

Gillian's story

Gillian arrived in the UK from Nigeria on a spousal visa. From the moment she set up home in Kent, her husband became abusive. Subjected to serious physical violence, Gillian moved to Southwark, South London, where several of



her relatives were living. But in London Gillian became depressed; she was sent for cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), followed by a course of heavy medication which made her drowsy and unable to engage in everyday life. In 2010, she was referred to Bede House's Freedom Programme by local mental health services.

"When I first came to Bede House I was very angry and hard to get through to. After the abuse and violence I'd experienced, I was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I'd also left my nursing job behind in Kent and was feeling very lost and low.

But after a while of attending the group sessions at Bede House, I started to come out of my shell. For the first time in a long while I was able to speak freely about what I'd experienced. I also heard other women's stories and saw that some had been through worse than me.

The group sessions focus on what's real. They don't sugar-coat anything. We are taught to accept that the past is past, to focus on the future and to build strong support networks for ourselves. When we are together we laugh and cry and hug one another. The women here are really wonderful and so supportive.

I'm in my second year of workshops now and have come a long way. I've got my groove back and am much more socially active than I used to be. I often go to see my cousin and his four children, who are a lovely distraction. I'm also studying events planning and management and hope to get a job in this area. Of course, I still have bad days. But thanks to Bede House I'm coping, I'm getting there."