



USING MTQ48 TO SUPPORT PEOPLE BACK INTO WORK

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MERCIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Background

Mercian Housing Association is an innovative 'not-for-profit' organisation providing affordable homes and contributing to the regeneration of communities across the West Midlands. Established in 1964 and with a strong reputation for quality services and customer focus, Mercian provides 3,300 rented and shared ownership homes.

Mercian is committed to innovation and offers a range of complimentary services to meet the needs and aspirations of tenants, homeowners and partners. This includes services which contribute to improving the quality of life for customers as well as a range of services focused on improving neighbourhoods, by investing in communities where people want to live, work and enjoy. In doing so, Mercian recognise that different people have different needs and so place particular attention to ensure that they provide more choice for customers in their homes and services.

Tackling Worklessness – the Open-Door programme

Mercian's ethos has extended into social regeneration activities, delivered through partnership approaches designed to develop financial inclusion and tackle worklessness in communities Mercian is committed to supporting. The Open-Door programme has been one of the most successful and innovative approaches.

In 2008/2009, the Learning and Skills Council introduced the Adult Advancement and Careers Service, as a universal service, embracing those in and out of work as well as was people in lower skill sets, providing access to information advice and support.

In Phase One, a series of prototype contracts have been awarded across the UK. One of these contracts was awarded to a group of Registered Social Landlords in the West Midlands to test out how social housing providers' relationships with their residents can assist in supporting them to gain better skills training and ultimately employment.

The "Open Door" prototype is being delivered by Black Country Housing Group, Mercian Housing Association, Castle Vale Community Housing Association, Midland Heart and Family Housing Association. Black Country Housing Group oversees the management of the programme.

Each association has a dedicated resource in the form of an Employment Development Officer, working with clients to offer a 'no wrong door' approach to support clients access a range of advisory services and get the help they need, on issues such as careers, jobs, skills, housing and health. This approach focuses on individual needs and providing tailored solutions to ensure progressive move-on in participants' work and life.

Feedback from officers

James Walsh, Community Regeneration Manager at Mercian helped design and implement the Open Door programme, recognising that a partnership approach to tackling worklessness was the next and logical step in Mercian's commitment to securing economic inclusion for their customers. James said:

"The work of the Employment Development Officers on the Open Door programme has been a revelation to both the residents and partners they have helped and supported. For us as a landlord, it's imperative that we understand both who our residents are and their

needs and aspirations. Only then can we support them with interventions which make a real difference. As a partner in “Open Door” Mercian can provide a key role in tackling worklessness by focusing on “real” resident engagement and building effective partnerships to bring shared strengths and meaningful support to social housing residents.”

What James and the partners realised is that to be sure of the value of their interventions, they need to be able to embed quantitative measures of distance travelled by each of the people they have supported, to understand whether or not they’ve made a difference.

James added:

“In some ways, helping someone get back into work is just part of the story – we want to know they are in the right job, at which they can be successful and remain employed, rather than a short term fix that got them off the unemployment register but finds them back on it within a matter of weeks because they didn’t see it through. That’s why we were so delighted to come across the resilience and mental toughness measure, because it does exactly what it says on the tin and is exactly what we need.”

Kim Bairstow, Mercian’s Employment Development Officer used MTQ48 with 7 of her clients and found that it gave her an invaluable tool to help focus and structure her discussion, practical advice and guidance to each person.

The development reports gave her the opportunity to leave something with each client, for them to further reflect upon after the initial discussion, take away and talk through with family and friends if they wanted as well as being able to use the report to support them in achieving their own personal goals.

The coaching reports provided her with insight and perspectives on how to initiate and take forward an intervention conversation and where and how to identify and agree tangible goals and outcomes with each person, designed to support them back into paid work.

Kim commented:

“As soon as I was introduced to the idea of using this measure with my clients, I immediately saw the possibilities and believe we should now be using this at the start and end of every programme. I want to know and be able to measure what difference the programme has made to each of my clients and be sure that our interventions have actually touched them on the issues that they need support on.

