

## Case study

Alice was diagnosed with mental health difficulties over a decade ago. She's experienced periods of crisis and periods of good mental health but is feeling positive about the future.

Doctors first diagnosed my mental health difficulties over a decade ago. Since then, life has been a cycle of feeling like I have successfully started to rebuild my life during periods of wellness, only to feel like everything I have achieved has come crashing down again at the next breakdown. In times of good mental health, I have achieved a lot but the loss of these achievements during the next breakdown has seemed even more painful. Rather than being able to take comfort from the fact that I have survived previous crises, each new one has felt worse than the last.

The last twelve months have been particularly difficult, with two prolonged crises only a few months apart. I had again reached a point that felt desperate and devoid of any sense of hope for a brighter future and I was both physically and mentally exhausted from the effort of trying to keep myself safe. I was back to the point of being high risk and I needed urgent help.

I found this help (and more) through three of the services within Bristol Mental Health: the Bristol Sanctuary, the Women's Crisis House and the Community Rehabilitation Service.

I used the Sanctuary extensively during those twelve months. At times, I needed the one-to-one time with a member of staff to talk through what was going on and how it was affecting me. At other times, I just wanted to sit quietly in a safe environment to get a break from the intense effort it was taking me to stay safe at home. It was as though the Sanctuary became a place where I could feel held during the intensely painful times when I couldn't hold myself anymore, right up until my Women's Crisis House admission.

The Women's Crisis House wasn't a new experience for me; it was my fourth stay over the years. The difference this time, so deep was my crisis, was that my recovery progressed a lot more slowly than in previous stays. I was genuinely worried that I wasn't going to recover sufficiently to be able to manage once discharged. The amazing staff persevered with me, supporting me

through the planned sessions and the many times when I needed ad hoc support. Gradually my symptoms improved and, by the time I left, I felt re-connected to myself and finally more hopeful about a better future. I also felt confident that my new positive momentum would continue to grow thanks to a referral they made to the Community Rehabilitation Service for support in my ongoing recovery.

I was assessed whilst still in the house and within a few days of leaving I had been allocated a fantastic care coordinator and peer recovery navigator. The plan is for the team to work with me for twelve months, using the model of the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' to identify and work towards goals for realistic and sustainable change. Now that I'm out of crisis, I feel incredibly positive about how much I hope to achieve with this support alongside me.

A couple of months on from my discharge from the Women's Crisis House the hope and ambition I rediscovered there remains and I feel more optimistic about the future than I have in years. Like a precious, delicate seedling, I know this re-found sense of self needs protecting and nurturing. The fantastic support I am getting from the Community Rehabilitation Service has been crucial in this respect; helping me pace myself and giving me the chance to reflect on my progress and any challenges arising. With their help, I've already been able to make significant changes for the better: enjoying some of the great activities and courses run by the St Mungo's Recovery College; taking on a voluntary role at a city farm; and becoming involved in service user representation.

It's scary not knowing if my mental health will deteriorate again, not having magic answers as to what my future should be, and the thought of getting "better" and leaving this decade of perpetual crises behind me. There may be future episodes or crises, but right now I'm content celebrating my good mental health and enjoying exploring what my future could be.