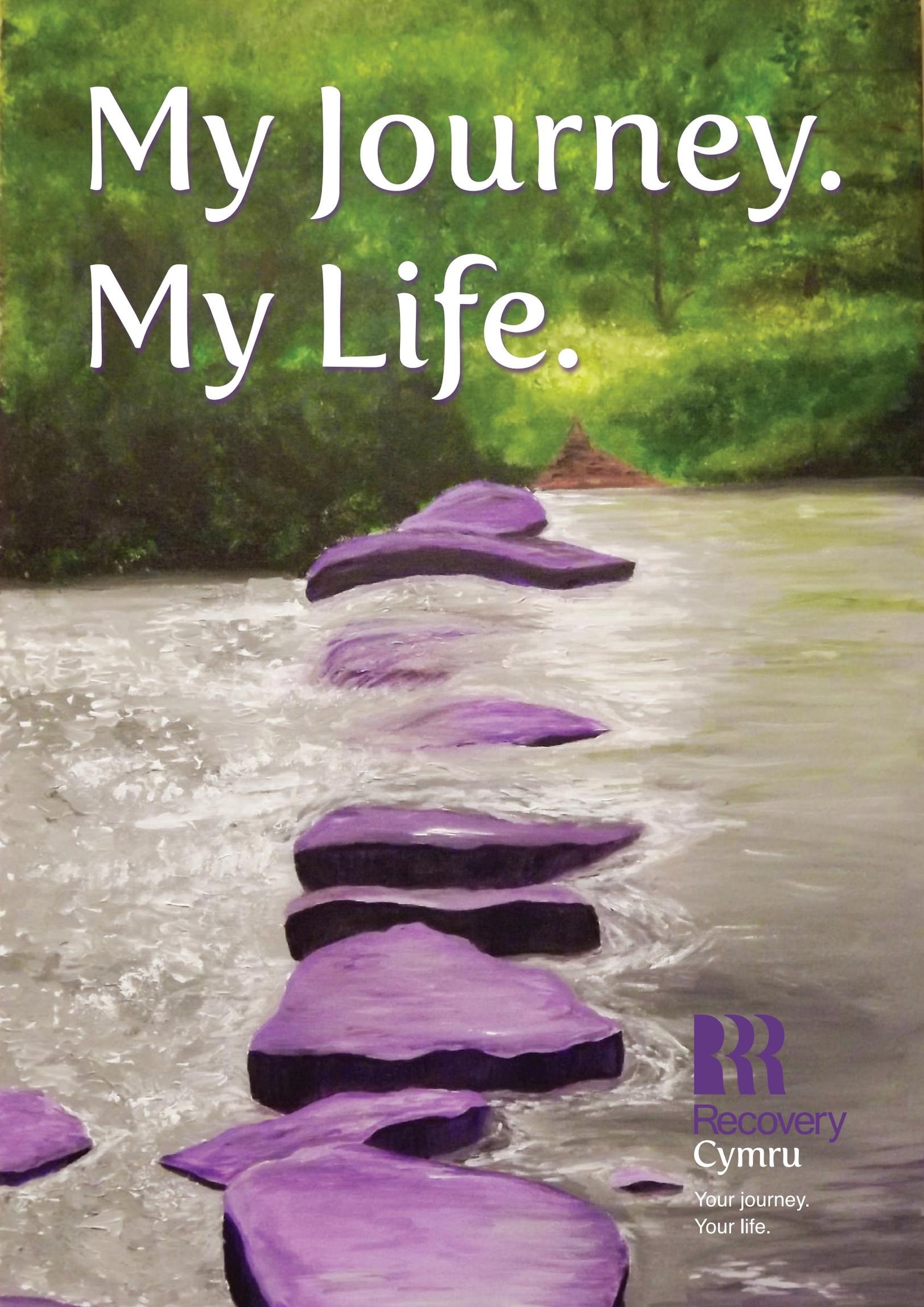


My Journey. My Life.

A painting of a river with a path of stepping stones. The stones are a vibrant purple color, contrasting with the natural tones of the water and the lush green forest in the background. The water is depicted with white foam and ripples, suggesting a gentle flow over the stones. The overall style is soft and painterly.

RR
Recovery
Cymru

Your journey.
Your life.

Our Vision, Values and Mission

Our Vision:

A recovery community where people recover from drug and alcohol problems. A community based on support, hope and opportunity which values individuals the process of recovery and believes recovery is about improved quality of life.

Our Values:

We believe in the reality of recovery and in the power of shared experience and support. Our approach is based on community, participation and independence. We believe that everyone has the potential to recover from drug and alcohol problems and our activities are based upon the following principles; hope, choice, empowerment, inclusion, understanding, support, enjoyment and acceptance.

Mission Statement:

Recovery Cymru believes in developing and strengthening communities of people recovering from drug and alcohol problems. People are empowered to initiate and continue their recovery journey, to achieve fulfilment, to explore their skills and interests and to improve their quality of life. Through the power of shared experience and understanding, people can support themselves and others. Recovery Cymru is also part of a wider recovery movement in Wales and is a champion for the Recovery agenda in the UK.

Our philosophy:

We value people and believe that all people should be treated with respect and dignity. We believe that all people have strengths, talents and should be valued in their own right. Our aim is that all people can contribute to our community as well as receive support. We do not define people by their drug, alcohol or any other problem and believe that recovery is possible for everyone and is real. We believe that drug and alcohol problems and dependency can affect anyone. We do not believe it is a fault or defect in an individual. Problems can be overcome and working together as a community all things are possible! We believe that recovery should be fun.

Foreword:

Since Recovery Cymru emerged as a single support group in 2008, we have seen hundreds of members go on to make and sustain positive change. Their own personal journeys through recovery never fail to move us and those that hear them. The stories in this booklet are told by just a few of the voices that have reverberated within Recovery Cymru's walls throughout the years. These stories try to communicate what challenges our members have overcome, what changes they have made, whether there were any key factors that helped and maintained both thinking and behaviour change, and what it means to be in recovery. While highly personal and often brutally honest, the stories contained within these pages continue to motivate and inspire, testament to the indomitable human spirit and capacity for hope and transformation that characterizes it. It is, therefore, with a sense of pride and honour that our members have agreed to share their stories here, with the intention of offering hope and inspiration to anyone experiencing difficulties with substance misuse, and the realisation that recovery is possible.



Elaine Alford

Rebuilding a Life



How many times have I heard people say, “If I put as much effort into staying sober/drug free as I did when I was using, it would be easy”? In my opinion this isn’t true. It is very easy to become an addict, otherwise why would we do it? Addiction is a choice, true, but when you are in the grip of addiction it certainly doesn’t feel like a choice. Logic goes out the window and common sense is nowhere to be found.

Giving up is hard, it takes all of your strength and reserve just to stay in some sort of control. Even then things are chaotic, thought patterns are altered and things don’t make sense.

My relationship with alcohol started several years ago. I was never a heavy drinker. I

drank socially and always in company. Then looking back on things, a series of events took place which started that slow decline. I was sort of aware that things were getting out of hand when I started to isolate myself. I was under a lot of pressure at work and didn’t want to admit to myself or to others that I was drinking as much as I was. I would joke about it to colleagues, saying

“I have learned that there is always hope, along with hard work, determination and a complete strength of mind to change.”

that I had drunk a bottle of wine the previous evening, to which the reply would be, “what, just the one?” Unconsciously, this was giving me the green light to drink more! I eventually left work

due to ill health, a very fair way of giving me the sack. I was angry and in total denial.

Things went from bad to worse. I lied to myself and my family and thought I could cope with my addiction. How wrong can you be? Finally, I had to hold my hands up and admit to my GP that I had an alcohol problem. Since then, I have experienced every emotion in the book.

My lowest moments were the contempt I saw from my son, and the heart-breaking helplessness of

my daughter.

It’s been a long journey from there to where I am now. There have been many slips and absolute moments of despair, but I have learned that there is always hope, along

with hard work, determination and a complete strength of mind to change. I have had a lot of help along my road of recovery, and appreciate each and every organisation that have been involved, including counsellors, mental health nurses and hospital staff, without whose belief I would not be here now. Most of all I've got to thank my amazing daughter, who never lost faith in my ability to beat this terrible addiction.

One organisation stands out for me: Recovery Cymru, their non-judgemental/peer led approach was something I hadn't experienced before. I wasn't quite sure what to expect when I entered their doors. I received a friendly welcome and a place to chat with other people who were or had been in the same position as myself. Through their relaxed and unpressurised environment I have been able to progress at my own pace. They have given me the opportunity to re-establish qualities and skills that I thought I would never use again. They have opened doors to training and a social network that I can dip in and out of when I want to.

I am now rebuilding my life. I have changed the way I think about a lot of things: life doesn't come to you, you have to go out and grab it with both hands; be kind to yourself and others and don't be too quick to judge.

Sober



*I feel quite good now, what can this be?
What's all this goodness doing to me?
What no hangover? What no dread?
Day by day a clearer head,
I sleep not on a sofa, I sleep now in my bed,
Looking for life not wishing to be dead.*

*Knowing what happened the night before,
Not cringing and fearing a knock on the door.*

*No longer scared to walk down my street,
Afraid of people I've upset I might meet.*

*No more of that crap, no not for me,
I'm gonna make it, just wait and see.*

–Gail

Andrew's Story

By Andrew Sims



During my late teens and early twenties I'd been quite a heavy drinker. I liked to drink. What's more, I didn't recognise this at the time, it gave me some of the confidence I lacked in myself. I'm a Christian and when I came out a lot of my friends and my Church didn't want to know me. I decided after university to immerse myself in my work and began a career in retail management. I climbed the career ladder very quickly and soon I had moved to London. I had a great job, a nice car and a beautiful home. I soon met a man I thought the world of but who had a bit of a temper – he enjoyed a drink but not as much as I did. My job became more stressful in London and I worked very long hours and when I came home I drank a couple of bottles of wine to

help me switch off – I would usually pass out in a haze of exhaustion and drunkenness, but was always up for work the next morning. I was trying to build a social life with my boyfriend but it was difficult as he could sometimes be angry and sometimes be quite cruel. It didn't matter though I'd just get drunk and shrug it off. I started having a glass of wine with my lunch when I was working and occasionally I'd fill a disposable coffee cup with wine and drink it on the way home from work in the car.

My job became increasingly stressful and I was, unbeknownst to me, suffering from depression. I left my job in retail and started working part-time as an administrator at a London University. The job was great but the pay wasn't and my lifestyle felt compromised. I still drank very

heavily and was becoming increasingly depressed.

I was headhunted for a job as the corporate manager of Disney Theatrical Productions in the West End. The pay was fantastic and I thought a new job with great money was the best way to cheer myself up and if I had that job I'd be much happier and probably stop drinking. I got the new job but I was still drinking very heavily – and I couldn't stop bingeing. I now started drinking on the bus on my way home from work. And in the theatre culture it wasn't long before I started drinking at work. My boyfriend left and I ended up having to go on sick leave. My doctor said it was "nervous exhaustion" but it was actually the start of a breakdown. I went back to work and was asked to accept a "leaving settlement" on my

first day back. I then fell into a several week binge. Relatives who lived near to my London home invited me to stay at their house as I was so unwell, and after trying to drive there under the influence I stopped the car and passed out in the back seat. I heard my sister and my cousin on the phone asking about where I was and I described a shopping centre car park. Dad's cousin came and found me and took me back to their house. I was a wreck. My ripped tracksuit was dirty and soiled, I hadn't showered, washed or shaved for weeks and I was steaming drunk. By now I was having withdrawals from the alcohol on a daily basis but didn't know what it was. I only knew that another drink would stop me feeling sick. My parents were on holiday in France and were telephoned to come back immediately. They travelled back and drove straight to London. I was badly withdrawing. They drove me back to their house near Newport and then I was admitted to a secure psychiatric unit with what was later described as a nervous breakdown. I didn't know much at that time, I didn't know who I was a lot of the time or where I was but I knew that I had to have another drink.

My thoughts were becoming darker and I started to think the world would be a better place without me. I was diagnosed with bi-

polar disorder and started lithium treatment but I was still drinking. I wasn't very consistent with the pills so the doses kept increasing and the anti-depressants got stronger – and I kept on drinking. My parents tried all ways to get me to control my drinking but I couldn't. After a long time and several failed projects to get me back on my feet, my parents were forced to talk to me about leaving their home. It had become clear that they couldn't make me better with kindness and my siblings had justifiable concerns about their children coming to visit their grandparents in the company of a drunken Uncle.

I wrote to the council telling them I was homeless and was put in a hostel. I was told it was a hotel – at least, the word “hotel” appeared in the business name. I thought this would be great; I was going to live in a hotel. So I packed my belongings and prepared to go there. I'll never forget that journey. My dad was telling me I shouldn't have taken the things I'd packed. He said I wouldn't need my iPod, laptop and the expensive clothes I'd packed but I didn't listen. Within 24 hours all but my dirty underwear had been stolen when other residents broke into my room. I was offered all sorts of new and “exciting” drugs, so social services intervened saying I was too vulnerable to stay there. I was housed immediately and quite looked forward to moving to

Blaenavon. I thought a little stay in somewhere quiet and semi-rural would be just the thing – life got worse and I got beaten up twice. I was, by now, physically dependant on alcohol and a total recluse.

