

For RUOK? Day we asked..

What have you brought to work that no-one knew about?

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

I am diagnosed Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Challenges are almost a daily occurrence for me, whether it's an energy problem- difficulty in engaging in small talk for example, because I'm already exhausted at 8am; or battling anxiety when answering the phone to an upset customer, or about to tackle a difficult task. Most recently was a prolonged attack of chronic anxiety over almost a week.

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

Many things! I emailed my Supervisor and Manager to let them know I was struggling. My closest confidant is a PSO so also let her know I was having issue. She reminded me of the simple things – like to breathe. I went to see my GP and medication was reviewed. It doesn't stop there. I meditate, I listen to calming music, I use cold packs to regulate body temperature. Work times remained flexible throughout this period, dependent on what I could handle on any given day, or for how long. And I'm also booked to see a psychologist next week. All of these things, together, helped me to get a handle on things.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

This is a really difficult question. My needs fluctuate rather widely, but I don't believe this to be uncommon amongst fellow anxiety sufferers. Sometimes I need to be alone, sometimes I need validation, often I need to have a break from “new” tasks, so I tend to limit people approaching and asking for anything. I can't operate the phones when highly anxious. Quite often need to walk, alone, no conversation. I think it's probably best that the needs in the moment are vocalised so that management and peers can support. For me, the single best thing to do, is dive into a job, head first, let it envelope me, suck me in, and limit distraction.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

Fear is your worst enemy. Have the courage to have an honest conversation with those best placed to support you about your struggles. I still struggle with this due to the feelings of shame and uselessness attached to my diagnosis. And read all that you can to better understand your own mind. Knowledge is power.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

I got married young to my high-school sweetheart. We'd been together six years, but our relationship had slowly devolved into an abuse situation. I have a very debilitating and painful reproductive condition and identify as asexual but I had been slowly conditioned into believing that I was abusive for denying him his right. I thought getting married would "fix" things, but it didn't. A month before the wedding I had a miscarriage and developed post-natal depression. Over the next two years things got slowly worse, I talked to my GP for help, starting anti-depressants. My best friend saw through the charade and slowly and respectfully helped me see the abuse. I decided to leave, he took everything. Shortly after moving out, I was formally diagnosed with PTSD as a result of the prolonged trauma. I recently plucked up the courage to follow up with formally divorcing him, with the help of Women's Legal Service.

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

I started seeing a therapist shortly after sexual health providers found evidence of physical trauma. It's helped a lot, I was having a lot of issues with dissociation when triggers came up, but now I can cope with most triggers. I've developed a great friend group and joined communities for things I'm passionate about and that really kept me steady through the divorce process. My GP is working with me so that when I'm ready, I can do some physical rehab to undo some of the physical trauma. My anxiety faded away quickly after leaving, it feels like the person I was back then was someone else. I feel capable and resilient and self aware. I don't regret the decisions I made because I'm proud of who I am now, and that's a part of it. Life is good.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

Everyone seems to always have the best intentions, but if a co-worker had found out what was going on back then, I think the best thing would have been to steer me towards therapy. So often abuse victims are the last to realise what's going on because of the way they're conditioned every day at home, so doing what my friend did and steering me towards my own realisations with some very legit advice rather than personal opinions was a powerful thing to do.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

No matter what situation you're in, no matter how deep a hole is or how much digging you think you've done: Nobody deserves trauma, mental health issues, prejudice or pain. You deserve recovery, you deserve change, you deserve better, no matter what you're going through. Let yourself thrive, welcome help, let other people and yourself cherish and care about you and treat you the way you'd treat them if the roles were reversed.

You. Deserve. It.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

Depression/Anxiety and fear of conflict relating to people from my past

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

Initially just GP/medication because I didn't think a psych would tell me anything I didn't already know. I guess I just assumed meds were a silverbullet... they aren't. The real work happened in therapy. I slowly began to realise that avoiding discomfort meant avoiding a meaningful life. I learned that I can't control what happens around me but I can control the way I deal with it. I realised I have power and value. I can also speak for PSOs.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

I didn't want to be coddled or fussed over but it would have helped if people spoke about their own problems more so I knew that I wouldn't be judged. All I wanted was understanding but everyone around me gave off the 'spoon of cement' vibe so I'd cry in the shower then come to work with a smile.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

Meds don't change you, they don't make you 'high' or fix you. They help return your brain to where it should be and provide the clarity and strength to start fighting back. Since swallowing my pride and seeing a psych I've realised that there is a misconception that therapy is for the sick. If you think you don't have anything to learn from therapy you're dead wrong... and frankly you could be the reason someone ELSE is in therapy.

