

Our stories

An inspiring e-book featuring real-life stories from Brighter Futures' customers, told in their own words. Read about their life-changing experiences with their mental health and what helped them through.



#ShareStoriesNotStigma



brighter futures
creative support, housing and employment

About this e-book...

Over the next few pages you will find real-life stories from Brighter Futures' customers. This e-book would not have been possible without their help and we would sincerely like to thank everyone involved for their time, courage and patience to share their experiences.

It is clear there is still a stigma attached to mental health and it is hoped this e-book will help others to gain a better understanding and at least start a bigger conversation. In this e-book you will find a few descriptions of some mental health issues mentioned by those interviewed, as well as support information.

You may be reading this and wondering who or what Brighter Futures is. We are a West Midlands-based not-for-profit organisation which is there to support the most vulnerable people in our communities. We believe that with tailored support our customers can be empowered to recognise and develop their strengths, confidence and self-esteem, manage their lives positively and build aspirations. We recognise that life circumstances such as abuse, bereavement, institutionalisation and mental illness can affect us all.

Our support workers help people every day to manage their health and wellbeing, work towards and maintain recovery. But, if someone experiences a crisis, we're there for them then too. Our work is backed up by a 'Clubhouse Recovery Network' based in communities across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, specialist staff, group therapies, employment opportunities and clubhouses, as well as our homelessness services and supported accommodation. Many of those interviewed for this e-book chose to mention The American, part of our Clubhouse Network. It is a truly special place which has made a huge difference to many people, and in some cases even saved lives.

We hope you enjoy reading this and remember, we're just a phone call away when you need us. Call our Helpline on **0808 800 2234** or for general enquiries call **01782 406000**.



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Steve, 61

Steve, 61, had no history of mental health issues, but that changed when he suffered a stroke.

“Four years ago I tried to take my life. I had a stroke, which affected my mobility and stopped me from working. I used to do air conditioning in new builds like Tesco stores around the country and travelled a lot. I'd gone to the Job Centre to get my benefit and I'd just had enough; a member of staff said something about seeing me next time and I told him he wouldn't because I was going to kill myself. He told me about Brighter Futures and I went straight to The American.

“I've never seen a GP about it, only Brighter Futures staff, and I've been coming ever since. I come about four days a week and I've started to take art classes here. I've always been interested in cartoons so I thought I'd give it a go and I really enjoy it.

“Depression is still there in the back of my mind and sometimes my lack of mobility gets me down. I'd been working for 43 years before I had the stroke so it's frustrating to not be able to do some of the things I could do before. When I told my family they'd just say to snap out of it, but I think a lot of people didn't take it seriously because I was such a laid-back guy, always joking, that they couldn't understand how bad it was.

“If anyone is at that low point I would say don't do it, there's a way forward. I know, I've been there. There's help out there all over the UK and if you can't tell your friends or family, tell a professional because talking is important. The staff at The American really listen and make time for you.”

Is Steve's story ringing any bells?

You can find more information about The American Clubhouse support groups [here](#).

It got to the point where I wasn't living, just surviving

The American Clubhouse on Waterloo Road means a lot of things to a lot of people. It's one of those buildings that you drive past and occasionally wonder about, never giving it a second thought – until you need it. We have interviewed a handful of members for this e-book and it may shock you to know the Clubhouse Network has saved lives.

Who better to tell you about what this place means than a member who has been there since day one? Gary, 50, loved the idea of the Clubhouse when it was first suggested and eagerly followed its progress. He said: "I've been coming here for 18 years. The building has changed a lot with the addition of the conservatory, games room and community garden. Now there are two other Clubhouses, The Observatory and twentyfourSEVEN in Hanley, along with loads of regular members.

"I was going to a mental health centre before The American and I've tried group therapy, but there's something special about this place. There's always lots going on and you can get

involved in volunteering and other activities. I'm here five days a week and I volunteer; there's always a choice to get involved and nothing is forced on you."

Gary remembers having problems since school and dropped out at the age of 13. He continued: "I like to learn and I teach myself new stuff all the time, it was the social aspect that used to stress me out. It took me a while before I actually went for help, because I was scared and because of the huge stigma

attached to mental health back then. It got to the point where I wasn't living, just surviving.

"In 1991 I went to a mental health centre, where I was told I had anxiety and [depression](#). I still have anxiety at times but I no longer experience depression and a lot of that is down to Brighter Futures. I actually got my first job with Brighter Futures as part of the maintenance team working part-time.

In 1991 I went to a mental health centre, where I was told I had anxiety and depression. I still have anxiety at times but I no longer experience depression and a lot of that is down to Brighter Futures.

