**Interviewer***: What kind of thoughts did you have about this study? When I asked you to participate?*

Yeah well, generally uhm I think it was kinda like...it didn’t take me long to decide that I wanted to do it. It was kind of an initial like ‘yeah for sure’ uhm. I’m always keen to be involved with something that could uhm you know raise general awareness uhm and it can’t be a bad thing you know to hear another story uhm…I’m all kind of like information of somebody’s experience uhm…and yeah, I was also like pretty aware it like it is likely to be pretty therapeutic for me you know I’ve had some sort of counselling over the past few years and generally the more I explain uhm…you know my journey with addiction and stuff…uhm the clearer I feel in my own mind about how things happened and where things are going and where I want things to go….yeah a combination of these things so hopefully beneficial for you and also beneficial for me. So yeah that’s kind of why I’ve decided really.

***Interviewer****: What was it like for you be asked by a stranger to bring a personal item?*

Yeah so uhm…it’s it’s cool like. It’s kind of uhm…quite like validating in a way. You know I find possessions or whatever it is that you associate with your experience of addiction or relapse can be quite personal things that perhaps you know I’ve not been spoken about before. They’ve just been things which were important to me in some way…uhm and so yeah like it thought was a cool kind of feature of the interview. And I liked what you said you know adding some kind of visual depth to the story and how visuals can really help in telling a story…so yeah. I thought it was a cool thing to ask. And it was kind of interesting for me to think about what that could be. I had a couple of things to choose from but uhm…yeah so it was a cool thing to ask.

**Interviewer***: So, what made you choose your item then? What made you choose yours?*

Yeah uhm I mean the one I was gonna choose was like a little lavender smelling square you know one of those little uhm…well this isn’t the one that I’m gonna use but it’s this thing right (shows lavender pouch). It’s like scented with lavender. And I was gonna use that because someone gave that to me uhm during like the worst relapse I had you know that was actually in SW uhm…where I ended up living in the hospital and yeah….was just like a really bad few months you know. And she gave that to me out of the blue and I was really touched you know that was a really kind thing to do uhm…and this was like 2 years ago so during the time I’ve been back in SW and it was also the case that uhm it’s kind of important because she’s actually now my girlfriend we are now in a relationship together two years later uhm….which is kind of funny how it happens you know. But yah I’m rambling a bit. But actually, so this is my bag (shows bag pack).

Yeah uhm it’s pretty like knackered uhm it’s pretty old uhm and I’ve actually had I’ve had this with me like through pretty much all of my addiction uhm…but I got it in CE at some like early morning like street market. I paid like 2 or 3 pounds for it. Which is like super cheap and uhm…yeah, it’s kinda cool because it’s got like…you might not be able to make it out (holds up his item) but it’s got some like writing on the back.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I do! There are some numbers on there?*

Yeah so there’s a name and it’s got these military codes. I didn’t think too much of it you know I’ve worn it for a long time. But then someone told me like ‘they used these bags in the Falkland War’ uhm...like these bags and I searched the codes online and uhm…actually found…like I’ve narrowed it down to a picture of like 30 soldiers. And it was one of their bags uhm…which I thought was kinda cool. Yeah so, it’s just like uhm…it’s basically you know...it’s kind of symbolic to me of like uhm…you know I was living around lots of different places for a while uhm….so during my using staying on different people’s floors and was on a couple of boats and I’ve always had this bag with me. Uhm so it’s there’s something kinda homely about it for me. And yet like it was with me through my worst kinda experiences of addiction and relapse and also like you know…when I’d relapsed you know I got to a point several years ago where I was like if I was using drugs I wouldn’t really have anyone to live with because…I had kind of burned those bridges you know. Uhm…don’t get me wrong like I’ve had lots of support and when I moved back to SW I’ve had my parents took me in for a while...it’s kind of symbolic because it’s like if I’m relapsing I’m gonna be out kind of you know on the roof again and I’ll have this bag (points to bag) and you know for a long time I’ve had everything I needed in it…and it would come with me to different places while I was you know in relapse or using so…I think that was the best thing to to use. Uh yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah that is so amazing almost like I’m getting this idea of like ‘through thick and thin’ kind of like even to the point where you picked it up from somewhere where it had already been through thick and thin with somebody before. It’s almost as if the bag came from a soldier and now you picked it up and have become your own soldier if you will you know in your own war.*

