

THE BASEMENT RECOVERY PROJECT

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

KEV'S STORY



My dad was an alcoholic. He would swing from a happy every-day comedian to a violent bully. He always seemed happy when surrounded by his mates and in the pub, but things were often different when at home. We'd often feel the wrath of his frustration through not being able to work due to arthritis. I remember all the times I was verbally and physically abused. I'd even received a broken nose for eating a lettuce sandwich – that kind of sums up the environment I was brought up in. Mum tried her best, but her best was always hindered by dad.

As soon as I left school, I left home too. Living there, the environment changed on a day to day basis depending on how much he'd had to drink (or how much he hadn't). My mum was, most of the time, very depressed and unhappy. As soon as I left the house she got divorced from my dad. I was the last one to leave (the youngest of five kids) and this was what she was waiting for, all the kids to leave home so she could leave too.

I was brought up in Mixenden in Halifax. It's quite a rough part of the town where drugs and drink were very much seen as part of everyday life for most who lived there. Despite this, I stuck through school right up until my G.C.S.E's. I started mixing with the wrong people and wanted (for some reason) to do the wrong things. I guess it had something to do with wanting to fit in, to be accepted, to be liked. I began to smoke weed and drink whenever I could afford it, or plucked up enough courage to steal for it. I didn't come away from school with any qualifications (that I can remember) and life was now starting to go downhill but I was happy with it at the time.

Being the youngest, with two brothers and two sisters, I always looked up to my eldest brother. More so than I did my dad. My brother was 10 years older than me and had a lot of respect from people. He always seemed to have a lot of money and no matter what went on he always looked after the family. His criminal ways meant he spent a lot of time in prison, but still, I wanted to be just like him.

Drinking, committing crime to earn money was now my new way of living. I started with just driving and vehicle related crimes but the more I would drink and use drugs, the more I needed the money to fund it. The crimes became bigger. It was a huge problem but still I wasn't concerned. Everyone around me was doing the same. I thought it was normal. It seemed normal. In all this madness, I met my ex-girlfriend. I was constantly in and out of prison for various crimes and somehow over the course of seven years we had four children. My first long sentence was in 2001 for two years and during this period, I had time to reflect on my situation. I was willing to make some changes. However, three months before my release I was visited by a priest who informed that my brother, whom I had idolised all my life, had died. He'd gone out one night, had a bit too much of a lot of things and choked and died. I felt lost and alone for the first time in a long time. I think at this point I didn't care about many things, more importantly I didn't care about myself. I sat and stewed in prison for my remaining three months only to be back inside within 14 days of my release. I just didn't care anymore, I had lost a loving brother, my mentor and my best friend. I was inside for a further 2 years.

PRISON OR SUICIDE?

There would always be a drink for me in the car when I got picked up from prison. How crazy is it now to think that was a way of celebration? Drinking became a daily thing, it always seemed like I was making up for lost time and it got to a point where I couldn't stop. I would try swapping the alcohol for any other substance; heroin, crack, amphetamine, acid, cannabis, ketamine, MDMA, you name it, I tried it. I don't know why, but for me, alcohol had become my 'first love' and I always went back to it.

My main objective in my life now was planning my days around how to get the next drink or whatever I could take to change the way I felt (even if it was just for a small period of time). I didn't know what to do and the only way out was, in my eyes, prison (as it's where I found comfort and a welcome break from drink) or suicide (to end all the pain and at least I would be with my brother). Life was an everyday struggle just to hold my head up.

I was still on remand from my previous sentence when my chaotic life really started catching up on me. I served two and a half years inside for waiving a toy gun in the street. The crime was of course, "possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence." I was out for about a year only to be back inside again for another 18 months. I'd just passed my test so thought it wise to go celebrating drinking and driving. This is how mad my life had become.

My relationship didn't last and it's no surprise why. I did meet someone else, Fiona, a wonderful partner who had two lovely kids. We moved in together and although I thought the world of her, it still didn't stop the madness. I got caught for a third time drink driving.