Gary continued: "Unfortunately, I had an unsuccessful operation on my leg in 2006 which prevented me from going back to work; instead I regularly volunteer whenever I can with Brighter Futures and North Staffs Mind.

"I think staying active both physically and mentally is the key to good mental health. In the mid to late 80s I would never talk about my health and I would bottle it all up. I was

feeling depressed and bored and wondering what to do. The American has really changed my life and given me motivation. I also go on regular walks, even though sometimes it hurts my leg, and my motto is 'get out and do stuff while you can'.

"For anyone reading this who wants to change their lives, I would say come to the Clubhouse. Never think you can't change things – I did."

Get out
and do
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Members of The American Clubhouse art group

Kate, 61, developed an alcohol addiction to cope with her mental health issues after waiting 32 years for the correct diagnosis.

She said: “Looking back I always heard voices as a child, but people used to just say they were imaginary friends. As I got older, the voices started getting really nasty, but I wasn’t diagnosed with schizophrenia until I was 32; instead, I was treated for depression and anxiety.

“I started drinking to try and cope with it and this led to a relationship breakdown. I ended up in a hostel for the homeless in Hanley. I would go for respite care at The Bennett Centre in Stoke, where I was put in contact with a Community Practice Nurse (CPN) and she decided to look into my mental health further, which is when I received my diagnosis.”

Kate says there is still a stigma attached to speaking about mental health. She added: “When I tell people I have **schizophrenia** their automatic

reaction is to shy away because they think I’m going to hurt them. The voices tell me to harm myself, not other people. My sister didn’t believe I had schizophrenia and only saw the drinking problem, but I think she was in denial. You just feel so judged by people who don’t understand.

“I used to get really down and I wouldn’t leave the house, but I don’t hurt myself anymore.”

A friend recommended Brighter Futures and The American Clubhouse to Kate and she has been coming ever since. She said: “I really like it here, as it gives me somewhere to go and everyone is

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Kate, aged 61

welcoming. I’ve even taken up sewing again, because they have sewing classes; I had not sewed in 20 years and now I’m making new things all the time.

“My advice to other people would be to seek help, because I waited until I was a lot older and I think the earlier you can get the correct diagnosis, the better.”

Did you know?

Having schizophrenia does not mean multiple personalities. Instead, the person has false ideas or has lost touch with reality. Multiple personality disorder is unrelated to schizophrenia.

I'd been wearing a mask for so long

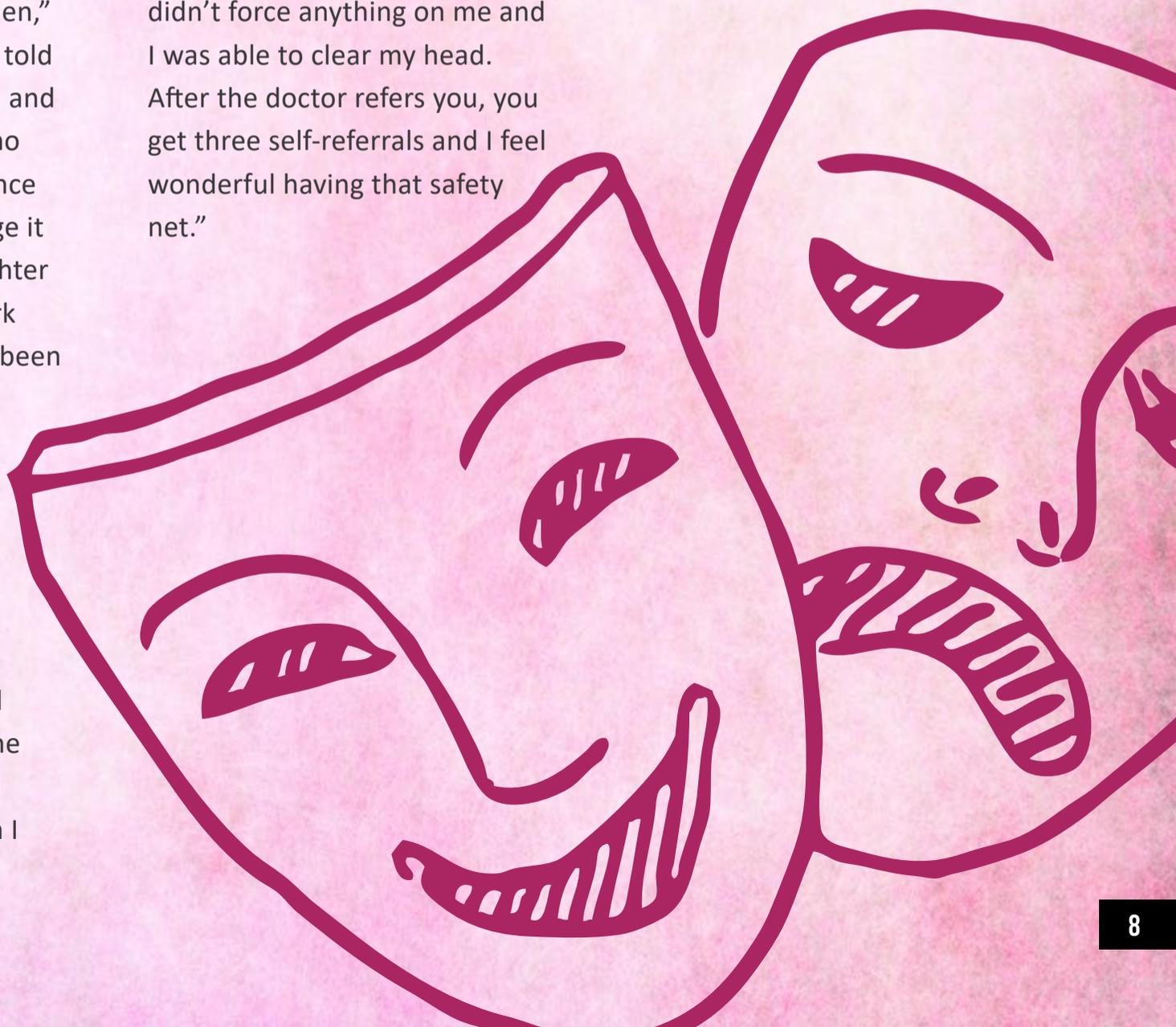
Emma, 45, knew she had a mental health issue when she experienced a nervous breakdown at 23 years old. But it wasn't until 17 years later that she received a diagnosis of [Bipolar Disorder](#) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

