

## **Tyron...My Story**

**Tyron, 42, Project Management Assistant, Currently seconded to Network Operations - Thames Valley. Experienced depression, anxiety, flashbacks and eating problems as a result of a past history of child sexual abuse, by an individual whom I encountered at a later date at work and untoward comments from colleagues in a team, whilst I was undertaking counselling.**

### **About me**

Passions in my personal life include music, travel and photography. I also have a keen interest in transport and planning and have worked within the industry for 23 years in a number of roles including within a Travel Centre, Operational Planning, and Infrastructure Projects. I am also Diversity and Inclusivity Champion and a member of the Can Do staff network whose aim is to improve understanding of the challenges disabled employees have and influence business decisions to become more inclusive to all. I believe the company and its employees can only gain from work in this area.

### **Support and Managing my mental health**

I was diagnosed with depression and social anxiety early in the 1990's and latterly Anxiety in 2003 after being referred to a specialist psychological hospital through Occupational Health and was later diagnosed with High Functioning Asperger's Syndrome in 2007.

I have managed my mental health since around the age of 17, and have used a wide variety of support services including NHS, private Counselling, police, Care First, Bupa, and HR as well as my friends and family.

In the mid 90's and early 2000's I was reaching out to a lot of people and discussing what had previously happened to me, however never told anyone the full story, as I had not fully faced the impact it was having on me. I was struggling to cope and had feelings of isolation and misplaced guilt. I was afraid of the stigma attached to what had happened and the labels of my diagnosis. Some people at work were making untoward comments, which added to my high levels of anxiety. I found it difficult to contain this whilst trying to function at work, experiencing panic attacks and flashbacks, and some of my anger got projected at work. I initially spoke with a counsellor in HR in Railtrack Days who was very supportive but left due to redundancy, HR then advised I speak to Care First after I started getting some teasing comments at work.

Care First supported me on quite a few occasions by telephone, but I also attended private counselling for around an hour a week for nearly 2 years where I worked from the start to end of what had happened to me. Working through everything was difficult and initially my anxiety increased further, which contributed to over 2 stone weight loss over a few months. In 2003 I was referred to a specialist psychological hospital through BUPA Occupational Health. I was prescribed a new medication via my GP which drastically reduced my symptoms and was advised to work with my manager to establish clear boundaries and to provide them with an explanation of the issues I was working through.

During this time I received some support from close friends at work, HR, and some managers were very supportive others were not so understanding - it was quite a macho culture in the industry then and things were a bit more taboo. I would have liked at the time of initial referral to Occupational Health a bit more reassurance from HR and my manager as I had a lot of anxiety over what people would think and feared for my job. It took quite a long time for me to trust that I had to go through the recommendations of CareFirst and Bupa and not to expect instant solutions.

After my counselling ended, I by chance discovered that the perpetrator was in the local newspaper for other offences. This paved the way for me to make a formal statement which allowed the police to start an investigation. This culminated in a case at Crown Court about a year later where the defendant pleaded guilty to a number of offences and was sentenced. This was a massive relief for me as all of the symptoms and effects of what had happened had been exposed and my victim impact statement was read out and I received vindication as a victim.

### **Where I am now**

Although I could not see it at the time, and felt like the world was against me, the medication prescribed has helped me have a greater clarity and calmness. My diagnosis in 2007 of Asperger's Syndrome further helped me understand the unwritten rules of social communication and how my past reaching out and reassurance seeking behaviours may have been viewed as inappropriate by others.

I have undertaken quite a few courses within Network Rail over the years which have helped me with Assertiveness and I also attended a course run by the National Autistic Society which helps with communication skills in the workplace.

Things now are going great. I enjoy my work and I have colleagues who understand me in the context of my Asperger's Syndrome. I also have friends and colleagues who are aware of my overall journey and can see how far I have moved forwards, and I have an arrangement where I can speak to a named individual if I need to as a sort of mentor arrangement. My mental health has improved and I have a lot more insight into things and view myself as a survivor. I live an independent life with a number of hobbies and interests, staying active and having a number of things on the go is great for me. I also enjoy being part of the Can Do Staff network and Western and Wales D&I network, as I feel I have a lot to offer in these areas.

For my Asperger's there is a group called DASH (Discovering Autistic Spectrum and Happiness) in my local area which I have used as well as the National Autistic Society if I need any information.

My advice for others is that however much it may hurt or cause fear please speak out to someone, work through the pain and never let anyone who commits this sort of offence win. There is a lot more support out there in this day and age than there has been in the past - you just have to take the first step, trust in someone and have faith in yourself that life can get better with time and support.