



# 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.*

Emj Morris

## What was life like for you at rock bottom?

To understand my life at rock bottom, I've got to go back to before I was born. That's where it all started really. My older brother was stillborn which was obviously really traumatic for my Mum. She got pregnant with me shortly afterwards, and I was born premature. My Dad was in the army so pretty much left it to my Mum to bring me and my sister up. What happened with my brother really affected her. I spoke in my own language, and only really communicated with my sister until I was about 7. I never learned to read or write. My Mum had a lot of mental health issues and had regular suicide attempts but was mostly attention seeking.

My parents split up when I was 13. I was drinking at this point. I lived with my Dad and Sister until I attacked my stepmum, I then lived with my Mum and step dad but my step dad mistreated me and my Mum so I ran away. I lived in the woods for a period of time when I was 15, then started sleeping on trains making sure I was in front of the cameras so I was safe. I was using drugs, anything to get through. I spent some time in and out of youth hostels, I'd attempted suicide, and was basically surviving by shoplifting. Just before I turned 18 I moved to be near my Mum in Basingstoke and went to live in an adult hostel. That's where I got introduced to heroin.

That's the beginning of my rock bottom. I was living at a mental health house when I had a major mental health episode. I was threatening police officers with a pretend fire arm and knives, dousing myself and them in petrol, threatening to set myself up and them on fire. I was sent to Bronzefield aged 20 and then spent the next 7 years in and out of jail. I know it's quite tragic, but jail was my safe place. I could get clean there and no longer had to sleep rough, but when I came out I slipped back into it again, so I kept getting myself sent back to jail.

## What was the turning point for you?

In 2014 I realised this had to stop. I'd been released from jail and moved to Winchester, got an awesome support worker, made new friends and started to go to open mic nights for my poetry. My Mum had a couple of strokes and a heart attack and I could feel my mental health unravelling steadily. I was experimenting with other drugs and putting myself in dangerous situations. I just didn't care anymore. I planned to kill myself by hanging, but it didn't work and I ended up with a shattered pelvis. When the ambulance turned up I knew then that I didn't want to die. I wanted to live. I was in hospital for months and had to learn to walk again. I found balance in the hospital, and when I came out I spent my first Christmas with my Dad since I was about 13 years old. It meant a lot to me but I then spent 2015 and 2016 Christmases in jail and in rehab for 2017. I then spent 2018 with my sister and her husband and last year I had the best Christmas since I was a kid spending it with my girlfriend and her sons.

## What helped?

The last time I was in jail, a prison worker told me about the Amy Winehouse Foundation in London and referred me there. Their worker met me at the gate which I needed, and took me to their place. I started attending NA meetings, but didn't understand the importance of abstinence then, so was still using other drugs. I relapsed completely. The worst part was that I borrowed a laptop and sold it for drugs. I'd never stolen from a person I knew before, never from someone who was trying to care for me.

I admitted it straight away to my probation officer who took me to a clinic and got me on Subutex. I was offered rehab in Sheffield at Phoenix Futures where I did a 6 week detox, then I went to Grace House in London for 9 months of trauma therapy focusing on my childhood. That was the hardest 9 months of my entire life!

After that I was offered to come back to Sheffield to the Women's House, and I moved from there to a shared flat and now to my own flat. I lapsed once in Sheffield but admitted it to the staff and that motivated me to start taking on suggestions and working hard on my recovery.

## What is life like now? How are things different?

I'm now two whole years clean! There's this thing in NA about 'life beyond your wildest dreams' and that's what my life is like now. I only learned to read and write in jail, and now I'm doing my GCSEs and hoping to go to University one day to do a creative writing course.

The hardest thing has been learning to let people get close to me, but I've got a brilliant sponsor now, a girlfriend who is amazing, and I'm an Auntie. After everything I've put my sister through, she let me watch my baby niece alone for 20 minutes when I was staying with her.

For her to put that much trust in me is huge. I'm back in touch properly with my Mum and Grandparents and we are working through what's happened. I'm closer to my Mum than ever.

I've learned to have compassion and I'm helping her now as her health isn't very good. I'm learning to care again. My life is mind blowing now, in every way!