

# THE BASEMENT PROJECT – MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## WHEN DID YOU START TAKING DRUGS?



It was about 1982. I was a young 17 year old typical kid I guess. I first started with barbiturates, I think back then they were much more popular than they are today but I didn't really like them, they just seemed to knock me out most of the time or at least made me like a glazed-eyed zombie. I was hanging around with the the scooter lads, they used to raid chemists and I soon found myself taking other capsules, particularly amphetamines. Those days were crazy times. I was running around as a skinhead with my Dr Martens, going on scooter runs and getting involved in fights, football hooliganism and generally being violent thug who was constantly in trouble with the police.

## WHY DID YOU?

I don't really know to be honest. It just seemed to be the thing to do, it seemed normal and I guess it was learnt behaviour. There was peer pressure; most of the other scooter boys were older than me. Perhaps looking back I guess I could have been rebelling against my father who I thought at the time was a complete bastard. He was a bully and a very aggressive person. He never showed any emotion or love towards me. I wasn't a bad kid you know, when I was younger I was never in trouble, so someone looking from the 'outside in' would have me down as a 'normal' kid.

**Name:** Colin  
**Age:** 48  
**Problem:** 30 years taking drugs  
20 years on methadone  
**Clean:** 18 months

## WHEN DID IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

At the beginning the drugs were more recreational. I was always in a gang; we had scraps, were involved in football hooliganism and were in trouble with the police. In the mid 80's I started 'screwing' chemists for drugs. I'd get speed capsules and diconol and other opiate based drugs. From that I got into stealing diamorphine hydrochloride, basically heroin! As soon as I was on that stuff I was hooked. But you can't expect to be turning over chemists and not get caught. I knew I was wanted by the police so went on the run to London, just me and my stash of drugs – ended up sleeping on the streets around Tower Bridge. But it wasn't long before I was missing my girlfriend so I headed back north, Kings Cross to Leeds, Leeds to Bradford, Bradford to Boothtown and Boothtown to waiting police. I gave them quite a run but they caught up with me – me and my stash. I didn't see my girlfriend for two and a half years.

So I did my sentence, got out in '89 having done a few drugs in prison but not much really. I had nowhere to live but an old mate said I could stay at his. I didn't realise he had become a heroin dealer in the time I went away. Of course the heroin was freely available at first; I was hooked in no time. I spent the next couple of years as a complete junkie. When I wasn't able to find the money for heroin I'd go through 'cold turkey' (something that had never really happened to me before) so I had to resort to robbing and stealing to feed my habit, even did a few chemists too. I was arrested a few times – suspended sentences, fines and community service.

A friend introduced me to methadone and it knocked me right out... and I could get this for free? Wow! "Sign me up" I said. I ended up ringing a psychiatrist at the hospital and she put me on a prescription for it. It stopped me from using heroin for a time. I stopped thieving, got into a relationship, got a flat, she moved in and we had a couple of kids; two boys. Things were alright for a while, for a couple of years in fact. Well who was I kidding? - only myself. It was after the birth of my first son that I started dabbling in heroin again. I was also doing pills, amphetamines, street methadone, acid, ecstasy and anything I could get my hands on really. I don't know why I did, I guess I just wanted to. I was bang at it, still on prescription methadone too, that was my safety net. If I couldn't get heroin I could still rely on methadone.

By the mid '90's I started to think about the affect methadone was having on me. I didn't seem to have any freedom in my life. It seemed like I was married to it, it was running my life for me. I tried to just stop on my own but it made me feel like shit, I was really ill. A visit to see my keyworker who had been giving me my script, confirmed that methadone was highly addictive and not easy to just stop taking and I would need a "detoxification". I was sent to a mental hospital in Northowram where I spent two weeks on a lofexidine detox.

I came out, went back home, felt poorly for a few weeks but I continued to pop pills, smoke pot and drink etc. After all I had only gone to get help with methadone right? The rest were just recreational. Things seemed ok again for a while, I went to college, got an NVQ in catering and hospitality – I guess I was back to 'normal'. As time went by I started to think maybe I could just do a bit of heroin, a bit of "tooting", just at weekends mind. But weekends led to week days and before I knew it I was "fixing" and back to shoplifting - "the cycle of insanity" they call it. So off to get help again, and how insane was it to feel relieved to be put back on a methadone script again. No more shoplifting, no more stealing and another trip to the mental institute! I didn't feel it working this time so ended up walking out. Why? I don't know. I was told about a rehab place by a recovering alcoholic. I didn't know anything about rehab and thought it was just another word for detox but this place was different, I had to stay longer and do some 12 Steps or something. Well I wasn't there to do 12 Steps, I was only there to do one – to get off methadone. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised to get kicked out of the place along with five others for smoking pot on the premises but I didn't really care at the time, didn't really care about anything anymore, so it wasn't long before the Mrs kicked me out too.

