



Michelle Jones-Cheung

Mid and West Wales Fire & Rescue

“I realised it's okay to be honest about your feelings with others and with yourself”



Michelle Jones-Cheung may not work in the fire service, but she knows what it is to rely on physical health for income, and the devastating impact long-term conditions can have on finances and, in turn, your mental health. Being married to a firefighter, she was eligible for our help.

A self-employed carpenter, Michelle was facing potential bankruptcy in 2015, after knee and hand surgeries left her out of work for five months. When a surgeon proposed further surgery that could see her off work for a whole year, she turned to the Charity for an alternative solution.

“I spent a week at Harcombe House, with the intention of focusing on my injuries,” she says. “With hindsight, I wish I’d asked for psychological support, but I was surrounded by people battling mental health issues, and I just couldn’t admit I was suffering mentally as well as physically.”

Worrying about finances, relying on painkillers, and not talking about her emotions, Michelle bottled things up. During a group session on how finances affect our wellbeing, things got too much, and she broke down: “A friend noticed I was crying. I said I don’t want to be here. She said here Harcombe or life? I said life.”

Michelle opened up to one of the psychological therapists, who encouraged her to seek medical help when going home. But the her fellow beneficiaries left a lasting impression: “They opened my eyes to the fact there are other people in similar situations to me,” she says. “I realised it’s okay to be honest about your feelings with others and with yourself. Being there changed my perspective and taught me so much about myself. I still have a few blips and we all have our down days. But I’m in a much better place now, and just have to find ways to turn things around.”

www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/michelle-jones-cheung

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