**Interviewer:** *Ok, maybe we can start with your personal item and just see where we go with that?*

Yes, this is a hoodie that I used to wear when I was homeless and begging. I've no idea where I got it from...none! I cannot remember where I got this hoodie from in any way, shape or form or even why I kept it. But I like it [laughs]. But yeah, I mean I was surprised to find...I was washing it not so long ago and surprised to find that on the inside of this bit that's on the arm [shows arm of hoodie] there's still blood stains on it and everything ehm...from when I used to inject...little bits in here. Ehm which I was surprised by you know...Yeah, it's like I say, I don't I don't know where I got this from, I've still got the trainers I had when I was homeless as well, because they were brand new when I got them. So ehm I'm not into wasting...I grew up in a family, in a house with my gran who grew up...during the Second World War when everything was rationed. So, throwing things away, that don't need throwing away is not the done thing in my family [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah.*

I've still got...because they were you know, they're still completely wearable, you know, they were literally brand new when I got them, and they were being thrown away. So, I've still got stuff that I still wear occasionally. So I had...when I was homeless, I don't know how I acquired it in any way, shape or form, but it, it does remind me of where I end up or where I ended up after the last one because... I mean the whole relapse thing for me ehm...I, I didn't relapse often because I was using all the time pretty much. But there were little...I had short spells a long time ago ehm...where I couldn't stay off, you know, after a few weeks ended up back on the drugs. But the last, the last time that it happened, it was quite spectacular. And that's when I ended up being homeless, so. Yeah. I mean, everything went properly, pear shaped very quickly. So, I kind of keep that top to remind me of where I'll end up...if that happens again.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So, you still wear it?*

Yeah, occasionally. Kind of like ehm...I'm going to say a gym top type thing. And you know, at the moment I work in construction so it's even when clothes on, sort of clothes you wear out and about often you know, they can still go through this progression of being workload. So, it's got that sort of potential. It's a nice top, there's absolutely nothing wrong with it.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So it's almost like it holds a special kind of memory of you know, this is where you ended up and you made it through, obviously, so yeah...when you wear it and you kind of think about where you were and where you are now, does that ever kind of hinder you from moving on? I'm guessing there's a sense of attachment to the item. You don't know where you got it from, but it holds a special memory?!*

Yeah, well, I mean, I'm quite...I don't know if sentimental is quite the right word...but I suppose it probably is..ehm so you know...so for instance I' ve got a shirt that I had from before I was homeless, that's been all around the world with me and it doesn't quite fit anymore. And I don't, I don't want to get rid of it [laughs]. But the good thing is it doesn't fit. It's a bit too big. So, there's always the possibility. So yeah, I do get attached to items and I think sometimes the craziness of ...so well the way my head works anyway...is that sometimes when I'm finding things a bit difficult and you start...your brain starts remembering all the good stuff...because I'm not going to lie, there were a lot of times when I was homeless where it was fun attached to it, you know, so I was homeless in CE, which is obviously quite a big university town. And, you know, being in CE on a Friday and Saturday Night, as a homeless person...could actually be quite amusing sometimes...like all of that carnage that people see on a Friday night out when they're out with their Uni mates...and, you know, I lived in that for four years [laughs]. So, some of the stuff that we saw was quite funny. I got to meet some nice people, you know, and even though it's very easy for my head to forget all of the other stuff that was going on and how difficult it was. So, you know, it's it's handy to have a reminder of a share of the evil. And you know, you can sort of wear that and remember not washing it for six months and you know, where you were at when you were wearing it, the things you were doing, do you know what I mean, and how tough that was.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, right. So, I'm getting I'm getting this kind of word. I don't know if this fits with you, but like honour, does that kind of fit with you?*

I mean, you know, not everyone not everyone makes it through that experience. You know, I've lost...when I was homeless those four years, I think in the last couple of years, so since I came to treatment facility and have since left, there's probably like twenty five people I know that have died in either through something like suicide or overdose or, you know, other complications, you know, liver failure stuff like that...yeah. So unfortunately, no one makes it through that. And, see to me it's just normal like because that's kind of what I did. You know, it was kind of like sort of normal to them, isn't it? But when I tell some people about, you know, I was homeless for four years, it's the reaction I get reminds me just how abnormal that is. I mean, and I don't know if I'd say there's a feeling of honour about making it through. It's an interesting way of putting it. I haven't really thought of it like that.

**Interviewer:** *No I mean, it might not it just it kind of just came to my mind when you said, you know, you you're wearing your or you are remembering about your sweatshirt and how, you know, all of the stuff that you've been through.*

I suppose it's honourable if you use that experience for something good. I'm not one of these people that wants to, you know, some people and I totally respect that, some people I know that they want to put it all completely behind them and move forward. And I understand that and I respect it, you know, but for me I think the, because I've spent all of my adult life as an addict, one thing or another, if I don't try and use some of that experience, which is vast, for something good, then it's a complete waste of time. And I don't like the idea of wasting half of my life so far.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I totally get that. Yeah. So maybe share a little bit about your history of your drug use and your relapse and maybe how many times you experienced relapse?*

So, I mean I started I mean, how far do you want me to go back? Because it's a long way [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. I mean, whatever you want - this is your story. So, whatever you feel like is needed for me to know.*

All right. Well well, I mean, I'll go as far as the substance misuse that started when I was 12, so. I was quite I've always been able to associate easier with people who are, certainly as a teenager, with people that are a bit older because...in my family, there's no one that's even remotely close to my age - everyone's either at least ten years older than me or at least ten years younger than me. So, I mean, no one even no cousins, no nothing are even remotely close to my age. So, you know, going to family events and whatever there is, it wouldn't be unusual for me to be the only child there. So, when I hit secondary school and I had the opportunity to hang around with the older kids. Not only did I feel like I fit in a bit more with them because I was really tall as a 12-year-old, I was like five foot eight. And, you know, they, you know, they were all smoking...things like hash and taking speed and drinking and all that stuff that you think it's really cool when you're a teenager. But I never really felt like I fit in with those guys because I was a lot younger than them and I used to get sort of picked on because I was the youngest, you know, but I was willingly putting myself in that position, because that was sort of what I thought I wanted to where I wanted to be. And yeah, you know, my idea of fun was going down to the local park and just getting completely smashed.

