

CASE STUDY

CAROLINE'S STORY

“I had lost my way and Tomorrow’s People helped me get my life back on track. I feel like a different person.”

Caroline McKenna thinks life is pretty good. She loves her job as a hairdresser’s receptionist and at age 22 is looking forward to a bright and happy future.

But just 12 months ago things did not look so positive for Caroline.

Having lost her full-time job and unable to find a new one she soon spiralled into a cycle of sleeping problems and depression.

Soon she was forced to abandon her dreams of a job in childcare and was claiming Incapacity Benefit and on medication.

Caught up in a series of doctors and counselling appointments Caroline’s depression grew worse and she felt no one could help.

“I tried medication and I tried counselling but they didn’t work for me. My doctor was really helpful, but the problem with being out of work and depressed is that as each days goes by it gets harder and harder to be motivated,” she said.

“Sometimes it was a struggle just getting out of bed. I had no direction and didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life.”

Luckily for Caroline she is a patient at the James Wigg Practice at Kentish Town, North West London, where Tomorrow’s People is on hand to give employment and welfare advice.

Based in one of the consulting rooms, adviser Faruk Noor offers help to people who have been out of work due to poor health but who would like to get back in to employment, education or training.

It was during a consultation with her doctor that Caroline was told about the Tomorrow’s People project.

“I was seeing the doctor again about my sleeping problems and we were discussing my lack of confidence when she mentioned the fact that there was an adviser on site,” says Caroline. “She said he might be able to help with my confidence so I made an appointment. I felt I had nothing to lose.”

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Caroline visited Faruk once a week, talking through her problems and barriers to work.

“Faruk was really patient and understanding. He didn’t judge me, he listened, but also slowly, but surely, built up my confidence,” says Caroline.

“He started off by giving me mini exercises to help me believe in myself and then asked me what I really wanted to do. He told me I could do anything I set my mind to.

“I decided I wanted to go back to college and study childcare because that was something I always thought I’d do. But in the end because I felt so good about myself and my skills I decided to go for a full-time job in a completely different field instead.”

As soon as Caroline was ready to re-enter the job market Faruk helped her update her CV and ran through her interview techniques that were video taped and reviewed.

Her confidence had grown so much that when she saw a job advertised for a hairdresser’s receptionist near her home at Kentish Town, North West London, she applied, and despite fierce competition, she got the job.

Caroline said: “My boss called me the same day to offer me the job and said that she was really impressed, particularly with my interview, which is funny when I think how nervous and anxious I was before meeting Faruk.

“Making the appointment with Tomorrow’s People was the best decision I have ever made. I don’t know what I would have done without Faruk’s patience and guidance. Without him I would still be lying in bed all day with no direction.

“I would thoroughly recommend this kind of service being available at other surgeries. There must be thousands of other people out there like me. I had lost my way and Tomorrow’s People helped me get my life back on track. My depression has completely gone now and I feel like a different person. I feel so lucky to be in this situation.”

Faruk said: “Caroline had lost a lot of confidence and was really at a low ebb when she first came to see me. Before we could move on there were a lot of barriers that needed to be broken down and Caroline had to be honest about her depression.

“Then we worked on what she really wanted to do. At first she thought she wanted to pursue childcare, but actually over time it transpired that she really wanted to deal with people. It was so great when she successfully got her new job. She is an excellent example of someone who, given a little help, can go a long way.”

There are currently 2.7 million people claiming incapacity benefits, costing the state more than £6 billion a year. Projects like this one, from Tomorrow’s People, show that this burden of costs has the potential to be reduced.

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So far nearly 200 patients have seen the Tomorrow's People adviser at the James Wigg Practice, and of those who have completed the programme, 87% have returned to employment or are back in education or training. On average, 82% are still in work 12 months on.

Tomorrow's People is a specialist charitable trust, with a 20-year track record of success in helping people out of long-term unemployment, welfare dependence or homelessness, into jobs and self-sufficiency.

The trust has helped change the lives of more than 390,000 people who had been resigned to long-term, even life-long, unemployment, since it was established in 1984.

Press enquiries:

Michelle Eastty
Media Relations Manager
Tomorrow's People
Tel: 01424 203752