Yeah you could say that! For sure. Though I do wonder like, if the guy is still alive you know. The guy whose bag it was. Be interesting to… yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah of course. You didn’t find that out, did you?*

No, it was...I just narrowed it down to like 30 soldiers and it was one of them, but I didn’t get much further than that. Uhm I’m sure I could if I’d spent some time. But you know I don’t wanna…you know if I would find him, I might feel inclined to like give it back to him you know. And I don’t know if I’m ready to do that (laughs). But yeah, it’s cool like it’s got a long history, I guess. And it is really good quality it should last me a long time I guess these military bags are built to last a lifetime you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah definitely. So, I guess how it connects to your experience of relapse is that it reminds you of those times and it was always with you in those times like a companion and is therefore pretty meaningful. I get the sense that you are pretty attached to it as it has been with you through thick and thin like you said. Would you say anything more about this or does this capture the connection between your bag and your experience?*

Yeah I mean I think you summarised it pretty well but I could say more...I mean uhm…yeah I think uhm…it’s kind of like a symbol of like uhm like safety and home and comfort for me. And I’m a bit like that with things anyways like I’ve always been quite attached to like…things that that…you know it’s a bit silly like...I wear my clothes until they fall apart you know because I get really attached and uhm….I’ve had it since childhood you know so it’s kind of part of a control thing and a comfort thing …and it’s kind of like I’ve had this relationship with things and it’s definitely a way for me like kind of a healthy way of control because regardless of what’s going on around me uhm I got that constant…..I’m like that with quite a lot of things. I can find it really hard to let go of a pair of boots for example…uhm. To a point you know it’s quite obsessive uhm but in the sense of the bag I think it’s kind of a positive thing. So yeah uhm…it’s like...a symbol of like stability and yeah there is a constant.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah that sounds so interesting. I just had another thought uhm of you know what would happen if you were...you know if you feel a bit attached to this as a reminder of those times uhm did it ever hinder you from moving on? Did that ever occur to you that maybe the connection you built with that bag did it ever hinder you…I mean it might not have but that was just a thought I had.*

Yeah good question uhm because…uhm I *did* (emphasis) have a period of not using it you know. Uhm and it’s cuz it’s a pretty big bag and I’d like wear it down the road to the shops to get some bread and and it’s yeah often with me and I think quite a few people uhm….associate it with me just cuz I have it with me a lot of the time. But…I did at one point…when I moved into the place where I live now about 2 years ago…it’s a very positive place and there’s a very positive energy just generally a bedsit you know but generally I’ve made a lot of progress since I’ve been here. And when I moved in here, I didn’t use the bag for a really long time…uhm…and then when I started using it again it *was* (emphasis) kinda like a reminder of times past. Uhm….I saw a friend recently and she’d not seen me pretty well and she’d not seen the bag for a while and as soon as she saw it...it was kinda like it took *her* (emphasis) back because she’s also in recovery and at one point we were in like….you know we both relapsed around the same time and we were like you know…she actually stayed with me in a hostel for a while and we were both in pretty bad shape and it really reminded her of that time. But I think because it’s still being around uhm …I’ve been able to kind of imbue it with kind of more of a positive thing…it always has kinda been more of a positive thing…yeah at times it kind of reminded of that. It’s got like some secret pockets and stuff in the back here (shows bag) don’t know if you can see. And when I was like… you know using I used to go score ...uhm score drugs and then I would put them in the back here uhm…but actually now I use it for like feathers (takes out 4-5 bird feathers he collected) like I’ve got loads of feathers in here. I mean like f\*\*\*\*\*\* loads I’ve not emptied it for a while. But yeah, I used to put drugs in there and so that pocket did really remind me of that. I mean I’d have like needles int here and it would go all in that back slot…. You know sometimes using… especially using cocaine you know and get kinda paranoid and I was hiding stuff in the bag there….uhm and…yeah I guess again it’s kind of like it’s now getting used to collect feathers which is something I like to do so it’s been on that journey of like from having something negative to something that’s just kinda like a nice thing I guess. So yeah, I’m rambling a bit but yeah, I think there’s quite a lot I could say about it.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, no that’s all good! Yah so I think I haven’t asked you this but uhm how many times would you say you’ve relapsed throughout your life?*

