

# St Giles



**Turning a  
past into  
a future**





**St Giles is an award winning charity** using expertise and lived experiences to empower people who are not getting the help they need, people who are hard to engage because they have been repeatedly failed— held back by poverty, exploited, abused, dealing with mental health problems, caught up in crime or a combination of these issues.

Our Peer Advisors participated in a 2 day photography course to tell their story and explain what being a Peer Advisor means to them. Find out more about their stories [here](#).

# Introduction

We believe **everyone has the power to turn their life around**, regardless of their situation. Many of our employees have been in similar situations and use their lived experiences to inspire and support those living through it right now.

We train Peer Advisors to become qualified in Level 3 Advice and Guidance. They then use this qualification and their lived experience to support people facing similar situations. Being helped by someone who has 'been there' is powerful and underpins all of our projects.

**“The Peer Advisor training brings out things that you never knew were there – that you didn’t think you’d be able to do.”**

**“Being part of it has been life changing. I don’t know where I would be without it.”**

**We are a charity enabling people to overcome adversity through peer-based social action:**

- by **training people** with experience of the issues faced by our clients to provide professional and credible services.
- by **supporting people** to overcome disadvantage and improve their employment opportunities.
- by providing **intensive support to vulnerable young people** at risk of serious violence, enabling positive life choices, breaking the cycle of exploitation and creating safer communities.
- by **supporting women** to gain confidence and self-esteem in their own abilities to build a better future through achieving independence and a positive lifestyle.
- by **supporting the criminal justice agencies** to reduce re-offending by delivering quality resettlement services that offenders need to help break their cycle of offending.

# Enabling the sector and beyond to benefit from lived experience

**Peer-led services** – or those using people with lived experience of the issues facing those they are helping - are at the heart of St Giles' work. We know they bring our services added understanding and compassion. This improves client engagement and accelerates the pace of their progress. Numerous evaluations into our services have concluded that they bring benefits on numerous levels –from helping the individual and their family right through to wider society.

The way we apply this is through our **Peer Advisor Programme**. It offers people who have experienced disadvantage and social exclusion the opportunity to train to become professional peer caseworkers whilst helping others in similar situations make positive changes to their lives. They work towards an accredited City and Guilds Level 3 Advice and Guidance qualification whilst undertaking supported work placements – either with St Giles or partner organisations who share our vision of putting lived experience at the heart of their work - as part of the vocational element of the qualification. This gives them a solid grounding

**“The customers love him. He does a really great job. He was a brilliant candidate and has really turned his life around - people don't recognise him!”**

in professional skills. The combination of this, alongside their lived experiences, brings a powerful tool that can effect positive social change from the grassroots up.

We first developed the Peer Advisor Programme in HMP Wandsworth in 2002. It trained serving prisoners to offer resettlement support to fellow inmates. At first, this peer-led approach was met with scepticism and resistance as agencies did not 'trust' former clients to be able to offer services. However, as the results of this approach started to speak for themselves we were able to extend the Programme further across the prison estate and extend its use into the community.

Since this time, **1000s of individuals have been able to transform their lives through the Peer Advisor Programme** and many hundreds of thousands more have been helped by a Peer Advisor.

