

Client Story

Growing up I was abused by my uncle at the age of 9 and he used alcohol and cannabis to groom me. This went on for 3 years. I went onto other substances from the age of 13, but after losing my mate to it all I stopped for a while. All my family were drinkers and I'd grown up around alcohol, but that wasn't my thing, it had put me off just watching them.

My behaviour was very erratic as a teenager and looking back I probably needed trauma therapy as a result of my past. My parents split and I started hanging out with a gang of friends and then got expelled from school at 14.

Over the next few years I would get clean for a while but invariably I'd go back. I was stealing, driving without a license and eventually I went to prison for a few months. I'd come out clean and then relapse within 3-6 months. I had done six and half year's prison time between the ages of 17-25. I moved to Bexhill for Rehab in 2004 after which I stayed, hoping to escape my past. I was partying and doing other drugs and eventually starting dealing again. I went back to prison and when I got out I was using heavily. I think I had a breakdown at this point through using so much. I contracted Hepatitis C which made me really ill and together with all the drug taking I was a mess

By this time, I had a partner and kids and social services had got involved. My behaviour had become so erratic that I had to move out and I ended up in a trap house. My partner managed to find me after not knowing where I was for nearly 3 months. She said I needed to sort myself out and look after our kids. That was my wake-up moment. I asked for help on May 17th 2017, I'll never forget that date.

I got into STAR quickly and then started attending SMART groups at ESRA. At first, I didn't want to talk or share with the other people in the groups, I was being judgmental... in my head I was not like them. But then I gave it a chance, observing at first and when I listened to other people stories I realised I could relate to them, so I started sharing and people were really supportive.

Thanks to the help and support of ESRA I got clean and eventually got my kids back later that year. The staff and environment at ESRA gave me a sense of belonging and a chance to recover, learn, and develop a new work ethic. I'd never really had a proper job before and ESRA gave me an opportunity for real 'work experience', it was educating being there. I gained employment and became a senior support worker for ESRA, drawing on my peer experiences to support others going through similar situations. It built my confidence and belief in myself, I was giving back and showing gratitude to the people who had believed in me and given me the opportunity to help myself.



“My best friend was stabbed and killed by a rival gang and I think this was the trigger that pushed me into heroin. I had been dealing it for a while but I'd never used it personally. I started smoking it from the age of 16 and from then on, I was hooked. I started to inject 3 months later, that's when it really started to go downhill and I realised I was in trouble”.

“Now I'm a successful business owner and run my own, co-funded Youth Project helping young people at risk of serious violence. I have been instrumental in installing isolated catastrophic bleed kits across the county and I engage with all forms of media to promote awareness of knife crime. I'm in a really good place and I've learned so much from how far I've come”.