



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

# **Press Partnership: Drugs and Alcohol**

**Published from Thursday, 18 January**

# Press Partnership: Drugs and Alcohol

- The Press Partnership is an innovative collaboration between DHSC and the news publishing industry, comprising over 350 national, regional, local and multicultural publications in England, reaching 17.7m adults (34%) daily. These insertions aim to raise awareness of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services with family members and friends of individuals that are dependent on, or having problems with, drugs and alcohol, as well among people who may be experiencing problems themselves, particularly those using alcohol, cannabis, and cocaine.

The collage displays various media pieces from the Press Partnership. Key elements include:

- Articles:**
  - "GETTING HELP FOR DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION COULD BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK" featuring Darren Lacey, a 45-year-old runner.
  - "It's time to tackle addiction" with the sub-headline "Beating a drink or drug dependency is life-changing... here's how to get help".
  - "Help is out there for substance abuse problems" with the sub-headline "If you, your family or friends are having issues with alcohol or drugs, there are lots of ways to access free and confidential local support from experts".
  - "IT'S TIME TO TACKLE ADDICTION" with the sub-headline "Beating a drink or drug dependency is life-changing - here is how to get help".
  - "Substance addiction: help is at hand" with a sub-headline "'I took all the support on offer for my alcohol problem - and I am so glad I did'".
  - "Drug and alcohol support could turn your life around" from The Independent.
  - "Struggling with drink or drugs? Help is out there" with the sub-headline "Free, accessible support is available - and here's how to find the best route to help near you".
  - "TO TACKLE ADDICTION" with the sub-headline "A dependency on alcohol or drugs is not a one-way ticket. 'You can recover' says someone who knows".
- Statistics on Alcohol and Drug Treatments 2021-2022:**
  - 133,704 of the people starting treatment.
  - 67% of people starting treatment were men.
  - 126,118 people starting treatment were aged 16-64.
  - 49% of people starting treatment were aged 65+.
  - 1 in 10 people starting treatment were aged 16-24.
  - 1 in 10 people starting treatment were aged 25-34.
  - 1 in 10 people starting treatment were aged 35-44.
  - 1 in 10 people starting treatment were aged 45-54.
  - 1 in 10 people starting treatment were aged 55-64.
  - 1 in 10 people starting treatment were aged 65+.
- Infographic: HOW TO ACCESS TREATMENT**
  - 1. Find out what you need help with.
  - 2. Talk to your GP or a specialist.
  - 3. Get a referral to a specialist.
  - 4. Attend a specialist appointment.
  - 5. Start your treatment.
  - 6. Get support and advice.
  - 7. Stay in touch with your specialist.
  - 8. Get help if you need it.
- Call to Action:** "Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. It's time to talk. Visit [talkfrank.com/help](http://talkfrank.com/help)"

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## IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO TACKLE ADDICTION

A dependency on alcohol or drugs is not a one-way ticket. 'You can recover,' says someone who knows

These days Connie Wilton is happiest tending to her horses. From mucking out to riding out, the equine world is more than just a pastime for the 37-year-old, from Accrington in Lancashire.

Along with caring for her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Ruby, and dog Roxy, it gives Connie routine and purpose. As her recovery from addiction continues, it's the ongoing therapy without a label I ride and jump, and look after them," Connie explains. "There are two big boy ones and a little pony for kids to ride. I'm up there every day, and Ruby comes at weekends and gets mucky too. Since I was a young child, riding has always been my thing."

Life changed dramatically for Connie – who was originally brought up in Tameside in Greater Manchester – when her father was killed in a road accident when the family were on holiday abroad. She was just 11.

"I was all messed up and went off the rails," Connie says. "I started being around the wrong people and going down the wrong path." Smoking cannabis led to class A drugs and as relationships with family and friends broke down, she fell into a life of dependency.

The turning point came when Connie became pregnant with Ruby in 2021 and finally realised that "enough was enough". She was introduced to a local service provider, Phoenix Futures – one of many running great treatment services around the country.



**'You've got to do it for yourself or nothing is going to change'**

Problems shared  
Opening up about addiction can help on the path to recovery

They offer psychosocial support to aid people on their journey to recovery through a combination of one-to-one sessions and group and community therapy.

Connie was checked into a specialist family unit in Sheffield – the only drug and alcohol residential treatment service in England where mothers, fathers and their children can stay and be supported in a whole-family approach. It provides safe, structured drug and alcohol treatment, alongside parenting support and childcare.

Three days after being admitted, Connie gave birth. "Getting the help I needed changed my life," she says. "I was a mess when I walked in and now I'm more confident and have my self-esteem back. I don't have cravings and I have the willpower to carry on."

The talking support groups are intense but they have got to be, to work. You're encouraged to open up to your key worker and once it is off your chest, you can put it in a box and forget about it. I told my

life story over six months, from childhood to now. It opens your eyes to a lot of stuff, especially what you thought was normality.