Forget bitcoin, you want ROI... invest in yourself.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

Relationship breakup, family member and partner mental health, depression, ex-partner stalking and intimidation

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

By maintaining contact with my support network and communicating honestly I'm able to process emotions with added perspective and remain positive and motivated at work.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

Sharing personal experiences and challenges makes it easier to share in return. A little vulnerability can help build trust

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

Look to understand your own feelings, and share them with someone you trust.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

Domestic violence ptsd social anxiety

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

saw my gp, meditation and meds

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

not judge me on my past

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

dont give up, or give in

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

5yrs of domestic violence. I'd come to work exhausted because he wouldn't let me sleep. Arguments went for upwards of 8hrs straight, I stopped fighting back, I had nothing left. I knew he was wrong but he always had a way of making my point of view seem uncaring. I slowly but surely I willingly isolated myself. He never hit me but I feel he was certainly capable when his eyes went 'dead'. He would purposefully punish me in other ways. His next girlfriend took out a DVO.

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

I'd regularly wake up crying because I'd dream about trying to escape him but because he didn't hit me I didn't think I needed help. Once I did seek help I started to understand what had happened was valid and began to rebuild myself. The dead-eyes stuck with me for some time. I still dream about him sometimes and its still 'escape' themed but haven't woken to a panic attack in some time.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

People in leadership... please ACTIVELY condone it. Email your staff semi-regular reminders that your office is safe and judgement free regardless of gender. When we're treated badly we need repeated reminding who we can trust, I no longer felt men were a place of safety. I know men have it hard in certain circumstances but if I hear you say "what about men..." it will make me feel like I can't come to you. I cannot explain to you what it's like to have the person you love look at you like prey and being at their whim.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

If you're in a situation like mine this doesn't mean you're "dumb" and its not as easy as 'just leave' - I get it... but please listen to that inner voice and don't waste a second longer than you have to under those conditions. You're worth SO MUCH more than that. Love yourself more than they will ever have the capacity to by planning to leave.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

Victim of psychological and violent abuse from my mother as a child, Drug Abuse Trauma from my incarceration

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

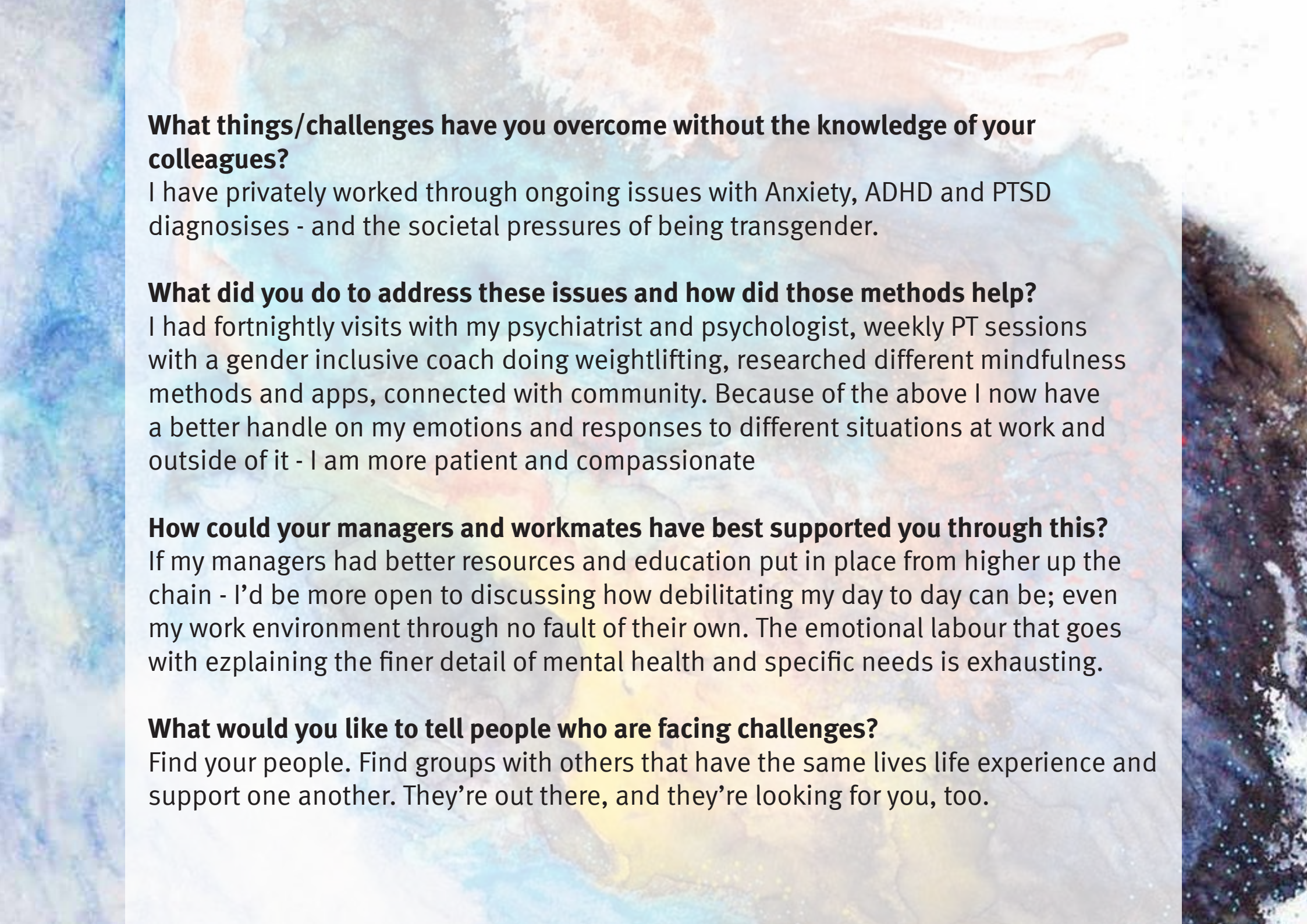
Explored the idea of purpose and meaning of life Connected with a spiritual ideology. Sought counselling Re-assessed my support network removing all negative influences.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

