

2024/25 Case Studies





**Everyone
deserves a
chance to
work.**

more than
70%

of people in
treatment are not in
work or training

1 in 4

young adults suffer mental
health issues—making them
~5 times more likely to be out
of work

16%

rise in young adults
accessing substance use
treatment

only **7%**

of people with complex
mental health work

you are **6x** more likely to have very poor
health if you're unemployed

61%

of people living with severe mental
illness report that fear of stigma
and discrimination prevented them
from applying for a job

TWICE

as likely to be unemployed in LONDON
if you have poor mental health

Supported Placement

Attend placement at one of our sites in Peckham (Southwark) or Brixton (Lambeth) twice a week.

Be immersed in the team, learning how to look after dogs, meet their needs, have fun playing and get involved in admin, social media and more!

Social networks

We believe fun and having a giggle builds foundations for connection, growth and enjoyment.

Social events deepend conenctions amongst peer and help Trainees build tools for supporting social anxiety. From BBQ's, to creative sessions to Thorpe park!

Workshops

Workshops bring together trainees regulary for peer learning and reflections.

Trainees learn a mixture dog behaviour, employbailty skills and personal development

Structured Workbook

Trainees use a workbook alongside their placement, with practical exercises, reflection tools and a resource to make use of on placement and beyond.

1-1 goal setting mentoring

Twice monthly goal setting sessions with a Placement Officer exploring barriers to progress, building asiprations and short let and long team goal setting.

Volunteering

Trainees can apply for a 3 months formal volunteering placement with Paws & Pause for those who want to further their work experiecne and potentially apply for paid roles in the organisation.

What does the Trainee Placement consist of?

Who we work with

Of the trainees joining our programme this year...

98%

are living with
mental ill health

42%

have
offending
history

55%

in substance
use recovery

95%

on out of work
benefits

55%

unemployed for
2+ years

89% experience 3+
barriers to work

53% experience 4 +
barriers to work

We know that multiple disadvantage puts people further away from the labour market & can have an accumulative effect of health and wellbeing.

96% report low self
confidence

69% have no or little clarity of
future goals

79% have low to resilience to
dealing with setbacks



HEAR OUR STORIES



TRAINEE STORIES

Current and former trainees of Paws tell their stories in their own words—capturing every step from tentative first days to renewed confidence, promotions, and community connection. These first-person case studies put a human voice to our impact data, showing how purposeful work with dogs can spark profound change.



JONATHON

Why did you join the program?

For more than a decade, my life revolved around addiction, unstable housing, and the relentless mental-health fallout of both. Before I started here everything was completely disorganized. I had no routine and no real purpose, but I wanted that to change. I loved the idea of owning a dog, but knew that this was quite possible yet and I wanted to learn more about another being. I wanted to know how it looks like, what is it to have a dog... I was not sure of the commitment, so I wanted to learn.

"Paws & Pause felt like the perfect place to learn more about getting a furry companion - Instead, it became the turning point of my recovery."

From the second I stepped inside, the noise in my head quieted, everything was at ease... I loved that. You don't need to talk—just go with the flow. That gentleness gave my nervous system a new baseline. Over time my breathing slowed, my thoughts untangled, and—miracle of miracles—I could finally sleep. "Now I fall asleep so much easier. These images of the dogs—this is what I keep with me when i'm falling off to sleep and they bring me peace"

Tell us what is like being a Trainee at Paws & Pause

The staff treated me just like anyone else, they didn't tell me what to do but they showed me instead and helped me learn how to make decisions and act on intuition, not just giving me all the answers.

In recovery, it can feel prescriptive at times and this placement showed that I could use my own judgement and be supported in learning new things. They let me make mistakes. I saw them by myself, readjusted what I was doing and it got better with ease and a new awareness. The first time I coaxed a sit with a calm cue and a single treat, I was so pleased with myself. Shannon explained to me how to give a cue without words to get a sit. I was amazed. **My self-confidence was really crushed—and this, it worked!** A workshop with Dan on dog welfare flipped a switch for me *'If you give your highest respect to the dog, it changes the whole dynamic... I loved this workshop so much!'* That same respectful, steady energy now shapes how I approach people. If patience and presence settle a nervous dog they can settle a tense conversation, too! **I became less intimidated to connect with new people after this and even joined the staff social trip to Thorpe Park!**

What makes working with dogs so special?

It's the bonds you create and earn, without even speaking, like the bond I made with Beanie the Beagle—my darling! She was a shy pup when I met her and she became my biggest teacher. There was something about her energy that I was drawn to, she didn't just give you her affection easily. After months of showing love and respect to her space, she finally accepted me – now she calls me to play and will come and cuddle with me freely – I feel like we really understand each other. **Her trust in me mirrors the self-trust I'm rebuilding too.**

Whats next in your journey?

