

# A journey into and out of heroin addiction

In this Background Briefing, Lydia continues to tell her story about the depths she went to before realising that things had to change.



**'My dream life became a distant memory. My real life became a nightmare. Although I could talk to the other girls, and we would even have a laugh - I felt completely alone.'**

**When I entered treatment I had thought that things would change for me. But things just got worse. I was still using heroin, and on top of that I was using methadone. I also had to take more risks to fund my drug use.**

I felt like I had been failed. I had put everything into treatment and trying to change, but nothing had worked. I couldn't really see any way forward – I felt trapped in a vicious cycle. That was until I met a friend who told me about the amount of money I could make working on the streets.

Initially the thought of working as a prostitute repulsed me. I had been sexually abused as a child, but I had learnt then to switch off, so I thought I would be able to do that again. It was a means to an end. Treatment hadn't worked for so it was time I helped myself. If I managed to make enough money to move away then I could start afresh – leave everything behind.

One night, after a close escape from shoplifting, I bumped into my friend on the streets. She helped me to sell my goods, and then we went to score together. After a long session I went back out with her. That was my first night working.

The next day was horrible. I hated myself. The only consolation was that I had earned a fair amount, so I went out and bought myself a sixteenth, and I still had some money leftover to save for my new flat. I kept on telling myself that it was worth it for the money and how it would change my life. I still believed that it would be temporary – then I could get on with the rest of my life.

After a couple of days working, I was introduced to crack. Everyone else was using it so I thought I would give it a go. That first smoke was amazing. The rush was intense – the best thing in the world – nothing else had ever come close. I wanted that rush again. I needed that rush again.

The next few months were a bit of a blur. My nights were spent working and my days sleeping. My drug use rocketed. I couldn't get enough of crack, and I used heroin to bring me down. Every penny I had went on drugs.

When I did take a look at my life, I was gutted. So I didn't let myself think about it. That was the only way I could cope. Drugs were the only way I could cope. I think I was quite good at pretending

that everything was alright. It was easiest when I was with people like me. We were the same. It was normal. The hard times would be when I saw someone from my old life. I could see the pity and fear in their eyes. So I made sure that I kept away from everyone.

I completely lost touch with all my family. I couldn't deal with them. When I saw them I felt like a complete failure. They didn't understand me at all. The easiest thing to do was to avoid them. So that's what I did.

Things carried on for a year or so. My dream life became a distant memory. My real life became a nightmare. Although I could talk to the other girls, and we would even have a laugh – I felt completely alone.

Although I had heard about people overdosing, I had never seen it happen to someone. Until one day after work, having just scored, my friend went over. No one knew what to do. There was some panic and talk about the police. None of us could afford to get the police involved. We left her alone and scarpered.

The next night I found out that my friend had died. I was shocked, hurt, angry and scared. A group of us went to her funeral. Afterwards we went straight to out score. I guess it was our way of coping. But I knew this couldn't go on.

A couple of weeks later, I decided that I wanted help. Continuing to use heroin wasn't an option for me anymore. I was willing to do anything to stop. It was almost a relief to come to this decision – even though I didn't know how I was going to go about it – I knew that things had to change.

I went to the local drop-in centre, where I normally collected my needles from. I spoke to a support worker there and told him what I wanted to do. He tried to explain that there were two local treatment services, but the only thing I really understood was that there would be a long waiting list. I was so angry. And frustrated. I was desperate for help now. I couldn't do it by myself and now I was being told I would have to wait months for help. I didn't know if I would survive for much longer...

**Written by Lucie James and Kevin Manley of Wired In.**