

## **Cpl Matt's story on managing depression**

You wouldn't know it looking at me now, but this time last year my world turned into a black, scary chasm from which I had to desperately fight my way out. It began with a busy, stressful work period. I didn't have the right mechanisms in place to cope—I admit that—and the way I saw life took a dark turn. I became stressed and anxious, and at the same time realised his stress and anxiety was rubbing off on my colleagues. I was afraid of the stigma that surrounded Mental Health issues and feared for my career.

I was due to deploy but began doubting my ability to do the deployment. My stress levels were at the max, and I went over the edge and couldn't get out. I approached my command chain who were excellent in the way they helped me. I was displaying severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, and the Army put things in place to help me deal with that. After a while I feel better about myself.

The opportunity for another deployment came up. I put up my hand but discovered I had been medically downgraded and wouldn't qualify. That sent me spiralling downwards again because I was feeling OK. I trusted their (the command chain) judgement. They weighed up the risk, and I accept that risk assessment, but it was hard. I knew they had my best interests at heart.

My anxiety made me feel totally isolated. I felt OK at work but when I was in civilian clothing I felt completely distraught. It's a deep, dark hole and you just can't find the light. Being in crowds was a big deal and was very difficult to deal with at times which is something that I think a lot of people are trying to cope with.

I have learned that along with the help that was offered to me, there are things I can do that help with my anxiety. Basic deep breathing is one thing that helps, and taking stock –kind of looking at your own situation objectively— can help. Sometimes you can't quite see the light at the end of the tunnel, it may seem so distant, but by breaking things down into really small goals it makes things a lot easier. Every time I achieved one of those tiny goals I felt good about myself and it pushed me to carry on, goal after goal, day after day.

Since telling a few people about my situation I have found so many people are in the same boat as me. It's so important to talk to someone. You have nothing to lose. You are far better off talking about it than hiding it and pretending everything is OK. I accept I may find myself feeling unwell again in the future. I have up and down days. There are going to be more tunnels, I know that. I have won the battle, but the war might never end. People need to realise that you can't just expect it all to disappear, you might come across another tunnel like I have, and that is perfectly normal! In my opinion it would be dangerous to think that it's gone forever.

Depression does not manifest itself as you, nor do you manifest yourself as depression, it is merely a state of mind as is euphoria and anger. If you can accept this then you are one step closer to dealing with depression and anxiety in a respectful manner. Yes I say respectful, Depression is one of those demons that will challenge you but respect you if you can accept and respect IT! Kia Kaha”.