

Employment Recovery Stories



**DORSET
WORK
MATTERS**

Connecting people to work

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Introduction

This booklet gives a selection of some of our clients' employment recovery stories to share the variety of people's experiences and journeys.

The people who have chosen to share their stories have wished to do this to inspire and share hope with others. You may be reading this booklet as someone who is starting your journey with a Community Mental Health Team or Dorset Work Matters, part of a clinical team, as a stakeholder or as an employer who is interested in supporting someone around their mental health or wellbeing at work.

Dorset Work Matters hope that, through sharing these stories, we can encourage an open conversation around work and mental health which demonstrates just what employment means to individuals' recovery journeys and what an important factor it can be to making a difference in their lives.

Dorset Work Matters is a service under the umbrella of the Wellbeing and Recovery Partnership (a partnership between Dorset HealthCare and the Dorset Mental Health Forum).

The Dorset Mental Health Forum has been built on the stories of recovery and learning- sharing collective experience to create changing attitudes towards mental health in Dorset.

We hope that through sharing the stories of those who have worked alongside our service, we can challenge stigma around mental health and employment, and increase opportunities for those who wish to explore vocation as part of their recovery.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to this booklet and taken the time to share their stories and feedback with us.

If you would like to know more about Dorset Work Matters our contact details are included at the back of the booklet.

The Impact of Work

Our clients say that they want to work for a number of different reasons:

- It adds structure to their day.
- To improve their self-esteem.
- Work provides an opportunity to give back to the community.
- To gain an identity as an employee.

The IPS Model

The Individual Placement and Support model is a strengths-based employment model to assist people with their work goals.

It aims to work effectively using eight principles.

It aims to get people into competitive employment.

It brings employment specialists into clinical teams.

2
It is open to all those who want to work.

3
It tries to find jobs consistent with people's preferences.

4
It works quickly. The job search starts within 4 weeks.

5
Employment specialists develop relationships with employers based upon a person's work preferences.

5
It provides time unlimited, individualised support for the person and their employer.

5
Benefits counselling is included.

Recovery Story

I've been working with my Employment Specialist to help me get back into work. They've been really helpful, and I started work soon after we did some employer engagement together.

I have severe PTSD, and this can impact me at work as I find it hard to focus for long periods of time. I can focus for a few hours and then I need to rest up, as I get really tired. I wanted to be honest from the start and my Employment Specialist supported me to think about what I wanted to share with my employer about my mental health.

My line manager has been great and really supportive as they have a personal understanding around my condition. I'm loving it so far. My manager has given me the flexibility around shifts that I need and has been so laid back and understanding.

My Employment Specialist then helped me to find a second job to get some more hours that are flexible to fit in with the first job. This one is great as there is good staffing cover so there's no pressure to have to do lots of hours if I can't do them.

I also have a dream job that I would love to be able to do one day and my Employment Specialist has been helping me take baby steps towards thinking about that dream job as well.



I've been having in-work support each week with my Employment Specialist. We agreed a call every week- one giving me time to consider my first job and then the next week thinking about the second job is going.

We are looking at doing an in-work support plan for each job so that I can keep a clear head and focus on the job in hand and not think about both at the same time in my appointments. We will then look to reduce the calls as I settle in.

Things are going so well and I'm loving it. I've even had some news about the little steps I've taken towards my dream job!

Client Q & A

Tell me about your experience with Dorset Work Matters.

My experience of DWM is really positive. There's been lots of support and understanding. It has boosted my confidence a lot.

What sort of things did your employment specialist do in your appointments that you found helpful?

My Employment Specialist helped me with writing my CV, cover letters and support with job applications. She helped me speak with the jobcentre to access the discretionary fund and then took me shopping for interview clothes. My Employment Specialist found me opportunities and job vacancies to apply for.

My Employment Specialist then took me to my interview and supported me in that. It was reassuring to have her in the interview as she was able to remind me when I forgot what I wanted to say. Before this we did a mock interview practice and she offered me help to think about how I wanted to answer the questions.

When I was successful in getting the job my Employment Specialist communicated with my employer to help me get the shifts I needed, change my hours and help me get the right uniform. It helped me feel more confident reaching out to my line manager after my Employment Specialist helped me to talk about my hours with them. Feeling more confident asking questions has helped me with some of the worries that I had about learning new parts of the job.

She then helped me with my workplace induction and e-learning, and then referred me to an occupational therapist to help me manage my fatigue so I can get up on time for work. She helped me to complete a change of circumstances form around Universal Credit and is continuing to work with me and support me as I start work and we have put together an in-work support plan. My managers have been really helpful too and are always available if I need them when I'm on shift.

What was it like having someone there to support with the process?

It is very comforting having my Employment Specialist to support me throughout the whole process. We had fun and having her with me took the stress out of it.

Is there anything about the support your Employment Specialist has given you that particularly stood out to you?

She is very caring and was flexible to meet me in different locations at different times- especially when my shifts have changed which worked well for me.

