

Connect

The voice of the people we help

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Back in the saddle

Finding a new life with Elizabeth Finn Care

and my mind would go blank. I couldn't think or string a sentence together. I would barely know my own name," Elaine recalls. "I would be able to teach a small chunk of the lecture, and then would have to go put my head down on my desk for 10 or 15 minutes to regain the strength to continue. At other times, I'd curl up and go to sleep on the staff room floor. The practical difficulties the illness causes are immense, but the psychological impact of such a dramatic change in your life is maybe even greater. In the space of about a month, I went from being fit and active to not being able to walk five metres."

Elaine visited her GP several times and got a response common to many ME sufferers. "He told me to pull myself together," remembers Elaine.

"I went from from being fit and active to not being able to walk five metres"

"After two more years like this, I was eventually diagnosed with ME, but that didn't help much as it wasn't really medically recognised back then. I got to the point where I could barely write a letter, let alone cope with the paperwork that goes along with lecturing, and I was forced to leave the job I loved."

Now unemployed, and with a

young daughter to care for, Elaine began to claim benefits. However, her condition was still causing her great difficulties, particularly when it came to completing paperwork and responding to important communications. More than once, this led to very difficult situations which someone not suffering from her condition could have sorted easily.

"If a problem occurred, I'd ring to try and resolve it," says Elaine. "Put it in writing', they'd say. 'I can't', I'd reply. 'Well we can't do anything then.' The consequences were disastrous, sometimes resulting in court appearances when, because I didn't have the paperwork to back me up, I wasn't believed. I felt completely helpless. I wasn't living, I was existing. And it was having a huge impact on the life I could give my daughter."

Elaine's situation continued in this fashion for the next 15 years, and she consistently faced financial difficulties. However, unwilling to give up, she embarked upon a venture that gave her back some quality of life.



Continued on page 4



Welcome

Dear reader,

It's hard to believe we're now in 2011 – a very happy new year to you all.

With the fun of the festive season now fading into memory, the first few months of the year can seem particularly long and grey. But Spring is on the horizon, and with it some new beginnings for us all.

Here at Elizabeth Finn Care, we received the exciting news that we have been chosen to administer the funds of 38 poverty charities in Edinburgh. This means we're going to be helping over 650 more people in Scotland. We're looking forward to expanding our reach in the country and have put in place a dedicated team to make sure all the people we help in Scotland get the best possible support from us.

This Spring also brings with it the anticipation of a Royal Wedding. As Kate Middleton prepares to join the Windsor dynasty, we thought we would look to our own royal connections. Elizabeth Finn Care is a charity with a long history of support from the British Royal Family. Find out more about our links to the Palace, and our recent visit from Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester, on the next page.

As always, we have included a story from someone we help. The resilience and strength of character of people like Elaine is typical of those we come into contact with every day, but it's still an inspiration to read.

I hope you enjoy this copy of Connect. We wish you all the very best for the coming year.

Bryan Clover

Director of Casework

Contact Details

If you would like contribute to the next edition of Connect, or if you would prefer to receive your copy as a Word document, please contact Anna Pietrowski on anna.pietrowski@elizabethfinn.org.uk or on 020 8834 9293.

If you have any enquires relating to the support and help you get or could get from Elizabeth Finn Care, please contact Case Enquires at enquiries.casework@elizabethfinn.org.uk or on 020 8834 9200.

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Our Royal Connections

For almost as long as Elizabeth Finn Care has been helping people who are struggling on low incomes (113 years and counting!), we have enjoyed the benefits and prestige of being supported by a member of the Royal Family. Our royal patrons have included such formidable figures as Her Majesty The Queen Mother, whose strength and compassion are portrayed by British Actress Helena Bonham-Carter in this year's Oscar-winning film *The King's Speech*. From the 19th Century right up until today, our royal connections have been a celebrated part of the charity, and an important part of the ways in which we're able to help more people in need.

In 1898, a year after Elizabeth Finn founded the charity, then called the Distressed Gentlefolks Aid Association (DGAA), Her Royal Highness Princess Christian of Schleswig Holstein became the charity's first ever royal patron and benefactor. The fifth child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, Princess Christian was a very active member of the Royal Family and a strong supporter of charity.

In 1902, Princess Christian was joined in her patronage of the DGAA by Her Majesty Queen Alexandra. It was at this time that the tradition of Christmas hampers, which are still very much a part of Elizabeth Finn Care today, began. Such symbols of 'royal favour' were very much appreciated by the people Elizabeth and Constance Finn helped, and the royals involved were always keen to know how their support was making a difference to the lives of people living in difficult circumstances.

From 1902 up until the middle of the century, a host of royals lent their support to the charity, appearing at public events and even making donations. In 1913, the DGAA received a donation of £300 from Queen Alexandra. While this may not sound like much to us today, back then it was the equivalent of a £16,000 gift!

