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Case Study

Name: Michelle McIlkenny

Programme: Think Positive

Outcome: Working for Autism West Midlands and studying

Since a family bereavement in 2008 Michelle has suffered from agoraphobia, depression and anxiety. She lacked motivation and at times she did not see any future for herself. She felt that there was very little support to help her find a job she wanted to do.

She was asked to attend the Think Positive programme by her adviser at Jobcentre Plus. The programme funded by the Department of Works and Pensions and run by TCHC aims to support people with mental health issues to help them gain confidence and get into work. Michelle was very nervous about attending the programme but on her first day she met our advisers who immediately put her mind at rest. “Ann and Kay made me feel very at ease. They explained in detail what the course was all about. I came away at the end of the day feeling quite positive about the next meeting.”

On the second day Michelle felt at ease and chatted to lots of the other delegates in the group. It was the first time that she felt at ease in a group and able to speak out. After each session Michelle gained more and more confidence as Kay the tutor explained things clearly, and at a pace they could all handle.

“I can’t stress enough how Kay helped my confidence to grow, by the fourth session I was truly inspired. I knew where I wanted my career to go.” Michelle was a qualified teaching assistant before her illness, but she realised that she wanted to help people get back on track, so she asked Kay to try and help her to become a tutor. “I found a passion that was always there. but was hidden as I never had any confidence in myself.”

Michelle worked with an employment adviser who helped her to work through what she wanted to do and all the different routes to get there. Michelle was inspired to apply for work and she was offered an interview with Autism West Midlands. “I was very nervous about my interview, so she sent me lots of emails about interviews and questions to ask and what questions they may ask me, and called me many times to make sure I was ok and that I was coping with everything.” Michelle thought the support she received was excellent “Mersha went above and beyond in my eyes.”

Since completing the course Michelle has enrolled on a Dementia Level 2 course and she got the job at Autism West Midlands. She feels that without the Think Positive course she wouldn’t have turned her life around, be working or have the confidence to pursue a career. “I can’t thank you all enough for helping me turn my life around the way you have, I certainly wouldn’t be where I am today had I not have done that course.”