Sometime later a friend intervened and helped me to move to Cardiff; and over the next few years I started to get help. I had support workers all of a sudden, from the Salvation Army and I had a mental health support worker too. They were, and no doubt still are, fantastic, but as I started to wake up to the extent of the problem I tried on more than one occasion to take my own life. My support worker tried to convince me that I should go to CADT for counselling but I can be stubborn and bloody minded when I want to be. She suggested I go, not to address the alcohol problem but, to confirm to myself and those around me that there was no problem. It worked! However, acknowledging the problem is only the first step. By January 2012 I was unable to leave the house without a chaperon and drinking 4-6 bottles of wine a day. I lost the capacity to ingest solid food and had to attend the GP daily for injections of Pabrinex (a high potency supplement for people who are malnourished through alcoholism). At this point the GP told me that if I wasn't going to stop I should start saying “goodbye” – as once people reached this

stage, they had not long left for this world. I was not likely to live until Christmas.

My parents arrived one day with a delivery of wine to keep me going – the fits I suffered if I stopped drinking invariably hospitalised me and risked being fatal. I had already started to go into withdrawal when they arrived. My mother recognised the signs and told my father to bring me a drink. He went out to the car and fetched a bottle. I was shaking so violently that I couldn't hold the drink so my mum held my head while my father poured wine down my throat. Moments after that I was "fine" again; the sweating, retching and shaking stopped. My mum later told me she had felt like she was poisoning me. We'd already buried one relative because of alcoholism – I was suddenly determined not to put my parents through the same thing as my aunt had been through with her son. That was the start of my belief that I could and should recover.

I was offered a date in June for detox. I begged the hospital to allow me to detox sooner – the daily struggle to remain drunk enough not to fit was proving too much and I felt like I was dying, if not already dead. I did wait until June 6th 2012 and was admitted to the care of the Adfer Unit at Whitchurch Hospital. After a shaky first few days I started to feel better, I felt alive again. I

was bouncing off walls with excitement because I felt well for the first time in years. I found out about Recovery Cymru (RC) while I was on the ward and went straight from the hospital to RC. I was treated with a respect I thought I'd lost the right to and the groups and the community feel really helped me. I became slowly aware that as I got better and started doing things I enjoyed, I wanted to recover not just for the sake of my parents but now to carry on doing the things I was doing for me! This is when recovery really took hold!

Eventually my friends & the staff at Recovery Cymru started to encourage me to explore life outside the recovery bubble and I joined a book club, a cake club and I started going to Church again. I was welcomed by communities of people who didn't judge me. There were teething problems – I felt like I was reliving my teens – but it was finally time to grow up and start learning to deal with problems and issues in a new way! Moments of insecurity and self-doubt became less frequent and over time so did the urges and cravings. I used Antabuse to help me stay off alcohol at first and slowly began to reduce. The groups I attended at RC helped me to deal with the past and face the future with a new-found confidence. Finally I was enjoying life! I decided to apply

for a job with Recovery Cymru in the hope they would give me some useful feedback for when I went for a job outside and was astounded to get the job! I've been working here for over 2 years now. Not long after I started I got a dog and 3 months later I met a fantastic guy. I'm living in the present and exploring the future safe in the knowledge that I've used RC to build a stable foundation for my recovery and an armoury of tools to help me deal with any problems and issues I face maturely and without a crutch. I've found a bigger family of friends and, for the first time, feel my life is truly very rich! There have been moments – don't get me wrong, where I've been tempted but I'm also equipped to manage those moments and able to seek and access support when it's needed.



Amanda

From heroin to heroine

At the age of two and a half my mum gave full custody of me to my dad but kept my two elder sisters, I didn't have any contact or see her again until I was seventeen, it took a long time for me to realize that she had her own issues and couldn't cope.

I grew up thinking there was something wrong with me, that I was unlovable, I first used alcohol to cover up the ugly feelings I had about myself. Alcohol gave me the confidence to mix with others, be the life and soul of the party, it helped me to exist and get through the day. Although alcohol appeared to give me confidence it also seriously impaired my judgement and introduced me to the negative side of the momentarily positive experience. In order for people to like me I began acting out of character, doing

crazy things.

Whilst studying at college to be a nursery nurse I met a guy many years older than myself, I was only nineteen at the time and mid-way through my studies. I became totally smitten by this new man in my life, having no idea he had an alcohol and heroin problem, by the time I did I was completely in love and naively thought I could help him get off the stuff. It didn't happen, within months I was taking heroin myself and failed the course I so loved.

The man I cherished with all my heart became extremely violent. I was paranoid, thought it was entirely my fault, if only I was tidier, kinder, more thoughtful, less stressed the violence would stop. My life by now was spiralling out of control. It wasn't long before I began

intravenously using fifty pounds worth of heroin a day. I was also paying for my partner's heroin habit. When I discovered I was pregnant with my first son I felt elated, over the moon with excitement and found the strength to stop using.

Three days after giving birth to my beautiful baby boy his father beat me up badly in full view of all those on the maternity ward. Social services were informed and on the day I was meant to bring my child home, I learned that the authorities wanted to place him into foster care for his own safety as it was agreed it would not be safe for us to reside with his father, luckily I was able to keep my son by going into a mother and baby unit.

Inevitably I ended up going back to my partner, soon got

back on the drugs, started selling myself and shoplifting to fund both of our one hundred pounds a day habits.

Falling pregnant once more I took the decision to hide the pregnancy, having no antenatal care as I was so frightened of having both my children taken from me this time. Seven months into the pregnancy my children's father broke my coccyx (tail bone) which forced me to go into an early Labour. Social services came back into our lives and I was put on a methadone programme straight away.

Somehow I managed get some normality back into my life, by getting myself together again. Unfortunately I still hadn't dealt with all the negative

feelings and emotions I had about myself, I really didn't

like myself; in fact by now I hated myself.

Within months of social services taking a step back I began using drugs and alcohol yet again, alongside my partner, who once more finished up by assaulting me severely in the middle of the street. I didn't feel as if I wanted to press charges but the police had seen enough and had witnesses so they went ahead anyway and he was sentenced to eighteen months in prison. It was at this point that I decided I needed to change my life for

the better. I would never have been able to do so if I had stayed with the father of my two boys so with the help of Social Services we found a rehab centre in Cardiff catering solely for woman and their children. I realised from the moment I stepped into Cardiff that I would never ever want to go back to Essex, I loved it in my new found home and my boys and I flourished. On reflection I now realise I had put all my effort into being a good mum and put my ill held feelings about myself on the back burner without dealing with them.

Six months after leaving rehabilitation I met and fell head over heels in love with a guy who was another heroin

addict. It was a road I knew so well and became hooked quickly, only this time around it was more destructive than ever before. Fourteen years passed in a daze with this man by my side and I had brought two more beautiful children into the world. By the time my boys were aged eleven and thirteen, and my girls four and two, my heroin addiction was at its worst. I had also added Vodka to my addictions. My whole life revolved around drinking and using heroin.

Looking back I have no idea how I managed to keep

my children for so long, I drank to function and used heroin to function too (or so I thought). I would lay down all day in my flat with the curtains shut, not washing, cleaning or showering. Life became too much to bear so I took a massive overdose and found myself being cared for in the intensive care unit. The only visitor I had happened to be a social worker; she wanted me to sign my boys over into their care, telling me that if I didn't co-operate they would get a court order and I wouldn't get them back. My heart felt as if it had been torn in two, the one thing I had kidded myself I was (being a good mum) had now slapped me in the face, and my lovely boys were now

in the care of social services. My girls had to have a responsible

adult living with them, so their dad moved back in. Two heroin addicts together is a recipe for disaster, the dreaded drug habit got noticeably worse and so did my alcohol addiction.

I felt bereft and unable to live with myself. The realisation set in that what my mum had done to me I had done to my own children, I had let them down. Just before I decided to go into rehab again I was charged with being drunk in charge of a minor. I knew if I didn't take some drastic action I would lose all contact with my children

"The real ME has emerged and I am embracing life with all I have, with so much to offer and a great deal to give back."

and end up dead. I wanted a happy fulfilling life but didn't think I deserved it. I wanted my children to be proud of me not angry, hurt and disappointed.

My key worker found a rehabilitation centre only twenty-five minutes away from Cardiff. They use a process called CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) which looks at changing your thought processes from negative into positives, and it's a sixteen week residential programme. I threw everything I had into learning this process and more, as I knew this was my last chance. If I didn't embrace this now I would never get another chance, I felt as if I would end up dying sad and alone.

Not only did I do what I had to with the programme, I found SMART™ (Self-Management and Recovery Training) online, a self-help and personal development community, attending all the online meetings whilst in rehab. I also trained as a facilitator and I started the first SMART™ face to face group in South Wales in the rehabilitation centre. On leaving the rehab centre I was armed with the knowledge that if I were to succeed this time I needed to feel valued, set goals and achieve. One of the goals I had planned was to walk up Snowden two weeks after leaving I am proud to say "I did it" On the journey I met Andrew and Sean from



Recovery Cymru (RC) a mutual-aid recovery community in Cardiff. After the walk I decided to visit the Recovery Cymru group, I asked to see Sarah Vaile the Founder and Director of Recovery Cymru and enquired if I could start a SMART™ group at their centre.

Within weeks of taking that first step to joining RC, SMART™ was up and running, it started off small but quickly grew considerably in numbers. I also started a child friendly group for RC members; held at Parc Play in Cardiff once a week from 10:00am till 2:00pm. I became a recovery champion for RC, travelling to different agencies promoting RC, I am also vice chairperson of Open-Links which is the forum for Newlink Wales and CARDUF (Current, Abstinent & Recovering Drug Users Forum) whose aims are to give people overcoming problems with

drugs the opportunity to voice their opinions. It also gives these individuals the chance to share their ideas for how to improve services or create new ones.

I am very happy to say that all my children are now back in my care and I have been sober and clean for over two years. I know my children are happy and proud because I am achieving my goals, feel fulfilled and am filled with Joy.

My life is so different to those yesteryears, I finally have a life not just an existence; I also have dreams and goals which I know I can and will fulfil. The real ME has emerged and I am embracing life with all I have, with so much to offer and a great deal to give back.

Recovery has made me the wholesome. Why not take that first step onto the ladder of recovery? I did it, you can too.

Tim Norval

My Journey



At the age of six or seven I was too young to understand that my mam and dad had separated because of my dad's drinking. As a last resort my mam, myself and three of my siblings moved in with my uncle, subsequently I made friends with my uncle's friend's son and would often stay over at his house. Whilst the others slept my uncle's pal plied me with alcohol, it made me feel all funny inside and what this man said and did to me felt nice too. I didn't know any different having been shown videos of men and young children engaging in sexual acts. This arrangement continued for about five years due to the contributing fact that I was being enticed by alcohol and these confusing feelings, along with extra perks of cannabis and money.

At the age of fifteen I began

collecting glasses at clubs in the town centre, getting smashed on the left overs. I knew I was on a destructive path so I decided to change my career for the better. I joined the army a year later at the age of sixteen, it's not so surprising that this didn't work for me and before I knew it I was back to collecting glasses. My boss at the time encouraged me to mix with customers, so I did and they bought me lots of alcohol. Unbeknown to me my eldest daughter was conceived at this dark time in my life but I didn't get to meet her until she was eighteen.

Once again I decided to change my job and managed to secure a career in construction. Unfortunately this meant that, although I worked hard, it also permitted me to afford to drink harder. I

also took a job as a doorman on the weekend, so drink and drugs were plentiful! I met a lovely woman during this period and soon moved in with her and her four year old girl whom I adopted and became her dad. A year later, to add to my delight, my partner gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, my son. It was in the year of 1991 when at the age of fifty-nine my beloved hero, my dad, died a horrible death; he bled from every orifice due to the complications and illness alcohol had bestowed upon him; this didn't seem to stop me though, I still drank heavily; I was twenty-two, fit, strong, and immortal; fifty-nine seemed a lifetime away. It was no surprise that drink had taken its toll and it eventually ruined my relationship, it deteriorated fast, there were so many arguments, violence

and cheating on both sides. It was time for me to leave.

Here began my geographical: I moved to Aldershot where I worked as a civilian dog handler for the Ministry of Defence, it was during this change that I gave Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) a try. Shortly afterwards I met a woman who I became smitten with, I convinced myself I could handle the drink. I was so in love, had a great job and before long I became a dad again and my youngest daughter was born. So much for Control, it didn't happen! I was drinking heavily and, as per usual, with the dreaded booze in tow along came the arguments, then the violence, and inevitably I became separated from my loved ones once again.

All I had left were the protection dogs and booze; even I could see it wouldn't work, and although help was available to me as a civil servant, I quit and left.

I moved to Camberley and found work in a warehouse, but unfortunately I had an accident, made a claim for compensation, and left. During a visit to see my son and daughter I met another woman who I kept in touch with, and when a job came up near Blackwood, I moved in with her. It became the same old story, history repeating itself all over again: drinking, fighting and not paying my way; I soon ended up back on the highway, relocating

once again to my hometown of Cardiff. It was shortly after my return that I received five and a half thousand pounds in compensation which enabled me to get a flat of my own, and of course I pissed the rest up the wall, and often down my leg, trashed the flat and eventually lost it. It was then that the seizures started, my head was spinning, where was I to go now? First it was the streets, then floor space, night shelters, cells and frequent hospital stays through fighting or fitting.

