

*“Black lives matter, white lives matter  
but drug addicts’ lives don’t?”*

*Stories of*  
**Love**  
**Loss &**  
**Hope**  
*during COVID19*





# Contents

Face and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR).....	4
These are our stories.....	5
JD.....	6
“The sound of my saw, the smell of the wood, the feel of the hammer in my hand, the taste of the pencil hanging out the side of my mouth”	
Ronnie.....	9
“Julie was the warmest, funniest, loudest, kindest soul who ever lived”	
Sandra.....	10
“Thomas I will say his name, he is not a statistic”	
Leeh.....	12
“The third part of the puzzle”	
Chelle.....	14
“Black lives matter, white lives matter but addicts’ lives don’t matter?”	
Anne Marie.....	16
“A road full of ghosts”	
Jackie & Davey.....	18
Two likely lads who never respected addiction”	
Donna.....	20
“No one has ever cared about my story before”	
Fred.....	22
“Stigma”	
Project Manager’s Note.....	24
In Memory.....	26



# Face and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR)

**F**AVOR is a member-led UK charity made up of individuals in recovery from substance use, their friends, families and small community recovery organisations. We have over four thousand members, 150 volunteers and we gained charity status in 2012. We are an inclusive organisation who welcomes people at all stages of recovery, including those who are currently using alcohol & other drugs to help cope with life.

FAVOR is the only member-led recovery organisation in the UK who are focused on tackling discrimination and are independent of recovery service delivery.

FAVOR's unique approach, of tackling the cause of exclusion from the perspective of people with lived experience of recovery, provides an independent, autonomous and authentic voice to change society.

Stories of Love, Loss and Hope' documents the impact of drug related deaths contrasted with positive stories of recovery. Throughout this document you will find examples of both overt & covert stigma. We did not have the capacity

within the project time span to work on advocacy language training for the participants. This is a record of their stories in their words, not ours.

The publication is designed to influence policy and follows our Working Together to Challenge Stigma to Save Lives. (23 recommendations to the Scottish Government on reducing the highest drug death rate in the world).

The project provided a platform for our voices to be heard, contributing to the public discourse about addiction and recovery. Using our personal stories, bringing them to life, sharing our experience of recovery, love, loss & hope we aim to change the toxic narrative of addiction and bring the truth that recovery is possible into the public consciousness's.

Despite years of political ambivalence & point scoring between parties towards those who have problems with substance use. We know that it is in telling our stories of recovery that holds the key to support people who are at risk of a premature drug-induced death.

# These are our stories.

People in recovery have much to offer at this unique juncture of cultural history. We are experts in brokenness, crisis management, and the processes of healing wounds to body and character. People in recovery understand the sustained effects of social isolation and alienation. We can share the transformative power of connection to the community. This project demonstrates how we are able to achieve together what we could not achieve alone, and how connection is possible even in the most difficult of circumstances and that our most desperate moments were also moments of immense opportunity.

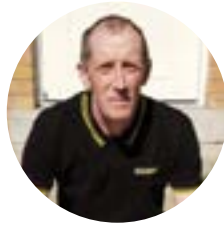
We all have a story, each of us is a constantly unfolding narrative, a hero in a novel no one else can write. Every single person who took part in this project is our hero. Tackling stigma and debunking myths has never been for the fainthearted, especially when you are the one who is experiencing that very stigma and discrimination. A big shout out to the courageous folk for their willingness to let their faces and voices be seen and heard.

We hope you will enjoy reading these stories and please share them as far and as wide as you can. So that others hear the message that we do recover and that hope healing & recovery is in abundance.

Annemarie Ward  
CEO @FAVORUK



# JD



*“The sound of my saw, the smell of the wood, the feel of the hammer in my hand, the taste of the pencil hanging out the side of my mouth”*

**M**y name is J and I am a person in recovery, I am also a loving and caring father, a true and loyal friend, and a devoted son and brother. I am a good person, I come from a good family, I have a lot to offer and I am a survivor.

