
Hit film highlights the plight of stammerers



Matt Callard is just one of 1,700 people to receive help for their stammer from the Starfish Project

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A MAN who stammered so badly he couldn't even say his own name is now talking non-stop thanks to a training course near Eastbourne which uses the same technique as in hit film *The King's Speech*.

Matt Callard, 34, was so frustrated stammering he would bite the inside of his cheek until it bled trying to physically force the words out.

After hypnotherapy and speech therapy from the age of 12 failed, he gave up and let his friends and family speak for him.

"I was mimicked at school and was terrified when anyone asked me my name as I'd never been able to say it," Matt said.

"I was so bad I stammered over every word, and it became worse the more I got to know someone, so I stuttered worse with my family and close friends.

"I used to be petrified about having to speak as people with stammers are always the butt of everyone's jokes. But the condition isn't funny.

"I've met people who changed their name and moved address to something they could pronounce.

"I could only eat things I could say, even though what I wanted most was a cheese sandwich.

"I couldn't pronounce anything with a C so that was an impossible dream."

After years of taking dead-end jobs in supermarkets and factories so that he wouldn't have to speak, Matt vowed to beat his speech impediment.

"I was sick of people hanging up on me on the phone as I tried to speak or of having to point at menus because I wasn't able to order food.

"Once, when I was working on a till at the supermarket, I had to use the tannoy to ask the price of something and was humiliated the entire shop heard me stammering.

"I had a degree but wasn't taking the right jobs as I thought I'd be judged or held back by my stammer.

"I'd tried everything to cure it, but nothing worked, so I'd almost given up."

Then Matt was told about the Starfish project – a three day residential course held every month at The Boship Hotel – and decided to try once more to stop his stammering.

"It was amazing," Matt said. "Within half an hour I'd said my name for the first time in my life.

"I was so excited I kept saying it over and over again. The technique was relatively simple.

"It's all based on costal breathing, which is the same breath you use when you sing, yawn or shout.

"No*one stammers when they're singing, so if you use that breathing style, you don't stutter.

"After my initial excitement, I was scared it wouldn't last.

"I thought when I left the course my stammer would come back, but I haven't stuttered since.

"I just keep practising the technique and haven't looked back.

"I can now say anything I want and was so happy when I gave a reading at my friend's wedding in front of a packed church without stammering once.

"I now give speeches at the Rotary Club and at conferences and even on the radio. I'm enjoying speaking without a stutter and never shut up!"

Matt is just one of 1,700 stammerers who've been helped at the Starfish Project, which was set up 12 years ago by Anne Blight.

She began it after starting training to be a speech therapist and realising little focus was given to people with stammers.

"We use the same technique as shown in the film, *The King's Speech* though we don't teach them to swear," she said.

"I'm just thrilled to help people and to see what a difference this technique makes to their speech and their lives. We can't cure stammerers as there isn't one, but we can help them learn to love talking, and to speak without fear."

The non-profit project is at www.starfishproject.co.uk
