

## **“I learned to live on my own, which is a lonely experience”**

I have experienced depression all my life. My symptoms have been feeling very low, sad, useless, and worthless, thinking the world would be better without me in it. In the lowest times, I would hurt myself to feel alive.

My family dynamics played a part in my mental health, with bereavement at a young age and a strong father figure, who expected us to just get on with stuff. I went to school young which was intimidating with kids much bigger than me, and I ended up a target for bullying by kids and teachers. I struggled with learning and discovered later in life I had dyslexia. My way of coping was to build walls around how I was feeling, and stay out of the way. I learned to live on my own, which is a lonely experience. When I was a teenager, I had my first breakdown, as my walls couldn't hold in my feelings any more. My parents realised I was struggling, and they addressed the problems I was experiencing with dyslexia and being bullied, but then the gates went up again, and I had to get on with life. These experiences meant that I really lacked confidence and worried about people's opinions. After attending university, which I struggled with, I started working in a couple of jobs. This was a good growing up experience, and I rediscovered an interest in learning through Open University.

Throughout my life, I have had suicidal thoughts. I feel like I just want to be gone from it all and allow others not to have me as a burden anymore. I have hatred towards myself for things I feel I have said or done wrong. I worry about everything. I am in a constant battle with depression, which peaks at times with suicidal thoughts as a solution. I often wish I wasn't here annoying folks, and feel like such a waste of space – for example, someone else could have my job if I wasn't in it. With my family, I feel I could be a better dad, and that my wife is a better mum, and could have a better man than me. I have self-harmed by punching my hand into things, hitting my head off walls. It gives me a sense of adrenaline and a tiny sense of being alive which is better than the sense of being trapped. But I'm still trapped in other ways.

## **“Our workload was increasing, and I was juggling a lot of life things in my head”**

I have had problems at work from the start, because of a lack of skill and experience and the expectations senior staff had in terms of my job experience. I was stressed trying not to lose my job, now that I had my own family, and I felt like a failure getting everything wrong. I did not feel I was able to talk to my Team Leader and did not want to discuss my private feelings with them. At the worst times I struggled to get out of bed and felt panicked on the way to work. I was afraid that if I let these feelings take over I may never get away from them. I can understand why people quit or hide away when they don't feel supported at work. The stress went up and down with workload and staff shortages. I was having really bad days, where I just wanted to leave. This time breakdowns were always on the horizon, just about to happen.

It all came to a head about 18 months ago, when my dad became terminally ill. Our workload was increasing, and I was juggling a lot of life things in my head. One day, at a point I did not feel listened to, my body just refused, and I had a panic attack, feeling dizzy and breathless. I emailed my Team Leader about how I was feeling, and walked out of work for a few days. I ended up at a friend's door. I'm not sure what I would have done that day but I'm glad I was able to escape and sleep. Being left alone was great - so great it was hard to go back.

## **“When I told people, they also talked a little about themselves and friends and family experiences”**

I visited the doctor in the middle of this crisis. He diagnosed depression and registered me for a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) course online. Although I never finished the course, I can see that it is helpful to follow some of the principles outlined in the course, and I do try to do this. It reinforced some of the other measures I was taking to fight back, like exercise and gardening. Recently, I ran a triathlon. I was using my strength which I usually used to deal with negatives for something which was positives instead. It has taken a while to sort out my medication – the first type of pills changed the chemistry in my head, made me feel dizzy and a little mad. The second type is better, and has stopped my suicidal dips. They have given me an edge of confidence, like I'm able to talk about things, but this has made me feel like I'm opening myself up to the world and running around naked. I still struggle with feeling like I am wasting the doctor's time, but recognise the benefits.

I never really had anyone to talk to about my feelings, until I met my wife. She recognised the long term problem and has encouraged me many times to go to the doctor and get help. It took the panic attack and my family suffering because of me for me to finally ask the doctor for help. At work I agreed to have counselling. I had never done this before but I admit now I needed it. I realised I had no friends to talk to in this deep way. It was reassuring to hear about other people and different cases, and find that you're not the only one. That reassured me and enabled me to open up more with close friends and some colleagues, especially those who were also struggling. When I told people, they also talked a little about themselves and friends and family experiences. Being able to help others by being open has helped me.