During my stay at hospital the Community Alcohol Team got me into Dyfrig house whilst I was waiting for rehab in Weston-Super Mare. In desperation I handed myself in for an outstanding warrant, I ended up in Cardiff Prison where my Dad was once a screw. Oh the shame I felt! I was pissed on arrival and spent the next four days on the prison hospital wing where they treated me for epilepsy and gave me Valium, I hardly remember a thing.

My place for rehab at Weston Super Mare came up, I was given sixteen weeks of help and I embraced it, got fit, and ran daily. After rehab was completed I went to AA, it was here I met yet another woman and formed a bond. Four months into the relationship we returned to drink due to boredom and complacency. We became dependant on each other for the drink, you can guess

the rest; it even resulted in hospitalisation because of violent acts. We moved to Swansea and married, I believe we committed to each other out of fear of being alone; nevertheless, five months later we separated after spending four years together.

I moved back to Cardiff yet again, by now my legs were not working due to the damage alcohol had caused and what I now know to be called 'cerebellar atrophy'. Same old, I ended up back on the streets, regularly using the facilities at the Huggard centre such as the showers and laundry, access to the nurse and a "care of" address so that I could see a Doctor at the Butetown surgery. Also food and floor space were provided for me in severe weather conditions in hostels, shelters and the frequent visits to hospitals. It was at my stay in the Wallich night shelter that I discovered the Bridge programme run by the Salvation Army. I enrolled on the Bridge program and on completion I got myself my own place; unfortunately with my poor mobility, and maybe a little misguided stubbornness, I did not follow up with a search for any suitable help, help that I now realise was particularly scarce nine years ago, especially for someone using a wheelchair. Subsequently I ended up back on the booze and my legs started to deteriorate fast, however this did not stop

me from obtaining alcohol in large quantities. Ironically, the worse my condition became, the more incapacity and DLA benefits I received. Inevitably, things became so bad I found the only way I could move around was by sliding about on the flat of my arse, shuffling to the toilet, I soon resorted to urinating in an empty bottle or bucket.

It was out of the blue a bed on the Adfer detox ward came up, not feeling at all confident I admitted myself at nine-thirty am on August the twenty-eighth 2007. I was so desperate I even left half a bottle of cider! I was helped into a taxi and physically carried to the ward.

After two weeks of detox I was classed as being neither physically nor mentally fit to be discharged. I now regard the severity of my condition to be very lucky for me and attribute it as the driving force behind my recovery journey. I spent three months on the special ward and during this time the NHS made some adjustments to my flat. I discharged myself in the December and left Adfer with a wheelchair, Zimmer frame and crutches; I was determined to get fit. A brave friend had cleaned my flat and continued to keep an eye on me. Once home I received outreach help provided by support staff from Brynawel rehab, but I needed more than that. There was little in the way of a Recovery system at that time, except maybe

AA, and through previous experience I had decided that was not for me. I realised I had to start filling my time instead of just watching TV and “white knuckling” my way. On consulting with my doctor I was given a referral to my local leisure centre for some much needed exercise, with my own ideas for physiotherapy I started swimming as often as I could, after a few months I moved on and began working out in the gym.

My support worker at the time from the Cardiff Alcohol and Drug Team (CADT) suggested the MILE (Mentoring In Learning and Education) programme. From there I became involved with CARDUF (Current, Abstinent & Recovering Drug Users Forum) and ASFA (Alcohol Services For All). I also completed a peer mentoring training course with Kaleidoscope. I took the chair position with ASFA, representing ASFA at bi-monthly meetings on the supporting service user task group. Also I represented the service users at SPOE (Single Point Of Engagement) later known as EDAS (Entry to Drug and Alcohol Services) development workshops. I also became involved with a group aptly named ‘Tearing Your Hair Out’ and learned some valuable lessons in relapse prevention, coping mechanisms and, above all, involvement in new social networks, which up until now my social skills and confidence

were desperately lacking. I now sit on the advisory panel as a volunteer for NU-HI which offers drug and alcohol awareness training. All trainers have personal experience with drug and alcohol abuse and through NU-HI I am licenced to use the help packs. It was in 2011 that I became aware of Recovery Cymru after meeting Sarah Vaile at Inroads, we were discussing ideas for Recovery Cymru around the picnic bench in the garden area. Later that year I became chair of AWSUM and presented the 2012 national service user forum.

In July 2012 I became a member of Recovery Cymru after recognising the importance of the role that this organisation can have in people’s recovery journey. A month later I became a volunteer and could barely stay away, such was the atmosphere and genuine warmth and care I encountered.

Today I am extremely happy and proud to be actually ‘Working’ at/with/for or, simply put, “a member of an enthusiastic and dedicated TEAM”. As volunteer coordinator I also have the pleasure of working with an amazing group of people all striving to maintain their recovery, improve their quality of life and raise awareness of recovery, not only among those who need it personally but to the wider community.

In September 2013 I applied



Andrew Williams

Step by Step

My name is Andrew. This is my third month into recovery. I'm feeling quite positive.... this is my story..

I have always been a drinker. Being a rugby boy, I was heavily involved in the drinking culture from the age of about 16, and I was good at it.... Drinking I mean. I don't think it really came all of a sudden, it just sort of creeps up, but it became a major concern for me about 6 years ago, after my mother died. All my worries about money, work and personal issues with my ex just escalated. It all came to a head about two-and-a-half, or three years ago. I think I had a bit of a head-fit, or a breakdown, when I think about it now. Yeah, I went totally off the rails in every shape and form, and it wasn't good.

I eventually came across

Recovery Cymru (RC) as a patient on the Adfer ward and the Therapeutic Day Programme they have on offer there is very pro-RC. They came on the ward to tell us about what they had to offer. Having tried various other places of recovery, as in AA, I found RC was right up my street. I just felt massively comfortable there.

I'd tried to enter recovery before but never quite found success. I was a typical case of the revolving door scenario. I'd been on the Adfer ward three times already and this had been going on for nigh on three years. I now know why I went back so many times: I wasn't ready to accept to myself that I had a problem. In hindsight I think I was going through the motions. I wasn't ready for it, didn't want it and wasn't prepared

to listen or fully take it in. I thought recovery was a load of bollocks, truth be told. Then, on my third, and hopefully last ever, stint on the Adfer ward, I was taken in under less than ideal circumstances: I'd tried to top myself, basically, which I'd also tried to do in the past; I've been in the Llandough poisons unit. Self-harming, basically, cutting myself, that sort of thing.

On my last visit to the ward I didn't sleep for two days. I was taken in on the 22nd of December. I wasn't in a good frame of mind at all. I literally didn't sleep for 48 hrs and I was driving myself insane, as you do, with thoughts circling around my head. Then, eventually, at about 4 in the morning after my second night without sleep, I went to talk to the staff and had a major off-load. I can't quite

remember what I said. I think I was in there for about an hour. Her name was Haver. I'll never forget her. She's a lovely lady. She listened to me, was very calming, gave me words of advice and just put a few things straight with me. I had a few bad thoughts that were going around my head at the time. I was very paranoid. She reassured me that what I was thinking wasn't true, I was just making it up in my head.

The following couple of days, well, they say you have this "lightbulb moment" and I always thought "well when is it going to happen to me?", so fortunately that was when I had that "moment" and it was a lovely feeling! One of the

progress." Excuse the cliché, but actions speak louder than words.

Recovery Cymru has done a lot for me since leaving the Adfer ward. It's fantastic because it's all fallen into place this time around: left the ward, came to RC, I've got a structure, I've got a timetable. I just really think it's a great place to be because everyone is on the same level. We are all like-minded people. You don't have to explain yourself. You're not judged. The people here just get it. So I've jumped in with two feet! I think it's a fantastic place. And now I'm volunteering. I couldn't praise it enough, to be perfectly honest. It's important for

can't drink. I'd never promise anyone that I'd never drink again, but the way I feel at the moment, I have no desire to drink. I need to get back with my kids. I haven't seen my children now, must be getting on for two and a half, three years. I know I'm doing this for myself but they're still a major reason to stay in recovery. I need to keep doing what I'm doing so I can earn their love and respect back and have a good relationship with them.

If I had words of advice for a younger version of myself, before I entered recovery, I tell myself to just persevere, stick with it! As bad as it is, it will get better. This is a massive thing to get your head

"I've learned a lot about myself since my recovery journey began: I've learned that I'm not a horrible person; I can be positive and that people like me. I've got something to offer on a positive rather than a negative note"

first things I did was to phone a few close friends and my father and my sister and so on, who had seen me deteriorate over the last number of years. I just wanted to give them a bit of good news for a change. Initially they were very sceptical, as they should and would be. The one thing I remember doing was not to make any promises. So I said, "I'm not making any promises. I'm not going to promise you the earth, or say I won't do this, that and the other. What I want you to do is to just watch me! See how I am and how I

me to maintain the changes I have made. I'm not perfect and nobody is. I've had down days. I'm on Antabuse and that just takes the choice away. As for the few cravings I've had, because they are few and far between, I'm learning that they don't last forever. They do end, and yes, it's not very nice when you're going through it, I suppose you talk to yourself in a way. As I acquire more tools and techniques I'm learning how to get through. I've learned to be mindful and never get complacent. I accept that I

around when you think you've reached rock bottom and you're in the shit, so to speak. It's important not to wallow in self-pity, and all that nonsense. There really is hope, at the end of the day. It does get better.

As for my hopes for the future, well, I'm a plumber by trade and I'm thinking of having a total change. I want to help others with substance misuse problems. I'm just about to finish the Moving On in My Recovery course, as part of the Footsteps to Recovery Programme and the logical next step to take seems to

be volunteering. I've already worked the reception desk and co-facilitated a group at the centre. I'm going to go on the MILE course at Newlink to equip me with the tools and skills to work in the substance misuse field. I just want to help people and if that turns into paid work that would be wonderful. I want a total change and a fresh start in a positive manner.

What would I tell someone struggling with a substance misuse issue? I wouldn't want to preach, because that wouldn't work with me, so I doubt it would work with anyone else. I'd just say, "Look, I know it's hard, something eventually happened for me and I hope it does for you". I've learned a lot about myself since my recovery journey began: I've learned that I'm not a horrible person; I can be positive and that people like me. Yeah, I'm not a bad person, I am a good person.



Claire's Recovery

I had my first son when I was 16. It was a shock at the time but also a huge thrill. I went on to have my first drink when he was about three years old.

Until I was twenty, the only drug I'd ever tried was to smoke weed. When I was twenty, I met my ex-husband. He was immediately unfaithful to me from the start of the relationship and, when he realised that I was accepting of this, began to reveal his drug addiction to me. He was on poppy tea at the time, which I got quite into.

After a while I felt that poppy tea wasn't strong enough, so I moved onto heroin. At my eldest son's request, my children decided

to go and live with my mum. This was very distressing for me at the time but my main intention behind the move was to get clean.

I slowly replaced the drugs with alcohol which culminated in me ending up in hospital with two brain injuries and a stroke. When I was discharged from hospital I realised that my husband was addicted to butane gas and asked him to leave the house. He refused so I phoned the police who removed him.

After he left my youngest son showed me and my eldest son a carrier bag full of butane gas cans he had taken off him, and a bruise on his side where his father had kicked him. Time

went by and, after about a month, the police called to say that he had overdosed while staying at a homeless hostel. It wasn't a surprise to me but it was to his parents and my children.

A week after his funeral I had my last drink. My relationship with my sons was always difficult, until I went into recovery. It is now great. I am also volunteering at Recovery Cymru, manning the reception desk. It is great to be involved in such an organisation and hope others can learn from my experiences.



Tom Davies

Giving something back



I've had addictive behaviours my whole life. I obsess over anything. Things fascinate me and I'll do things to extreme. There's no moderation and all through my childhood that would be with toys, games. As I got older and went to boarding school, I started drinking and smoking and doing drugs. My first problem was with coke and when I started doing that it just span out of control.

Every bit of money I had went

on it. I noticed quite early that I'd do these drugs with friends, and I'd always want to do more and more and more and more. I'd often be the last one doing it or I'd do it on my own when everybody else had stopped.

"I could never say no, I always wanted more, and that particular drug really got me by the ankles, and it's a dark, dark road."

This sort of progressed and I managed to keep it up for a while, this kind of student lifestyle, then when I got to the third year of university things took a turn for the worse, and I started taking heroin with an ex-girlfriend of mine. I think there's two types of people: there's people who will get offered heroin and they will run a mile; and then there's the other kind,

like me, who will get attracted and excited by it; and then 6, 7 years later here I am with all this chaos in between. It's taken me to some crazy places, crazy countries, very dangerous places, and although the memories and

the stories are important, they're not as important as the other stuff: the effect it's had on me and how I've affected certain people, and what I'm going to do about it. I just could never stop, I could never say no, I always wanted more, and that particular drug really got me by the ankles, and it's a dark, dark road.

I first started taking heroin when I was twenty, within a few months I knew it was bad, things had started falling apart around me very quickly: relationships,

friends, money. I found a clinic, they said that the nearest appointment was about 11 weeks from now, and I was like "What the hell do I do for eleven weeks?" and they said "The safest thing we can recommend is

to carry on using”; so eleven weeks of using that stuff, with a low habit, is long enough to get you deep, deep, deep into a dark addiction. By eleven weeks I was even more addicted, so, of course, I missed that appointment. The journey had begun!

