

Case study

Lucy discusses how mental health services not only helped her mental health but inspired a career within these services.

People who meet me are often surprised by the story I tell. I was always an anxious child, scared of lots of things and constantly worried. I was bullied throughout most of my childhood at school and would often consider what it would be like to disappear. When I was 11 my mum started to get unwell and at this moment in time I had to grow up very quickly. As I progressed into my teens, my mum's health deteriorated and I naturally became a carer for her. During my last years at school I experienced a time of uncertainty as we were still unsure what form of muscle wasting disease my mother had and what the outcomes would be. This affected my mental health considerably.

I would say that the years between 16 and 21 were my darkest; I definitely took a path that no one would have expected. I was always destined to do my A levels, go to university and progress through life following the 'normal' path, however, this was not the way it would be.

If it wasn't for the mental health services in Bristol and North Somerset I don't think I would be where I am today. I was already involved with the IAPT services before I joined AWP as a member of staff in 2009. Due to the help and support I had received from the service, it made me want to embark on a career in mental health myself. I wanted the opportunity to make a difference in some way, to give back and to use my experiences and challenges I'd had help change the future of services. I think my understanding of what it's like to be a service user helped me develop a supportive and client-focused administration service at [Positive Step](#).

By working within AWP I was able to develop my personal career through opportunities that wouldn't have been possible if it hadn't been for my manager at that point in time. By 2013 I was a completely different person and had the opportunity to leave AWP to develop my career elsewhere. I wasn't gone for long as I returned to Bristol Mental Health in early 2015.

I came back to BMH and AWP because I truly believe in what the system has set out to achieve. I would be lying if I said it was all sunshine and rainbows but I feel very passionate about the system and that the challenges in my role and others across the system are worthwhile.

Working within such a complex system has given me a wider understanding of our city and how BMH plays such an important role in supporting it. I feel really passionate about how my role as system information and improvement manager can help, even in a tiny way, to achieve better mental health prospects for the city. It's all about seeing the 'wider picture'.

I am working hard to change the attitude towards data and information within BMH services, to promote and encourage data and information to be driven by intelligence, wisdom and knowledge - not to be just another number counting exercise.

Since working for BMH I have accessed mental health services again following the breakdown of my 11 year relationship and my dad having a stroke. I may need to access them in the future too. Mental health services have helped me for a variety of reasons over the past eight plus years and, unfortunately, don't always get the praise they often deserve. From working within the system, I am blessed with the ability to have a helicopter view of all the amazing work that takes place and to offer my support to achieve system goals.