Acknowledgement that they can see my suffering without probing too hard and asking about my latest interests in discussion

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

There is no quick fix solution, people have walked the path that you currently find yourself on and once you remove ego and identify your purpose in life there are resources to guide you towards your goals



What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

I have privately worked through ongoing issues with Anxiety, ADHD and PTSD diagnoses - and the societal pressures of being transgender.

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

I had fortnightly visits with my psychiatrist and psychologist, weekly PT sessions with a gender inclusive coach doing weightlifting, researched different mindfulness methods and apps, connected with community. Because of the above I now have a better handle on my emotions and responses to different situations at work and outside of it - I am more patient and compassionate

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

If my managers had better resources and education put in place from higher up the chain - I'd be more open to discussing how debilitating my day to day can be; even my work environment through no fault of their own. The emotional labour that goes with explaining the finer detail of mental health and specific needs is exhausting.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

Find your people. Find groups with others that have the same lives life experience and support one another. They're out there, and they're looking for you, too.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

I recently found out I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder which had gone un-diagnosed and untreated for most of my life. This led me to having extremely low self esteem and mental health problems. ADHD and Autism often have crossover symptoms so I seem weird in person, especially if you're measuring me by what's normal for you. MY "normal" is different and my body language isn't always consistent with my intentions/feelings.

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

I raised it with my psych who sent me to a psychiatrist for diagnosis so now I see both and have medication. I've gone from constant depressive episodes to finally being able to have some self-compassion and confidence. My brain was made for problem solving/creativity and part of my depression stemmed from having work that was not engaging for me. I was exhausted ALL THE TIME from actively trying to keep focus for an entire day on work that was unengaging.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

My bosses are really good but it was hard to tell them because ADHD is highly misunderstood. With all conditions I'd ask that people talk to the person about THEIR experience and needs. My fear was that I would be micro-managed. I'm highly capable and wanted agency over how best to manage it. Don't judge people as YOU are, ask them who THEY are.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

Never stop advocating for yourself and don't be afraid to self-diagnose. That fear stopped me talking to my psych for a year and I suffered needlessly. He reminded me that I know myself better than anyone and to never be afraid of addressing theories. The worst that could happen is that the diag doesn't fit.

What things/challenges have you overcome without the knowledge of your colleagues?

Trauma derived from childhood emotional abuse/domestic violence exposure.

What did you do to address these issues and how did those methods help?

