

I will always remember the first time I met my peer worker from Penumbra, Angela. Walking up to meet her nervously thinking is this going to work? Will I get better? Is this possible or am I beyond it? Feeling terrified that she wouldn't be the right person to help me and thinking if nothing else has worked so far who's to say that this will? Little did I know how far I would come with her support over the space of just six months.

The biggest issue I have found with counselors or psychiatrists is that I don't genuinely think they have cared about their job other than getting the wage slip at the end of the month; or more importantly, I would be getting advice and opening my heart to someone that did not actually understand how I had felt because they had not experienced it. These are problems I have heard voiced by other young people who have ever needed support in any shape or form for mental health issues and it does seem to be, unfortunately, an ongoing problem that I believe can affect the chances of some people getting better, or at least

delay the process. It certainly did for me. Then I met Angela. In very little time she gained my trust and I was able to tell her things that I wanted no one else to know. Over the months not only did she help me learn healthier coping mechanisms than self-harming, she helped me understand why I did it and what it was doing to me. But what is the most wonderful thing that I gained out of Angela's help is my confidence. In January 2012 I couldn't even look shop owners in the eye, I was that ashamed of my own existence. Angela gave me that back. She made me realize my potential in life, and that I deserve so much more than hating myself. She even helped me to not relapse on alcohol. I had stopped drinking completely and was struggling with it and I spoke to her and was so angry about why I couldn't be 'normal' and just wanted to drink and supposedly control it. The way she worded her advice made me come to terms with the fact that I couldn't be a social drinker and that my life would only get worse if I ever tried to be. I can't emphasise enough how eternally grateful

I am for everything she has done for me. She never just helped me stop self-harming; she changed my life. She gave me my confidence back, showed me my strengths, encouraged me to push myself and taught me how to love myself again. How can anyone possibly thank someone enough for that? She didn't just give me my life back, I know that she saved it. Because I know that without her help, without her honesty, kindness, empathy, hilarious banter and ability to do her job so well, I probably would not still be alive today. If anyone that reads this article was cool enough to watch "My Mad Fat Diary", she is Kester out of that. Although obviously not as bald.

Angela is just one of the peer workers at Penumbra. This charity is not well-known enough and does not get the advertisement, nor the credit that it should. From the day I got my assessment from Tammy, to the day I said goodbye to Angela, my life began to change for the better. When life was bad it was more manageable, and now certainly does not result in cutting myself. I look at my scars and don't feel sad or embarrassed. I look at them as a reminder that I survived, and came through a stronger person with emotional stability. Tammy and her staff deserve

knighthoods as far as I'm concerned because it is this small charity and these people that make a difference in vulnerable people's lives. We need more places like Penumbra for people like me and so many others to turn to and ask for help from an issue that is unfortunately, still such a taboo, completely misunderstood and incredibly hard to admit and ask for help.

This is just one success story. I am just one person. If Penumbra has done this for me then I can only imagine what they have done for others too. Angela will possibly never know just how much she has done for me, but I can't thank her enough. She was the one person that helped me when no-one else could. She taught me how to love life and sail through its inevitable bad points. She made me the person I am today and I will never, ever forget what her and Penumbra done for me. Thank you so much for everything.