



CLIMBING... IT WORKS FOR ME!

Christine Belk started climbing two years ago when she took part in the **Adventure Leader Programme** through **Adventure Unlimited** in Brighton. It was here that she fell in love with the sport and is now an instructor. Christine talks to **Elliot Klimek**, the **activities project worker** at **MindOut**, to explain why climbing is so important to her and the ways it benefits both her physical and mental health.

How have you benefited from climbing?

I identify as having mental-health issues and physical disabilities, but since climbing I am physically stronger than I have been in years. I am more flexible and more able to do day-to-day things. It doesn't take me two hours to get out of bed any more! Mentally, I find climbing a fantastic outlet for when I'm on an up and I feel like I'm going to explode with energy. When I'm on a down and I'm locked in my room and scared to go out, it's the only thing I'll leave for. People will ring me up and say, "Come climbing!"

Do you have to be particularly strong or fit to climb?

Nope! Everyone climbs differently. No two people climb the same route the same way because we all use our natural abilities. Larger people might have stronger leg muscles and smaller people might not be as strong but work better with their balance. All sports have three aspects to them: physical ability, technical ability and mental strength. Climbing is one of the few sports that uses all aspects equally. The physical and technical ability will come with practice – I find it is the mental strength that most people need to work on.

What has been your most memorable climb?

Tantalus in the Lake District. It's memorable because it's the only one that I nearly died on.

What happened?

I wasn't being respectful of myself. I was being cocky and it was too hard for where I was at skill-wise. I wound up 30 metres off the ground having to make a very technical move and, looking down, I noticed that all of my slap-dash protection had collapsed below me.

What were you thinking at that point?

I heard two voices, one saying, "Let go, you've been trying to kill yourself for years." It had been with me for a very long time, that voice. But I also heard a new one that said, "Fuck that, choose life Christine," and I did. So, obviously, I made a move somehow and didn't fall... luckily! And that suicidal voice has never had a grip on me since then. It sneaks back in now and then, but it has no power.

It sounds like a powerful experience.

That's why I'm so fanatical about this sport and why I want to share it with other people. But that doesn't mean climbing is for everyone. Everyone can find their passion. But you can start small. I think when you're having a hard time with your mental health, movement is so important. Even just walking to the bus stop can help you feel less stuck. I know it's challenging when you are feeling down or whatever. I find from my own experience and teaching other people that fears in our lives are reflected in how we climb. Someone who is fearful of things in their life will also find it hard to trust themselves on the wall and make the moves they need to. The flipside of that is that if you take on new challenges in climbing I think you will see that you can do that in your everyday life too. I really recommend giving it a go.

Christine teaches at Adventure Unlimited, 01273 681058, aultd.org