

## Feel supported with your mental wellbeing - a case study



Zev Taylor, Camden

**“If you have more control over your condition, you have more choice. You can’t let your condition run your life.”**

I have a particular type of schizophrenia. My main symptoms are lack of organisation, confusion, tiredness and my reactions can be quite slow.

I first became ill in 1995. I had a breakdown due to stresses in my life which were exacerbated by recreational drug use. I had a lack of insight about my own condition and did not realise how ill I was.

As a young man I was quite incapacitated and although I had received formal clinical support and help with getting on the right medication, my 25-year diagnosis for schizophrenia made me feel isolated.

I was in a rut. I couldn’t work. I didn’t function normally. I couldn’t go out into the world. The doctors were good but found it hard to prescribe me the most effective medication and I lived for several years in a sort of limbo. Occasionally, I would stand in the street or hallway and not move for up to four hours at a time.

A family member signed me up to one of **self management uk**’s group mental wellbeing courses. The moment I walked in the room I felt at ease. The peer element genuinely makes the difference. Mental health issues can be quite taboo and they are not very easy to talk about as there is a lot of stigma around them but the tutors have lived experience of health conditions and are honest about their successes and challenges (no use of the F word = failure). They made us feel very secure and welcomed. The other participants help you to normalise your condition. I didn’t feel alone in my struggle.

I made a friend on the course and we now work together.

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One of the tutors said I would make a brilliant volunteer. I wasn't ready and had little self-confidence but my friend encouraged me and we did the training together. My family were very surprised I had travelled across London on my own, a first. They said I had come back from the dead. They had lost me.

I volunteered for in my local area for 3 years. The world stopped spinning so fast and I had a moment when I looked around and thought, I'm not in a hole now, I have choices about where I want to go. My symptoms weren't controlling me.

I started to socialise. It was like I was catching up on the silent hours that had gone before.

Volunteering made me feel useful. I was obviously helping others, but the courses helped me to feel better.

After 3 years, a colleague asked me to apply for a paid role. The boost to my self-esteem was immense. I hadn't worked in over 20 years. The charity assured me I would be supported and that most staff (around 95%) lived with a health condition.

I am passionate about the way the charity works and feel grateful to them for helping me out of my hole, into a routine and part of something. The compassion, empathy and intelligence of this project answered a great need in me.

My problem-solving skills are a lot better now. I am more active, and my mind and life are more structured. This is the best way to manage my condition. Now I am a tutor, I can share these skills, knowing that the ability to talk about your concerns is key.

It is important to be aware of and acknowledge your health conditions so that when you go to the doctor you are clear and can give them more detailed information. **self management uk**'s course makes people more aware of how their symptoms/condition affect their day-to-day health and wellbeing. It is interesting to see how many people, who are managing different conditions, have similar symptoms.

If you have more control over your condition, you have more choice. You cannot let your condition run your life.

For further information or to speak with Micheline or other course tutors, please contact **self management uk**:

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