"You have to give it everything you've got. You will feel 100 per cent out of your comfort zone – everybody does. Have faith. All you can do is give it your best, but there's no faking it to make it if you're not ready."

"Mum used to ring up every day and tell me to keep going. I'd be upset when I put the phone down, but knew I was doing it for me and mum and the family."

Connie's younger brother and mother died within two months of one another while she was receiving treatment. "My key workers, Michaela and Bex, took time to sit with me and make me feel a lot better about myself," she says.

"They're like my family, and I have been excellent with me and my little girl. They still ring me to make sure I'm OK."

"Not wanting to spend Christmas alone, Connie returned to Sheffield for the festive period and helped

with the community support. "I gave a speech explaining what I'd gone through," she adds. "A couple of girls said I'd been an inspiration to them. They told me how they had nearly walked out, but having talked to me they'd seen a totally different view. To think I'd stopped two girls from leaving made for a lovely Christmas."

Connie's advice for people living with addiction is to reach out and ask for support. "You've got to do it for yourself or nothing is going to change. Even if you're proud, I didn't want to ask for help, but I needed it."

"Grab it with both hands and give it a go. Then stay calm and keep focused and busy. You need a routine and structure – like caring for the horses. If you're bored, your mind starts wandering."

Friends and family can also take action if they see loved ones struggling. "Give them as much support as you can and give them the numbers for groups and organisations who will talk to them," Connie adds.

### Friend in need? Don't delay – reach out for help

If you're a friend or family member of someone who you know is struggling with addiction, then your help could be vital in setting them on the road to recovery.

Drug and alcohol problems can be hard to talk about, bringing up emotions such as shame and embarrassment, but with early intervention and the right help and support, people can overcome them.

Treatment is available for people who are dealing with all types of substance abuse, including drugs perceived as being more social, such as cocaine and cannabis.



Scan to find out more

### Who to contact

Whether it's for yourself or someone you are concerned about, you can call FRANK, the national drug and alcohol advisory service, any time on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice and information. This organisation will also help you find out how to access treatment services in your part of the country. FRANK also provides a directory of adult and

young people's alcohol and drug treatment services at [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help). Talking to your GP is another good place to start to get help with drug and alcohol issues.

They can discuss your situation and get you into treatment, which will depend on your personal circumstances. All health professionals, including GPs and practice nurses, will support people who need help to access free local services, but if you're not comfortable talking to a GP, you can

approach your local drug and alcohol treatment service yourself without the need for a referral. Alternatively, a friend or family member can contact the service on your behalf.

### What to expect from treatment

At the first appointment, staff will ask about drug or alcohol use, as well as work, family and the general living situation.

They will talk through options and agree on a treatment plan before assigning a key worker to support throughout treatment.

Treatment for drug use may take place while living at home, as a hospital inpatient or referred to a residential rehabilitation service.

Most people receive support to stop drinking alcohol in the community, although some individuals will need a short stay in a medically supported unit so that their

withdrawal symptoms can be safely managed. As well as treatment services, mutual volunteer-run aid groups offer support from a community of people in recovery.

These include Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and SMART Recovery UK – and Al-Anon Family Groups and Families Anonymous for Families and Friends.

Each group is different so if you go to one that isn't for you, try another.

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### Is it time to seek help?

It's available if you are worried about yourself or someone else. Call FRANK on 0300 123 6600 for help.

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## Substance addiction: help is at hand

It can be hard to admit you have an issue – or to see someone close to you struggling to cope – but excellent treatment is available for everyone

Alcohol and drug problems can affect anyone. As more people look for help, people from all backgrounds and ages are getting support. It's important to know that help is available for everyone. It can be hard to admit you have an issue – or to see someone close to you struggling to cope – but excellent treatment is available for everyone.

becomes attached to routines. This can stop people asking for help as many worry that you know the problem will change. Don't be too hard on yourself. It's important to know that help is available for everyone. It can be hard to admit you have an issue – or to see someone close to you struggling to cope – but excellent treatment is available for everyone.



Help is at hand. For more information, scan the QR code or visit [www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

thinking excessively every day, but he has to be there most about five a year. It's not a bad thing. The right treatment can help. It's important to know that help is available for everyone. It can be hard to admit you have an issue – or to see someone close to you struggling to cope – but excellent treatment is available for everyone.

### HOW TO ACCESS TREATMENT

- If you think a friend or relative has a problem, you can help them get support. You can help them get support by talking to their GP or a local drug and alcohol service. You can also help them get support by talking to their GP or a local drug and alcohol service.
- If you think you have a problem, you can get support. You can get support by talking to your GP or a local drug and alcohol service. You can also get support by talking to your GP or a local drug and alcohol service.

