

Mark's story

“Pinpoint gave me the confidence not to give up when things were tough – and a year on, the turnaround for my son has been massive. That experience and the journey we've been on inspired me to set up a new support group for parents where they can be open, chat and not worry about being judged in any way.”

Single Dad Mark gave up his career as a carer to young people with learning disabilities when his son's self-harming began to escalate. Now, he's back to helping others but this time he's supporting other parents at Listen*, a new Huntingdon group he set up in September 2017.

Mark was a regular at Pinpoint's monthly Self Harm group, which ran for two years.

“When I heard the Pinpoint group was stopping, I got very emotional as that parent-to-parent connection had been such a good thing for me personally.

“It was the isolation of it all when Ryan was at his worst. I lost a lot of friends through it – them not understanding it and because we all parent differently. I became very isolated so when the Pinpoint group started up, I didn't have to hide any more. I could speak openly about self harm – it was a huge release.

“It reminded me about the journey I've been on and what we had achieved. So it was a way of gauging how far we'd come and also, if you like, a bit of a pat on the back to show how I'd got through things. “

For Mark – and many other Pinpoint parent carers - talking to other parents, who have gone through a similar experience, is key.

“When you talk to someone, you can see they have empathy – you see it in their eyes and their body language. And you realise you are not the only parent going through it. And it makes you realise, I'm not a bad parent, I'm not doing something wrong.

“Setting up Listen was daunting. But I felt a real sense of pride going into the chemist and the GP surgery and seeing the posters up advertising the group. It's out there now! I remember the first meeting – nine people turned up – way beyond what I expected. And all wanting to chat.”

Interest in the group from other parents showed how widespread the problem of self-harm is – and how much parents need support. And Pinpoint is now working with other charities and county partners to develop a co-ordinated approach to supporting families affected by self harm.

*Listen meets on the last Friday of the month, 11am to 1pm at Huntingdon Youth Centre, Sallowbush Road, Huntingdon PE29 7AF. Any parent who is worried about their child or young person is welcome to come along.