

Patient Case Study: Karen

"At the point of beginning the Health & Wellbeing course with Emily, I had been in relentless agony for 20 years. I was deeply depressed. I felt overwhelmed with emotional distress and hopelessness. Answering the assessment questions at the start felt pointless and futile because I had to think about how I viewed myself within my own life, and that view was heavily weighted with misery and sadness. I didn't really have an expectation of what may happen throughout the weeks. I did not have the energy. But I could hear in your voices how focussed you were on helping me."

Karen's Story

Karen had been suffering with chronic pain for 20 years. She was isolated, inactive, and had completely lost her sense of self. The pain had greatly impacted her quality of life, and she was unsure if the service would be able to help her. We began with the basics, setting small achievable goals, working on self-compassion and resilience to tackle the pain-inflicted low mood and low self-belief.

"Within 2 weeks, Emily, you helped me to recognise the tiny things that could help me to get out of difficult/miserable situations, like accepting that completing a small part of a task or having a tiny involvement in an activity still meant progress and accomplishment. I was learning to re-quantify progress and achievements and very quickly felt a shift in my defensive, submissive, victim reaction to things. I felt a significant lift in my mood and in my ability to cope. My resilience built up fast, and I stopped feeling anxious about pain being a prevention. I stopped crying."

As we moved through the pathway, Karen found great support from our resources and information. She was consistent with further goals such as her personalised exercise programme and pushed through the difficult stages to prove to her body the pain was not in control.

"By week 3, I was reading and re-reading all of the resources. I took notes and made copious lists (especially around the social sections). I memorised all the buzz words and infiltrated them into my days. I stopped focussing on what felt physically challenging. Your exercises hurt; all of them did, but I trusted myself to redesign and adapt the movements to keep a regular regime and not give up."

Continuing through, we had nailed the basics and were able to work on other lifestyle aspects that can negatively impact pain. Through improved sleep hygiene, she was sleeping more, giving her more energy to overcome the pain. Alongside finally being able to attend social events, which she had actively avoided for years.

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“By weeks 4 & 5 I was recognising multiple achievements and had stopped noting challenges as being significant. I had a strict bedtime and wake-up routine in place and had begun to sleep 8/9 hours per night. I tested the waters on attending social visits for a small part, rather than not at all.”

Then, Karen found herself again.

“At weeks 6 & 7 I felt like I was ‘waking up. I could feel a sense of Karen. I could see and hear with more clarity and started to feel a stronger ownership of myself. I was beginning to reestablish self-reliance and the desire to be independent. I started to make decisions without the internal dialogue of debate or self-doubts.”

At the end of the pathway, Karen had worked incredibly hard and was seeing the results, achieving and completing things that had once seemed unattainable.

“By week 8 I was taking a trip to Germany, exploring the possibilities of driving again, moving to a healthier dwelling, taking on some consultancy work, and tackling the much-needed dental work.”

A month after completing the pathway, Karen reflected on the journey.

“You listened, you heard, you acknowledged, you valued. You gave me gentle suggestions on how to move forward and that gave me renewed hope. But most of all, you reignited my ability to tell myself what I needed to do and how. Words of gratitude can never really convey how much you have done for me but please note, you will always remain in my most happy memory box.”

Emily (Health & Wellbeing Coach):

“Coaching is an invaluable service, as shown by Karen and her incredible journey. I built up rapport and trust with Karen, and our calls were a safe space for whatever Karen felt she needed that week. Karen knew deep down what she was capable of but didn’t have the self-belief to achieve it. I was able to work through these fears with Karen and allow her to show the pain she was in control. Some of the things we worked on included: flare-up management, self-development, improving sleep, implementing movement, reigniting social interaction, supporting with daily tasks, and pacing. These aspects, plus many more, are all things patients with chronic pain can benefit from when they enter our programme.”