**Interviewer:** *OK, and so how about you start with your cards. So tell me about your cards and like kind of maybe whatever you want to share with me about them, how they helped you or. Yeah. It's up to you.*

Ehm so I kind of got these last year, ehm I do follow a certain religion called spiritualism. Ehm I attend like development groups and you know I go to the

spiritualist church on a regular basis ehm when I was in ehm when I was actually in treatment ehm I used to go to the church every Sunday ehm and I would just find ehm feel kind of like solace and that energy in the church. Ehm also, while I was in treatment, I was going one of my friends is a professional medium, so I was going to achieve uhm the development group. So, I would go to ehm, can't remember the day on [date] evening ehm and attend to a group and ehm and we started to like work on kind of building like psychic ability or meeting these like abilities. And then we've looked spoke about getting cards. Ehm now I already had another set of cards, which somebody got me years ago, but never bought me own so while I was kind of in treatment, I bought this like pack of ehm cards. Ehm and what I do with them is like, I get times where I like I can, I can be quite chaotic to do you know what I mean in my brain. Works...goes on overdrive and ehm so a lot of time if it's like decisions to be made or I'm unsure about a certain situation or I've got this kind like...[pauses] I don't know like uncomfortable feelings or something else kinda ehm, because what you tend to do is you meant to ask a question and then you kind of put your energy onto the cards and pick the three cards and then, you know, look at the meaning of the cards. And it can be quite significant at times of the meaning behind the cards ehm and be quite healing.

**Interviewer:** *Oh, man, would you like to do this now? Would you like to maybe see what they say about how they like how they connect to your.*

Yeah, so let's just pick three now ehm...

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, for you. So that is about how it connects to your relapse experiences?*

Ok how I disconnect my addiction that's what I'm going to ask.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah. Sounds good. Wow. That's so interesting. I've never I've never experienced that before.*

[shuffles cards] and what you meant to do is you as you go through them, you just kind of the one that feels right, you just pick it out. So, you know, like if I was doing it for somebody else ehm I'd say pick three cards but what we can also do that that's fine. So we have [picks first card] ehm The Ten of Winter...ehm [picks second card] Awakening and [picks last card] Seven of Spring. So I'm just going to quickly read up on what they mean [checks cards]

Ten of Winter means:

It's time to walk away. This situation no longer serves you and is merely holding you back. Sometimes endings are sad and sometimes they are a relief. Change can be stressful and intimidating, but trust that this is a healthy and necessary one. Drawing this card means that you have probably known for some time that you needed to move on. You've been unable or unwilling to cut ties. Let go and set off on a journey towards a happier tomorrow, set new goals for yourself, make this a fresh beginning. Focus on the future, not on the past. A fairy is leaving a challenging land of winter for warm destination so her troubles will be over. And then it just tells me the resolution of difficulties. The end of addiction. A weight lifted off your shoulders. An emotional overreaction.

So good isn't it? For me it always just gives it some kind of depth and meaning to things.

And Awakening [checks second card]:

It's time for a change of perspective. Seeing your challenges in an entirely different way can help you find a new lease on life or end a stagnant situation. Ask God for the angels and the fairies to give you signs that will help you perceive things in a whole other light. This card can show up to remind you just how wonderful, eclectic and magical you are. Others value the qualities within you that you may have labelled weird or unusual. You can come to see the incredible strength and potential of lies in being your own unique self. This is a card of charity and kindness. Just as the fairies are willing to reach out and help you on your path, you are asked to do the same to those who may be in need. It's beautiful to extend aid and compassion to others. Remember, though, to keep a balance so that you don't fall into an unhealthy pattern of overgiving. The fairy on the card is upside down, giving him a whole new way of reflecting upon his situation that do not being simple rests on his feet as he searches for just the right balance in his life. A new point of view seeing beyond what's hopeless. Hidden action behind an apparent standstill. Exploring your past life turns. Giving so that others can gain.

So again, that's quite significant isn't it to what we're doing now. And then one more [checks last card] Seven of Spring:

It's healthy and normal to stand up for yourself. Don't allow others to talk you out of your beliefs or opinions at this time. Your thoughts and feelings about what is the right thing to do are exactly spot on. This isn't the time to back down or to compromise, however, it is a good time to pay close attention to what was happening so that you can learn from the situation. Don't allow people in power to intimidate you, assert your ways. Sign petitions. Call your local government to attend rallies to demonstrate his strength in numbers. The fairy in this image is dressed in red to show her passion for her mission and her signals that she will be quick to defend their beliefs. Additional meanings: taking a stand, defending your position, knowing that you are right, courage through adversity, taking self-protection or assertiveness or gaining physical strength.

**Interviewer:** *That is so amazing!*

Which is quite significant isn't it to that question? Ehm and it's quite interesting that sometimes, if you've not really got like they say that you are meant to set an intention, you know, when you’re kind of putting relevance to the cards. Now, not everybody believes and things like that do you know what I mean...but I do. Ehm and it's interesting isn't it like, like what I was actually thinking about. It was kind of, the first card was kind of about...maybe second one was also about like it being important not just for me, for, you know, what I learn and grow, when I learn and grow going through all the stuff that I'm doing. That's going to not just help me. And I have been doing a lot of service lately, you know, for ehm NA. I've taken on quite a lot of service to help me. And I've also, you know, briefly spoke to you the other day don't ehm you know, and I feel like that ehm the card is about like, you know, making the right choices and going in the same direction and I'm obviously ehm starting a degree in mental health nursing. So, it feels very significant.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, totally. Yeah. And I love how it was talking about your you know, it's like you are learning. It's like a change. You know, something is about to change. It's a new season and something new and you're learning from it. And I wonder that, you know, and then also the second card then was more about, you know, advocate for stand up, be courageous about what you're going through. And I wonder if that is kind of like I mean, I don't know. And I want you to be very honest, but I wonder if that is kind of like how you maybe processed your relapse experiences because, you know, like how you go about this. Like, is it connected to what you think about your relapse?*

