



## CASE STUDY

The personal journey of Alistair Bryant  
Peer Mentor and Volunteer Coordinator  
at Swanswell Worcestershire

**cranstoun** 

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“The drug services that were there before aren't there anymore, and we need to be up to date and relevant and making sure that we're not stuck in the past. Everywhere has gone digital, so recovery needs to go digital as well. We need to move with the times.”



## Overview of Alistair's journey

Alistair first engaged with substance misuse treatment services in 2012, and quickly progressed to becoming a peer mentor. Following this, he became a recovery champion. To support this new role, Alistair used Breaking Free Online to gain key therapeutic skills that enabled him to conduct one-to-one keyworking sessions with service users.

This led to Alistair being employed full time as part of the paid management team and acting as the current peer mentor and volunteer coordinator for Swanswell and Cranstoun services across Worcestershire.

This case study highlights Alistair's progression through services and discusses how he used Breaking Free Online to develop his therapeutic skills and build confidence to undertake his new roles.



## About Breaking Free Online

Breaking Free Online is an evidence-based digital behaviour change programme that has been demonstrated by extensive peer-reviewed research to be effective at reducing people's substance use and dependence and improving their mental health and quality of life.

Designed to be interactive, engaging and personalised to each individual, the programme supports people's recovery by giving them 24/7 access to a comprehensive toolkit of psychoeducation, proven behaviour change techniques and recovery resources. To cater to all literacy levels, and different learning styles, full voiceover accompanies every screen.

The intervention targets over 70 different substances, including opiates, stimulants, alcohol, new psychoactive substances (NPS) and prescribed medications of abuse, and is endorsed by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).

## Service User

Alistair started treatment in 2012 for some problematic substance misuse issues, which gave him an opportunity to discuss his priorities in life.

Fairly soon after engaging with the treatment service, Alistair came to the realisation that he wanted to use his knowledge and lived experience of being a service user to help others in recovery:

**“I really wanted to be able to sit with a service user, make them understand it, to other people, because I hadn't had**

**that before and I think it's really powerful, and that triggered me to do some peer mentoring and some volunteering.”**

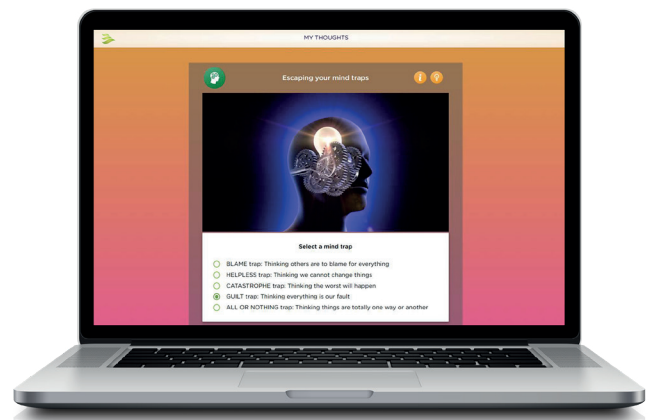
## Peer Mentor

Training to be a peer mentor took 17 weeks:

**“Being a peer mentor has been amazing because, for me, you're in between the worker and the service user. In the eyes of a service user there can be quite a gap between those two people. As a peer mentor, you can slot in the middle of that. And you can create some believable stepping stones for the service user to walk on, while still being someone they feel equal to.”**

It was through this peer mentoring role that Alistair was introduced to Breaking Free Online. By inputting information from his own recovery, he was able to work through the programme, learning behaviour change techniques and applying these to his own life and circumstances.

As a peer mentor, he started introducing service users to the programme and promoting Breaking Free Online as an intervention that could support their recovery.



## Recovery Champion

From being a peer mentor, Alistair was offered the opportunity of becoming a recovery champion. This role gave rise to opportunities to work on a one-to-one basis with service users in a therapeutic and safe setting.

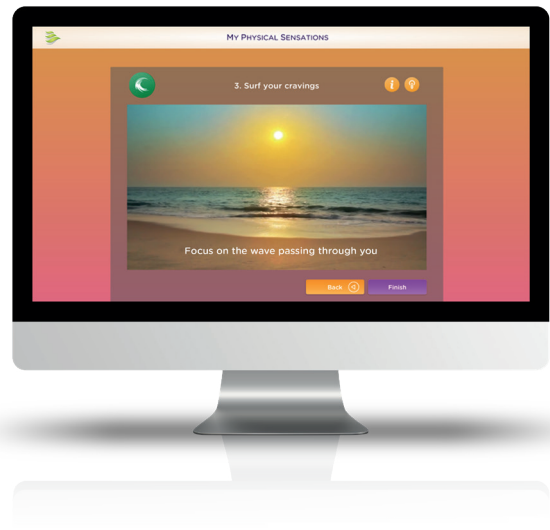
Despite not having much experience of supporting individual service users at that point, Alistair was able to use Breaking Free Online as a tool to develop his skills:

