

They've been *framed*



Theresa and Ian Bates

An award-winning and bespoke framing service in Bognor is helping people with mental health problems to picture a brighter future, writes **Sue Gilson**. Photographs by **Louise Adams**

There was a time, not so long ago, when Theresa Bates couldn't leave her house. From a hard-working, out-going sort of person with a good social life, she became depressed and anxious, eventually having to give up her job as a data processor and locking herself away.

Unable to see a reason to get out of bed in the morning, she was, at one time, seeing a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a cognitive behaviour therapist and a social worker.

She and husband, Ian, had had a stressful time with an extension built onto their home in the north east, but there was no other reason, that Theresa could see, why she was feeling this way.

"All of a sudden I didn't want to go to work and I started taking days off. The depression and anxiety was terrible and I wasn't even going outside to take my milk off the step," she says.

"Before I got ill, we were going on holidays, away for weekends and having a social life and then that all stopped and even a family gathering was an

ordeal."

Her first steps towards recovery came through regular beach walks with a beloved English cocker spaniel when she and Ian moved to West Sussex seven years ago - and learning woodwork at a picture framing centre in Bosham.

This Theresa loved, and when it closed two years ago she set about launching a similar company - Frame of Mind.

And it is a very different Theresa who is now running this award-winning community company, which offers adults with mental health issues and learning disabilities the chance to learn picture framing and how to cope in a work environment.

She may be softly-spoken and gentle, but she has a new-found confidence and a real passion for the work.

And it is because she has been through such a lot herself that she can relate so well to the trainees who gain so much from the centre on the Arun Business

Park.

For many of them, this is their only interaction with their local community outside of their residential accommodation. Everyday challenges include getting to work, working alongside others, using specialist framing equipment and developing social and business skills.

And there is no compromise on the quality of the frames produced - around 25 in a typical month - which go out to many local artists and organisations.

Theresa, operations director and co-founder, with Ian, of the non profit-making Frame of Mind, works closely with the trainees on fitting a wide variety of conservation mounts and mouldings for photographs, all kinds of artwork, certificates and memorabilia.

And she has just been presented by MP Nick Gibb, with the prestigious Guild Commended Framer award from the Fine Art Trade Guild, in recognition of her excellent craftsmanship and service.

“It is about challenging peoples' expectations, both about themselves and what the system has held for them in the past.”

This is awarded following rigorous examination of framing skills and knowledge and only 970 framers have earned this qualification.

Theresa is modest about her award. Her real satisfaction comes from seeing how her trainees, currently 18 on the books, referred by mental health teams and GPs, progress in the light, airy and welcoming workshop space.

"I knew how much picture framing had helped me and I knew I had to do something. We now have people coming here of all ages. One lad gets on the bus to come here and that is such a big thing for him. Another had now applied for a job which he wouldn't have considered doing before," she enthuses.

The trainees take on everything from measuring the frames to dealing with the public on the phone.

"If they get the right support, it is amazing what they can do. You can really see them moving on," she adds.

Theresa and Ian say they could not have done all this without the support of the trust, but Ian, group training and development manager for major construction company Osborne, - the first local company to sponsor a Frame of Mind trainee - still has to work in his spare time on drumming up more much-needed funding.

But the couple are determined to see the company - which won the Business in the Community Award in the Arun Business Partnership Business of the Year Awards in October 2007 - continue to thrive.

"I still take my medication and I still don't care much for going out but this really takes my mind off things. I absolutely love it," says Theresa.

And Ian adds: "I have seen such a difference in Theresa and we both see the progress people make here.

"It is about challenging peoples' expectations, both about themselves and what the system has held for them in the past."

● *Frame of Mind, 17 Arun Business Park, Shripney Road, Bognor, tel 01243 828066. Open 9am-5pm, Mon, Tues, Wed and Thurs. Visit www.frameofmind.uk.com (website sponsored by Chichester District Council). Please get in contact for competitively-priced framing work or if you can offer help with funding.*

David Smith

Working at Frame of Mind twice a week has given David Smith a new purpose.

Diagnosed with schizophrenia in his twenties, he would hear constant voices in his head and couldn't find a job he liked. With his condition now under control, the quietly-spoken 36-year-old of Bognor is happy to spend two days a week at Frame of Mind.

"I like mixing with people, and I get on well with everyone here, and I am learning a new skill as well," says David, who used to attend the framing workshop in Bosham too.

"It has made me more confident and people are pleased with the job I do. I come down twice a week, on a Monday and Wednesday, and I stay all day.

"If I wasn't doing this I would be doing a different sort of job, but I am happy here."

Jo Mullineux

Finding new friends has been a real bonus for the sociable Jo Mullineux.

"In my old flat I only had myself for company and I didn't like it, but I have made friends here," says 40-year-old Jo, who has been with Frame of Mind for three months.

"If I wasn't here I would be doing boring housework. I have always had confidence and I find the work here quite easy, but it is about meeting people."

Jo, who has carried out charity work and worked in a garden centre previously, has mild learning disabilities and attended special schools.

Robert Russell

Robert Russell is only 21-years-old but has suffered from low esteem for a number of years.

"I once had a job at St Richard's Hospital but found the work too much and resigned," he says.

"I found it difficult to get back into a working environment."

Robert's confidence started to plummet but then he found out about Frame of Mind, started attending workshops and soon reaped the benefits.

"Frame of Mind is a friendly place and it helps you get your confidence back.

"It helps you to get back into the workplace and teaches you useful skills like maths, carpentry and business as well as social skills.

"The work is nice to do because it keeps my mind active, but also lets me help other people."

Robert intends to stay with Frame of Mind for two years at least and his desire is to help people like himself. He would eventually like to become a volunteer helper there.



David Smith



Jo Mullineux (right)



Robert Russell