

What the Mulberry Centre means to Mary Evans, our resident volunteer coach

How I came to the Mulberry Centre

Two passing comments, eleven years apart, brought **The Mulberry Centre** into my life, each time to make a profound and lasting impact.

The first comment was made in July 2004 at the West Middlesex Hospital suggesting that I might want to think about Counselling support at **The Mulberry Centre**. A monthly counselling session, offered in the evening after my return from work, was key in getting me through the first six months following the sudden death of my partner, following treatment for bowel cancer. It gave me a supportive space to share what I couldn't unburden to family and friends. It was a bridge towards building a different future.

In 2015, I had started working as a part-time Executive Coach with clients in the public sector. I met a new colleague who was the Chair of the Trustees at **The Mulberry Centre**. She commented that **The Mulberry Centre** was starting a coaching service and suggested I contact the senior managers there. I did and was taken on as a volunteer coach working one morning a week. For the last six years those few hours a week have given my life a richness, both professionally and personally.

My work at the Mulberry Centre

There is no typical client for me at **The Mulberry Centre**. They can be patients, carers or bereaved, men and women, with a wide spread of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. Some are not sure where to start, although things generally begin to emerge in a space which is confidential and free of judgement. The focus of sessions can cover all aspects of life and work. When people face a change of any sort, or wish to live their lives differently, coaching gives them time, space and help to focus on their own needs and to consider what they really want.

It was through working with clients at **The Mulberry Centre** that I really learned just how much people can surprise me; that first impressions often give no real clue to who that person is or what is going on for them. Each day I work at **The Mulberry Centre** I see a wide range of personal qualities and inner resources. When someone reveals to me their vulnerabilities and shares their deep feelings I feel honoured by their trust and openness. I feel privileged to be able to work alongside people who are moving towards feeling more hopeful and empowered. I respect my clients' forbearance and determination and I enjoy the humour they share with me. When I finish my three sessions each week I feel tired but uplifted and stimulated. It is rewarding to be told by clients that they feel better at the end of a session.

Coaching during lockdown

I have seen firsthand how the last year of lockdown has added additional challenges for **The Mulberry Centre** clients, whether through uncertainty, fear, isolation or home-schooling. Thankfully Zoom, FaceTime and the phone have enabled me to keep seeing clients during the last year of lockdown. I have kept in touch with the staff and other volunteers in this way too. I can see that the different types of support which **The Mulberry Centre** has continued to offer during this period has had a valuable impact.

Looking to the future

I am pleased to be able to give something back to **The Mulberry Centre** after the difference it made for me 17 years ago. I so look forward to returning in person to **The Mulberry Centre**. I want to see face-to-face the staff and volunteers who are so friendly and who make me feel a valued part of the team. Each time I walk through the door to that welcoming, comfortable space with views through to the beautiful garden I reconnect with the healing power I felt on my first visit.

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