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because I'm kind of going a bit in a different direction with what I'm talking about. But basically, 100 percent because since last relapsed you know ehm I've had two I'd say I've had two times of a relapse ehm but it was like over a period of time so it was like a bit of a relapse and then I kind of stopped and then back again, but it was like two on two occasions that that happened. Ehm and, you know, for me, especially this time ehm I've become quite active in service ehm, you know, for fellowship, which is Narcotics Anonymous. And ehm that's been a significant change in my attitude ehm my commitment to to what I'm doing, do you know what I mean? Because I'm not, I'm doing something and it's helping me. But also, like, you know, I'm like, on the service team for like running these sorts of meetings and stuff, do you know what I mean. So I have to go there, I have to be there, I have to commit, I have to give my time like I've been given. So, you know, I feel that that is kind of related to that as well, you know. And that is a result of relapsing and going 'what can I do differently?' Because, you know, at times, you know what? Where am I going with this, I don't know what I'm doing wrong or you know what I mean?

**Interviewer:** *So you are one of the big guys now at NA, are you hey?*

Well, I don't know. I mean, I'm just I'm just a bit more committed. I'm a bit more I'm not just sitting there, you know. I'm actually participating, actively participating, do you know what I mean? like I'm trying to do everything, everything that I can and everything that I hear people are talking about suggesting to do a long term, I'm trying to like constantly be doing that so that I don't end up in that same position, do you know what I mean?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, that is amazing. Ok the first question I had was when you thought about when you heard about the study, what kind of thoughts did you have or what came to mind?*

So obviously, my first...ehm when I first heard about this study, I'd had a one-to-one session with my counsellor, from treatment ehm and she sort of mentioned it...didn't really know an awful lot about what it was, she just said if I was interested in participating and then obviously, I spoke to you whatever. Ehm and again, I think ehm I can kind of relate it to how it's made me feel by being of service in NA, you know what I mean? Because it's not just it's not always just about what I'm going through and what I'm going through or what I've been through. And you know, you can get a healing from laying it out in a conversation or, you know, but also, it's like it could be really beneficial to other people as well. Who you know, might be going through some of the things and don't know how to talk about it and stuff…so so when we kind of have that conversation last week, it made me think of other people as well. So that made it more like, know what, I really do want to do this and also what I'd said to you like it's something that I'm definitely interested in learning more about myself...do you know what I mean? So, to go through this process, I think it is interesting for that as well, you know what I mean? If I'm going to study about mental health and I want to specialize in the area of addiction and me participating in this opens my mind.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah. Oh, that's incredible. Like you love helping and advocating.*

Honestly, ehm I probably haven't always been like that. Ehm it's took me to go down to the bottom and work my way back up to get to that point, do you know what I mean? But like what I am doing is learning how important it is to be of service, do you know what I mean? Ehm obviously, like for me to get to these points and go through the process, other people have stood up for me, do you know what I mean, so it's like a natural thing, then that you're going to work through stuff and then also then do that to somebody else, because it's all free, isn't it? you know, if you go to anything like NA and then you've got all these people who go and give up their time and, you know, they're going for themselves or for anybody there and then helps somebody else, do you know what I mean. So, I'm learning more and more about that. So yeah. Yeah, I feel like that is a significant change for me as a person.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, that's amazing. All right. So, what was it like for you to be asked by a stranger to bring a personal item about that kind of symbolizes your relapse experience? What was that like for you?*

Ehm it just wasn't. Yeah, I mean, I just didn't get it at first, I didn't kind of get. You know, we've obviously just had a conversation about it now and kind of have more more of a kind of a deeper understanding of something that I could use ehm...You know, there is a possibility that it could be something that was related to me actually using, as I said before, I just, you know, for for my own sort of like safety, I had kind of had got rid of anything like that so then I was just unsure as to exactly what to use. But then, you know, now as we've kind of gone through it and I've done that it felt like exactly the right thing to do, do you know what I mean. And yeah. I mean, I'm uncertain if I've answered your question.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, no you did. A bit confused in the beginning, but it was it was all good.*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Well, I'm going to go on to asking about the relapse experience. So you said you mentioned you had 2...have you had, are those the only kind of ones during your life?*

No no no ehm...I mean ehm...So when I described two relapses ehm I kind of describe them as the point of going into treatment ehm. I went into treatment last year and when I got back from, I was living in the south of England and moved back up north to kind of get some help because it's like family, friends and stuff and I went into ehm ehm our treatment facility in north center and it's called treatment facility. So, I was in there for two weeks and I just couldn't deal with it. Ehm I had moved into like an abstinence house. Ehm but I just I obviously wasn't ready at that time. And when it was getting very, like emotional and stuff and I was like 'I don't need to be through this’. You know this isn't for me. So, I left ehm on the Friday afternoon and by the Friday evening, I was kind of using, do you know what I mean? I was drinking and then taking drugs ehm smoking crack cocaine, getting to which, I was like so not wanting to do but what I was doing it ehm I was doing it and and then I kind of got worse after that. Ehm and and so getting kicked out of my ehm supposed accommodation and then ended up homeless. While I was homeless, I had no home to go back to. Ehm so then they were like recommending that I go to this kind of hostel thing, which was just horrific. While in there, someone paid for me to stay in the hotel for one night and then I got put in the Salvation Army hostel for about ten days. And and then ehm because I also have kind of problems with mental health. So, I had to go to the counsellor and then they'd put me in this kind of supported housing, which I'm in now. So ehm but it's like it's not an abstinence house. Just they've got like us 14. We have our own flats. And and I carried on using for a little while ehm not kind of to the extreme that I was before I moved back from the southwest but ehm then I was kind of I just, you know, I need to change, I need to do something different.