Yeah that’s definitely uhm like…it’s been quite a few times because uhm…you know like after I after I…I mean...I started using drugs quite young, but it wasn’t until I was like sort of 21 or 22 that I got into heroin. And I would use cocaine here and there and drunk a lot of alcohol you know in my younger years. But it wasn’t until I got into heroin that I really started to consider myself a drug addict I suppose uhm…and so after that like when I got into taking heroin I would use for a week or couple weeks and then I would stop…try and stop for a while…uhm so I guess I’d count some of those times as relapses where it wasn’t long after I started taking and I was like ‘I need to stop this’ and I would try and end up using again. So that’s a kind of relapse I suppose…but in terms of like sort of major relapses since I’ve been really trying to change things…uhm yeah, I mean…something like kind of 6 big relapses after I had a sustained period of abstinence I would say. But you know quite a few times there’s more than that in sort of slightly lesser senses where I’ve slipped up and used one time and got clean again. You know? If that answers the question?

**Interviewer:** *Oh, absolutely yeah. So how do you feel about that? How you feel about having had six major relapses or even you know with a few mor blibs?*

Uhm yeah I mean…it’s definitely uhm…you know I’ve been doing well for long enough now that I can look on it like without all the feelings of like shame and…you know the initial regret you feel when you slip up like that. And now I look at it pretty much as like part of…part of the process. Uhm…you know and stuff that I’ve like learned a lot from. For me it’s been like an incredibly necessary part of like getting to where I am now…uhm and you know I don’t so much look at it like you know when I’m on drugs -I’m in trouble, and if I’m off drugs – I’m well. That *is* (emphasis) the case but it’s kind of being the case of like working on myself and confronting myself and uhm drugs were involved with that and relapse was involved with that…uhm but yeah like it’s all part of the process. It’s not something that I regret necessarily cuz it all needed to happen uhm…you know to get to where I am now. Uhm you know some people they get clean and they don’t relapse. That is also possible. But many people do as I’m sure you know uhm…and so yeah…I I look at it as something I learned a lot from.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. I love your positive outlook on this. I was actually going to ask you how has this experience changed how you view yourself? Has it made a difference in how you see yourself?*

Yeah (rolls cigarette) I think it’s been positive learning but also negative….I mean I don’t know if I’d look at it in like that positive or negative frame I try not to think things…I used to think more like black and white you know and I think that’s part of it…it’s kinda like I’m using or I’m not…uhm I think I’ve the time you have…I mean in hindsight you can see things in a more non-binary way uhm…..but yeah I think like in terms of like self-esteem I think like…obviously addiction can really damage a person’s self-esteem uhm and I think relapse is a big part of that. Because like…if you’re spending so much like energy telling yourself that you’re gonna stop doing something uhm and then you find yourself doing it again…uhm like the accumulative effect of that over time is like I think really damaging on…on *my* (emphasis) self-esteem anyway. And I think uhm it has definitely had an effect. And even in like a subconscious way where it’s like you just…it’s like you can’t fully trust yourself cuz like you know part of you has told yourself ‘you’re never gonna do that again that’s the way’ and then something over rails that and does it and I guess you confuse yourself in a way…and it becomes hard to like trust yourself. And yet like over the time I think the more that happens you kind of sort of trust your gut instinct and your inner feeling …uhm as a result of that. Because you’ve made these what you could call decisions, that have led to sort of those outcomes that you associate negative…uhm yeah and I think recovery for me has been a big part has been to trust my inner feeling again and that it’s not always wrong. Actually, it’s something I always need to like listen to. Uhm and like mindfulness and meditation has helped a lot with that. But I think a lot of people find themselves like…after like relapsing and stuff it’s like ‘I can’t trust myself’…my inner feeling is bad you know there is something bad about it. It’s wrong. It’s broken. Uhm…and so that has affected me for sure. I think my self-esteem has taken quite a long time uhm…it’s a slow-moving thing. But at the same time like, I’m definitely in some ways a better person for it as well cuz I’ve learned a lot about myself yeah…just those extremes…going through those extremes. It’s definitely taught me a lot uhm…I think like I’m more compassionate and kinder….partly as a result of relapse and going through those extreme sort of times…uhm definitely a big lesson like how quickly things can change….and being grateful you know for the good times. Uhm…yeah, it’s taught me a lot really. Uhm so yeah there’s good and bad. But overall, I would say it’s been a learning experience…you know it’s kind of a cheesy saying like ‘what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’ but I think that’s pretty true like….in many ways.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. It sounds like you had a period of time where your trust was broken over and over again and you became calloused to yourself where you had a part in you saying – oh you are going to using again anyways and another part says – I know I can do this I can stop using. So, you have had this internal struggle of those two sides in you. So of course, it might seem like you are out of control and not trusting yourself. And then I love how you said that you grew in compassion towards it…like you are not too rigid in that it’s either not using or using…you grew more in compassion to the process saying that whatever happens, happens it’s not good or bad it’s all valuable.*