But I had...my mom was an alcoholic, so she she was at home and she wouldn't drink during the day so much that I'm aware of. She wouldn't drink excessively during the day, but in the evening, she'd be an absolute nightmare. So, I'd much rather be out of the house with my mates getting high all the time than I would being at home. So, you know, I started off just doing what teenagers do, I suppose, getting high in the park and whatever. I think by the time I was 15, I'd sort of found class A drugs, things like speed and ecstasy and things like that. By the time I was 17, I don't think I don't think there were as many class A drugs that I hadn't taken at that point, started going to raves and all the rest of it. And by the time I was 18, I think I'd sort of been introduced to heroin. And obviously that's when things went went downhill properly because I'm already long before that I ever came across that substance, I was already using it effectively because I would use as much as, you know, as often as possible, because that's that was what I enjoyed doing. I enjoyed getting as off my face as I possibly could as often as I could. But, you know, back in those early years, it it was fun. You know, a lot of people say was it was quite enjoyable. I used to do a lot of raves, things like that. But even that was a complete mess. The way I used to fund all of this was by selling it, you know, so I could...because I had all of the older friends I very quickly caught on to being the one that could get hold of stuff for the people that were my age.

**Interviewer:** *OK, yeah.*

And you know, and so it started off being quite a small, you know, just literally getting some money off of people, getting their stuff, being able to get it cheaper. So, I bought my stuff for free. And it just might be a bit of hash or, you know, weed or speed maybe, you know, but of course that just continues and by the time I was 16, I was involved in all sorts of things that I shouldn't have been involved in at that age. Some quite serious stuff as well, to be fair, because things were looked at a little bit harsher back then. So it was, I was involved in a world that I kind of thought I wanted to be involved with. Exposed to a lot of more adult stuff than someone in that age wouldn't necessarily have been involved. You know, I used to...even at that age, I used to use with people that were in the mid-20s, you know like the older I got, the more, the easier it became to hang out with older people. And of course, they were all been exposed to a lot of other different bits and pieces. And you see that, and you think 'aha ok cool well that doesn't look as bad as everyone made it out to be, so I'll give that a go.' And that's what led me to taking heroin for the first time was a couple of my mates that I lived in a hostel with, that were good friends ehm they weren't addicted at the time. I think they both still are now. But, you know, they had a beer and it didn't look as bad as people have made out. But yeah, but in the end, I ended up being addicted because I was sort of reintroduced to it a year or so later. So eventually I ended up doing exactly what I knew how to do, which was to sell that to get mine for free. So, I worked for this guy and I think by the time I got to that point, so I got put in prison when I was 21. By the time I got to that point, I'd had a couple of attempts of getting off the stuff. But I didn't really understand what recovery was in any way, shape or form. I just thought it was as simple as being abstinent from whatever your substance of choice was.

But I went through the whole process of rewarding myself for staying off of it by taking some [laughs]. You know, I'm going to say, you know, I wasn't really putting any effort into it. I wasn't doing what I do now. I wasn't trying to understand with recovery I wasn't trying to get into rehab or trying to go to any of the not the anonymous fellowships where I just thought you just had to stay off of it and that was enough, you know. So, I'd be on some form of substitute like methadone or Subutex or something and then. Yeah, I, I'd only last a few weeks. Let's be fair. Well on one occasion something pretty horrific happened to me. So, whilst I was attempting to get clean, I, you know, I was that bloke in my twenties, I wasn't going to listen to anyone else because I thought I knew best. But yeah, it's yeah. I had no idea what recovery was. I wasn't really trying to recover. I wasn't interested in being completely clean and sober. But I just didn't want to be a heroin addict any more, but would reward myself for that by taking heroin, you know, so I ever only lasted a few weeks, like I said. Then I went into prison and then, I mean, I couldn't even stay clean in there, you know, like, this is surprisingly easy to get a hold of drugs in prison. Yes. I had I've had a lot of support financially over the years for addiction from my family. So, I was able to bring up my mom or my gran, getting them to send some money somewhere externally outside of the prison so that I could get some whilst I was in there. It was very easy for me to get hold of drugs. So, I think the whole the whole year that I was in prison, I kind of I probably had a sum total of about two or three months where I was actually clean in there. But it's you know, it’s unfortunately drugs are very, very good way of making that time pass quicker. So, you know, and everyone else around you is using and very few people that are in there really are very interested in getting clean. So, I never lasted long. I mean, I walked out of there having not used for about six weeks I think...and then relapsed immediately as soon as I got out because I was still associating with the same people.

I was on tag so for four and a half months with a thing around my ankle I had to be in at like quarter to seven. And all my mates that had come out were all using so I sort of, you know, relapsed like immediately. So, I mean, so I have been through the cycle of doing I mean, not that, but when I came out of jail, that was probably until...so I came out jail when I was 22, I think I was using pretty much every day, you know, probably every day. So up until I was in my early 30s. Yeah, it was 18 years I spent as an addict in total. Like I say, were very, very sporadic times of being clean and sober. I mean, to be fair, the two years I've been clean recently, it's probably the longest I've been without any form of substance whatsoever. So, if you include alcohol since I was a child, because it was acceptable in my family for a kid to have a beer at Christmas or to someone, someone to give you a little bit of their drink. So, I actually can't tell you how how young I was when that sort of stuff was going on. So, the last two years has been the longest. It's been the longest I've been without any form of substance since I was a very small child.

