

# Participant Stories

## 2024



# Bonnie, 19

January 2024

I was in the worse headspace I have ever been in, completely in a rut.

I had left my job, could barely get out of bed, lost my friends. Felt like I was at rock bottom in life.

I was talking with my Work coach and expressed my struggles, and he told me about the course, and I thought 'I might as well,' he was encouraging me that I had nothing to lose to try it.



I liked the idea of meeting other people in the same position as me as I felt very isolated. My first reaction was 'omg no-one is speaking' and I wondered how much to get involved and I felt a little bit nervous, but I was quickly put at ease by the facilitators. I still wondered if it would be for me and whether it would be useful but decided to stick with it and quite quickly, I was really interested in the topics and pleasantly surprised by the relaxed atmosphere.

Without sounding cheesy it became like a little family and the facilitators were so lovely. It felt like a safe space, and I was looking forward to joining the call each day. I made some connections through it. The course itself I really liked that it was not just work related and I was glad that it was looking at mental health side of things. I got a lot out of that bit, and wanted to keep seeing how it would continue to help me. Each session I felt increasingly comfortable and started to really enjoy it and see a change in my mindset.

Well, I got a new job while on the course which I am so excited about it. The facilitators helped me with the job interview prep, and I really felt I could not have got through it without them. So, it was amazing to have the help, and I am just excited to start the role in a few weeks. My life has really changed, and life feels better now, I am hopeful for the future.

# Bruno, 19

February 2024

Before the course I was doing a lot of job hunting as well as a bit of writing and watching things while I volunteered as an usher at a theatre. I mostly spoke to my parents because my friends were all busy working.

I thought the workshops were extremely helpful and it was interesting to spend some time thinking about myself discovering new things it really opened my eyes; I really enjoyed the relaxed and positive vibe of our group.



It was genuinely nice to talk to people who were in a similar position to me. I enjoyed sharing ideas and it helped to give some structure to my day.

I started to contribute increasingly as the course went on.

I am still looking for work but have had some interviews and was recently interviewed for a caretaker job at my local church.

I was surprised to get the interview due to my lack of experience so was incredibly happy to make it to interview stage.

I was also successful in getting a zero-hour contract at a warehouse.

I have worked two days with them so far and now waiting for some more shifts to come up.

I plan to do as much volunteering as I can so I can add that to my CV. My plan is to find an entry level media job (I recently applied to an apprenticeship with Channel 4). I also would like to move out and start living independently again.

# Holly, 21

February 2024

I was feeling like there was not much hope for anything and feeling useless, I feel like I was coasting, letting life happen to me and I did not know where to go or what to think.

I just let things happen, I was just staying at home, and I was not seeing anyone. I was just staying home as much as I could, hiding away and playing on the laptop.

I have been learning about all the aspects of my anxiety and the learning more about myself, I know why I am anxious now and have a better understanding of it.



At first the idea was overwhelming as I am not a huge fan of video calls and prefer face to face, But it was good because of the friendly group- it was not as bad as I thought it would be. Everyone was worried about being on camera and mic, but we did not have to, so it was fine, It was nice that everyone thought the same and that it was a group of like-minded people.

I really enjoyed it and like the routine of it, I also do not like change so when I am used to something, it sticks, I do not like endings so acceptance was a good Pathways session for me because of this.

I went along to the 'Serendipity group; with Autism Hampshire and I am now on the waiting list to join when they have a space, I am focused on getting well enough to think about part time work without filling me with dread, I need proper therapy for my existential crisis and the doctor at I-talk has some referrals for me.

might wait for my Mum's shifts to regulate and then think about therapy. I know what my problem is but do not have the tools to figure it out. My depression is not as bad as it was before now. It is more the existential side of things. I am currently volunteering, and it has given me something to do, and it is quite fun. Looking at artifacts helps me wonder about things. It gives me a routine and I would love to have a paid job.

