



Making recovery visible

In Sheffield we know that there are 100's if not 1000's of untold stories (often shared in closed groups) that the general population don't get to hear about. Sheffield Recovery Forum is STILL on a mission to change that.

Darren Mansfield

22 years of drug addiction and the chaos that brings have led me to this point in my life. Not that I'm saying every day was terrible, in fact I can look back fondly on the all-nighters and the scrapes we got into. But slowly I began falling into the depths of despair, unable to find the strength to pull myself out. I'd like to share my experiences to highlight along with other individuals who have trod a similar path that recovery is not only possible but achievable.

What was life like for you at rock bottom?

My early life was one of abandonment by an angry, confused alcoholic mother. When my parents divorced the 'new' man in her life subjected me to sexual, emotional and physical abuse on what seemed a daily basis until I had to leave my younger sister and go live with my father and his partner. Life got better until I turned 13-14 then the drinking and the drugs started. I found it difficult to let anyone get close to me and found myself stopping more and more with my grandparents and those are some of the happiest memories I have growing up. I've been told by councillors and support workers that my addiction stemmed from my early years, I never thought to deeply into it and enjoyed the feeling and freedom drugs gave me. It's been hard pin-pointing the exact time when I'd had enough, living at rock bottom but staying alive for so long makes it difficult.

What was the turning point for you?

When my youngest daughter was born with an incurable illness I completely went off the rails and all bets were off, she was eventually placed into foster care and in the end she was permanently fostered by a what I now know to be a loving, caring family. At the time I was devastated, and I was either going to end my life in a drug-fuelled rampage or try to get help, I wasn't ready to give up and when my father decided to gain guardianship of my eldest child I made the bravest life-changing decision of my life and entered a drug rehabilitation project here in Sheffield.

Although very challenging at times I left Phoenix Futures Storth Oaks residence in Oct 2015 and went into their supported housing project at Priory Rd, with a plan to begin to live independently,

What helped?

I was diagnosed with complex PTSD and attended intense counselling with IAPT. I found this very difficult and my behaviour at times was deemed inappropriate, which in turn led to me being asked to leave and I was lucky enough to be offered accommodation at the Salvation Army. To family and friends this seemed a backward step, but I was determined to remain abstinent and managed to apply myself well to the point staff at Phoenix asked me to return to a new independent living project they had set up at Harcourt Road. It was there that I started my volunteering, first at Zest then User Voice and finally Addaction on Sidney Street.

My role involved supporting clients with their substance issues, running the breakfast club and facilitating gym sessions I set up with the support of Chris Fitzgerald and the team at MBC.

What is life like now? How are things different?

Whilst there I was presented with the opportunity to apply for a GROW traineeship at Shelter and I was fortunate enough to be successful and I started in Nov 2019. All throughout my placement and my volunteering roles I have become a much more understanding individual and I have gained a much wider and professional view of addiction in its many forms and feel confident enough to both share my experiences and offer support not only to clients but the wider community. For many years, throughout my own descent into addiction and chaos, I saw no way out, no future and let the fear of change completely rule and ruin my life. It was only through my own determination, the support of others and over-coming the fear of change that I am now living proof that it is possible to use all my years of addiction in a positive way and hopefully inspire others to believe that when the time is right change is possible. Someone I respect greatly once told me to trust the process and if I can give anyone wishing to make a change a piece of advice, that would be it.