**Interviewer:** *Wow. That's incredible. Yeah how would you define a relapse? How do you understand what, what a relapse is?*

Well I think what it takes most people back to the I mean a lot of people go through the whole cross-addiction they don't necessarily count those as relapses, especially if you don't understand what addiction really is. So, and I did that, I, I've got a three and a half years where I was on methadone, but I also used sporadically as a treat. But I was drinking every day, you know, so I did the whole cross-addiction thing. I think most of the time when you when, when a lot of people I know relapse. And I think, you know, it's probably true for me as well, is your own life is comfortable and it's you know, you get clean and all of a sudden your feelings are really, really, really uncomfortable because you get them all back. Sometimes it can be really, really tough to deal with them. I mean, I struggle with anxiety quite a bit. I get quite...I enjoy being around people, but I do get a little bit shy and a bit nervous in those situations sometimes apparently, I mask it relatively well. But, you know, it can be. Yeah, it's you know, it can be very difficult. I know since I've got clean, I've noticed myself being anxious about various things quite a lot, especially recently with this whole lockdown thing. So yeah, that back can be really, really difficult to deal with. And of course, as addicts, we all know exactly how to take those feelings away, like immediately. So, yeah, you know, when things when things get a bit tough, you end up going back to what you know how to do, which is use or drink or whatever whatever your choice is. And then, you know, almost immediately you become mentally dependent, if not physically dependent on it. You know, some people I know reckon that it takes them about three days to get a habit back when you take heroin. I'm not sure if that's a physical dependency that's come back at that point, but it's probably definitely a mental dependency, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah.*

Yeah. So, it's it's a tough place to be.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So I wondered how so would you say that for you any time that you stopped and then gone back to using is a relapse, or is it when you actually consciously know what recovery is and then you go back to using?*

I think I was probably both ehm...having had the sense of your having had some sort of experience in recovery now, when I look back, you know, even when or even at the time, I would have identified it as a relapse, which is not necessarily in that way...not really unless someone's, as a user, unless someone's been fully clean, ehm we don't really like defining it as a relapse with that word. But you just call it getting back on your pills.

**Interviewer:** *It's good to know. So how many times would you say did you have of getting back to that then? How many times?*

Probably three or four over the years. I was I was happy for quite a long time. But the thing is, because I grew up in a house that had a lot of addiction in it and you have no other way of socialising without having a drink or using some sort of substance. And I chose not to drink so much because I didn't want to end up like my my mum or my auntie or my uncle. So, yeah, you know, I thought 'I'll take drugs because you clearly gotta do something to have fun and socialise and whatever'. So that's that's what took me down the route of taking substances rather than drinking. But then when I stopped taking substances, I ended up drinking like my mom anyway. Like exactly, but my mom.

**Interviewer:** *OK, yeah. So maybe you can tell me how, you know, what what does relapse feel like? Like what did you feel when you were relapsing?*

Well, I think the times before. So the ones that happened a long time ago, I was never really interested in being completely clean, ehm you know, so the idea of taking some coke or have a drink or whatever, was still very much part of my world, but the last time that it happened like properly. So, I had 3,5 to 4 years where I was just drinking instead of using. But it was it was it was quite unsatisfying because I had the experience of what my mum was like and I knew what I was doing was exactly like my mum. I wasn't quite happy with that. So, I ended up in a situation where the drugs were very easy for me to get so the three or four years where I was really using sporadically the sort of stars had to align for that to happen. So, I'd have to be dropped off in a certain place in the town and see someone I knew that was going to score whilst I had money. That had probably happened like three times a year, maybe four times a year. So I was never really properly interested in staying completely abstinent, but then ended up pulling back on the drugs and I ended up stealing a lot of money because I was married at the time, hid the addictions from my now ex-wife the entire time we were together, which was about 10 years, and sort of sort it out, not really because I was drinking still and then using occasionally.

But I didn't have a drug addiction at the time. I ended up getting back on the drugs, having stolen thousands of pounds out because I had a lot of money from her inheritance. So, I managed to work my way through like 11 grant in three months. And yeah, I knew I was going to get caught for that...having fully relapsed and I made some horrific decisions on sort of how to deal with that. I never went home, didn't tell my ex-wife what was going on. It was horrible. It was such a dark place to be. And that's when I became homeless because ehm I was just running away. You know, I felt the need to the drugs weren't helping, you know, it never matters. And I had access to quite a lot of substances at the time because I got back into selling again like I always do...so. No amount of drugs that I was putting into my body has taken away the feelings of guilt and shame. And remorse I suppose ehm...with what I've done with my ex-wife. So, it was horrible. It was I mean, it, the last time it happened, I battled through properly suicidal thoughts for about six months. It was a very, very dark place...dealt with a lot of things really badly made some seriously bad decisions, owing people money that you don't want to owe money to, stuff like that. And then yeah, the only thing I felt like I could do was run away. So that's when I ended up living on the streets of CE. Because I didn't think that I had any other option what to do. So it took probably a couple of years of me being homeless, living in the chaos that is that world, before the, the sort of feelings and guilt and shame that subsided a bit to the point where I'd noticed, you know, so the last time I relapsed, it...it almost made me kill myself.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, OK like a very strong sense of despair.*

And a lot of other feelings mixed up in that as well because I felt awful about what I had done with my ex-wife you know, she didn't deserve...she wasn't you know, I used with her occasionally, you know, so you know, she still does now, but she would do a bit of coke on a night out occasionally. But rarely, you know, it wasn't it wasn't unacceptable for her to do that. But she wouldn't do it effectively, you know. I hid my heroin addiction from her. The entire time we were together, she didn't know. She thought I got clean when I left prison, because I got religious before I went to prison. So, the entire time she thought I was clean. So, I kind of knew what I knew I'd done...living that double life broke me in the end, like properly. And of course, the addiction is always going to be well...my addiction pulled me in that direction rather than putting me where I should have been which is being honest and upfront with what was going on. It made me feel absolutely horrendous. She didn't deserve it, you know.

