



**WOMEN'S
BREAKOUT**
Chances to Change



MEMBER CASE STUDY

Cohort 4

The needs the woman presented with when she arrived at Cohort 4

Accommodation

Health

Mental wellbeing

Attitudes, thinking and
behaviour

Education, employment
and training

Finance, benefits and
debt

Drugs and alcohol

Children and families

Domestic violence

Prostitution

About the Womens Centre

Cohort 4 support the positive lives of women affected by the criminal justice system and those surviving abuse and disadvantage in their small community. They offer social networks, friendship, craft workshops, access to training, skills development, work experience and OCN accredited mentoring training. All of this is within a women safe environment with qualified volunteers. Their women are the organisation, so are involved in all aspects of planning, organising and delivering what they want for their lives.

The circumstances the woman was in before being in contact with Cohort 4

Before finding Cohort 4, Clare describes her life as 'going down the pan.' She was behaving in a self destructive way with no consequential awareness about the impact to herself or others, she says that her life had no direction or value. Clare was getting easily wound up and behaving in an aggressive way towards others, she felt unable to cope with the emotional impact of her mental ill health, her situation or lifestyle. She felt that she would either end up dead or in prison as she was at risk of offending; assault, damage, drink driving, using illegal drugs etcetera. Clare's mental health was poor, she was self harming, she had anger management issues, resorting to alcohol use and substance use to cope.

Clare is a mother and grandmother and this too caused her anxiety as she did not feel able to cope, or feel that she was a good mother, her confidence as a woman and as a mother was also low, as was her communication with statutory agencies involved with the family.

The impact that Cohort 4 had on the woman's circumstances

Cohort 4 offered Clare some stability, some focus in allowing her creativity and interests to be funded and appreciated, Cohort 4 offered support in the way of a woman peer mentor and professional advice and advocacy, Clare developed friendships with women who understood and did not judge her behaviour, she was gently and consistently encouraged and supported in going to a benefit tribunal, in accessing professional counselling support through another organisation, going to appointments with her, helping her to write letters to statutory agencies and to cope with life. Clare attended a series of confidence development classes, training days and motivational activities and workshops. She joined a small Cohort 4 group for a short holiday in Somerset where her photography skills were encouraged.

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...cont **The impact that Cohort 4 had on the woman's circumstances**

When Clare was finding life difficult, she had a peer mentor to talk to or one of the Directors of Cohort 4, there was always someone trained and on hand to enable Clare to talk about her situation, emotions and risk levels. The knowledge of this was reassuring and calming.

After two years with Cohort 4 Clare does not feel isolated, undervalued and unappreciated. She does not feel that she will commit an offence, or return to substance misuse. She has undertaken work experience with Cohort 4 and has made a range of craft products for herself, for her family and for the organisation to sell in order to raise funds for the group to continue. Clare is a valued member of Cohort 4 and has promoted us, attended network events and was adamant that she wanted to be on our promotional video on our website.

The woman's circumstances now

For Clare, mental wellbeing will always be a struggle, but it is now carefully managed and she attends appointments and has accessed counselling. Clare feels like a valued and active member of Cohort 4 and is fully involved in designing the groups, decision making and direction of the organisation. This gives her structure, value and purpose. She has access to resources to enable her to pursue her creative talents, and this helps financially in terms of making gifts for others.

Clare is secure in accommodation, accessing treatment, in constructive use of time, a full pro-social lifestyle and is happy. She no longer uses substances as a poor coping mechanism, and she is appropriately accessing treatment and support for her mental wellbeing and previous traumatic experiences.

Those involved helping her

Clare has had a trained Cohort 4 peer mentor work with her intensively initially, then has encouraged her to undertake tasks for herself, to make decisions and to be supported and encouraged to deal with life appropriately and non aggressively. She has had access to professional support by trained and highly experienced members of Cohort 4 where needed, and has been supported in accessing services and resources outside of the group, in her community.

Cohort 4 is a women survivors group and all women are involved in all aspects of planning, design and delivery. Clare is an active part of the planning and delivery of Cohort 4 projects and her creativity and intelligent input has been encouraged and valued.



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The woman's personal account of what happened

Before I found Cohort 4 I was at rock bottom. I was sure at that time I would end up either dead or in prison as I was out of control. My mental health was at rock bottom, I had real anger issues and wasn't managing my emotions at all. As a consequence I was using alcohol and drugs to cope with my mental health and feelings. I had no idea this kind of support for women existed in the community, I had struggled for years and frankly had no confidence in statutory services as they just make things worse. Cohort 4 has changed my life, I can say that with honesty, it has helped me to completely change my life around from the direction I was going.

Being with other women at Cohort 4 has given me confidence in myself, some self worth and self value. It has definitely reduced any risk of me getting into trouble greatly, that life is completely behind me now, including drug and alcohol abuse. It really makes a difference that there's no time limits for me to go to Cohort 4. My mental health illness will never be cured, it'll always be there. I know that I will always find things difficult but I have a peer mentor now and real friends, other women who don't judge me, but listen, support and encourage me in the right direction. The fact that I can keep going to the groups means I don't get anxious that the money or support will disappear. Also, I have purpose, I enjoy crafts and Cohort 4 enable me to develop my creative side, photography, jewellery, embroidery and sewing. They bought me a proper new sewing machine and I love it, it's the best gift anyone could give me, I make things for myself, for family and for Cohort 4 to contribute to our future as a women's group. This, along with friendship and fun means I don't feel alone now, I feel calmer, and with a future. This makes me a better mum and grandmother, a happier woman with good friends. Cohort 4 is brilliant, I feel every woman like me should have a Cohort 4 to go to.



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