

My Story of Support from Abbey Road

I have suffered on and off since I was 19 with depression. Four years ago it started to get worse, and although I was working I couldn't hold a job down. I would get to the point where I couldn't cope and would walk out. I did that with about eight jobs. I was isolating myself, my anxiety was high and my trust in people was gone.

My dog Samson, who had been my constant companion and my only friend, was suffering because I was struggling to cope. People I thought were friends couldn't cope with how I was changing because of the depression so they didn't keep in touch. I didn't want to keep in touch because I couldn't cope with people. I was afraid to because of my anger and the feeling of wanting to lash out. I started to drink to deaden the pain. I got divorced. I was in such a mess I became bankrupt. I lost everything and all I had left was Samson.

In October 2007 I eventually went to the doctor as I had never been so low. At this point I was close to committing suicide. I couldn't go on any more. I was put onto medication and appointments were made for me to see someone. As we started to work through things it was realised that a lot of my problems stemmed from my childhood. I had low self-esteem; no self worth. I turned the anger on myself.

I was also referred to the Abbey Club on Abbey Road. Mike was my first contact and I was very nervous and anxious but he very quickly put me at ease. We did a recovery (WRAP) plan which was to help me to get involved with people again and going out etc. The day I first went to the club Mike had made me an appointment with Paula for a massage. Afterwards I just went home. When I went again I just sat and didn't want to talk to anyone. I had an appointment at the job centre and Mike went with me – he realised my anxiety was very high. He discussed with Paula about going out with me and doing graded exposure and Becky, who is a second year student, to do my WRAP with me. Paula started to go out with me. I had always been afraid to talk to people about Samson – he was, and still is, a big part of my life. I was afraid people wouldn't understand. I didn't like to leave him – he went everywhere with me. When I was working he went with me and we were always together.

Paula had mentioned that she also worked with animal massage and crystals and she came to my home to see him. She realised that she needed to work with me and Samson together as a unit. I felt a great weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I needed help with him because of the way I was feeling – Samson was feeding off that and I was losing control – and the fact that he had been trained.

I started to gain confidence when I was going out and when I was going to the club. I started to mix and join in. There was a group who played cards and they invited me to join them.

I wanted to learn more about depression and the childhood link. I started to read about it and understand it. The book I am working through on childhood trauma and self help cognitive behavioural techniques is hard. Learning to overcome the trauma of sexual abuse, physical abuse, bullying at school – I could go on. It is something I have to do for my own sanity. My therapist from Waverley and the Abbey Club is the support I need to do this. They are there for me to help with any problems. They are taking me out of isolation, helping to restore my confidence. I am starting to recognise triggers and how to avoid them and also challenge them.

Paula is still working with me and Samson. I was afraid to go onto a bus with him but Paula came with us to Paignton and when we got to Paignton bus station I felt good.

The journey was great, just having someone there with me for reassurance – it was a great help and calmer. The reassurance was there at the end of the trip as well as the beginning. When we got to the bus station and got off the bus, an elderly lady who had travelled with us came over and said she had to come and say what a well behaved dog I had. That boosted my ego. I went straight down the town centre, head held high. People tend to comment when your dog does something wrong, so it was nice to hear.

I am now at the point where my confidence is growing more and more. I did have a setback a few weeks ago when I went into town on a busy Saturday and felt penned in and smothered. All I wanted to do was get home as quickly as I could. When I got home I was sick. Torquay was starting to get busy with holiday makers and due to the ban on dogs on the beach I could no longer walk there with Samson. I panicked and hardly went out for over a week. Paula rang to let me know what was going on at Abbey Road, but I didn't go. The second week Paula called again I got upset. I went down to talk it over with her.

The saying is true "a problem shared is a problem halved". There will always be ups and downs. I have learnt it is better to confront them. I have the Abbey Club where I can do that. My confidence is growing. I laugh more. I am starting to enjoy life again. Samson and I are the best of friends again – with Paula's help – and always will be, but now I am making new friends at the Abbey Club. The banter we have when playing cards, the friendliness, is helping to restore my trust in people. It is still an ongoing battle each day. Who will win at the end of each day – me or the depression? It has to be me, with the help and support from my doctor, and therapist at Waverley (who have both been there for me) I can win through.

The Abbey Club is there each day and always will be, with its support. My next goal is to go further a field round Torquay more. Then I can get back to work which, when I am ready, the Abbey Club will help me with. Without the support I have been given, Samson would have had to be re-homed. I know I would not be here now. It has always been hard for me to ask for help, but I know I couldn't have done it on my own.

I am learning to live side by side with my depression. It will always be there but maybe, with the help I am receiving, we can be friends and learn to live together. To anyone out there who feels the way I did 9 months ago, don't be afraid to ask for help or to accept it. There are people who want to help if we let them.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me and who will continue to support me on the rest of my journey to recovery. Compared to 9 months ago when I was ready to end my life I feel I have something to live for. I have a best friend, I am making new ones and I am learning to live with the past. I can't change it but maybe soon I will be able to let it go.