

Hello my name is Alex and I am going to share with you a little bit about my story and how EVOLVE, an initiative from the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation (BLCF) have helped me massively on my journey and also are still continuing to support me along the way.

I am going to start with what my life was like before I received my 1st grant from EVOLVE Mark West Fund for Women.

I had just been released from prison & was recovering from a long drug addiction that had completely ruined my life, I had nothing but the clothes that I wore out the prison doors.

I was scared, worried and didn't know how to live a "normal" life.

I had severe mental health issues from Many years of drug abuse and my physical health was in a bad way too.

With a huge amount of support from my family, the all women centre "stepping stones" and resolutions drug services, I am where I am today.. I am now to date 1 year and 7 months clean. (Go me)

Half way through last year I found myself again, it made me think about everything I had lost and the opportunity's I had missed out on, with that come much regret but I was trying so hard to not look back and keep moving forward.

It made really want to make a "life" for myself and have a career I could be proud of..

Unfortunately I left school with no qualifications (another big regret) but still looking forward..

So this is where horses come into it for me, they have always been my passion from a very young age and all the way through until my life was turned upside down and destroyed by drugs.

I started volunteering at my local riding for the disabled riding school where my mum takes her 3 Foster children 1 of which had autism Tommy.

As Tommy trusted me he would ask me to lead him around, this is when I realised this was my calling, just seeing him enjoying himself without being scared or worried was fantastic, the bond he felt with the pony was priceless.

I want to become a riding instructor for kids with special needs either physical or mental (you would be amazed at how horses can really help people.)

I started researching courses but unfortunately as I am now 35 I kept hitting a brick wall as there was no funding for my age group.

It was then my support worker Donna at stepping stones who found EVOLVE bursary managed by BLCF who was offering grants to individuals for training, I couldn't thank her enough as everywhere I turned I was getting knocked back and now there was light at the end of the tunnel.. I could finally do what I love doing and make a career out of it.

Since receiving my grant I got myself a laptop, all my PPE equipment and have been studying for my exams.

This has helped me so much with my self-confidence and believing I am able to learn again, studying what is my passion is like a dream come true.

I never thought I would get the chance to do.

This has helped my mental and physical health so much I would recommend it to anyone who is struggling.

I really don't know where I would be without the horses in my life now.

So. I then received another grant from EVOLVE which is where my dreams really do start to come true...

Iv always been into "Monty Roberts" the horse whisperer he has been my idol for as long as I can remember..

I have just recently come back from a 5 day course with his right hand woman "Kelly marks" herself.. it was fantastic, life changing in fact. I learnt loads about the horses behaviour and how to "really" interact with them with their own language a language they would understand.

It wasn't until i was home I realised a year ago I was struggling to leave the house let alone go away ALL ON MY OWN, I met some lovely like-minded people and have definitely made some life-long friends.

This has now opened up so many opportunities for me and I have now taken on a part time job with 1 of their own recommended trainer.. eeeek I'm soo excited..

So..

The moral of my story is..

Never give up .. keep trying, you are not alone there is so many wonderful people out there that ARE willing to give you a chance no matter how bad things have been in the past it's what you make your future that counts ..

Thank you to everyone who believed in me and made this dream come true..

Thank you EVOLVE Women and BLFC I really couldn't have done it without you xx