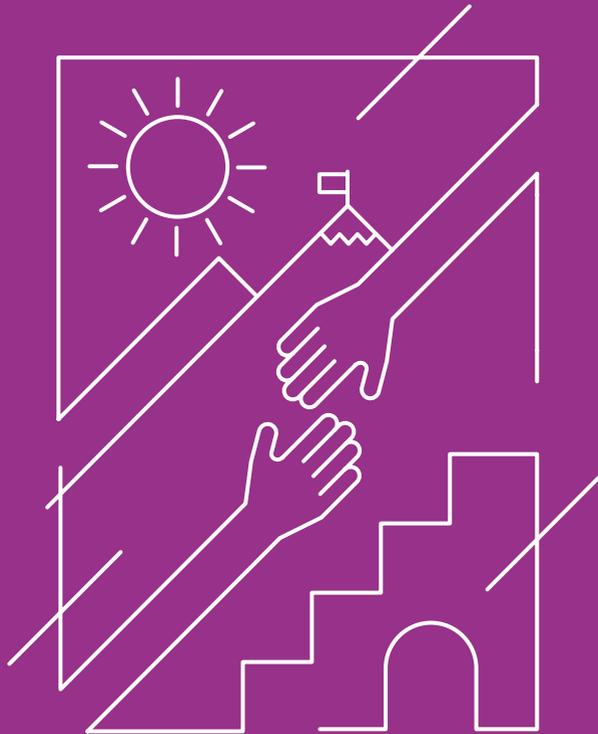


Drink Wise, Age Well



Stories of
determination
and friendship

Inside this booklet are stories of people who have attended SMART Recovery groups at Drink Wise, Age Well in Sheffield. They have found that spending time with others who are looking to change their relationship with alcohol has been encouraging and helpful. We hope that there are elements of their stories that you can identify with. Their journeys have all been different but with some things in common. They have experienced unhappiness, hope, progress and change.

SMART Recovery groups take place on a weekly basis in many different venues across Sheffield. People share difficulties they are experiencing as they regain control of their alcohol intake and maintain progress. The group, who are all people who are making or have made the same journey, use their experience to help each other find solutions and move forward. If you would like to know more please contact one of the numbers on the back of this booklet.

DON'T GIVE UP GIVING UP



I'm a mother of four – I've got three daughters and a son, and I've also got a granddaughter and a grandson. Basically, they're the centre of my life... central to everything I think and do, really. I think I'm reasonably intelligent and articulate... I also think I'm kind, empathetic, and caring... well, in my opinion, anyway!

I do strive to be non-judgemental, but I suppose I'm like everybody else in that respect because it's not always easy. But I think I've brought my children up to have good values... which is a great achievement to me. I like arts and crafts, gardening. I absolutely love reading... and I like chatting actually, as well.

I went to Drink Wise, Age Well because my family began to see that I had a bit of a problem with drinking... basically, I think, partly because – there were a lot of other things – but I'd just moved over to Sheffield for work which was a big thing, and also I was in a relationship, but then that finished. So I was living on my own in Sheffield and didn't really know anyone. But anyway... my family encouraged me to get some help and it was one of the best things I ever did – because of all the support you get and realising I didn't need to feel ashamed anymore... and it was a safe place to speak of any problems I had. And also... it helped enormously, actually, to listen to other people – the problems that they face and how they dealt with them.

Drinking was becoming a problem – basically, my kids had noticed that if they phoned me at night I'd be all over the place. It wasn't as huge a problem as some people have, but I was drinking too much, I was drinking every night, sitting on my own, thinking 'oh why am I here?' sort of thing, you know. At the most I'd maybe drink one and a half bottles of wine – but I'd be legless after that...

I've not given up drinking but I've cut it down. I'll have some days now when I don't have a drink, where I don't even want a drink. I'm getting to the point now where I actually think to myself 'I don't even like the taste of it'... although that's not to say it will stop me drinking – it's not about what it tastes like, is it? It's how it makes you feel – it takes that edge off things doesn't it? But, yeah, I've been a lot better since coming here.