So very often someone who has been made redundant or been out of work for a long time can suffer from a real crisis of confidence, find it hard to tap into the tenacity they need to keep applying for jobs, lack the drive to rise to the challenge of interviews and end up agreeing to actions that they are not committed to take forward.

Using MTQ48 has helped me understand quickly and easily I need to support and guide my clients and where they might be vulnerable. It’s made a real difference to the quality of the conversations I have with them. Even filling it in online can boost their confidence and capability with computers and IT skills, an added bonus.”

Feedback and comment from participants

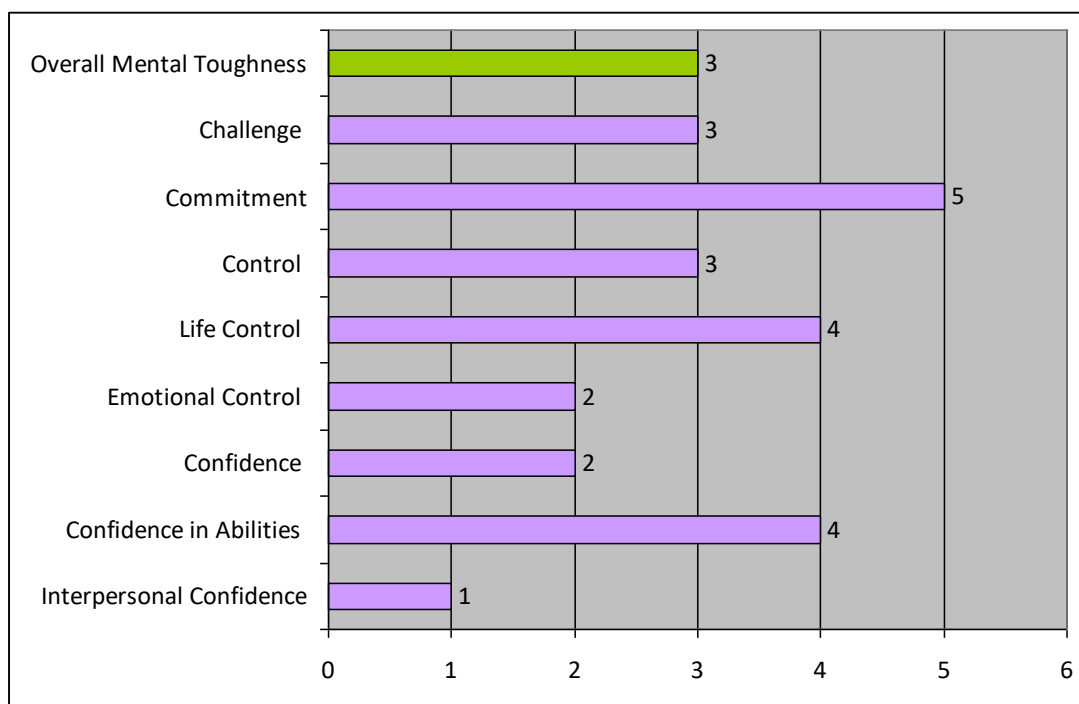
Kim Bairstow

Age: 29

Job Role: Employment Development Officer for Open Door

Background: Previously working for Mercian Housing Association, Kim took on her new role as Employment Development Officer in April 2009. Kim found that taking the questionnaire helped from a professional and personal perspective. Professionally it gave her insight into the tool she would be using with her clients, the questions which they would answer etc and how the comments could aid with coaching techniques.

Comments: Personally, the scores Kim received were much lower than she would have anticipated, but did feel the comments were reflective of her personality. The statements and suggestions in the development report helped her identify areas where she could incorporate challenges in her new role. Kim felt it would be useful to use this in her one-to-one action plans and for discussion with her line manager.



