

TESTIMONIAL TO AN INCREDIBLE 'LIFE LINE' SERVICE

What a fantastic FREE service

I came across this service by accident, an incidental remark by a worker from Inclusion Cornwall who gave me Rowena's name, I am so glad that she was able to take me on, I would be dead now if it weren't for her.

I was shipped away from my place of birth, home and lifelong friends after a series of horrendous domestic violence incidents, suffering with PTSD and not knowing which way is up. I was moved to an area in Cornwall where I lived with my children, very happily, for 10 years, making lots of new lifelong friends.

I undertook free courses at Link into Learning and volunteered in my son's primary school, I was there 3 years and able to get Lvl 2 & 3 Teaching Assistant certificates. All this enabled me to drag myself out of the results of years of abuse at the hands of my mother, abuse at school, abuse throughout my adult relationships, to actually believing that I was a valid human being and well on the rung to make me a whole and valid person.

I applied for a job at my son's secondary school, had an interview and got the job on the same day, I worked there for over 3 years, and was really good at what I did, insightful in the classroom as I'd been through a lot of the same, and the kids really took to me as I'd had a rough home life and I could see what they were going through because most of it had happened to me. I felt really good, the wages were not good but I had my house, my awesome job and lots of friends.

Then the bedroom tax hit (which does still exist, a lot of people think that this has been done away with but that is not the case). The housing officer was more and more insistent that I down-size, but they didn't have anything in the area and as, by now, my son was in his last year of secondary, it made more sense to move nearer the college as rumours were that he would not have travel to college paid for. The housing officer made me her biggest challenge before she moved jobs and the pressure to leave the house was so intense, my mental health suffering because the schools had turned into Academy status we were forced at every turn to prove Value for Money (VFM), reapplying for our jobs on a regular basis and the pupils started to suffer, the amount of bullying cases I reported didn't seem to be followed up until one day I was under investigation and lost my job, they told me that I had gone against Child Protection Procedures which I hadn't but, had they sacked the tutor of the other college that did, they would have had to close that college and the words that were uttered to me was 'Teaching Assistants are 10 a penny so you have to go' I was made scapegoat for an unprofessional tutor that already had a similar charge against him on his record!

Unfairly dismissed from my job, disciplinarys, appeals and racist Chairman of Parent Govs, botched and guilt free, then I lost the house.

I had to sell anything, everything of value that I'd bought with a lifetime of working, furniture, heirlooms or things that my deceased dad had bought me just to afford the removal costs, leave everything, my beautiful home and friends all over again. I don't recommend that anyone does a

mutual exchange, especially when your mental health issues dictate that you want the pressure of the existing housing officer to stop and take the first place that comes up.

There were so many issues with the property we moved into, the electrics and upper floors dangerous, the plumbing leaking, the bathroom suite damaged, the back bedroom (mine) wall damaged as was the kitchen window wall, with black mould, holes through the list is endless but the council refused to help because I'd signed for the responsibility of it all when I signed the mutual exchange forms.

The house was barely habitable and I was reduced to sleeping on foam on the lounge floor, freezing, no money, no heating, no food, I had a chest infection and good old fashioned 'flu, hallucinating, sweating one minute freezing the next, the previous tenant was coming up nearly every day, with her 'gang' who lived around me to beat me up, threaten myself, my daughter, my son, my cat, they gathered outside in huge gangs, etched £600 worth of damage on my daughters car posted used sanitary products through my letter box etc etc made life hell, I'm not even sure why, I can only tell you how it affected me, my son was going through anxiety and depression as it was because of how I'd been treated at the school and having to leave both our previous homes that all impacted on his college work.

This was about the same time I heard about Rowena and her fantastic service, I had so many 'issues' I didn't know who to go to but most of them charged money for the advice, I had none, by this time I was on ESA in a support group with capability assessments every 12 months, at first there was housing benefit and was exempt from Council Tax because of an SMI, the food bank helped a lot more than there were supposed to, the council wouldn't let us have a resettlement grant or loans to have the flooring recovered, because they deemed that I had put myself in this position.

I was sign-posted to Inclusion Cornwall who slipped Rowena's name out, it seemed, almost by accident, I was suffering from my mental health issues so badly I met so many people from so many different agencies I couldn't keep up, maybe Inclusion Cornwall couldn't put a finger on what she did, to be honest, this woman is incredible and the service she gives is hard to define, the financial and benefit support, the 'wave' training comes in handy as she is able to see through my mental health issues and knows just the right way to calm me down and breathe, Rowena has a down to earth manner which helps me stop the cycle of anxiety to enable me to communicate and break down the maelstrom of issues that seem to encompass me, it's impossible for me to separate the issues as for so many years I didn't even recognise things as issues and subconsciously would push things to the back boiler and just 'get on with it' until it all came out sideways and wouldn't all go back in the box.

Rowena is so easy to talk to, and non-judgemental, she puts more than her heart and soul into dealing with your issues, she goes above and beyond what is expected of her, she has taken my fights as high as the MPs to get some justice and still she feels that she hasn't done enough. Listening to her battling with people on the 'phone on my behalf I have this mental image of an intrepid explorer, a fierce look of determination on her face as she hacks through the diatribe with her proverbial machete in her hand. She can solve more in one 'phone call in one day than I have over 4 years!

Most agencies you have 6 or 12 sessions then the funding runs out, not with Rowena, and please, don't kid yourself that outside office hours she puts everything on hold until she sees you again, this is far from the case, this woman is constantly searching for new avenues and ways to progress with

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your case or cases, I've even received news and updates from her on Saturday and Sunday, she blows me away with her ability to do such an intense job for me, as well as deal with her family and normal everyday issues, incredible woman, there is only one disadvantage, we're unable to clone her by the thousands so that everyone with issues has their own 'Rowena'.

This is a charity, that's what I can't get my head around, this woman does all this because she cares, it's not a service that's heavily funded, but is probably one of the most effective services out there at present, most other services with their frills and lace only offer limited support and are heavily funded by the EU so the future of their services will no doubt be curtailed when the Politicians can make up their mind.

My mental health issues are difficult to put into words how things affect me on a day to day basis but I panic when the capability assessments are due as they only assess my physical health, and then cut my money off, it's harrowing to read the medical reports, which I didn't know were allowed to be recorded, because each one of my assessments, lots of what I've said or were talked about at interview were taken out of context, I was asked how I'd tried to kill myself yet in the report there was no mention of that but it was stated that there were no signs of mental health issues as 'she wasn't rocking'!!!! How antiquated and ignorant is that view of mental health! I don't eat flies either but still am too scared to walk out my door every day! I can't thank Rowena enough for taking on this more than regular battle on my behalf to get the correct benefit and consideration, the minefield that is Universal Credit and/or PIP, she does an amazing job of helping people who are suffering the fall out of these 2 benefits as well as my ESA, the whole country is broken, we need more Rowenas!

I can, 'hand on heart' state that I would be dead by now if it weren't for her, I can't stress how broken and low I was, how futile things were. Yes, I may be a domestic violence survivor but I have no quality of life, I'm not living, merely existing and I would have gone a long time ago had this woman not validated what was happening to me and been willing to stand up and support me in all the ways that she has for as long as she has.

Rowena, Keep up the good work, you and your service really is a matter of life and death, god forbid we would have to be without this service now!

Yours sincerely

Ms RB Boulkam