



1st November 2017

Dear Mark,

I write to you as one of the founding directors of The Down to Earth Project, as I wish to convey my sincerest gratitude for all that you and your exceptional team have done, not just for me, but also for a multitude of people from unfortunate and vulnerable backgrounds.

I have a long history of emotional vulnerability, which exists due to Post Traumatic Stress. For over a decade I have suffered with anxiety and panic issues, social phobias and at its most darkest, I endured anxiety induced agoraphobia. The PTS has influenced my life dramatically, destroying my self-confidence and with it my sense of self-worth. These vulnerabilities have been tough to live with; I have difficulty with employment due to my 'demons', my personal relationships with my family and friends have been strained due to the inevitable subconscious withdrawal and feelings of emotional numbness and at an individual level I am filled with a variety of strong negative emotions. In all, it has been a long, lonely and distressing time.

I have been in therapy a total of six times, undergoing Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Neurolinguistic Programming, and general counselling in order for me to understand my feelings and provide me with various coping strategies. I am very thankful for those sessions. However, I refer to them, and my prescriptions of a variety of psychoactive medications in an analogy "It is like being a house, with fundamental problems with the foundations following an epic earthquake causing structural instability – therapy sessions and medication provide wallpaper, paint and furnishings which covers the damage cosmetically, but the underlying issues remain and soon re-emerge".

I was referred to take part in your Wednesday course via Hafal, who in turn I was referred to via the Tenancy Support Unit at Swansea Council. Naturally, I was initially very anxious about joining the course, and made several 'reconnaissance' visits to the site and thoroughly read your website before my first session. I needed to take diazepam (along with my regular daily medication) just so I could successfully make the journey and face meeting new people.

I met with Kate and John on my first day, along with Steve from Hafal and a number of people who had also been referred to the course. Both Kate and John were immediately very welcoming, open and displayed genuine compassion and a friendly

personal interest in all of us, which for me was very refreshing. They made me feel comfortable in a situation where I was battling internally with anxiety and the usual thought processes of planning an escape. We explored the site, and as time progressed, I began to feel moments of an unfamiliar relaxed ease. I thoroughly enjoyed my day, despite the usual anxiety.

As the course days progressed, I began to look forward to my visits, and I no longer relied upon the diazepam for the journey to site. Kate gave continuous friendly support to all of us as we began to learn about woodland management. We were taught to use basic tools safely, and utilised our new skills clearing a pathway on site and subsequently to a woodland site where we spent our days clearing invasive non-indigenous species of plants.

These activities and access to a safe woodland space gave us a purpose, with Kate's friendly exceptional interpersonal skills, encouraging us all to perform the tasks at our own speed. I found the work in the woodland habitat very rewarding. That sense of purpose boosted my confidence and self-worth. Something so simple as being out in nature, being part of a project which had benefits for the environment enlightened my heart, and before we left each day we could literally see our efforts as the woodland space opened up. While we worked together, I began to forget the suffering of my past and was able to focus upon something else, something worthwhile, something positive. The anxiety that has for so long dictated my life seemed to lose its grip while I was with the group, and slowly I could feel that the other members of the group were opening up, and a common bond was forming. I believe it made us all experience a more positive outlook, gave us all a sense of purpose that had been previously lost. My emotional wellbeing was significantly lifted by my experiences with Kate and the other members of the group. It displayed that despite my neurotic issues I could have a fulfilling purpose in society. That people with unfortunate circumstances who are so often and too easily disregarded by mainstream society could perform successfully and make meaningful contributions.

My social confidence grew rapidly, and has had a very positive affect on my personal life. Before the Wednesday sessions, I was unable to enjoy nature and take countryside walks, something I loved prior to the PTS. But during the weeks I attended D2E, I found myself drawn to nature like many years before. I made trips to the Gower coast (without the aid of valium), and although I experienced anxiety, I became drawn to our wonderful natural environment, and with little steps, now take daily excursions into nature and I am able to go further, experience more, explore more and discover more, fulfilling my life like never before. I am also able to make visits to Tesco alone, something I could never do previously. The crippling nature of having anxiety issues and social phobias seems to be fading for the first time in fifteen years! This is the first time I have genuinely felt positive about my future; a feeling that years of psychological therapy and medication have never provided. I feel positive about employment and will be actively making steps towards finding work. Whereas I used to feel desperate sadness about the time lost to PTS and the residual psychological issues, I now feel positive about my future and I believe that I owe this new sense of confidence solely to my attendance at D2E.

Your project has had an amazing affect on my current circumstances. As I said previously, something so simple, an idea so compassionate, helping those in need,

those left behind my mainstream society, the unfortunate and vulnerable, is so worthwhile to so many. The efforts of you and your team must be commended. I hope my words express how thankful and grateful I am towards all you do, for so many.

I intend to support your work by volunteering my time and efforts, I have spoken highly about the D2E project, and would not hesitate to recommend you. I wish you and the Down to Earth Project all the very best success in the future. I hope that your compassionate vision and respect for unfortunate individuals like me is able to continue and develop to support more people towards a brighter future.

With kindest regards and best wishes always,

Yours sincerely,

