

## Emma's Secret Heartache

Depression crept up on Emma Edwards. She was 14 when an incident at school led her to being punished for something which wasn't her fault. So began her downward spiral.

Emma became very good at concealing her feelings she went on to study for a degree in law but inwardly the story was very different. The 29-year-old said: "After doing a postgraduate diploma I was unemployed before eventually getting a job at Royal Doulton as a merchandise clerk, which I did for about 18 months. I think the feeling of stress and anxiety had been growing until, one day, in February, 1999, I realised the amount of anxiety I was feeling just wasn't right. It was excessive worrying. I was waking up early in the morning and I felt tired all the time. I would just go to work and come home and I didn't go out socially at all. I left work and went to the doctor, who signed me off sick. I was also given medication and sent for counselling. But in January, 2001, I reached a real low point. The anxiety got to a state where I felt I couldn't cope and I threatened to jump out of a window.

After that I voluntarily admitted myself to hospital because I knew I had to change. I had a lot of help from an occupational therapist and a psychologist. I also went to some support groups and it was a relief to meet people who felt the same. Since then I've found exercise combined with medication has really helped to combat the anxiety. "In October, 2002, I felt well enough to do some voluntary work so I started working front-of-house at the New Vic Theatre. I really enjoyed that and the following January I came to a training day being run by the Hanley based Mental Health Media Action Group.

"Now I work as their media bureau co-ordinator. It has helped with my confidence. I am still taking medication but I'm determined to be better than I am now.

"I would say to others that if you have any of the symptoms like extreme tiredness, feeling worthless, not able to concentrate or if you are feeling really anxious go to your doctor before it takes hold. I think I would have been better if I'd tackled my problem as a teenager. It does make a difference if you catch it early.