**Interviewer:** *So how do you feel about having relapsed three or four times?*

Ehm I wish I'd ehm...suppose I'm a little bit disappointed with myself, knowing what I know now, you know, like the...because I never really...it's one of those things that if I knew now or if I had only then known what I know now, I'd have done things very differently in hindsight. And it it does make me feel a little bit disappointed that I've done, you know, so many years in my life with this stuff. Like heavily affecting everything I've ever done...so this is part of the reason why I do some stuff I do because there's nothing saying that I can't use those experiences and use them for something good. But I think I'm going to reach a point where I forgive myself, which I haven't done yet. I need to use that stuff for something for something good. You know, I can't I can't help, you know, my addiction and the selling drugs and the things caused me to be involved in some horrific stuff. I have also been the victim of some quite horrific stuff, but it was, you know, the addiction that put me in those places every single time, you know, and it's quite painful, all that sort of stuff. So, if I think if I don't use those experiences for something good, they could just be a little bit of a waste of time. And I think I think I'll be even more angry with myself if I didn't try and use some of that stuff for good. It's the only education I've got, you know, I never really tried at school. That's you know, it makes me feel really sad when I think about it and angry at times. Disappointed. Frustrated.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, of course. So, has going through three or four relapses changed the way that you see yourself?*

Ehm...I think the last one has kind of shown me what what I'm capable of taking. Just being homeless for years is a tough experience. You know, I don't view myself as being a particularly tough person. I think my my view of myself is always quite negative. So, you know, generally whenever I bother to compare myself to people, I'm always looking at them and thinking that they're doing better than me. Doesn't really matter where they are...so if I'm comparing myself with someone else who's in recovery, I'll be going, 'oh, I wish I was at that point, but I don't have as much clean time as them' you know, so self-acceptance is quite difficult for me. But yeah, it's it's definitely opened my eyes so having been clean now for a couple of years, it's definitely opened up my eyes to probably why I relapse on the occasions that it happened, because dealing with feelings is really difficult for me and I never really knew that was the case before. So then of course, you know, I try and spend time looking into where these feelings are coming from...which of course, I've never done before. I wanna avoid, I wanna avoid relapsing again. Because I know where my head went the last time it happened and it's really, really scary like really very scary. I don't want to end up homeless again and I don't want to feel the way that I felt because it was horrific.

**Interviewer:** *So did you, would you say that the way that you kind of saw yourself maybe the first time using, would you still say it's more of a negative kind of view you have on yourself or has it changed since then?*

I still got quite a negative view of myself. The ehm...but before I don't think I tried to, I think I was probably, one of the things I was trying to avoid was, the way that thought process was, because I've never really felt like I fit in, you know, like there are so many so many things in my past that were a bit abnormal. So, I was born virtually deaf in one ear and almost all deaf in the other. So, when I was young at nursery ehm just being me wasn't enough because one of the people that worked there were talking to me behind me and I couldn't hear them, so I'd get in trouble just for doing nothing. You know, things like that. So, I don't really remember that. But there are quite a few stories in my family about that sort of thing, you know? Then I grew up in a house without my dad. My mom was only 19 when she had me. I don't know where my dad is. So then at school, everyone else has got families and whatever. And, you know, I used to get asked by the other kids, you know, 'what happened with your dad' or whatever. And I had no answer for that you know, because I didn't know. I still don't know. So, yeah, I've always, always felt a little bit different. I think but I didn't know that at the time, so the only way that I felt like I could be at ease and comfortable with myself was to be completely off one side of something.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So, do you feel other people, like friends or family members, have seen a change in how you are since you relapsed?*

Well, the...like I said earlier, my, a lot of my family supported me, but financially with the addiction and knowing that that's what it's for ehm, for quite some time. So, the the time when things went properly, pear shaped was the only time that I wasn't able to get financially supported and then that lead to me being homeless. So, without them, without that relapse and without being supported by my family, I wouldn't have ended up being homeless. I don't think I would've thought 'you know what, I've had enough of this.' The interesting thing is, quite a lot of people I know that I've used with, have always said to me that they don't really see that much change when I am using you know, some people get really, really horrible when they're using. It's not to say that that doesn't happen to me. It's just I think that the levels that I take it, too, aren't quite as severe as some people. And so, yeah, I mean, since since the last relapse and since I've got clean ehm...I've had people in my family telling me that they're proud of me and stuff like that, no one's ever done that in my family before because I've never done anything to make them proud. I never, never been getting into anything other than getting into like bad situations and. So, there's no, you know, it's not necessarily their fault because I've never done anything to make them proud of anything. I think it's funny, I still find it very, very difficult to deal with. I don't quite know what to do with that because it doesn't happen very often. So, you probably could say that they have seen a bit of a differences of relapse and of pain because they've done things like saying they're proud of me.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Right. So, can you just maybe walk me through exactly what you like, what you thought or how it felt right before you were relapsing or right when you were about to use again and maybe also right after? Can you kind of walk me through that experience a little bit?*

Well, like I said before, before I'd properly relapsed on the drugs the ehm...that I had a drinking issue that was really, really unsatisfying. So, you know, it's it starts you know, generally speaking, I am sure I have been quite so dissatisfied with life. I come from a bit of a weird family. So, a lot of people in my family are successful one or two are relatively famous. So, you know, I have one side of my family that are great at everything and very successful people, very hard-working people. Then I've got another side of my family with my father where I'm being told that, you know, we're not good enough for that. You know, we can't afford things like university and that sort of stuff, so but then on that on top of that, they've also always told me how special I am, and I don't quite know why they say that sort of stuff. But there's definitely something more that I don't know about, this surrounds like my mom being pregnant and all...so ehm, the whole thing of people telling me that I'm intelligent, but we're not good enough to go to university and all this sort of stuff and you're not, you know, you don't get your head around the fact that the kind of job you're going to have aren't going to be good ones necessarily. 'You're not going to be like these people but you're really clever', you know. So, like...just kind of doing normal life became a bit unsatisfying to me, really, because I get bored quite easily because I'm not you know, I'm I'm not particularly well-educated, but I'm not unintelligent bloke. So yeah, I get bored very, very easily of things. Just stuff. Talking is about the only thing that I am developing [laughs]. So, you know, life is unsatisfying. And I sort of attempted to reach that satisfaction by using or drinking or something. So, I was drinking and that became unsatisfying.

