

# PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

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## LISA

Lisa is a woman of European ancestry who lives in a small town in southern Ontario along with her 22-year-old son. Prior to starting the IM&M+ program, she was experiencing depression, anxiety and regularly occurring panic attacks. She had been unemployed for a long time, although she has extensive volunteer work experience, especially in the schools that her son attended. Lisa also has a criminal record, after being framed for a crime that she did not commit over 30 years ago. Before taking part in IM&M+, Lisa had started a skills-based employment program but did not complete it, due in part to the group atmosphere in that program, which she contrasted with her experience of the IM&M+ group:

*This [IM&M+] group has brought me so far in my personal life, employment and everything, when I first started it. I didn't want to talk at all. I just listened, and I broke my silence because at that point my dad just passed away like 3 months before that. So I was kind of close-lipped, and there was one discussion, I forget what it was, but it got into some personal stuff, and I let that out. And that was the best*

*thing I could have done. I was suffering depression at that time in the group we had a phenomenal group of people and they literally brought me out of it. And I felt so comfortable. I can start a group, and then not complete. But this group, I looked forward to it every day like it was just it was amazing.*

In addition to the supportive group atmosphere of the IM&M+ program, Lisa found the routine and structure of the daily sessions to be very beneficial, “I felt so good about completing the course, because I usually don't do that and yeah, and every day. I got up, and it was a routine that was what I was doing for the morning.”

Lisa she perceived the IM&M+ program as helping her to overcome numerous barriers to pursuing her employment goals. Specifically, she has noticed that she has higher self-esteem, no longer blames herself whenever something goes wrong, and is more able to systematically evaluate situations she encounters, “I seem to analyze things more than when I used to, and I just wait. What's my pros to this, what's my cons to this? If I don't know, I go

*back to the notes and I go back and see what my notes had said and it kind of guides me the right way.”* Accompanying these new ways of thinking, Lisa has also noticed that she is now much more organized than before, *“I have everything organized in a timely fashion. That was a big, ‘cause I would just, like, procrastinate. Now I have everything written down.”*

Lisa also explained that she is now experiencing fewer panic attacks and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, she is less socially isolated than before, *“I actually have a social life, like, I’ll go out and be with friends where I would just kind of sit at home, and not do anything.”* Lisa also provided a concrete example of how she is sharing what she learned in the IM&M+ program with others:

*We live in a low riser. So, there is a young girl down on the first floor, and she’s really suffering from depression. She just had twins, and so forth, so I kind of put the advice that they gave me into her, and I’m kind of relating what I’ve learned from the group and I don’t know now if she’s listening but at least I’ve used it. And I think it just makes me feel so much better that I can help somebody, and I know the advice is correct, so that’s a big thing for me. I’m using the information that I was taught to help someone else.*

Finally, Lisa also recently initiated the process of obtaining a pardon (i.e., record suspension) for her criminal record and anticipates that this will expand her future career possibilities, *“because I have a record... I think, once it’s all done and said, I think that will be amazing and I can start, you know, exploring my other options, you know, what I want to do and so forth.”*

## SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF THE IM&M+ PROGRAM

In addition to the structure of the IM&M+ program and the general support provided by group members, Lisa identified two specific activities that she found to be particularly beneficial: (a) an exploration of roadblocks through The Maze activity and (b) the Community Project. She elaborated on how meeting the challenge posed by the project was beneficial for her:

*[Lisa]: The community project went very, very well. It was collecting stuff for the less fortunate. And this would be like used clothing, good used clothing, and then we had a budget, and there is certain people that had certain jobs. So, mine was to contact the person that was in charge of the used clothing. There were other people that did the shopping, and so forth. ... It was a total success. Everybody had fun, doing it. It seemed like I got the ball rolling. That was my first job, doing that and then it just all went. And it was a lot of pressure, because I never had that before. But it was it went so smoothly we had a ball doing it.*

*[Interviewer]: Isn’t that great? I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like it was that sort of thing that helped contribute to self-esteem?*