This was not always the case though especially in my own eyes. I've struggled with substance use disorder for all of my life, spanning decades. Starting in primary school with solvents, graduating to heroin. At 40 I introduced alcohol to the mix and any thoughts that I was in control of my addiction quickly disappeared. Over the next 7 years I spiralled down losing everything I held dear to me, my children, my wife, jobs and house. I could also throw in my self-esteem, confidence, my morals but I never had any of them to be honest.

All that was taken from me at a very early age and in its place was left a hatred of everything and everyone. Anger, resentment and an intense self-loathing manifested itself in a dance with chaos

and danger. I was always searching for something, searching for answers but all the time I was running I needed to be someone other than myself.

In 2018 my father died and something changed in me, he died hurting because his son was lost in substance use disorder. My best friend killed herself because she couldn't stop, she chose to take her own life. I knew I didn't want to die, I wanted to live, to be there for my kids. I didn't want to be a victim any more. I knew I was a victim but I knew I could be something better, I had been a fighter all my life, I was going to fight back.

I was offered a place in a residential rehab, a six months break from my life, six months to work on me, to address my issues to get clean and sober. I went into Phoenix Futures and from that moment, rehab became the gift that kept on giving.

I initially thought it was all about getting clean but soon learned that there was more to it than that.

I had to talk about my issues. I started getting flashbacks and intrusive thoughts about the abuse I suffered as a child and it brought back all the self-loathing and the hatred for myself that I have been masking with substances. It all hit me at once and I had to speak about it and I eventually opened up.

I knew I was broken when I went into Phoenix but the truth of my life broke me in a different way. It had me on my knees I was physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually broken. I was supported to go into trauma counselling and that was the biggest thing for me. Being guided to backtrack through my life, piecing everything together to a single instance in my life and then the walking forward through it all. It gave me a different perspective, it changed everything for me. I learnt so much about myself in Phoenix. I changed my whole thinking. I look at life different. I'm able to stop outside my own mind and re-evaluate what's happening enabling me to make the right choices. Phoenix gave me a solid foundation to build on, it can be hard but it is rewarding. There are still times where I feel I have no emotions, I feel as if I am just existing, I feel totally disconnected and I struggle to keep myself in the here-and-now.

I got an opportunity to make crosses for FAVOR UK as part of their drug death awareness campaign to highlight the drug deaths in Glasgow. At first it was just a bit of joinery but making the crosses became so much more. Making the crosses helped me deal with the effects of the trauma counselling, it brought me into the here and now and it slowed my thinking down immensely. It was also difficult as some of these folks who had died were names I knew as I engraved their names onto the crosses.

Then January 10th 2020 I lost my 33-year-old son Brian to substance use disorder. It was sudden, unexpected, it was heartbreakingly tragic, it still is and always will be. He spoke about trying to do what I am doing, he just never got round to it but he was so proud of his dad getting into recovery.

Brian only got to be part of my recovery for 9 months but it meant the world to him. We were going to do so much together but it wasn't to be. Brian knew my grief and pain at being estranged from my other kids and he

always said he would do everything in his power to get his younger siblings back in my life. Through his passing he did and I now have my other kids in my life again after not seeing them for over 2 years.

Brian's death brought me the biggest battle in my recovery, I knew myself well enough to know I was at serious risk of relapse. I had too much freedom in my current supported accommodation, the choir was singing in my head. I started to think I could use heroin again and that I could get away with it. It's only a wee sympathy use, folk would only say; oh well he's just lost his son. But the thought of using on his death knowing how much my getting into recovery meant to him. I just couldn't do that to his name.

Phoenix allowed me to return to the rehab to offer me extra support. For once in my life I was making all the right choices. I know I've not beaten my addiction that will come when I'm on my deathbed and I take my last breath. But knowing I never have to use again reinforces to me how much I want to beat this.