Yeah for sure. And learning to be kind to yourself and uhm… kinda mentioned that…you know if you are addicted to something like heroin there’s also something quite like natural about that because your mind is telling your body that it needs it as much as it needs food and water you know…and so like unless you make certain changes you know 9 times out of 10 you’re gonna keep slipping up. So, it’s taught me how to be like be kinder to myself and make things easier for myself instead of blaming myself and putting it down to just like being deficient in my will power. Initially you know it was like ‘I don’t have enough will power to stop’ and it’s about realizing and stepping back from that and we are all like weak in certain ways and you’ve got to make other changes you know. It’s not just coming from this place of will power. Yeah so big lessons to learn for me and it’s helped me in other areas.

**Interviewer:** *Right. So, would you say that your family or friends have seen a difference in you with all of your relapse experiences?*

Yeah definitely and they told me as much. Especially my family who…you know I never really told them about my addiction and stuff…uhm for a really long time but then when I moved back to SW, I sort of told them everything. I was like you know ‘I need some help’ basically and moved back in with them and…uhm and very kindly they wanted to help, and they wanted to listen and understand and…you know I was very lucky in that respect. And so, they’ve seen a lot of a lot of the stages of it. Uhm and I definitely…being on a journey of learning as well so it’s a difficult thing isn’t it for friends and family of someone with addictions…because it seems totally rational and it kind of overrides relationships and various things. Yeah, they’ve definitely seen like…and they’ve said that to me as well especially my dad who said that he feels like I’m kinder you know in recent times. Which was good thing to hear you know. Yeah and friends as well for sure they’ve noticed a change in me. Uhm generally I think I’m more kind of open…uhm it’s been a big ole lesson in how dependent I am on like other people uhm…whereas before I was very much like...uhm you know self-consumed and…very much kind of feeling like…I just wasn’t like letting anyone in with what was going on with me and so it’s been a process of learning to opening up and people have noticed that yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Wow that is incredibly important to learn yeah. I guess going back to your relapse experiences, can you tell me how you felt when you were about to relapse? Or even after you relapsed? Did you have any particular thoughts perhaps?*

