



Volunteer Story

Two years ago I was in a dark place with physical and mental health problems, not wanting to leave the house, not wanting to be around anybody including family and friends, needing someone to be with me when I went out shopping. My confidence was shot to pieces.

Then one day I got a phone call from a member of staff from First Contact Clinical who was working alongside my GP practice, I was offered an appointment to go to and see someone called Vicki, I was reluctant at first but went along. The first appointment was hard to attend as meeting a stranger was then my worst nightmare at that time, Vicki put me at ease straight away and she discussed practical things that could help me, this included getting extra benefits I was entitled to, even accompanied me to DWP medicals.

After some one to one appointments at my GP's she suggested a mutual aid group that was running by them, but as a man I didn't do group therapy plus that was terrifying to me, to be in a group of people I didn't know, but after a few weeks I agreed to give it a try, I was met outside by another member of staff and escorted into the group, it felt like the first day of school, for the first few weeks I didn't say much or get involved but slowly I gained more confidence with the help of the staff.

About six months later I was asked if I would be interested in becoming a volunteer facilitator of the group, I was apprehensive at first not thinking I had the ability or the confidence to do this, after a conversation with Vicki she persuaded me to apply and I started to do the training course, this gave me more confidence.

Within a couple of months I was facilitating the group with help from staff at first then alone with the backup of staff, it was hard at first but it felt a real accomplishment for me from where I had been months before. It is now run by me and a member of staff called Emily who is a big help.

Volunteering has given me an interest as researching topics for the meetings give me something to do and learning more about my own health conditions and help research conditions that other members of the group suffer from, it also gives me the ability to give help and support and receive support from members of the group, which are now like a group of friends. It gives me great satisfaction having the ability to try to help others and try to improve their lives in any way I can, it also helps me give something back for all the help I received from Vicki and the rest of the staff at First Contact Clinical, as without their help and support I don't know where I would be now.

Chris Grieves