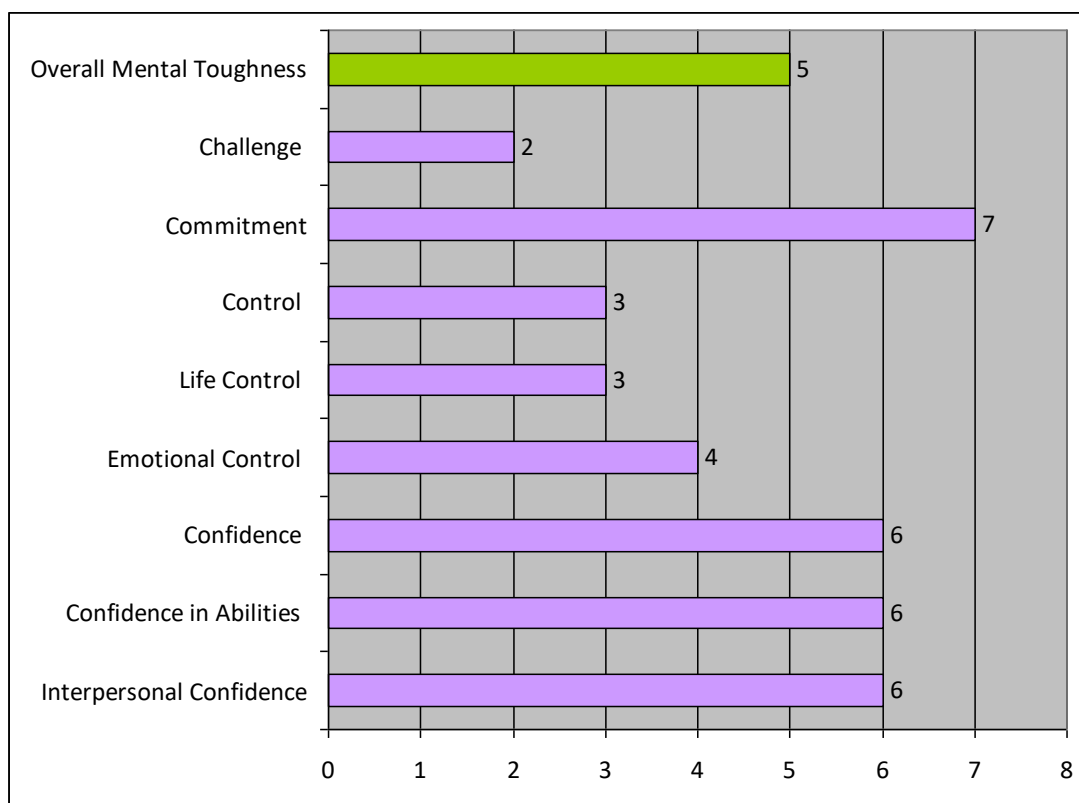
Client 1

Age: 35

Employment Status: Unemployed

Background: Client 1 is an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe who has previously worked in five-star hotels and as a football coach with children in football academy programme. His aspirations are to continue working with children in a sports environment, but he lacked the qualifications required.

Comments: As this client was already on the Open-Door project, the development report gave him the opportunity to review the action plan which was set at the start of the programme and see how to build in sessions which would help with personal development and raising some of his lower scoring areas. The client felt the results were “really accurate and the feedback gave direction on what I have always wanted to know”.