# Melinda, 22

May 2024

I was not fit to work, and I was told to sign off sick by my work coach who then referred me to the course. I knew that if I started a new job now, I would quit after a week and could not handle the pressure.

After getting more into it on the second day I thought, "This is revolutionary!" I wrote everything down from the first day and found it extremely helpful to copy everything down, From the first week I felt like the course gave me a sense of direction.



I felt like even though my goals felt far away, writing them down and having the facilitators say 'yes!' they felt less far away, I had felt intimidated at first but felt comfortable with the option to keep my camera and microphone off.

The games got me to start interacting and I ended up unmuting and speaking which I never thought I would be able to do.

When I saw everything that I had written down, it felt real and like something I had done rather than just someone talking at me, I found it calming to break things down and work out what the issues were and how the tools from the course could apply to me.

I felt clearer about how to go about things, and it felt safe that there was no pressure to share if I did not want to.

I now want to start doing the things that I enjoy again- which I never was available for before. My goals used to feel extremely far away but I realise now that there are just some small steps that she needs to do first which I can do in her own time and focus on one thing at a time. I realise that just because you are not in school or college, does not mean you cannot do the things that you enjoy. Now I know that I deserve to have relationships in which I feel equal.

I was grateful for Pathways because if the course ended after just 5 weeks, I felt like I could easily slip back into my old ways. I was glad of the structure it gives me and the reminder to keep learning.

# Sofia, 23

May 2024

About a week before the course started, things were starting to feel a bit better, and I was feeling a tiny bit more positive. Before that I had been barely leaving the house.

I did not have a good understanding of my issues and was not aware of what makes me.

I knew I had anxiety and knew about my triggers, but I had not gone deeper until now. I felt unsure if it was going to help at first but also optimistic and happy to see where it went.



I had been in therapy etc before so I did not think it would be any different.

But after first session, I felt like it was vastly different to what I was used to, the sessions went much deeper, they were not patronising or relying on the classic 'how does this make you feel' questions- it went deeper.

I enjoyed and benefitted from the activities and from being asked to think and write stuff down, having examples helped and I found the structure of the workbook helpful. It was not basic; it felt more complex- in a good way!

The people and being with people in the same position as me. Also, the facilitators. It was such a nice environment- very welcoming and enjoyable, It got heavy but it was never draining, It was about exploring yourself and I became interested in learning about why I felt the way I did.

I am still progressing with leaving the house more by going on drives with my friend. My goal is to be able to reconnect more with my family. I want to be able to do basic things like help My Mum with the shopping or to go in with her to collect her prescription (rather than waiting in the car). Since the course, I have been able to get out more and not focus so much on my thoughts. My thought process has changed. I can now manage my thoughts better before getting overwhelmed by the physical sensations of anxiety.

# Bobby, 18

June 2024

I was unemployed, on universal credit and barely making enough money to stay afloat, my mental health was rocky and not good.

I was quite lost and did not have any tools to support, I was pleasantly surprised; I was expecting more of what I experienced in CAMHS which was a stilted atmosphere where they just got through the motions, and they do not really acknowledge you as an individual person.



It was nice to feel treated like a person not a subject on this course, the reason's I stuck with the course was because I liked the group and because I didn't have any reason to leave, it felt very useful and I learnt and figured things out on my own, and it was nice to feel I helped others in the group by sharing my experiences.

I did not really have any tools in place to support my mental health previously, I have done some similar things before, but I have not internalised that knowledge, until doing this course where it was explained properly to me, and I was shown steps on how to do it. Being taken through it step by step was helpful.

Biggest takeaway was especially the disputing negative thoughts technique, it has really helped me, and I have taken that away. It is great as it is a tool I can use mentally (not writing down) and do anytime.

It is going to be a lot better than you expect. It is completely different experience to being in a therapist's office or similar settings like CAMHS, I would genuinely tell them to literally try it as no pressure.

# Alice, 19

September 2024

I was not in education, training, did not have any social groups. It was very boring. I went to school in 2021 and went straight to college after school. Then I had covid and got extremely ill and so, I took a year out.

