

Sinead is Back!

After depression put an end to her career in social care work, Sinead Cafferky is building a new life.

SINEAD CAFFERKY CAN LOOK BACK NOW AND see that she has lived with depression since her early teens. She simply seemed like a grumpy teenager – but her depression caught up with her in her twenties when she became a social care worker.

“At first it was fine. I was young. As it went on, it did wear away at me because I wasn’t well. I was cranky, agitated, tired. I found it hard to get on with people. I took it out on them.”

After five years of social care, the stresses of her job and lifestyle took its toll on her. She was spending time on her own, staying in bed, watching TV, avoiding people and drinking too much.

“I was very quiet, angry and irritable with people I trusted, not wanting to go out or meet people. My bedroom was a mess – it was not kept well. It was as if I thought ‘I don’t deserve to have a nice room, so why bother?’ What’s on the inside is reflected in the outside environment.

“Three years ago I called a halt to it. I went to a psychiatrist who diagnosed mild depression, prescribed anti-depressants and recommended I leave work.”

Cafferky left her job to the great surprise of both her boss and her parents who had no idea of her depression. She moved back to her parents’ farm in Kilkelly, Mayo, and enjoyed the peace of rural life.

After two years, Cafferky moved to Dublin to live with her sister and heard about Roslyn Park College. She realised she needed somewhere to “chill out and make some life choices” but she still felt she should be on the other side of the classroom. “I hadn’t accepted I was mentally unwell. I would have to face it.”

She signed on for the Psychosocial Foundation course, a diverse programme which covers topics such as personal development and creative writing, as well as teaching participants how to look after themselves and how to learn so

they can go on to further study. The timetable is flexible and participants choose what they want from a range of options and sample vocational courses in the college. It’s connected to CollegeStart, an introductory skills course, so students from the two courses mix. “I’ve met so many people from so many different backgrounds. It taught me life skills that I didn’t have.”

Cafferky is now studying the Business Studies (Administration) course and learning a wide range of skills in customer service, communications, information and administration, word processing and the European Computer Driving Licence.

“The Business Studies course is, as I see it, a gradual, flexible way of being able to test different waters. It’s shown me abilities I have in areas such as presentation,





Pictured above: National Learning Network student Sinead Cafferky.

leadership and organisational skills. It has reinforced abilities I had forgotten about and taught me consistency, persistence and patience.”

One of the things Cafferky found helpful was the WRAP (Wellness, Recovery, Action Planning) programme which was included in the Psychosocial course. It empowers participants to research their own recovery plan and she found it helped her understand herself, gradually coming to the realisation that a return to social work was not for her. “It was a hard pill to swallow. Now it’s a relief, to be honest. It was burdening my health. I’ve got my sense of humour back. Relationships are not as hard. My sense of self has improved.”

After 18 months, Cafferky is looking forward to a new career when she graduates next spring and a holiday in Asia.

“Two years ago, I was afraid of knowing who I was and what I needed. Now I have made goals for myself – travel, a job, finishing the course and pursuing interests I never thought I could be doing, like drama. In the future, I would like to take up an arts programme part-time. Sinead is back!” ■

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