"I think the reason I struggled so much was because I wasn't diagnosed until I was 40, and not properly medicated until then," she said. "Previous doctors told me I had severe depression and gave me medication, with no signposting information. Since then, I've learned to manage it more and I also attend Brighter Futures' Clubhouse Network support group – which has been my safety net.

"What made a difference for me was when I got married and changed my GP; my new doctor happened to be a qualified psychologist and he understood and listened to me. He referred me to the Greenfields Centre, where I received counselling, which I found very good."

Emma experienced another nervous breakdown when she was 40 and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. She said: "The doctor there told me she didn't work by ticking boxes and she really listened and gave me my official diagnosis. She said she believed I had been suffering with my condition since I was 13 years old. She referred me to **Safe Spaces** for four days and it really made a difference; they didn't force anything on me and I was able to clear my head. After the doctor refers you, you get three self-referrals and I feel wonderful having that safety net."

Emma did what many people with mental health issues do and tried to hide her condition from those around her, including her children. She added: "The most challenging time for me was when my boys left home and I experienced empty nest syndrome. It was very hard. I'd been wearing a mask for so long that it got to the point where I was wearing around four different masks. I've been able to



let one go after the other thanks to the group therapy through the Clubhouse Recovery Network. I used to feel guilty offloading my problems onto someone else, and I think that's how a lot of people feel, so going to group sessions and counselling really helps."



There is still a stigma attached to talking about mental health, says Emma. "I feel like saying chop my leg off and save me my mind because people can see if you have lost a limb, but they can't see you have a mental health issue. They just see you've put makeup on and a nice outfit and think you're fine, when in fact it's the opposite.



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"If you know someone with a mental health issue, please don't give up on them as the consequences can be serious. You also find they can become quite

frustrated or agitated and have very strong feelings and they may occasionally lash out, so please have patience and try to talk about it so you can understand."

How can Safe Spaces help me?

Safe Spaces offers somewhere to go during the week and weekends when you're in mental distress or crisis, when a hospital admission is neither wanted or needed.

Safe Spaces can provide:

- Support and a listening ear during your stay
- Space to be alone if you wish
- Information and help to resolve your distress
- Activities and relaxation techniques

You will need a referral from someone involved in your care the first time you stay with Safe Spaces. This could be from a mental health social worker or CPN, psychiatrist or GP Emergency Duty or Crisis Team. Once you have stayed with Safe Spaces, you can self-refer up to three times within a six month period.

How do I contact Safe Spaces?

For more information and to speak to a member of the team call 01782 811815 or [click here](#).

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Howard worked at the Wedgwood Visitor Centre for 40 years, meeting visitors and making jewellery. He needed to be confident, but that wasn't always the case.

He experienced poor mental health off and on for 20 years and was initially diagnosed with depression and sectioned under the Mental Health Act in 2011, when he was admitted to Harplands Hospital for six weeks.

He said: "At the time I went in kicking and screaming; I didn't want to go in, but then I had a breakthrough and realised people were taking things seriously and something could be done to help me."