Line Manager Feedback

She is doing absolutely brilliantly! She is picking up all the different kitchen stations really well. She is fairly quiet but still manages to have a positive impact on the team as she is always so willing and ready to help. I have had lots of the team pass comment on how pro-active she is at getting jobs done without being asked and she is just generally a pleasure to have.

Is there anything that you have learnt from the process of finding work?

I have learnt more about how the Jobcentre can help me. I have also learnt more about myself as my Employment Specialist was able to point out my skills and qualities which I had not recognised in myself. I now feel more confident in doing things.

What are your hopes for the future?

During my induction I was given some information about apprenticeships that the company offer. I've seen a chef's apprenticeship on there. I'd love to do that and aim towards this in the future.

Recovery Story

The last time I was looking for work was nine years ago, and the application process was very different. I had no idea about the ‘NHS trac’ website or ‘Indeed’ when I started looking recently.

When I was looking for work before, everything was done by handing in paper applications and there was much less paperwork to complete.

My Employment Specialist has been fantastic. I’m terrible with computers but she has taught me how to use my mobile for online emails and things. I learnt about current job hunting which was an eye opener for me. She also helped me to keep on top of the correspondence and has held my hand through all of the difficult stuff.

When I first met my Employment Specialist, I told her that I would need baby steps and she’s done just that. She’s really helped to keep stress levels to a minimum.

My illness brings on my symptoms and she’s really helped me to keep calm and take it one thing at a time, walking me through it all.

Everything went quickly and I was surprised to be offered the first job that I applied for. The job is going very well so far. I have lovely colleagues and my Employment Specialist has been ringing in each week to check in with me that things are going OK.



My boss has been fantastic. She's very patient and she's been really good at sending me off for a break if I have any spare time between my duties. She also thanks me for my work every day which really helps.

The job has lots of variety which works well for me. The hours are also great for me as my medication knocks me out for the count which means that early starts are really difficult. I start at 11am which fits in really well with this.

Once I've finished my training, I'll be able to pick up some weekend hours as well. Overall, the experience has been a really good anti-depressant.

Employer Feedback



Your Employment Specialist has been enormously helpful in helping both my new colleague as well as helping me as their manager over their probationary period.

Early conversations with them enabled me to adapt my management style to better meet the needs of my new colleague as they often found it hard to articulate their needs directly to me. Later conversations have helped both my colleague and I to trouble shoot areas of emerging challenge as and when they arose. The result of this support is that my colleague and I have a hugely rewarding working relationship and my colleague has recently successfully completed her probation!

Clinical Team Feedback



Dorset Work Matter's support has been invaluable to our CMHT staff and service users.

The support they provide to help find and retain employment has supported our service users with their recovery journeys and really enhanced the care they receive.

The Employment Specialists are very knowledgeable and compassionate, and their commitment to working alongside service users to achieve their employment goals has been excellent. Employment support was such an unmet need, and we are very grateful to work alongside them.

Recovery Story

Before I started with Dorset Work Matters, I was unemployed for around 5 to 6 months. It was pretty boring for me with no real schedule, and I was going to sleep and then waking up late.

I found it difficult to get through that when you don't feel that you have anything to do. It feels like you don't have much purpose and things feel that they drag on. I was feeling tired and fatigued all of the time. It's an oxymoron really and very uncomfortable!

Some people think that not doing anything is the life, but it really isn't! I didn't have any chances to go out and meet people and no reasons to go out. I was getting more depressed over time, after having suffered with depression in the past. I felt lost, overwhelmed with everything and didn't know what direction to go in.

I found having meetings with my Employment Specialist was helpful. It made me feel hopeful. I had some social interaction and started feeling that someone else cared and wanted to support me. That support helped to push me the extra mile and it worked as I found a job quite quickly.

In my first meeting with my Employment Specialist, she asked what support I'd like rather than what support she thought I needed. I'd never been asked what I wanted before- it had always been services telling me what support they could give. It was nice to be able to have options.



We discussed how to talk to an employer, and how to approach them about my ADHD and the struggles I might be facing with it. I had no experience about talking to employers about it before as I was only recently diagnosed. Following my diagnosis, I had felt left behind and forgotten. My Employment Specialist helped to open up a new path for me- how to talk about things and that I don't have to keep it 'hush hush' like my family would have said before.

Outside of my psychiatrist sessions, I wasn't getting any extra support. No one was talking to me about ADHD despite its impact on my life.

I feel less trapped now and that I can actually get a job and put myself out there. I was hesitant to do this before and felt reluctant to get back into work.

I had support from Universal Credit, but the support wasn't the same. My Employment Specialist helped me to consider what type of work I wanted and the types of things that might suit me. She helped me look for work around the local area and to re-write my CV.

I had really struggled with this before. I had received CV support before from a service who told me what I needed to change, but then I would go home and forget about the advice, which meant that nothing changed.

Continued...