The first rehab I went to was a full year into a full time habit. I did 11 months of treatment in South Africa and then went to primary, secondary and tertiary centres. I stayed there for another year but relapsed again back in England. Then I did a

treatment up in Cambridge a couple of years ago called Focus,

and I lived there for a while. Then I got a job in London and worked full time for a year but was deep into a relapse, so as much as I’d managed to get there every day and put my all into it, I was essentially living two lives. That takes me up to the past six months when I literally lost everything: lost my flat, all my possessions got thrown away, I was literally homeless living at McDonald’s and on the street and doing whatever I could to get money. My parents were at their wits end! They had moved to Cardiff about a year and a half ago while I was still living in London. They found an organisation called Community Reinforcement

And Family Training (CRAFT), and through CRAFT they’d heard about Recovery Cymru. I was told a few simple things like “Look, we are in Cardiff we will help you but only if you are in recovery” I knew I could get up to Cardiff and essentially have another chance, but they wouldn’t help me unless I was on a script, so I had to get a script! That took a while but I managed it, and they’d only support me if I was in recovery, so, I had to stop using! Somewhere inside me the will to want to get better

“Getting off the drugs is easy, I’ve done that countless times, It’s staying off the drugs, developing life into something more socially responsible, more productive. That’s when the work begins.”

was greater than the will to do the drugs. I managed to get myself on a script and I managed to get the last bus up here to Cardiff. Since then I’ve been here I guess things have just taken a turn for the better, I guess.

What attracted them to Recovery Cymru was the emphasis put on an aftercare model approach. You can come here 9 to 5 and feel safe and take part in groups. I came up on the 24th December and by Boxing Day I’d had a member induction and before I knew it I was coming every day. It helps fill the days, I find. It’s given me safe new friends, it’s given me stability, as time has come on, and I’ve

become part of the building, so to speak, it’s given me fresh responsibilities, new projects, some brain food for me to work on, helping out with the web site, for instance. It’s helped me with routine, knowing I’ve got to be somewhere at a certain time. It’s also given me knowledge; I’ve done a few courses here, groups. It’s put me in touch with Footsteps to Recovery, so I’ve done the Footsteps Programme, which was good. I’ve done recovery a few times, a few rehabs, a few clean times, and different

attempts; but they’re doing something different this time, and it’s

working. They’ve given me hope. I’m not scared or worried about the future at the moment. I’m just going with it and things seem to be working.

My previous experience has purely been Narcotics Anonymous, 12 step based. That’s all I’ve done before, and as much as it helped and it gave me clean time, I didn’t really have much of a life attached to that. This place is based on a different model. It’s got more of a social aspect attached to it, more responsibility, there’s no “them and us”. I feel part of something here, whereas before I felt like another number in the system. When

you finish rehab, they just let you out into the world. You just have to tackle it and if you make it you make it and if you don't you trip up. At other centres they offer you an aftercare group, once a week, for two hours on a Wednesday, and that's it for rest of the week. If they had something like this set up, a place you go to everyday, with optional groups, responsibilities, a safe community, then I think the statistics will greatly change.

There are a few things in NA that have stuck in me. One of the things is that I can only keep what I've got right now by giving it back, so if I keep putting things into the system, I should continue to have a happy, peaceful content life. Getting off the drugs is easy, I've done that countless times,

It's staying off the drugs; developing life into something more socially responsible, more productive, that's when the work begins. I feel here at RC I've got the foundations to build that. The way you start off as a member, then, if you want you can volunteer, then volunteering may lead on to something else. It's like you are continually building on yourself. I've become accountable to people, I know now that if I don't carry on and complete a particular piece of work that its going affect the staff, it's going to affect the whole system, it will affect everybody in some way, so, you could look at that as pressure, but in a way it's healthy pressure.

As for the future, I don't know how long it will take, but I want to get back to work at

some point and this is the best place in which to practise that routine. And it's supportive here, I know that I can come here and I can sit down with anybody and talk about what on my mind. I've come to Cardiff and I've got my mum and dad, and I've got this place now. It's nice to know that the few friends I have here are safe friends, they're not the kind who are going to derail my recovery, or jeopardize what I have going for myself. They understand that we're all one and the same in a way. The substance or the drug may be different, but at the core of it we're all from the same family, in some sense. We've all been to certain places and we all want the same thing.



Susie Boxall

My Journey



I thought I would tell you about my own experience as a service user and as a member of the recovery community to illustrate how Recovery Cymru helped me. I have had problems with alcohol use and mental health issues since 1997. I suffered from post-natal depression following

the birth of my daughter, largely due to the domestic violence within my marriage

which I did not share with anyone. I was also extremely anxious so started using alcohol to cope with my anxiety. This set up a very unhealthy dynamic in my mind that I could use something external, i.e., alcohol, to help

life feel manageable.

Mental health issues and substance misuse issues are so closely linked it is difficult to separate them out. However the services are set up separately and service users frequently report that mental health services won't get involved

"I felt much more shame and stigma accessing help for my alcohol problems than my depression. I think there is still a huge misconception in society about substance misuse, anyone can develop problems at any time, and alcohol is so readily available"

until the substance misuse has been treated, and, similarly substance misuse services won't become involved until the mental health problem has been treated. This leads to a revolving door situation for many service users.

I have worked as an Occupational Therapist (OT) in the NHS from 1989- 2013 including 24 years at Velindre Cancer centre. They were able to offer me more support with my mental health issues. There is still very little knowledge or understanding about substance misuse and I feel

there is still a lot of stigma attached. I have always found it much more

difficult to talk about alcohol misuse than depression and anxiety.

Following my post-natal depression I was treated by a Psychiatrist and Community Psychiatric Nurse, which was a massive support. They treated

and helped me manage my depression, and I went back to work after 1 year off.

I also suffered post-natal depression following the birth of my son in 2000 and my marriage broke down, so I started using alcohol more to cope with the difficult situation I was in. Again my depression was treated and I returned to work after a year, but my alcohol use remained an issue. It took me a long time to accept that I had a problem. The acceptance is a critical point because it is only then that you can change your behaviour. I felt much more shame and stigma accessing help for my alcohol problems than my depression. I think there is still a huge misconception in society about substance misuse, anyone can develop problems at any time and alcohol and drugs are so readily available.

I started attending Pen-yr-Enfys, a counselling drop in centre to help people with drug and alcohol problem, in 2007. The counselling I received there was excellent; there was no judgment and my counsellor helped me make changes that I identified I wanted to make. The service was extremely responsive to my changing needs. The biggest challenge is sustaining the positive changes you make as part of your recovery, and when I found I was struggling I was able to access counselling again really quickly.

My counsellor suggested

I attend the support group at Recovery Cymru (RC) in 2010, and it was through him that I became involved with RC. Talking to others, sharing problems and realising that other people were experiencing similar problems, really helped me progress in my recovery. I found, once again, that there was no judgement and people accepted you for who you are, which was extremely liberating. Service users often have very low self-esteem and RC really helps because you are valued for the unique person you are and the skills you have. I was asked to volunteer and facilitate the support group and then the Educational Self-Help group. This really helped build my self-esteem and realise that I do have a lot to offer. I was lucky enough to be recruited to the post of Programme Development Worker in July 2014, and I'm really enjoying my role. It is a big change from working as an OT but OTs have so many transferrable skills that I find I constantly use my OT skills in this role.

I hope this has illustrated how being part of this recovery community has been fundamentally important in my recovery and how I see so many members of the community achieving so many goals and moving forward in their recoveries.





Katy's Story

By Katy Benson

Running as fast as I could, I ripped off my dress, revealing a bright blue playsuit. I grabbed a handful of my hair and tied it off. I hoped this would prevent me from being recognised too easily. I glanced behind my shoulder. I couldn't see my pursuers but I knew they weren't far behind and I could hear sirens blaring in the distance. Looking around and taking in my surroundings, I realised I'd run into a cul-de-sac.

The police would easily find me here. I ran through the garden of the nearest house, and launched myself over the fence of the back garden, straight into a clump of brambles that must've been several feet thick. I cleared myself a space in the brambles, and sheltered there, shivering and not daring to make a sound.

For a moment, I allowed myself to question what my life had come to. My arms and legs were covered in scratches, my hair was a tangled mess - and I was hiding in a patch of brambles.

This moment of self-doubt and self-hatred was replaced

with another feeling. An overwhelming urge to rid myself of these painful and raw thoughts in the only way I knew how. I found myself picking up my mobile phone, dialling a number and whispering "Can you come and get me? And have you still got my raise from earlier? I need a pipe".

My life hadn't always been quite this crazy or chaotic.

I was brought up in a supportive, middle class family with wonderful parents. I've always experienced the world very vividly and richly - I felt others' pain as though it was my own, I often became absorbed with anxiety and self-doubt; and found myself increasingly bewildered and disillusioned by what I saw as the cruelty and harshness of the world I lived in.

I didn't learn how to manage the inevitable disappointments and frustrations that come with everyday life; and found myself trying to escape from the pain and sense of inadequacy I felt, by self-harming and using recreational drugs.

At the age of 16, I left home and began a relationship with an abusive heroin addict. My partner was a master manipulator, an expert in recognising insecurities and

using them to hurt. I started using heroin.

The heroin did not make me feel amazing. The feeling I got from it was not euphoric or blissful. It made me feel numb - but to me, that was just as good. It was a relief from caring. The more it became a part of my everyday life, the more frightened I became of facing the world without it.

I split up with my partner after a few years, and entered into another relationship with an addict.

I started a methadone programme and went on to have a child. I stopped using heroin. My life still felt empty and meaningless and I was beginning to think it would always be that way. After my first child was born, I quickly became pregnant again and my second son - Jay - was born.

After we brought him home from the hospital he stopped breathing for a few minutes. I was terrified, but I started Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and he regained consciousness. He spent a few days in hospital, and was discharged with an alarm that would go off if he stopped breathing.

A week later I was woken by a beeping sound. I glanced over into his Moses basket and saw

that Jay was grey. I grabbed him, put him on the floor and started CPR with one hand whilst phoning an ambulance with the other.

Even then I had a sense that things would be okay. After all, he'd stopped breathing before and been fine, hadn't he?

The ambulance arrived minutes later. At the hospital he was rushed into resuscitation and I followed, still not really comprehending the seriousness of the situation. After 45 minutes I was told that they'd managed to obtain a pulse and ventilate him.

I could have cried with relief and I burst into a smile – I couldn't understand why the nurses didn't share my elation.

The answer came when I met with Jay's doctor. Yes, Jay was on a ventilator. But his brain had received no oxygen for 45 minutes. He was severely brain damaged and would be lucky to survive. If he did live, he would be profoundly disabled. They advised that we consider turning off his life support.

A day later, on the 18th April, we did. Jay died in my arms a few hours later.

The grief I felt wasn't crushing, overwhelming despair. It was a sense of hollowness, of total numbness. I didn't cry once. I felt dead inside.

I went on to have a third child; and I began using drugs again. This time, I used crack cocaine to feel something again, even if that feeling was an artificial high followed by guilt, paranoia and depression.

My usage continued to climb, I was spending hundreds of pounds a day on crack and sometimes using heroin. I became involved with other users, and used with my partner. I began professionally shoplifting to cover both habits.

The further I fell into this lifestyle the more I felt guilt, shame, despair and hopelessness. The worse these feelings got, the more I used to escape them. I made two suicide attempts and was lucky to survive.

My mental health deteriorated to the point that I was admitted to a psychiatric ward. I broke down and cried for the first time about the death of my son. I spent two days solidly howling.

My dad came in to see me. I told him I never wanted to leave, and he said how sad he found it that a 27-year-old woman had a better life in a locked psychiatric ward.

Those words stayed with me long after he left, and I found myself hit with a realisation – I wanted a life! A life that was better than being in a psychiatric hospital!

When I was discharged, I started a day programme at the detox ward of the hospital. On the last day, a guest speaker from Recovery Cymru (RC) came to speak to us and I found myself overwhelmed with emotion at her story.

I cut myself off from my former using associates but I was realising I needed more. I began running and quickly

became hooked. I joined a running club and attended RC regularly. In October 2014, I ran the Cardiff half-marathon raising £600 for RC. When I went into hospital in December to come off methadone, I had messages of support from over 100 people. I was overwhelmed. It was only a year beforehand that I did not have a single friend.

For the first time in my adult life: I had a wide circle of friends; I had hobbies I was passionate about; I had a reason to get out of bed; and a plethora of things I loved in my life. Having lived such an empty and meaningless life for so many years I took nothing for granted, and relished everything.

That is where I am now. Many times I find myself almost in tears when I look at my children's smiling faces as they hug me and tell me they love me; or when I'm running through a beautiful forest with the wind on my face. I never thought: that life could be this good; that I could be happy; or that I could make my children proud.

I've realised that recovery is not about enforced abstinence, it's about a better quality of life – of realising your worth and building a better life for yourself. I feel so grateful and glad to be alive. Life today, with all its ups and downs, is so amazing that the person who wanted to block it all out seems like a different girl.



