

Chris Ling – Personal Story

My name is Chris and I am 37 years old. I am a recovering alcoholic.

I started drinking at the age of fifteen, just for a laugh. When I left school I started as a trainee roofer. At this time in my life I was drinking for fun. My first serious relationship was when I was nineteen. We had a son together called Josh. We split up when Josh was three months old. That was when I first started drinking heavily, and things began to get bad for me.

My first arrest was for criminal damage, followed by hitting a policeman and on and on. From the age of twenty-two until I was thirty-five I had six sentences and three remands. At the time, when I was drunk, if anyone said the wrong thing to me then they would take the brunt of it.

A few times I would get myself back on track and everything would seemingly be alright. One of these occasions was when I was twenty-four. I'd realised that the drink wasn't doing me any good and was sorting myself out. Then my Grandad died. We were really close - in fact he was like a Dad to me. So, the drinking started getting heavy again. It was also around this time that my depression began and my split personality started.

I got into a relationship for five years with an older lady. I was working in the day as a roofer and committing serious crime at night. It looked like I was living the high life. But, I was still struggling with my depression and, at the age of 27, I first tried to commit suicide. At the time it just felt like things had gotten on top of me. My Grandad had just died and I was in a bad relationship – I felt like there was no way out. I took an overdose and ended up on the poisons ward of Llandough hospital. Although it was a genuine suicide attempt, I was glad it didn't work. I tried to sort out my depression and drinking after that.

In 1999, I was sentenced to two years in prison. My partner at the time said she would stand by me, but three months into my sentence I found out that she had cheated on me. I felt all alone in my cell and it felt like no one cared. One night I just couldn't cope any more and decided to end my life. I lying on my bed in my 8x4 cell and cut my wrists using a razor blade. I went deep into my main artery and tendons. I ended up back in hospital.

Before I had attempted suicide I had tried to find someone to talk to. I had asked the prison officers for help, but they had been really blasé about it. They would tell me that they would sort something out but nothing would happen. The only person who I could speak to was the Chaplain, which did help but it was not enough.

When I was in hospital they offered me psychiatric care, but the prison staff said that there was a psychiatrist I could see at the prison. That never materialised. Whilst in prison no one tried to get to the bottom of why I had tried to commit suicide, or help me with my depression.

I came out of prison in June 2000. On my day of release I started drinking heavily again. I was working as a roofer in the day and then drinking at night. In 2001 I met my six year old sons' mother, and we had a two and a half year relationship. I started my own roofing business up and everything was going well. Then the business got too big and I had up to ten men working for me. It felt like I was losing control a bit.

In January 2002, my second son Conor was born and not long after we started having financial problems. That's when I started my down hill spiral – I was on self-destruct. I would go to work in the morning, sort the men out on the jobs then be in the pub by 12. I also got back into crime to get money to help my failing business.

My partner at the time would confront me about my drinking and I would deny it – saying I'd only had two pints when really I had had about ten. I would hide cans in the house and my drinking problem got bigger and bigger. We split up in November 2003 and not long after I went to prison for hitting a bailiff.

I got out of Hawfield prison in January 2004. I went back to my home town and after only one week I was back in prison for threatening to kill someone. I was released from Cardiff Crown Courts on the 8th April as the charge had been dropped to harassment. My bail conditions stated that I couldn't go back to my home town until after my court case.

I moved to Cardiff and into a bedsit where I started drinking again. After about a month I got a job and met a new girlfriend. She liked the drink as well. So while I was out working she would be at home drinking heavily all day. I would come home and start drinking to catch up with her. Soon I was drinking at lunch times and not long after I was having a drink as soon as I opened my eyes. My girlfriend and I were constantly rowing and the police were frequent visitors to the flat.

In 2005 I went back to prison, and when I was released in July 2006 I had trained as a qualified chef. My girlfriend met me straight from prison and we went round town having a drink. Not long after I was released my girlfriend kicked me out of our flat (on her family's insistence) and I was forced to move out. My girlfriend and I were still together, just not living together.

I was drinking heavily again and working in various pubs and restaurants as a chef. My drinking was getting worse and worse. In 2007 I went back to roofing for a company that meant I was working away all the time. My girlfriend and I split up and I moved back to my home town.

Even though I was working as a roofer, the drinking was still heavy. In April 2007 everything became too much for me and I took an overdose. I was admitted to hospital where I did an in-patient detox. I came out and went back to work.

One morning I got on the train to go to work but jumped off before my stop. I went to get four cans from a shop and sat in the car park drinking them. I then spent the rest of the day drinking. I ended up on a bridge in Cardiff town centre, with the intention of jumping off. After several hours I was taken to the police station under the Mental Health Act. The local mental health hospital would not admit me because I was under the influence.

The crisis team came out to see me at the police station. They told me that it would be better to go home to my mums that day and they would come and see me there the next day to start me on a detox. They said that they couldn't give me tablets that night as the doctor was not available to prescribe them. They asked if I had a drink at home and I replied no. They said that as I was coming down off drink I needed to get some so I would not fit in the night. They ordered me a taxi to take me home, first stopping at the shop to get me some cans of beer.

I started my community detox, one of several, the next day. The detox went well and I started off ok. Everyday I would have to walk past my local pub to go to work. At first I resisted the urge to go in, and then I would tell myself that I could go in for a coke. Quickly I was drinking alcohol again, and things went downhill quickly.

