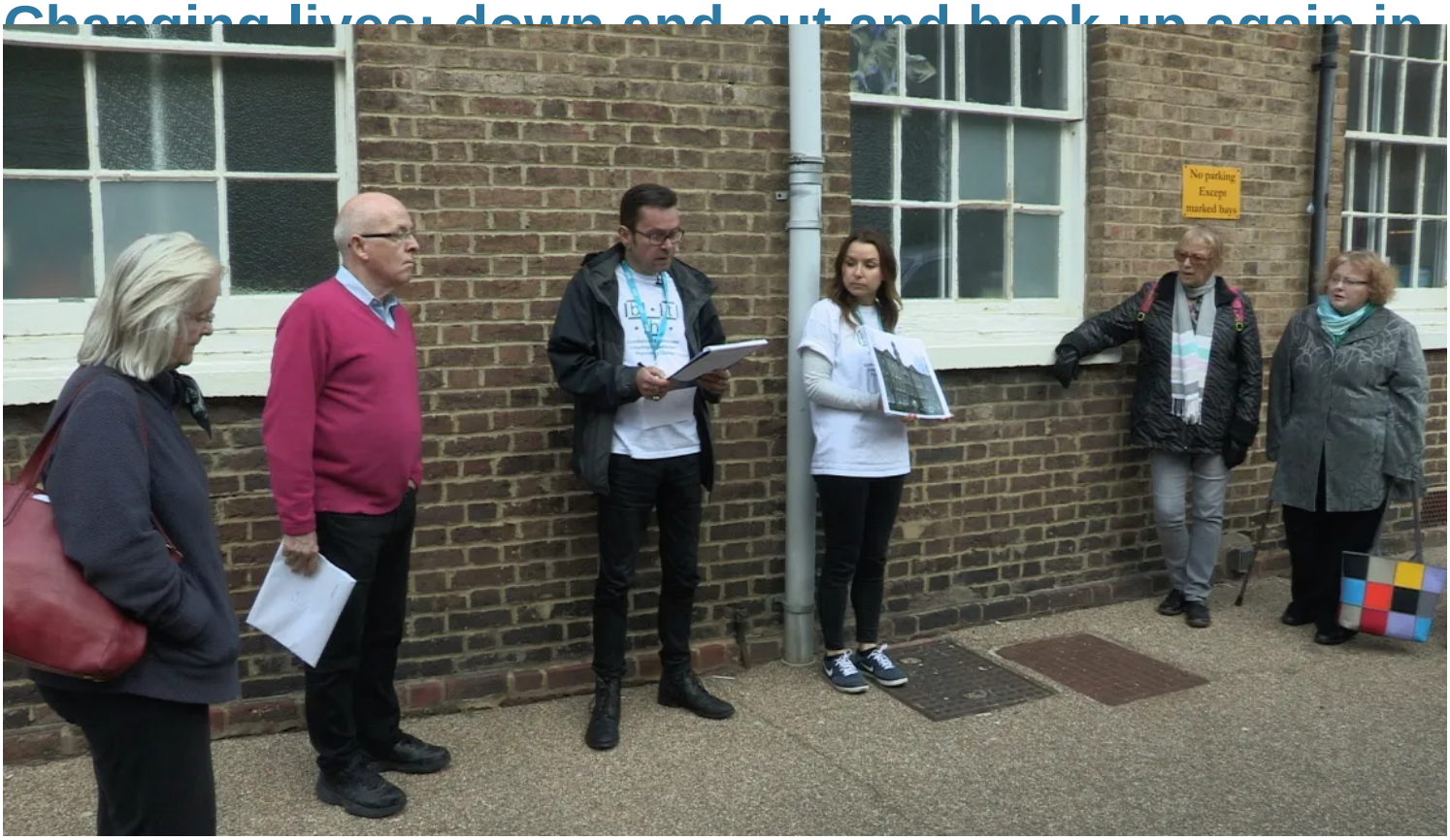
Changing lives: down and out and back up again in



Steve tells the story of how getting involved in an HLF-supported heritage project proved to be a lifesaver.

I was the general manager of a very successful bar and restaurant on Brighton seafront for nine years, working 90–100-hour weeks.

I was in a difficult relationship, had been suffering with long-term depression and was grieving my father's death. What I realise now is that I was in the midst of a breakdown.

Eventually I was signed off work. The relationship broke down shortly after this and I had nowhere to go. Christmas Eve 2014 was my first night out on the streets.

> "I was six and a half stone, totally numb and couldn't believe I was in this situation. I couldn't see a way out of it."
>
> - Steve

I was six and a half stone, totally numb and couldn't believe I was in this situation. I couldn't see a way out of it and battled with suicidal thoughts. A friend told me about First Base Day Centre; in floods of tears, I met with a caseworker.

On my third or fourth morning at First Base I was approached by the heritage officer and asked whether I had any interest in history, as there was a trip happening the following day to Weald and Downland Open Air Museum. I needed a distraction from my feelings and the officer said that there would be no cost to me so I decided to go along.

Planning for the future

It was the first step in a journey which led to me researching and presenting the HLF-supported Brighton Housing Trust (BHT) heritage trail during the Brighton Fringe Festival. Representing BHT gave me a huge sense of pride and the great feedback from the public was a big confidence booster.

The last 18 months have been a total rollercoaster. I still have dark days but my mental health has improved, I'm eating healthily and I meet with new friends regularly. I got heavily involved in creating this year's heritage trail and I'm starting to look ahead and plan for the future; something that I haven't done for a long time."



Pete Short, RSPB Blacktoft Sands Site Manager



Gardeners at Lloyd Park in Walthamstow

Heritage and positive mental health