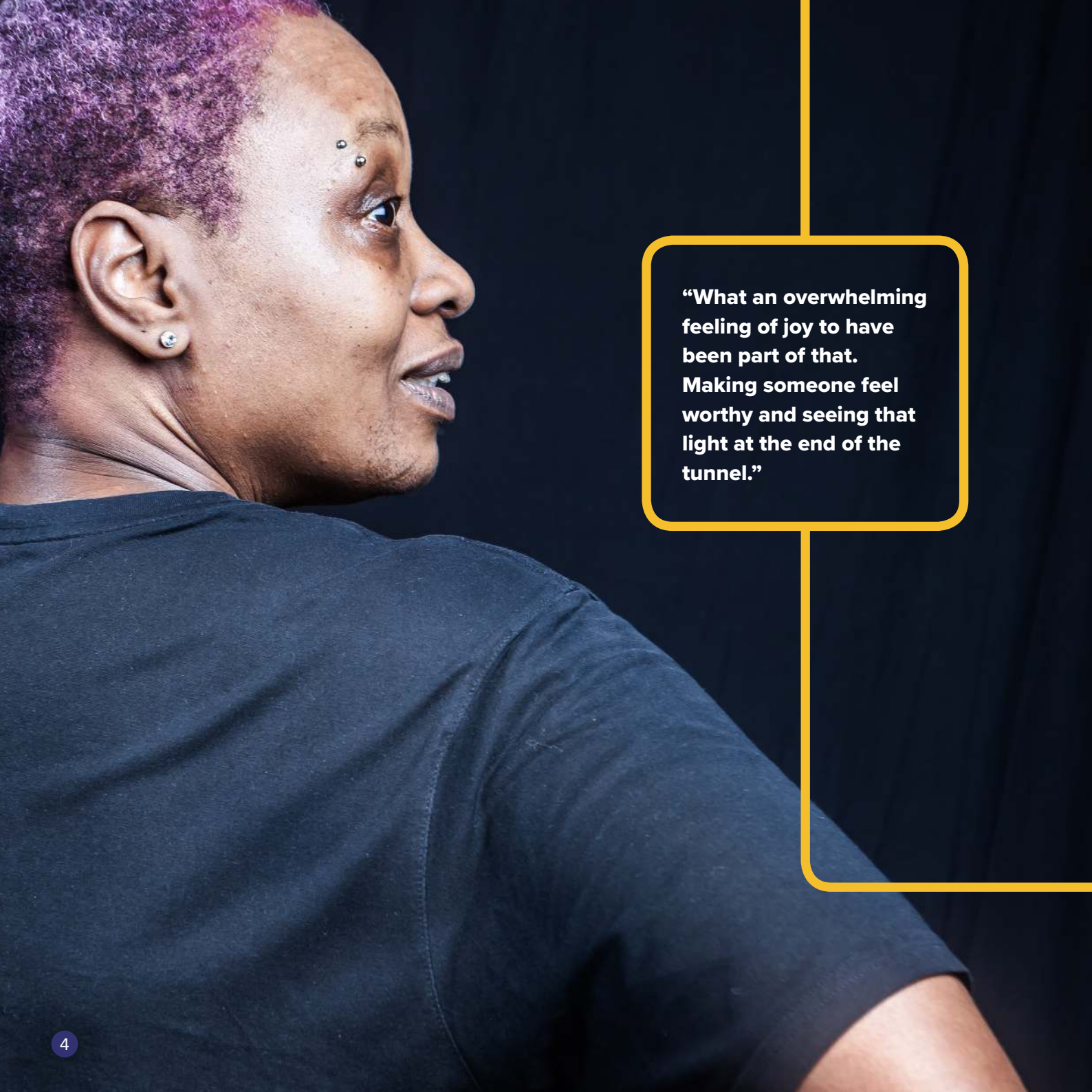
We are grateful to all the supporters who have helped us develop this work and all the organisations who have hosted peer placements. Special thanks go to the National Lottery Community Fund for supporting our first ever Peer Hubs in London and Leeds and for sharing our ambitions in extending the network further.

We have bold ambitions which extend beyond St Giles and the Peer Hubs. We want to mobilise a fundamental change in the way services in our sector and others are shaped so that training and deploying peers becomes the norm. Through our tried and tested approach borne out of many years of developing and professionalising our Peer Advisor Programme, we have a wealth of knowledge to share with other organisations across sectors.



**“It’s very powerful. I can really see now that it’s all about not denying your past but using it to bring about positive change - being open about it - not proud of it but proud of overcoming it - that’s a huge benefit for others coming through the process.”**





**“What an overwhelming feeling of joy to have been part of that. Making someone feel worthy and seeing that light at the end of the tunnel.”**

# Peer Circles: building lives with opportunity

**Peer Circles helps people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage** to improve their employability and progress towards positive and stable lives. It works with people who often have nowhere else to turn to. They are likely to be facing a complex mix of several challenges such as being homeless, having addiction issues, being an ex-offender, having a mental health condition, and experiencing domestic, sexual violence or prior involvement in street sex work.

Many have no network of family or friends to support them. Skilled and trained volunteers, who are also project clients, can help to form the circles of support that clients lack and that can make a big difference in building a positive future. They provide employment and other specialist support which works to address each individual's unique needs. Within the project there is provision for women to address their specific barriers and needs.