Two years later Howard's friends and family noticed he was experiencing extreme high mood. Howard knew he was feeling on 'a high' but thought he was okay, he did however agree to go to the Harplands where he was readmitted and diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. "It was a relief to finally have a diagnosis of Bipolar, it meant I could start to get the right treatment I needed and the medication helped me be stable."

Howard now volunteers at several foodbanks and runs activities at The American clubhouse. "When I went back to work, I just didn't want to talk about it, when I was off work I just wanted to hide.

"I still think there is a stigma

around Mental Health, it's getting better and famous people talking about it, such as Frank Bruno, helps. If talking about mental health helps one person on the street relate to their life and reach out for help it's worth it. It needs more people to be talking about it, getting into schools early, so that people know it's not wrong.

"Going to The American helps



Don't suffer in silence, tell someone, a friend or family, your doctor, speak to someone; it can help to speak to someone who has been through the same thing. A conversation can be life-saving.



because I feel good helping other people; there are people who sometimes have much worse problems and I can help."

Howard says that if anyone is struggling with their mental health they should tell their GP. "Your GP can often signpost you to services. We also produce newsletters for The American Clubhouse telling people what support is available here. In the past people only went to the doctors' for tablets, but there

are other things available; places like The Clubhouse.

"Don't suffer in silence, tell someone, a friend or family, your doctor, speak to someone, it can help to speak to someone who has been through the same thing. A conversation can be life-saving.

"You do have to recognise that everyone is different, I don't want to be interrogated about my mental health, sometimes talking to a complete stranger can be better."

He said that in the Clubhouse Network everyone has some kind of mental health issue but everyone is in the same boat. "You'll always see a nice smiling face. You can just visit, have a little look around, there is no pressure. If you're worried, it's never as bad as you think."

Looking back, Howard added: "I do believe things happen for a reason. Going through what I went through has made me a better person. I'm stronger. I'm still here. I have purpose – helping others. I feel positive, even though I was in a bad place. At my lowest point I had attempted suicide, but the only way is up.

"You're not alone. No matter what, you're never alone. You might feel no one understands, but it will get better. You might have times when your mental illness comes back but you learn how to manage it. You learn what works for you and how to help yourself."

Charlotte lost all her confidence when she was diagnosed with epilepsy in 2014; she went from having a job and independence to struggling with everyday things like catching a train. She began self-harming as a way to cope, but people didn't understand.

“I was working for Somerfield when I began to have mental health problems. It started with self-harming; a member of staff who I became close with asked how I injured my arm and because I'm honest I told them the truth about what I did. They said that if I could hurt myself I could hurt others, accused me of doing it for attention and said they wouldn't bring flowers to my grave – because they thought self-harm was the same as suicide.

“In 2017 a support worker eventually convinced me to go to The American clubhouse and once I settled in I met my best friend. I enjoyed colouring and I became interested in 5D Diamond Printing – I even made the American Bald Eagle with a flag, which I donated to the Clubhouse to mark Independence Day. I got most of the members doing 5D Diamond Painting and I seemed to be gaining my confidence back. I even dressed as the Statue Of

If you know someone with mental health issues you can help just by letting the person know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk. Try to be patient and not judge them.

Liberty for Independence Day last year and Uncle Sam this year! I also took part in the Potters 'Arf Marathon, a Race for Life and The Dougie Mac Moonlight Walk.

“I've done lots of things I didn't feel confident doing before; I'm now an official volunteer for Brighter Futures. This year will be a year since I re-joined.”

Charlotte recommends keeping a diary to note down feelings and moods, to help decide if someone should visit

their GP. She said: “They can show the diary to their GP, who can refer them to mental health services, like Brighter Futures. Please don't be scared to ask for help.

“If you know someone with mental health issues you can help just by letting the person know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk. Try to be patient and not judge them. If they are afraid to go see their GP, maybe offer to go with them for the first appointment.”



Peter, 55, first heard about The American when he was staying in a hostel around five years ago. He'd seen his GP about depression around the same time.

He said: "I've never told anyone I have depression because I find it difficult to talk to people about it. I start getting nervous and anxious because I don't know how they will react."

"Everyone here is very welcoming and my life is a lot better now. Sometimes there are days when I will isolate myself in my flat, but I think that doesn't get me anywhere. As soon as I come back, the staff are really supportive and it's made a real difference to me. I would encourage other people to give it a try."

I've never told anyone I have depression because I find it difficult to talk to people about it.

Talking is really important too, you just need to find the right people to listen and now I've found that.

Janet, 40, has been diagnosed with emotionally unstable personality disorder and severe depression.