Founded here by
ELIZABETH AND
CONSTANCE FINN
THE
DISTRESSED
GENTLEFOLK'S
AID ASSOCIATION
on 5th May 1897

Her Majesty The Queen Mother became the charity's official royal patron in 1953, graciously taking on the responsibility after the death of her mother-in-law, Queen Mary, who had supported the DGAA for more than 30 years. Not to be outdone, The Queen Mother became a highly active and interested patron for the



charity, lending her support, and on numerous occasions her presence, for almost 50 years.

The Queen Mother regularly attended events hosted by the DGAA, including a Commonwealth Exhibition and Market in 1955, the Association's 75th anniversary Gala Concert in 1972, and in 1985, herself aged 85, a Gala Ballet performance at the Royal Opera House. To mark Her Majesty's 90th birthday in 1990 and to say our own thank you, the DGAA were proud to join the royal parade through the streets of London.

In 2000, royal patronage of the charity was assumed by Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Gloucester. Just a few months ago, we were proud to host the Duchess as she toured our offices in Hammersmith, just a stone's throw away from the house where Elizabeth and Constance first founded the charity. The Duchess met many members of staff, finding out from 'the front line' exactly how Elizabeth Finn Care is helping people across the UK, as well as expatriates abroad. Her Lady in Waiting wrote on The Duchess' behalf to express her gratitude:



HRH The Duchess of Gloucester meets members of the EFC Casework team

“Her Royal Highness was delighted to be able to visit Elizabeth Finn Care and have the opportunity to meet many of those involved. The Duchess was most interested to hear, first hand, of all the work carried out by the organisation and indeed the plans for the future.”

We hope to long continue the tradition of royal support which the charity so appreciates.



Ways to save: making the most of welfare benefits

Claiming welfare benefits is an excellent way of increasing your income and gaining the extra financial help that is available to you. There will be some changes to the benefits system in April 2011, so it's a good idea to check regularly to make sure you are getting all the assistance you are eligible for.

Elizabeth Finn Care created a service called Turn2us in 2007 to help people navigate the often complicated world of welfare benefits. A free and confidential website www.turn2us.org.uk and freephone telephone helpline let people search for all the help available to them in benefits, charitable grants and other sources of assistance.

Top tips for accessing the help available to you:

- **Use the Turn2us Benefits Checker.** The Benefits Checker works out for people what extra income they might be able to claim. It's easy to use and completely free of charge – all you need to do is provide information about your circumstances either online or in complete confidence with a helpline adviser. The benefits checker will then calculate whether you can claim anything new. Head to www.turn2us.org.uk or call 0808 802 2000.
- **Check if your benefits are subject to any changes coming into effect this year.** We've created a comprehensive list of all 2011's benefits changes. Visit www.turn2us.org.uk and click on the Information and Resources tab to access our 'Benefits Changes' page, or call 0808 802 2000.
- **Are you still eligible?** If your circumstances change – for example, you start living with someone, begin acting as a carer or inherit some money – you might gain or lose eligibility for benefits. If you're claiming any benefits, let the benefits office know straight away of any changes to your daily life – even if you're not sure if it'll make a difference to your claim. If you don't and you no longer qualify for your benefits, you could be unintentionally committing fraud. If you're not claiming any benefits, and something changes in your life, use the Benefits Checker or call the helpline to make sure you're not missing out.

There's a whole host of information and resources available for you to browse at Turn2us. After all, it never hurts to have all the facts when it comes to your finances.

Back in the saddle: Elaine's story continued

"I'd always loved horses and so did my daughter," says Elaine. "When the opportunity arose to acquire a small piece of land, I took a chance and decided to go for it. Through sheer hard work and a love for what I was doing, I built up a not-for-profit pony trekking centre." Elaine was able to give a new home to rescue horses, and worked with children with special needs and behavioural issues. But just as things looked as though they were improving for Elaine, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

After two weeks in hospital following surgery, and with her income stretched to breaking point, Elaine was put in touch with Elizabeth Finn Care. "It was hard having to ask for help, but I'm so glad I did," she says.

Elizabeth Finn Care helped Elaine with direct financial assistance. "The financial support is invaluable and has made such a difference," Elaine says. "But over and above that, you're treated with respect, like a person, not just a statistic. After years of battling and struggling financially, someone realised how difficult my life had become, and they were willing to help. I can't thank Elizabeth Finn Care enough for that."

With a safety net beneath her and the continued support of Elizabeth Finn Care, Elaine is now able to live life the way she imagined it. She finds it difficult to describe what she likes best about Elizabeth Finn Care.

"It's everything. It's the practical help, but it's also the emotional support. The fact that there are kind, supportive, thoughtful people ready to help is amazing. It's the little things too – the Christmas hamper and the card on my birthday. Just little touches that remind you that, yes, even after all these trials, even on bad days when things seem impossible, someone cares about you."



Could you share your story to help others find out about Elizabeth Finn Care?

Our Media Volunteers are vital to helping us get the charity's voice heard.

If you'd like to know more about how you could help us, please contact the Press Team on 020 8834 9200.