My main problem was that because I was living in the Vale of Glamorgan (an area outside of Cardiff) there was never any funding for me to go to a rehab after my detoxes. This meant that I would get through the process of stopping drinking but I would not have any further help to address the reasons behind my drinking.

My drinking was uncontrollable and my depression was overwhelming. One day in early September, 2007, after drinking all day, I went to a railway bridge in my home town where I planned to commit suicide. After four hours a police negotiator talked me down, and again I spent the night in the police station because the local mental health hospital could not take me in as I was under the influence.

I was released from the police station on deferred bail for 'disruption of British rail'. In November 2007 I was charged, and on December 5th, 2007 I was given one years probation (which I am currently attending). I think that the fact that I was charged with this offense shows a lack of understanding of mental health issues and the relationship between mental health problems and substance misuse. I found that the authorities did not look past the fact that I was intoxicated to consider the underlying issues which led me to contemplate suicide.

A couple of weeks after this suicide attempt, I cut my artery in my left elbow and once again tried to take my life. I was found and taken to hospital. The following Sunday I was drinking all day, and the more I drank the more depressed I got. I went to my local docks and climbed a 200 foot crane. I continued to drink more beer while I was up there. I had

been up on the crane for four hours when someone called the emergency services. After another two hours I was brought down by firemen.

I was arrested under the Mental Health Act, and again my local mental health hospital could not take me as I was under the influence. I was kept in the police station. I asked for a doctor and they told me one would come in four hours after the drink had worn off. After several hours, the drink was wearing off and I pressed the buzzer to say I needed a doctor. They told me one would be with me soon. I started to feel agitated and stressed and the suicidal thoughts came back. Using one of the plastic buttons from my suit I cut away at my left elbow, pulled out the old stitches and continued to cut my arm.

When the police officers checked on me the wound was opened and deep. The police officers shouted and were angry. They bandaged my arm up and put me in handcuffs. It was 7am and there was still no doctor. I was coming off the drink big time. At 9am the doctor came – he was so unhelpful and really nasty. He didn't even look at my arm. He prescribed me valium and told me to calm down. I was left waiting for the crisis team to come.

The crisis team came at 1pm. After discussions it was decided that I would go to Llanfair Hospital (mental health unit). After an assessment by a doctor at the hospital it was decided that I needed to go to a different hospital to get my arm seen to. However, once there I was told that the wound had been open for too long and it would have to heal on its own.

I spent a week at Llanfair. I did my detox whilst there and was told I would have to go home as there were no resources or funding to put me into rehab. I felt so let down. I was given a weeks supply of all different types of tablets. My head was still in a mess, and as soon as I left I was drinking again, because I didn't know what else to do.

A couple of days later, after drinking all day, I took about 100 tablets. I remember walking over to the train station, not knowing where I was going. I must have collapsed on the train station and I remember coming round with two paramedics looking over me. I was taken to the poisons unit again. A doctor assessed me and I was put on a drip for 24 hours.

Over the next four days I was seen by several doctors and spoke to the ward psychiatrist. Between us we decided that I needed to come off the drink once and for all. My psychiatrist, Jill, phoned up the Bridge Project, a residential rehabilitation programme in Cardiff. She was told that there was a space for me on the aftercare unit of the rehab which I could have as I had already done my detox.

So, on Thursday 27th September, 2007 I started on the Bridge Project at Ty Gobaith, Salvation Army. I have now been dry from alcohol for eight months. My life has changed dramatically.

Since being on the Bridge Project, I have done various courses. These include achieving my CSCS card and doing a four day course to become a qualified first aider in the work place. I am also on the M.I.L.E programme (run by New Link South Wales) which trains up ex-substance misusers to work in the addiction field. I have nearly completed the course, and although it has been difficult and challenging at times, I have really enjoyed it. I am hoping to become a substance misuse worker, ideally working with juveniles (aged 16 – 25) with substance use problems. Recently I have also started running group sessions on the Bridge Project which is giving me experience for my future work.

Since December 2007 I have been a volunteer with Wired In. I am writing my personal story so that others can learn from my experiences and see that there is a way out of alcohol addiction. I want people to know that there is help out there. But, they have to push for it. If you are determined enough to get through a detox then look for help. Remember, no one else can do it for you, you have to want to do it. But the help is there.

Since I stopped drinking alcohol I have had a lot of challenges. But with the support that I have around me, combined with sheer determination inside, I have managed to overcome the temptation to drink. I have made sure that I keep myself busy by doing courses and volunteering. I have also really gotten into running and when I need some time out I go for a long run. I am also organising a fun (!!) run in aid of Ty Gobaith, with Kate Morgan who is a key worker from the hostel. Another really important thing for me is being able to talk to people. Whenever I have any problems I make sure that I talk to someone about them rather than bottling them up inside.

When I first went on the Bridge Project I didn't know what I expected. I really didn't know if it would work for me as I had been unable to keep away from alcohol in the past. At the start I was really unsure, but day by day I started to like the thought of not drinking. Now, when I think about the future, I feel very optimistic and inspired. I do have occasional worries, for example, living on benefits when I could earn good money as a roofer, but that could lead me back to drinking, and I want to focus on a career as a substance misuse worker.

Life is good now. I am not drinking anymore. I have moved out of Ty Gobaith and I am living in an aftercare house in the community. It is so good not having to wake up every morning and have a can to stop the shakes. Life is good and I am looking forward to having a new career and a long, good life.

Thanks

Chris Ling

