

Case study

Toby* was out of employment for five years before being supported by the Employment Service to find voluntary and then full time paid work.

I first made contact with Bristol Mental Health's Employment Service through my GP and I've been supported by an employment coach for almost two years now. After being out of work for five years, I was ready to begin my journey back to employment.

I started going to the Employment Service's Job Club, which meets every two weeks and offers emotional and practical support to help people get back into work. Through this I found a voluntary administration placement that I felt ready to apply for. I thought it would be a good opportunity and it seemed quite unique as it was specifically structured for people in my situation. It was aimed at those experiencing mental health challenges but it was also specific in the type of work, ie administration. I'd been doing some conservation volunteering as a way to get involved with something physical that wasn't too taxing on the mind. When I applied for the placement I felt ready to try out something a bit more challenging.

Going to Job Club was beneficial as it's held at Windmill Hill City Farm, where the placement was also based. This meant that I became familiar with the environment I'd be applying to volunteer in. I was really nervous but got the placement after an interview.

During the eight week placement I was supported to identify my goals and areas I wanted to develop in. Answering the phone was my biggest challenge and I overcame it in week three or four. In general, I started to feel more comfortable with my communication with colleagues and visitors. I feel I now have more confidence to challenge myself to do things I was avoiding or found difficult.

I was supported by everyone I worked with. My tasks were clearly set out and structured, beginning as simple tasks and building up to be more difficult. This made it easier to adapt to. I

knew I could ask the supervisors questions and ask for support or contact anyone if I needed to. I was given a document called The Windmill of Change which I used to set goals and identify anything I wanted to work on. It helped break down the things I was worried about until I wasn't worried at all.

The placement gave me a sense of doing something useful and purposeful and of contributing towards something. The social aspect was good for me too. After my placement I was helped to find some ad hoc, paid work in administration covering someone on holiday. I am now happily employed full time in the same post.

**Name has been changed*