



Sheffield Recovery Month 2022

Alison Thornhill 55 combined a busy working life with addiction to alcohol for more than 20 years. Driven by shame at her spending on drink, she began to shoplift her alcohol supply to supplement the amounts she was also buying.

'My name's Alison and I'm 55 years old and I work in a call centre, and I live with my long-term partner and two cats and I've been in recovery for just over three years'.

'I'm an original Sheffield lass born and bred and went to Sharrow Lane primary school and then to Abbeydale Grange and college after that and I was on the straight and narrow for several years'.
'In the last 15 or 20 years however, I wasn't really living I was just existing'.

'My poison was alcohol and vodka was my best friend and because alcohol is acceptable, and everybody likes a good time on a Friday and Saturday night'.

'But it wasn't until I got to my late thirties that I stopped socialising and started drinking at home with my best friend – a bottle of vodka'.

'I was also part of the old rave scene where alcohol wasn't involved, but later on in life my use of alcohol slowly progressed'.

'My father died relatively young in his mid-thirties and so when I got to the age of around of 35 or 36, I thought oh, I've outlived the age at which my father died'.

'I now know that this was the trauma that triggered it for me to start drinking and it just escalated from there'.

'I had a nervous breakdown and was put on medication but found that wasn't working but it was alcohol which hit the spot by blotting everything out, giving me a few hours away from over-thinking about it'.

'My mum never really discussed my father's death or anything about him. It was a hush hush sort of thing and my thinking turned to everything that was bad from when I was younger and I was unable to remember anything good that happened'.

'I kept everything bottled up and the dam burst when I was in my 30's and I was off work for six months, but then I returned to work'

'My drinking escalated from a half-bottle of wine to a full bottle of wine and drinking every single night'.

'I'm lucky that my long-term partner Daniel has stuck behind me throughout everything'.

'But addiction caused my mind to think that I would get Daniel to go and get my bottle of vodka and therefore I'm not getting it, I'm not paying for it so that's acceptable'.

'We did have conversations about my drinking, and I used to bat his concerns off by saying, I can afford it, we can afford this bottle of vodka and he told me that the problem wasn't buying it but the impact on my health which was the problem'.

'During the last few years of my addiction I can say I wasn't sober at all, so I never suffered from hangovers, because I was just 'topping up'.

'I needed to have a few vodkas at half past seven in the in the morning just to get up and get out of the house to go to work at quarter past eight, so I used to have a few vodkas just to stop the shakes'.

'My shift finished at half past two and I knew that if I got back home by three o' clock I knew I'd be able to combat the withdrawals, so that is what I always aimed for'.

'This went on for more than 20 years and I was drinking a full bottle of vodka a day but the bottle being empty each day used to worry me and I always had to make sure that I'd got enough in there for the next morning, so I could collect my next bottle on my way home from work'.

'I'd gone through recovery previously but not given it one hundred per cent and the turning point was when I went into a shop and decided to shoplift a bottle of vodka'.

'The way that I was thinking in my mind was that I would get a bottle, pay for it and pinch a bottle and through pinching a bottle, my partner wouldn't be able to see how much I was spending on alcohol, because we had a joint account'.

'This had happened around ten times previously, but unfortunately or as it turned out fortunately for me, I got caught'.

'I wasn't arrested but faced a civil prosecution where I had to pay an £80 fine and I was banned, and I still am, from going into Marks & Spencer's'.

'The amazing thing that happened was that the security guard who caught me gave me the contact details for Project 6 which used to be called the Sheffield Alcohol Support Service (SASS) on Abbeydale Road'.

'I phoned them the following day and went down in the afternoon for a drop-in, just to speak to a volunteer there who'd gone through the recovery process from addiction'.

'It was April 24th, 2019, when my recovery started and I thought that I was the only one who had these problems and that nobody else suffered with addiction and I was on my own and even though for the first two months I was at rock bottom going there, I found some solace in it'.

'Meeting other people who had gone through the same process as I was going through then and realising that I was not alone. helped me a great deal'.

'Project 6 put me in touch with the Sheffield Health and Social Care Substance Misuse Services at Sydney Street in Sheffield where I received support for my addiction and the existence I was living'.

'I did a home clinical detox after going to the going to the alcohol services for two months because they don't just give you a detox there and then'.

'After this I received alcohol counselling for twelve weeks then I was discharged'.

'It's fine doing the detox and I found it easy because it was a medical detox but changing the mentality and habits of addiction was much harder after doing the same ritual for many years. This involved changing myself and my routine'.

'After treatment and counselling I went back to Project 6 to take part in smart meetings at least once a week'.

'These are a form of CBT or 'talking therapy' and talking about progression and moving forward, which I'm still doing today'.

'After six months of engaging with Project 6 I became a volunteer and undertook a 'smart facilitators' course'.

'Now I facilitate and run smart meetings and I have just achieved six hours a week of paid work at Project 6'.

'I want people to know that if I can do it, anybody can do it if you really, really want to'.

'It's opened up such a vast range of opportunities for me, meeting other people and realising that there is help out there and go get it because you are worth it'.

As told to Andy Kershaw

All interviewees have expressed their written consent to interview by print and broadcast media for Recovery Month (September 2022)