



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

**Joshua Gordon 35** - 'I was born addicted to heroin and both my parents were drug addicts'

Josh Gordon is good-looking well-built Londoner with a huge smile and a full head of slicked back hair which makes him look a bit like a model for a top-class hair stylist. However, the story of his traumatic childhood, his addiction to class A drugs and his time in prison for violent crime is both horrifying and extremely sad.

'I was born in South London and grew up in foster homes because both my biological parents were drug addicts and I lived all over South London and sort of went to school'.

'I was good at learning, but even better at misbehaving and once they let me loose in the playground, I was off.'

'I lived in a foster home from the age of around seven until I was ten where I was physically and sexually abused.'

'I also had my little brother with me who was really young, and we got passed around quite a lot and didn't really settle into school very much.'

'When I was twelve, I got to go and live with my mum and dad again, which may sound like a good thing, but they were active drug-users on things like crack and heroin and that was how I started using drugs.'

'My parents were quite successful criminals and they had money. They weren't what I'd call 'street drug users' with that sort of chaotic lifestyle, they actually functioned well'.

'I've also got older brothers and sisters and so we had a fairly normal start before we realised this was our parent's sole source of income.'

'My elder brother has a professional career, and my dad was quite educated and so things seemed 'normal' to us.'

'But by the time I got to live with them again after foster care, they didn't have any money and they were really chaotic and unwell.'

'I lived with my mum and dad for about five-months, smoking crack and heroin with them and my dad then got caught smuggling 10kg of heroin at Dover Port and was sent to prison, where he died.'

‘I was then on the streets with my mum for about a year, before she went into rehab and got clean, and she’s now been clean and sober for 20 years, which is great.’

‘As a result of being on streets, I got arrested for robbery, burglary and possession of a bladed article and my mum was done for shoplifting and fraud and her family paid for her to go into rehab and I then moved to Brighton with my sister.’

‘A lot of what had been going on in our family life was not known to our wider family, so my sister didn’t really realise the type of person who was coming to live with her and the habits that I was bringing.’

So, at the age of fourteen, I was really streetwise, quite aggressive and about as big in build as I am now, and I went down the wrong path completely with drugs and violence’.

‘I’m now a discretionary lifer, out on license with an IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) sentence which means I can be recalled to prison at any time.’

‘This is because I hit someone with a hammer whom I believed had sexually assaulted my girlfriend and this and other offences have led me to spending over a decade of my life in prison in four separate terms for carrying knives, S18 wounding, aggravated burglary and use of a dangerous weapon.’

‘I’ve also been recalled to prison twice for different offences including drugs.’

Reflecting on his life to date, Josh says; ‘It’s really hard because I became very much institutionalised with foster care, prison and rehabs, so it made going clean, straight and normal, a lot more difficult for me.’

‘I’ve had love in my life, because I had a pretty good and caring extended family and I know that seems hard to believe, but they are good people leading normal non-criminal lives.’

‘I used to really resent them for not having me around them when I was younger, but now I’m an adult, I can see why they didn’t want me close.’

‘By the time I was 14 I wasn’t trustworthy, and I had this enormous build for my age.’

Reflecting now on his recovery, Josh says. ‘Once I got my IPP sentence in 2009, a couple of people I got really close to in prison got murdered and things really started to change for me.’

‘At around the age of twenty-six, I had a serious drug habit in the prison with Spice, then the emerging drug of choice for many inmates, but I also used heroin and it just dawned on me that I was throwing my life away.’

‘I think prison saved me in a lot of ways. It certainly stopped me ending up on the streets again.’  
‘You don’t really get ‘treatment’ in prison’. That’s all really made-up nonsense.’

'When the economy crashed in 2008, prison really became difficult, rough and dangerous. I could hold my own, but I almost got killed, but this next generation of kids are going into an environment where life is a lot cheaper.'

'It took until I was in my mid-twenties before I started to really think this is ridiculous and where does it end?'

'Drugs had really started to affect my mental well-being and I was really unwell, and I couldn't function or understand what was going whilst I was addicted to Spice.'

'At the age of 22 I didn't think I'd end up like most other 'junkies' because I told myself that I was different and I really believed that, but the older I've got the more I've seen that this is not how it works.'

'Because the more addicted you get to drugs, the less anyone wants to be involved with you'.  
'I then got out of prison a couple of times, and I couldn't live out here and my answer to that was to take more drugs, which made things an awful lot worse.'

'So, the sort of glamour side of drugs and crime had all gone and I was on my way to living in a doorway with no friends at the age of thirty.'

'I moved to Sheffield to get away from Brighton and the people that I knew because my sister lives here and I went into a rehab centre'.

'I completed the rehab and came away with a real understanding of addiction and what it was really going to take to get over it, but I also knew that I wasn't ready, so I relapsed into Class A drugs, went missing and got recalled back to prison for 15 months.'

'I was in prison during the Covid 19 lockdown and then I really started to think about changing and that I would need to give myself the space and time to do that'.

'The first thing I did was to get myself into The Greens, which is supported accommodation in Sheffield for people with addiction issues and then I knew I needed to get honest and real about dealing with my addiction.'

'You can have as many services as you want, but if you're not ready and you don't want that goal, it's not going to work.'

'I also went to CA (Cocaine Anonymous) and AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings and asked for some help and told them I really wanted to change and that I was scared of relapsing because I knew it was going to kill me or I was going to kill someone.'

'The absolutely first step is putting drugs down which was the easy part, but its staying stopped that's the hard part.'

'It was very tough for a couple of weeks. I detoxed for two weeks with people round me supporting me.'

'When I moved into the Greens, I failed their drug test, so they knew that I was going to be detoxing.'

‘I’d done quite a few detoxes but I’d just had enough, and I told myself every day, that it would be over in a couple of weeks and that I could start building something for myself.’

‘This was about 15 months ago now and it’s been like a miracle’.

‘I surround myself with well addicts, not active users – they say get in the middle of the bed and take part in everything, so I’ve done that, and I try and help other addicts if I can.’

‘I still do CA and I also play for a recovery football team called ‘Futures FC’ which is a massive part of my life and my recovery, because I’m a Chelsea FC fan and a big sports fan too’.

‘I’ve never worked and when I got out, I wanted to educate myself, so I did a barbering course, which I hated, but I made sure that I completed it and at least I’m a qualified barber, so I’ve got a skill for life’.

‘I’ve just applied to do an access to higher education in business course and I’m hoping to go to University next year to do my degree.’

‘I’m now a volunteer with ‘Changing Futures’ – a levelling up funded scheme in Sheffield to share my lived experience with others, such as professionals to help their recovery.’

‘That keeps me well now, because my brain is still set up as that former person, it’s really against me and it’s a daily struggle to stay well.’

‘I live my life a day at a time. I think its unhealthy to think too far ahead, because what I’ve learned in CA is that I get a daily reprieve so I can get up tomorrow morning, say a prayer and say that I’m not going to use for that day and then I’ve just got to get through that day.’

‘I recognise that if I want to do something positive with my life, then I need to be able to earn money. I’ve also wanted to have a career, so I need to educate myself because I’m playing catch-up after losing so much of my schooling to drugs.’

‘And the other side is that as a result of my addiction, I’ve got lots of mental health problems, which aren’t massively visible, so I’ve accessed therapy and counselling to start and get to know myself a little bit.’

‘I’m not 100% sure that this is the authentic self I’m portraying, but equally I’m aware I’m not that person, a drug addict anymore’

‘I liked the feelings drugs gave me, but I hated the person they turned me into.’

**As told to Andy Kershaw**

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