"For me it started right after my husband died, seven years ago. I took an overdose and they sent me to A&E, then I went to Harplands Hospital. While I was there my house got repossessed by the council and I was referred to Florence House Rehabilitation Unit and North Staffs Mind. They told me about The American and Brighter Futures' support groups.

"I like going to the Clubhouse Network support group because they discuss different topics and there are other people there in similar situations, including people who self-harm. No one judges me and I can talk to members and the staff. It's made a big difference to my life and I don't self-harm as much. Even just knowing there is a helpline to call makes me feel better.

"Some of my family are supportive, but my mum says I'm just attention seeking. Some days I feel depressed but now there is a light at the end of the tunnel and you have to just go at your own pace and keep taking the medication. It's important to stay active and get out more. Talking is really important too, you just need to find the right people to listen and now I've found that."

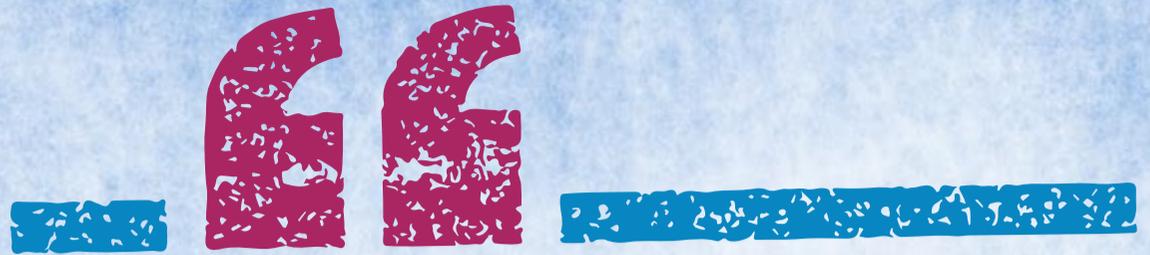
If you need to talk,
we're here to listen.
Staffordshire Mental
Health Helpline
0808 800 2234



Vicky, 36, experiences depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and panic attacks. She was encouraged to seek help by her mother and she is learning how to manage her mental health.

She said: “The worst time for me was when I was with my ex-partner, who didn’t understand at all. I never used to talk about my mental health with other people but now I feel more confident speaking about it. When I go for job interviews I feel like I have to tell them about my health and as a result I’ve not got the job. I feel like if I’m not open about it and something happens then it would be my fault. I really want to get better so I can go back to work.

“Since I started coming to Brighter Futures my OCD has got



I didn’t used to talk about my mental health with other people but now I feel more confident speaking about it.



a lot better. For me it’s a hygiene thing where I need to wash my hands a lot. I’m also getting help from North Staffs Mind to manage my panic attacks.”

Vicky has also had help from Sasha, a little Jack Russell cross rescue dog who she takes for walks. Vicky added: “She makes

me go out more and I’m doing training with her at the moment to get her used to other dogs. I have a few animals and I enjoy looking after them, which really helps me.”

Did you know?

About one in 50 people have OCD at some point in their lives. OCD usually starts in the teens or early twenties. It tends to get better and worse over time, but people often don’t seek help for many years.

Obsessions can include: fear of causing or failing to prevent harm; intrusive thoughts, images and impulses; fear of contamination; fears and worries related to order or symmetry.

Compulsions can include: rituals; checking; correcting thoughts; reassurance.



Ruth, 57, has had bipolar all her life. In childhood she was always “the naughty girl”, then in teenage years, “the black sheep”. She didn’t know what it meant to have bipolar disorder, just that she was different, and she turned to drugs as a coping mechanism.

“I told my doctor I was suicidal and I was sick of it all. He said to talk to my friends, have a coffee and calm down - so I became addicted to heroin.

“I wanted to feel normal. I’ve had it all my life but it was about 15 years ago when I got a diagnosis of bipolar disorder and manic depression. They didn’t tell me any more than that and it was scary to hear. I had become a heroin addict

and going to rehab was the bottom of the pit. I was tired of life, I didn’t care and I wanted to die. But I had a young son and I couldn’t bring myself to abandon him.

“I was living in Wales for a good while and the drugs were getting worse. I went to rehab for five days; they put me on methadone and it didn’t work. When I eventually started doing better my dad died and I went back on the drugs. I had a second detox and then my mum died, so I went back on the drugs. The whole time they only saw the drug problem and not the reason behind it. There was nothing for mental health in Wales at the time. I just felt like the doctors weren’t bothered.”

It seemed that every time Ruth was making progress something set her back, whether that was bereavement, toxic relationships or frustration. Then a doctor told her about a drug which prevents heroin withdrawal symptoms.