Since joining the programme I have much more confidence, I can advocate for myself in a professional environment, take on tasks and feel good about the responsibility, communicate at work and ask for help and feel less anxious about making new social connections. **Still the biggest thing for me was building the routine and trust of the staff and dogs and feeling a new sense of possibility in my life. My head was only ever at war with itself before, now this new found hope is life changing.**

I'm about to finish my placement, but I'll stay on as a volunteer for a while and continue to learn. I've enrolled in a peer-support worker course so I can use my lived experience to help others. Come September, I'll begin Psychology for Change, and I'm weaving my first career in dance into my long-term goal of qualifying as a drama and movement therapist!



Sarah joined the Programme in October 2024 after seeing the team on a BBC news feature! Sarah will start volunteering with us soon and then move onto a Carpentry Diploma in September.

Q. What was life like before you joined Paws and Pause?

I came to Paws & Pause during a really uncertain time in my life. I'd recently been diagnosed with ADHD and had stepped away from teacher training, something I'd worked hard to pursue. CBT helped me start thinking differently and I realised I didn't need to rush back to this.

Q: What made you apply?

I've always loved the idea of being around dogs – stroking them, playing with them. There were times when I felt really low and just thought, "I'd love to cuddle up with a puppy." I'm not great with human contact, but with dogs it feels different. I hoped that by the end of the program, I'd be in a better place mentally and have some clarity about what I want to do long term.

Q. How has the program impacted you?

At first, I was terrified. ***I thought people would look at me and immediately see me as someone with "issues" that they had to watch out for. But it wasn't like that at all.*** I've always been known for being shy, even around people I've known for years. But here, I find myself laughing all the time at what the dogs do and just chatting about life with others. ***It's made me so much more relaxed socially.*** I even signed up for courses I never thought I'd try – like construction skills – and I've been loving it!

How do you feel different now compared to when you started?

I feel so much freer. I used to worry constantly about jobs, careers, and staying on track. During CBT, I was told that most people have three or more careers in their lifetime – and I didn't believe it at first. But now, meeting all these people here, I see it's true. Everyone's figuring it out, changing direction, and that's okay. It's helped me let go of this pressure to have it all planned out.

Q: What are your plans going forward?

If they'll have me, I'd love to keep volunteering with Paws and Pause in September I'm starting a Carpentry Diploma – I took an intro course last November and surprised myself by really enjoying it. I'm also tutoring maths online and recently did a "Start Your Own Business" course, so I might try to grow that too. I haven't landed on a long-term career path yet, but for the first time, I feel okay with that. I'm enjoying learning new things and following what interests me!



EMMIE

Emmie graduated from the Trainee Programme in September 24' and went on to complete 6 months of paid work with us!

Emmie asked us to share the heartfelt she wrote to the team on her last day ...

"I started the trainee program almost a year ago, not believing for one second that I'd make it past the first couple of months. I remember going to Peckham to meet Jodie for the first time and pacing up and down the road outside for ages battling with my anxiety and trying to find the courage to go in. I so nearly gave up and went home before I'd even made it through the door that first time.

"That version of myself from last March would never have believed that in a year's time she'd be leading the day at Brixton once a week, chatting with customers, and doing the job well enough to be getting paid for it."

I'd never done any kind of paid work before, and so the most obvious benefit I've gotten out of Paws & Pause is that I now have some experience of having a job. I have something I can write about on my CV, and I have confidence in my ability to work. Having a job no longer feels like something that is out of my reach. This is the first time in my life that I've felt like that.

It's been about so much more than just being able to have a job though.

The confidence I've built at work has carried over into so many other areas of my life. As I've grown to feel more and more capable and self-assured at work, I've also grown to feel that way in a more general sense.



Albie



Rodney

"The feeling of starting to stand on my own two feet and not having to lean on family or Universal Credit as heavily for support has had a truly wonderful impact on my sense of self-worth.

Being unable to work is a very "Othering" experience. It makes you feel somewhat separate from the rest of society. It makes you feel different to the people around you. To feel unable to work is to feel unable to lead "normal" life, which in turn makes you feel like you are not a normal person.

"Starting work with Paws & Pause has given me that sense of normality I was missing and helped me feel like a regular person and a regular part of society."

Finding yourself in your late twenties without a lot of the life experience you'd be expected to have by that point is humbling. Deciding you're going to take steps to move forwards with your life after a lengthy battle with your mental health is daunting. I will always be very grateful that I got to take this particular step forwards in such a supportive environment amongst good people.

'm going to be doing dog walking next! I know from Paws & Pause that I most enjoy working with small groups of dogs and getting out and about with them - so that's what I'm going to focus on going forwards. I'm going to have a go at setting out on my own, starting my own little dog walking business in Finsbury Park.

