

# MY EXPERIENCE OF BEFRIENDING

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

In her own words, Sarah\* explains how having a Befriender helped her during recovery from Bulimia and why she would recommend the service to others.

\*Names have been changed

"I developed bulimia when I was 14 after a period of quite significant change, and some long-standing difficulties with anxiety, although at the time I was unaware of any of the reasons for my ED, and still am not clear on all the causes.

I denied the existence of my ED for a while, assuming that my issues with food were normal amongst teenagers, and since I was still doing well in school and I never lost any weight, I thought no one would believe that I was struggling. But it eventually got to an unmanageable point where ED behaviours were taking up most of my day and I was often running late to things because I couldn't stop bingeing and purging. So I sought help from school, my GP, and my local eating disorders service when I was 16.

**I never felt able to talk to my family about how I was feeling**

I was lucky enough to have incredible support from friends, school and my treatment team, and although my family were so loving, I never felt able to talk to them much about how I was feeling. I had weekly (and at one point, twice-weekly) therapy which was helpful, and was discharged from my service once I turned 18.



Befriending is a service that links adults (18 years+) who are currently in recovery with those that have recovered. The relationship lasts for 6 months via a weekly phone conversation and offers lived experience understanding and recovery focussed guided support.

By that point I felt stable in recovery. At stressful times, I might binge or purge or restrict my intake, but I had found my motivation to recover and had the support of friends and school to get me out of bad patches and keep me going.

So I still had a few ED niggles, but the issue came when I started my first year of university. I relapsed really quickly due to the stress of change, and I felt like I was right back in the depths of my ED again.

I felt like I couldn't speak to anybody; I no longer had therapy, I'd lost the consistent support from school, I'd struggled with my existing friendships and didn't feel able to speak to my family. So only I could keep myself accountable and it was easy to deny the existence of this relapse. That's where Anorexia & Bulimia Care came in. I called the helpline after a really bad day at uni and they suggested Befriending.

## How Befriending helped me

Befriending was helpful for a whole host of reasons.

Reducing shame was the biggest one, for me. I didn't have to tell anyone else about the calls and I never had to show my face and be confronted with potential judgement; as a result I could talk candidly about ED behaviours.

I attribute getting out of that relapse quickly (within a few months) in part to my previous experience of recovery and knowing what worked for me and how sneaky the ED could be, and in part to Befriending. I had some therapy during that time, but had unfortunately received some insensitive comments during my assessment

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I relapsed quickly due to the stress of change



Befriending is not a counselling service but it is professionally guided support with some goals that both sides work together to achieve. It should therefore be an additional service to other professional input, i.e. medical monitoring and psychological/emotional support.

with the service, which stopped me from opening up about the ED fully when I eventually had therapy there.

### Expressing my fears gave me hope

Expressing all my fears about full recovery to my Befriender whilst receiving reassurance that full recovery is possible gave me hope that I'd lost for a while. A few months into Befriending, I felt pretty much recovered again, and over time I've reached a point where I feel about 90% recovered.

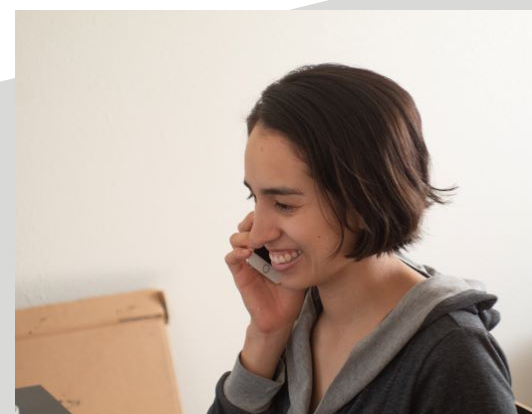
For me, that means that most of the time I can get on with my day without obsessing about food or exercise, I haven't binged or purged for so many months that I've lost count, and I can deal with any ED thoughts really quickly (i.e. notice then ignore them).

### Befriending has helped me realise that full recovery really is possible

Events like Christmas and birthdays are no longer stressful food-wise, so that's in the background whilst I can have fun with family and friends. Since Befriending has helped me realise that full recovery really is possible and I don't even need to live with an ED voice inside my head, I have more motivation to keep challenging the last few remnants of the ED inside me, so soon I can be completely free. Even more free than I am now.

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I haven't binged or purged for so many months I've lost count



We provide comprehensive training prior to becoming a befriender, which covers calling guidelines, best practice, confidentiality and listening skills amongst other things. Each Befriender is also trained on the Recovery Star model, a well known and respected measure of outcomes to support mental health and wellbeing.

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# Could a Befriender help you?

We currently have trained Befrienders waiting to be matched with someone working through recovery. Perhaps that might be you or a loved one.

To find out more, including full eligibility and details on how the Befriending relationship works, click the link for our 'Guide to Befriending':

[www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk/help-for-you/befriending](http://www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk/help-for-you/befriending)

You can also get in touch by emailing us:  
[Befriending@anorexiabulimiare.org.uk](mailto:Befriending@anorexiabulimiare.org.uk)

Our Befriending Manager will be very happy to chat your situation through and answer any questions you may have.

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Knowing someone is there for me and understands what I'm feeling, is support like none other. I've made such progress in my journey to recovery that I would never have been able to make without my Befriender

