

Case study: developing confidence

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Bernadette, 52, had been out of work for five and a half years, due largely to an anxiety-related breakdown she had suffered. She had been on different types of medication which had not helped her feel confident about going back to work. Bernadette felt very low, wasn't keen to interact with anyone and her self esteem was at rock bottom.

She was referred to New Deal but was extremely worried that she would not be able to cope with group induction. Her Jobcentre Plus adviser rang ahead to explain this and it was agreed that Bernadette's induction would take place as a one-to-one session with an adviser and she could see how things went from there.

When Bernadette arrived she was greeted by Helena and they sat down in a side room to discuss what being on New Deal would mean for her and how Helena could help. Bernadette felt immediately at ease as Helena had a kind nature but, more importantly to Bernadette, she was a similar age. They discussed what the job market was like for people aged 50+ and Bernadette left feeling more at ease because she understood that she wasn't too old to go back to work and that employers would look at her skills rather than her age.

Bernadette discussed the retail work she had done in the past but said that because she was taking anti-depressants she didn't feel able to cope with work that involved dealing with people. They talked about the kind of work she would like and Bernadette said that perhaps she could consider working with animals as she has always had pets and loved programmes like *Animal Hospital*. Helena arranged to see Bernadette again the following week and asked her to see if she could go to her GP in the meantime to talk about going back to work and to ask to have her medication reviewed.

When Bernadette returned, she seemed livelier and had made a decision to try to find work, but she said she needed Helena's help. She had also discussed her medication with her GP and he had decided to reduce her dosage. Over the next few weeks Helena worked with Bernadette, setting her little tasks to build her confidence. These tasks included getting her to plan bus journeys to parts of the city she would be prepared to work in, talking to friends and neighbours about any jobs they knew about, and also to ask in shops if they had any vacancies. Although a

little nervous at first, Bernadette worked at the tasks and they slowly built her confidence around interacting with people in new situations.

After a time Bernadette asked to attend one of the CV building workshops which really surprised Helena as she had been so against the idea when she first joined the programme. After the session, Bernadette started to look for placements and managed to get one helping out at a dog grooming parlour. After she had been there a while she told Helena how happy she was and how she felt she was getting back “on top of life”. Helena looked for jobs for Bernadette while she was on placement and after several interviews Bernadette found a job working at a pet shop. Bernadette was excited about starting work as she felt she was back in control and could “see a future for herself for the first time in ages”.

Bernadette is still in work two years later and has persuaded the pet shop she works in to take people on placement as she knows how much it helped her.

Key learning points:

- *Someone like me:* 50+ customers may respond better to advisers of a similar age.
- Try to find jobs that match the customer’s interests.
- Encourage intervention by other stakeholders, for example GPS.
- Design the journey around the customer’s needs, for example one to one rather than group sessions.
- Go at their pace, taking account of whether they want to speed up or slow down.