I am in control of my life, not my schizophrenia

*Hannah Bryndís Proppé Bailey from Reykjavik has been living with depression and schizophrenia for over half her young life, but, thanks to football, she has found avenues to express herself and have fun.*

***Every month, as part of its #EqualGame campaign, UEFA focuses on a person from one of its 55 member associations. This person is an example of how football promotes inclusion, accessibility and diversity; his or her story exemplifies how disability, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, personal well-being and social background are no barriers to playing or enjoying football.***

"Can you imagine having flu every single day of your life? To be tired every single day? To struggle with getting out of bed every single day?" This is the daily battle that 24-year-old Hannah Bryndís Proppé Bailey from Iceland faces every day of her life.

She has been living with depression since the age of 12 and was diagnosed with schizophrenia around four years ago. She receives plenty of support from her family and friends but admits that life can be tough. However, despite the constant battles she faces, Hannah is not one to accept defeat and is adamant she "cannot just quit life" because she lives with a mental illness.

"This often makes life difficult. I hear voices and can be paranoid, and that can make life difficult at times," Hannah says, "but I am lucky to have received the help that I have been given."

A few years ago, while at a rehabilitation centre in Laugaras, a suburb of the capital Reykjavik, she learnt about the chance to play football. She was introduced to the team FC Sækó (FC Psycho in English), which mainly accommodates people living will mental illness.

"It's open to all ages and for people in all kinds of shape," Hannah says. "I'm not the best in my team, but I participate and go to training sessions, which I think is great because it's so exciting and I'm having fun – and that's what matters to me."

She rarely misses practice and admits: "It's among the best things I do nowadays." The team meet up twice a week for training, with an emphasis on enjoyment and taking part rather than being overly competitive. The training sessions are conducted under the watchful eye of the team's coach Bregþór Grétar Bödvarsson, who is the glue that keeps the team together, while he also offers the team ample encouragement and support.

"People with mental illness often feel like they are all alone and close themselves off," Hannah says. "They are perhaps at home all the time and stop talking to their friends and so on. Football is good for people, because they can leave; both to get some exercise and be with people they don't necessarily usually talk to."

Aside from finding a new outlet to express herself, playing football has also had numerous other benefits. "The exercise has done so much for me mentally," she explains, adding that when she began to exercise, she "started feeling so much better".

In her spare time, Hannah enjoys doing stand-up comedy. Her older sister was the inspiration and, despite a few early reservations, she has never looked back since.

"To be on stage is really stressful at the beginning," Hannah says, "but you just get up there and start talking into the microphone and then everything changes."

Hannah's material is sharp and honest, while she uses the opportunity to talk about her "schizophrenia and other illnesses" in a light-hearted manner. Although that can often surprise the audience, many have praised her openness and ability to speak in public about the problems she faces.

"This makes people a bit surprised, but I also do it because I get people who come up to me and say 'Hi, I'm also dealing with a mental illness and I find it really helpful to know that someone else is also dealing with these things and is able to talk about it on stage.'"

Hannah has an extremely close bond with her family and friends. Looking back, she says her mother "saved my life" by taking her to a psychiatrist when she was 12 in order to get an understanding of the problems she was facing.

"I found that I fitted into a group when I was diagnosed, especially with the schizophrenia because I never felt like I fitted into any groups," Hannah recalls. "I felt like no one understood me. When I got diagnosed with schizophrenia, I just thought, 'At last, finally someone understands me. Finally, there's a group I fit into.'"

A fan of pop and rock music, Hannah enjoys socialising with friends and watching movies. She also enjoys traveling, while she has travelled to various conferences across the globe to promote the importance for the younger generation to become leaders. Hannah is keen for the public to have a better understanding of what life is like for people with mental illness and regularly meets with the local council to offer advice.

"Mental illness for me is just my life," Hannah explains. "I've been dealing with it all my life. My goal is to not just suffer with it myself but to educate and teach other people what mental illness is and teach others how we are dealing with it."

Hannah knows better than most the importance of receiving assistance in order to help a person deal with difficulties in their lives. At weekends, she works at a nursing home as a caretaker for the elderly, helping them with everyday chores such as eating and getting ready for bed – something she describes as being "extremely rewarding".

"What I like the most about helping others is seeing their reaction," she says. "They seem so happy after having been helped because they can't do these things by themselves."

Hannah has big plans for the future and aims to enrol at university in the autumn to study psychology. "I am in control of my life, not my schizophrenia," she explains. With the support of her family and friends, and the confidence she gains through football, Hannah is determined to show and help others to realise that it is "possible to have a good life even if you have a mental illness".