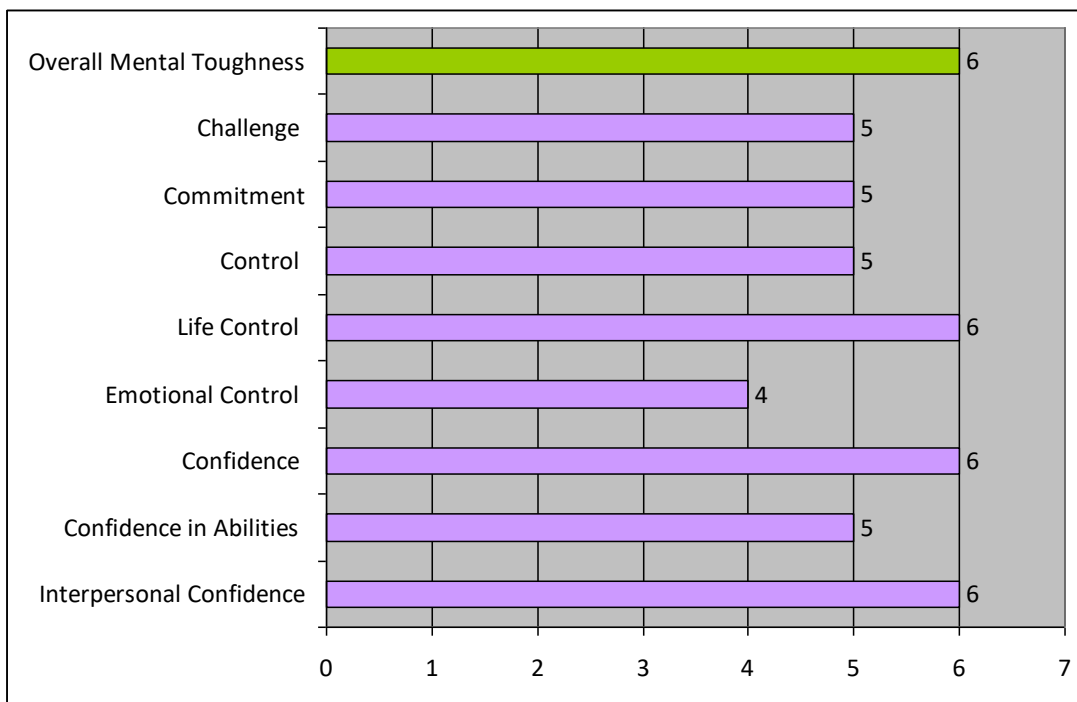
Client 2

Age: 54

Employment Status: Recently made redundant but since found short term employment

Background: Client 2 has worked in the housing sector for over 10 years but was made redundant and was unsure about her direction. She had been applying for jobs but lacks confidence about the application and interview process as she has not had to do this for some time.

Comments: The client found the questions easy to complete and agreed the results would help with determining where she was now after facing issues such as redundancy, and a scale as to which rate her development in areas such as confidence when applying for jobs.