Caseworkers and Peer Advisors from St Giles and its partners, Evolve and Shelter, work with each vulnerable person to **build a relationship of trust and plan a positive future**. This gives them confidence and self-esteem, reduces isolation, encourages them to re-engage with services that are vital for their progress, including through Peer Circles' highly effective partnerships with other organisations.

This is no easy task against a backdrop of an acute lack of suitable and affordable housing options, severe pressure on mental health and other services, and a rapidly changing job market that can all too easily trap people in poor quality, insecure and low paid jobs.

Peer-led support and progression is integral to the project. Clients who take up the Level 3 training to become a Peer Advisor are provided with significant support to achieve the qualification – for many their first.



Peer Circles is a Building Better Opportunities Project funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund

**Since 2017 Peer Circles has helped the most excluded and disengaged people in our communities who would probably have been struggling in the same situation or declining further if the project had not been here:**


- **Building relationships of trust** and supporting 746 severely disadvantaged people to help tackle their housing, finance/debt, mental health, addiction and barriers to training and employment.
- **Enabling 186 clients to move into work**, many for the first time, and 134 clients into education and training that can form a pathway to work in the longer term
- **Providing specialist women's support** to 210 women provided by a caseworker who **“really knows how to connect with women who typically have not engaged at all with other services.”**

- **Training 68 clients as Peer Advisors**, with 22 completing the full Level 3 industry standard qualification and 12 delivering support to Peer Circles clients.
- **Supporting 8 Peer Advisors** to move into paid work, demonstrating that the model helps people with complex and very difficult barriers to embark on quality careers paths.

Peer Circles works across 16 boroughs in London - Camden, Islington, City of London, Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth, Wandsworth, Croydon, Bromley, Bexley, Sutton, Merton, Kingston Richmond Kensington & Chelsea & Westminster. It has been awarded further funding until 2022.

**“Working on Peer Circles as a Peer Advisor is really rewarding. You really see the difference that you can make to someone's life. I definitely want to get a job working with people – young offenders or women.”**





**“Being a Peer Advisor gives me something positive to hang onto. We’ve all come from difficult backgrounds and it means that we can use that negative experience in a positive way. It reminds you of what you have, not what you’ve lost.”**

## The London Peer Hub

The London Peer Hub developed from St Giles' long-standing work offering the Peer Advisor Programme, to people in community facing severe exclusion and disadvantage to reap its benefits. It offers a **life-changing opportunity** for people who come through it, giving them the chance to overcome their problems whilst inspiring and supporting others to do the same.

A recently commissioned independent evaluation into the Hub has found that the **excellent training and support** on offer enables people to grasp career and life opportunities that were previously out of reach. Through professional training, they become Peer Advisors and gain **self-confidence, experience, knowledge and skills** that improve their prospects whilst helping others.

Peer Advisors come from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds such as poverty, having mental health needs, addiction problems, or who experience homelessness

**“Doing this training has really helped me find what I wanted to do. When the staff at my placement saw what I could do because of the training they started to give me more responsibility and that builds your confidence. The staff have fought for me to get a job offer!”**

and are ex-offenders. The London Peer Hub trains and supports them so they can bring the unique value of their professional skills and first-hand experiences to the heart of service delivery. Partner organisations working with the Hub are highly positive about its **great expertise in training** that creates **real stand-out Peers** and is a **perfect way to launch volunteers into work. The level of the training means that Peer Advisors get the skills and knowledge they need to work with challenging clients.**

**Between 2016 and 2019 the Hub has delivered some impressive achievements including:**

- **Training 121 people as Peer Advisors**, with 86 completing the full Level 3 industry standard qualification which includes client facing volunteer placements to further develop their skills
- **Supporting 59 Peer Advisors** into paid employment, 40 of them in advice roles and 29 with the organisation in which they undertook a placement
- **Helping 500 clients** through the support from Peer Advisors, enabling them to increase their motivation, self-confidence and progress in tackling their barriers
- **Enabling 37 organisations** providing a wide variety of services for people with needs and issues to develop their volunteering practice and policy by putting lived experience at the heart of their client facing delivery

- **Establishing a reputation for excellence** with 8 organisations who were so impressed with the offer from the London Peer Hub that they want more Peer Advisors training and working with them

These achievements show how the London Peer Hub has broken new ground in sharing its award-winning Peer Advisor Programme across organisations in the voluntary and statutory sectors in South London. As part of the new National Lottery Community Fund supported UK-wide network of Peer Hubs, London's excellent partnerships can continue to develop and grow over the next few years, taking client-facing volunteering to a new level in service delivery.