Jo

My Story

I was living a good life, even though I was a single mother with 3 children. I enjoyed working as a Carer in a Nursing Home and had saved enough to maintain a nice home and a car. I also didn't have to worry about my bills and could spoil my children. I had some really good friends and a good relationship with my mother and brother.

A few weeks before Christmas, I was introduced to a man who seemed lovely. He was funny and sweet and we got along really well. We began seeing each other and my children liked him too.

Then one evening we were having a few drinks at my house with some friends when he told me that he had been in jail for Class A drug offences. He admitted that he took heroin on some occasions. I was a user of amphetamine

at weekends and had tried cocaine a few times but I had never tried heroin.

I was at home with my best friend over Christmas (my children were at their father's) and we noticed a square of foil with some brown stains on it with a larger amount of brown substance on it. I had watched my boyfriend smoke it a few times, and me and my friend decided (as we were drunk) that it would be a good idea to try it. We completely burnt the heroin but had smoked enough to make me feel absolutely amazing. I was extremely sick and itched like mad, but I loved the feeling it gave me. My boyfriend came home later and went absolutely mad at me for smoking it, but he wasn't angry enough not to give it to me again and again and again.

A few days later I woke up

feeling like I had the worst flu ever. My legs were aching so badly and I was hot and cold. My boyfriend informed me that I was "clucking" and if I had some more then that would take the feeling away. This was just the start.

Over the next few months every spare penny I had went on heroin. My children were always fed and in school on time, but they were left with my friends a lot while I went into Ely to score. I went out one night and left my children with a friend when I was stopped by the police. I'd been to Ely to score and I had also been using a large amount of amphetamine. They searched my car and arrested me on suspicion of being under the influence of drugs whilst driving. I was in custody for 23 hours and police raided my house while I was in the

police station. They found amphetamine and other items such as scales and cutting devices. They also found stolen property. I was charged with intent to supply and handling and receiving. I was also informed that, due to the nature of the drug offences and because I was associating with known criminals, my children had been removed from my care and placed with their dad. When I was released from custody my main concern was getting to Ely to score.

I went rapidly downhill after that. I started doing stupid

contact with them. Due to the fact I was not paying my rent, I was also evicted and was homeless now and living in my car and I also sofa surfed some nights. I also lost all the benefits I was receiving for the children and had no income coming in myself. I was shoplifting and going into Ely to score for other people to support my habit. I also robbed a runner in Ely, as I was so desperate.

Their father said that I could spend Christmas day with them as long as my mother was there. I was really excited

himself. I was so ill while I was there and decided that I had had enough. I took every single prescription tablet I had and also loads of Valium, all his Antabuse and drank the last of his cider. I don't remember very much from that night apart from an ambulance coming.

I was released a few days later but I still wasn't well so my friend lent me money to go and score. This went on for a few weeks and I am ashamed to say that I even shared the heroin with my friend. If he was using I would always have

“I went rapidly downhill then. I started doing stupid things to get a few quid; I was breaking into cars, driving local criminals while they were out doing stuff at night and my boyfriend was also dealing. All I really cared about was having enough Heroin.”

things to get a few quid; I was breaking into cars, driving local criminals while they were out doing stuff at night and my boyfriend was also dealing. All I really cared about was having enough heroin.

I was arrested several times more, all for drug related offences and appeared in court twice. I was extremely lucky and got two 2 year suspended sentence and fines. My boyfriend ended up being sentenced for murder over £10 he had lent to someone and he wanted it back. He received an indefinite sentence.

Social services were involved as I was considered a risk to my children and was not allowed any unsupervised

about this and as I had spent all my money on heroin, Llamau very kindly donated me a few gifts for them. When I woke up Christmas morning, I realised I did not have enough heroin to last me the day, so I had a little bit in the morning just to take the edge off my cluck and saved some for later. I used the last of it sneakily in my mother's bathroom but it wasn't enough to stop my cluck. Within a few hours I was in agony in my mum's house in front of my children. My mother was furious with me and asked me to leave. I was devastated and left in tears. I went to stay at my friend's flat. He was a lovely guy who had alcohol problems

a supply and someone to go in and score with me that was the way I saw it.

My mother saw the state of me again and broke her heart. She dragged me to my doctor's the one day and begged them to help me. My doctor agreed to put me on a shared care programme and I had to wait for a while until I got a prescription.

I received amazing care from Newlands Street and my doctors. Once I was on a methadone script my life became much easier. Instead of being ill all the time and trying to find money to score, I was actually stable. I was on 130mls of methadone to hold me per day. I stayed on quite

a high level of Methadone for about 6 months until I was confident enough to start reducing. I did this very gradually and when I was on about 90mls I enrolled myself on a computer course at The People Business in Barry. I gained my ECDL qualification and began volunteering at The Vale Volunteer Bureau as an admin assistant. I had been working there for a few months when I had to type up an advert for Peer Mentoring and I decided that I would like to try this myself. I completed the Peer Mentor training a few weeks later, as I did an intensive course, and then found paid work as a Senior Peer Mentor with the Kaleidoscope project. I am now working full time for Recovery Cymru, supporting people whose lives have been affected by substance and alcohol misuse.

I have my children to stay every weekend now and have a good relationship with them. My relationship with my mother is also really good now too. I am also happy to be involved with a recovery community that is both welcoming and non-judgemental, helping people out of the kind of chaos and mayhem I was once in.