So, I got back in contact with the treatment place and I went back in there ehm I think it was kind of like at the end of September last year or beginning of October maybe. And it's like a like a preliminary stage that you're in for several weeks then you go back into treatment. So, then I stayed abstinent from the end of September up until until March. And so, it's like six months altogether. Ehm and then I relapsed. Ehm so kind of you know, what I've kind of learnt from being in recovery is that you relapse when you're in recovery. Do you know, there's times, loads of times in the past prior to coming back from last year that I've carried on that I've used again, have used again, have used again but I've never been in recovery, never been following a programme, do you know what I mean, or anything like that. So, I kind of maybe think that this last year is really that time when it can be the most significant way that I can say that I've relapsed, because I've had time where I've been hospitalized for using ehm and been seriously ill and come out and I have not used for like seven months. So, you could say that that's a relapse. But, having been in recovery, do you know what I mean, I **just chose not to use** for those seven months of more of fear of dying. Ehm so and what was what else...was I going to answer sorry?

**Interviewer:** *Oh, it's this is more of a conversation. So I might pop in some questions that come to my mind and one was ehm, it is so interesting that you kind of connect relapse with being in recovery. It happens when you're in in recovery rather than you had a time of being seven months where you chose not to use. And you and that kind of for you almost doesn't seem to be recovery. It's just really interesting. I've never heard somebody say that that way. So how does that make you feel to have relapsed multiple times?*

Yeah, so, I mean, prior to coming into recovery and stuff like that and going through treatment ehm I would have, I probably would have said about that time where I didn't use and then that I started to use again. And then that it got completely out of hand, do you know what I mean. But it was only really. It was one time really, where I wouldn't use ehm for several months because I've been in hospital with kidney failure ehm from taking an overdose ehm and that it was more like say out of fear. And then I'd kind of started to use again ehm and then it just went to a whole new level. And then there wasn't really like, because there was because with my kind of using there, I wasn't using every single day. It was like these mad sorts of benders, which were then getting more and more and time off between was less. But I'd say, you know, like from I think what it is I got when you go into recovery so you've kind of been through treatments, then you find your fellowship, and you return to meetings and you're kind of learning about not taking not taking any mood or mind altering substances ehm, then it feels more significant if you relapse. So, like, I relapsed at the beginning of lockdown ehm it's hard ehm and kind of, I'd gone through treatment. I was having doubts about the fellowship, I was having doubts about my sponsor, I'd started to date somebody. So that was causing all this emotional turmoil, and I was also having kind of episodes with mental health. Ehm and I relapsed. And then I stopped a couple of days, like I stopped for 30 days and then relapsed again ehm which then lasted another few weeks. And then I was like, 'right come on, come on, come on. You can change this' and then I'd stopped for 90 days and then ehm having issues again and kind kind of what I've kind of learnt over the past few months ehm it's been how like I react to things and stuff and like I don't cope with emotional things very well. And ehm and the using is kind of the end end of that. So, it's kind of like me having to realize ehm...How to how to recognize those kinds of when those kinds of things are creeping in, do you know what I mean? Ehm for it to not happen again, do you know what I mean ehm. But I'm still I react to things in a certain way, but like not. It's like trying to choose something differently, do you know what I mean.

**Interviewer:** *How many times would you say you've relapsed then?*

God. I mean, you know, if we just look at it in general terms [laughs] a lot, I don't know how many, you know, 20 times maybe, I don't know. But, you know, in relation to hoping to coming back and starting that journey of recovery ehm is probably five.

**Interviewer:** *OK, um, how do you feel about having relapsed so many times?*

Well, you know, I think what it is, is if you're not aware, if if you're not aware of what you're suffering with or. That's kind of where they got that kind of term that how how can you be relapsing if you're not aware of what's wrong with you or you in denial? You basically, you're not relapsing, you just you're still using because you haven't you haven't had a period of like recovering abstinence. You know what I mean? Ehm I think that's where that kind of idea comes from, which you can kind of understand. I've gone through some work, do you know what I mean but when you relapse, that's just horrendous because you just [pauses] It's like especially after going into recovery, because it's like you you know you know what, you shouldn't be doing it. So, like it hasn't had the consequences of my using weren't as bad as what they were before I went through treatment and everything, but the mental consequences were 10 times worse because I kind of I had an awareness of recovery. Does that make sense?

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Would you say it's even harder now that you have that awareness of recovery?*

It's like more painful because. And then, yeah, and and I think obviously the way it affects me, but then it's like just that kind of guilt and shame and like letting people down and, you know, I mean. Like what is wrong with me? Why can't I get this or...it's hard.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yes. So has going through five relapses made a difference on how you see yourself?*

Ehm well, for me, it's been, every single time something's kind of happened it's then, you know, when I'm kind of out of it, and I kind of look back and reflect, I can kind of see where I've gone wrong or you know actually what I'm suffering with. It's more the drink and drugs are a solution to the way that you feel. It's like ehm, you know, what I said before, if things are going on for me and it's kind of mentally challenging or emotionally challenging, when it gets out of hand. That's my problem. And then I will use to try and stop me from feeling that way. So, it's now learning how to not use to I'm just learning how to manage those emotions and feelings ehm without using which, you know, hopefully I can get there.

