

Sheffield Recovery Month 2022



Darrell Barker 39

'I told everyone that I was reducing my alcohol consumption, but I was hiding vodka in my van and upstairs in my sock drawer and lying to everyone'

Darrell from Wincobank in Sheffield is married with three children, and he runs a successful plastering business employing eighteen people with plenty of work coming in, but alcoholism destroyed years of his life and the precious family memories he should have been enjoying'.

'My dad had his own plastering company and my final exam at school was on a Wednesday and on the following Thursday I was on site labouring for one of his plasterers learning the trade going straight in at the deep end'.

'I started drinking when I was 13 years of age, drinking Boddington's at a friend's house, and I liked the feeling it gave me'.

'We also hung around shops sending adults in to buy cider for us because we were underage and then drinking it in the local park on a Friday and Saturday and it just all started from there'.

'When I left school and started getting paid, I found a local pub that would serve me, and I would drink in pubs after work and that led to full weekends drinking'

'No matter what I'd drunk the night before I would still bounce out of bed in the morning getting on to the building site, doing my work, and repeating this process until I was eighteen and then I progressed to nightclubs and drinking cans at home every night'.

'I'd justify drinking after work by telling myself that I worked hard and that I deserved these types of things and at the time it didn't feel like a problem, which it obviously was, but it didn't feel like it, because nobody was saying anything to me'.

'I met my wife when I was fifteen and we've been together for 25 years in January next year and she often said to me, Darrell, you drink too much, it's not good for you'

'In my late twenties and early thirties, I sort of knew I had a problem, and I was hiding in my house drinking and getting into all sorts of drunken states, falling asleep downstairs'.

'My eating habits also changed because I couldn't eat if I was drinking so I'd not eat all day so I could drink as soon as I finished work to the point where I'd fall asleep and leave things in the oven and getting up in the mornings was becoming a lot harder because I was getting older and also I was drinking a lot more'.

'I also found any little excuse to leave work early so I could get to the pub, and it slowly affected every aspect of my home and work life'.

Straight from finishing work I'd even go to the shop and buy four cans and drink two on the way home and then get a further ten to drink in the house at night, so my intake was 10-12 cans a night'

'I can see, on reflection, that I neglected my family because my focus was on me, myself and I, that's all that mattered and of course the alcohol'.

'My eldest two children knew what was happening and my son who is now seventeen have seen and heard the worst of it because I've let them down numerous times through alcohol especially my son by not turning up take him for football training'.

'I'd be driving home and needing a drink, I'd choreograph events, so that one of the other dads picked him up, so I didn't have to stay sober to drive him to it and I let him down so many other times, so he's felt the brunt of it'.

'Eventually, getting up the morning and looking in the mirror, coughing and splurting, and with my eyes watering made me think – what am I doing to myself?

'And every morning was the same -that's it I told myself, but by dinner time I'd be feeling a little bit better, and it started all over again'.

'My wife gave me a sort of ultimatum 'drink or us', something like that, so I went to get some help from my GP and they referred me to a place in Rotherham'.

'I went there twice and then I stopped going because I wasn't ready and I was doing it to please other people and not for myself, because my wife had given me that ultimatum and it was to keep her happy, rather than to get better'.

'It was never going to work when I was going into it with that frame of mind, which I recognise now I'm in recovery'.

'I first went to my GP when I was twenty-five, so it's been a few years since I first began seeking help, but I never really stopped until I came to Kickback when I stayed dry and clean for seven months'.

'I relapsed for three weeks, because I thought I knew better and it was because when I'm left trying to cope with my feelings that's when I am the most vulnerable, because I feel massively guilty and shameful at what I've done to my family'.

'I should have a lot more memories of my family than what I have, and drink stole them from me and that's why I feel the most guilt.'

'My family have been very forgiving, and my recovery really started 18 months ago when I walked through the door into Kickback Recovery – a peer-led recovery support service in Sheffield'.

'Before that, I knew I had a problem, and I did want to stop but I didn't work at my recovery'

'Experts at Sydney Street told me to halve my alcohol consumption because stopping immediately can be dangerous, but that was never going to work for me, because if I'm having one, I'm having ten or whatever it took to get drunk'.

'I did try halving my cans, so my wife could see me only drinking six, but when I went for a cigarette to my van, I kept some vodka there along with a stash in my bedroom drawers and I'd drink that without her knowledge, so I was just lying to her'.

'All along my wife thought I was working a programme of halving my intake and I wasn't'.

'The support from Kickback and the connection it gives, working my recovery and surrounding myself with people in recovery, helps massively so that I can visibly see people recovering alongside me'.

'Walking into a room full of addicts in recovery made me realise I'm not the only one with these problems and it knocked all of the self-pity out of me'.

'I've been one of the lucky ones whose had a wife that's stuck by me and from the age of fifteen, she has never left me and has always been there for me and my wider family and circle of friends and it could have been a lot different if I'd have not had that'.

'I do still get tempted, but I'm quite a proud, stubborn man and in situations where temptation exists, I don't let alcohol dictate what I do and when I do it anymore, whether that be celebrating a christening or going to a pub with my son to watch a football match. I'm trying to own it rather than it owning me like it has done for years'.

'I just can't avoid all the social situations where drink is visible and ever-present, that's just life. My kids will get married one day, but I've just got to get my big-boy pants on and get through it and make these memories which I have been doing without alcohol ruining them'.

'And I don't want my family to feel awkward or that they can't do this or that because dad doesn't drink, but if in a social setting, I get uncomfortable my wife will spot this as other people get merry and she'll say, are you ready to go and I say yes please'.

'But I still turn up and I still go to the family events and in that way, I feel I'm in control and that is not'.

'It had me for years and dictated my life and now it doesn't'.

As told to Andy Kershaw Media

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