

# PERSONAL STORY BY MEL B

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When I started my primary school, I suffered from bullying not only from the other kids but from the teachers too, so I had no friends. There was only god, me, myself and I, thank god for that!! Basically it was like hell at Primary school and I felt lost, I felt uncomfortable. In 2002 I left school and I went to this special needs secondary school, I also suffered from bullying but not as much. I also felt school helped me a lot to improve my spelling and reading a little. In 2006 when I left school to start college, I've been studying and also receiving talking therapy. It was by my therapist I was referred to Vocation Matters to help look for course, but City Lit was full and it wasn't at the level for me to learn. They then introduced me to look into supported courses, which is when I came across Blackfriars Settlement to improve my English language.

At BS, they really helped me, I started basic English, maths, and IT (3 in 1) course and then another student from there told me about the mental health and wellbeing services upstairs. It was the art sessions, in particular the clay that really caught my eye. These sessions help me be relaxed and comfortable. I grew from those sessions by believing I could actually draw and be artistic. I also grew by meeting new friends and by discovering things about myself through encouragement from the art tutors & art therapist/staff. I felt more heard here at BS than by anywhere else. I didn't get shut down here, and the only friends I have now are here, they have similar stories and are in similar situations to me. After a while I joined in with the other activities, twice a week, Cook & Eat course, user-run discussion group and members meetings. I improved my cooking skills, which was really satisfying. After a while I was asked to chair the meetings, I was nervous at first and didn't know what it meant. I got some explanations and directions from staff who made it friendly, fun and helpful. Chairing the meeting made me feel heard, a little bit powerful because as a young woman I need to feel like that.

Art therapy has really helped me, therapy helps me to speak about my problems, I draw use colour on paper and talking helps a lot. The therapist always explains it's a confidential space, when I have questions she responds which helps me to understand. I feel happy in this environment at the mental health and wellbeing service Blackfriars Settlement.

(Story told to Renuka who typed up, MelB has agreed to use her story and edit as required.)