**Interviewer:** *That's literally my next question. Like, how would you say you have changed through these experiences?*

So. So. What I'm kind of getting a bit more awareness around is, if certain conversations or situations happen that kind of make me feel not quite accepted or a little bit rejected, it creates this kind of turmoil, internal turmoil and I'm kind of maybe like conditioned myself throughout the years to kind of block that out and all…you know I haven't probably not really blocking out always trying like 'I don't need to mention that' but what it does is it kind of like makes me angry or resentful or emotional or upset. Ehm so what I'm learning to do is when and even if it's only something small is talk about it. Talk about it to my sponsor. Talk about it to my peers, talk about it to my counsellor when so that I don't get to a point where several things have happened. And by that point, I can't deal with that. So that's that's a major, major shift for me. Ehm and where I said before, like, you know, before we went into lockdown, it was doing its service, I'll be the one that's making the tea and greeting people ehm and in this last 7 weeks, I think, must be nearly 8 weeks now, ehm that's been really key for me to be of service ehm because it's like it's kind of like a deeper commitment to my recovery, you know, on four days of the week. I mean, I enjoy meeting every single day at the moment I'm doing 90 meetings in 90 days ehm and of four days of the week I do service so I have to be there at that time, so I then have to fit anything else that needs to be done within my day has to fit around that. So that's like a big part of my day ehm and that's that's been massively helpful for me to kind of have a structure and a deeper commitment to my recovery because ehm. So yeah, commitment and awareness. And maybe, like understand it like a bit more acceptance of myself and what I'm suffering with.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, well, those are big things. Yeah, OK. How does your family/friends view you as a result of all of your experiences?*

Yeah, I mean, you know, like when I look back, you know, I moved back to the north of England ehm in May 2019 ehm it's been, you know what we spoke about, there's been several times where I carried on. Like having a little bit of abstinence using, have abstinence then using, have a little abstinence then using but on the whole, throughout that period, my life has gradually got a bit better and it took my family hundred percent, you know, they were barely speaking to me and my sister didn't speak to me for five months and she didn't know what to do. Yeah, they definitely kind of you know, obviously there's a kind of worry every time, you know, they kind of will notice straight away if I have changed and my behaviour is changing. And, you know, I'm definitely off on like a better relationship with my family ehm. And friends, you know I'm making new friends as well, which I think is important as well, can't kind of have I can't lead my life in that way ehm and if that means I have to have a new set of friends to stay healthy and stay well then that's what I've got to do. Ehm so you know I meet people through recovery, which I kind of got deeper and deeper into relationship with. You know and they are noticing a change in me and my sponsor is definitely noticing a change ehm he's kind of vocalized it to me the other day saying that he can feel the difference with me and how I'm approach things, and I can feel it myself, but I don't want to get complacent to something and to friendships because it's a day at a time isn't it?

**Interviewer:** *Yes, yeah. Actually, I love that you said that with new friends because it wasn't that one of the cards said too, like of like not looking back, but actually kind of, you know, whatever other people say doesn't matter. But like do your own your new season moving forward. It was something like this in the cards.*

Absolutely. Yeah, I probably wouldn't have been noticing but that sounds like something like you've just picked up on that, you know what I mean? And and because it is it's like standing in your own truth and not being ashamed to talk about it. You know, people go on to social media and post all these things and, no that isn't necessarily me, but to be honest, you know, and I'm still because my sponsor will often say to me 'Save your ass, not your face.' So, you know, I kind of attempted living that, like I'm a [profession] and, you know, at times, you know, because it's like a profession, I may not necessarily be honest with people, but it has kind of opened the door to me lapses in the past because everyone was drinking or people on a social setting taking drugs, you know, and for me ehm I can't I can't do that, you know, I'm not always honest, so I don't always say' do you know what, I'm in recovery'. So that still needs to be something that I need to work on. But that totally fits in with what you just mentioned there about. Yeah, to be honest. But it's yeah.

**Interviewer:**  *Gosh, it's amazing how did you get into that? That's amazing.*

I trained to be a [profession] when I was 17. And and, you know, I was pretty successful with it, had some great, fantastic jobs in CE and travelled the world a lot back then. And it was always been like my party and like my crazy lifestyle and the background, which then eventually kind of took over. But yeah, and it's something I've been doing for a long time now. Twenty-one years, and then I trained to [other profession] in 2012 so about 8 years ago, but then I went into like doing a degree and like a [degree course] ehm. And I got like I ended up getting like a teaching position straight after it on a sort of degree course in CE and then at the university they offered a teaching position. But I ended up like having a major issue with drugs while I was trying to do that job, so I had to resign. And, you know, and and I've kind of like I'm trying to take a different kind of turn with my life, to be honest, at this point in time, because as much as I look as much as I love that job and you know I've done it for a long time, there is [pauses] I don't know it can encourage an unhealthy kind of an unhealthy environment to be in. It's kind of, you know, if you're in the industry, there is this kind of like drink and drugs so. I think, you know, when I, my abilities have kind of helped me to mask what's really going on in a lot of ways, because I have the ability to perform until I couldn't hold it together anymore. But I kind of thought it gets a lot easier because of that, so it's been as much a positive and, in some respects, and in other ways it's been very detrimental. And maybe that's why it's taken me a long time to get to this point, you know. And also, you know, because the type of work that I'm in, I know how to present myself quite well, you know I can make myself look presentable. So, then it completely hides like no one can see what's really going on.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Whereas now, you're more open? You kind of it's almost like the [profession] is off and you're like actually learning to be more your authentic self?*