SOCIAL SERVICES INTERVENE

Upon my final release from prison, nearly two years ago now (the longest period I've been out since 1997) I was met at the prison gate by social services who told me I could not go home. Things couldn't carry on the way they were and changes needed to be made. The kids were being massively affected by my drinking and behaviours around everyday life.

Now living on my own in a place I didn't want to be, I didn't have anything. I knew my family wanted me home but I was not allowed without supervision. Times were difficult for all involved. All I had now was me and my own head. Things couldn't have been worse, I was back to the same old thinking, prison or suicide. I didn't want either. I wanted to get well, I wanted my family back.

I asked social services about getting help and they referred me to Calderdale Recovery Steps. I had an assessment and was given a date and a place to start the next stage of my life. I was assigned a Key Worker who helped me with social services and other aspects and they referred me to The Basement Recovery Project which is part of the Recovery Steps service.

MY HEAD WAS CARTWHEELING

On the way from Recovery Steps to the Basement, I had a million thoughts going on in my head. They won't understand what I'm going through, I knew better so how can they tell me about me, maybe I'm not that bad and I can do it on my own. My head was swimming with excuses of why not to go. But I made it. I tried to keep Fiona and the kids at the forefront of my mind. On arrival, I was greeted by someone who asked if they could help. We got talking and my mind was quickly put at ease. I got a massive feeling of relief when I explained what was going on, where I was at and that I needed help. It was like a weight had been lifted. I started to believe that this could work.

One of my biggest concerns was around how will these people know what I was on about if they are just working there and know nothing about it. It was quickly explained that everyone there had been through similar experiences, they were all people who had had an issue with addiction and were now in recovery. I was no longer alone.

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

I was signed up to the Recovery Programme. After attending lots of here and now meetings (which are amazing) I then started the programme; pre-recovery which lasted four weeks and then abstinence which lasted 12 weeks. I felt a lot of comfort and felt I could open up a bit more (even though it took me a long time to even talk in meetings). I got a great deal of knowledge through doing the programmes and have gained a lot of very good friends (my recovery family) all with the same outlook on life as I now have. It's like been given a new life and none of us intend to waste it.

I think without Calderdale Recovery Steps and the Basement Project I would be in prison or dead. I have absolutely no doubt in that whatsoever as that's the way my life was heading. Without the help, the knowledge and the love I know that would have been the outcome.

So now, upon finishing the programmes and doing various courses at Recovery Steps and the Basement Project, I have a brand-new life. Because I attended and completed the Through My Child's Eyes course at Recovery Steps, I was recently asked to attend a conference and deliver a presentation/workshop on my recovery story and the effects of my using has had on the kids. I was very nervous because I struggle to talk to more than just a couple of people at any time. This was in a massive room full of people, I went through with it and it was an amazing experience and it's boosted my confidence to a new level. This is exactly what Calderdale Recovery Steps and the Basement Project have done for me, they have lifted me from an isolated, unloving person to someone who cares deeply about life and the people within it.

I am now a Recovery Builder at the Basement Project, helping to promote recovery through various means. My life couldn't be better. Myself and my family attend karaoke nights at the Basement, recovery walks, running clubs, ongoing projects and many other things. I have a new little baby boy (named after my brother, Shaun) and I have a lovely home with a loving family who know I love them too.

I can honestly say that I do have my life back and I couldn't have done it without the help from the services here in Calderdale. Lately, I have had a very up and down few months. It has been emotionally testing due to a death and a birth within the family but my recovery family have been through it with me every step of the way. I don't thank them enough but I do believe getting well and being happy is its own thanks because that's all they want – for people to get well.

For anyone who is thinking about getting themselves into recovery but have all the questions and thoughts going on in their heads I would "suggest" that you get stuck in, put those thoughts to rest, hand over what you think you know about yourself, be very open minded and willing to learn and you won't regret it.

Massive thanks to both Recovery Steps and the Basement Recovery Project, not just from me but my family too. You have given them their dad and Kev back. Xx

Kev

