



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.

Jamies Story

What was life like for you at rock bottom?

Gosh, at rock bottom I was just stuck in a rut. I woke up thinking about where I was going to get alcohol and weed from. That was my first thought every day. At the time I was living with a friend, an older guy, and I was dependent on him for money. The weed was affecting me so much by this point, that I felt like I was going to die. My mental health was terrible, but still I wanted to do it every day.

When I was drinking I became violent and aggressive. I was really angry, and lashed out at my Mum on occasions, even threatening her with a knife one time. Drinking and smoking weed had been getting me in dangerous situations over time, since I was about 15 years old. I was sexually assaulted by a man who bought me a drink in a pub - the drink must have been spiked, but there was no way I wasn't going to drink it because I just wanted the alcohol. Even back then at 15, I felt like I had no control and couldn't say no to alcohol.

So many times I've woken up not knowing how I've got home. Covered in bruises and no clue where they came from. So many messy situations, and so much guilt. Constant blackouts from drinking, and dreading looking at my phone the morning after to see who I'd texted and who I'd upset or hurt. Nine times out of ten I'd been a total knobhead. I caused so much hurt to my family. I first tried cannabis as a teenager but didn't really like it because it made me paranoid, but then later on in a relationship my partner smoked a lot and it just became what we did from the minute we got up until the minute we went to bed. It was all that held our relationship together. It enabled us to talk and be intimate with each other.

After we split up I got sober for a while and got myself a flat, but then I went to a friend's house for coffee one day and stayed for 3 years, relying on my friend for money for weed and alcohol! I was spending about £50 a day on cannabis, and was completely relentless with it. I always wanted more, and always more than my fair share. I'd had intermittent periods of having a job, but always ended up getting fired for something related to drinking. I've not managed to hold down a job for the last 8 years now.

What was the turning point for you?

There was no lightbulb moment for me. I'd always known this had to stop, I never wanted to carry on, but I was in denial about how bad things had actually got. I guess looking back, one key moment was when I was out with my Mum and sister and we were in a taxi. I was drunk and got aggressive with my sister and punched her in the arm. I knew then that things had gone too far.

I re-engaged with Forward Leeds, a drug and alcohol team, who I'd been in contact with on and off before. I started attending meetings, but kept lapsing. Naively I thought that I was fine and that I was in control. Some of my Mum's friends suggested rehab but I thought that was for proper alcoholics, people who needed a drink to wake up with. I wasn't like that, but I had started to get the sweats when I hadn't had a drink, had restless legs and couldn't sleep, so the warning signs were there. I mentioned rehab to my worker and he was supportive, so I went to Phoenix Futures in Sheffield and did 4.5 months there with only one small lapse. I started to feel better but still didn't want to tackle my mental health issues. I've got OCD, depression and anxiety and experience intrusive thoughts. I drink to forget, to avoid tackling what's happened to me, the sexual abuse as a child and the situations I've got into as an adult.

What helped?

After rehab I moved to supported housing, where there were only staff present Monday to Friday 9-5, so then I started to lapse regularly. I needed the bubble of rehab really, I know that now. I was asked to leave, but then was referred to The Greens. I kept lapsing so was asked to leave there too, so went to my friend's house in Leeds and just properly got back on it. Drinking, smoking weed, full on, back to where I started.

The Greens asked me to come back again though, so I came back in June, and apart from a couple of lapses I'm doing well. I'm 8 days sober and feeling good. I'm back at the gym, back filling my days with activities so I don't get bored, but being careful not to take on too much either.

My key worker, Cathy, is amazing. She's personable and says it like it is, which works for me. It's a really comfortable relationship that we have and that's helping me feel more settled this time around at The Greens.

What is life like now? How are things different?

Despite everything I've put my Mum and sister through, they are still there for me 100%. I never used to be grateful for what my Mum has done for me, was never appreciative, but now I can see what she's done for me and continues to do for me. We worked out that when I visit her in Leeds that can often lead to me lapsing, nothing to do with her, but more to do with being back in Leeds. So now she's going to come and visit me in Sheffield instead. Before, I always used to let people down and never kept in contact with friends.

People and relationships didn't matter to me. Now, I prioritise relationships, and I'm talking more instead of keeping everything bottled up and dealing with it by drinking. I know I need to get better at talking and opening up, and also understanding when things are starting to get stressful so I can stop myself before everything goes wrong. I've got lots of work to do.

At our group this morning I wrote down, 'I am resilient' and 'I keep trying' - I think that's what best sums up my recovery story to date. I want people to know that it's a long journey and there may be lapses along the way, but we've all got to keep trying and doing our best.

That's what I'm working on!