**“It’s so good to get help from someone who understands because they’ve been through it too. You feel like you’re not on your own and that there’s a light at the end of the tunnel.”**

CASE HISTORY:

## 10c (Tencey)

I never had my parents in my life. I was very insecure and unable to fit in with females. Which resulted in me being the only female in one of Birmingham's well known gangs. They welcomed me with open arms which I fitted in gracefully. Even though it came with a price.

I was pregnant when I was sentenced. I knew I had to change my way of life. My son was looked after by his gran. It was a hard time for me. Not able to see him for six months.

When I was released, I tried to leave. Word went round. I was unable to get away. People were not going to just let me just get up and leave.

I knew I had to totally move out of Birmingham.

1998 at 4.30am was the day I walked out of my house. The day I left Birmingham with my children I came to London homeless. I was then placed in a hostel.

Once I had a foundation - a place I could call our home - things started to build. Through St Giles, I started voluntary work. As a result of the training I got my first job.

I accomplished the goals I set out to achieve in prison. My children made my lifestyle. As they became older they gave me the tools I needed to become the person I am today.



**“Each shoe has a story to my life. During the ups and down I have continued to keep stepping forward.”**



CASE HISTORY:

## Beverley

I have been working with St Giles since May 2018. I first started by doing the information, Advice and Guidance course and completed it in December 2018. I have been working as a Peer Advisor ever since.

I supported clients with multiple and complex needs and a number of them have got into training and work. One I was working with needed a CBT licence so he could be a courier. With the help of the client fund, we booked him for a test. Once he passed, the next thing was to find a job which he did within four weeks. Peer Circles helped again with purchasing a helmet, waterproof clothes for the bike and a Bluetooth connect. He was so happy as he was able to provide for his family. It made him feel like a man and he felt worthwhile being the man of the house.

What an overwhelming feeling of joy to have been a part of that, making someone feel worthy and seeing that light at the end of the tunnel.

On top of working as a Peer Advisor, Peer Circles helped me to start my own business. With their guidance and support, I registered my cleaning company in January 2019 and with the help of grants was able to purchase cleaning products and public liability insurance. I have been up and running for nearly a year.

**“I was awarded an Inspiring Woman Award from St Giles at the Old Bailey in April 2019.”**





**“Being a Peer Advisor fed my spirit by feeding others. By helping others grow, I grew myself.”**

## CASE HISTORY:

# Robert

I picked up a flyer from St Giles on the last day of my detox. I was inspired to educate myself and help others but unsure what to do.

I also felt God did not want me.

I had failed a suicide attempt, failed in my life more than once and spent more time in prison than outside. The failed suicide had left me disabled and unable to do the job I was good at (decorating and building).

After my interview at St Giles my Caseworker told me “You are exactly what we are looking for”. No one has ever made me feel worthy or needed in this way.

She helped me get my life in order and then I did the Advice and Guidance course. I had a reason to get up that did not involve drugs or crime. Volunteering did my self esteem and confidence good. My mother saw me change before she passed away. Mum’s very last words to me were: “Thank You”. (R.I.P Mum and Thank You).

I was offered a part time job last December. I believe I would be in prison or dead without St Giles’ care, support and understanding. I was allowed to make some mistakes and learn from them.

I showed clients who believed they couldn’t read or write that they could simply because they could text. A client who thought he was dyslexic shouted down the phone: “I’ve passed my CSCS test Rob, thank you so much it’s the only thing I’ve ever passed in my life!”

My training meant I could identify a client self-harming and about to take his own life. I was able to ask the right questions without scaring him. He is now living without medication, has stopped self harming and is at college.

Being a Peer Advisor fed my spirit by feeding others. By helping others grow, I grew myself.

