

Stammering blighted my life - just like King George in hit film

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Adam Wright , Bedworth, went on a three day course to help control his stammering.

He said: "Some of the techniques are similar to what is in *The King's Speech* – but not the weird stuff, like when the speech therapist sits on the king's chest. The 'coastal breath' and projection of the voice is part of the Starfish technique.

"When they teach you 'coastal breathing' you wear a belt around your chest so you can feel the breath working.

"It's extremely hard work, like having to forget everything you've ever known and retrain yourself.

"When I came back from my first course I was shattered because it takes so much effort. Eventually it becomes second nature.

"Helen and I went out for a meal and for the first time I ordered everything. It was like: 'Wow I can do this!'. It's helped Helen because she felt a bit under pressure to do all of our household phone calls – now I do all that."



The Starfish Project has a close support network. There are 19 regional support groups and a list of 173 members who students can call anytime, 365 days of the year.

Adam said: “Before the course I’d never met anyone with a stammer. You do feel isolated – as though no one else understands you.

“I have been back on the course around four times now. It’s good to refresh and use the time to concentrate on your technique. You can also help new people on the course – that’s how it works.

“I have met some lifetime friends. We have a West Midlands support group in Walsall and meet once a month.

“I’ve heard from many people from the Starfish project courses that The King’s Speech is fantastic. Usually if people have a stammer on TV or in movies it’s not shown in a very positive way like in Open All Hours and A Fish Called Wanda.

“When I first saw Gareth Gates trying to speak on Pop Idol I just burst into tears. I so much knew what he was going through.

“It raised understanding of stammering but like The King’s Speech it’s only going to last a certain amount of time. But it’s great while it lasts.”

Day-to-day Adam helps to provide vital services for up to 25 people working with Bedworth’s learning disabilities team.

He was seconded to Coventry University to study a social worker degree. “It is very competitive and I did really well to get onto it. In the summer of 2009 I qualified as a social worker. But don’t think I would have been able to do it if I hadn’t been on the Starfish Project.

“Having a stammer really helps me in my work, having been through experiences and difficulties.”

Adam has also learnt to open up about his stammer.

He said: “Before I didn’t talk about my stammer with anyone, not even my family, whereas now I make a point of talking about it.

“At Starfish they teach you to let people into your world.

“When I am working on a technique like slowing down on the phone I will say to the office: ‘This is what I am focusing on, if you could help me’. I am a great believer that you only stammer because of the fear of stammering.

“Picking up the phone and meeting people is really good for my speech as it pushes me out of my comfort zone. Before they would fill me with a massive fear.”

Adam has pushed his comfort zones even further by speaking in front of even bigger

audiences – at a Rotary Club meeting about the Starfish Project before 500 people, his best friend’s wedding and work presentations.

And his confidence has soared.

Adam said: “People say I even walk differently. When I used to go to work on a Monday morning I’d duck my head down to avoid eye contact and would do anything to avoid a conversation – now I start the conversation.”

Starfish founder Anne Blight (above right) said: “Adam is amazing. When he first came to us he was stammering a lot and his confidence was pretty low.