

# Recovering, Mentoring, Working

Rob Roche shares his journey from early recovery into training, learning and onto becoming an Education, Training and Employment (ETE) Peer Engagement Worker.

## How did you find out about Touchstone and the Peer Mentoring Course?

“My recovery coach at the Basement Recovery Project suggested the course to me. I started there after an alcohol detox in hospital. They helped me complete pre-recovery and abstinence courses and then suggested other things that I could get involved with, including the Peer Mentoring course.

“My coach explained how the course can help you get back out into society without the aid of drink or drugs. It was in the Peer Mentoring training sessions that I learnt more about WY-FI, Touchstone and the project’s other partners.”



## How did being a Peer Mentor inspire you to move into support work?

“When I was peer mentoring I realised I had a good connection with beneficiaries. I could understand what they were saying and how they were feeling. I felt that the work we did together really mattered and made a difference to their lives. In turn that made me feel great too.

“It’s not like anything I’ve done in the past - I used to drive trucks and forklifts and do building work. It’s hard to explain but the feeling I get from doing support work is completely different to other jobs I’ve done - and it’s that feeling that keeps me clean today. Without them realising it, beneficiaries are supporting me in my recovery too.”

## What appealed to you about becoming an ETE Peer Engagement Worker?

“I’d been peer mentoring for a while, and was starting to think about how I could progress from volunteering to what the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) call ‘permitted work’. I was on Employment Support Allowance (ESA) so it was important to return to employment gradually. I’ve learnt that rushing things can have a bad effect on my recovery.

“The ETE team at Touchstone explained what permitted work was, and I started looking for opportunities. After a while a Trainee ETE Peer Engagement Worker role came up, that met the Government’s permitted work criteria. And because it was part time, it would mean that I could stay connected to my recovery centre, as well as support my new family - as I had just become a Dad!”

## What new skills, knowledge and behaviours has your role given you?

“Since starting the role I’ve been on numerous training courses. Domestic Violence, Safeguarding Adults and Transgender Awareness are just a few. These courses have helped me develop the skills to be able to work with people from all walks of life, as well as build up my knowledge of how to support people into education, training and employment.

“I’m also working in an office as part of a team and my confidence in this setting is improving every week.”

## What would you say have been your biggest challenges?

“Sorting out my benefits was challenging. It took a lot of phone calls, letter writing and going to the council to explain the permitted work I wanted to do and how it relates to my on-going recovery.

“It’s all sorted now, but it took a while. It’s always best to speak to the DWP as soon as you’re thinking about doing some permitted work.”



A Touchstone training session

## How have Touchstone and WY-FI supported you?

“They’ve both supported me every step of the way, by always having the time to see me when I’ve needed to speak to them. They gave me sound advice when I was thinking about taking the next step into paid employment. Their job application and interview training was also really useful, as I’ve not had much experience of applying for jobs in the past.

“One of the main things though is that they accept me for me. I don’t have to hide the fact that I’m in recovery. I know that if I’m ever struggling with anything, they’ll do everything they can to help.”

## What advice would you give to someone thinking about getting into Peer Mentoring and/or support work in this field?

“I’d say that if you’re thinking about it, then just try it. I never realised that my lived experience meant I had so much to give. I used to be ashamed of my past and not talk about it. Not any more though. Now I’m putting it to good use.”

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**Department for Work & Pensions**

### Permitted work - what is it?

You might be able to work and still claim ESA. It’s permitted work if both the following apply: you earn up to £125.50 a week, and you work less than 16 hours a week. For more information on ESA and permitted work, please check directly on the GOV.UK website ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)).

## More about Touchstone

Touchstone is the WY-FI project’s lead on education, training and employment (ETE), peer mentoring and BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) engagement. They combine their knowledge of recovery needs with ETE opportunities, to ensure that beneficiaries have support to achieve their ETE goals. The ETE Team work with beneficiaries, local ETE providers and partner organisations to identify needs and opportunities and ensure that education, training and employment go hand in hand with recovery.