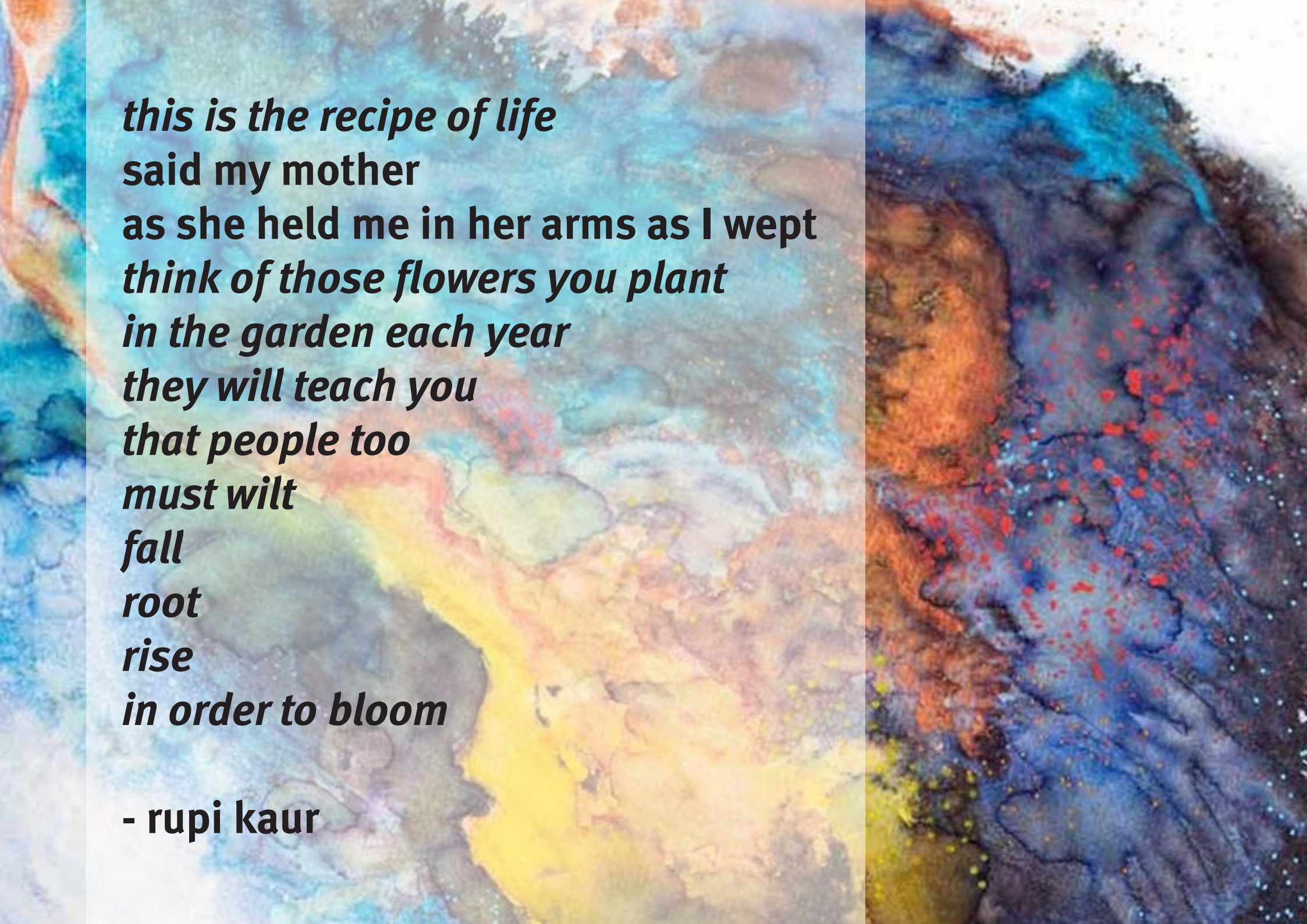
After many many years of refusing to seek professional help, an external friend convinced me to seek out a psychologist. Psychology sessions included exercises, talking through trauma, etc. It resulted in understanding why things happened and how to address current issues that stemmed from that.

How could your managers and workmates have best supported you through this?

If work communities had a larger understanding that mental health affects a large majority of people, I believe just understanding that its okay to be struggling and getting through things.

What would you like to tell people who are facing challenges?

You deserve to feel okay and happy. Taking action is hard but it will get easier.



***this is the recipe of life
said my mother
as she held me in her arms as I wept
think of those flowers you plant
in the garden each year
they will teach you
that people too
must wilt
fall
root
rise
in order to bloom***

- rupi kaur

FESSN: 1300 309 508

FESSN 24hr Counselling: 1800 805 980 (free call/not a crisis service)



**Seeing who's struggling
isn't always obvious.**

Chances are one of you needs to talk.

**Our sincerest thanks to all our contributors, your stories are so
powerful.**