# POEM BY J

You threw the dice, brought me into your game  
Stole my Innocence, left me with shame

Took my childhood  
You filled it with pain  
Left me feeling I was to blame

I feel your touch  
I feel your haste  
I have your smell  
I have your taste

I'm your damaged goods  
your left-over waste

So, I tapped on the wire  
I smiled through my frown

I sunk the spike and filled my veins with brown

It lifts me up as it lays me down  
Your pain and your abuse have just left town

I'm dying in my future  
living in my past  
going down this road  
my recovery won't last

I won't be the black sheep of the family or  
bottom of the class

I refuse to be just another social outcast

For 40 years I've lived with  
this s\*\*\*  
Now I ain't taking any more of it

I'm gonna take more punches  
but I won't take another hit  
I'm taking back my life bit by bit

I am no longer the child filled with fear  
I'm no longer the adult who has to take gear  
I've kicked out the whisky, pills, powder and  
beer

So, watch this f\*\*\*\*\*  
space cos this is J's year



# Ronnie



*“Julie was the warmest, funniest, loudest, kindest soul who ever lived”*

I am the eldest of 4 (now 2) of your average dysfunctional family. My personal war was over many years ago and I have been in recovery ever since, mainly thanks to the many wonderful people who have been put in my path.

My wonderful sister Julie was also an alcoholic but she didn't make it - she committed suicide 8 years ago. I am however blessed with the most amazing memories of her - she was the warmest, funniest, loudest, kindest soul who ever lived. You will meet so many addicts like Julie; kind and caring to everyone except maybe themselves. I also lost a brother to a heroin overdose last year and my youngest brother is still addicted to heroin. Sadly, he won't give up yet.... but there is always hope.

There are so many families like mine as well as many with no history of addiction whatsoever - it doesn't matter. It's not a competition nor do

you need to have a genetic link to have an issue yourself. If you are an addict that's just how it is - but it doesn't have to define you. I am a human being first and an alcoholic second.

I would say to anyone out there suffering - put out your hand and ask for help. I remember how frightening or even impossible that seemed. Just do it anyway. You have no idea how much support is out there and better still you can possibly have the life you deserve. You are worth it - no matter what your inner voice is telling you. It's OK to be afraid, unsure, lost, sad or stuck. But it's so much better to be free and to live the life you have the potential to have.

And when you start to feel better you can help the next poor soul out there - we are there for each other when we are well enough. It's as simple as that.

# Sandra



*“Thomas I will say his name, he is not a statistic”*

I lost my older brother to drug addiction in December 2016, he was 38 years old. As a child he was called smiler, he was a good person who would have done anything for anyone, he wasn't just a drug addict he was our Thomas. He battled addiction for well over 20 years, I think he first started taking drugs when he was around the age of 12 or 13, and it progressed from there. He was in trouble with the police from a really young age, he would steal, rob and generally do anything he had to, to feed his addiction.

Thomas and most of his childhood friends turned to drugs, this started with cannabis, jellies etc, then after a fall from a 30ft bridge at the age of 15, he struggled a lot with his brain injury and it didn't take long for him to progress to heroin. He was trying to escape himself and heroin gave him that.

He almost died at 15, he was in intensive care for two weeks and the doctors prepared my mum and dad for him possibly not pulling through, he

did, but a part of him didn't, he was different. He struggled with mood swings, headaches and seizures and was discharged from hospital.

There was very little follow up and no psychological help for the trauma he had faced when it was discovered he was addicted to heroin.

It took a long time before he went to get help, he denied it at first, he took things to pay for drugs, my mum had to pay off drug debts for him. When he finally sought help, he was offered methadone, and was assigned a drug worker. He was never offered residential rehab, or an alternative to methadone. There were periods when he would be doing well, sticking to his programme of methadone and seeing his drug worker, but there were always the relapses, which usually ended with his methadone being increased. If he ever asked for this to be reduced, he would be told no, he wasn't ready.

My mum tried to keep him locked in his room but he would jump out of a second-floor window, as he couldn't cope with the withdrawals. We lost our mum in April 2016 and he went into a Valium detox for three weeks shortly after this, he left that facility and was using two days later, again no follow up, it wasn't a meaningful process.

He was returned to the same community, the same friends, all battling their own demons, with no support, what did we expect?

He was found dead in his flat on Monday 19th December 2016, our younger brother Jamie called the police as he couldn't reach him and had saw him just two days before. He died alone in his flat with heroin and etizolam in his system. My brother Jamie never got over it, he also passed away in May 2018.

If I could go back 20 years, I would be more compassionate to Thomas, less angry at him.

