

Kelly's Story



Before completing the Woodland Wellbeing course my depression had returned and I felt isolated and lonely after moving to a new area in 2020 during Covid. I'd moved back to the Midlands, where I grew up and where my family live, after spending 15 years in Brighton. The last few years there had been incredibly difficult — I was struggling with both physical and mental health while trying to keep up with a demanding full-time job. I'd had several periods off work, but eventually I just couldn't cope anymore.

Everything started to fall apart. I was in a deep depression, battling health issues that made even the smallest tasks feel impossible. I had no money because I couldn't manage consistent work, and there was little support available because, in their view, I "wasn't ill enough yet." I was desperate to hold on to the life I'd built in Brighton — my job, my friends, my home — but everything gradually slipped away until I completely broke down.

Eight years later, I'm still recovering. If I'd received the right help earlier, I might still have my job and wouldn't have had to rebuild everything from scratch. The system was broken, and so was I — and knowing it could have been different still haunts me sometimes.

I had no choice but to move back to my family home in the Midlands, leaving my job and friends behind. Thankfully, my family welcomed me home with love and safety, giving me space to rest and heal. I'll always be grateful for that, because not everyone has that option — and honestly, it saved my life.

I was desperately searching for something to help with my recovery — a safe and supportive place where I could begin to heal and rebuild my life. I came across the Tallis Wood group while looking online for anything that might help, as I was feeling very low and lost.

The course immediately stood out on the Recovery & Wellbeing Academy website. The idea of being in a local woodland really appealed to me — being surrounded by nature, in a place where it was okay to be honest about how I was feeling, or simply to *be* without pretending I was okay. I also hoped it might help me meet new people and finally make some friends in Leamington.

Being around so many people on the first day was daunting. I felt raw and exposed when all I wanted to do was hide away. But I knew that if I didn't try something different, nothing would change. It was emotional and overwhelming, but realising that others in the group felt the same helped me settle.

Taking part was a huge step after spending so long just surviving day to day. I'd recommend it to anyone who's struggling. The power of learning and sharing in a group made such a difference. Once I got past the initial nerves, I began to feel supported and safe. It also helped that the facilitators were so welcoming — Aggy especially had such a calm, reassuring presence. Tallis Wood is a truly special place, run by people who are kind, compassionate, and genuinely down to earth.

There were many meaningful moments but one really stands out. One day, I felt completely lost and ashamed — I couldn't stop crying. Years of emotion I'd held in just poured out. As we sat around the fire, everyone offered gentle support and reflected back what they saw in me, almost like holding up a mirror. I'll always be grateful for that moment. It created a shift in me — I began to believe I could be myself without being judged. It gave me courage and hope, and showed me that being open didn't mean I'd be rejected.

I also loved sitting around the fire sharing a warm meal. The comfort and connection of those moments can't be overstated. For the first time in years, I felt truly connected to people and to nature. I found courage, comfort, and hope in those circles. My words can't really do it justice — you have to experience it for yourself. If you're struggling, feeling lonely or disconnected, I hope you take that first step.

On the final day Aggy invited us to share positive reflections about each person. One by one, we stepped away into the woods while the group shared kind words around the fire. They were written down for each of us to take home. It felt like carrying a piece of the group's support with us. I still have mine two years later, and whenever I feel low, I read it. It takes me straight back to that safe, comforting time — I can still feel the warmth of the fire and the kindness of everyone there.

For the first time in years, I felt part of a community. It was comforting to be surrounded by people who truly understood. I didn't want anyone else to be struggling, but there was a shared sense that we were in it together. Even when we weren't talking about our problems, there was an unspoken understanding that we were safe and cared for. That allowed me to relax, stop pretending, and begin letting go of the tension I'd been carrying for so long.

The facilitators were so caring and genuine. You could feel how much they cared about everyone's wellbeing. They were knowledgeable, supportive, and attentive — always noticing if someone was struggling and taking the time to check in. That kind of care makes such a difference.

And being in the woods while working through everything felt deeply grounding — like being held and supported by the trees themselves. Sitting around the fire, surrounded by nature, brought a calm and quiet healing that's hard to put into words.

The course reconnected me with my love of nature, which had faded when I became unwell. Now, I spend much more time outdoors, and it brings me peace and comfort.

After Tallis Wood, I joined the Foundry Wood group, inspired by the experience I'd had. Both groups have given me structure, purpose, and a genuine sense of belonging. I'm now meeting like-minded people and making real friendships — something I couldn't have imagined when I first joined.

It's also helped me to open up more, instead of keeping everything inside and pretending I'm okay when I'm not. Nature has become an anchor for me — something that keeps me grounded and steady when life feels difficult.

Tallis Wood reminded me how much I love being creative and being outdoors — both are incredibly healing for me. It gave me hope again and made me feel like I was meant to find this place.

For me, Tallis Wood was a lifeline at a time when I'd lost all sense of belonging. The support from Aggy and the team helped me realise that I *do* deserve to belong somewhere — and that I can.