When I first went to the SMART Group, I was really unsure about it and wondered what on earth it was all about. But I had a worker at first, and I was having one to ones with her nearly

every week, and she was brilliant – she really, really encouraged me... and she was really, really nice. This SMART group was just getting off the ground, and it was her who suggested I go to it. And when I first went there were only a couple of people there... it was a bit difficult at first because it was such a small group. But, anyway, I went for a while because I was off work then – I'd had a bit of a nerve do – Then I went back to work, so I couldn't go then as it was in the middle of the day. But before I retired I went part-time working three days a week so I managed to get to the group again. And when I went back there were a lot more people, not as many as there are now, but still quite a lot more people going than before, which I did find better. If the group is really small, it's like there's nowhere to hide, but with a bigger group you can go along and if you don't want to say anything you don't have to say anything, you don't have to contribute.

Basically, we just have a sort of conversation. We don't talk across each other... but if someone's talking about something we can say 'oh I know what you mean'... it's really, really good.

We do an introduction thing at the start of the group, you say your name because quite often there's someone there who's not been before. And then you can say what you want to say, really. You know... 'I've had a good week' or 'I've had a bit of a downer so I've been drinking'. A lot of people are abstinent so they can say 'I've not had a drink for so long' and encourage people. But you don't need to say anything at all. If you don't want to say anything you don't have to say anything, you can just sit and listen to somebody else.

Basically, we just have a sort of conversation. We don't talk across each other... but if someone's talking about something we can say 'oh I know what you mean'... it's really, really good.

As we go round the table when we first go in there's a flip

chart and we can write down anything we particularly want to talk about. We've also got a SMART handbook. It's got all sorts of advice in it, and worksheets which can help you – there's one which is a kind of cost benefit analysis – it helps you work out what the costs and benefits of drinking and not drinking are. It's good to work through. And also the book helps with things... like if you've got a craving and you want a drink – there are ways to deal with it. There's lots of different things you can try. And, you know, your craving doesn't last forever. If you can delay it for so long, you get to the point where you're not bothered anymore.

My advice to other people would be, don't be afraid to ask for help – and that's really difficult to do because... I mean, originally I didn't ask for help – it was my kids who said, 'Mum, you know you need to try and get some help with this...' And they got the phone number for SASS, and I went through them and that was how I got to Drink Wise, Age Well. But, you know, if you're really down or you're in that grip of something, it's the worst thing in the world to try and pick a phone up. No matter how much anyone says to you 'if you need anything, ring me', you just will not do it. You just can't bear to do it, can you? It's a big barrier – but if you can be brave and actually do it, I think it's worth it in the end. Maybe you need to ask the right people for help.

In Drink Wise, Age Well you're not afraid to say anything – you know that whatever you say it's not going to go any further. I never spoke about my problems at work because I thought I'd be judged, but you've not got that here. I was so ashamed of myself, that I'd got myself to this point, that I'd let myself get like this. But after I'd been going a while I thought 'Actually, I don't need to feel ashamed, it's just life...' – sometimes things just happen, you know?



AN OVERWHELMING



DESIRE TO REACH OUT

I went to college, studied for three years, got a B.Ed, and a distinction in my sociology papers. Then I came back to Sheffield and started teaching – I taught in North-East Derbyshire for three or four years – I went out with lots of different blokes – none of whom quite fitted the bill, or I didn't fit their bill, whatever.

And then I met Jim, who is now my ex, and he's now deceased. We married, and we were quite happy to start with, and I spent, ooh, quite a few years having three babies – loving them, caring for them, and bringing them up... which was all good stuff.

During this time I lived in a very masculine household – three sons and a husband... but it wasn't a problem. And I had a Guide company, and I loved my Girl Guides. We camped, we walked, we barbecued – we just got on so well together. At this time, the blind Brownies used to meet at Manchester Road and they really needed some support. So I tootled along there because at this point I was wondering about doing special education. So I went along to help for a couple of years and then the Brownies dispersed into sighted packs. Eventually it became a bit much – the job, my family, the Guides.

Fifteen years ago, I suppose, we came home from visiting Jim's parents after a Mothering Sunday obligatory coffee and cake, and he just announced he was leaving us. Just like that. Out of the blue, no idea, 'I'm leaving you'. And then he went off to a folk club. And that was it... it took him two or three weeks to find somewhere to live, during which I foolishly let him stop in the house. My eldest son had already started stopping with friends and doing his own thing. The middle boy was at university. So it left me at home with my youngest, which was fine. But he's a bright lad and he wanted to go to university, so I kept on working because, well, I wanted him to go to university. So, off he went to do a psychology degree, and then... my mum died – she had pancreatic cancer – and from diagnosis to death it was about two months which was a huge shock. Seven months later my dad died – we always said it was a broken heart because they'd been together so long. Possibly it was that, but he had bronchial pneumonia, anyway. So, then it was me, alone.

