

Clare: What inspired you to do Train the Trainer. What was it like?

Monica: The training was great and the reason I wanted to do it, is pretty much the same reason for wanting to be a mentor.

I had a mentor myself when I was first diagnosed and I am very grateful that I had a safe space to go to and for the emotional support that I got at the time.

This encouraged me to volunteer as a mentor. I just wanted to share all the good things that I got out of the experience.

The same happened with the training. After I trained as a mentor, I was a very different person.

Happier, more confident and this equally encouraged me to train to deliver the mentors' training.

I would love to help others to feel as amazing as I did after training as a mentor.

Aer: Very similar things as well for me. The way Project 100 designed the approach we use for peer mentoring, which was then grown and expanded by Brigstowe, and peer mentoring more widely as a way of supporting people is something I feel is both really powerful as a form of support and really impactful. You can see the difference it makes to people. As a mentor you can see how someone can grow and change during the time you are working with them. And so for me it was also about wanting to be in a position to help Brigstowe and potentially other charities and organisation to deliver support in that way and to spread the word of about this way of offering peer mentoring, that was a real motivator for me. I also really liked the idea of being able to train the next generation of peer mentors and set them off out into the world. It felt like a natural next step from what we do as mentors.

Clare: You mentioned a few times, the model of Project 100 and the way Brigstowe support, how is that different. What makes it special?

Aer: What stands out for me is, particularly for Brigstowe, is how thoroughly thought through the approach is, and that it's properly resourced and its supported. It's not something where you feel the burden is on you as a volunteer to make it work - it works for you and you are fully supported. It's also a programme that has elements that grow you as an individual and it gives you opportunities to grow in that role if you are interested in mentoring.

I don't know if Monica would agree with me but I felt the experiences I've had as a peer mentor within Brigstowe's version of the mentoring programme stood out.

Clare: How was Train the Trainer?

Aer: There were a few occasions where people were like 'this might be a thing a service could do and we were like 'oh we do that'.

Brigstowe keep innovating and refreshing what it means to be offering peer mentoring.

Monica: Yes, it felt somehow we are in the good team.

Clare: What have you got out of mentoring that has led you to feel like you want other people to have that experience?

Monica: Training to be a mentor has given me a "push" in my life, in terms of confidence, understanding myself better, among many others.

Mentoring has massively been a part of my personal growth. It's given me very useful tools for life and I would love for others to have a similar experience.

Clare: How did it feel to actually deliver some training, after doing the Train the Trainer course a month ago?

Aer: I'm really glad we got an opportunity quite soon after we did the training. I think if there'd been a really long gap it would have felt quite distant and I might not have been as confident to say 'yeh ok let's just do it'.

Monica: Definitely!

Clare: Having Sean(Development & Training Coordinator) there, having a team of you to do it is that a good way of delivering the training?

Monica: Yes, it makes so much sense having someone else to support you. Sean is an experienced trainer and also sharing the training session with Aer made it much easier than delivering it on my own

Aer: It was really good and it felt quite important that the Train the Trainer course was delivered by two people who were really experienced themselves in delivering the peer mentor training and both were people living with HIV. It felt like a strong reflection of what is at the heart of this approach. It's not saying that you can't be involved in this if you're not living with HIV but the vast majority of people were, it felt really important as one of the core points of peer mentoring that it is delivered by peers and you've got that shared experience.

Clare: When you had the core training, how did it feel then both of you to have at least one of the trainers also being positive?

Monica: It felt very powerful. My trainer was Mark and he was amazing, confident, and encouraging. It felt like he was passing all those feelings to the group. Definitely to me. I remember going into the group and being nervous just by introducing myself. I felt someone different after the training. Again it was very powerful to see someone so confident and so happy, kind of HIV is just another part your life, what's all the fuss about! And with first hand knowledge.

Aer: They can share their personal story and it makes that immediate link, because there is that moment of being in a room and being like 'oh, everyone else here is HIV positive' for the people who are being trained, and the fact at least one of the trainers was also HIV positive meant there was an immediate link there and it wasn't them and us, and it wasn't professionals with no lived experience coming to impart their studied knowledge onto us and so that barrier that might have been there was removed immediately.