Then I had the opportunity to get hold of drugs quite easily because I was being dropped off from work by, right by someone I'd known for a long time who was having someone in there selling drugs. So, I sort of treated myself to to using because it was a treat at the time, but then I got into treating myself like two or three times a week. And then it was five times a week, you know, and then it went back into being every day. And it's because everything else that I was doing was quite unsatisfying. Ehm but it crept in slowly, not that slowly, but I do the whole thing of, 'oh, I'm just going to pop round and say hello, I haven't got money on me so I'm not going to score.' And then about half an hour after I've gone round there I find myself going up to the cash point, getting some money and coming back and scoring, even though I told myself I wasn't going to, whereas in reality what I should've done is just not going around there and I might not have done...because I lived quite far away from where I was getting dropped off. So, you know, I think even though I didn't recognise it at the time, secretly I was going round there because I wanted to use and and I was just going back to my substance of choice that I've had an issue with for a long time by that point. But when I say crept in slowly, I mean, it didn't take that long. It's just that I didn't start that process and then immediately get an addiction that...physical addiction, I would you know, it took a few, a few weeks of me using every day again. But I think I did it just because I was unsatisfied. I wasn't being a particularly good husband. Things weren't exactly moving forward any direction, because everything I've ever done until recently has always had the act of addiction in the background, you know? So, I'll be thinking of, you know, I really want to try that sort of job, but I can't do that sort of job because I might not get back until after the pharmacy closes. So, I wonder how to get my methadone, or I might not be able to score, you know, there are many, many reasons why. And also, because I've got this negative view of myself, I think I'm going out on an opportunity and I still do that. I think it was just because I was feeling really, really unsatisfied and the only form of satisfaction would be to take drugs.

**Interviewer:** *And then after you took drugs again, how did that feel like?*

You kind of know you're messing up, but you don't really care. Like I say I've not been fully abstinent from the drugs, but it was it was sporadic. And they do ehm in the beginning they the means that you have of...I mean, they're still at that point, there's still a lot of fun attached to them you know like, getting high with your mates still fun...when when, you know, you've got the physical addiction back and all that sort of 'oh man, I've gotta go through this every day', you know, so I've gone from doing it for fun to having to make sure that I've got something there for every day that I wake up. So if you're going to work or doing something with my ex or whatever and then try to hide all that as well, it's a really, really tough place to be...you kind of get a feeling of dread that comes with it when, you know you've got started doing that stuff again and then of course you're angry with yourself. You've got to that point again. And, yeah, especially when it's all being hidden. I didn't want, I didn't want it highlighted by anyone how much a mess I was because I knew I was a mess. So, I hid it from from a lot of people, not very good people, but I didn't feel that I wasn't being honest with myself. So, I wasn't going to be able to be honest with anyone else. I didn't realise how messed up everything was because it had become normal to me a long time before that happened, you know, like living in that way had become the way I lived for years, by that point, years and years.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I'm I'm almost getting the sense of like that for you to, but I'm almost getting a sense of like one hides things in your family. It's not being talked about. Things are not being brought into the light. So, it makes a lot of sense that you would accept that into your adult life, you know.*

And yeah, for years my mom's addiction was never spoke about. I didn't feel like I could tell anyone. I wasn't even sure how to tell anyone although I could, I wasn't even, I didn't even feel that I had permission to talk about it. So, I started noticing her drinking being really bad when I was like eight or nine, I think... she wasn't drinking often...she died recently and I was at the funeral. And my cousin was saying how she she would be around during the day but then she'd always be working at night and she always worked in a pub. So, she might have had a drinking problem long before I ever recognised it. But it got to a point where I wouldn't know what version of my mom I was getting when I walked in. But I didn't I didn't wasn't able to talk. I hid that from everyone. I hid the way that that felt. I mean, I was a teenage boy. I didn't even know how I felt about that stuff. So, and the one time I did try and bring that up with my family, no one believed me. So, I didn't bother talking about it again. And that was in my late teens. And you know, it was people in my family thought I was trying to blame my addiction on my mom. I'm quite fortunate in some respects that right from the beginning, I've always known that taking drugs has been my choice rather than blaming it on my mom, you know, I mean, I did take drugs because I didn't want to be like my mom, but I knew that it was my choice to do that. I can even remember where I made that choice. I was 12 years old when I made that choice. You know, I'm still stuck with the choice I made when I was 12 to this day. And I will continue to suffer from that choice for a very long time. Yeah it was it was all hidden and then my mom moved back into my gran's house. This is where I was living at the time. And it all got highlight then how bad it was. And yeah, it was it was quite a relief to not have to hide that anymore.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I was going to ask how, having gone through three or four relapses or going back to using, did you feel when you went back into treatment?*

No this is the first rehab I've ever done.

**Interviewer:** *All right. OK, so right. So maybe you can just tell me about that one experience of how it felt like to go into treatment?*

When I when I walked into treatment center on the first day, I was so scared because I didn't know I didn't know what to expect and I had no idea what I was going to do without drugs and alcohol, because that's what my entire adult life in my entire life has been centred in some way around some sort of substance use...all of my family as much as the only the only people that have got proper addictions, that I'm aware of in my family, are my mom and her brother and sister, so my aunt and uncle and all the rest of the family seem to either manage it very, very well, you know, so I'm not suggesting that they don't have cousins or whatever don't have a beer every day because they might go, I don't know. But they don't they don't have the same issues that the people in my part of the family have. So, I have no idea what I was going to do without being able to drink or use. And I was really, really, really, really scared. I think now I'm more scared of having to walk back in those doors knowing that I've messed everything up. You know, it was it was a tough experience going into especially seeing the detox there. It was a very difficult experience for me to walk, walk into that rehab because I'm quite nervous because like I said, I was fearful, quite anxious. And yeah, I was mainly afraid of what what I didn't know what was involved. But the only information I'd kind of been given about what was going to go into rehab was that it was going to be very difficult, might not be the only advice that was given. The only thing I heard [laughs] was it was going to be quite difficult. I knew it was going to be hard. I didn't know how or in what way.