The only anaesthetic I knew of was alcohol. I hadn't addressed any of the things which had happened – they'd gone in and gone down, gone in and gone down – layer after layer of them – all

unaddressed. So I addressed them with the wine bottle. Lots of wine bottles. Lots of behaviour that I am... looking back... I am ashamed of. But then, when you're pissed you don't care... And at least while you're like that, you're not remembering any of the things that have hurt you.

I had a long period when I was drinking quite heavily, and things were really chaotic then... terrible. I mean, I was on my own in this house, and I was just going to the off licence and waiting on the door step for ten o'clock in the morning when they opened. Until it got to the stage where they said they were very sorry but they couldn't serve me anymore, which I suppose I had coming. So I had to go down to the next one, and then things got really bad and I had to go all the way down to the Spar at the bottom of Hunter's Bar. Now that was problematic because walking down there was a difficult option when you're half pissed, and then catching a bus to come back. So it all got a bit awkward – and then after that, I think, they wouldn't serve me on Banner Cross at all so that was that.

Anyhow, eventually – after a spell in supported housing, which wasn't all that bad really – I started going to AA, and there were parts of AA I found incredibly useful and helpful. And then from AA I sort of drifted into SASS, then I became a Quaker, and then I started volunteering at SASS and I was very happy. I still volunteer at SASS – every other Monday, every other Tuesday night, and Fridays. I don't have to think 'Oh, I've got to get out of bed to go to SASS' – I think, 'Great! SASS today!'

And at DrinkWise, AgeWell they are so warm, so welcoming, and you feel valued. You know, even though I'm just an ordinary person – I go as a person, not as a facilitator like I do at SASS.

I have an
overwhelming
desire to reach
out, put my arms
round them and
say 'It'll be OK' –
you know? – 'It'll
be OK'.

They just welcome you – you can't help but become really engaged with the whole group... I really appreciate listening to others, listening to their stories... feeling empathy with what they're saying. I have an overwhelming desire to reach out, put my arms round them and say 'It'll be OK' – you know? – 'It'll be OK'. I think it's a great privilege listening to other people's stories – and sharing my own, because I've been quite open about it. And we also have a joke. Danny and Belinda are forever sparking at each other, but they're both lovely people.

As for the next five years, I'm struggling with that a bit. I want to carry on volunteering, and wonder whether or not there might be opportunities for that to spread out a bit more – different avenues, whatever, I don't know. I'm content to enjoy my days, as they go. I'm totally abstinent now – nine and a half years.

Showing compassion... sometimes you have somebody who starts weeping while they're telling their stories, and what have you... you just feel this urge to put your arms round them, and you pass the tissues, and ask if they'd like a coffee, or whatever comes to your mind. Just reaching out to someone... you know that might sound very trivial, but in actual fact, a cup of coffee when you're needing it at that stage of the day, and a nice bun – they go down really well.

When I talk to people when I'm volunteering I say, 'Come on, just reach out for help to whoever you can' and I'll give them the number for Drink Wise, or SASS, or Samaritans, whatever it is that they want.

So, reach out for help to whoever you can, as often as you can, and whenever you can. There's a lot of help out there.



I'VE COME BACK TO TELL YOU THAT THERE'S LIGHT



I'm 66 years old... The first thing about my life I remember is my brother and sister going to school – I'd have been about 4 years old and it was one of the best times of my life. I remember it vividly as if it were yesterday. Just me and my mother – we got on really well... I wasn't fighting for her affection with my brother and sister, and I could play with all the toys in the house without arguing. It was really good – I really enjoyed it, going on trams and stuff like that...

I was 13 when I started drinking, drinking alcohol straightaway. The next few years, from 13 to 16, that were when my life was very exciting – everything was new, everything was exciting. 17, 18, that was the same. I was still drinking all this time – building up all the time, but it was no problem to me. It wasn't causing me any problems at all.

I got married at 21, had my son round about 22, 23, and my life sort of changed then. I had to get my sensible head on and get a career, and stuff like that. But... unknown to me at the time I was, like, living... living my life to meet the emotional wants and needs of this fictitious person in my head, do you know what I mean? I... I wasn't being myself. I was being what I perceived life wanted me to be, or what my father wanted me to be. So I wasn't happy. Although I was successful in my work I hated my job. I hated most of my jobs that I got. But I was just going out and doing what I thought was my duty – to go out and earn as much as I could.

