

**Reasonable adjustments: Small adaptations, big difference**

By Employment Co-ordinator Kate Fry

I have been suffering with a hidden disability since the age of 14, although I was only diagnosed at 19. I have Endometriosis, a disease in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus. It can cause severe pain in the pelvis and can affect the individual's mental health.

It can often be challenging to talk about my condition, not just because it is a 'woman's health issue', but more so because of the way in which Endometriosis can debilitate me, but no one can see it. Quite simply, it appears made up.

My condition can affect me in many ways and it is often unpredictable which makes things difficult to plan in advance. This can pose a challenge within employment, as reliability is a key skill all employers look for and you never want to let your team down. Something that I have developed with the management at JET, which I think has been the most positive reasonable adjustment for me, is having a plan for my recovery for each time I have a flare-up. By having this in place, there are clear expectations of my capacity set in advance.

My plan involves the flexibility of working from home and a phased return to work. This enables me to continue to work when in the past I would often have to take more time off than I would have wanted.

What I have in place at work to enable me to succeed:

- My recovery plan after a flare-up. By setting clear expectations, I can relax and recover knowing my team and I are well set for the time I am out of the office.
- Understanding my limits and communicating this.
- A desk assessment and adjustable chair, including back support. I have a lot of scar tissue, caused by surgeries. This scar tissue can cause frequent back pain.
- Flexible working. If I have had a minor flare that morning and need to wait for painkillers to kick in, I am able to start my day later.
- Working from home. Having the ability to sit in loose clothing and a hot water bottle is a life saver.
- Having a First Aid person present. At my worst, I can need A&E attention. I will also suffer from shock and be unable to be as mobile.
- Regular breaks. Part of the management of my condition is being able to sit down and stand up regularly.
- The ability to choose who I have my back-to-work with. It is important to recognise that many employees will have a preference for who they feel most comfortable talking to about their disability.
- Empathetic and understanding colleagues. I talk about my condition openly to spread awareness and also keep them in the loop about how I'm feeling that day with pain, as it can often affect my mood and how I come across.

\*Kate has set up a group on Facebook called Endometriosis Jersey, which is great for peer support.

\*This article was written to complement the Embrace Our Difference event, raising awareness of employing Islanders who have a disability or long-term health condition.