



## Volunteering Case Study: Stephanie Merrett

Stephanie first trained as a volunteer in 1999 for a non-profit organisation called Home-Start, which offers practical and emotional support to families (with young children under the age of 5) experiencing difficulties through: isolation, sickness, disability, mental health, domestic abuse, twins/triplets and difficult relationships. Stephanie's role as a volunteer was visit families to offer emotional support and respite from their usual routine. Several years later Stephanie volunteered for Supporting Others through Volunteering Action (SOVA) mentoring young people that had recently left the care system.

***'Looking back, I feel that my enthusiasm to assist others in exploring their inner thoughts and feelings combined with the desire to make a positive difference - is what led me towards a career in counselling'.***

Stephanie's decision to start a career in counselling started when she experienced a difficult relationship break up which made her evaluate her direction in life.

***'Surviving this emotional trauma, taught me that I was stronger than I thought I was and it gave me the courage and determination to reach for things that I thought were beyond my capabilities'.***

Stephanie studied for a Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling. She found it very difficult to find a counselling volunteer placement that fitted in around her working life and the fact that funding for counselling services everywhere had been cut.

Stephanie got in touch The Haven Wolverhampton. She met with Marta, the Volunteering Lead and knew she had a very similar vision of offering women who have been affected by domestic abuse therapeutic support through counselling.

***'Volunteering at The Haven has been an amazing experience from both a personal and professional perspective. I have had the pleasure of working alongside dedicated, hardworking and supportive staff who gave me the opportunity to gain valuable skills, in a supportive environment'.***

Working in refuge helped Stephanie gain a clearer understanding of the difficulties and frustrations for both staff and service users and how counselling fits in to the dynamics. Stephanie's experience has given her the confidence and self-belief to start up her own counselling business [www.affinitycounsellingtherapy.co.uk](http://www.affinitycounsellingtherapy.co.uk).



***'It's been a privileged to have been a small part of the lives of so many amazing women that sought counselling at the refuge I was based. I truly applaud their resilience, determination and courage to keep going through some of the toughest battles. I would like to thank everyone at The Haven but especially the women whom trusted me enough to share their stories with me and for the lovely feedback they gave me'.***