

Martin. Age 50

“There’s a ripple effect of positivity with these programmes that most people don’t even realise is there.”

Martin lives in Claydon in Ipswich, with his wife and two children, Ethan aged 14 and Amy 16.

Martin was an engineer at Hewlett Packard and in his 40’s he took voluntary redundancy and decided to do something with his life that he’d always wanted to do.

So, he trained to be a teacher, completing his degree at the University of Suffolk, in early years care.

He got his first teaching job at Beaumont in Hadleigh, which he loved for three years, then decided to change schools. In this new school he received great feedback after his first year, teaching Reception and Year 1/2, and everything was going well...he loved his job.

But after a very stressful situation at the school when Martin felt he was being bullied by another member of staff which lasted a number of weeks, Martin suffered a breakdown.

Martin recalled “I’d never experienced anything like this level of bullying in the work place, and



as a grown man, it was so hard to deal with, to try and remain professional with this person and be supportive to all my colleagues”

“Things got so bad that I went home one night, and sat in the corner of my kitchen and broke down”

Martin became reclusive for some weeks following the breakdown, and he lost all his confidence, he wasn’t even able to take his children to school.

“When you suffer with depression, you often feel numb, and that’s the only way I could describe how I felt to anyone...just numb, and I felt quite worthless. It definitely stripped me of my confidence and self-esteem.”

“But there was also an anger I felt, when I saw how it affected my family, my son became introvert and my daughter expressed herself with some challenging behaviour.”

Martin received some stress advice from the National Union of Teachers whilst he was unwell, but he knew he needed to make a

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case study

change. If he was going to recover from his depression, he needed to do something for himself and for the sake of his family. Martin's wife was the one who told him about the Outreach programme and although he couldn't swim well and was completely inactive at the time of starting the programme, he had enjoyed swimming in the past, so he thought he'd give it a try.

His anxiety was so extreme on the first session that he very nearly didn't go in. Lots of people were at the first session, it was noisy and he felt very self-conscious, but he recalls "The coaches were brilliant, they explained everything and I soon realised that everyone had a story, a reason for being there and I swam 50m. I went home and remember thinking...I can do this."

Martin's anxiety meant that his breathing was a bit erratic during the swim sessions, but the coaches worked with him on this and it started to improve. By about week 6, he completed a mile and his confidence had started to return.

"I think having a challenge, something to aim for, something to push yourself for, made me focus more on what I was doing rather than what had happened to me, and that was so helpful in my recovery"

Martin made a lot of new friends in the programme and went swimming 2 or 3 times a week, as well as attending the coached sessions. He also did some pilates and yoga at home to help with strength and stamina. At the end of the 12-week programme he felt ready mentally and physically to take part in



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the Great East swim, and he completed the one-mile route in 50 minutes.

“I didn’t realise how much the training would create self-belief and it’s that self-belief that got me round the course, but also has made me feel like me again.”

Martin has carried on swimming regularly since the programme and has signed up for other open water swims. He’s also going back to teach in September, at a different Primary School, and he’s feeling positive about it.

“I hadn’t realised how much my confidence was damaged, I used to panic about almost everything when I was unwell but taking part in this programme has massively boosted my self-confidence and self-esteem.”

“I would urge anyone who is suffering with mental illness to find something like this programme to help them. Find something that you can focus your mind on and set yourself a challenge.”

“There’s a ripple effect of positivity with these programmes that most people don’t even realise is there. Not only have I physically and mentally improved as a result of taking part, but my family has too.”

GREAT EAST SWIM 2018 OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Supported by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Sport, Sport England, Allied Health Professionals, and local pool operators, aims to support inactive residents, who want to make a change to their physical activity levels, using a mass participation challenge as their motivation.

The programme, provides 12 weeks of supported coaching, encouragement, membership to their local pool, free wetsuit hire, fast-track physiotherapy support and entry to either the 1/2 mile or 1 mile Great East Open Water Swim held at Alton Water reservoir near Ipswich.

In 2018, 82 people between the ages of 18 and 64 registered to take start the programme with 72 completing it.

Many are continuing to swim and exercise on a regular basis and have made a positive change to their health and physical activity levels.

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