Yeah so, they are all a bit different, but they all have different things in common for sure. And so uhm….yeah I mean...I’m just thinking of like which one to go with you know cuz…I guess like one of the biggest ones that I’ve had was when I was like in a dry house…you know there’s a place called XXXX from a drug service. Yeah that was a big one because I’d been clean for a while…I mean not ages but I’ve gone in there like...done a detox and then...had done like 5 or 6 weeks in there…yeah it was a nice place to live and I was around other people in recovery. And yeah it was kinda difficult in that it was like getting a lot of cravings. Uhm so speaking in terms of the obvious uhm…you know there is obviously a strong physical element to it. So, the withdrawal lasts a while and takes a pretty long time to….and so yeah like…you know there’s that physical sensation if like…of lack you know. Of like incompleteness. Which is a real strong sense with the opiates you know that real sense that you are missing something…uhm and it’s quite a big question because it’s like…you know my drug use has been linked like with other issues within myself. And you know…a big one is sort of like uhm since you know quite young childhood, I had issues with basically like an eating disorder. Which took a long time to understand because it was like you know uhm…around sort of like 12, 13 I started not eating. And I didn’t know why I was doing it at the time. I wasn’t like an overweight kid…uhm you know it was something that just felt like the right thing to do at the time. Again, that’s something I learned over the years that it was kind of a control thing you know I was looking to regulate something to make me feel better about other things. A coping mechanism you know. And that’s been a big part of like relapse for me…because it’s been something I had worked on for a long time and you know it’s not the only reason why I’ve gone into drugs, but it was definitely a contributing factor. And certain drugs would help me with that and basically you know I wouldn’t need to deal with it…it would sort of level me out and learning to escape that whole framework of thinking…and of punishment uhm…and so yeah like many of my relapses have been a result of like getting clean and then getting all that stuff come back and be struggling with that and then get to a point where I’m feeling so bad about myself that uhm…you know relapsing on heroin seems like the lesser of two evils. So that relapse in the dry house was a big part of it you know uhm…yeah, I’ve also struggled with like gambling addiction. And, that I had a slip up with that as well in the dry house...which kind of again was a contributing factor. So, I started like feeling very low and uhm you know over the course of weeks it sort of like suddenly the thought of using drug again seems like the lesser of two evils it can be that kind of clear cut …..where it’s like as much as I wanna do this, I feel compelled to do it. Uhm so there’s the physical kinda dependency and all the physical feelings and then there’s also the mental sort of turmoil…and you know struggling to face up to other issues. Yeah so there’s a lot to it I guess and there’s always sort of a web of reasons…uhm and that’s yeah one example but I’ve had other relapses where it was more straightforward where I’ve drunk a lot of alcohol and then got in a bit of a dark place and then it’s loaded my inhibitions to a point where things happen uhm…you relapse so…yeah again there’s quite a few different times and each time is slightly different…but those were key things for me.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah so since these experiences were so different would you say that uhm there’s some overall change that you might have noticed in how it’s happening? You are now very compassionate towards it but was there any difference between how you experienced your first few relapses to your, let’s say 6th, 7th or 8th relapse?*

Yeah, I would say so. For a few reasons. Uhm I think like since being in recovery and being around people in recovery and having a lot of those things in my head, you know a lot of ideas and goals….it gets harder to relapse because if you’ve got a head full of recovery, it can really like….so they say this in NA, I’ve done some of the 12 step stuff and they say you know ‘if you get your head full of recovery then it ruins your using’ uhm…you know because yeah like the guilt and the shame is more because you worked so hard to get to that point…uhm and it can be a dangerous thing because uhm…you know you worked so hard at something and then you feel like you messed it up….you know they call it like ‘hit the f\*\*\* it button’ you know it’s like just everything is wasted so might as well go…..yeah you know that’s more in the past. Lately it’s changed in that the last couple of slipups I’ve had have been sort of isolated so it’s been like one night and one occasion and then I’ve woken up the next day and you know…just being very sure that I want to continue with recovery and put that behind me again whereas in the past if I relapsed I would then end up again using for months.

**Interviewer:** *Right ok, so yeah you are in a different mindset now that is almost protecting you now. So, if you had to describe what relapse means to you, what would you say? What comes to mind?*

Well, it’s like sort of chaos. Uhm you know it’s like uhm……yeah it’s like going into a different place you know…and kinda like you know when you are a kid and you have a bad dream or something and then you wake up and you’re kind of in your home, but everything feels a bit different. It’s kinda like that you know all the…uhm...it’s like you’re going from a stable, familiar place to like a chaotic place. Uhm which can also be like familiar but…more recently it flies in the face of like everything I’ve been working on. So yeah, I guess dark like it’s a dark place uhm and yeah…dark and difficult and unpleasant and confusing and yeah. Going from somewhere calm into somewhere chaotic that’s how I would summarize it.

