

## Case study

Dave Nichols found that being supported by Bristol Mental Health inspired him to work for the system and help others.

My story isn't a remarkable one and I'm certainly not a remarkable person. Anyone could experience the mental health problems I've had - and come out the other side, too.

Since I was a teenager I've had low self-esteem and felt very self-conscious. At this age I began experiencing social phobia and suffering from debilitating panic attacks. To mask my anxieties, I would drink, and if I wasn't able to drink I would avoid social situations. I was ashamed of myself and hid my problems from everyone, including my family and friends.

Throughout my life I've had episodes of depression, too. I would spend weeks in bed and wouldn't eat or drink. I lost jobs, relationships and many opportunities to enjoy life. Despite the low times, I've managed to have good times as well. When I was 35 I found my vocation: supporting people with mental health needs.

I was employed by a national mental health charity for a long time, working with people with mental health needs to help them access their local community and build up their confidence and self-esteem. I then worked at a supported housing service where we supported people with mental health support needs to gain the confidence and skills to be able to manage their own tenancies.

Unfortunately, I hit a low point recently when, at the age of 50, I became unemployed. My confidence took a big dip and I became depressed. I was lucky that over time I had developed a good insight into my mental health and knew that I needed to challenge myself and focus on building myself up before finding a new job. I joined a gym and spoke to my GP who referred me to the AWP South Gloucestershire Patients Liaison team. They carried out an assessment and supported me to attend a six-week self-esteem course provided by Bristol Mental Health's (BMH's) Wellbeing Therapies Services. This was a challenge as I felt anxious around big groups of people. I felt really nervous before the first session but the course facilitators put me at ease.

I attended all the sessions and, although it was challenging at times, fully participated and felt confident and ready to find a new job by the end. I was referred to BMH's Employment Service as it had been a very long time since I'd written an application form or attended an interview. The employment coach who supported me was an inspiration. They believed in me which meant I started to believe in myself. I applied for two jobs within BMH, was offered both and accepted a role with the Employment Service as a team leader.

I received excellent support from BMH that inspired me to want to work in the system. I'm happy that I've achieved that. I'm still going through recovery and discovering myself but I feel excited about the future.