There's a lot about that that makes me feel really anxious, but I proved to myself during my time with you guys that I can do things that make me anxious, and I think about how far I surpassed my own expectations at Paws (from assuming I wouldn't make it to the end of the trainee program to ending up as a proper member of staff) whenever I find myself doubting my ability to achieve what I want going forwards." - **Love Emmie x**

Back in 2022, Shancy joined the Trainee Programme, since then Shancy has worked as a Barista, continues to volunteer locally in Peckham and has worked part time for us for the 18 months!

*Shancys **dream job is to be a published writer**, so we asked her to write a peice that encapulates her journey with us..*



It's 7am as I write this, the sun just beginning to peep its head over the plain trees in the park across the street.

Today marks an important day, yet it's beginning the same as any other over the last 4 years. In some ways, that's reassuring in itself; no matter the turbulence in life, another day will dawn the same as any other, like all the days that before it and all the ones that will follow. I think that's one of the most important things I've learnt over the last 4 years - a bad day is simply that, just a bad day out of 7 potential good ones. I say that with such ease now, but I think the Shancy of 4 years ago wouldn't believe me no matter what I said.

I've always been good at hiding how I'm truly feeling, a smokescreen of jokes and smiles that don't quite reach the corner of my eyes. It's easy to hide from humans, dogs on the other hand? They can smell sadness, the chemical changes in our bodies give off distinctive smells that dogs can detect. So I guess I was always destined to fail at hiding forever. I remember that first day, I stood across the park willing my anxiety to settle, clutching onto a coffee cup to hide the trembling in my fingers.

Approaching that pink fence, and seeing those inquisitive eyes and wet noses poking through the gaps to get a sniff, I remember thinking "well, if it all goes wrong at least someone was pleased to see me."

Spoiler alert, it didn't go wrong; quite the opposite in fact, met two of my closest friends that first day, Amy who'd just started as a trainee the week before (we laugh at this now, how lost we looked, how we looked to each other for reassurance and how we were friends almost almost instantaneously) and Rolo, the anxious spaniel who's been a stalwart of Paws for years at this point.

I remember the feeling of a wet nose against my elbow, looking down there he was, in all his chocolate-caramel coloured glory, regarding me with his big orangey eyes, seeking reassurance. I guess he must have found it, for not a moment later he had climbed into my lap, laid his head on my shoulder and went to sleep. I sat there stock-still, Rolo's warm breath against my neck while he slept; in that moment **I felt a sense of calm wash over me; if this animal – who has never met me and was wary of strangers, felt that I was a safe space, then perhaps, despite all my own beliefs it may be true.**

Throughout my time on the programme, I learnt more about dogs' body language and breeds which eventually helped me identify those who needed just a little extra re-assurance. What I didn't quite expect, was being able to identify it in the humans too. Admittedly, I missed a fair few of the workshops at the beginning because the idea of being in a room full of humans was far more terrifying to me than being with a group of dogs! But through some gentle coaxing and reassurance, I found myself able to attend these too! We learnt many different techniques to cope with our anxiety and built a framework that would eventually lead us to be able to apply for work in the future; something that, for a lot of people who struggle with our mental health, it often feels like an impossible feat.



But Paws and Pause don't look at it that way, for the team, mental health is a subject we have always been actively encouraged to talk about, making it less of a stigma and forever feeling like perhaps we aren't as alone as our brains like to tell us we are.

If you told the Shancy of 2022 that she would be working for Pause and Paws as a paid member or staff helping other people just like her, have had her articles published in the newsletter (and their annual report!), appeared on BBC news live on camera, and also have her own pet sitting service that runs solely on word of mouth, she probably would have rolled her eyes.

I wish I could go back to that girl now and remind her that it's ok for it all to fall apart as long as you know it's all going to fit back together again. Japan have a term for repairing beautiful things that are broken – Kintsugi. In English it translates to “to repair with gold”, broken shards of pottery re-joined together with gold coated lacquer. That's how I see myself these days, a complete version of a whole, still cracked and sometimes fragile but the pieces put back in their place. **I came to Paws and Pause with a handful of shards of myself, unsure, and with trembling hands – and they helped me put the pieces back together. The gold? That was all me,** my hard work and determination to get my sparkle back. I wish I could tell the Shancy of 2022 how golden she is now and with how, at the end of a bad day, there's always a new day just waiting to dawn. That there is no shame in letting people in, and, most importantly, when the world starts feeling like it's all too much, there are always dogs.

CHRISTIE

Christie began her Trainee placement with us in 2024 after being made redundant from her previous role and struggling with her mental health. A mood disorder and anxiety made teamwork, communication and goal-setting especially difficult, and she was losing motivation to return to work.



"When I first started my placement at Paws & Pause, I had lost my hope about getting a job. I'd been to loads of interviews before, but nothing was working out. However, not long after I began the placement, I started to feel more optimistic. I actually believed I could do well, and I even thought that by the end of the programme, I might manage to secure a job.