**“I now had a reason to get up in the morning.”**

CASE HISTORY:

## Georgena

I had been unemployed for a year and found accessing the social welfare system to be challenging. I then realised that having a support network would help to alleviate the barriers that I was facing.

I was introduced to St Giles and later registered for the L3 IAG course, which I have now completed.



During the course, I was offered a volunteer placement with their Bewbird café. Whilst I was volunteering, I was offered a part-time job with the London Peer Hub as a Support Worker, helping the peer learners. I became a Peer Advisor to encourage and support people to reach their potential goals

From the opportunity gained being on the IAG course and working with the London Peer Hub, I was then offered my current occupation as a career coach.

**“I thank St Giles Trust for the opportunity they have given me.”**



CASE HISTORY:

## Con



**“My journey as a Peer Advisor took me from zero to hero, coming in as a client, my head was hanging low, volunteering as a Caseworker my head was held high. I was able to show other disadvantaged people - through my own lived experience - how to get out of the rut and into the mainstream of life.**

**I am due to start work as a Senior Floating Support Worker, in the Achieving Potential team at SHP.”**

When Peer Circles first came into contact with Con, he was experiencing anguish and depression as a result of his unstable housing situation. With the support of Peer Circles, he was able to get his own place – for the first time in 8 years - and become debt-free.

He embarked on the Level 3 Certificate in Advice and Guidance and was able to use his lived experience to support others to overcome similar barriers. As a result of all this, his self-confidence increased. He successfully completed the course and qualified as a Peer Advisor. After volunteering on Peer Circles for 9 months, Con has been employed by partner agency Evolve as a Trainee Caseworker. Con also decided to extend his education further by doing a Level 3 in Interpreting before he started his new job and he passed with merit.

St Giles continued to support Con after he started work, touching base with him on things like how to manage his finances and his transition from being a Peer Advisor.

Con completed his Trainee Caseworker role and is now moving on to bigger and better things.



**“Being a Peer Advisor gives me  
the strength to believe.”**

CASE HISTORY:

## Jennine

Although, she'd done a few short courses, Jennine had been out of education and employment for a very long time. She'd had a rough time, living in an area affected by gangs from the age of 13 and she would sometimes find herself involved in street fights and petty crime.

Now a parent, Jennine wanted to build a career in youth work. She'd had some experience in this field but wanted to build her skills further.

With the qualification and experience now under her belt, Jennine hopes to become a Support Worker as she would love to give back to her community. She is currently doing a voluntary placement whilst applying for paid work.

**“I was referred onto the Level 3 Advice and Guidance course. Now after completing the course I am more confident in giving advice and guidance to others and have gained more knowledge in this field.”**



## CASE HISTORY:

# Kayode

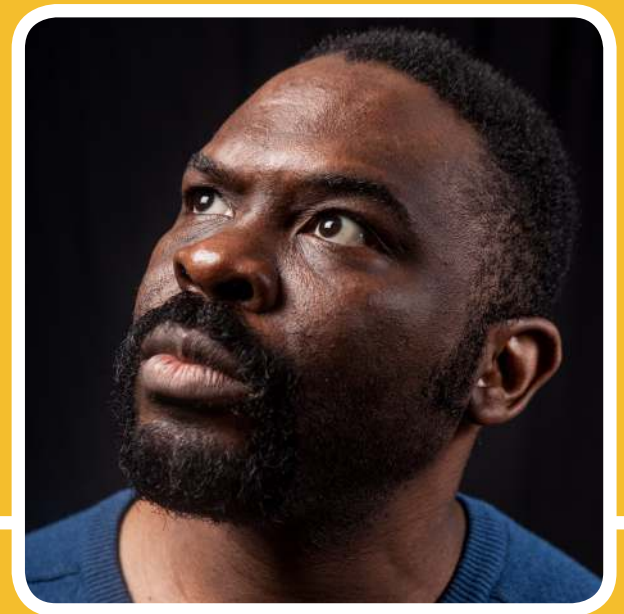
I cared for my mum with Alzheimers for over 9 years and also worked as a nurse in a busy London hospital.

I lost a lot of friends as I became absorbed into a lonely life of caring for my mum. This inner struggle finally became an external one when in 2016 I had a serious mental health breakdown and was hospitalised.

