

# "The most rewarding aspect of my job is witnessing people's growth."

Jacqueline's own mental health journey ignited her passion for helping others to overcome similar challenges.

## Jacqueline Howell

### Health and Wellbeing Peer Coach



#### How I got into the role

**Expand / collapse**

My own mental health journey ignited my passion for helping others to overcome similar challenges.

It started about a decade ago when I was diagnosed with anxiety. I also suffered from debilitating panic attacks. At the time, my GP referred me for cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) sessions. These sessions really helped, and it was then that I started to look into various resources that could help me gain control over my panic attacks.

I was really determined to do some volunteer work to help with this. I initially joined a charity called VoiceAbility as a peer support worker who helped me complete the Mental Health Peer Coach Training programme. I also volunteered at a mental health hospital as a response volunteer for the NHS, where I further developed my skills and knowledge in mental health.

Finally, I became a peer support professional at Choice and Control NHS. Through this opportunity, I found my way into my current role as a peer coach.

## **What I do**

### **Expand / collapse**

I help people reach their desired level of physical health and fitness.

I offer them unwavering support and expert guidance to help them access the resources they need to meet their health goals. I support them with a range of challenging issues, including housing, navigating the benefits system, managing the high cost of living, addressing substance misuse, coping with domestic violence, and improving the management of underlying health conditions.

Building relationships with the people I work with takes time. My approach involves active listening, characterised by empathy and being free from judgment. I want to motivate and empower people to set and accomplish achievable goals while maintaining their motivation throughout their journey towards better health and well-being.

## **The best bits and challenges**

### **Expand / collapse**

The most rewarding aspect of my job is witnessing people's growth. The trust that develops during our sessions with clients and the remarkable strides individuals are willing to make towards positive change are profoundly fulfilling.

Getting access to training and gaining new qualifications has always been important to me. I have had training as part of the Peer Support Programme, which helped me develop as a peer support specialist. I also have a qualification in Certified Personal Medicine Coaching, which reinforced my commitment to providing support and guidance to the people I work with and supporting their personal wellness and mental health.

There are challenges. One of the biggest is dealing with the stigmas and misconceptions associated with mental health. It can also be frustrating when the process of finding someone suitable accommodation becomes difficult. There can also be a lack of financial support for our services, which can be frustrating.

## **Life outside work**

### **Expand / collapse**

My leisure time is important to me. It really helps my health and well-being and gives me a work/life balance. I really enjoy connecting with nature through activities such as walking, hiking, cycling, and yoga.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

### **Expand / collapse**

My plan is to continue to develop my skills and make a positive impact in the field of trauma support. I'm currently training in trauma technics. Specifically focusing on Integral Eye Movement Therapy (IEMT).

IEMT is a type of therapy that uses guided eye movements to help people manage and overcome emotional issues and distressing memories. It connects eye movements with emotions to bring about positive changes in how someone thinks and feels. I expect this to help me develop a strong foundation in trauma interventions.

As for top tips, I would encourage people to:

**Volunteer:** engage in volunteering opportunities related to your desired career. It'll give you first-hand experience of what the role entails and help you gauge your interest and suitability.

**Look at taster training:** Consider participating in taster training programs or workshops within your chosen field. There are short courses that can provide you with a taste of the skills and knowledge required, helping you make an informed decision.

This will give you valuable insights and you'll gradually be able to make your way into a career you are passionate about.

I wish I had discovered a career as a peer coach earlier. But it's important to remember that it's never too late to pursue a career that truly resonates. I've managed to bring about this change in my life, and I genuinely believe that anyone has the potential to do the same.

---

**Source URL:**<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles-psychological-therapies/peer-support-worker/real-life-story-jacqueline-howell>