I would shout louder and longer to get him the help he so desperately needed.

**“ If I could go back 20 years, I would be more compassionate to Thomas, less angry at him, and I would shout louder and longer to get him the help he so desperately needed. He put his trust in a programme of methadone that left him with no way out. It kept him hooked and stuck in a loop.”**

He put his trust in a programme of methadone that left him with no way out. It kept him hooked and stuck in a loop.

I feel like we could have all done more, society by dropping the stigma and seeing the person, families by realising they can fight for a better system, and the government by accepting this is a public health emergency and treating it like any other illness. I can't have my smiling, caring big brother back, but he will never be forgotten, I will say his name, he is not a statistic.

Thomas Twigg 24/08/1979 – 19/12/2016

# Leeh



*“The third part of the puzzle”*

**M**y name is Leeh, I'm 35 years old and I've spent 20 of those years battling with a substance use disorder. I came into Jericho house, an abstinence based long term rehab over 8 mths ago. It is the first time since the age of 15 that I've ever had more than 2 days abstinent from all mood- and mind-altering substances. Including alcohol, anti-depressants and pain killer.

I have experience's where services try to 'lift me off' using harm reduction methods, such as methadone and suboxone scripts, I was on these for over 11years. Countless GP's prescribing me antidepressants and anti-anxiety tablets for almost as long. Throw into the mix countless attempts at psychotherapy and yet still nothing worked. I continued to use drugs no matter how bleak and despairing my life had become.

Over the years I've lost many friends to addiction, some were so totally lost and hopeless they felt

there was no way out other than jumping out of a tree with a rope around their necks. Or throwing themselves in front of oncoming motorway traffic, either way they felt completely alone. They felt they had absolutely no chance of ever understanding what the driving force behind their agonising thoughts and feelings were. Death was the only conceivable way to stop the pain.

**“The project empowered me to take control of communicating my own story.”**

Countless other friends have lost their lives through accidental drug overdoses and although these deaths are as equally painful for me to live with. I believe from my own experience of addiction and feeling suicidal daily, that these people were perhaps the lucky ones!

They were saved the literal “hell on earth” that can be associated with the last few weeks or months of crippling and debilitating suffering. Taking this action may requires courage but it contains no courageousness whatsoever; as by this point it reflects nothing but the purest form of desperation, it's their only relief.

What I am sure of is that either by overdose or suicide both groups were on harm reduction treatments and medications, prescribed for their problem with mental health and yet both groups ended up dead.

The third part of the puzzle asks the question why? Why are harm reduction treatments and other prescriptions still being used as a "solution" Why does my experience, the experience of countless other addicts and the statistics; all of which provide hard evidence that harm reduction treatments and other prescriptions are vital and necessary services but in themselves are not the solution.

My own experience is that substance use disorder isn't actually the bigger picture; although society believes that it is. I believe my addiction is nothing more than what I suffer from and that is a disease in my thoughts and feelings. Substances including harm reduction and GP prescribed medication are like a plaster over the top of a wound in my soul. My feelings of fear, confusion, anxiety and loneliness have been there well before I even knew what drugs were.

Childhood traumas left me feeling completely disconnected from everyone and everything. Isolated and alone I was in a constant state of heightened awareness and fear. My first genuine memory is of wanting to die when I was 13 years old and it was that same year I first used a substance. I drank myself into oblivion and was very unwell. For a little while that all-consuming fear that was with me minute to minute was lifted and I believed subconsciously I had found the antidote. Within 2 years after that my negative perception of self-became too much to bear and I used an

antidote once again.

For the next 20 years I moved from one drug to another, from amphetamines to alcohol to crack and heroin. For a very short period of time the substance I was using would work. But it always stopped working and I would be left with even more guilt shame remorse and self-hatred than when I started. I would move on to a harder substance to numb my soul and repeated that until I had gone through them all ending up on heroin with no runs on the ladder left to climb.

By this point a lifetime of pain, fear, remorse and neglect lurking in the space where my soul used to be. Without even knowing it I had sold my soul and only then when I was completely broken with no hope or fight left, only hours away from suicide that I was swooped up by Jericho and saved.