So I just started drinking more and more... and then I lost everything that I ever... ever valued. My wife left me... took my son away. I didn't lose my job – I held on to that by the skin of my teeth but my career went backwards. And that kept on, I was just miserable, I drank more – once my wife had left all the restraints were off, and I just drank myself into an alcohol depression.

I carried on. I got to be about 30, 31, and I realised what I was doing was wrong but I was too far in this depression, and then I got to the stage where... I nearly lost my life a few times... I was at a real low ebb, physically and mentally, and I haemorrhaged really badly. I was just bleeding all over the place... and I was took into hospital. But I signed myself out – they did try and talk me out of it for hours and hours but I wasn't having it. So they said 'If you go you're going to die...' So I just went home to die. It just seemed... it just seemed an end – a merciful release.

So I went home to die, and after three days I wasn't dead. I thought, well, I better go to see the doctors. So I went to the doctor and she just got me straight in hospital.... I didn't know anything about alcoholism at all then but I knew what I was doing was wrong, I knew it was killing me, but I didn't know anything about it, I didn't know how to get out of it, I didn't even know what a detox was.

So I had a detox explained to me, and I went for this detox. I really wanted it – you know what I mean? – I would have done anything to get out of the misery that I was in, I would have absolutely done anything. So they sent me in for this detox, and luckily for me it was a bit quiet on the ward then. I went on to a mental health ward, and they called me a breath of fresh air because I was deadly serious and did everything they ever told me.

That was the best thing I ever did because I got on a mental health ward and I learnt about mental health. Whereas before it was a taboo subject and I would have probably ridiculed those people. But once I got to know and understand them I had empathy for them. I began to realise then what mental health was, it's an illness, so I saw it in a different light altogether. And I made a lot of friends, but I realised early that I'd got one advantage over them – that I could make myself right, whereas they couldn't. And all through my career, as I've been going on to mental health wards to interview people, and one thing and another, I've bumped into them, time and time again. They've gone back in, and they've had a lifetime of that. So I feel privileged that I was able to get out of that.

I began to realise then what mental health was, it's an illness, so I saw it in a different light altogether and I made a lot of friends.

I learned to run towards my pain instead of away from it. And I learnt to do that correctly when I was feeling strong

The first realisation I had was when I was on the ward, and I knew there and then what I wanted to do, I knew I wanted to get myself right and I wanted to do what I was good at, and that was listening to people. I've always been good at listening to people. People have come to me with their problems because they know I keep a secret... So, that's what I wanted to do, and I knew I was going to do it – and two weeks after coming off my detox, I did my first training course. I just threw myself into it after that, for years, just training and training to be an alcohol counsellor,

and anything to do with that. I soon realised that alcoholism is just a symptom of many other things.

So I did that, and I went for the more experiential training because I'm not a very academic person. Later on in life I did some more academic training when I went on cognitive behavioural courses. But all the others were experiential, because I thought that was my strong point, and it was also working on myself all the time, so with working on myself I could understand myself – and that's how I got better because I understood myself and I learnt to like myself. I learned to run towards my pain instead of away from it. And I learnt to do that correctly when I was feeling strong – it's no good doing it when you're feeling down. And I went through all this, and all the bad things that had happened to me. I forgave myself – I came to some sort of compromise with myself. I forgave myself for all sorts of things I'd done... because... I'm not an evil person, but sometimes we do things and hurt people without realising what we're doing, and I'd done a lot of that.

The first time I felt really, really proud of myself is when there was a problem with the family. Before, I'd have been the last person they'd phone because I'd just make a mountain out of a molehill, just to drink on it. Now I'm the first person they phone if something goes wrong. And I feel proud of myself – and that's something I'd not done for years – years and years and years. So it felt good.

So I've just built on that, worked on that, and I had a career – I was an alcohol counsellor, then I worked in a dry house, and within three years I was the manager, and I had a twenty-six year career just in that one dry house. I'm retired now – I was made redundant one week before my sixty-fifth birthday – I suppose that was lucky because I got a few quid.