## **“I realise I judge myself much harder than I do others”**

When I got back to work, my Team Leader made an effort to address the problem. We agreed more one to one meetings with my manager, who has questioned things in a helpful way. She agreed to refer me to the counselling sessions available through PKC. You are able to have three with another two on agreement. The process means you have to expose yourself to your manager to get the funds signed off for the help. This was why I always avoided this in the past, choosing instead to phone the PKC helpline. The counselling has been helpful, but I need more, as I am addressing such deep rooted issues. In my experience, it's been essential to have the right chemistry with the counsellor involved so you feel able to open up. I was lucky enough to have that through the PKC service. Others told me to take stress leave and I almost did a few times, but I can't – I felt I'd be a failure and a burden on others, like that's not what I'm paid for. I realise I judge myself much harder than I do others. I see now it would have done me good, and would advise others to take a little

time. I would also say that work has obligations to help - read the personal policies and ask HR or friendly staff. This will make you feel more secure in the workplace if you choose to get help, enabling you to fight back and move on.

I have developed a better friendship with a work colleague, and we do a lot of outdoor activities together. Having someone who responds to my friendship feels really good, and recognising I was not getting that from old long term friends has highlighted a missing part of my friendships. It has been important for me to spend time with my family, and individually with my wife. We have been making changes to our lifestyle in terms of my wife's work, school issues, money worries, and being parents. Before, we were always busy, passing like ships, only talking about problems and not living. We are trying to make time to be together more and fix issues that are making us feel sad.

## **“It is important for some men to hear that they are doing alright, and that they too need sympathy and attention”**

I think in work there is still a stigma to saying I can't cope. I think when there is an obvious 'real' crisis like family death or missing limb from accident, people accept it more easily, but stress and depression are not so obvious. I have learned now that talking is okay, and it is important that you tell someone how you are feeling. The hard bit is who. You may be surprised who will help and who will not; it can put strain on personal relationships if people don't think they see you progressing. It can seem to friends like the crisis is over and you're just wanting attention, but really you want someone to listen to and comfort you. This is where counselling really helps, as there is confidence this person will listen and help you with your issues. I would say open and younger doctors are very aware of mental health issues and can be a good place to start if you're feeling really bad. It's okay to open up when struggling and to get professional help if it's needed.

I think men in particular need to have an emotional as well as a physical outlet. The role of men has changed, and we don't know who we are anymore. Young men fight and struggle because they have all these hormones, feelings, and old genetic male roles; it's a lot of pressure. We live in a society now of self-focus, lacking honourable role models, lacking a respectful society for men. Women can be seen to have support, friends, talking, fighting against the male world, multiple roles and opportunities, role models breaking barriers. Men have limited support, and are told to man up, drink it out, that talking is taking the piss and that they have it all. I guess women have a far more open and varied support network and have all doors open. It is important for some men to hear that they are doing alright, and that they too need sympathy and attention.

## **“I think there is still a stigma to saying I can't cope”**

Our society demands that you must fit in with expectations, that you must be nice looking, open, and not be angry. Being able to express your feelings and use your words makes you powerful. This can clash with male feelings as only those with superficial power or body language can succeed. An old tradition was working your way up the ranks gaining respect. Men can have barriers speaking to other men – they don't know how to react when another (apparently strong) man is cracking. The next generation of men need to have opportunities to have their feelings and problems listened to – but to reinforce they do not need to follow their parents' expectations and show them positive, down to earth and honourable role models. It's a new world of trying to find methods to help men. I

noted in the news there were interesting initiatives of night school which encompasses both honour and fighting skills. In France there has been recent conscription service workshop, giving young men and minorities who are struggling within society a place, honour, patriotism and self-worth. The spy 'try out' TV shows on BBC show the value of different skills, really showing up alphas and superficial show offs. We don't have the old aspect of warrior elder anymore - most never even experience technical skills apprenticeships or conscription. Society has run away from this because they consider it risky or aggressive, but that means we have then lost the positive side of it.

**“I love helping people and have always been open to listen and help. Now I have more experience in mental health issues I may be more useful – but I’m still no expert”**

If you are affected by any issues raised in this case study or are worried about someone, please contact the Samaritans on 116 123, Breathing Space on 0800 838587 or NHS 24 on 111. In an emergency call 999. For information about mental health and suicide, visit [www.sucidehelp.co.uk](http://www.sucidehelp.co.uk) or download the Suicide? Help! app by searching in your app store.