Yeah. And I think it's definitely a journey. It's a constant learning process. And and there's probably more and more things that I need to work on but. I kind of was inspired when I was in treatment especially, and kind of watching, watching and feeling being part of this experience of like changing groups, like an internal experience rather than in you know [profession] is external, which does have an internal impact on mental health and wellbeing, but this kind of journey is an internal thing. I think that's kind of helped me to make decisions about where I want to go for the rest of my life. You know with the mental health nursing I could be very active in that.

**Interviewer:** *Right. Yeah, that's amazing. So amazing. Ok so how did you feel when you were about to relapse and kind of afterwards?*

OK, I don't remember the date now, but it was kind of the end of March beginning of April this year and I'd basically just. When I was when I had kind of bumped into somebody who I hadn't seen for many years ehm while I was at the end of my treatment and it was then we decided to meet up and go on a date. I think I was just kind of at the end of treatment and then maybe I had a couple of days left or I just I think I've just finished maybe and. So, started to go on dates and it was really lovely ehm, but I had to be, like straight away, be very honest about ehm my personal life ehm and this person and I haven't seen him for for many years. And he was kind of linked to prior to 2012 I used to be be kind of active in the club scene and go out partying and be like I was still a bit able to hold it together and not know what was very much aware of what's going on. Like, what was really like. It was not nearly as bad, but basically back then I just had this fear like I don't know why like I was so bothered of about him talking about me to all these people. So, it just set off this kind of internal [pauses] like self-loathing, maybe if that's the right word, about it all you know about myself and about being judged not being accepted. And, you know, God knows. And so, I think it was kind of doomed, really from the start, you know, and I've been advised not to get in relationships, but I was kind of like you know I haven't been with anyone for a long time. You know I'm just going to take it easy and see how it goes. But it’s kind of, I just... if I'm looking back at it right now, like I wasn't coping at all with...I would be crying and stuff. And I just wasn't great with the emotions at all very well ehm but at the same time, I had come out of treatment ehm I was getting told to do 90 meetings in 90 days, and I just was like, I don't feel I need to I've just done treatment and, you know, I was attacked quite a few years ago and nine and a half years ago, like, I was kind of beaten up so I do get a bit of fear sometimes about being in certain situations. And, you know, like some of the meetings that you go to and stuff can be quite ehm masculine. And, you know, it just doesn't feel comfortable for me to be in that kind of environment. And so, I was like resisting going to those meetings to the point where I actually thought, 'right, I'm not doing this fellowship now. I'm going to go to a different fellowship.' And then it was just very chaotic. And there was kind of a lot of things going on. And then we went into lockdown. And then I just remember just. Like that, that guy, had kind of like a kind of sense that something wasn't quite right with it and and I and he'd ended up messaging me because of the Lockdown saying that his kind of ex-partner was going to move back in with him. Ehm I remember just thinking 'I can't deal with this shit' and I ended up, I'd got myself into that much emotional turmoil that I'd kind of, not really had any solid connections with recovery, like with fellowship sorry, ehm so I was kind of like backed myself in this corner and then I saw a different kind of like, quite significant, ehm episode ehm with mental health. So, I'd gone to like ehm my mum's and had been, I had these kinds of outbursts of energy and stuff at times ehm and just a bit kind of crazy behaviour.

So, I ended up having a massive argument with my mum and my sister about it and I just I just completely lost her. And then my reaction straightaway then was to go and drink alcohol ehm which I did for like a day and a half. Ehm then I stopped for a couple of days, I owned it, I spoke about what I've done. And then on, that was like mid-week. And then by the Friday, I kind of had a one-to-one with one of the counsellors and honest at the same time I'd kind of like drawn a line with that guy ehm. But I just I was just it just felt very, very emotional and I just couldn't handle it. And then I actually then used drugs that day ehm, I broke down in one of the meetings and then just I think I;d already kind of made that... I'd already gone down that path and carried on for a week or so, a couple of weeks I can't remember, ehm but I was just. I remember just being like, 'oh God.' And it broke out and I was kind of vulnerable. I was, had then used ehm something that I'd sworn that I wasn't going to do again, you know, six months earlier and then I'd gone in the lockdown. I haven't seen anybody really you know apart from the odd pair. I haven't seen any of my family. And ehm I went to do someone's hair who was like ehm somebody I'd known for years and they were all having like a garden party. And he offered me a beer and I just thought, 'why not?', I'm fine. I'll be fine type of thing but I kind of was in that I'd already been using and ehm then he brought out a bag of cocaine. So, I then used cocaine. And then I came home that night. I didn't want to tell them. I felt ashamed ehm that I'd been using again. So, I was then back out there again so that was kind of like old. One period but then I just. I think I need to use again and oh I don't know it was just chaotic and ehm. Since that's gone on ehm I went to the community mental health team, try to get to the bottom of what goes on with the mental health. I've been diagnosed with ADHD now and trying to get treatment for that ehm. So, I kind of got different things going on, you know, what the feelings and the emotional instability and ehm yeah, that's that's my problem. That's the kind of like because I'm on this journey now with mental health now because they can't really get to the bottom of things until you are abstinent. And they're still unsure whether there's some kind of personality disorder going on like an emotionally unstable personality disorder. But now, I'm getting treatment for ADHD ehm so it's kind of like trying to treat everything separately, Yeah, you could say there's a lot going on. Maybe it is. Maybe it isn't, do you know what I mean? Ehm but it's definitely feelings that might...and not been able to cope with emotions. That is probably my driving force into using.