The last two years I was under a hell of a lot of stress because the dry house was struggling to get funding all the time, so I got a lot of stress from work, and I'd got my mother-in-law living with us because she suffered really badly with dementia, and she was getting worse, and my wife's sister was dying of cancer – both at the same time. So it was like a crescendo that last two years, it was just problem after problem after problem. It was every day – it was just one problem after another – and they both died within a fortnight of each other. Then I retired about a month after – and I went from having twenty-four hours of just caring for other people and no time for me... I just went from full-on to nothing. I always knew you'd got to plan your retirement – because of my job, you know, I'd worked with lots of people who'd suffered because they'd not done that – but I hadn't had time

Now I'm the first person they phone if something goes wrong. And I feel proud of myself – and that's something I'd not done for years – years and years and years. So it felt good.

I've been retired just over a year, and I'm just about ready to take the 'L' plates off. I think I've... I think I've cracked it. I don't just go to help people, I go to help myself

to do it. I hadn't even had time to think about it.

So I was lost. I went from having no time to myself to having loads of time for myself, which made me a bit maudlin – I wasn't meeting my emotional wants and needs. So I sat down and conducted a plan, and I've... I've stuck to that. Part of it was volunteer work, and one of the ways I've done that is with Drink Wise, Age Well SMART meetings. I trained up to be a SMART facilitator, so I go in and I'm first reserve now – if anybody's

off or anything like that, I step in. I want to get my own meeting, I think, me and somebody else are starting at the end of this month – and I'm working as a befriender to people, where I go and, sort of, pop in and give a bit of motivation, do a little bit of motivational work with them, try and get their enthusiasm up.

So, it's getting that balance right – it's just balancing out now. I've been retired just over a year, and I'm just about ready to take the 'L' plates off. I think I've... I think I've cracked it. I don't just go to help people, I go to help myself – I don't do it for nothing. But I've realised money's not much... yes, you need it – you need it to survive, but it's not a be-all and end-all. You spend a third of your life at work so it might be best doing something that you love doing and you're passionate about.

My advice to anyone who's struggling like I was, is never give up – never give up. No matter how far down you get, how depressed you get, there's always light at the end of the tunnel – and I see that's what part of my job was. You can't see light at the end of the tunnel – but I've been there and I've come back to tell you that there's light, and I've come back to help you on

your journey to get there. And that was my role. And another thing is to keep people motivated. So, if you've run out of energy, if you've run out of motivation, have some of mine by all means. And that's what you can do, you can share motivation. That's what a group does – you spread it out to people. A group is like having an injection – an injection of motivation. You might walk in a bit flat, but when you leave you're about a foot taller, you know... if that makes sense.

I do feel very strongly about alcohol. I used to drink a lot on anger, so I'm not allowed to get angry – I try not to get angry. But alcohol is something I get very angry about. Alcohol is the biggest killer, after nicotine. It's far more dangerous than all the other drugs put together, and if alcohol was invented today, it would be a Class A drug – you'd get jail for selling it. I once told a landlord that in a very heated argument, and he... wanted to rearrange my face. I see no difference between somebody selling alcohol and somebody selling crack. There's no difference for me – it's just how society perceives it. It's just that it's been around for centuries, people have relied on it for all sorts of things. You're not going to get rid of it. You, you can make it a death sentence but it still doesn't put people off – they've tried it and tried it in various countries all over the world, and it doesn't work. So it's about... I see it as about educating people, which luckily is happening more and more....

I get a lot out of Drink Wise, Age Well – you get a sense of belonging for one thing because you're talking to other people

You get that sense of belonging – being with a family, a gang, whatever... You get that feeling of belonging, and that's... that's good. You can see you're not alone... and you get that hope... and you get that injection of enthusiasm and it stirs you on to do great things.

with similar problems. If you're a drinker nobody understands you except another drinker. So if you're in a group, you don't have to write a chapter, you just have to say a sentence and people will understand you. That comes down to meeting your emotional wants and needs because some of that is to understand and be understood, and you get that straight away. You get that sense of belonging – being with a family, a gang, whatever... You get that feeling of belonging, and that's... that's good. You can see you're not alone... and you get that hope... and you get that injection of enthusiasm and it stirs you on to do great things.



IT WON'T BE EASY

BUT IT CAN BE DONE

I'm in my early 50s – I had a professional career for 24 years, and a family. I've struggled with alcohol... over the last six years it's been especially difficult. I've always drunk alcohol because I've struggled with confidence issues and esteem... low self-esteem. That was because of some family relationships, and also some other relationships when I was younger. As I got older I felt I wasn't assertive enough.