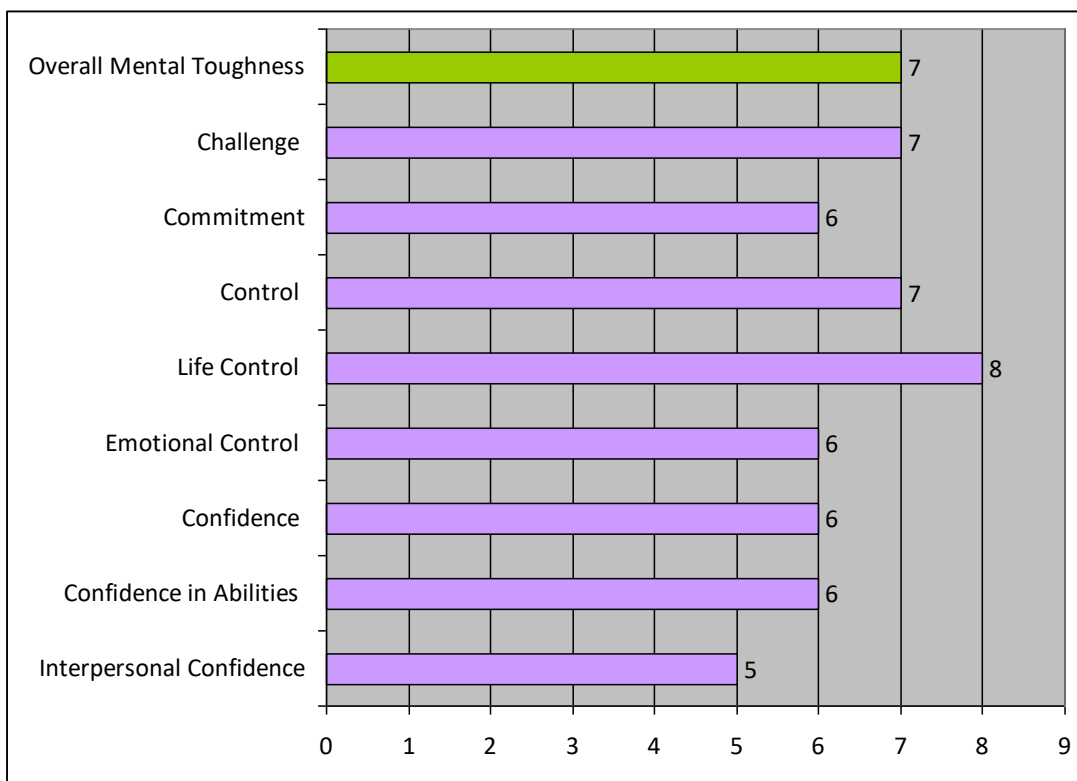
Client 3

Age: 50

Employment Status: Made redundant in May 2009

Background: Client 3 previously worked for Yellow Pages as Project Support Manager but was made redundant. She received a grant from her previous employer to help with training needs after her redundancy and has gone on courses such as Prince2. She does not want to rush into just any job and is applying for those that she feels she really wants to do.

Comments: The report was used at Client 3's initial meeting and it was agreed that although the client was motivated and skilled in her job search, the report was in terms of identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in relation job interview techniques and to review her status/progress in six month's time if necessary. She felt some of the answers were more "touchy feely" than she has experienced in similar tests, but the probing questions helped her focus on areas of development.



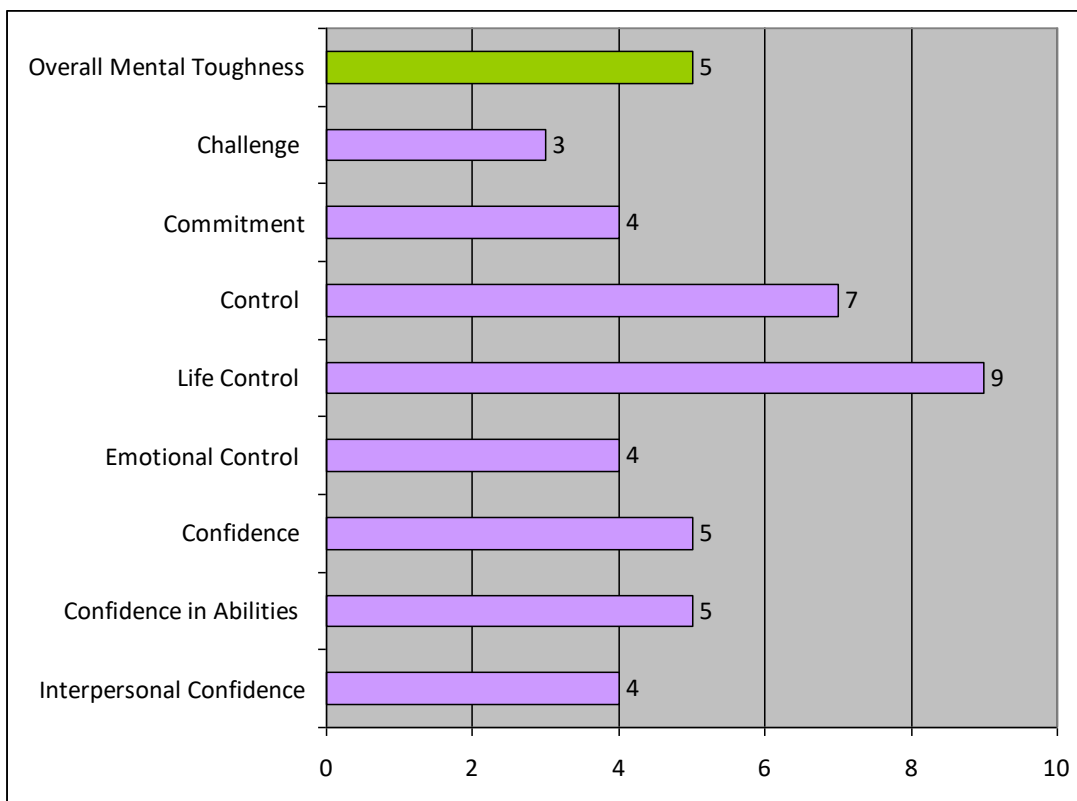
Client 4

Age: 64

Employment Status: Unemployed

Background: Client 4 previously worked in MG Rover for 20 years as a senior electrician but was made redundant, since that time he has followed a goal to work in property construction and has completed a two-year HNC in Construction. Ideally, he would like to work in property maintenance within a Housing Association.