**Interviewer:** *Can you remember how you felt right after you relapsed, did you have any particular thoughts or any feelings?*

Ehm I definitely just felt disappointed. Ehm guilty, shameful. Ehm, you know. That period, that first kind of period ehm back in April, March or April, that went right through April ehm by the end of it I was starting to get that kind of ehm well I was starting to just become like lying and deceit, manipulative, you know all those kinds of negative traits that come with using ehm and that made me feel horrendous. Because I was like, oh, my God, I don't want to this isn't what I want to be, you know, I don't want. Ehm you know, I definitely feel that I'm not like that when I'm **not using me.** I feel like there's two different people. Ehm so that just and then it's like it's then up until like you've got to tell everybody to be honest and you know, that's challenging. You know, you feel bad enough about what you've done but you got then explain to somebody else and then take home what they're going to feel about it, do you know what I mean. It's challenging. It just makes you feel like your self-worth is low. You know, just having to try to explain it. It's just...it's hard. It's not a good place.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I, I was I got really interested there when you said it's almost like, you know, you said, yeah. You kind of got reverting back to these, you know, manipulative and lying traits. But at the same time, you also having almost like an internal policy or something like something that tells you internally, I don't want to be like this. So it's almost like you have an internal, like, battle or whatever, like a dilemma.*

More of the battle, and where I was trying to explain before, is once you kind of go into recovery you start to learn...you're aware, then you're aware of what you're suffering with. And prior to coming back last year, I would always be in denial really about what I'm suffering with, so. Whereas now it's like, oh, my God what are you doing, do you know what I mean? Ehm I don't want to do this, but again, it's like what I've learnt from this kind of second occasion, which was 50 something days ago for two weeks before that. I was learning to realise about the emotion it is how I react to situations and how I deal with my emotions or don't deal with them. That's my problem. You know, prior to that maybe I still had this kind of idea that the drink and drugs is what. That's you. That's the problem. That makes me behave in a completely different way. When I then used the drinks or drugs or what happened before. I got to that point where that seems like the best option. That's what I'm that's what I need to learn to address.

It's not the root cause cause it's like tryna address the what the problem is. You know, what I've kind of come to learn is that drink and drugs are the solution they're not, they then become a problem as well. Because you don't want to feel what you're feeling. You you know, why don't you try to change the way you feel trying to not. So it's like learning how to manage, learning how to feel things like and how to manage your emotions and stuff is that's that's then has to become the solution, which you're kind of slowly getting moving towards bit by bit. Ehm my solution now has to be kind of like, say I go to my 12 step programmes they made me learning about myself.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Gosh, thank you for sharing that. And so how would you describe what a relapse means to you? What does relapse mean to you? Like, you know, are there any kind of particular thoughts or like words or images that come to mind or if you can just have a general think about that.*

So I'd say for me personally ehm, you know, I don't want to relapse a hundred percent now. I don't want to have to go through anything like that again, but it's taken those occasions to me to come to this kind of deeper surrender, to like my problems, and and have an understanding of, you know, without those things happening. I have been able to learn from them, I've been able to like reflect on them and look back and see my patterns of behaviour and see ehm that actually like, you know, even though it's maybe like something slightly different that's happened, the way it is is how I react to things like ehm where I kind of briefly touch on it and know all the answers before, you know like, if something makes me feel like I'm not really accepted or rejected, it sets off this kind of internal pain for me. So, without those relapses, I wouldn't have learned that, you know what I mean? Because I may have may have done it at some point in my life but it's it's it's gave me an awareness, a deeper sense of awareness of myself by going through those things. So, you know, some people don't go through that. Some people can stay abstinent but for me, that's some part of my journey so far. And I think obviously, if you don't learn from something, at some point you go to the next thing that comes along that presents itself in that way again. It's gonna take me down the same path again. It's about learning from it, ehm but just having like ehm support you know, obviously I'm quite lucky, I'm still under continuing care from treatment you know, so I have those people to kind of reflect and chat about things ehm, but I also have NA so my fellowship, NA what I go to, so I have other addicts that kinds of. Because people, other people can see things that maybe I can't.

**Interviewer:** *That's a really powerful answer. Having gone through, you know, multiple relapses, how did you feel when you then went back to treatment?*

It's horrible. Like when I spoke, because I'll go back to speaking about ehm March and April around that time. You know, I'd relapsed at the beginning when I started drunk first for a couple of days then I went on a bender for a few days. And then I kind of stopped for 30 days so in that 30 days I was in fear of ehm...'oh God I can't believe I've done' you know I don't want to lead my life this way, and then when it got to that point where I'd done it again, I'd ehm I've been getting so much more support, so it felt even worse. I was like ehm letting down, letting all those people down and ehm then another person, who I've just kinda become friends within treatment who'd relapsed, asked me to go around and help and then gave me the drugs. I didn't. I kept them. And then whether it was going to a place of guilt or whatever, but I'd kind of mentioned it to people knew that I'd gone there and were worried that that's what happened, so I said I'd throw them away and I haden't and used them and that's what I said before, that I kind of got into that pattern that I was lying to people....to have lied to people who were supporting me. So, to then have to be honest about that felt horrendous, because it felt like I was letting them all down. But it's like I, I have a tendency to think to think what I think is going to happen or what I think is going to get said or and actually in reality it's completely different than that. But by me thinking what I think it's going to be, it can help me back from actually doing it and so I'd say even that has been like because it's like I had to go through that kind of pain. Ehm it's a learning process as well. To just be honest ehm.