I've had a faith from being about 10 years old – when I was in the choir at the Church of England church just up the road and, for me, I knew that there was always something bigger and better than me – out there. But at such a young age I couldn't grasp it, I couldn't get it yet... You have to go through life's trials and challenges to, kind of, get the bigger picture, and see God's greater plan, you know?... the design He has for you. For me, the evening church services were amazing, the 6.30 services, and on a day like today the sun would be streaming through the stained glass windows, and it was... so weird – in a good way I mean – it was so tangible you could almost touch it, and it was just the feelings I had that were associated with this great and powerful thing...

The period where I drank in a very destructive manner for six years... I've had to learn to forgive people. What I've come to realise is that... in this life, and it's personal to everybody I guess, we can really hurt each other, as people – even as Christians. And... it's about letting go – trying to come to a resolution if we can, in whatever way they've hurt us – but if we can't, it's about letting go and forgiving the person or the people who've hurt us. Otherwise it completely enchains you, it enslaves you – you're in shackles, imprisoned in your resentment, your bitterness, your anger. And it just creates a whole vacuum of emotions, that – if it's not already – will explode like a volcano erupting.

I used to attend SASS on Abbeydale Road and one of the workers there recommended Drink Wise, Age Well. The group that I attend – we're all over 50, and I think it makes a difference... without being ageist. What I've come to realise about Drink Wise, Age Well and the facilitators is that they're very empathic, they're very compassionate, it's a very non-judgemental place, and for me primarily it's a very safe space, where you can explore things that maybe you haven't explored with other people before. I feel comfortable in the small group – people let me say what I need to say without interrupting which is really good. The people in the

group are more mature... We have an element of understanding – we share the same common bond. It's a trustworthy setting – confidentiality – and for me it's been educational, informative, humorous... For me, it will be the one thing, coupled with my church activities, that will keep me abstinent.

The other thing I want to say is because of the personal trauma that I went through which I don't want to talk about because it's still too painful, my drinking did increase really heavily to the point where I was binge drinking two or three bottles of wine several times a week and... in the space of four and a half years I took a lot of overdoses... to try and deal with the pain of what I was going through. I was told by the medics at the Northern General that I could have lost my life seven times... they said, 'you took a potentially fatal overdose'. The first overdose I took was in January 2012, and in February 2014 I remember completely having a meltdown one night and drinking very heavily. I was very emotional, very upset and unsafe in myself – not safe in my own skin – and I took a cocktail of tablets, and a friend was that alarmed they phoned the ambulance, and the paramedics came and asked me what tablets I'd taken. I gave them the packet, and they were so concerned they didn't even give me a right of refusal to go to the hospital. Immediately they said 'You're coming to hospital, now. This is very serious – you've taken enough tablets to kill an elephant.'

And that night – it was a very busy night at the hospital – and I remember feeling just totally inadequate, and ashamed, guilty, because there was no room in the cubicles, a lot of us were put out on chairs on the corridor and I felt like I'd taken up somebody's space just being sat on that chair, and eventually I got ushered into a cubicle, had a small wait before a doctor came, and he was talking to me and said 'What's happened tonight, what's brought you in here?'. And I was talking to him and all of a sudden I just didn't feel well, everything was going black, I was dizzy, I just felt weak and unwell, and I collapsed on two chairs at the side

We have an element of understanding – we share the same common bond. It's a trustworthy setting – confidentiality – and for me it's been educational, informative, humorous..

of me at the hospital. Unbeknownst to me my blood pressure had fallen to a dangerous level, and also the amount of medication I'd taken had affected the rhythm of my heartbeat, and afterwards I had to be wired up to a heart monitor for 24 hours.