**Interviewer:** *Interesting yeah. Would you say that…having gone through these relapse experience uhm how did you feel going back to treatment or back to recovery?*

Yeah like uhm…I guess there’s always like uhm a sense of relief to…yeah to feel like stable again. And also, gratitude for you know…for how forgiving and patient a lot of the services are like drug service you know and other people in recovery there’s always that real acceptance. Which is you know a big part of recovery is meeting people who have done the same things. When you’re on your own it’s just so easy to like uhm…you know hate yourself for it and give yourself a really hard time for it but then being around other people and like recovery and the services…yeh there’s that acceptance of you and that relief to feel like ‘ok, I don’t have to go down that road again’….uhm but also you know like the more difficult feelings like confused…uhm when you open that door again it takes a little while to close it even if you are back in recovery and around services it’s still that way…once you opened that door, for a little while, it can seem quite even to do it again cuz kinda like I mentioned before like you being clean for a long time and then you relapsed so you’re like ‘oh I’m back here again’ yeah…there’s that little part of you that thinks you could go back to that place. Uhm because there are you know as as bad a thing it is on a whole, there are positives to using. You know it does provide like obviously in some ways it functions as something that helps you in some ways…that’s I guess why it happens uhm…so yeah yeah it reminds you of all of that. Takes a little while to find your feet again.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah of course. So, would you say there’s kind of some confidence arising in you having witnessed that you have relapsed and yet you have gotten yourself back to recovery? Kind of that confidence of like ‘yeah I have done it before so I can do it again and all will be well again’ would you say that little confidence might be involved?*

So, like the confidence of knowing that you used and slip up but then get back on your feet? Well yeah like…uhm but I think there’s also danger in knowing that you are capable of uhm…you know in bit more recent times I’ve been able to relapse for one night and then get back on track again…uhm as confidence boosting as that is there’s also that danger of knowing that that’s possible….so that can actually make the idea of using drugs also quite appealing because you think ‘oh I’ve managed to rectify things in the past quite quickly’…yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah right. Ok that’s super interesting. You seem to be very reflective and aware of your internal processes…awesome. Now I’m gonna ask a bit about the impact of relapse on your recovery. What effects would you say did the numbers of your relapses have on your redo very?*

Yeah sure…..well like I guess as I’ve mentioned it’s always like a learning experience uhm…and the old saying like ‘doing the same thing expecting different results’ you know you hear that a lot in recovery and…you know it’s true. Every time you relapse you have to think about why did that happen and yeah like I’m always thinking about that a lot you know because it’s like it helps to be able to think why did that happen and what can I change? To keep your mind busy because it you just look at it like ‘why has this happened? How could this have happened? Then it’s quite…you know at times where I have been like that, I continued to use you know because you feel kinda defeated. Yeah, it’s sort of tweaking things…you know it happened and it’s ok it happened and what can I do differently uhm…but then yeah like it can really rock your confidence. It can have effects on practical things like where you live, people around you like relationships…obviously all gets very damaged by repeated relapse and people only have so much patience you know even people that care about you most uhm…and so you know all of that is going on in your head as well you’re feeling bad…(mimics frustration) sort of guilty and ashamed cuz you know how it affects other people. Yeah, I guess maybe the more hopeful uhm learning aspects of it take a little bit longer to kick in and initially it’s a lot of negative feelings you know it shakes your confidence.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah so you said it took you a while to get to that point of wanting to learn from it…how did you make that shift? Has that to do with the number of times it happened or how did you make that shift in your mindset?*