Abstinence is the only thing that worked for me. I have since asked myself how did I expect to get off drugs using more drugs to do it, prescribed or not? We use drugs to change the way we feel, when our tolerance grows and the drugs stop working, we're still "on drugs" and still sitting with our ever-increasing barrage of self-hatred, fear and confusion.

It's the same with methadone, suboxone or anti-depressants, we will always reach the point where we need more to escape our hellish feelings once our bodies become used to a regular maintained dose. So, what I needed wasn't a change in drugs (socially acceptable or not). What I needed was a change in my thinking. I needed long-term abstinence-based rehabilitation.

Trying to treat me with mood- and mind-altering substances is like trying to suppress pain by inflicting more pain, for me it just doesn't work.



# Chelle



*“Black lives matter, white lives matter but addicts’ lives don’t matter?”*

In my opinion people with substance use disorders are treated as if their lives don't matter. That's the way I see it. If you see something negative in the media it makes people say things like that's just those junkie bastards, they don't matter. It's as if they don't exist as humans, they are a non-entity. People who have never suffered with a substance use disorder or suffered with a family member with a substance use disorder, they do not get it. The stigma makes people shut their eyes to it and deny that their families have a problem, to me denying it is worse, because they are not helping the person by pretending. But you know what; its universal, substance use disorder is universal. it doesn't just happen to people in schemes and it's not just people who have experienced trauma it's a global disease.

My brother was the youngest he was spoilt rotten, he always got the best of things, not to say that we didn't get anything, but whatever Edward wanted

Edward got. He was the only boy and there is quite a big age gap between him and my sister and I, so everybody showered Edward with whatever he wanted. What can I say, he was always chasing something and he is a boy who never waited for things because he always got whatever he asked for. He never needed to wait, he didn't need to go to work for things and he went down at path of addictions.

As he got older, I think he was always chasing something, he started off his addictions with glue then gas, progressed to drink finally led to smack, not only smack, but jellies. He's got an addictive personality he was the same with bikes and cars. He was always chasing the rush but I think to myself where does the chase take you, where does it stop. He is 47 years of age now and he is still in active addiction. I'm not saying anything I haven't said to him but it has caused all sorts of strife in our family, but as a family we stick together and

deal with his addictions as they come. I think it's got easier as time's gone past because now, we just accept he's an addict and this is what we need to deal with.

It's funny he can be abstinent for months and months and then it can just take one simple thing and he's at it again. But that's addiction for you, if you know what I mean, I don't get it because I don't have that myself, I suppose I've got addiction issues with food but I've not got that thing where I need to be chasing something all the time. I think he was chasing his first taste of smack he said it was nothing like he had ever experienced in his life. He's never gonna get it again but the more he got the more he wants. He has never done rehab but has been in and out of the jail umpteen times. In Scotland addictions don't get addressed as an illness, it's seen as a moral issue, people say things like they knew what they were getting into. It's not an illness an illness is something you can help people with.

My mum looked for treatment for him when he was younger, when he was only 18 my mum went everywhere, she went to the police, to the doctor's, she went everywhere but was told there is nothing, there isn't enough resources. They told her he comes from a good family his needs are being met so he doesn't fit the criteria because we've only got very small amount of beds available.

There wasn't a whole range of services available, except methadone. I will tell you what I think of methadone, it's what makes doctors, chemist etc rich. He was one of the first people on the methadone script right when he was 19, he is now 47 and still on that script! They do not do reduction. he has tried himself; he has brought himself down many times and they refused to let him come off the methadone altogether. I know a girl bought herself down to 10 mils and the doctor refused to bring her off, because it's a money-making scheme. Methadone is a big money maker. It is used as a freebie; it's topped up or it's sold on and it is not regulated well enough off and everyone knows that methadone is worse than smack to come off.

Instead of using methadone as a medical intervention to get off drugs it's been used as maintenance treatment this should not be happening, this is madness. It's unbelievable and as I say my brother was treated with methadone and all this time later - 22 years he is still on 100mg every day. His addiction worker is a laugh, he gives him his scripts takes a pee sample and that's its job done. It seems that thinking is they are never going to get better once a junkie always a junkie, keep them quiet on the side until they die.

