

A person is shown from the side, sitting in a meditative lotus position. They are wearing a white tank top and white shorts. Their hands are resting on their knees in a mudra. The background is a vibrant red with large, soft-edged, overlapping circular shapes in lighter shades of red. The overall mood is calm and focused.

Stories of recovery from addiction:

squatting to employment

I was addicted to sensation. I needed rapture - passionate experiences to feel I was really alive. But I began to have black outs lasting several days and would end up waking in strange beds with strange people and no recollection of what had happened for the preceding few days. I spent a few nights in emergency shelters when cold weather was around. The reality of sleeping on a flea ridden mattress in a night shelter was my first turning point. Worse was when I woke after another drug binge in a very comfortable bed with a good woman and just had to get a hit of something before managing even a cup of tea. When I was really desperate I had to beg for money. I had such a physical craving.

For years I was in and out of hospital. There I met more accomplished drinkers and drug users and learned to mix drugs and drink. I got much more involved with hash and swallowed a few diazepam before heading for drinking sessions. I even started drinking cough mixtures before sessions to see if I could get a better buzz.

I tried moving to London and lived in a squat for a while but I saw the effects of heavier drug use and decided to come home again. I tried counselling for alcohol problems and after their advice I spent 2 years just getting dry. At first I used a lot more hash to keep cool and avoid drinking.

I became fed up with always feeling cloudy in my thinking and had started to suffer hallucinations even when not stoned. I was unable to tell who I was talking to at times as they would change into other people in front of my eyes or become reptiles. I was warned by a psychiatrist I respected that I would end up permanently unable to distinguish reality from the dreams. I was having bouts of drug induced schizophrenia. This helped motivate me to just concentrate on being sober and drug free as I did not want to end up like some of the casualties I saw in hospital.

I started to enjoy a feeling of clarity in my thinking a little more. I didn't face the constant hangovers and confusion. I woke up in the day and saw the sunlight without a fog of drugs. In fact I remember getting a buzz just from seeing a clear sky and thinking I am straight. I wanted to have a purpose in life. I changed my company and haunts to avoid just repeating old habits.

I had become so isolated I had forgotten how to talk to anyone. When you are drunk or stoned you don't need to talk, just grunt or laugh. I couldn't mix with people and had to learn to feel safe talking again. I got involved in self help groups where I learned communication skills, cooking, relaxation, massage. I learned that other people were also afraid and I began to trust enough to open up with others.

I attended groups where we exchanged support and I got as much as I gave. I got a lot of satisfaction when listening to other people who were also struggling. I started to volunteer and achieve some skills to help me work with other people. I took a short course in counselling and found that I was able to help support others with addictions and with mental health problems.

I found I needed to start a new life with a flat of my own. I was carrying too much baggage from the past. I applied for a full time job running a befriending scheme which was focussed around the rehabilitation unit at a hospital and was accepted. This was a great boost for my self-esteem – first time in employment for years, and I enjoyed the work, developing patient councils so we could express our opinions and wishes to the Health Service.

I developed a real commitment to yogic meditation training to help me find some inner peace. I continue going for massage and spiritual healing. I am able to feel in control of my emotions a lot more than before. Now I have health problems to deal with – partly caused by long term addictions - but am not tempted to go back to drink or drugs. The feeling of clarity I now have is so much better than being stoned or drunk.

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You can read other stories
of recovery from addictions at
www.storiesofrecovery.org.uk

Thank you to the participants who were kind
enough to share their stories for the greater good.

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the project.



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