So, I know that statistically speaking, most people relapse and have to redo the programme again, whatever that programme might be. So, I really don't want to do that because the last time I relapsed it almost made me kill myself. So, you know, I don't want to I don't want those feelings of letting everyone down and the guilt that comes with it and all that sort of stuff, I don't want to repeat that. So, it in some ways is in some ways especially once I was on the programme, it was quite a freeing experience. I really, you know, as difficult as it was and it was tough at times, I really enjoyed it because I never put any effort in myself at all. So, in some ways it was quite enjoyable. But since I've left, I know because I'm in one of recovery houses at the moment. So, yes, since I've left a lot of stuff has gone on, you know my mom has died ehm I've had various other things go on. It just just kind of like life stuff is difficult to deal with. And then you got to throw in the whole pandemic business as well. So, things have been really, really tough since I've been in this house. Really tough. Yeah. Dealing with those feelings and emotions can be quite difficult at times, but I don't I don't want to repeat the experience of having to walk back in there.

**Interviewer:** *How did you make the choice of going there? Like now I need to go into treatment...*

It is not a short story [smiles]. So I was homeless and I got into a friendship with someone that was quite a dangerous person to be fair and me and him fell out and this was this was I mean, the interesting thing about my being homeless is it was almost four years to the day like so I became homeless in like I think it was April 2014. And I stopped living in CE on the street in April 2018. And I've gone from CE back to my (lost connection), which is just up the road, and decided that that was crap as well. I didn't want to be there either. And I just kind of had enough of dealing with the stress and the carnage of being homeless. So that took me back to my hometown. And then things weren't quite the same there either. My gran had recently moved from CE to SWE, where the houses are a lot cheaper, like a lot cheaper. So, she had quite a bit of money kicking around. And she said to me that she would help fund my habit as soon as I agreed to go to rehab which she was going to pay for. So, I got ridiculous in the end. I really, really took the piss [smiles]...but it started off with me only I wasn't interested in going to rehab, to be honest. I was I was just interested in getting the money out of her. So ehm and I've told her this as well, so. I was kind of halfheartedly looking at all these treatment centres and whatever, and some of them were really expensive, like stupidly expensive. And they're like 'oh yeah, we only do twenty eight day detoxes here' and I'm thinking, I know because I've, I've come off of methadone before, I was like, 'there is no way that I'm going to be feeling on top of things after 28 days. No way'. And 'you're you're going to charge us 15 grant for those 28 days or whatever it was', you know. So, it was yeah. It didn't really seem like a viable option. Like I said, I was only really halfheartedly looking anyway because I just wanted to get money out of her.

But I was having to come from SWE back up to CE and I'd buy like 300-400 pounds worth of drugs, come back down to SWE to stay with her. And when those drugs went out, I'd come back up to CE, buy a lot more and came back down. So, I mean, and I was doing that, you know, going through about 500 quid like every three days. So. Yeah. And, you know, I wasn't buying this off a normal street dealer either. I was buying off from someone a bit further up the chain. So it was, you know, you were getting quite a bit for all that money. And I was moaning about my gran [smiles] having, that keeps banging on about me going to rehab with one of my friends, as I'm walking into someone's flat that I'm just about using. And he was like, 'oh, you want to check this place out?' And handed me the newsletter from treatment center, which had all their open day information on it. So, I didn't know that he'd been to rehab. Or that he'd been to treatment center. I've always been aware that there is supposed to be this rehab nearby CE somewhere, but kinda didn't really believe it because I never really heard anything about it. Or known anyone that's been there, which makes sense that I would go because apparently they didn't used to take people of like locally based, you had to be from somewhere else, you know, because some rehabs don't like people being near where they were from. So, yeah now knowing that it doesn't surprise me, but I was like 'alright I'll check this place out' because he kind of sold it to me, you know. He was like 'it's a Christian place, but not overly Christian' and that sort of stuff. So, I was like 'alright I'll check that out' and it was remarkably cheap compared to some of the other places. And it's also got one of the best success records in Europe. So, you know, and the fact that you could be there potentially for a year and possibly a year in one of the houses really appealed to me. So, you know, I was like 'alright, I'll go for an interview with them'.

And just before I went for that interview, I had like one of these moments of clarity that you often hear people sort of talk about in recovery. I was in my like what was my bedroom that is in my gran's house, but there's no bed, I've just got like this covered type thing to lie on, literally surrounded by needles like they're everywhere. And I've got to a point where I was using so much that ehm half of what I was using would have killed people. You know, I was looking at a syringe and it wasn't like you see on the films where you could see through it. This stuff looked like coffee [emphasis] it had that much heroin in it you know. And I thought, you know, half of that could kill anyone you know, you're going to take twice as much as what would kill them. And in about ten minutes, if that doesn't kill you, you can have another one. You know, like because I was using like constantly [emphasis], because whilst I was homeless, I got like into injecting heroin and crack together. So before before I was homeless, I was only ever into smoking the two. Then I got into injecting heroin cuz smoking heroin wasn't quite doing it for me. Smoking crack or something I carried on doing. Then when I became homeless, everyone was injecting the two together. So, in the end, that's what I ended up doing. But I couldn't afford to do that whilst I was in SWE. So, I was just injecting heroin. And it was really, really unsatisfying. It was like...just not fun. So I ended up just coming to a point where, and it's weird when you when you sort of have one of these moments, you can kind of feel it, you don't just think it, it's like a feeling as well. And I was like, you just got to do something about this. You've got to try, you know, because all you're doing is killing yourself probably quite quickly because it would only take a what I was using to be a little bit stronger than I was expecting and I would've been in trouble. And no one would have come and found me in that room for a long time. So, the possibility of overdosing and dying would have been substantial.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah*.