I met my second partner almost straight away, we had a son together but I could no longer hide my unmanageability and life as an addict. After a couple of years she was really on my case so I ran away to a caravan in the middle of North Yorkshire (and in the middle of winter too) to try detox, I was doing it for her. Of course it was doomed to failure, though I couldn't see it at the time. I lasted two days of 'torture', and had to go back and score some methadone (I was no longer on my script at this point). It was all over within six months, I had nowhere to live, and I was back out shoplifting and leading a life of crime. I went back to treatment where my keyworker got me back on a managed script and stable. For the first couple of years I was using on top; a bit of heroin, a bit of crack, alcohol and pot and was even buying extra methadone too. But I was fed up, was sick and tired of it so stopped everything but methadone. I thought I was doing well, sounds familiar I know. After starting some voluntary forestry and countryside work I started to buy methadone again. My keyworker found out and put my script up, I soon went from 40ml to 140ml and still I was buying more. I had resigned myself to being on methadone for the rest of my life.

I found myself isolating more and more. I'd rather turn my phone off so I didn't have to speak with anyone or arrange to see the kids. I'd rather buy 500ml of methadone and get wasted. There were times I would have my son with me and I'd realise the dangerous people, places and things I'd exposed him to. I was buying methadone from everyone and anyone who had it.

## **WHAT MADE YOU GET HELP?**

Sick and tired of being sick and tired. I was sick of the isolation; no woman, no friends, no booze, no heroin and no me. I was a completely changed person. My whole character had changed and I was no longer the 'happy-go-lucky' guy that I once was. I didn't know how to enjoy myself and have a laugh and there I was, alone and afraid. It was 2010. Where had the time gone?

I went to see my keyworker. I told him no rehab, no detox centre, no mental hospital etc. I was shit scared of coming off methadone but at the same time scared of what it was doing to me.

## **WHY THE BASEMENT PROJECT?**

It was my keyworker who suggested TBRP. He arranged a meeting so I went down for a chat, don't really remember much about the meeting to be honest. I told them my story and they were shocked. They hadn't treated anyone like me before. They talked about detox, explained things had changed since my day and that they had a programme in place to support the before and after process. I said I would have to work on reducing my script; I was still scared but I had to do something.

I managed to get down to 70ml and arranged to go back TBRP for another meeting. Twelve months had passed. I attended their pre-recovery course where I met others like me wishing to stop and others who had completed the programme and who had stopped already; some for weeks, some for months and years. I never missed a session and during that time got myself down to 40ml. I was offered a detox and had heard great things about it, had met people who had been through it but I needed to get used to the idea, needed to get used to being on 40ml. I was still learning about my addiction, I couldn't take this lightly and I knew I had to be in the right frame of mind.

I went back five weeks later and said "I'm ready". Detox lasted 16 days, including the last two being completely drug free. When I got out I stayed with my ex and her family (and my son of course). I knew it was a dangerous place going back to my flat. I attended the TBRP abstinence programme – again, didn't miss a session. I attended NA meetings (travelling miles to get to them), 'here and now' meetings back at TBRP. I was meeting people, people just like me. The programme was great!

## WHERE WOULD YOU BE NOW?

I've met many people now who said they would be dead right now if it wasn't for the TBRP recovery programme. I'm not sure that's where I would be, I can't say for sure. But if I wasn't I would still be in my flat probably having never met another person in recovery.

## HOW ARE YOU NOW?

I feel great! The old me is back. Life is good and I'm really enjoying myself. I am very passionate about recovery and I'm a member of the CRO team at TBRP. We call ourselves Community Recovery Organisers because it's more than just being a champion of recovery. We organise social events, help with training and education, are there for others going through the programme. We promote recovery when and where we can and are currently making a film about it.

I also run some of the recovery group 'here and now' sessions and recently became a SMART facilitator, running sessions in Halifax and Kirklees. As I said, life is good and I'm really enjoying it. Recovery rocks – let's rock on!