All at Sea

~~~~~  
*Sometimes I feel out of my depth,  
Like I'm drowning in a crowd,  
Feeling scared to death.  
Sometimes I feel it's my last breath.*

*Cannot find anything left,  
Was it because I didn't listen  
Or was I intentionally deaf,  
I'm just floating like a cloud  
With too little to invest, I need some rest.*

*I'm walked around as if dead  
Like I'm waiting to be blessed  
I'm a passing thought for anyone to recollect  
I might make a footnote  
On somebody's text  
Wish I was a fly on a wall  
Then I'll be made up in the press.*

*It's all gone to hell,  
Wish I didn't waste my time ignoring that  
school bell.*

– Derek

# Introducing Ingrid

by Jacqui Grogan



Hello, my name is Ingrid and I would like to share with you a pint-sized portion of my life experiences, and how I came to be in recovery.

I was born into an alcoholic family and am an alcoholic myself. For me, being the daughter of an alcoholic mother meant many things: it meant disruption, instability, fear, anxiety and neglect. Nothing in my life felt secure, I was emotionally stunted, through no fault of my own, and became unable to express my true feelings.

Instead of being nurtured by a loving comfort blanket as a child, I was draped in a shawl of fear. I really did not know any different, I assumed, trusted, that everyone on earth lived in this alienated way. It was not until my teenage years that realisation set in, the environment I

lived in was toxic, completely dysfunctional and dangerous to my wellbeing.

I swore as a young child that I would never touch alcohol; this was a promise I soon learnt I could not keep. I first took a sip of the adults poison entitled alcohol at the tender age of fourteen. At that moment in time I remember feeling painfully insecure, so terribly lonely and empty inside, devoid of any love or kindness, I just wanted to be accepted. My identity and self-worth was non-existent so I turned to the one thing that had already destroyed my childhood... alcohol!!!

With alcohol inside of me I became fearless, confidence oozed from every pore and no longer did I feel as if I were a boring creature. I began to embrace the gregarious character that emerged when

I took a tippie or two; for the first time in my short life I could let go and not care what others thought of me, I became a clown and had the confidence to chat up women I felt attracted to.

It wasn't long before I discovered that whilst alcohol lifted me up when intoxicated (meaning in a poisoned state), in sobriety it triggered a depression in me, and a deep seated hatred of myself began to rear its hideous head. This gruesome skull became my guide, accompanying me all the way, steering me through the highways and byways until eventually we came to the junction marked 'The Road to Destruction'. Soon I was no longer able to hear the voice of reason so I listened to the hideous head instead and took this thoroughfare. On this road I became so destructive,

hurting myself both physically and emotionally became a regular pastime, deep scars began to form in every nook and cranny. Many times on this highway I found myself waking up in a police cell after being arrested because of my companion termed alcohol. I was hospitalised many times too.

It was during a particularly vicious self-harm episode, and waking up still yearning for my trusted buddy alcohol, that I realised how insane my life had come to be.

Because of this terrifying insight I managed to step off the road to destruction. With the support of friends, family and numerous alcohol services, I was able to function

at the time, except for Sean. I think I would have felt a bit intimidated otherwise, as I was in a vulnerable state of mind. Sean was so easy to talk to, I found him to be very helpful, compassionate and supportive.

Becoming part of the Recovery Cymru community has enabled me to feel as if I belong, like a happy fragment of society once more. I have made new friends, am able to structure my day by getting out instead of hiding myself away, and enjoy participating in different activities which help with my feelings of self-worth.

Now I know I can only take one step at a time, staying sober one day at a time. I also



*“Becoming part of the Recovery Cymru community has enabled me to feel as if I belong, like a happy fragment of society once more”*

in the land of the living once more. I learnt that alcohol is a cunning, devious entity, so to distract its ugly voice and hopefully eliminate it from my life forever I began to practice positive affirmations constantly, on a daily basis.

I was abstinent for a very long time, until one day, for whatever reason, I relapsed. It was during this setback that I discovered Recovery Cymru. One day I summoned up the courage to walk through their door, thank goodness nobody was in the building

realise it is support from other recovering addicts that I have needed as they understand the ups and downs of life and sit in non-judgement.

Recovery Cymru has gifted me greatly; I am so much in gratitude to them and hope to continue to enjoy building many bridges that may help us all in crossing over the rivers of emotion and stepping onto to the path of freedom.

Many thanks for taking the time to read my story.



# Dave Lockyer

## My Experiences

My name's Dave and I've been in recovery since December the 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014. This is the first time I've really recognised that I'm in recovery. I've never come across the phrase before in this context. It's a great concept, just realising what's out there. Having done the Footsteps to Recovery, you learn about yourself so much on that programme. The realisation that significant problems have been going on in reality for about 30 years, but then not really medically significant until 2002. In that time this is the only time I got caught by the system; but the focus for me on the Footsteps programme was the Moving on in My Recovery course, I learned a lot about myself on that course. I did an awful lot of writing, so there were some spectacular revelations and ways of thinking that I hadn't

engaged in before; things I would have hidden or blocked consciously or subconsciously, it all came out. Specifically one of the first revelations I had was that my recovery started on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December when I left hospital in Southampton, but at the time I had no concept of recovery and no concept of life after drinking.

One of the things I did do on the footsteps was to work out how many times I've been hospitalised due to drinking. I'm not trying to glorify anything but I worked out I had been hospitalised 8 times and I can't quite remember the number of home detoxes. They'd give me the diazepam but there was no aftercare so to speak, so after a couple of months it was straight back into the old routine. That's what is so miraculous this time, there is so much more

support, some of which, no doubt, would have been available back then, but it wasn't flagged up, it wasn't advertised and it certainly wasn't promoted.

I don't know how it all started. I've always been a big drinker, I didn't grow up in a drinking family. Very much middle class: wanted for nothing, only child, so I was spoiled in some senses. I'm adopted, but that's never been an issue as I was only eight days old. It all started in school really. In the mid-eighties we used to go down the three arches. In school you tend to split into groups and I'd hop between the brainy students, the swots and then the slightly rebellious side who would go down the Three Arches, a pub in North Cardiff.

I had a passion for rugby and began to play at youth

level, immersing myself in the drinking culture that surrounds the game. I just loved it! I liked drinking and I liked getting drunk. It was during a year out between school and university when I took a job at a solicitor's, that I first began to drink every day, and soon noticed that I could take on a lot of booze, an ability that I now wish I did not have. Then I went to university in 1988 and it was very much part of the student culture to go out every night drinking. It was beer and spirits. I was never alone but as I started to go through university I realised that I was drinking all the time but with different people, so no one saw how much I was drinking. I should have drawn up a rota. I only did my PhD to carry on with the rugby, as Loughborough is a big sporting university. I was drinking through that, but I could have easily got thrown out. I've always been a high functioning alcoholic, for want of a better word. I suppose that's when it became super problematic.

It was during the late 90's that I first took to drinking on my own. I'd bought my first house and I celebrated that with Jameson's so I was drinking that for a while. In those days sherry seemed to be a base, you could get a relatively quick buzz out of it and it didn't take that long. But I drank quite a lot

of it quite quickly and then from there it just escalated completely.

2002 was my first detox. I stayed on at Loughborough to do research and the contract ended in August so I just started drinking on my own, and that was when I was drinking litres of vodka a day. Around November at that time I had my first experience of withdrawal. It was hallucinations, panic attacks, which looking back were relatively mild. I was driving home to Cardiff and it happened. I must have looked white as a sheet and I couldn't stop shaking. My mother got me to the GP, He gave me a prescription for diazepam. I

*"The withdrawals were unbelievable, the hallucinations! I had the fire brigade out, I had the police out a number of times because I was being attacked and there was an army in the back garden"*

couldn't sleep. Hallucinations were visual, they weren't auditory. I was looking out my bedroom in November, and I saw 2 men beating up a neighbour who lived opposite. Of course that wasn't happening but I remember I got in the car, reversed it so I could just see. It was a cul-de-sac, so there was no traffic around and there was nothing there, but that was when I got acute sensitivity to sound and that was the most terrifying symptom of withdrawal.

Fast forward a few years to 2004 and things had

started to get completely desperate: I was hospitalized twice, once in February, once in May. The withdrawals were unbelievable, the hallucinations! I had the fire brigade out, I had the police out a number of times because I was being attacked and there was an army in the back garden. The police took me to my GP who gave me a couple of tablets of lorazepam and he tried to get me go to the mental health unit. I didn't know what to think, I was all over the shop. Later that night I had hallucinations again and called the ambulance and the police and ended up in Leicester Royal Infirmary. My mum was begging me to come

home, money was running low, and I was borrowing against the house. I was due to come home the end of May, but then I was drinking again, then before the Friday I was due to come home, I was hospitalised again! I'd just stopped drinking and I didn't really appreciate the severity of what I was doing back then. There were hallucinations, I remember sitting on my bed and sand was dripping through a hole in the ceiling which obviously wasn't there. Looking out and there were people singing in a

tree in a neighbour's garden - I can remember the song- we are the teeny weenies, or something like that. I could hear people laughing and I had panic attacks. I ended up at the mental health unit of Leicester General and that was my first supervised conscious detox.

But still I carried on drinking! I eventually came into contact with the CAU and they did a home detox, which was very traumatic. They come out to your house 5/6 times a day and they give you a lot of diazepam, like 10 mg a time. Subsequent to that I did the Therapeutic Day Programme, as I said, there was nothing afterwards, I had a couple of sessions with the CADT. Everything went well, I started going to the gym again, during that period I made myself bankrupt and I had no option, I owed far too much money, I had no assets! I remember at the Therapeutic Day Programme we were talking about what can change and I remember thinking, "I'll sort my money worries out and I'll be fine and have no reason to drink", and of course that's rubbish...so I carried on!

I ended up working for Admiral and was quickly promoted to assistant manager, but even though that I carried on drinking; periods off work to indulge in bouts of drinking oscillated between a series of horrendous home detoxes. Even when I did work and we'd

drink sociably I'd have one or two pints just to be polite and then I'd head straight for the cocktails or the shorts. The intention was to get drunk, not for the flavour. Looking back it was what could get me most drunk the quickest. Eventually they kindly gave me the option to resign rather than get the sack. I remember at the time thinking "This isn't fair I could do them for wrongful dismissal". But this is the kind of distorted thinking you get when the drink has got to you! But it was never work that caused the problem, I was never stressed. It was my addiction, I never drank to release any pressure. I enjoyed drinking and I loved being drunk. I could watch something on the telly and fantasize about playing for Wales or being in Iron Maiden, it was just pure escapism!

Last year was the nadir, my mum was not very well and I bought a caravan down in the Gower. Looking back it was somewhere I could go and drink. She never came home from hospital, she deteriorated and had to be placed in a home. I had to be rescued by friends, so I went back home to Cardiff with the dog, and then drank solidly until December the 12th. I could hardly walk! A neighbour decided that I'd had enough, I just couldn't go on and he eventually got me into a clinic in Southampton. When I came back from Southampton amongst the detritus was a

letter from the CAU, saying I had an appointment with Neil Jones on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, I went to that but could hardly walk. He put me onto the Therapeutic Day Programme, through them I went on the Footsteps to Recovery and through a combination of the both I became acquainted with Recovery Cymru.

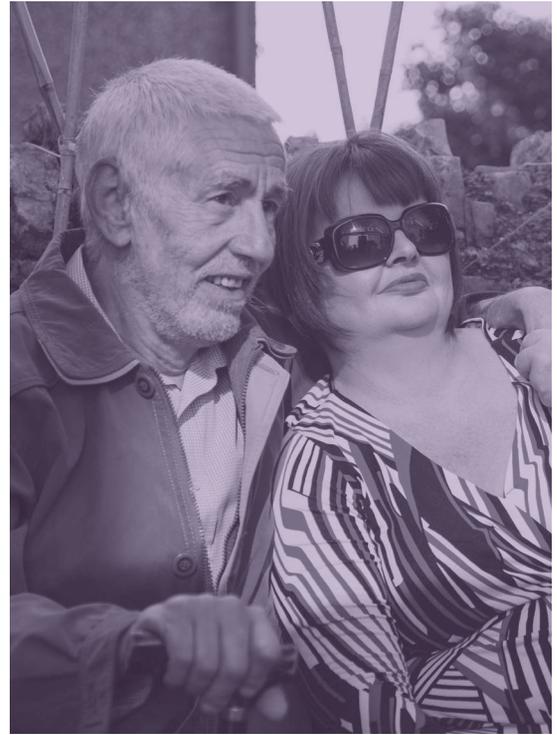
Recovery Cymru was, for me, the focus during the Therapeutic Day Programme, John Edwards couldn't speak highly enough of the place, he kept banging the drum but in a positive way. I was receptive to RC because I'd never seen anything like it before. I got more involved with groups when Footsteps started, so I've been involved with RC for about 2 months. I do the educational self-help group and I've found that really powerful as well. Some of the groups overlap big time, but that's fine because you get different people, because they're all open groups, so anyone can walk in. The important thing for me is the ethos. It is non-judgemental and there is a flat hierarchy with no one person in charge. Also I like the idea that it encourages recovery through any medium or route that's going to work for the individual.

I suppose you could say I've had a series of revelations since my recovery began. It's been such a revelation that had I not begun my recovery I couldn't have taken care of my



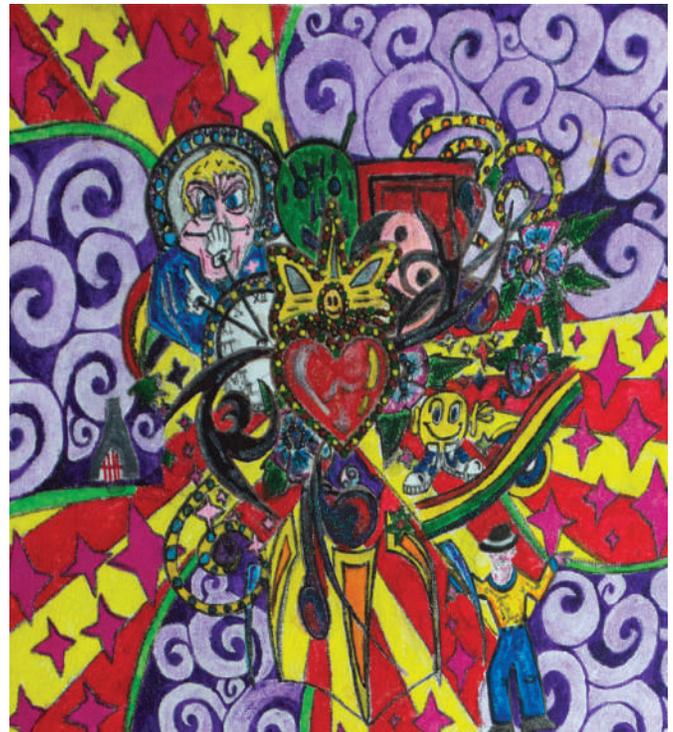
# Roy's Story

## By Jacqui Grogan



Roy, a retired carpenter, was one of the first to enter through the doors at the Vale's Recovery Cymru Centre. He was introduced to Recovery Cymru (RC) by Derek, a friend of his. At the time Roy was suffering from an eating disorder, depression and was under the care of a dietician after becoming unable to eat for more than two years. His problem was initially brought on years before by being unable to afford to eat after having to retire early due to ill health. For an inordinate length of time he didn't go far, being confined to his home he felt cut off from the outside world which only added to his problems. Since becoming a member of RC Roy has made many friends, one of those friends has become very special to him, her name is Lisa. Lisa befriended Roy and encouraged him to eat by constantly badgering him to come out and dine with her socially. Her first recollection of Roy was hearing him say "I just want someone to text me" this touched her heart so she took Roy's plea on board and decided to make it happen for him, she hasn't stop texting, phoning and caring for him since. Now Roy has reached an acceptable weight he has been signed off from the dietician; he attends most of the groups and social

functions, including the cookery social and outings with the Come Outside project, who encourage people to enjoy the outdoors and discover the places of heritage on offer in the local area. Roy loves this new way of life he has been gifted, he has opened up his heart and is blossoming like a flower in the summertime of his life.



# Lisa's Story

## By Jacqui Grogan



Again, like Roy, Lisa was introduced to Recovery Cymru (RC) by a mutual friend they shared, Derek. Initially Lisa thought she was suffering from depression brought on by past hurts where she spent a period of ten years bedridden. It wasn't until she sat in on a family support group that twenty years of suppressed emotions came flooding out. It appeared that her brother, who is an alcoholic, had played a huge part in her depression having put her through many trials during his drunken outbursts. She remembers how having her windows smashed on several occasions, being verbally abused and having malicious gossip spread by him injured her deeply on an emotional and physical level. Unable to cope with the devastation she walked away, not speaking to her brother

for a long while. Because of her revelation Recovery Cymru was able to help Lisa differentiate between the alcoholic and the real person behind the alcohol, arming her with coping mechanisms. She didn't understand the effects of addiction before and how it can take over the whole of one's life, causing such pain and suffering not only for the afflicted but their loved ones too. Now Lisa has a greater understanding of her brother's addiction and with the support of Recovery Cymru has reformed a relationship with him. There is still a lot of work to do as Lisa constantly worries about her brother and where he will end up, but she has decided that she is going to concentrate on getting herself well first and is embracing life. Lisa is always willing to help others

and has made many valuable friends at RC, Roy being one of the closest bonds, she also volunteers for RC as a receptionist, facilitates cookery social groups, attends events and support groups and is a valued and much loved member of Recovery Cymru.





