

Developing Open Dialogue: personal stories Alternative therapies

I found Open Dialogue in 2014, after I bought Russell Razzaque's book "Breaking down is waking up." I'd had two lots of counselling from 2012 onwards, but they hadn't worked: I needed to be more open about how traumatised and disintegrated I felt. New rituals and tribes were needed.

Before I began the Open Dialogue therapy in 2016 (via Dialogue First, the NHS referral service), I returned to healthy teenage habits: yoga and not drinking. In yoga, I learnt about the power and sustenance of breath and breathing correctly, breathing into and out of the poses, and the deep connection between mind, body and spirit. The yoga teachers were all gentle and everything was focused on peaceful healing and being utterly present.

Over time, I adapted some poses to use daily, whether as yoga or in creating a more joyful and mindful way to do household chores. It taught me awareness of my body and the tears which had been blocked for so many years began to flow at last. I began to eat more mindfully too, becoming aware that I'd often over-eat to distract myself from painful thoughts.

I found my home tribe when I quit drinking on 1st May 2015. 1st May isn't just the beginning of spring and Beltane, according to ancient pagan history, it was also the anniversary of my younger brother, Eric's funeral. He'd never managed to overcome his drug addiction and took his life at just 54, after his best friend died suddenly. Community, connection and compassion would be my watchwords. I found the most honest, accepting and wise community ever, in the recovery community, via online forums.

Yoga, journaling (via daily posts) and helping others recover created a new and more meaningful life. I could be myself online in ways in which our judgmental society too often discourages. Later in 2015, I left the Anglican church – I support same sex marriage and it became very evident that my belief was counter to the church's stance: I needed to align with my soul, not dogma.

I also arranged two fundraisers for The Bus Shelter MK, a Milton Keynes based charity which provides accommodation for the homeless and a route back to work and social integration. I did this in honour of Eric, who'd had bouts of homelessness during his most active phases of heroin addiction.

My mental health improved enormously because I was **heard**: Open Dialogue, **felt**: my new sober friends and **appreciated**: the homeless community. My life had a new purpose and meaning, which is really what I needed after 13 tumultuous years. We moved home in November 2018, close to where my father was born in the West Country. It was a coming full-circle and I continue my work in the recovery community, helping homeless people as well as with our new group, Open Dialogue

Champions. Today, I know that my life really matters, and that's the best gift of all.
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