Once discharged from hospital a new life awaited me. As I reflected on the time I spent looking after my mum I realised that I was a carer to my mum and my patients but not to myself. This left a whole lot of neglect inside me that had a serious impact on my mental and physical health. I don't look down on the time I spent caring or my breakdown. I look up and ahead and take this valuable life lesson to heart. In 2017, through St Giles I was given a new life with help of volunteering as an Information, Advice and Guidance Advisor and this has really helped empower my recovery. The next step was to complete the Information, Advice and Guidance course and since then I

have only been looking forward. At the heart of my breakdown was this tension in caring for my Mum and caring for others but not for myself. This tension still exists but I have learned so much about the value of self care and how to stay caring for both myself and others.

This contrast is at the heart of my breakdown. The conflicting - almost paradoxical - situation of caring so much for others but neglecting myself makes me think of graffiti. It is in a way destroying how something looks but adding another way of seeing the very same thing.





CASE HISTORY:

## Matthew

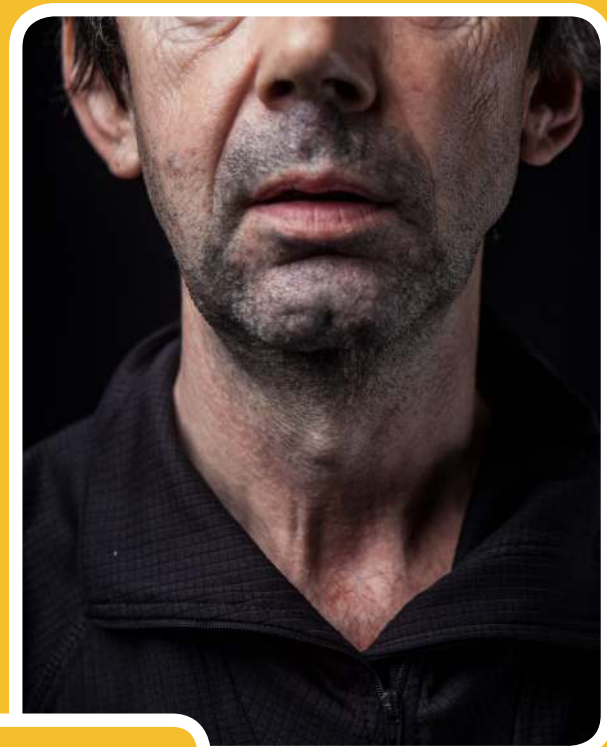
When we first met Matthew he was experiencing financial problems and homelessness, both of which were compounded by mental health issues and isolation. He'd been stuck in this lonely rut for over 15 years.

We encouraged Matthew to become a Peer Advisor to use his experience to support others to overcome similar barriers that he was addressing.

Matthew's work with clients showed sensitivity, commitment and diligence. He helped them to recognise and develop personal strengths, knowing that they were more than just a bundle of needs and problems. Having lived through similar experiences, he was able to show empathy and listen without judging.

He always leaves a good impression with his clients and is punctual and respectful. This is enthusiastically reciprocated by the people he helps.

Matthew's confidence and abilities have grown considerably and he is now looking to move into a paid role supporting people with complex needs.



**“Becoming a Peer Advisor  
gave me a voice.”**

CASE HISTORY:

## Rodney

From a life of drugs from around the age of 12 that carried on into my early 30's. Which messed up my schooling, relationship with my family and any relationships I formed. Which led to crime and eventually prison.



To meeting someone who helped me beat my addiction to cocaine. Who became my wife and got very ill very quickly. So I became a 24 / 7 carer for some time.

To losing my wife, the black hole of despair that then engulfed me. The hidden disability of depression that dragged me down to the very bottom to me wanting to end it all and KILL MYSELF.

To me being introduced to St Giles and the London Peer Hub and being told how my life experiences can help others. Has given me a new light and no longer the darkness of depression.

So I continue to make new life experiences.....

**“I fight the hidden demons in my head daily but now I will not let them win.”**



## WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK?

**Alongside financial support, you could offer a placement or job opportunity to a Peer Advisor.**

To learn more about the St Giles Peer Advisor Network and how Peer Advisors can bring benefits to your organisation please contact us at **info@stgilestrust.org.uk**

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