She explained: “It stops you rattling and it didn’t take me long to come off the drugs – I haven’t used since. It opened everything up for me then. There was still no counselling for my head problems, and then my husband left and I became badly depressed. “My son, now an adult,



I told my doctor I was suicidal and I was sick of it all. He said to talk to my friends, have a coffee and calm down - so I became addicted to heroin.



wanted me to come and live with him and I moved to Stoke three years ago. I saw the immediate care team and a Community Practice Nurse and she told me about The American and Brighter Futures. At the time I was ready to kill myself because the mania was too much and my son could look after himself by that time. I was told about a support group and after the first session I was ready to do a runner because they were talking about anger issues and this upset me. A staff member knew at the time what was going on and she spoke to me after the group and I went to the next session. I’ve been going ever since and I’ve never looked back. It helps me find the reasons why and what works for me.



I've been
no one. I've
been a mum.
I've been
an addict.
I've been a
victim. Now
I'm finding
out who I
really am
and what
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"During the support sessions, I've found out a lot about self-harm. I used to bite my lip and the inside of my mouth until it bled; I would pick my skin, I used drugs, drank... I don't regret any of it because it's given me life experience and I'm now using that experience to help others. I've given advice to people who have relatives who are going through addiction and I've recently found out I saved a life. My advice to anyone who wants to help is to be ready to talk and be patient.

"Brighter Futures has given me all the support I could ever need and has saved my life. I have a wonderful, magical life now and so much to live for. I know I'm not better, but I'm better than I was. I have a healthy relationship and my partner is really understanding. He knows that some days I feel great, untouchable and others I'll be on a low. Some of my family still don't understand but I've really made an effort and if they don't want to know that's their problem.

"I've been no one. I've been a mum. I've been an addict. I've been a victim. Now I'm finding out who I really am and what I'm capable of and life is wonderful. It's still a battle every day to get out of bed and get dressed but now I have a reason and an amazing life, so dream that little bit and go for it because if I can, you can too."

How can support groups help me?

You can talk in confidence to other people who understand how you are feeling. The service provides peer support and information for people aged 18 and above who have experienced self harm. This can include things such as eating disorders, alcohol abuse, drug taking, cutting, etc.

For more information about our support groups, including our self-harm support service, contact the Clubhouse Network on 01782 835220 or 07500 444116.

Catherine, 45, was diagnosed with depression and anxiety in 2000.

“I’ve had [anxiety](#) since I was little. Some people in my family still don’t understand it and it can be very difficult. When I get stressed, it gets worse. When I try to tell people about my condition, they look at me like I have a contagious disease and I just think if they had the right information they may be better informed and not react like that.”

It took Catherine two years to work up the courage to step through the door of The American, with the help of a member of staff from Safe Spaces, who met her outside

“

If someone is in two minds about coming somewhere like this, then I would encourage them to take that first step because it’s made such a big difference to me.

”

and came in with her. She said: “There’s no way I could have done that on my own at the time but coming here really helps because no one judges me and I’ve made a lot of friends. The only thing my doctor can do is manage my medication, but here

I feel like the staff make time to listen to me.

“If someone is in two minds about coming somewhere like this, then I would encourage them to take that first step because it’s made such a big difference to me.”

Some people think I have something wrong with me

David, 50, experiences depression, anxiety and [panic attacks](#). He said: “It’s something that’s there with me in the back of my mind all the time and I’ve had it all my life.”

David first plucked up the courage to come to The American Clubhouse thanks to the encouragement of his girlfriend. He continued: “It was really scary at first, especially for someone like me, but I’m so glad I did

it because I have lots of new friends and I can talk to people with similar health problems.”

Over the past few years people have been more encouraged to talk about their mental health, with celebrities stepping up to talk about their own experiences. But David says he still does not feel comfortable doing this, adding: “Some people just think I have something wrong with me and I don’t tend to tell them about my health because I don’t

want them to judge me. I’m worried they will bully me or react negatively because there is still a stigma attached to it. But I would encourage people to speak to their GP and get help because there’s a lot out there. I know that people’s experiences with their GP can differ, but if you are not happy or feel like you have not been listened to then I would get a second opinion.”

Let's talk

The people we spoke to for this e-book thought it would be helpful to include a brief description of some of the mental health conditions they had mentioned. While mental health can affect everyone differently, we thought this would be a good way of helping others to understand.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder mainly affects your mood. You may experience:

- Manic or hypomanic episodes (feeling high)
- Depressive episodes (feeling low)
- Potentially some psychotic symptoms during manic or depressed episodes

The term 'bipolar' refers to the way your mood can change between two different states of mania and depression. Periods of time in each state can vary. Bipolar disorder used to be referred to as manic depression, so you might still hear people use this term.

Bipolar can disrupt home life, work, relationships, finances and physical health. During times of high mood, someone might make risky decisions or spend money they can't afford. When someone returns to a 'normal' or depressed mood they can feel embarrassed or regretful.