After I recovered, I could not focus and was unable to see college through another reason I struggled in college was that I was always a classed as a high achiever, being diagnosed with autism meant that I was faced with challenges but also meant teachers were hard on me and there was no room for failure.



This knocked my confidence, and I made me hate any kind of learning/ education setting. So, it was a huge step for me to sign up to SAFE and join the programme.

I would say my expectations were met. Although at first, I was familiar with the content having done similar things in college, it was nice to go over it again. I liked getting to hear other people's experiences and learn from them, that made it different for me. The SAFE programme differs because it all ties together and that is helpful because one session leads to another. With previous trainings, it felt like little glimpses, but it is nice to see a bigger picture even with individual sessions.

Even though we are only halfway, I can see the difference in me. The session on Change really impacted me. It helped me understand that change is going to happen regardless, but I can accept and embrace it.

My goal for the future is the Childcare Bootcamp where I get Level 2 qualification in Early Years, I would say "definitely do it." The course has affirmed so many things - I understand myself a lot better, had a lack of confidence but now I have a lot more confidence in myself and my abilities. The strengths quiz was so good for me, it helped me relate my strengths to my employability. The handbook has been good – helped me step by step visualise myself.

# Claudia, 22

September 2024

Before I started, I was doing the same thing all the time and not giving anything my attention. I was not doing anything that needed to be done, and I was not motivated to do general stuff like shopping. I was very depressed and going through an unbelievably bad mental place.

I was very anxious about coming onto it. I learned about it from my work coach, and she thought it would help me. I was a bit scared because I did not know if it would help me because I have had stuff in the past that did not work I was worried that it wouldn't.



When the course started, I felt like I was a lot more relaxed.

I thought I would be more worried to join in, I was worried about people judging but I was shocked and happy with how calm and non-judgemental everything was. I did not think I would connect with what was happening, I thought it would be boring, but I really enjoyed the first week- it was eye opening.

The atmosphere with everyone- they were all so welcoming and they understood. It was nice to see that we had some similarities- nice to connect with them over past experiences that we shared.

My goals are to continue with Pathways to get a bit more help with everything that has been going on. I want to keep putting everything from the course in my everyday life. I thought I had no strengths but since doing the course, it has told me I have more strengths that I thought I had- as well as skills. I want to get out more because that has been a problem since before the course. But since the course I have gone out that little bit more with friends, family, or partner.

# Tony, 25

January 2024

Life was a bit like stumbling around in the dark, I felt like I was just floating along, not doing much, not really sure where I was headed and I didn't have much confidence, struggled with anxiety and felt like I was stuck in this loop of negativity.

It was hard just getting by day to day I needed help and was willing to give things a go, but I was not sure if I could stick to a course.

The first week was a significant change, Seriously, it wanted to step into a whole new world.



I did not know how much I was stuck in my own head until after the first day. At first, I was nervous about all the people and I was, like, 'Can I really do this?' But once we got going, I started to feel more at ease. Everyone was so friendly and supportive. It was like a breath of fresh air, I knew I could actually talk about what was going on in my head without feeling judged.

The other participants and the facilitators they all played a massive part in keeping me going. Knowing that I was not alone, that there were others going through similar stuff, it made all the difference. The things we were talking about were challenging, I liked learning about my strengths reminding me that I have good qualities though I might struggle with some things, not everything about me and my life is bad. The facilitators really knew their stuff. I started setting goals, which has always been hard for me, I want to take on challenges more now.

I wanted to keep going, to see where this could take me. Right now, I am in a better place, thanks to the course. At least I feel more like working on myself. I have started exercising more. I need to sort my housing issue out and I am determined to do it. I am working on finishing up a customer service course online—it's a step towards something more stable. I am taking small steps now, it will take time, but I am getting there. No question, this course has been a great for me, and I reckon it could do the same for anyone else struggling out there. You will meet some amazing people and learn about yourself. It is not easy, but it is worth it. You will not regret it.