Comments: The client found the questionnaire easy to complete and felt that, although the comments were reflective of his personality, the scores were not as he would have expected. The test was used at the initial appointment, and he agreed it would help his personal development to look at a six month action plan to work towards improving the areas he had scored lower in.



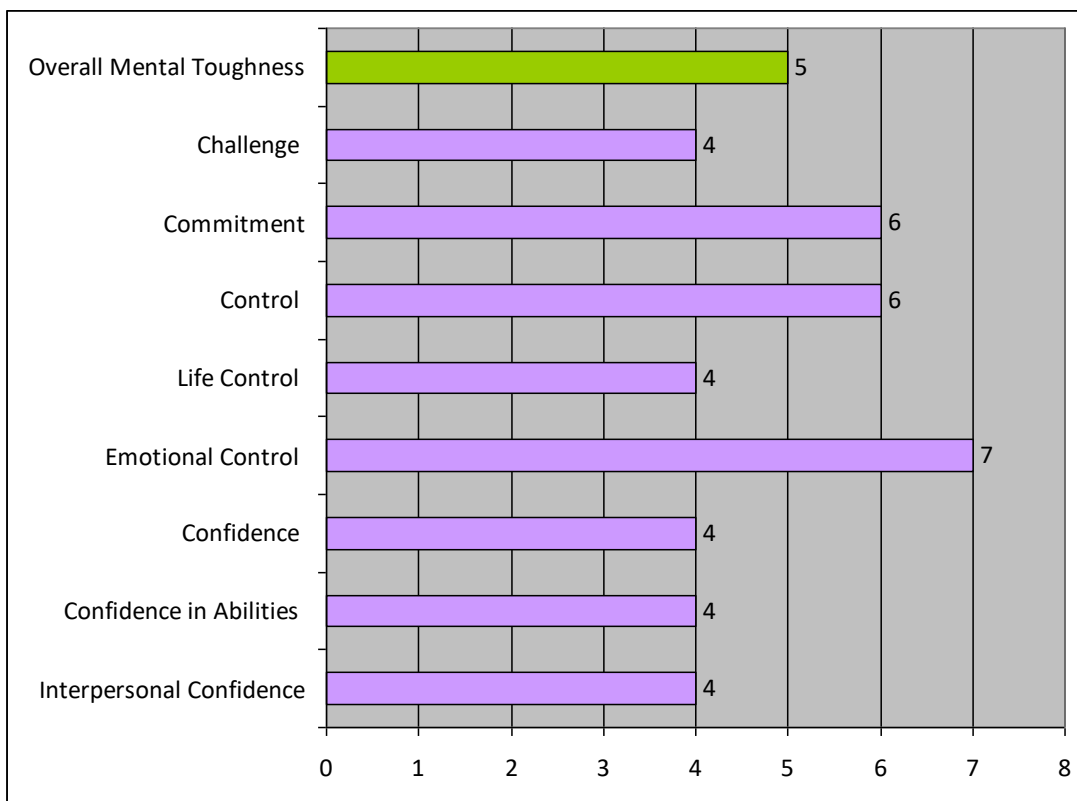
Client 5

Age: 45

Employment Status: Unemployed

Background: Client 4 was made redundant in October 08 and previously worked for an Audio-Visual company as an IT technician. Has been updating his skills with free courses and been applying for admin and retail positions, but ideally is looking for multimedia vacancies but these are less available.

Comments: The questionnaire was completed on the first session with client 5 and he found it to be useful and relevant experience for future job interviews. Previously he has had to take similar tests and knowing the kind of results which would be given to employers based on his answers, would help him prepare and work through the application process. It also helped identify areas of personal development through the Open-Door project.



