HOME OF HEALING

A specialist treatment centre for children and young adults diagnosed with an eating disorder, **Rhodes Wood Hospital** is a home to facilitate healing and the re-establishment of a normal life

"You have your whole life ahead of you." Just eight little words, yet no others could sum up so perfectly the ethos of Rhodes Wood, the beautiful, welcoming home for the treatment of eating disorders in young people.

Director Sharon Donaldson paused in the middle of our tour around the light-filled, expansive Regency building to show me the handmade placemats that several young residents had crafted during their stay. Those eight words were written on one in bright felt pen, surrounded by colourful patterns – and the sentence that followed made me realise what a special place I was being shown. The young lady had written: "a beautiful life of happiness, fun, love and laughs". How true and so poignant, because for many young people, their illness goes unnoticed and escalates before a problem is acknowledged.

In today's society we are seeing an increased number of young people experiencing difficulties around issues with eating; those who have high expectations of themselves or high levels of anxiety, can be more at risk of developing an eating disorder. Parents can sometimes struggle to accept what is happening to their child, and busy lives mean that often a child suffers in silence.

Unfortunately this illness can quickly become entrenched before action is taken. Sharon explained how Rhodes Wood can help parents who have any concerns about their child's eating habits; an extremely affordable, comprehensive assessment with an eating disorder specialist is available to any outpatient. Although it is based near Hatfield, Rhodes Wood accepts patients from anywhere in the UK. The treatment options offered are highly specialised and can include day care as well as residential care.

Children as young as eight to an upper limit of 18 are catered for. There is also an on-site Ofsted-registered school, which ensures that academic work does not get left behind.

Although eating disorders are often assumed to be a girls' illness, Rhodes Wood has seen an increase in the number of boys being referred. With boys, one sign is the replacement of a balanced diet with protein shakes in a mistaken bid to build muscle. With boys and girls, parents are encouraged to be vigilant when their child is exercising compulsively in solitary sports such as running or swimming, and also to be aware that baggy clothes may be hiding a wasting body.

Once treatment is started, issues are faced in a manageable, loving way and the young person learns highly effective strategies for coping with anxieties while learning to eat a healthy, balanced diet within their re-engaged family dynamic.

As we walked around the bright, cheerful interior of Rhodes Wood, I saw young people in recovery from a difficult illness; I saw faces of hope, engagement, energy and self discovery. This treatment works in a lasting way and is testament to the care and knowledge that is available to everyone who needs it. All it takes is to reach out and ask.

RHODES WOOD HOSPITAL

Rhodes Wood is a specialist eating disorder centre which cares for NHS, self-funded and insured patients.

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Photographs are posed by models