# Anne Marie



*“A road full of ghosts”*

*I thought it would help  
I wanted to survive  
It's cold I'm frozen  
Why  
How do I make this stop?  
No-one to help  
It's hard to keep my head above water  
Waves crashing all around me, tossing me around  
like a piece of driftwood  
I did the only thing I could  
I found something that helped  
A panacea for the soul  
An eraser that removed all  
I thought it would help  
I can see those closest to me shimmering like a  
mirage I know I am causing harm but I just can't  
stop*

*Trapped, kidnapped and held hostage.  
Who am I, where am I, where have I gone?  
I can only think of one thing  
And it is utterly against my will  
Compulsion  
A puppet on a string  
Always Wanting, Craving, Aching  
I thought it would help  
Failure  
Worthless  
Feeling shredded  
I found my rock bottom  
And knew I needed help  
My will to survive is like a powerful river rushing to  
the sea.  
A yearning, a promise, a pledge from thee  
A whisper that there is always hope for me*



**M**y grandparents, parents, myself and my siblings have been caught in a long line of transgenerational addiction.

Breaking the cycle of addiction, poverty and incest was not on my things to be when I grew up, but then neither was becoming dependant on alcohol and other drugs.

I was born in 1966, I became dependant in 1975 and was trapped in the web of the destructive effects of drugs and alcohol until I was 46. Getting support to end my dependency was not an option, the stigma and discrimination would cost me my job. In an attempt to control my using I would change the drugs I took, but the need for something to change how I felt and how I thought never changed. I was desolate and despairing, devoid of hope

and didn't know how to change. When I stumbled into the rooms of 12step fellowship my journey to wellness began. It involved navigating a terrain I was unfamiliar with; I was on a 'Road Less Travelled'. I learnt about the disease of addiction, its intergenerational nature, the impact of adverse childhood effects and becoming acquainted with the self I had thought was long forgotten.

“My story is filled with broken pieces, terrible choices and ugly truths. It is also filled with major comebacks, peace in my soul and a grace that saved me.”

The road to wellness has left me bereft of people I cared about, in particular Matt, Amanda and Gavin. Each loss avoidable with the right treatment but now a drug related death statistic.

Returning to Scotland Feb 2020 after a long period away has been a bitter sweet experience. I was only here a few short weeks and Scotland along with the rest of the entire planet went into lockdown. So, when Gavin died, I could only watch in misery a recording of his funeral, the loss of yet another young man.



# Jackie & Davey



*“Two likely lads who never respected addiction”*

So, after 20 years of addiction I arrived in a 12 step fellowship. After my first meeting I had a real belief I could live a life without the use of drugs and for the first time in my life I had a feeling of hope.

My name is Jackie and I am in recovery, I'm from a small town in the north east which had the highest percentage of known heroin addicts in their twenties. Over the years I have known at least 100 deaths from drugs in my hometown. Even with that fear of knowing I could lose my life I still could not stop. There was nothing I wouldn't do to get drugs, I thought I was going to die through using and had already accepted this. I eventually realized that I couldn't live the rest of my life like this and decided to look for help by entering a rehab in Glasgow. In my first year abstinent I kept hearing about people I knew who

had died through drugs, I now know that many I have lost count.

I started attending a 12-step program day centre and through this met someone named Davey. We were both the same age and Davey had recently left a different treatment centre from me called Jericho House in Greenock. We went to meetings together and shared the first year in recovery together, we laughed so much we had tummy pain. We always had each other's back, we both told each other our deepest and darkest, as we had total trust in each other.

“Thank you for the opportunity to participate for providing a vehicle for people to see and hear us as regular folk”

One-night David phoned and he was in shock his ex-girlfriend had been murdered in front of his two teenage daughters. He stopped attending any meetings and began taking care of his two daughters, I didn't think he was emotionally ready

for such a big responsibility. And then he began to constantly relapse and was in and out of recovery.