# Gail's Story

## By Jacqui Grogan

Gail grew up on the Isle of Man, born into a family whose father was an abusive alcoholic. She suffered both physical and emotional abuse and was sexually abused from a young age (not by her father). Gail can remember being introduced to alcohol at the age of ten by her father, he found it hilarious when she fell into a drunken stupor. That's when she began to self-harm and her life of alcoholism began. Self-harming was a release from the mental, physical and sexual abuse she endured in the most important part of her life, her childhood was not something she chose to remember, it was a living hell for her. This pattern of self-harm became her way of life. By the time Gail was fifteen she was diagnosed as being alcohol dependant by her school and the police.

The alcohol caused her to commit offences whilst under its influence, she acted out of character, which of course was a cry for help.

At the age of twenty-one Gail had a drunken frolic and became pregnant. She gave birth nine months later to a beautiful baby boy who she adores immensely. When she was twenty-eight she decided to leave the Isle of Man to get sober and start afresh on the mainland. Having been found a place in a mother and child unit she got the help she needed and became sober. For a whole year her life felt so much better, a flat for Gail and her son to start anew was found and they moved in. Unfortunately there was no ongoing support in place and because of the lack of support she relapsed and the road to self-harm and alcohol abuse

reared its ugly head once more. The authorities decided it would be best to take her beloved child into care.

Her self-esteem and confidence took a nose dive and she ended up in some terrifying predicaments. So often she became homeless, it seemed to her as if there was not one person out there who could help her to heal the pain she carried deep within her soul. In 2008 (after committing yet another alcohol related offence) Gail was introduced to the Women's Turnaround Project who offer practical support to vulnerable women in danger of committing further offences, helping those at risk to help themselves and family by changing their way of life. Gail began working with her son's social worker and had access to him twice a week. She

worked with the Community Addictions Unit to address her alcohol dependency issues and was given counselling by New Pathways. Also, she re-entered the education system and worked well to gain her Literacy and Numeracy levels one and two. In 2010 Gail took part in a Real Radio interview regarding Safer Wales where she spoke of her plight, encouraging people to come forward and get help for their addictions and the underlying causes.

Over the remaining years Gail has tried hard to move forward with her life, seeking help wherever possible. She has found it hard at times as there seemed to be no every day, all year around support network to suit her needs. She had been in the system for twenty plus years by the time Recovery Cymru (RC) opened its doors in the Vale in September 2013. Gail was so pleased to hear of the support that was now available to her, and what's more it is right on her doorstep. There is no time limit to how long anyone can attend or access support. Gail was so delighted to hear this welcoming news that

she was one of the first to enter through RC's door and become a member. She tells me that since attending RC the support given to her by staff, volunteers and members has strengthened her so much, whereas before, if she slipped, she would end up being kicked out of support; this is not RC's philosophy. Happily, Gail says that due to the backing from staff and members she has managed to maintain a stable way of living, periods of abstaining from alcohol have grown immensely and the episodes of bingeing and self-harming have become few and far between.

Her son (whom she is so clearly proud of) now stays with her regularly when he is home from France, where he is training to be a Chef. He has a stable and loving relationship with his mum. Unfortunately, Gail's Dad died last year, he apologised for all the pain he caused her before he died. She has found that forgiveness is the only way to move forward.

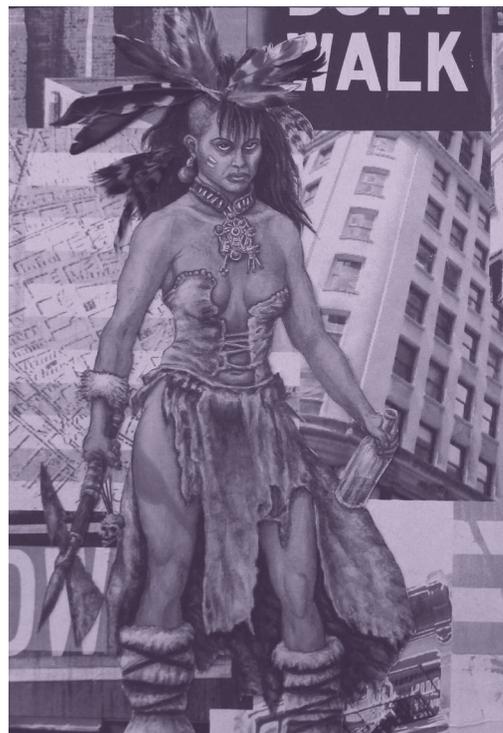
Six months into Recovery Cymru opening its doors, Gail decided to raise funds for them after their yearly funding for the supply of tea

and coffee ran out. Showing what a good sport she is, and how big her heart is too, she decided to have her beautiful curly locks shaved off, raising almost two hundred pounds. These days Gail is part of the furniture at Recovery Cymru, along with her dog Sox. They have become part of a beautiful, supportive and non-judgemental community. They have also helped and supported her through a recent family bereavement. She is doing so well, all things considered, when you hear of the terrible injuries that were bestowed upon her as an innocent, defenceless child, you realise how strong and beautiful her soul really is.



# Jackie G

## *Piece by Peace*



My journey with addiction began the moment I entered this world in 1964. I had a ready-made family of three half-sisters, three real sisters and a brother, eight, all of us at the mercy of a volatile, violent alcoholic mother whom my father was absolutely terrified of. I don't have any sweet childhood memories like most; my stepfather's allotment and the church were my sanctuary in the early years from the more than frequent beatings and visions of cruelty my mother bestowed upon the family.

She was constantly drunk, smelling of whisky and was in and out of hospital after nervous breakdowns. We had no other family to look after us in a caring, loving way, everyone was terrified of her, including her own mother, so they cut us off and the only

adults we got to know were my mother and stepfather. I thought that this was how life was, alcohol, violence and terror were normal. People thought I was a happy go lucky dumb mute with my head in the clouds as I didn't speak until I was six plus. Truth is, I was too terrified to say the wrong thing in case she beat me like my brothers and sisters.

All of my siblings had run from home by the time I was eleven and my brother was taken into care for his own protection after a very brutal beating. It was at this age that I couldn't stand any more physical and mental beatings either so I ran away, straight into the hands of a cruel and sadistic paedophile, now in prison for murder and rape. Again I ran and ended up in many children's homes including

one in Barry. It was here that I was unfortunate enough again to be spotted by another sexual predator. By now I was thirteen, a naïve, extremely quiet and shy, mixed up child who just wanted to fit in; so when this guy asked me on a date I accepted. He later openly admitted he had been following me each weekend as I left the children's home. I soon found out that sex was his motive and by the time I was sixteen I gave birth to my beautiful daughter whilst living in a foster home.

Unfortunately, my foster family didn't treat me very well, and I was more like a live in slave than a foster daughter, so I ran again. I was eventually housed in Barry with my daughter and her father. I carried on with life and adapted to my new home that was all mine, a safe haven for

me and my child to grow up in. No chance, my naivety was short lived. I became pregnant with my second child and gave birth to my beautiful son a month after my eighteenth birthday. By now my children's father had become pretty cruel and his sex addiction was blatant. I became terrified of him and then to my dismay, a day after my daughters second birthday, when my son was six weeks old, I attended a wedding thinking it was someone else's and it turned out to be mine! He and my mother had arranged it behind my back. I really didn't know what kind of world I was living it, but it didn't match the loving world I was searching for in my head. Six months later I filed for

divorce, but only after he was convicted of a brutal attack on a

woman during a burglary he had taken part in. It was only then that I had the courage to do so.

Free at last, or so I thought, only at the time of my ex's arrest he had three other men who he worked with as a contractor lodging with us. I eventually started a relationship with one of these men; he was never violent, just a self-confessed sex addict with a cannabis addiction. Then at the age of twenty-one my ex was released from prison, he started to turn up at my home and work. One day

I woke up to him just sitting over me, I became terrified in my own home. It was December the twenty-third of that year, six months after his release that I was watching the news and recognised the house that was on fire: it was my ex's Auntie's, a lovely elderly lady. Before I could utter a word CID were banging on my door, questioning me about the children's father. His Auntie had suffered a horrific attack, was raped and burnt alive, he was sentenced to life without parole in 1985 and is now due to be released in 2015. My children's lives and mine were thrown into utter chaos, we became ostracized by family, friends and society as a whole. My poor son got

*"I attended a wedding thinking it was someone else's and it turned out to be mine! He and my mother had arranged it behind my back"*

the worst end of it as he looked so much like his father and was judged as such by family, society and the police, right up until his death in 2012.

I soon ended up in a relationship with another addict. At first he told me he was diabetic and that's why he had needle marks, so I felt sorry for him and let him stay while he was looking for a place to live. Boy did I learn a lot, after weeks of him not leaving I tried to get him out but he was having none of it. He became obsessed with me, how I ended up in a short

relationship with him I will never know, but I did, big mistake. I came home one day and he had sold everything bar the carpets in my home. The level of abuse that I was subjected to was unreal; he never hurt my children physically but they did get to witness the violence that came with his addictions. Still I wasn't tempted by drugs or drink; I was twenty-five by now and the abuse was taking its toll on me, I became very ill due to a disease I had been suffering from since the birth of my son. I started to develop huge abscesses in my body and on my face and became bedridden, my poor children needed me yet I felt I wanted out of this cruel world. It took

two years of fighting through the courts and liaising with the police to

keep this man away from us.

Then one day I went to pick my children up from school only to find that he had taken them. I found him and he said that unless I went back with him I'd never see them again. As he said those cruel words a bus stopped right at our feet, I grabbed the children, got on the bus and begged the driver to drive off, so he did and I summoned up the strength to go straight to the solicitors and have him charged. It still took another year to get him away. It was during this period that I succumbed to alcohol

and smoking to numb the pain of the violent visitations we were forced to endure whilst he was awaiting sentence, and when sentenced I didn't have an urge to drink anymore. Free at last? Learned my lesson? You'd think so, but as my friend once said to me 'you are too easy'. I got back into the swing of life, began a course on decorating and life became sweet again. I entered into another relationship, an old mate I'd started

hooking up with, at first he appeared kind and caring and my children loved

him. Then one day almost two years into the relationship we attended a summer ball where drink was flowing freely. My children were being looked after by my niece and I was staying over at his. I awoke in the early hours to the sound of sirens, my head was banging and my body ached so much I couldn't move. I turned my head to see this guy mopping up a pool of blood on the bathroom floor. I noticed he was panicking but I couldn't move, I was naked, puzzled and frightened by now, he saw I was awake and dragged me down the stairs like a ragdoll by my hair, but because the police were smashing the door down he dragged me back up the stairs. By the time the ordeal was over I was a shattered woman, black from head to toe from the beating I had taken, I had been seriously

abused too, apparently the neighbours heard my screams and saved my life.

This incident was to be the beginning of my big issues with alcohol; it changed me from being a trusting, kind, and loving, happy-go-lucky individual into a raging, angry and abusive one. That night I left my children as a happy mum and returned an empty battered and bruised shell. I still had to carry on and earn a

*"I thought that this was how life was; alcohol, violence and terror were normal."*

living. There was little support or counselling on offer in those days so I just fumbled along in a daze, getting smashed once or twice a week when I got paid, I was on the path of self-destruction and I knew it but I couldn't see anyway out.

The bruises faded as did I, anorexia took hold, and I became a lost soul. I wasn't drinking daily so kept a bit of decorum in my life but I became a weekend drunk and not a pretty one. The abuse that flew out of my mouth was horrendous; I was becoming my mother, except for the beatings she dished out. My son, who had learning disabilities, needed me more than anything at this time, and I tried hard to get his needs met. Times were hard, I was mashed in my head but managed to stay afloat for my children. I passed my

decorating exam after three years of hard work, but was living in a secret hell and stayed on my own for a few years. Life became bearable again and joy started to come back in my heart with alcohol taking a back seat. Luckily by now I was under the care of a Community Nurse from Amy Evans who I found I could open up to and share my life with. She recognised why I had become so angry and

depressed and piece by piece helped me to find my self-respect.

I was good at my job as

a decorator and respected by the men that I looked after as a team leader, they helped me to see what was right and what was wrong and taught me that not all men were like the men I had experienced. I suppose they taught me to start trusting again. It was 1993; I was back to the old me, having fun with my children and family, dancing to the tune of life once more. On Valentine's Day I met my future husband whilst watching a band at my local, something I got to do every Sunday for a few hours respite after a week's hard work. Drinking was not an issue anymore, two halves was enough.

I started to date my future husband who was a shift worker and we fell in love, and even though he drank I suppose I didn't see it as a

problem at first as he worked so hard and I hardly saw him. I moved in with him about eighteen months later and everything seemed fine, until the day his ex-wife got wind of our happiness and stopped him from having contact with his children. As an ex-serviceman he was used to using drink as a way of coping with stress and began to use it in a big way. At first I held back for the sake of my children, but by this time he was in the midst of his grief and blaming it all on me and I caved in, our relationship became violent and volatile. The kids suffered deeply listening to the fights and rows. Somehow, through it all I managed to gain my teaching certificate and became a community tutor, I also worked as a paint expert and DIY tutor for B&Q on the weekends. Once again I felt like giving

up on life, adopting the attitude 'if you can't beat them then why not join them?' By

now I was in my late thirties, and the past few years had passed by in a daze of pain and drunkenness, when my son, who was now in trouble with the police and addicted to gas and cannabis (not surprisingly), said to me in desperation "when will it get better mum? Do I have to wait as long as you?" If ever there was a wakeup pill that was

it. My heart was wrenched, I knew I had to get better for the sake of my son, I started to read every self-help book I could, begged the doctor to get me counselling to help me unravel the pain of the past.

Life for me became a mission of finding myself once more, for the sake of myself and my children. My daughter was doing well and carved out a career for herself, unfortunately by now my son had got into the prison system, he had become a "mini-me", such a beautiful lost soul paying for the sins of his parents' irresponsible ways. As I got better he got worse, and because of his father's crime, and his communication problems due to his special needs, he was prodded and poked until he exploded and got into more trouble. Alcohol and drugs

*"Becoming a member of RC was a life saver for me, the staff and members helped me to regain my confidence by giving me ongoing support and encouragement"*

became his crux for fourteen years. In 2012 he experienced the loss of his son which affected him badly. After binging on vodka and downers he was beaten badly, arrested and thrown into prison. Four days later I got the call that every parent dreads, and at the age of twenty nine, with a son and daughter left behind, he took his own life in prison,

the prison his father had been held in whilst on trial for murder and rape. This was the darkest moment of my life but I vowed I would not deal with it through drink and drugs, my son had given me the strength to make this difference. Life was unbearable but as always I carried on, I had to, I still had a daughter and five beautiful grandchildren who needed me.

During the first year after my son's death I overdosed twice, I wanted to die, if I hadn't been so weak my son would still be alive, were my thoughts. Luckily for me counselling was offered to me for the abuse I'd experienced in my early years, so I grabbed it with both hands whilst I was waiting for bereavement counselling from the doctors and Cruse. All services helped me put my life into perspective

and find peace in my heart, but I knew if I was to continue to climb out of hell I would need ongoing

support. In September 2013 I noticed a sign being put up on one of the local shop fronts; it said 'Recovery Cymru'. I really wanted to pop my head in and see what it was all about but I was still lost and out of my head with grief. In March of 2014 my long-time friend Derek invited me to a session at Recovery Cymru (RC), I loved the friendly non-