Recovery Story

My Employment Specialist actually sat down with me and spoke through the steps to break down the information. She worked with me through re-writing my CV and re-phrased things for me that I found difficult to phrase. This was actually helpful, and having a new CV was how I found my job.

Up until I found a job, my family told me not to tell my employer about my ADHD, whereas my Employment Specialist said that if I felt that I needed to talk to them, we could work together to figure out what I wanted to say.

She sat down with me, and we looked at pros and cons of sharing this information. We explored some accommodations that I wanted to ask my employer, such as asking for written instructions as I find verbal instruction difficult to process and remember.

We asked for this from my line manager and my employer wrote instructions down really clearly for me to help things make sense and be easy to remember. My employer really listened, and I felt a lot more confident after this conversation.

I feel so happy with my job, as it fits in with what I wanted. It's local, the hours suit me, the employer is supportive, and I work by myself with support from them if needed. My line manager is a good man and a supportive employer. He gives me positive and constructive feedback and appreciates my work. I can just get on with it by myself and not worry about having to be part of a big team.



Before I thought I had it figured out myself and didn't need help, but the support from my Employment Specialist really opened my eyes and I now feel a lot more confident and happier entering the workplace.

To my younger self I would say (as a young girl who was told "you just don't listen", "you're inattentive", "you're bright but don't put yourself to the task"): You are really smart, really bright and you can do it. But don't be afraid to ask for or accept help. And don't feel ashamed that you need some extra support.

It's been the most helpful support/service that I've had career-wise ever. I would like to say thank you to Dorset Work Matters and please keep doing what you do. To me this has been one of the most essential services for my mental health and work. It's helped provide me with a clear map of what I can do and gave me some direction.

The service makes it feel much more possible for people to feel that they can get into work and that they have a purpose.


Employment Specialist Feedback



When I first met my client, she had been unemployed for a number of years due to her mental health. She was struggling with depression and severe anxiety meaning she struggled to leave her house.

She was referred to IPS and I met her for our first meeting at the CMHT office where she felt comfortable. We had to take a very soft approach and discussed work she had done previously and her whole presentation changed when she spoke about her previous role as a carer. She didn't believe she could ever get back to this.

Throughout our meetings, she decided that she was happy for me to disclose to employer on her behalf, allowing me to tell them about her mental health but also to tell them of her experience, compassion and determination.



We created a CV for her, and she was quickly offered multiple interviews which I supported her with through skills training and accompanying her to interviews.

She was offered a role almost immediately and with a rigorous in work support plan and support from us and her manager, she absolutely thrived.

She started going out more visiting friends and developed a good social circle. She was able to identify that the lack of routine and purpose had kept her in a negative cycle and she now feels valued and positive about the future.

Recovery Story

To me, I'm really driven by purpose. It can make you question your own worth when you feel that you've lost that and feel unable to provide for your family.

When I left school, I always wanted to be a chef. I did a catering course, and it was a time in my life when I wasn't feeling the best mentally. I tried my hand at gardening several years later and passed a qualification in horticulture and got a voluntary job.

After this, every time I tried to get into paid work, something bad always happened. I had some very bad experiences which made me give up any belief in myself. I was getting more and more depressed. I couldn't do my voluntary job anymore as the location moved. I got another voluntary role until they were told they couldn't continue to take on volunteers around Covid.

I spent some time unemployed and was at a very low point, where I was also struggling physically and putting on weight.

I then approached my CMHT to try and get some help. My Employment Specialist has been great. He's done so much for me - I cannot sing his praises higher. He's never given up on me and has got me believing in myself.

It was challenging whilst looking for work and I had lots of bumps. At one point I'd applied for loads of jobs and hardly heard back from any of them. My Employment Specialist didn't give up on me and put his neck out for me on several occasions to help me.



We then found the job that I've been in now for about seven weeks. My co-workers and line manager have been really supportive and have taken into account when I look after my daughter when organising my shifts which has been really important to me.

Since finding my job, my life outside of work has been a lot better. My friends have pointed out how much I've changed- saying that I'm much calmer and more confident. It's meant everything- my confidence is higher than it's ever been. I'm physically better than I've been in a while, and I've been starting to lose some weight. It's given me a sense of purpose again.

My daughter is the most important thing to me, and I always want to set a good example to her. I was worried about this when I was out of work as I didn't want her to think that I was lazy.

Through this experience I've learnt to never give up and that this experience has been really important to me.

To someone coming into the Dorset Work Matters service for the first time I'd say: Persist. Don't give up. Always ask any questions you feel that you need to ask- don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to express how you're feeling.





Individual Placement and Support

At Dorset Work Matters we use the Individual Placement and Support model. This supports people with mental health conditions to gain and maintain employment and is open to all those open to a Community Mental Health Team who want to work.

The service provides one to one support to gain and retain paid employment.

The service is tailored to meet your needs based on your preferences, abilities and choices.

Through a combination of our mental health experiences and employment expertise we know that work is an achievable goal.





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