But something happened in the time that I'd collapsed on the chairs at the hospital, and I found myself back, kind of almost transported, if you like, back in bed, in my former home, and it wasn't like a dream or a vision or an out of body experience

– I was just there. And I just remember having these amazing, wonderful, beautiful feelings of warmth and security and assurance, and this amazing love that I just didn't want to leave, and I was surrounded by bright light which I now recognise to be – I'm a million per cent sure – the light of Jesus. And it was just incredible. I just didn't want to leave, you know... where I was at that instant. But obviously, I was still... crashed out on chairs at the Northern General Hospital... And when I came to, I didn't know how long I was out for, I didn't ask them, they didn't tell me, and I just kind of saw doctors and nurses running at me with a trolley and they said 'you've got to be on here now, we need to do tests, you've affected the rhythm of your heartbeat'. And I actually was shivering, I was shaking, I was... my lips were blue, I was cold, and there was... I just felt... I just remember... it was such a weird transition from having this amazing experience where it was all warm and light and safe, going back down into something that was dark and potentially painful and harrowing and scary. There was actually one sort of fleeting moment when I thought... 'I'm going to die...' I actually... that crossed my mind, I thought, 'I'm going to die', you know?...

'What I just experienced was Jesus and Heaven, I'm dying – I messed my life up.' And I really truly believed I was going to die that night, and thanks to the amazing care of the medics at the Northern and the treatment, I did survive. I remember speaking to a chaplain that night who gave me his own little cross, a wooden cross, and the next day we spoke for about an hour. I just threw every single question I could at him, about God, about the world, about this broken world and how people can hurt you and everything. And he never faltered once, and he prayed over me, and I did survive.

I've always drunk alcohol from being sort of 19, 20, as you do – you know, you kind of go out with your peers, it's a social aspect of drinking, you go into a pub, you have a laugh, you have a chat, you catch up with people, and it's... The drinking that I experienced then was what I call the safe, contained environment, it wasn't self-destructive, there was no... never any thought of ending my life back then, even though there were hurtful situations that I still had to come across. Basically it's only the last six years or so that I purposely used alcohol... as a destructive weapon. I knew the damage it was doing to me, I know how it can kill you, I know how poisonous it is basically – and yet I still chose to go along that route of using alcohol. I actually wrote a poem called 'Drowning in my Misery' associated with what I'd been through and the alcohol, and I put something in it like 'I find I'm with my friend again...' That was the bottle of alcohol, always hiding behind the bottle. But obviously I realise that alcohol was a very destructive friend – I was using it as a coping mechanism – it's a destructive and destroying liquid and it doesn't make your problems go away, it just

The only real advice I can give to people is if you ever find yourself really struggling with something, no matter how small it might seem to you at the time, is to talk to somebody that you can trust

escalates them. The problems are still there the next day and alcohol... is deceiving. It changes your personality, and you begin to lose your identity. After what I'd gone through, I mean, I felt I didn't know who I was anymore, but with using the alcohol it was like, you know, it was ten times worse. I was like a zombie most days – I just couldn't relate to... anything normal in my life.

The only real advice I can give to people is if you ever find yourself really struggling with something, no matter how small it might seem to you at the time, is to talk to somebody that you can trust. Reach out – it's important to reach out to other people who you know are not going to judge you. And I found that in Drink Wise, Age Well – I'm not judged, there's a lot of compassion and empathy. And the encouragement that we get – the support is amazing.

I've been living in supported accommodation plus a detox centre for 15 months, and I've been abstinent for 15 months, and it's been amazing. I was scared at first when it first got offered to me, you know – I said 'No, no, no, I'm not going in', but obviously God had other plans for me and the right time came for me to go in there, and it's been conducive to my emotional health and my mental health. It's not been an easy journey – recovery. It's ... I've had some real struggles, but I've hung in there and had a focus, and it's the same hope that will be... I've had a hope and a faith and it's the same hope that will be with everybody, hopefully, who's had enough of their former life and can really make a fresh start. It can be achieved, it is an achievable goal – it won't be easy but it can be done. I've now progressed so much – I've got myself a council property and I'll be moving in shortly, which'll really be like home to me. And the things that are going to keep me safe and abstinent are Drink Wise, Age Well on a Wednesday and the activities I've got in my church.



HOPE IS



A whisper in the wind we feel but cannot see,
The strength to carry on.
Waking to sunshine and a cool breeze,
The sense of a bright tomorrow.
Faith and care as you plant a seed
And watch for shoots to grow,
Spring rain patterning the face of a stream,
The loving smile of a friend who knows.



If you would like to find out more about SMART Recovery groups in Sheffield please phone:

Drink Wise, Age Well
(until March 2020) –
0800 032 3723

Sheffield Alcohol
Support Service –
(0114) 258 7553

Sheffield Treatment
and Recovery Team –
(0114) 305 0500

UK SMART Recovery
<https://smartrecovery.org.uk/>

