



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.

Lee, from The GREENS

What was life like for you at rock bottom?

I was married at the time but drinking heavily. This led to a cycle of depression, anxiety, causing rows, starting arguments, more drinking. Eventually my marriage split up. I started drinking to forget. My depression was getting worse, and so was my drinking. I was getting through 2litres of vodka a day.

One day I went to my ex-wife's and she thought I was really drunk, but turns out I was having a massive stroke. I was 42 years old. I almost died because a massive blood clot nearly ended up on my brain. I was paralysed and in hospital for 10 weeks. You'd think that would have stopped me drinking wouldn't you? I went to live back at my ex-wife's and she looked after me for a bit. My movement and speech started to get back but I was just bored. Really bored, nothing to do. So I started drinking again. I moved to a B&B but couldn't afford to stay there long term, then was sofa surfing at my Mum's house after that, but that didn't work out, so I ended up sleeping rough in the woods. I think that was my lowest point really. This illness that I have had led me to this.

What was the turning point for you?

I woke up one day with a really bad headache, I'd been on the vodka and having paracetamol to try and shift the headache, but nothing was helping so I took more, and ended up passing out in the middle of Chesterfield Road. A bus stopped just in time and luckily I didn't get hurt, but I woke up in hospital where they thought I'd taken an overdose, but it was accidental - I was just trying to sort my headache out.

I was really poorly when they took me in. My organs were basically shutting down. My liver was totally knackered, I had a bad kidney infection, and ended up with sepsis and pneumonia. I remember clear as day the consultant coming to me and saying, "if you have another drink you will die, and if you collapse again I don't think we'd get you to hospital in time". And that was when I decided to carry on living.

What helped?

The alcohol team at the hospital were great with my initial detox there, and the mental health team referred me to The Greens. I moved in here in January and they are brilliant - they have saved my life! It's an abstinence house, so no drugs or alcohol and there are regular tests at random times which works for me - I need the unpredictability. We have regular meetings looking back at our past and making plans for our future. They help with CVs, budgeting, cooking, all those basic life skills that we'll need for when we leave. I'm hoping to stay for 2 years.

What is life like now? How are things different?

I've been sober for 200 days! This is the longest I've been without a drink since I was 13 years old. It was my Mum's birthday the day lockdown came into effect. I managed to get to see her with a cake that morning, then we got locked down that evening. It's the first time I've ever spent her birthday with her when I've been sober. Physically I've still got a long way to go, and I may never be able to walk far without the aid of crutches again. I'll still have physio and take a load of tablets. Mentally I'm getting there.

The team here and my key worker are great. I've just passed my level 2 Health & Social Care qualification, and am hoping to start on my level 3 soon. I want to be able to help people like me, like I was. I can say to them, 'look, I understand. I've been there, I know how hard it is'. That's what I'm aiming for.

I'm back in touch with my ex-wife and met my step-grandkids for the first time recently. My family says I'm a different person. You can earn credits here to allow you overnight stays and I went to Blackpool with my ex-wife, went in pubs, didn't drink. That's massive for me.

I know I'll always be an alcoholic, but I'm proud of the progress I've made this year.