So, yeah. That's what led me to get into the interview up at treatment center, you know actually attending the interview because again, before that happened, wasn't really that bothered about trying to sort something out. I didn't really know that I could, you know, I didn't know how to do it. So, I went for the interview. And just before I was due to go in, I had another moment similar where I sort of realised that the fear of never doing anything in life - or just fear, I now know it probably was just fear what was causing me to use - but you're never going to do anything in life, which is what you're afraid about, but you're not going to do anything in your life because you're using but you're using to kill the fear of never doing anything, you know [smiles]. That's just feeding itself. So. Yeah. And that's what actually made me, made me go.

**Interviewer:** *It's amazing. I wonder, you know, connected to your hoodie, wearing a hoodie and having something that is always there during a very difficult time. In what way is it special other than it reminds you of where you've been?*

Well, I mean, I was one of these people that would never wear a T-shirt because the scars on my arms were horrific. You know, it was if I if I was, it gave me the opportunity to hide [emphasis], that's what it did, because I could put my hood up and hide the fact that I hadn't had my haircut for two years or and you know it kept you warm because I mean, I was out and about in some horrific weather. So ehm a sort of sense of hiding and security I suppose. Because, you know, ehm you're aware that you look like a mess, I don't think you're aware of how much of a mess you look, that you're aware that you don't, you're aware that you look homeless, do you know what I mean? I think now, because occasionally I run into some of those people, I don't go into CE unless I absolutely have to, but occasionally I have to. So, I'll run into someone I know, that's begging or just on the streets or whatever. And I noticed how sort of bad they look. Sort of reminded that, I used to, in my head at the time I thought that I looked worse than them. So, you attempt to hide how bad you look in the best way you possibly can, I did anyway, in the best way you possibly can. Which might involve putting the hood up. I always wear hoodies. I rarely wear anything else now.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Why do you think that is?*

Well, it is probably a security thing, you know. When I was in rehab, when I was doing the detox, it was that summer in 2018, where it was like thirty degrees like every day. And I'd still be sat out on that back patio with the hoodie on and my hood up, just feeling like death you know, like I was so ill. So, everyone else did in t-shirts. And me and me and the other guy that started the same day as me, we both be there with hoodies on, you know. It gives it gives you a sense of security, you know, it's weird.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So, having gone through all of these experiences, what would you say does relapse or going back to using mean to you?*

Well, I mean, I've heard so many people say that every time you relapse, everything just gets worse, worse and worse. So, you know, I don't I don't want to find out what things are like worse than the way they were the last time it happened. You know I really don't want to know what that's like. But it's still, you know, recovery still really difficult. Like I said earlier, the last time it happened it almost made me, you know, I had suicidal thoughts. So, I don't want to know what it feels like for it to be worse than that.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So, it's almost like relapse kind of means going back to that place of almost death, if you will...

Yeah, the problem is for me, ehm I'm one of these substance misusers that if I'm in I'm all in, you know. But someone I said someone I know and have known for some time, but also has done the programme the same time as me, said to me that, you know, you relapse, you will kill yourself.

**Interviewer:** *If you are that sort of person, then you are also doing a recovery 100 percent, don't you?*

But, you know, sometimes it doesn't feel like that [smiles]. Sometimes I do feel like I could be, I'm quite laid back - when it comes to everything else apart from misusing substances, I'm pretty laid back. I mean, I've got pretty laid back towards acquiring drugs. Some people get seriously impatient when the drug dealers are taking too long or whatever. I try and take a bit more of a relaxed attitude towards it. Doesn't mean I always do but I try to be. And I've got a pretty relaxed attitude to sort of everything. But because the substance misuse has been so vast, you know, that's where my head goes back to, you know. It's not...if I'm thinking about using, it won't just be using a little bit, you know I'll be like, 'oh, you know, when I had that [emphasis] much, that was fun'. So that's what my head is associating with using again, it's not just having a little bit, it's just going back to where I was, which was ridiculous.

**Interviewer:** *So it does it does sound like, kind of recapping a little bit, like the first couple of relapses you had where you have maybe a week off and then you went slowly but surely back into using a couple of days first and then five days a week, and then every day week, like you were unsatisfied with your life and you kind of saw the benefits of using again. Whereas that one last relapse you had where you ended up homeless and you ended up having suicidal thoughts, then you kind of had that internal drive or feeling that kind of pushed you to saying, 'OK, I think you need a change'. That's a huge shift from the first couple of times to relapsing, more seeing of like 'OK, how do I mask this unsatisfaction?' I feel it versus now thinking how do I not die because relapse is going to kill me. There's a huge difference in how you view that.*

Yeah. And like I said, It hasn't happened to me yet, but a relapse is part of recovery, as far as I understand it, because you have to beat yourself out of that whole that whole mindset of you know 'I can do everything and it'll be OK', you know, so it always gets worse always. So, you know, sometimes you have to go through that process again just to realise that you can't have a go anywhere near any of it again, because it's just going to be worse. Of course, once you know that ehm once you had an experience of some sort of proper recovery and you go back to using again, you're beating yourself up about the fact that you're using again and the way that you mask those feelings is to use on top of them [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. What would you say you've learnt from, from your relapse experiences in terms of what could you have done differently?*

I sort of now know that I've got absolutely no control over my substance misuse in any way shape or form. I've got no control over it at all, you know everything becomes around, I mean like the four years that I spent being homeless was ehm, in some ways quite ehm, in some ways it was kind of where I needed to be because...all I wanted to do was use and I was surrounded by people that were in that same place. It just highlights to me that when I'm back out there, that's all I want to do, you know, is...I know of no other way or, I don't even want to do anything any other way than just fill myself with substances, you know? So, having got that information now, it can drive me to...because I don't want to be in that place you know what I mean, it's ehm...it's not a nice place to be. It's put me into some really dodgy situations [smiles] with some very weird things which I can sort of think about some kind of humor because I know that those things actually turned out at the end. But some of the stuff that I've been through had the potential to end very badly [laughs]. But, didn't, you know. Like I said, I've got some crazy stories when I was homeless. I don't want to repeat that experience, you know, I wish I didn't know some of the things I knew. I wish I hadn't seen some of the things that I've seen. I wish I hadn't didn't I wish I didn't know that I'm quite capable of making enough money to support my drug addiction by doing things like begging, but you know I do. I can remember saying to someone at some point during my addiction, 'ah I'd never end up homeless and all that sort of stuff' but you know, in the end that's where I ended up...so it's sort of, this information can push you on to do what you need to do.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. How do you manage your relapse? What do you do to protect yourself from relapse now on a day to day basis?*