Yeah I think repeated times and getting to like some bad places….all of that kind of ‘I need to change otherwise I’m going in a really bad direction’ and I’ve also had some help from other people so….uhm I had like one really key thing was like when I was back in CE you know using a lot and staying on a friend’s floor…not in a good way….uhm I had like a job at the time handing out flyers for like a nightclub…..so I was just out on my own with my bag actually full of flyers and I’ve had a lot of freedom…and there was this guy that worked for the nightclub…he was like the accountant. He was just this lovely guy…he didn’t know me very well but like we would always have a chat you know and…he advanced me a bit of money a few times for my wages so I think he knew that I was in trouble….yeah but very sweet man. So long story short I was in a bit of a rock bottom you know…I owed a dealer quite a lot of money and I’d been paid and I went to like trying to gamble the money to make enough to pay him back and score more drugs you know and I lost all the money…this happened many times I mean the whole gambling thing is kinda another story but it has worked with drug addiction uhm…and yeah like I…it was one of those rock bottoms where I was very desperate and in a very bad place and I actually called him up….uhm partly to ask him if I could borrow some money but like in hindsight uhm I actually just really wanted to talk to him because I knew I could, even though I had not actually told him about my addiction it just always felt that way with him that I could talk to him about stuff. Yeah, I ended up going to see him and sat down and spoke to him for like an hour and that was a really important part of my sort of journey because he was very straight up with me and he basically convinced me to come out of CE and come clean with my family and really start trying to do something. Up to that point it was like unthinkable for me to do that…you know to come back to SW to tell my family about everything uhm….it was unthinkable you know I was just doing my thing. And I knew that I was in trouble I knew the way that I was living that I wouldn’t get far…but he kinda was just like totally underlined that for me you know and he really made me see that I wasn’t gonna see 30 years old if I carried on that way. Uhm and he kind of convinced me you know and after speaking to him the idea of carrying on as I had been seemed like…uhm the worse of two evils. The thought of coming back to SW and the idea of coming clean with my family that seemed like you know….it was really difficult, but it was like, I was like there’s no way I could do that. But after speaking to him it seemed like the lesser of two difficult options uhm…and so yeah, I’m rambling a bit.

**Interviewer:** *No, you are doing good. I just asked you about what effects your relapse had on your recovery and then you described how you made that shift from ‘this is now the move forward’ so it is so interesting to hear that it was a person from the outside encouraging you…and all of the sudden like your whole world opens up and you started to think ‘oh I can actually do that’.*

Yeah and it’s not like I hadn’t been trying…I had already gone on a script like a Subutex script so I had been trying for a while…I had been to like a gambling addiction clinic but uhm it was all kind of like….I hadn’t made the right changes. I was kinda scratching the surface and I still haven’t been very honest with everyone about where I was at…so yeah in terms of these shifts that was a big moment and he didn’t want me to thank him or anything but like he had such an impact on my life you know when someone just comes to you, they don’t owe you anything but they really set your life in different direction uhm…so that was a big one. And also, like other people in recovery since being back in in SW so…changes in my own mind and having that deep sense of like the will to like change and that kind of survival instinct that we all have, but I also had help from other people. Without that I definitely think I wouldn’t have had enough to change I think it’s been bigger than I am and that was a process of understanding that…so yeah, I had a lot of help from so many people as well.

I**nterviewer:** *Yeah of course. Awesome. Would you say that you look at recovery differently? If you had to describe recovery? Or what it means to you after having had these relapse experiences what would you say?*

Yeah well, as I was saying it’s like uhm confronting and dealing with the parts within yourself and of your life that leads you to using drug uhm in the first place…it’s more that than just stopping to take drugs you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah. Would you say that…what have you learned from relapse? You already said quite a lot about that…you learned a lot about yourself and becoming more aware within yourself but is there anything you would’ve done differently or you wished you had known that you know now when you were going through relapse?*

Uhm well something that I know now and didn’t know then and was struggling to believe then, was how much things can change. And how like the obsession to use drugs, you know that real obsession and feeling that it’s something you need, that that can change. Now I go weeks without even thinking of using and I catch myself you know I actually haven’t thought about heroin or cocaine for quite a while…I think that’s something hard to believe when back there…it seemed like an impossible task uhm…but yeah that is something that, being around other people who are doing the same thing that you’re trying to do, helps that. You know it’s hard to refute that much evidence if you are around that all the time. I think the longer you are around people who have what you want, I think the more you start believing that it’s possible. Generally, and possible for you…yeah. I wish I like learned about mindfulness and meditation earlier on…I mean I kinda wish I learned that as a kid you know because a lot of addiction and the problems that lead into it they are living in your head and in your thoughts you know…yeah like a big part of meditation is to realize that you don’t have to believe everything you think…like I wish I had learned that a long time ago. So many problems are caused by having a bad relationship with thinking uhm…and I definitely have had a bad relationship with my thinking. And that is something that drug service do…I actually do one of those groups now. The first group I ever went to at drug service was a mindfulness group. Yeah so it was a while until I started to do it more seriously in my own time…but yeah. So, I think those groups also had an impact on me. I was involved with a clinic in CE when I got on a Subutex script and that was very different……they had lots of people coming through the door, so it was very much like you went in, had your appointment and then left. You know and a lot of places don’t have resources…but for example drug service has a garden and a place where people can hang out…yeah. Does that answer your question?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah so I guess for you it was a mixture of the support from other people who encourage you that what you want is possible…and also having the mindfulness work and having a better relationship with your thoughts. So, you are working on your core beliefs and for you it’s learning to understand that I don’t need to believe that I am worthless, even if I feel like it’ so it’s interesting for me that this has been your experience. To learn to think well and healthily and having that support from others. That’s really good.*