Anxiety

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think might happen. If anxiety starts to impact on the way you live your life then it can become a mental health problem. For example, it may be a problem for you if:

- Your feelings of anxiety are very strong or last for a long time
- You avoid situations that might cause you to feel anxious
- Your worries feel distressing or are hard to control
- You regularly experience symptoms of anxiety, which could include panic attacks

A **panic attack** is when these feelings of anxiety become intense and overwhelming. Symptoms include shortness of breath, sweating, an increased heartbeat or blurry vision. A panic attack can be associated with a particular place, object or situation.





Depression

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time and affects your everyday life. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make you feel suicidal.

If you are given a diagnosis of depression, you might be told that you have mild, moderate or severe depression. There are also some specific types of depression: **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**, depression that usually (but not always) occurs in the winter; **Dysthymia**, continuous mild depression that lasts for two years or more (also called persistent depressive disorder or chronic depression); **Prenatal Depression** which occurs during pregnancy; **Postnatal Depression (PND)**, which occurs in the weeks and months after becoming a parent.

Behaviour of someone experiencing depression may include:

- Cancelling plans with friends, or giving up hobbies they normally enjoy
- Staying in bed for long periods of time
- Changes in appetite
- Using drink or drugs more often
- Snapping at family and friends
- Avoiding or calling in sick to work, school or university.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder. It has two main parts: obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwelcome thoughts, images, urges, worries or doubts that repeatedly appear in your mind. Compulsions are repetitive activities that you do to reduce the anxiety caused by the obsession. It could be something like repeatedly checking a door is locked, repeating a specific phrase in your head or checking things.

Some of the types of obsessions people describe experiencing include:

- Concern over safety of friends and family, or that they will accidentally or deliberately harm themselves or others
- Unwelcome and intrusive thoughts about unintentionally carrying out violent, sexual or blasphemous acts
- Fears about contamination, infection or disease
- Worries about things being in the right place, in order, or symmetrical

If you experience OCD, you may experience disruption to your daily life. Repeating compulsions can take up a lot of time, and you might avoid certain situations that trigger your OCD.



Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a diagnosis given to people who experience symptoms of psychosis, alongside 'negative symptoms'. Psychosis can include hallucinations, delusions, paranoia and confused thoughts and feelings. Negative symptoms include withdrawal from family and friends and an extreme lack of interest and motivation generally.

A diagnosis of schizophrenia does not mean someone has a 'split personality', but many people wrongly think this. Some people think hearing voices means someone is dangerous, when voices are actually more likely to suggest that you harm yourself than someone else.

Personality disorders

Personality disorders are a type of mental health problem where your attitudes, beliefs and behaviours cause you longstanding problems in your life.

You might be given a diagnosis of personality disorder if all three of these apply:

- The way you think, feel and behave causes you or others significant problems in daily life. For example, you may feel unable to trust others or you may often feel abandoned, causing you or others unhappiness
- The way you think, feel and behave causes significant problems across different aspects of your life. You may struggle to start or keep friendships, to control your feelings and behaviour or get on with people at work, for example
- These problems continue for a long time. These difficult patterns may have started when you were a child or teenager and can carry on into your life as an adult



Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is also called Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD). If you have BPD, you may feel upset or angry a lot and you may be more likely to self-harm and have problems with relationships, alcohol or drugs.

People with BPD may experience the following:

- Extreme reactions to feeling abandoned
- Unstable relationships with others
- Confused feelings about who you are
- Being impulsive in ways that could be damaging. For example, spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, and binge eating
- Regular self-harming, suicidal threats or behaviour
- Long lasting feelings of emptiness or being abandoned
- Difficulty controlling your anger. For example, losing your temper or getting into fights
- Intense, highly changeable moods
- Paranoid thoughts when you're stressed

Psychosis

Psychosis (also called a psychotic episode) is when you perceive or interpret reality in a very different way from people around you. You might be said to 'lose touch' with reality.

The most common types of psychosis are:

- Hallucinations
- Delusions

You might also experience disorganised thinking and speech. Psychosis affects people in different ways. You might experience it once, have short episodes throughout your life, or live with it most of the time. The word psychosis is usually used to refer to an experience. It's a symptom of some mental health problems and not a diagnosis itself.

Self-harm

Self-harm can take many forms and is best described as harming yourself as a means of coping with emotional distress. Many people say that when they harm themselves, they experience a release of tension and so they often feel calmer. Self-harm is not just 'cutting' but can also include picking at skin, alcohol dependency, drug abuse and other methods of self-injury.

Need to talk?

If you or someone you know has been affected by any of the issues in this e-book, or are feeling stressed, worried or struggling to cope, we are here to listen.