Time began to pass and I went to Aberdeen to work, Then I stopped doing the things I was taught in recovery and ended up picking up drugs that took me on a bender for 3 weeks. I woke up in my friend's flat and she told me what date it was. I was in shock at the chaos I caused in such a short time so I began to attend meetings again but I was full of anger.

I ended up back out the door and bought 20 Street Valium, I woke up 5 weeks later in hospital. I had fallen asleep on my right side; the blood flow was cut off to my arm and legs and I now have a disabled body. My right arm does not work and neither does my right leg. Davey came to visit me in hospital to support me through this time.

I couldn't accept the fact I had disabled half my body and for the next four years I was in and out of hospital needing medical treatment with my leg. Ultimately it had to be amputated and I became suicidal but I couldn't even manage that properly.

I phoned Jericho in Greenock to see if they would take me, they did and I was in a few weeks later. I didn't realise how shutdown I had become again and my mental and physical health was in a bad way.

Not long after coming and I got the news that Davey had died from drug addiction, he had left behind two daughters, one at the age of 21 and the other only 18. His oldest is now pregnant and I know Dave would have made a fantastic Grandad.

His addiction cost him his life and now his daughters are left with no father leaving his family utterly devastated. The consequences of drugs, leaves families shattered and ripped apart. So those two likely lads with foolish heads never gave addiction the respect it was due. Leaving David dead and me disabled. I now live my life completely abstinent from all mind & mood altering substances and I have that feeling of hope back in my life again, I can live without prescribed medication and deal with my disability in recovery. I am so grateful to Jericho house for giving me a chance to work the program.

# Donna



*“No one has ever cared about my story before”*

**M**y first memories of growing up were of my dad beating up my mum, she is crying because he has spent all the money on drinking and gambling. That was just the way life was and then he started turning on us kids. When ma left him, we were so happy because with my dad gone, we started to feel safe.

Sadly, it didn't last long, my ma got a job, that lead to drinking, parties & men. My sister and I were left to fend for ourselves. Every day she was boozing. Violence, broken home, incest from my dad, mums many boyfriends, and then my new step dad, another sexual predator.

I cannot remember any good memories or happiness growing up.

“If I could say one thing to my past self, I would say Donna, you are loved and life will get better, you are so worth having a life beyond your wildest dreams.”

When I was 15, I met Paul – it was the first time I felt safe or loved by anyone. He helped me leave home and he believed my secret. After a couple of years together I got pregnant. This frightened Paul and he disappeared off the scene. I moved into the high-rise flats and sometime my baby's daddy would come and visit and I let him.

I started to see he was maybe taking something other than weed. Aleisha was nearly 2 when Paul

came up to visit again, he went into my kitchen and jumped out the window – 9 stories' high.

I was 17.

At this point drugs where never an issue, but after Pauls suicide I was prescribed Valium and temazepam. I was hooked, this started a journey into drugs, overdose, self-harm, psychiatric wards, gangs, working on the streets, with 1 punter even attempting to murder me. And then my brother William was murdered and that became the impetus to see if I could make a different life for myself.

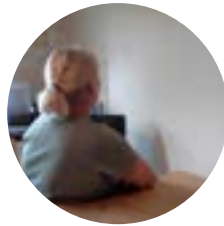
I sought out detox's and rehab for myself, I was never offered it, I was only ever offered methadone and loads of medication that did not help my

mental health. Going into a rehab helped me to get through that final detox and it also introduced me to the 12 steps and got me in and around meetings. If I had not went to rehab I would 100% be still doing drugs and finding ways and means to feed my habit and I never would have found fellowship or go to meetings.



My recovery has been totally different during covid 19 as I have been able to access more meetings through zoom and connect with a lot of inspirational women which I had never done before. I feel like I have the foundation to keep going in my recovery and I am stronger in my faith in the 12-step program. If I weren't in recovery, I would be dead and if I did survive, I would definitely still be on the streets selling myself or locked up in a mental health ward sad and broken.

# Fred



*“Stigma”*

**M**y brother John, he was 45, the youngest, he was always chasing my mums love, poor boy he was always chasing that. He started using drugs a long long time ago, I wouldn't say he was a hitter, Valium was his big thing. He died on the 19th May 2020, they said it was a heart attack but it is still inconclusive because the street Valium which is the big thing at the moment, when you overdose on that, it results in a heart attack. It's tragic I only ever wished for once he could be happy, he had a terrible life, his whole existence was so sad. After he died and organising his funeral the celebrant asked his children if they had any memories or thoughts that they would like to share. It was so sad; they couldn't think of anything.