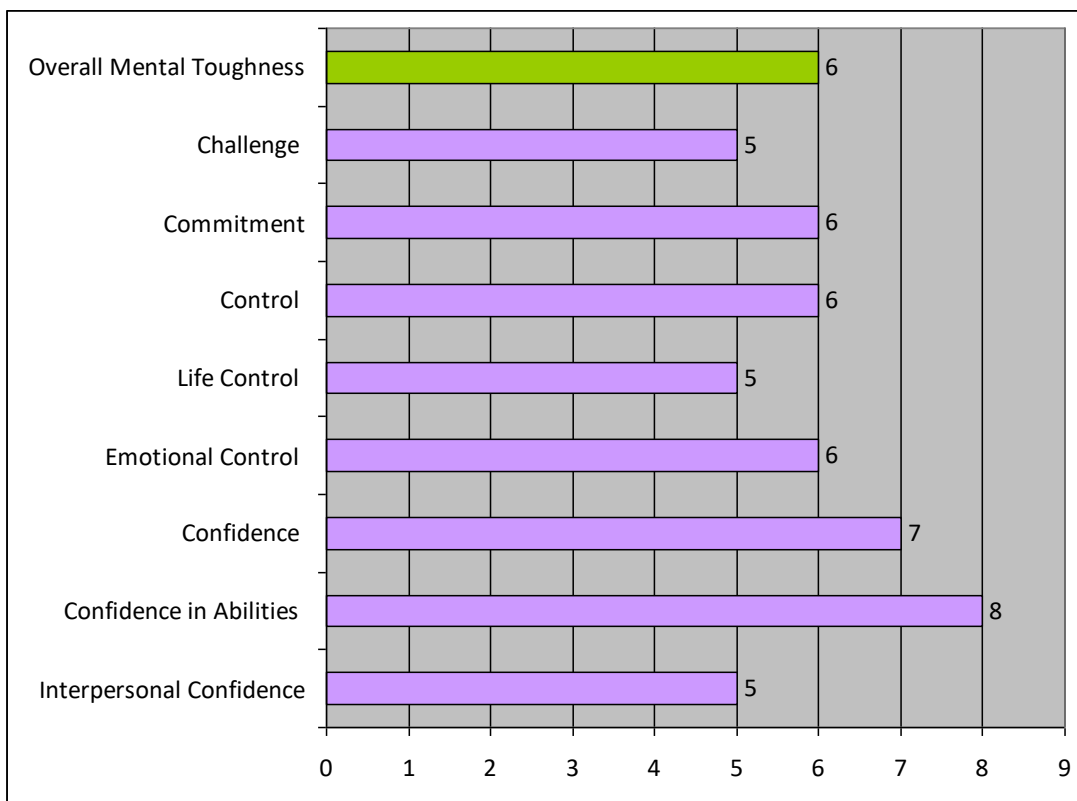
Client 6

Age: 42

Employment Status: Unemployed, recently redundant

Background: Previously worked in IT sales but has experienced problems for the first time in finding employment. He is a confident individual who has effective job searching techniques and CV. He is looking at his training options and how he can use his skills to find employment either back in sales short term or similar roles, but long term is looking at maybe the more technical side of IT and retraining for installation work or management role.

Comments: Client 6 was surprised at the level of some of his scores as he is a confident person and that although they were reasonably accurate, he thought he would have scored higher. He did however feel that the comments were useful and gave him areas to think about and potentially develop in.



Client 7

Age:

Employment Status: Employed

Background: Client 7 currently works in the social services sector but was looking for a change in career. She approached Open Door because she lacked confidence and direction in her job search.

Comments: Client 7 was already an existing Open-Door client, and she was agreed the results would help monitor her personal development as she went through the service. Many of the barriers this client faced were confidence issues, so the report gave an invaluable scale to determine where she was now and give her the opportunity to identify where she wants to be alongside practical suggestions as to how to get there to make her goals more accessible.