Call the Brighter Futures Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline

Free confidential listening support for anyone aged 18 and over living in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

Call: 0808 800 2234 Text: 07860 022821

Email: staffordshire.helpline@brighter-futures.org.uk

Instant message: www.brighter-futures.org.uk

Open weekdays 7pm-2am, weekends 2pm-2am



Over **31,000**
successful
contacts



6,609
instant
messages



14,119
phone calls



124
emails

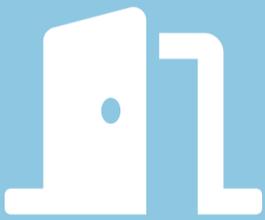


9,821
texts

The Clubhouse Network

 **ALMOST**
22,000
MEMBER VISITS
 TO OUR CLUBHOUSE NETWORK
IN 12 MONTHS

345 
CUSTOMERS
SUPPORTED

 **MORE THAN**
3,400
NON-MEMBER VISITS
 TO OUR CLUBHOUSE NETWORK

 The American  *twentyfour*SEVEN
 The Observatory

97%
   
 OF CUSTOMERS
 TOOK PART IN
PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY

89%
 OF CUSTOMERS
 HAD PERSONAL
 SUPPORT PLANS

260
RECEIVED
HEALTH SCREENING
AND ADVICE

How can the Clubhouse Network help me?

Our Clubhouse Network offers support to anyone who has experience of mental health problems, providing social and leisure opportunities in a safe and welcoming environment.

You choose what you get from the Clubhouse Network, including:

- Support from staff who are always available
- A quiet space to eat lunch or read a book
- Taking part in weekly activities – art, crafts, creative writing
- Volunteering at the Clubhouse Network
- It is FREE to join and you can use any of our Clubhouses!

You don't need a referral; you can call us, pop in, or come along with a friend or someone who supports you to find out more.

There are lots of activities and training opportunities available at the Clubhouse Network throughout the week, including art and craft workshops, games and quiz sessions, support with reading and writing, music sessions and complementary therapies.

How to contact the Clubhouse Network:

The American Clubhouse:
148 Waterloo Road, Burslem,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 3HB
01782 835220

twentyfourSEVEN Clubhouse:
23 Hillcrest Street, Hanley,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 2AA
0300 123 1535 ext 1470

The Observatory Clubhouse:
17 Bucknall Old Road, Hanley,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 2AF
01782 272799

Clubhouse Recovery Network:
Meir Community Education
Centre, Pickford Place, Meir,
ST3 7DY
07824 326498 / 07824 630858
07824 638 088

For more information on our
Clubhouse Network [click here](#)

Words of wisdom

Here are some highlights featuring some of the advice from our customers

1

TALK TO SOMEONE

If anyone is at that low point I would say don't do it, there's a way out. I know, I've been there. There's help out there all over the UK and if you can't tell your friends or family, tell a professional because talking is important.

SEEK HELP

My advice to other people would be to seek help, because I waited until I was a lot older and I think the earlier you can get the correct diagnosis, the better.

2

3

DON'T GIVE UP

If you know someone with a mental health issue, please don't give up on them, as the consequences can be serious. You also find they can become quite frustrated or agitated and have very strong feelings and they may occasionally lash out, so please have patience and try to talk about it so you can understand.

FIND SOMEONE TO LISTEN

Talking is really important too, you just need to find the right people to listen and now I've found that.

4

5

GET OUT AND DO STUFF WHILE YOU CAN

I think staying active both physically and mentally is the key to good mental health. I go on regular walks, even though sometimes it hurts my leg, and my motto is 'get out and do stuff while you can'. For anyone reading this who wants to change their lives, I would say come to the Clubhouse Network. Never think you can't change things – I did.



What we do

- **Mental Health Recovery and Wellbeing Support**
- **Supported Housing and Accommodation**
- **Employment, Education and Training**
- **Homelessness and Outreach Services**

At Brighter Futures helping people to lead fulfilled lives is at the heart of what we do.

Our one stop shop operates 365 days-a-year.

Want to know more?

You can find full details of the support we offer by clicking the link below.

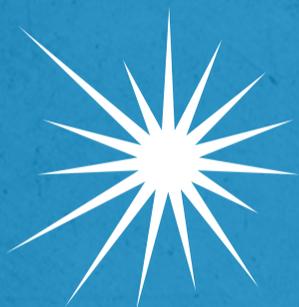
www.brighter-futures.org.uk

Help to spread the word

Thank you for reading this e-book. If you found it useful then please help others to find it by sharing it on social media using the hashtag:

#ShareStoriesNotStigma

#ShareStoriesNotStigma



brighter futures

creative support, housing and employment

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