, and more introverted so I don't know how she got on with the groups.

When we would visit her at the Linden Centre, we would walk around the grounds there or if the weather was poor, we would sit in the TV rooms with her. We thought mum was getting treated and that she was in the place where she could be helped.

The Linden Centre told my dad they wanted to trial electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) on her. The electric therapy had been explained to dad, and he had relayed it to myself and my brothers. We were all hopeful it would work, and I think my mum was too.

On 2nd December 2005, after the second session of ECT my mum absconded from the Linden Centre. She was meant to be watched every 15 minutes, so I don't know how she could have got out as it seemed so secure. She must have not been being observed properly and sufficiently and obviously something went wrong.

When my father rang me to tell me she had gone missing, I went home and met him, and we drove around looking for her, before we got a call from the Transport Police who said she had been found. She had been found seriously injured on the train tracks and taken to Broomfield A&E. She died in the early hours of 3rd December 2005.

As a family we were distraught at the circumstances of mum's death and couldn't understand how she had been able to abscond from a facility we thought was secure and meant to protect her. Following her death, my father pursued legal action against the Linden Centre, and an inquest was held looking into the care she received, although to my knowledge, there was no internal investigation by the hospital.

The hospital apologised, but we didn't get much support from the hospital after she died. The last time we went there was when we went to get her belongings, and I don't think we had much correspondence with them. I never felt the hospital showed much remorse at all, and it felt like they treated my mum as just another statistic. My mum's death has seriously impacted my own mental health, and I have had NHS counselling sessions over the years and have tried therapy to come to terms with my grief.

My mum was a loving and popular person, with many friends, some from all the way back to her first job when she was a telephonist at Chelmsford Telephone Exchange. I remember her going off to bingo and line dancing with her friends. She loved music, especially Abba and the Beatles. She once went to a Tom Jones concert and kissed him, which was a story she loved to tell. I happened to also meet him once on holiday in Spain and told him this and he asked 'what was her name!'

She was only 60 when she died, and my children, aged 13 and 17, never got to meet her. She would have made a lovely grandma; she was so great with children and used to make the most fabulous chocolate cake which I know they would have loved. She got to meet my niece who was only a few months old when she was alive; she got to hold her and was great with her. I used to work as a nanny and have the children I cared for around her, she was always so good with them. I have found it hard not having support from my mum with my own family and missing out on all the important milestones in our lives. I treasure the letters she wrote me when I was in Australia, and the videos of mum, often up and dancing as she loved parties, but as my children grow older, I worry about them asking why she is not with us, and what to tell them.

I want to speak about my grief and experience, as I don't want this to happen to anyone else, something needs to be done to ensure that patients are monitored properly, and especially prevented from harming themselves whilst under treatment and care within a facility. I hope the work of the

Inquiry succeeds in stopping other families from suffering the terrible loss, we are still coming to terms with.