*So, I’ve got one more question:*

*On a day-to day basis, how do you manage recovery or how do you protect yourself from relapse now? And has this kinda changed since the number of relapses you’ve had?*

Uhm yeah so…there’s definitely things that I do and things that I’ve learned. I think a really big one of those is like routine…uhm having structure and whatever else is going on these are things `I do every day. That can be as small as like waking up and having a cup of coffee in the morning. Because before recovery I didn’t have any like…yeah, I’d have times in my life where I had routines with my drugs and different stuff but in terms of like my own self and my own space…there was no regularity to it. And you know there were reasons for that like being in different mental states you know struggling with my issues…yeah like building in sort of routine uhm and repetition you know….so waking up, having a coffee and then meditate or something. So, I got like into running as well…about 3 years ago…so when I came back to SW…and I just did my first half-marathon actually 2 days ago…which was a big achievement.

**Interviewer:** *Oh amazing congratulations that is a big achievement yeah!!!*

Yeah it felt good because I’ve been working at it for a long time…but that’s been a huge part of me getting clean. And I really kept it up like for a long time it was every day…now it’s more spread out. So yeah those are some examples of the routines so for the last 2 years it’s like uhm…every day I like meditate, I do Spanish lessons on Duo Lingo. Yeah there are small things but like they’ve been a huge part in all of this for me that routine. I do push ups every morning uhm…and I just don’t think those things can be understated. It’s symbolic you know. It’s a pretty big part of it is getting the small things right so yeah…uhm that stuff like is the first thing I would say. The social side of things is a big one. I never spent like a whole day at home alone…obviously the last few months have been a bit more difficult but used to spent days on my own inside when I was depressed or using…and I never do that anymore. And even some times, when I want to do that I just know that I can’t do that you know it leads to bad places…so quite a practical thing. Yeah, those things that come to me. For sure. And the importance of being connected to other people uhm and yeah really maintaining those relationships. They are all just layers of protection. I also make sure that I don’t have too much money around uhm….and I’m pretty disciplined with that…I don’t have much money but if I have more than I need for a week or two….you know sometimes I send money to my dad and ask him to look after it for me. So those basic practical things are all important…yeah, I like spending time in nature around green stuff. That’s been a big part of me too. I’ve always liked being outside, but I don’t think I realized how much I needed to be outside around stuff so yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah so would you say this has shifted with the number of relapsed you’ve had or was it always the same?*

Uhm yeah it has shifted like slowly I’ve built my wall of protection of these things in uhm…the last couple years you know running and meditating they’ve been in there and they’ve not gone away. But yeah with every relapse I’ve learned a bit more and sometimes it took a bit of time to understand what I needed to do differently but yeah it has changed each time.

I**nterviewer:** *Awesome, yeah so is there anything about your experience that you haven’t yet said or feel is important for people to know?*

Yeah I mean…uhm I think uhm…something I guess I’d say to others is like…I do believe…I mean I guess you could say this about other things as well but like, addiction sort of backs you into a corner and it forces you to like deal with yourself and confront yourself and turn over all the stones. And for me, I really believe that there’s such a like potential blessing in that if you can get into recovery and can get clean I think you can become a more kinder person and more rounded person than perhaps you ever could’ve been if you hadn’t have gone through that. So, I like really see that positive in there. People find that in lots of different ways and it’s not saying that people who haven’t gone through that can’t self-actualize. But I think in a way it can sort of forced you to deal with yourself in a way that perhaps…otherwise you wouldn’t. Potentially you could live a much better life than you could have if you hadn’t been forced to really take a look at yourself. So yeah, I guess that’s a positive note to end on.