I felt really grateful that everyone enjoyed having me around. The placement helped a lot with my mental health and anxiety—especially on days when I didn't feel like going in. **Seeing how happy the dogs were to have me there completely lifted my mood!** Working at Paws & Pause also helped me gain confidence in handling different dog breeds, which is super useful for my future goal of becoming a veterinary nurse.

From the start, my hope was to work closely with a variety of dog breeds and sizes, and to boost my confidence in a workplace—especially one in the animal industry. I definitely achieved that! I learned so much information from everyone I worked with, and, in the end, I landed the job I'd been wanting for ages; my dream job as a Veterinary Care Assistant!

I felt so supported during my time at Paws & Pause. **The team ALWAYS encouraged me not to give up and kept reminding me that I'd eventually get to where I wanted to be, they didn't give up on me.**

It was a big contrast from my previous job, where I never felt like I was part of the team and found it pretty stressful. At Paws & Pause, everyone was welcoming and friendly, and if I had any issues, they'd help me out in any way they could. I'm really thankful for the whole experience—it lifted my spirits, gave me new skills, and helped me get the job I'd been hoping for. Love Christie xXx



Joe graduated from our Trainee Programme in 2021 and is now working as a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner at the Maudsley. Joe featured in our 2020 TV appearance on the Russell Howard Show and now Joe would like to tell his story 5 years on and after 5 years in work!

"I joined Pause & Paws in Autumn 2020, I have had a history of bipolar affective disorder episodes with mania and psychosis since my 20s and have been hospitalised under section five times between the ages of 26 and 39.

My last serious episode requiring hospitalisation was in October 2015 and due to taking my time over eight years to explore the work I really wanted to do and try different things and take time to heal from my mental illness, I have not (touch wood) relapsed since then. From my teens I used drugs and alcohol as a means of escaping my feelings and managing my mood. I had experienced two major traumatic losses; one of my mum and another of a man I was very much in love with, Karl who had died suddenly in an accident. **Taking drugs and drinking pushed down my feelings of grief and anger and with the help of Twelve steps I went into recovery when I was 36.**

Recovery after my last bi-polar episode was slow. I often felt depressed and anxious. However, I maintained my sobriety, and volunteered doing what I had always done which was fundraising.

However, I came to the realisation that I wanted to make a change and when I saw the advertisement for volunteers at Paws, I leapt at the chance to put myself forward to offer my services to this formidable social enterprise.

Jodie and Grace are wonderful leaders, managers, and advocates for their volunteers. They welcomed me with open arms and immediately I felt happy and comfortable to work with them and other members of the team. I worked with the dogs which was therapeutic and I met other volunteers who had similar journeys to me. Going there each week gave me a purpose. I was given responsibility for a range of tasks. One of my favourites was to organise the 'away day' which was a curry at base with a session of laughter yoga beforehand. I absolutely loved it! It was so much fun. We all could not stop laughing for a full hour.

As my confidence grew, with regular review meetings with Grace to plan getting back into paid work, I started to realise that fundraising was definitely not what I wanted to go back to and that I wanted to help people who had had similar life experiences to me.

I have lived with HIV for 15 years and had been volunteering as a peer mentor to support other gay and bisexual men. I wanted to somehow utilise this skill I had trained for and developed.

It was serendipity when I saw an ad at King's College Hospital (15 minutes from home) for a peer mentor in the HIV department. I spoke to Grace who was supporting me and we worked together to write an application and work on interview techniques. Grace was knowledgeable and encouraging. With her expertise she offered guidance and advice and gave me three practice interviews. For someone with low confidence and self-esteem this was an invaluable support which I had not been offered before.

I got the job! This was my first paid work in seven years and I worked there happily for two years.

As I grew in my role, I discovered an opportunity to work at The Maudsley opposite King's which (even though I had been sectioned there a few times), was a dream job working as a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner. Understanding that this was competitive to get, again with the help of Grace we looked at the job spec and Grace supported me with the interview - even after I had stopped volunteering. This proves to me how dedicated Paws is at supporting their staff beyond graduation.

I am pleased to say that I have just finished my training year with SlaM and UCL and have secured a permanent position there. I am happier than ever and so grateful for all the support from Grace and Jodie whilst I was at Paws and Pause. The team understand mental health, they understand substance use, they understand dogs and how they provide comfort and love, **but predominantly they understood my needs and also how to help me get back into work.** I will be eternally grateful for the time with everyone.

I have to give a special shout out to the furry friends. Throwing balls, going for walks, cuddling, playing and stroking the dogs all contributed to improving my wellbeing. The four legged fluff balls made my time volunteering fun and pleasurable and I want to send a warm loving woof to them.

