**STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Jennifer\* was struggling with stress but her Fit for Work case manager gave her the confidence to take action. ennifer\* is a sales assistant in a traditional bakery in Manchester, which makes bread, rolls and cakes on the premises and sells them from the shop on site.

When she began developing significant symptoms of stress, including sleepless nights and an ongoing stomach upset, Jennifer went to see her GP. She was referred to Fit for Work and, thanks to a very positive experience with her case manager, has returned to work.

Jennifer works part-time (20 hours per week) and is responsible for bringing trays of bread and cakes from the bakery into the shop, restocking shelves and replenishing cabinets, preparing salads for lunchtime and serving customers. She began experiencing symptoms of stress and became very concerned when they began making her feel very unwell.

She went to see her GP who initially signed her off work for two weeks but also told her about Fit for Work because he thought she would ultimately be off work for four weeks or more. He asked her whether she would consent to a referral for a work-related health consultation with a Fit for Work case manager.

Jennifer had never heard of Fit for Work but her GP explained how it would benefit her and how quick the referral process was. She consented to a referral and was contacted within 48 hours by a Fit for Work case manager who booked her in for her consultation.

Her main challenge at work was communicating with her employer about her problems. Whilst she had a good relationship with her line manager, Jennifer was struggling to explain how she was feeling and wasn’t sure how to broach the subject of her stress. Initially, Jennifer was also nervous about talking so openly to her case manager (Stacey), but Stacey always made it clear that none of the information she gave would be shared with her employer or GP without her consent. This meant that she could open up to Stacey and be completely honest, knowing that the support offered by Fit for Work was completely voluntary and on her terms. However, Stacey encouraged Jennifer to share her Return to Work Plan with her employer in order to make it easier for her employer to support her fully, and she helped Jennifer in her discussions with her employer by helping her write down the points to cover:

“My case manager helped me make a plan that I could refer to when I was struggling and I was given the confidence to approach my employer so I could explain how I was feeling.”

In Jennifer’s own words:

I was really impressed with how quickly the support from Fit for Work kicked in. Within 48 hours of my GP referring me, I was already talking to my case manager, who was fantastic. She was understanding, supportive and non-judgemental, and it was the first time I’d felt there was someone I could properly talk to. Stacey discussed so many different things with me – she encouraged me to continue doing the things that were working for me (taking my medication and socialising), and made other recommendations for overcoming my sleeplessness like not smoking at night, listening to relaxation tapes and drinking hot drinks. In fact, talking to Stacey has encouraged me to make an appointment at the stop smoking clinic, which is something I’d never thought of. She also recommended other organisations that could help me like Acas and Citizens Advice. Stacey always phoned me punctually and sent me information in the post (I don’t use computers much).

“I would not have been returning to work today if I hadn’t had the support of my case manager. I would probably still be sat here worrying about what was going to happen”

Jennifer is now back at work and is approaching her work with a new-found confidence and positivity.

**Task: Analyse jennifer”s situation and provide a solution.**