

RETHINKING PAIN

MARK'S STORY



What led to your involvement in the Rethinking Pain service?

My name is Mark, I have in the past been a logistics manager at a brewery in Tadcaster, an owner of a small cleaning business, and more recently worked in card fraud for a UK bank.

In life, I was never mega fit but was capable of walking 6-7 miles. I have persistent pain and other health issues, mainly type 1 diabetes and now aortic stenosis (narrowed heart valve) amongst other things!

In March 2021, I fractured two of my vertebrae whilst carrying a table with my wife. The pain was so bad I needed help to dress, shower and even turn over in bed. Since then, I have had many medical investigations that did not reveal the cause of my pain and 18 months on I still had pain, requiring frequent pain relief medication and physiotherapy.

In autumn last year my Doctor warned me that medication might not fully resolve my pain (which was a sobering conversation). He referred me to various articles on mindfulness and managing pain and to the musculoskeletal (MSK) service at Airedale Hospital, where I saw a consultant, who in time referred me to Rethinking Pain.

What has your experience been with Rethinking Pain and what's improved?

The referral from the physiotherapist was the easy bit; walking through the door of a community centre for the first Rethinking Pain meeting was not because I'd lost a lot of confidence. I did not really expect too much but was determined to see if something besides pills would help, even if it was only slightly as I was worried about issues that would crop up later in life. I also wanted to do it for my family as they had supported me so much.

I started with the Rethinking Pain Peer Support Group meetings. The team and others attending encouraged me to look at positive actions I could take rather than just focusing on the negatives of the pain, and the lack of progress. The staff were so friendly and supportive from the very first contact and this made those first steps so much easier. From there, I joined seated exercise classes. Yes, exercising! When you have pain you think moving more is bad but I now know it helps with pain. I then joined the Keighley history walk group, a singing group and seated yoga. I am about to start a blood pressure friendly cooking group and I am hoping to join a photography group later in the summer.

Participating in activities has been fun, it's invigorating but also pushes me to keep going on days I am not 100%, as I don't want to let people down.

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The **Rethinking Pain Peer Support Group** and the Understanding Pain 'Workshop' helped me understand the bigger picture of my pain, like what pain is, how my body responds and how being more physically active can reduce and alleviate my pain - even if it can't stop it. On my regular walk from the car park I felt something was wrong and it took me a while to realise it was because my knee pain had gone (hopefully for good) without me really realising.

The Rethinking Pain team has helped me with distraction techniques and have encouraged me to keep busy with activities and support. It has also been nice to help others who are not as far on their journey as I am now. I find I'm encouraging participants in one group to come and join other groups.

I have also met a particular Rethinking Pain participant who has been really supportive and encouraging. They have explained their journey and how getting involved with activities at Keighley Healthy Living (KHL) have helped them get better, which was very inspiring.

How has accessing 'holistic, community-based support' helped?

When I get Rethinking Pain support and enter the community centre, it's like many hands are there to help and support me. I've never seen any of the team without a smile on their faces.

My confidence has returned and I feel positive about the future. I enjoy getting up in the morning and thinking about what the day has to offer. I am out walking again but so far have restricted my walks to 2 miles for the time being but hope to increase this in the summer.

I'm also much happier generally and my wife is less worried about what the future holds. She sees how much thinking differently about pain has helped me and she's pleased I'm moving in the right direction; and we are now making plans for the future.

Has the service positively affected any clinical care or treatments that you receive?

My previously frequent GP and medical visits have reduced to almost nil. I've virtually stopped all my pain medication and I'm managing my pain better.

It's difficult to believe how much I have improved in such a relatively short time. I am so grateful to my doctor, my physiotherapist and everyone at Rethinking Pain and KHL for supporting me to change my thinking and adopt some lifestyle activities that help me manage my pain better.

Both my daughters are currently living in New Zealand and because I feel better, my wife and I are thinking about a visit there, which only 6 months ago was never going to be a possibility due to the pain I'd feel over the 36 hour travel time.