**“When I managed to get the recovery champion job, this meant that I had slightly more responsibility and that gave me the opportunity to really use Breaking Free Online as a proper development tool as well as a recovery tool for my service users. I saw it as a two-pronged approach... what it gave me in my development as a practitioner was a structured way of learning one-to-one work and doing it safely. I could learn the best way to get the most out of people, how to work with them, how to recognise what might be quite difficult in the process and support them through that.”**

Alistair went on to run Breaking Free Online sessions with service users on an individual basis to support them with their recoveries:

**“Those CBT skills that are in Breaking Free Online, once you learn them you can’t unlearn them so what you learn in there you do end up implementing in**

**your own life because they’re good skills to have.”**



Drawing upon his experience, Alistair identified several ways to improve engagement with Breaking Free Online, and so help service users gain the most therapeutic benefit from the programme.

He found that when practitioners and peer mentors worked in tandem with service users to guide them through digital intervention programmes such as Breaking Free Online, it was particularly powerful. This supported them most in acquiring self-knowledge and learning to put into practice new skills and positive coping methods.

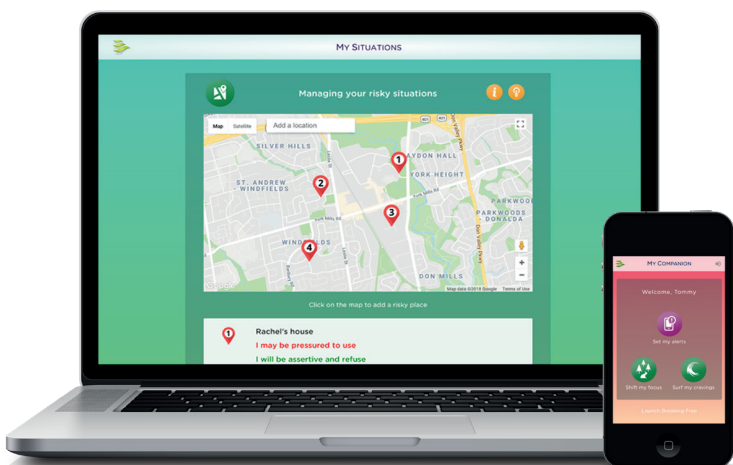
As well as helping service users gain more from the programme, Alistair found this created valuable opportunities for therapeutic discussion:

**“If I was to just hand a card with a log in number to a service user, that might be just like another flyer they’ve been given. You get given a lot of stuff when you come into services. So I gave them a card but was like ‘look, if you need extra support, come**

and see me and we'll do this in the service'. They could come in and see me for an hour, just working through the programme. Breaking Free Online did the work, but I brought the conversation and contextualised it to where they were at in their lives.”

Alistair also highlighted how Breaking Free Online could be used to increase service user engagement with their recovery more generally:

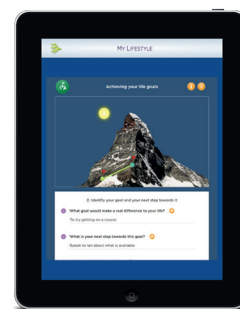
“If you see your worker once, see me do Breaking Free Online, then do it once at home, you've tripled your engagement.”



In the context of continuing austerity measures and decreasing budgets for treatment and recovery services, this notion of Breaking Free Online being used as a cost-saving tool is important.

The programme provides a structured psychosocial intervention that, depending on the needs of the individual service user, facilitates self-management or can be delivered as computer-assisted therapy, harnessing the skills and lived experience of peer mentors and volunteers:

“We need to be creative and up the amount of engagement by using platforms like Breaking Free Online, with the support of service’s peer mentors and volunteers to give an extra one to two hours a week recovery time to someone who only has to see one paid staff member. That’s where a service needs to be savvy and if a client’s interested, that’s where you bring in a Breaking Free Online champion to help that person with the programme once a week and then tie the support in via email or the summaries that get printed from the programme, which can be uploaded onto the client’s caseload. Doing this means there’s more engagement, but for not much more money.”



## Peer Mentor and Volunteer Coordinator

Currently, Alistair works as the peer mentor and volunteer coordinator for the Swanswell and Cranstoun services across Worcestershire. He is responsible for co-ordinating all unpaid staff and increasing support for their service users.

In the future, Alistair wants to continue using his skills and experience in recovery to help others.

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“I’ve been a big advocate of giving a voice to service users: marginalised people who think that they’re not going to be given any support. For me, just to grow and develop to steer more opportunities to widen support for service users, and to tackle stigma which is a massive issue... I want to keep Breaking Free Online, and all those options that are cutting edge, at the forefront of my mind, because I see where that increases engagement and offers more support, whereas maybe some of the services are a bit behind in that thinking.”



Breaking Free Group would like to thank Alistair for his participation with this case study.



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