



## ***Sheffield Recovery Month 2022***

**John Nelson 61** has been in recovery for ten years and in that time has trained as an NHS Recovery Ambassador, doing voluntary work on the 'Drink-wise Age Well' project where he helps to facilitate resilience classes with people over the age of fifty with issues around alcohol in their lives'

'I began as an underage drinker, and I'd always been a heavy drinker going through wine, beer and gin particularly at weekends. I was working in an area where there was a heavy drinking culture, and all my friends were heavy drinkers and I think that's what led to my addiction'.

'Things got a lot worse 12 years ago when my first wife died very suddenly and traumatically for me, and I was unable to process the whole experience and I was using alcohol to numb myself so that I didn't really have to deal with the grief of losing her.'

'This continued for around two and a half years, and I became a dependent drinker' drinking four bottles of wine a day'.

'After my wife died, I was signed off work for nine months and then briefly went back to work as a civil servant, but an early retirement -voluntary redundancy programme came up and I thought that I might as well take it because I really wanted to change my life and do something different'.

'People might think it crazy to change your job during all that trauma, but for me, it was the best thing I could do'.

'I kept drinking for another year after that, but I later had what you might term as a moment of clarity and realised that if I stopped drinking, life could and would be better and I did try and stop myself but I felt unwell and had to go to the emergency department at the hospital for help'.

'The hospital signposted me to the alcohol support service here in Sheffield and that's when I started going into treatment'.

'I had an in-house detox in hospital and support from my GP with medication to help stop the alcohol cravings and I had one-to-one counselling for about five months which was very helpful'.

'I then started doing some voluntary work in a local hospital and started playing bowls, but as I was doing so well in my recovery, I wanted to give something back to society so I trained a 'recovery ambassador' volunteering on the drink-wise age-well project delivering resilience classes, eventually taking up paid work promoting the project to frontline alcohol workers'.

'I now act as a recovery coach for Project 6 in Sheffield helping people to maintain their recovery'.  
'I'm also doing some paid work at Newcastle University advising on research projects with older people on alcohol and mental health issues.'

“I now feel really well, and I remarried last year so I’m in a good place relationship wise and I’m enjoying the work I’m doing helping others to get well.’

‘I have to still be on guard against potential relapse in the same way as most recovering addicts, but these days I rarely think about drink except perhaps on holidays, but I’m not desperate to have a drink all the time’.

‘This resilience comes with time and experience and when I do meet friends who are drinking, I don’t often spend more than a couple of hours with them because their behaviour begins to change with the alcohol, and I can now recognise that’.

**As told to Andy Kershaw**

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