

## Case study

Service user involvement has helped Peter Hale gain a sense of fulfilment and achievement.



A few years ago I went through a challenging time as I lost my job, my marriage ended and I experienced housing problems. All of this led to me being diagnosed with anxiety and depression.

As part of my physical and mental recovery I started playing football and walking with Bristol Active Life Project (BALP) and still enjoy playing football for the BALP team to this day. I also accessed the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Service through what is now the Wellbeing Therapy Services. This was a great help to me too.

Since my diagnosis I've become really involved in helping to shape mental health services in Bristol and ensuring that service users are involved in this. My first experience of service user involvement was through Healthwatch, and I'm now also involved with Bristol Mental Health (BMH) and Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP). For example, I'm part of the Joining the Dots Care Planning Project and am helping shape AWP's service user strategy.

I've been a Service User/Lived Experience Representative with Bristol Independent Mental Health Network since the organisation was set up in early 2015. In this role I attend lots of meetings, many of which are with BMH, to share my experience and knowledge of mental health services in order to help them be the best they can be. As well as this I'm a Representative for Rethink, a Time to Change campaigner, a Peer Mentor with Second Step and a lot more besides! All these roles give me a sense of fulfilment and achievement. These roles have also given me many opportunities to take part in free training, such as peer mentoring, mental health first aid, and suicide prevention, which I've found really useful.

I have a PhD in Computing and I use many of the skills I developed from this as a service user on AWP's research committee and in my involvement in research and development projects

through this. AWP's Research and Development Team carry out research about preventing, treating and managing mental health problems, dementia and addictions the findings of which are used in clinical practice.

Recently, I've also been diagnosed with high functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome. Asperger's isn't an illness but a difference in thinking, perception and senses. I think in a systematic way, communicate differently, get distressed by chaotic environments and badly managed change, and don't pick up on nuance and body language well. I've been accessing social groups for people with these conditions. This helps me to socialise, deal with benefits, volunteering and work issues, and understand my own and non-autistic people's communication needs.

Asperger's is an advantage for the type of work and volunteering I do but for many social situations it can be a disadvantage. I have different triggers for anxiety and a resilience to many stresses that other people experience. I'm now involved with service user activities and research into autism as well as into mental health issues. All this has helped me prevent re-occurrences of the crises I've experienced in the past and encouraged me to focus on the present and future. I now have a well-balanced life that consists of rewarding activities that keep me physically and mentally fit.