Clare: How does it feel to take that on and be the trainer for new people coming into the service?

Aer: It's exciting and that's part of what gives the motivation and what energises it for me, knowing and understanding it from my own experience of being trained what it can mean for people to be in that environment where you are also a HIV positive person. It feels like a real privilege to be able to take on that role and to be able to use what has been a real mixture of positive experiences and some quite negative and difficult things relating to what I've been through in relation to HIV. It does feel like a privilege to be able to take all of those experiences, good and bad, and turn them into something that is actually going to make a difference, not just for the people in the room, but for all the people that those individuals are going to go on to support.

Monica: I feel very similar to Aer. And as I said, I took so much from the training that why would other people not have the opportunity to do the same and to feel as great as I feel.

Clare: How long have you been mentoring and how many mentees have you had?

Monica: 4 years, and I'm on my 8th mentee.

Aer: Only about two years and two mentees so far. Thinking about something Monica said earlier, it's definitely reached out more widely into my life. Doing the mentoring and the skills and the confidence that has given me has meant there have been times when I've been able to support someone outside of my Brigstowe volunteering, and I've realised that essentially what I've done is a little bit of mini mentoring. That's just happened naturally and it didn't seem weird and I didn't feel worried or anxious about it, because I know I can help and I know I can be confident doing it, and they will be comfortable speaking to me because we have shared experience. It would be interesting to ask the other mentors how much it becomes a part of who you are and what you can do.

Monica: Yes definitely. I've incorporated many skills that I got from the training on my daily life and when interacting with other people.

Clare: So the skills you've got from mentoring, it's actually spreading out into other areas of your life?

Aer: Yeh it's reached out into bits of my life that I didn't really think it would. Certainly at work, I think I'm a better manager because of the mentoring. It's just taught me and built so many of the skills that are part of being person-centred, listening and being able to provide that pastoral support.

Monica: Yes, I've noticed it in other aspects of my life. I listen more than I used to before, I am more self-aware now whereas before I might have interrupted someone while talking or told them what to do without me being aware of that. I am also more receptive. I definitely use all those skills and "tools" in my normal life.

Aer: In the same way, we as mentors get as much from the mentoring process as the mentee does and we learn from them. Delivering the training refreshers, already things have come up that we've thought about or the discussions that have been had, it's not just been about repeating stuff off a script.

Clare: What have been the main themes you've helped mentees with?

Aer: Confidence is a huge thing.

Monica: Yes, definitely with confidence! And seeing HIV as just another part of your life, not something that makes you, it's just there. Simply another part of you. No better, no worse.

Aer: Being able to trust themselves that they do understand and they are in control. That they can manage this and they can do what they want to do and be who they want to be. That confidence in who they are.

Monica: I was also thinking: helping with first-hand knowledge, because as many things as you might read on the internet it's not the same when someone tells you, having a relationship is not a problem, or I haven't used condoms for years.

I find it very powerful when someone shares those things first hand rather than "I've read..." or "I've heard someone saying..."

Sharing knowledge in a peer mentor relationship has been great for me and for what I've seen with the persons I've mentored, has also been great for all of them. Knowledge is power at the end of the day.

Aer: One of the things that has really stood out for me is seeing how once a mentee starts to feel more relaxed and confident in the mentoring relationship, how HIV threads through all different aspects of their life and how their personal experience of HIV can relate to and touch on so many things that perhaps I would never have thought might be in any way connected to why they would come to mentoring. It really brought home the uniqueness of the individual experience of HIV, that you can deliver a set of tick box things which are important, around this is a website where you can look this up, this a booklet that will tell you about HIV, but actually we are unique individual human beings and our experiences of HIV are unique and will thread through our lives in ways that are completely different from each other. There are common touch points and like Monica said, there are elements of my experience of living with HIV that will resonate with my mentee even if it's not exactly the same. As a mentor that's a big part of how I then learn because I see reflected in their experience things that I've experienced and in that mirror I learn something new because I can now see it slightly differently. I can take something back from that which helps me grow.