Just telling people how I feel. So ehm reaching out for as much support as I possibly can. I [smiles] make a conscious effort not to let my pride and my ego get in the way of my life being made simple by receiving help from someone else. I try not to make it like oh everything's about...but if something comes up and there is the offer of help for that particular situation. Ehm I've various things at work, you know, I've got the opportunity to say ' do you know what? I find this particular thing difficult or I don't like doing this, you know because I find this quite unsatisfying or this is physically demanding for me because I've got a physical issue'...ehm 'so can we try and do something about', you know what I mean, because if I start getting bored, frustrated or angry with work, for instance...ehm everything becomes really unsatisfying again, you know. And, of course, a lot of the lads where I do all the construction stuff I do, ehm they have a bad day they can go down to the pub. I can't do that! [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that's something that's difficult for you anyways isn't it? Like it's a it's a learning of opening up about how you feel as that was not quite easy for you, so that's really good.*

No feelings aren't…even though I grew up, I grew up in a house with a lot of women in it. But ehm feelings aren't necessarily discussed very much in my family. So, yeah, you know, I had no idea that I was gonna have to spend a year and doing what I do now talking with twenty other blokes about feelings you know [laughs]

**Interviewer:** *Yeah how much would you say you think about it relapse?*

I've lived with a lot of people that have relapsed. So, when I was in the second part of the programme, a lot of the guys that I lived with, relapsed. Everyone that I've lived with in this house has relapsed at one point or another or back in prison. And the main thing I see with those guys is that they don't talk about what's going on or they think they've got it all sorted. And I generally don't feel like I've got it sorted at all, to be quite honest. Ehm because of everyone relapsing, I've ended up spending quite a lot of time on my own in this house and being on my own really is quite difficult for me...ehm like I said to you earlier, I get sort of bored. There's only so much TV I can watch. I've been I've been set on ehm...so I was doing some 12 step stuff with my sponsor and I was getting the train back here, and it was a Saturday night at like half 7 and the train was quite dead because there's none on trains these days...and ehm I was just sat there and I was like, 'this is shit'. And it's because...sitting around in a house or whatever is just not fun for me. I like getting out and about...as nervous as I get around meeting new people, whatever, I do enjoy you know? I need things to be kept interesting you know and being on my own in this house was really, really boring for a very long time.

I literally have, like, this internal thing going on in my head where like something would pop in and like 'ah this is rubbish' and then the other part is going 'shut up!' because I know where those thoughts are leading so, yeah, there's kind of a proper internal internal battle that goes on between like the part of me that's the addict and the part of me that's clean. But at least I'm able to sort of recognise that certain thoughts lead down a certain path, you know. So yeah, sometimes it does [laughs], sometimes it does feel like I'm sort of gripping onto the whole recovery thing for dear life. But there's a lot of big changes sort of happening in my life at the moment and...or there's a lot of possible big changes and not necessarily happening but I'm at a point where a lot of really good stuff is going on and I'm not used to it. I'm not used to things going well. So then because I've got such a negative view of myself, I've got this voice in the background going 'you're going to mess everything up'. But just kind of being armed with the the knowledge that you don't have to listen to that. Doesn't make it easy. But just knowing that there is another choice, you know, it's it's a choice to...like I said, these days I do. I have a choice. I can choose to go back to the drugs, or I can choose not to. But, you know, you've got to try and keep things healthy. To choose not to go back to drugs [smiles].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. I wonder, have you ever heard about neural pathways and core beliefs and...it sounds like you have to completely rewire your brain and make new neural pathways?*

I'm one of those people now that, you know, if I'm in a really, really bad place, and someone goes 'are you alright?', I would tell them how I feel. Don't get me wrong, it still very much depends on who I'm talking to [laughs]. But yeah, for me there's always got to be someone there that I can talk to. At times, it's probably one of the few things that's kept me clean like in recent months is just being able to talk to people and say that, you know, this is how I feel. Some of the stuff I've been through...you know of a charity called Adfam who support family members of people with addiction?

**Interviewer:** *Yes.*

Yeah, it's quite a big charity you know. And I didn't expect to meet this woman [person in Adfam] again but thanks zoom and lockdown, I've been able to be involved with one of their support groups like every week. And [founder] tells me that I've basically been adopted by like 15 women who are with me [laughs]...so ehm it started off with me going along with just kind of giving them some sort of insight into what might be going through their son or daughter's head with the addiction, and it's like now, you know, I ended up talking about how I am with those guys to give off as much information to them as I can. So that's one thing stopping me from relapsing is that I've got about 15 women from CE hunting me down [jokes].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. There's no there's no possible way! Well is there anything else about your personal experience with relapse that you think is important for me to know?*

Well, that I don't want to do it again. For a start, you know, it's ehm it takes you to such a dark place ehm...it's really difficult, it's tough. Ehm but the crazy thing is, about getting clean, is your brain conveniently forgets about all the crap that's gone on as a result of relapse, you know, so you're just starting you know, you start and you choose your brain, obviously, chooses to remember good stuff. Yeah, it's so easy to forget this stuff...the sort of chaos and the carnage and the feelings that come with going back to that. Sometimes it can be quite appealing and that can be frustrating in itself...

**Interviewer:** *I mean, if your brain is only telling you about the great things about using, then you've still got those blood stains on your hoodie which can remind you of how crappy it was.*

Yeah, I was an absolute mess when I was homeless...without washing myself and all the clothes I was wearing for six months...So yeah I sort of know how poorly I take care of myself when I'm using, you know, when I'm in that really, really dark place. And I do. I generally don't care about myself when I'm in that situation which is why I've got no veins left...I'm covered in scars. When I relapsed and I don't want to repeat that again, because if it gets worse than that, I don't want to know what I feel like.