**Interviewer:** *Um, yes so what effects would you say, did your number of relapses, so let's say five, the five big ones, and what effects did all of them have on your recovery?*

You know, I'd say like going back to last year, 2019 when I'd attempted treatment and then kind of relapsed, I wasn't really following anything in particular ehm. I think that's when people thought I was bit of a lost cause you know by that point I'd moved back in the north I was still heavily using crack cocaine and then I was now using heroin to bring myself down and just, you know, my sister you know, she's got children. She didn't want them to think that she can't condones that kind of to behaviour ehm. And then you kind of went back into treatment, you know. Sorry I think I got off in the wrong direction with the question ehm...Sorry, can I start again with that?

**Interviewer**: *Oh, absolutely, yes, absolutely no problem. What is the difference between having had one relapse and going into treatment versus having had five and then going into treatment?*

Yes. Sorry, I'd kinda lost my thought. So, when I had to go back, I'd kind of had this disagreement with one of the counsellors when I was first in treatment, went and complained about her, so then having to go back. I totally was like 'I'm never going back there', I'd totally ruled it out and then I had to kind of go and face that ehm...we ended up getting on really very well in the end with that lady ehm, you know, it was like I wasn't ready. They totally. It's really like, you know, everything that I'd just spoken about that sense where I think something's going to be a certain way and to be able to see it's completely different experiences. And that's part of my problem. It's my thinking. It's the way I think something's going to be but each time. Like, I'm kind of, you know, I have got an awareness, have got an understanding, have got...you know, people are...people who have seen I'd say, me as I should, me as I am you know the real me ehm. You know, I am constantly learning each time those things, all help me within my recovery. You know, I'm able to...it's taken a long time for me to kind of start being open more when in meetings and stuff and kind of ehm because sometimes I share and I'm like 'oh, my gosh, what am I going on about?' Ehm but it's getting stronger. Ehm, you know, and there's going to be a lot of people who may have been through kind of similar experience, so yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, OK, so the next question would be again about recovery. So if you had to describe what recovery means to you after having had multiple relapses, what would you say?*

I mean, I've definitely come to the realisation that I need ehm I need to be active within my recovery fellowship, you know what I mean? I have to be I have to have to have that because I know I can't do it on my own. Yeah, I mean I don't really know how to answer that question ehm...Sorry again I just got a bit lost.

**Interviewer:** *No, no, no, it's fine. So what would you say does recovery mean to you? Like and has it so has it changed? Let's say what did recovery mean to you when you first got had a relapse*

So recovery. When I came back last year, it was I knew I needed to stop taking drugs because it's destroying my life, you know, the consequences of my using terrible arrests, job loss, home loss, homelessness, family disowned me you know so many consequences ehm I need to stop using drugs. So stop using drugs. And actually, you know, my recovery, my and my fellowship has helped me to learn take the drugs away that's when you can really see what the problem is ehm so recovery is important for ehm learning and growing continually as a person ehm and again probably without all these situations that bring up all these emotions and feelings and then relapsing that bring up all these other emotions and feelings, I'm not not going to learn and grow so my recovery is is key to all that.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah, it's amazing. So, what would you say you've learnt from relapse?*

You know, my my relapses have helped me to understand myself on a deeper level ehm it's kind of took for me to go through something, experience something, to then have a opportunity to stand, look back and reflect and see and learn about patterns in my behaviours and that all of that, all of all of my kinds of things that have caused these kinds of emotions that I know have got kinds of similarities with the way it makes me feel, you know what I mean? And that is what I need the help and what I need to keep working on today. I mean, without those relapses, I wouldn't have experienced that.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Is there anything that you would have done differently or wished you would have known or the service could have done differently for you?*

I mean, ehm I could say. Yes, to that question, ehm, you know, I wish it was all plain sailing and really easy thing to do and, you know, everybody gets a different experience, but my experience hasn't been that ehm, you know, in the way that I'm...in the position that I'm sort of getting into now, where I've got this kind of deep level of awareness about myself. Maybe no, I wouldn't, because if I hadn't gone through what I've gone through, if I hadn't experienced what I've experienced then would I [pauses] be where I'm at now, and I still got quite a lot of work to do on myself, and I'm hoping that I can continue to do that without having to use drink or drugs to as a solution and hope that what I'm doing with my fellowship will work for me...to continue on this path. But again, like to answer that question again like without those experiences, I wouldn't have that...I wouldn't be able to see that person I am, I wouldn't be able to notice my reactions.