They were in and out of care for so many years and my sister and I looked after them for long periods of time over the years. How I see it with my brother passing it's a blessing for the children, for there will be no knock on the door. His children they probably understand addiction more than anyone

they are 21, 20 and 14 years of age. I really wish the children would go into therapy they really need it.

It was really difficult but I loved my brother, it was so hard, he never sought help for himself but his partner tried. We would buy messages and take them to the flat, we wanted food in the house for the children, we didn't want to give them money because we knew how it would be spent, so we took up groceries. Is that enabling, call it what you will, I had to help in any way I could.

Trying to organise his funeral during this pandemic was very difficult how do you say goodbye, nearly everything we did was over the phone. I feel like I'm in a bubble because of the pandemic, things just feel unreal, it's hard to feel my emotions. I so wanted the best for my brother, now all I can say to his children is that their daddy is in peace, there'll be no more chapping on the door.

I wanted to participate in this because most addicts do not have a voice, and they surely need a voice.

We live in a judgemental society, the stigma around people with the disease of addiction contributes massively to keeping people unwell, shaming the person and their family which keeps the problem ongoing. I wanted to give a family members side of it because too many families are shamed. It's not just the person with addiction, it effects families and of course society, it affects everyone.

I'm involved in this because to be honest no one has ever asked me about him, no one seems to care about my brother, it's as if people think he is dirty, in a nutshell drug addicts lives don't matter.

To have somebody who is taking the time, who wants to know how families feel that's what we need, we need a lot more of that. I could sit and talk about my brother with any number of people, some friends included and I still feel that his life doesn't matter.

# Project Manager's Note

The overarching aim of this work has been to create change in order to save lives, government spending cuts, community perceptions and stereotypes have led to overt and covert stigma and discrimination towards individuals and their families recovering from substance use disorders. This in turn has had fatal consequences resulting in Scotland having the highest recorded drug deaths per population in the world. It is worthwhile noting that due to this very discrimination many potential participants did not feel it was safe to break their anonymity to participate in the project. People were concerned that breaking their anonymity would have personal and professional repercussions and that the real stigma and discrimination they faced would be experienced by their children and were understandably loath to expose their kids to harm.

The development of this project whilst always a professional endeavour very quickly became personal. Until now my story and experience with substance addiction had been kept in the realms of no one's business but mine. That changed after meeting these storytellers and hearing their stories first hand. Each of these personal stories has filled me with admiration, sadness, inspiration, hopelessness and righteous anger. The loss of so many lives, the discrimination, the stigma, the disregard of utter human misery offends the very core of my being and has roused the sleeping tiger in me. To that end I made the decision to join these courageous folks and stand alongside them willing to let my face, my voice and my story be seen and heard. My name is Annemarie and I am a person in long term recovery

Annemarie Ferguson  
Program Manager@FAVORUK





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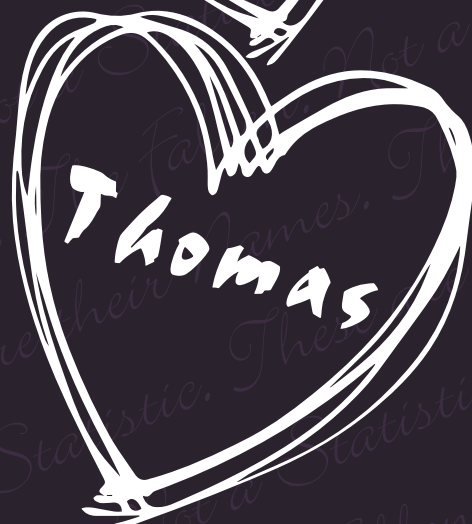
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If you have a [Facebook](#) account you can set up a fundraiser on your birthday and choose us as your charity!

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# In Memory



**YOU KEEP TALKING DRUG DEATHS**





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