



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

**Jo Powell** is a recovering alcoholic after 15 years of heavy drinking which cost her two failed marriages and a serious brain injury, Now, clean for four years she has achieved paid work in the alcohol recovery field after many years as volunteer with Project 6.

'I live at Charnock in Sheffield, and I work at the Project 6 a drug and alcohol recovery charity as a sessional worker doing introductory sessions with new service users and any follow-up's which may be required including reviews and checking on people's well-being'.

'I absolutely love this work which I started on a voluntary basis in 2019 during lockdown and now I'm a paid worker and its so nice to give back what was so freely given to me, and it keeps me grounded as well'.

'My addiction started from a nasty 'split-up' with my first husband when he left me for another woman'.

'I'd always been a social drinker, but this wasn't just about that episode, because during my childhood I was also sexually abused'

'I was only seven years old when this occurred, and it only happened on two occasions but that was enough, and I simply bottled it up at the back of my head'.

'This then affected every part of my life growing up and I felt that I couldn't be myself. I felt that I had put a front on as the 'happy-go-lucky' Jo, people pleasing, but it destroyed my confidence'.

'Consequently, I didn't do very well in school academically and I just felt that because of this I couldn't be me and I never knew what being myself was like, because I had no idea why I was feeling like this. I just kept quiet and put it to the back of my mind and just got on with my life'.

'I know I could have done better, but I couldn't tell my parents because it would have broken my mother and I know that I was protecting her more than anything, but she has passed away now and never knew of this'.

'I've got a good work ethic and have always worked, including a Saturday job when I was fourteen and then on leaving school, I went on a YTS (Youth Training Scheme) in a greetings card shop, followed by some time at a horse riding stables for Mencap along with other small jobs along the way'.

'I eventually became a support worker and a therapy assistant in the community and a job came up at the Northern General Hospital as a physio assistant and I did my NVQ level III and then went to university for three years to qualify as a nurse'.

'I worked at the Hallamshire Hospital for twelve years, until the drinking became too much, and I resigned'.

'My divorce was the main trigger for the heavy drinking after my husband had left me in 2002 and I was in my third year of University'.

'Once he'd left, my drinking gradually escalated over the next few years starting with two bottles of wine and particularly drinking on my own at home and feeling very isolated'.

'This didn't stop me doing my studies, my exams or my placements on the ward and I still functioned normally'.

'The minute I got home, however I would have a drink, and this went on for four years until I got pregnant with my new partner in 2005'.

'I found it very hard not to drink and I did still drink a bit during the pregnancy, which I'm not proud of it, but wasn't every day and thank God, my daughter was unaffected by this'.

'The urge to drink was still there though, and so I would drink two or three glasses a couple of times a week and I think I did know I had a problem before my first child was born'.

'This went on for fifteen years, gradually getting worse and worse and I then I got into binge-drinking after I resigned from nursing in 2014 and so I then I was drinking day and night 24/7'.

'The times I've tried to stop drinking have been too numerous to mention, and I've even been admitted into hospital a few times for a detox. It was all just horrendous, and I thought I'd never ever stop'.

'My children went to live with their biological dad after I split up with him because I wasn't capable of looking after them and during this time my mum died and myself and my sister who is also a nurse, nursed her at home, so the shock and bereavement was another thing I was dealing with'.

'In 2014, I ended up having a brain haemorrhage through seizures from trying to withdraw from alcohol by myself and hitting my head which led to a right sided bleed on my brain'.

'The medics at the Northern General Hospital had problems controlling my bleed but eventually it did stop but as a result, I could hardly speak or pick up a spoon or walk properly and I was in wheelchair and on a Zimmer frame and I pushed and pushed myself to get better, but even this still didn't stop me from drinking'.

'I wasn't honest with myself or with the people there about how I felt and that's where I failed, because it was killing me inside, how much I was lying about everything'.

'In my head I still wanted to drink to escape, but I never realised what the main issue was until I had counselling and that brought it all to light for me'.

'I'd never spoken about it before either, but that didn't happen for years until I started going to ARC - the Alcohol Recovery Community, part of Project 6', which is when I decided that I wanted to live'.

'As soon as I could walk, I'd get myself to the shop for a drink because I couldn't stop, and this led to another hospital admission and then a hospital mentor came to see me from Project 6 and talked to me about ARC'.

'He gave me some leaflets and I thought, right, I'm going to do it this time. I'll go along and see what it's like and I went there for six months and thought I was okay, and I'd cracked it and I stopped going'.

'This was a big mistake. I picked up the bottle again and within weeks, began binge-drinking with no money and I was isolated all over again and I didn't care whether I lived or died, because I knew only then, the hurt would stop'.

'I was also in debt and owed the council money for my rent, with no family around me, my kids had gone to live with their dad, so I went to Sydney Street alcohol services and made an appointment'.

'They gave me counselling for my addiction and some medication to help me keep me going and also advised me to still have a drink until they could get me in for a detox at Nether Edge Hospital'.

'I went in there for a two-week detox and was quite poorly and I just knew that this had got to change because I felt there was more to life than just existing and I knew I'd got to fight for it and give it everything and to do it for me, not for my kids or my family not for anything else, but for me'.

'I thought that if I'm well and okay, everything else falls into place and I had to give it everything I'd got and the only place I can go, is to back to ARC every single day whether there was a meeting on or not I chucked myself into it and here I am today'

'People there got me, knew where I was coming from. I wasn't judged and it's the first place I felt like I belonged in a long, long time and where I could be my authentic self with no lies'.

'I stripped myself to the bone and blurted it all out because people were being so honest about themselves, so I thought I've got nothing to lose and I got tremendous support from my peers, the volunteers, the staff and I thought why I didn't do this before, but I wasn't ready back then'.

'I've realised that I'm never going to have cracked it, I never will. It's something I have to work on every single day'.

'I am an alcoholic in recovery and that's never going to change and I know I will always have to be aware of where my mental health is and of the triggers and never get complacent, because complacency is dangerous for me because that is when I start to think I'm all right now, I can just have one drink, and I can't'.

'I'm now four years clean and never in a million years did I think I'd be here, that it would ever happen, but it has'.

'Life is good, and I feel like I've found myself and that I'm not a bad person and I like to think of myself in two words and that's perfectly imperfect'.

### **As told to Andy Kershaw**

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