**Interviewer:** *So on a day to day basis, how do you manage your recovery and or protect yourself from relapse?*

My my difference in this last 54 days ehm I've been doing, I've been still doing 90 meetings in 90 days, which is what I was doing anyway ehm but I've also been doing my service commitments, which they are major to me...on top of that ehm it was kind of the world has kind of opened up a little bit again ehm I can go back to my spiritualist church ehm…so I do that...every Monday I do a development group ehm I also, I used to sing when I was younger and I never really pushed myself with it at all. So, I started having singing lessons...so I do that on a Thursday ehm I've kind of made things a little bit less pressured. So, you know, I've always in the past felt that I needed to be doing this job or working really hard in that way to kind of change things. Ehm so I'd in March applied and started to do a degree, which was just too much at that time because I had too much going on. But I've now put that forward to to restart in January and hopefully by January I'm in a better place, emotionally and mentally to cope with the pressures of doing a degree. But it's kind of like recognising that my recovery needs to come first before anything else because...otherwise I haven't got those solid foundations to cope with.

**Interviewer:** *Would you say that on a day-to-day basis, you think about relapse or using?*

What I've what I've what I've noticed so it might just be a small thing. So, it could be like, say, a particular person might kind of do something that makes me feel a certain way or like feel a bit emotional or like, 'oh my God why are they doing it? Now why would you say that?' do you know what I mean? Ehm but what I've, I'm kind of aware of it now so I'm kind of noticing it as it's happening and I'm speaking about it immediately. So that's a big change for me, do you know what I mean? Whereas in the past I wouldn't do that. I'd go... [mimics frustration] 'ugh forget it!' but it's still thinking about it and then the next time something happens, I may overthink it even more so ehm yah, did that answer that question?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, you kind of find a way through, even if you might get triggered…*

Yah, sorry. So, I might...in the past because I haven't dealt with those things or been open and verbal about those things. It's then got to a point where it's like, 'oh my God, I've got that many different things going on inside' that using becomes the most appealing thing to do...to stop 'I don't want to feel that way', so I'm trying to recognise that before that gets to that point. There is occasions where I go...I have a thought, you know, like last night I was on my way to my spiritual group and I walked past a pub and just for a slick moment, my thought was 'oh, I' you know I was just going there and have a pint of lager' but I didn't...ehm it was just exhausting...it's like trying to, like, learn that this thought obviously you don't have to act on those thoughts and feelings about things, how I manage those feelings and be honest and talk about it is going to stop me from getting to that point where then I've got that many things going on internally like that when I do go past that pub there's like the things that I should do, because I'm being honest and speak about these things that it doesn't become, do you know what I mean?

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yes. Would you say that how you are managing it in this particular way of speaking up, has that been a result of having had multiple relapses or was that something you did already the first time you went into treatment?*

No, that's definitely been a change for me. And as a result of my relapses and and again, being able to, like, reflect back and actually see what was going on, what when was it changing where was the moment that things weren't going right? And I wasn't being honest about my feelings. I wasn't... I didn't see them as important, I didn't see them as...and what can happen is because I can think a certain way about something, like what I was explaining before, you know, I thought that woman would hate me going back into treatment. Yeah, that wasn't the case. So then and then thinking about it a completely different way to what was actually the reality of it. Whereas, you know, if that was happened now, I can go 'oh my god this has happened. I feel like I'm about to...why do I feel?' What what's going on for me that makes me feel that way. And you know, when I'm speaking about these things, it takes the power out of it. You know what I mean? And it doesn't have to build up into something because what they sort of say it's like a bit of a resentment can build, so you can become quite resentful to that person when actually, you know, like what happened a few weeks back is, I'd I was kind of not really liking the way my sponsor was speaking to me and I wasn't honest about it and tell him that's how I was feeling it's like 'you said that and it's making me feel this way' I just didn't say anything. But then I would talk to somebody else about it. I couldn't say it to him to the point and in the end, I didn't want anything to do I don't know where I was with him and then I don't even want to start with that fellowship anymore again...It's kind of in a short space of time, I was in a place where I was isolated. So, but I've only learnt that from relapsing and then being able to look back and be made aware of those patterns.

**Interviewer:** *OK, is there anything else that you would like to add to your experience, or think is important for people to know about relapsing?*

I'd say...ehm the thing that's just significant to me, it's like they have three kinds of principles, what they talk about within the first bit of going into recovery ehm a bit in treatments but even more so in my fellowship I go to, is honesty, open mindedness and willingness. Being honest is key for me, it's like also being kind of open to things to sort of like say, 'I'm not doing that because I think it's going to be', you know what I mean? I'm not even giving it a chance. Ehm and I'm not willing, you know what I mean? It's like I'm not willing to do those things so those those things are key. And it's like you have to constantly be prepared, be prepared to just be to take on board what's been stressed is for my benefit, you know what I mean? It took me time to get to that point where I realised how so.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So what was it like for you to do this, to do this interview? Like how are you feeling now?*

I feel like it's kind of a healing process for me because it kind of it's going to explain things in a different kind of way, you know what I mean? And actually, like a go, put all join all those dots together and reflect. I mean one, one thing I can just say about myself is you know, when I was a young lad my my I was just having fun...I would go out with friends on weekends and would take ecstasy tablets and partying in clubs, listen to music, go to all big parties all around the country, go to and then, you know, over a period of time got gradually worse you know all my friends were kind of having children and, you know, their life would go in a different direction and I was getting worse, never in a million years, being a sixteen, seventeen year old and going to [island] and going to the big, you know, because when I become thirty-eight, you know the raves we've seen is huge. And that was all that was our hobby was going to a big rave. Never in a million years would I have thought that so many years down the line I'd be ending up smoking crack and heroin that wasn't something that I thought would happen. But it's my reality isn't it. None can ambition that that's the end. But it's my journey and I just hope that I can stay in a good place and hopefully someone will learn something from where I've been. And that's that then. You know, if I hadn't been on that journey, I wouldn't have been able to help that other person today.