

# A journey into and out of heroin addiction

In this Background Briefing, Lydia concludes her journey out of addiction, considering what helped her the most.



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I was finally accepted into treatment, after a wait that seemed like years. My first day there was horrific. I sat in reception shaking because I was so scared. Part of me really, really wanted to get off the gear once and for all. The other part of me wanted to run as far away as possible and curl into a ball.

I kept thinking that everything I touched or did turned bad. I was bad news. But then I realised that I hadn't always been like that, and the smallest glimmer of hope developed. That scared me even more; I'd learnt that it was dangerous to have hope. It always ended in failure and hurt. My head was swimming. I knew that I had to push all my thoughts away and concentrate my efforts on treatment.

The next few weeks were a blur. I can remember focusing all my effort on not walking out the door. It was then that everything changed; something came over me and I realised, and I think believed, that there was hope for me. It was like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I could see other people getting and staying off the drugs, so there was no reason why I couldn't do it. That day was a turning point for me.

I learnt that a couple of the staff were in recovery themselves. I was amazed! Just knowing that helped me to understand it was possible to lead a productive life after addiction. I could lead a normal life. I could get a job. I could have friends and go to the cinema or go shopping. I finally felt that I could have a future.

The other members of my group, especially the ones who had been there longer, were also a great encouragement. If they could do it then so could I. Over time I developed some really close bonds with some of the other residents. They would say so many things that I could understand. I started to realise that I wasn't alone. I wasn't the only person to have done these bad things.

It didn't take long before I started talking in group sessions. At first it felt weird, but soon I realised it helped to share in group. It felt good to get things off my chest. I knew I could trust the others. I even started looking forward to hearing their feedback. Together we went through some difficult times. But we got there.

One thing that I learnt early on is that addiction is not just a physical disorder – it is mental as well. I thought that I would be able to

give up heroin once the methadone was holding me – but it wasn't as simple as that. The one-to-one counselling sessions were helping me with this, and at other times I would talk to my new friends. I learnt how to keep myself occupied and resist the temptation for heroin. I began learning ways to cope with things.

When my time came to reduce my methadone I felt more than ready. I didn't want to be on it anymore. I couldn't wait to be off everything. Looking back, I may have put too much pressure on myself. When I got to about 50ml I started to struggle. My emotions were all over the place, and the temptation to use was growing.

Now I can see exactly where I went wrong – I bottled everything up. But at the time I didn't want others to think I was struggling when I had been doing so well. I thought I was strong enough to get myself through it.

I ended up using one night. Afterwards the guilt was intense. The next afternoon I decided that I needed to tell my support worker. I was expecting to get the bollocking of a lifetime, but instead I got a sympathetic ear. She made me realise that it was not the end of the world. We agreed to slow my reduction down until I felt more able to cope.

I learnt a lot from that time. I learnt the importance of not becoming complacent. I learnt the importance of sharing my problems with other. I realised what I wanted out of life.

Living without drugs has been tough in so many different ways, but ultimately it is a better life than being an addict. I now have to worry about paying my rent and bills on time, rather than scrounging enough money to get a bag together and not caring about anything else.

I'm being careful to take each day as it comes. Looking into the future scares me, but it is becoming less and less scary. I'm learning to deal with life. I'm also learning about myself. I now have the opportunity to make choices in my life. I am in control. I can now work towards my dreams.

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