

About Emma – The creator of Student Survivors'

I am a recent Graduate who studied Sociology and Combined Studies at university.

A large part of my degree was affected by mental health problems ranging from depression and self harm to an attempt to take my own life.

With the right help and support towards the end of my degree I started to move forward and better control the problems which until that point had so consumed my life, but as I did so, I realised that the experience was too important for me to just leave it in the past, and I felt compelled to do something to help other students who may find themselves in a similar situation. I was very aware both of how lucky I had been in finding the right help and support, which I truly feel saved my life, but also that there were no specific mental health services or websites aimed just at students and their needs.

I had just written my dissertation on whether there was a need for a mental health service aimed specifically at university students and this had further fuelled my desire to do something to help and although I knew there was not a lot at that particular point which I myself could do I set up a web-board called Student Survivors' which I hoped eventually I would be able to promote within universities and students would begin to use.

Not long after doing so I found out about the work of Students in Mind and contacted them to see if there was some way we could work together – since then my life has changed dramatically and I have been on a journey which led to the creation of this board, which you are now able to use.

Students in Mind was amazingly supportive of my work, and have supported me ever since, in my quest to bring this board to the many students whom I knew needed it, wanted it and would use it once it was available.

My original idea has been fully embraced by the charity and it is with their help that this board is available for students to access and use. I am a perfect example of how the charity works and really listens to those it is trying to help and support. This board is the evidence that students' ideas really are taken on, embraced, celebrated and developed within the organisation.

I now work part-time for Students in Mind and my work with them has given me a new lease of life and a renewed confidence and belief in myself.

Having the charity believe in me and my ideas has been a truly empowering experience and being able to use my own experiences to help others has been a huge step forward for me. It has helped me to move my own life forward, knowing that the experiences I went through are not in vain and that I can use those to help other students who sadly may end up in a similar situation.

My work with Students in Mind has given me a hope for the future which had not existed until now and ultimately in helping me to move forward the charity has saved my own life.

Through my work with the charity I have met some very special people and made some amazing friends, whom I am sure will remain an important part of my life for many years to come. These people have truly understood what I myself have lived through, some of them having been through very similar experiences and the stories we have shared as a collective group have only fuelled my commitment and passion for the charity.

As for me ... I do not feel it is fair of me to say that I have no problems now, because some days I still struggle, but I do feel it is fair to say that on those days I know much better what steps to take to look after myself, and also that it is fair to say that my life is no longer so consumed and controlled by problems the way it once was.

When I look back now I am sometimes still amazed that I survived and made it through to gain my degree, but I did, and I am so thankful for that now, because during those days I could not see the great things that lay ahead of me and could not imagine ever living the days I am now, which are among some of the happiest I have ever had.

It was a long and hard road and one that at times I never thought I would see the end of or make, but in the last year or so things have changed so much for the better, and I am so much happier than I believed I ever could be.

It was not easy to reach this point and it took a lot of fighting and a lot of will power. I was lucky that I had some amazing support and was able to somehow pull myself out of that dark, dark hole. That is not to say that I don't still have difficult days or that I never revert to my old ways of thinking, but I can recognise the patterns now, and try to stop myself before I get too far down that road.

At times it has been much harder to be ok than it ever was to be in the depths of despair, because being ok meant believing there were good things about myself, and meant learning to like and love myself, which I never felt I would be able to do. It meant unlearning things I had either been told, or told myself about myself for many years ... BUT it was and is worth it.

I have now been self-harm free for just over two years, which is a place I never believed I would get too, but now I know that I can make the next two years and the ones after that. It has been really hard and some days I have struggled more than others but it is easier and the urges are less intense now than they were at first. I have got to a place where I can see how self-destructive I was being, how much I actually hindered my recovery by doing that to myself and most importantly some days now I even like myself enough to know that I am worth more than that and that I don't deserve to hurt!

SO much has changed in my life I look back at the person I was even just six months ago and sometimes I literally lose my breath because I can see how massive the change is. I still have hard days but in so many ways I no longer even resemble the person I was back then.

I had got to a place where I hated and despised every part of who I was, and I was blinded to some of the wonderful things there were about me ... I had so completely believed the lies I had heard or told myself all of my life and I had no desire to live another day, to lead a more fully and enriched life or to recover in any sense of the word. It was the darkest time in my life and I didn't believe I would ever recover or get to a place where I would have any desire to live another day.

Now ... Things have changed so much and every day I am thankful that I am still here.

I have so many amazing people in my life, whom although it is sometimes still hard for me to believe I can finally trust when they tell me how much they love me, how much they admire me and all the special things about me.

I am happy and I know that I have a future which sometimes I never thought I would see but now I am happy to be looking forward to that future... I can look at myself now and be happy at who I see.

During those dark days my soul was so destroyed and now it is full of love, joy, excitement, optimism and happiness.

I know that many of you are probably in the place I was back then, not being able to imagine things ever changing for you, but things do, and I wanted to write this, to say that even when you are in the bleakest place imaginable, and I know what that place is like because I have been there, do not give up. Reach out to someone and ask for help, because you are worth it and your life is worth living.