

Article appeared in the Derby Evening Telegraph on Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2009, after discussions at the East Midlands Support group on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June

## Stammer left me relying on my seven-year-old in a crisis

Saturday, June 27, 2009, 07:30

WHEN Mick Fee urgently needed to telephone an ambulance because his partner had collapsed, he struggled to make the call because of his stammer.

Instead, he had to get his seven-year-old son, Sam, to make the emergency call.

For Mick, it was yet another trauma in a life over-shadowed by his speech problem.

The 44-year-old, of Beaufort Road, Stenson Fields, said: "In trying to push a word out I'd bite down on the inside of my cheeks. I'd almost go into a spasm.

"It was so extreme that on a number of occasions I had blood running down the side of my mouth. I've still got scars."

He says he was bullied at school by pupils and teachers.

He said: "One teacher slapped me across the face because I couldn't speak in class. I got caned on numerous occasions."

After starting up his own building company, he was unable to take complete control.

He said: "For the first four years, nobody knew it was my company because I employed people to speak on my behalf."

But it was after he was unable to call an ambulance for his partner of 30 years, Marie O'Conner, that he decided to take control of his stammer.

Three years ago he joined the McGuire Programme, an international organisation which teaches students a special breathing technique to give them greater control over their voices.

In Derbyshire, the local branch of the support group meets every two weeks at Shardlow Village Hall.

Many members faced huge problems at school and work.

Paul Porter, 31, of Nottingham Road, Long Eaton, quit his dream job working for the fire service.

He said: "I had a bad experience during training. People were sniggering when I got stuck on words, so I quit."

He now works at Sudbury Prison.

He said: "I have to use the radio every day and, before coming on the course, I felt I could put people at risk if I wasn't quick enough with my speech to give directions in a violent situation."

Members agreed that social situations are another area of everyday life where stammering is a particular issue.

Steve West, who is training as a course leader, said he struggled to order a round of drinks in the pub.

The 41-year-old, of Huntingdon Drive, Castle Donington, said: "I always used to order the wrong drinks for my mates because there were some words I couldn't say. They'd end up with lager instead of bitter."

Members travel from all over the East Midlands to attend the Derbyshire group.

Guy Scott has always been able to mask his problem when meeting new people but says it has led to some odd results.

The 18-year-old tyre-fitter, of Great Glen, Leicestershire, said: "I had a big bag of tricks.

"I would pause or think of a different word to use when I'd started over-thinking a word and started to panic.

"In conversation, the person I was talking to would sometimes have no idea what I was talking about."

After bringing his stammer under control he has been able to fulfil his dream of teaching snowboarding.

Nurse Charlotte Brabbins, 29, of Leicester, has struggled to speak on the phone and in groups.

She said: "Before I started the course two weeks ago I was very shy. I would often hold back with family and people I was close to."

Parmdeep Ryait says he was only able to start an MBA at the University of Leicester after his problem had been brought under control.

The 26-year-old, from Leicester, said: "One of the main parts of the course is doing presentations. Now people have been coming to me for advice on how to take their time, project their voice, make eye-contact and move around instead of standing still."

The McGuire programme was founded in 1994 and made famous after Pop Idol star Gareth Gates joined.

Students initially take part in a five-day course before attending regular support groups.

For more information, visit [www.mcguireprogramme.com/](http://www.mcguireprogramme.com/)