judgemental atmosphere, and my son would have loved it too. Becoming a member of RC was a life saver for me, the staff and members helped me to regain my confidence by giving me ongoing support and encouragement. I began to re-emerge, came out of my frightened shell, got involved with group sessions, the Come Outside and gardening project, Valeways walk and am now volunteering at Recovery Cymru as an arts and crafts group facilitator. I have completed the MILE course run by NewLink Wales as well as many other courses and I'm training to become a SMART™ facilitator. My gratitude toward those who have helped me on my recovery journey is enormous. They have renewed my faith in humanity and shown me that people do care enough to help those afflicted by the damaging effects of addictions. Whether the user or the recipient, we all have been afflicted in some way. Fortunately for me I am big on forgiveness as I understand that the majority of people who inflict pain on others are injured souls themselves and need help. I've got to understand from both viewpoints, I've sat on both sides of the fence so who am I to judge?

My future is? Who knows, all I know is that I too want to help others on their recovery journeys. This fantastic service may have come too late for my son but I will not let him

die in vain. He has taught me humility and the true meaning of love and life, and if I can help others with what I have learned through him, I will. I certainly plan to continue learning how to help others out of the pit that we fall into in the midst of escapism. If it wasn't for RC I would still be wandering around aimlessly, without a purpose, now I have a purpose. Thank you RC for your guidance and believing in me.



# *The Wisdom of the Trees*

These feelings seem so alien to me,  
I sense peace in my world, feel akin to a tree...  
Could it be that I am free, from the past, at last?  
Can I really let go of chaos, so easy, so fast?  
Where has the demon gone, in my head?  
And the tornado in my tummy, the one I so often dread.  
I don't get it, Am I alive or Am I dead?  
I feel alive, that's for sure, when the crisp morning air greets me  
On opening the back door...  
I can hear the robins chirping away,  
I see the Blackbirds hunt and the finches play...  
The dew on the grass seems so inviting to drink  
And the Sentinel Trees appear to be glowing bright pink...  
"Let go, let go" I hear the trees whisper to me.  
"The only drink needed in life is heavens elixir,  
And the good news is, it's free.  
That man made nectar you sup is poison, not healing!  
It's the reason you hit rock bottom, or bang your head on the ceiling.  
There's only one juice you really need, it's the juice of Love,  
pure nectar, life's seed...  
Let this knowledge be planted within your being,  
And goodness shall be all that you're seeing.  
Sow the Seed of Love within your core  
And the pain of the past shall exist no more!"  
"Thank You Sentinel beings" I hear myself say,  
As I turn to go indoors, to get on with my day  
And trust that eu-naturel is the only way to be,  
If I am to keep moving forward,  
If I am to always be free  
Of the dreaded Nectar once sold to me  
That caused so much havoc, Chaos and insanity!!!

– Jacqui G

# Roxy's Journey



My alcohol addiction started in my early teens to hide how empty I felt. I didn't know that I had a mental illness, as mental health wasn't widely talked about in my home country of South Africa. My addiction started as sips of alcohol from the bottles of spirits my mom kept in the house, she made no secret of them and allowed me to have a small glass of wine with food on special occasions such as Christmas, birthdays, etc. The little sips started becoming large swigs over the years, and eventually days would blur into one because I was drinking so much. I kept drinking because it numbed the pain and I was a functioning alcoholic by the time I was 16/17. I wrote my final exams under the influence and no one knew, I was surprised I even passed them, and I passed

with the ability to go straight into university. Due to an abusive relationship and being pushed to breaking point I had a psychotic breakdown when I was 18. I was deemed incapable of caring for myself, I didn't even know my own name, at this point my drinking stopped and the void was filled with anti-depressants and tranquilisers. My mom and grandma cared for me, and I started seeing a psychologist daily, I was diagnosed with clinical depression and had been suffering with it longer than I could remember. I honestly thought everyone felt the same empty feeling I did, so I never talked about it, instead I internalised the pain, and numbed it with drinking and self-harm. My mom, family and psychologist decided that it would be best for me to move to the United Kingdom,

and my mom got back into contact with my father, who I hadn't known because he was a drug addict which was why my parents' marriage broke down. My father assured my mom that he was clean and living a good life in Wales, and agreed to me moving here.

I moved here in 2007, my mom stayed with me for a month to make sure I was enrolled in college and that everything was okay. As soon as my mom left, everything changed, my father took my passport from me, all the money I had, and then the secret cannabis plants he had in storage came out and were placed in my bedroom. I lived with my father and his mother, he was still using and she was an abusive drunk. They were both extremely paranoid and if I was home late from college, they would lock me out of the

house until tea time, where I would be given a small bowl of food and no one would talk to me. If I ate any more than I was given, they would shout at me. This carried on for a few months until I had applied for university, when the invite letters came through, my father had opened them and discovered that I had applied for universities outside of the Cardiff area. This caused a massive argument and I was kicked out of the house. I didn't have a National Insurance number and had only been in the country a few months, so I panicked and phoned people I had met in a local nightclub. I ended up staying with them in a 4 bedroomed shared house, there were 8-10 people living there in various rooms including the lounge, the front door didn't lock and there was no hot water, my drinking became heavier and heavier, I was drinking 6-8 litres of cider a day and anything else people would buy. People would give me money for food, my mom would send me small amounts and I sold a lot of my jewellery to pay for my alcohol.

The people I was staying with would take and smoke various drugs, and I would join in, I stopped taking my medication for my mental illness because I thought I was better and continued to drink and smoke cannabis. Eventually I out stayed my welcome and was back out on the streets, I slept on

benches and crashed on the sofas of the people on my college course, some of them would bring food into college for me, or take me home with them for a night so I could have a shower and some food. The college tutors let me sleep during lessons. I was desperate to finish college but wasn't stable enough and had to leave. Eventually someone took me down to the council and they agreed to put me in a hostel in Newport, I hadn't been to Newport and the thought terrified me. The college got me a National Insurance number and helped me claim jobseekers allowance. I didn't know what to do, so I went back to living with my father and the abuse continued. I was thrown out numerous times even being taken to safety by the police and my drinking just continued. Finally I met my husband-to-be, and he helped me to get back onto my medications. One of my drinking buddies was taken into Whitchurch, his kidneys and liver was failing and he had a breakdown, he looked so ill and I was so scared that that would happen to me, I had lost so much weight you could see my ribs, so I told my boyfriend I had an alcohol addiction. I had never told anyone about it, up until that point I didn't think it was a problem. We agreed to cut out all temptation and I "cold turkeyed it". I didn't know I could ask for help from my

doctor. I lost most if not all of my friends, but my boyfriend stayed strong for me, giving me the strength to stop. I owe him my life. I moved in with him and his dad, and his family became mine after the final time my father kicked me out. I never looked back, I haven't had contact with my father for 4/5 years. I think things are better this way, his addiction continues and I would rather not have that in my life.

By chance a job centre adviser applied for a job on my behalf and a substance misuse organisation and when that job ended I continued to volunteer. I find helping others with substance misuse issues helps my own recovery. I started volunteering with Recovery Cymru in 2014, and although it is completely different to the place I previously volunteered and worked at, the community is outstanding and extremely understanding. They have welcomed me and accepted me, this new journey is adding to my recovery. I feel that I am always going to be in recovery, I am not abstinent, but I am able to say no when I need to, and I don't drink when I'm in a bad frame of mind. I'm taking every day as it comes and I will continue to help others with their recovery journeys.

# Silver Lining

by Dean H

From a young age I always felt different in some way. As a young child I remember going to school in unsuitable clothes that were often the wrong size and faded in colour, and the other children would bully me which would affect me badly. I always remember being hungry in school, because as a growing child you need to eat a lot. I remember once I stole another pupil's crisps, he caught me and I gave them back. Lucky for me the boy didn't report me; he probably knew how embarrassed I'd feel. I was generally a very quiet boy in primary school but I ran into problems because my packed lunch wasn't up to scratch, and letters were sent out to my parents! My mother's excuse was that I wouldn't eat anything, so constant hunger was a big issue for me in primary school.

As a young child I remember my mum getting stoned and drunk a lot with her boyfriend. I vividly remember this one time I was sitting on the stairs and I heard her say that she never felt that she had ever bonded with me or was able to love me. I think this must have played on my mind a bit because it was around then that I separated from my friends and started misbehaving. My

nan was always good to me though, and I'd spend time with her on the weekends. We'd watch football and go shopping and sometimes I went sailing with my dad and grandad. Things went downhill quite early on, though, at this point, because my cousin, who was only 3 at the time, was killed in an accident with an ice-cream truck, which left my dad's sister quite traumatised. She later went on to have a daughter, who needed a simple operation, but they messed up on the operating table and the little girl died. There are no words to expression or convey the look in my auntie's eyes on the day of the funeral. I walked out after looking at her and just broke down. Days later my auntie ended her life and I think it was at this point that my dad chose to drink; probably as some kind of coping mechanism.

Moving further on, my brother was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease (a form of cancer) on my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday and it eventually spread to his lungs. This meant that I spent the next three years in and out of hospital. I don't remember seeing much of my mother during this time as she would be away at the hospital for three days at a time. It

was awful to see my brother, as well as the other patients on the ward, go through so much poking and prodding by the hospital staff. I bonded with many of the children on the ward, including a 14 year old girl who died in her sleep, which affected me greatly. I also watched other children decline and when I lost them I became angry with the nurses, but looking back now I think I was looking for someone to blame. It was touch and go with my brother for a while and at one point we thought we were going to lose him as my brother's doctors had told us to prepare for the worst. Then quite miraculously, over the next few weeks my brother's health began to improve and quite quickly he went into remission; that was when a lot of what I'd seen and been through really hit me and I began to see a psychiatrist.

It's important to try and move on and regain some semblance of normality, but after seeing my brother in such horrendous pain that's easier said than done. At this point my dad's alcohol use had become really bad and when he was under the influence he usually took it out on someone else – usually me. He went from being my hero to a monster who hit me with a belt. Then he would breakdown and cry. He wasn't really a nasty man, if you consider what he'd been through, but despite this I blamed him for years. He was

in a state of abject loneliness and there was no support available for him. I can see now why there's a need for communities like Recovery Cymru (RC) and sometimes wonder what would have happened to my dad had RC been around back then. At least I still had my grandad, and I would take the bottles of cider from my dad and give them to my grandad and he would pour the contents down the sink. The situation was taking its toll on everyone and eventually my grandad got taken ill and wrote me a very positive letter while on his death bed at Llandough Hospital. My grandad was my father's last thread of hope. I remember at the funeral looking at my father and noticed how withdrawn he'd become and I remember the colour leaving his eyes and thinking that he'd given up on life.

About two months after my grandad died I found my dad lying on his bed with a smile on his face. I tried to rouse him but I knew he was gone. I didn't want to leave him and the coroner let me have time to say goodbye. People say it's selfish to end your life, especially if you have children, but to do so means you have assessed your own personal weaknesses. At the end of the day who knows what's going on in people's heads? You can't judge him. I thank God he had gone in his sleep, but he was surrounded by countless cider bottles. He had only

just turned 40 but with all the trauma and hurdles in his life I think he eventually died from a broken heart.

At this moment in my life I felt I couldn't go on anymore, and eventually became a heroin addict, and then went on a methadone script when I was just 18. I came to realise that the drugs were used to block out the pain I was feeling. For a while things seemed to calm down and I gained a reasonably good education, achieving 5 GCSEs including Maths and English, and an NVQ level 2 in Hospitality and Catering. I also met the mother of my children. In terms of our upbringing we were polar opposites: she was very spoilt and didn't really have a clue about mental health problems, but fair play, she was good to me and would do anything to help. We eventually went on to have two loving children and life seemed alright for a while.

I then got a job in a nightclub, which I loved, moving up the ladder very quickly to become Assistant Manager. I was young and had the attention of a lot of young women, which boosted my self-confidence no end; but I was young and stupid and got involved with some girls and a member of staff, which affected my relationship with the mother of my children. The relationship eventually broke down and I moved into a friend's flat while my girlfriend stayed at her mother's. While I

was staying there I came home late one night to find my friend hanging from the attic! It was a horrific sight to look at and the image of him hanging there came to me every time I blinked and haunted my dreams. His motivation for killing himself remains a bit of a mystery but there were rumours that he owed money and people were out looking for him, but I've never let rumours sway my opinion of someone. He had a sixteen-year-old son at the time that was desperate for answers but I couldn't give him any. Sometimes with something like suicide there are no answers just loads and loads of unresolved questions. All I could do was sympathise with him, as we had both lost fathers to suicide at around the same age. All I could do was to tell him that he needed to make his father proud and that he should make the right choices and grab life by the horns!

Moving on from then, the nightclub in which I worked closed down as the boss was losing money so I was out of work and homeless for a while. I found accommodation through the Community Addiction Unit and with their support and encouragement I slowly began to get some kind of order in my life. The mother of my children had become an alcoholic by this point so I had custody of my children for 4 months. This was a very stressful time for both the children and everyone in my

family but I was determined to give them a damn sight better life than I'd had. They eventually went back to live with their mother, which must have been hard for them, but she's a good mum and she's done well despite a minor relapse. I was also praised by Social Services for my care of the children.

It's been years of havoc and mayhem and if I was to tell you about the rest of what had happened in my life it would probably fill a book, but through it all I have still managed to keep my head above water. I often see my children and they have a good life. I fight every day to get better mentally and I think I'm close to the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. I find keeping busy and taking advantage of the support around me helps to sustain me and keep me on the straight and narrow. One organisation really stands out for me and that is Recovery Cymru. I now volunteer there and with support and practice hope to use what I have learned to become a support worker, so I can help people who've been through what I've been through. I can't say it's all been positive, but it is possible to turn things around. I've got two loving children for a start, which shows that something good always comes with the bad, it's never all just terrible: there's always hope and a silver lining in every dark cloud.

## *I Take My Last Breath*

*The darkness bites at my feet  
As I hurriedly run down the street  
I frantically claw at the wall  
To find the switch  
I hear the click  
And see the darkness  
Shrink away, back into the abyss  
I breathe with relief  
And bathe in the comfort of the light  
This is my salvation*

*I fight the darkness  
And beat it back everyday  
I smile triumphantly  
This is my salvation*

*I take my last breathe  
And fall into oblivion  
I feel the darkness  
Wrap around me  
Comforting and cool  
I let it all go  
And finally find  
My true salvation*

*– Roxy Newman*



# THE RECOVERY TREE



## Acknowledgements

In addition to the contributors featured in this publication, Recovery Cymru would like to extend its sincere thanks to: Jacqui Grogan for coordinating the project & helping some Recovery Cymru members tell their stories; Alex Ralph & Chris Parsons for their hard work in editing and designing the content; Gareth Joseph for his efforts in coordinating publication; and Julia Millington & Nick Fudge at Ikon Creative for their patience and invaluable assistance.

