

Tom's story

Tom is in his early twenties; well presented, articulate and easy to chat to, it is hard to imagine that he has struggled significantly with his self-esteem, social skills and motivation.

In fact, Tom had been finding it hard to cope with life's challenges for quite some time before he was referred to Surrey Care Trust's mentoring programme.

Under the care of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) from the age of 12 to help with his emotional wellbeing, Tom also felt he didn't fit in at school and finally dropped out in Year 10.

When Tom turned 19, he no longer qualified for support from the CAMHS service and he was referred to Surrey Care Trust's mentoring programme, which helps people to appreciate their own strengths and find ways to cope with their problems so that they start to feel more confident about themselves and their futures.

Tom was matched with Mike, one of the Trust's volunteer mentors and over the last 18 months Mike has helped Tom to gain confidence and make positive changes.

Tom explains: "I was very low when I met Mike. He would ask me questions and initially I didn't know how to respond to him. I found it hard to talk about how I really felt – talking to anyone was just too difficult for me. So at first we would just talk about things like the weather or things I was generally interested in like travelling. But knowing he was going to be at the café to support me every week and just listen to me however I felt, helped me to open up.

Now, if something bad has happened in the week that I haven't felt able to deal with I will tell him and we'll talk about whatever the problem has been. He has started to set me some goals like writing a c.v. to help me get a job, passing my driving test and getting fit. He even came out running with me to help me to get started with my fitness.

In combination with some medication, mentoring has helped me to feel that I can handle things now - things that would have normally knocked me back a huge amount I can now take on the chin. Mentoring is like having an extra head - I can focus on what I want to focus on and not get weighed down like I used to and it feels so good to be able to say that!"

Tom's mentor Mike has seen a huge change in Tom too. "Trying to get Tom to talk about his emotions was like getting blood out of a stone when we first met," Mike says. "But he's made huge progress and I'm so pleased with the way he's come along. Despite some significant problems recently, he has been able to cope and I see a very positive future for him – he has such a lot to offer."

Mike feels he has gained from the mentoring programme too: "I feel I have more patience now and a greater understanding of people. I'm probably better at expressing myself too and of course, I have such a sense of satisfaction knowing that I can help someone – doing something that's so valuable."