## 'I took all the support on offer for my alcohol problem – and I am so glad I did'

Sarah Pearson, from Leeds, is a 45-year-old communications manager at Cancer Research UK who has been sober since 2017

Looking back, I've had an unhealthy relationship with alcohol for most of my adult life. I started to be the one who drank the most, who was the longest and wanted to do it all again the next day. I became more nervous in my late 20s. Physical dependency developed over about 10 years. My partner and I were planning to get married, but he knew I was drinking too much and had had to suggest me to not drink and when that didn't work I started having alcohol I wasn't ready to give it up. At some point I realised I had to tell my family. They were incredibly worried, supportive and wanted to help me, but didn't know how. I thought that getting married might be the best idea. My drinking escalated in the run-up to the wedding, which ended up being cancelled just a couple of weeks beforehand. I started an drinking for seven years after that. Alcohol had the only way of escape. My first was struggling and I'd had an episode of alcohol-induced psychosis and had to stay in a secure psychiatric ward for about a month. Eventually I realised the seriousness of what was happening to me. I was really worried about admitting my dependency to people, and how it would affect my career, my business and my relationship with my family. My GP referred me to Frank.

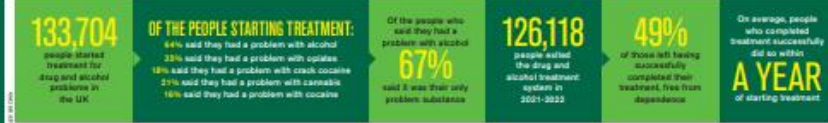


Leeds – the drug and alcohol services. Because of my physical dependency, they had to see me in for a week-long residential detox. I was medically supported, supportive and structured, giving me the best chance of early sobriety. Afterwards I was supported by education, counselling to help my coping and urges, and I was introduced to support groups based on CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), mental health workshops and other activities. Frank people such as writing. That all helped me to get the foundation for my long-term recovery. Everyone I met at the local service provider has been so supportive and non-judgemental. They include support workers, counsellors and other people asking for help. Looking back, the only person judging me was me. I took a year off work to focus on making my recovery plan. That came with financial worries. A service provider came with me to a DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) appointment to help me apply for appropriate benefits. It wasn't just my business I was worried about, though. It was supporting a successful career and was concerned about getting another job or being judged for why I'd taken time off. But I couldn't have worried. It's completely in control of how much I had people – when – including potential employers.

The response I had showed me life does go on. Rather than just surviving, I'm thriving.

I used to think asking for help would mean writing myself off as a normal person.

### STATISTICS ON ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENTS 2021-2022



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## Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. If it's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](https://talktofrank.com/help)

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**'FAMILIES NEED EMOTIONAL SPACE'**

A year after stopping drinking, Sarah volunteered with a charity that supports carers, including those looking after loved ones with addiction issues. She knows it's tough for carers – that's why the professionals can be such a help...

"Mum, Dad, my little brother and sister desperately wanted to support me but just didn't know how," Sarah recalls. "They'd try to love me out of drinking, shock me out of it, nag me out of it. When I moved home they removed all alcohol from the house so there was no temptation."

Sarah advises carers to seek professional support. "It's a lot of pressure for family and friends. Carers need a safe space to process their emotions but also advice on setting boundaries."

"Parents of people with dependencies who are financially struggling want to give them money. But if someone isn't feeling the consequences of their dependency, they may not be motivated enough to change."

Professional advice on these issues can really help."



## 'HOW I BEAT BOOZE'

Party lover lost fiancé and pals thanks to drink addiction – but a special care centre helped her recover and learn to live again

**SARAH Pearson once slashed wine in the wardrobe to hide her drinking habit – now she's sharing her story of dependency to prompt others to get free, easily accessible help through the NHS and support groups.**

"While I was dependent on alcohol my big fear was admitting it. I thought if I did, my life would be over – I'd never have a job or relationship again," says Sarah, 45. "But admitting it and getting help was like waking up after sleepwalking for years."

Sarah's alcohol dependency began in her 20s, and she was the party girl. "I thought my behaviour was normal for someone in their 20s – I was having fun," remembers Sarah, who works in internal communications for a charity.

"But when I moved in with my boyfriend and the relationship shifted from nights out to staying in and watching television, I struggled. I hid alcohol – white wine or spirits – in water bottles in my wardrobe and while my partner was in the loo, I snuck upstairs to take a few sips."

**By JANE COMMON**

The NHS defines addiction as "not having control over doing, taking or using something to the point where it could be harmful to you and to those around you".

Certainly Sarah's drinking had an impact on those around her. Sarah's partner – now her fiancé – inevitably cottoned on. She gave up drinking for a bit but started again in the run-up to their wedding. Two weeks before the big day, he called off the marriage.

**ROCK BOTTOM**

But even after being dumped, Sarah still hadn't reached rock bottom. Instead she was trapped in a vicious circle. "Alcohol was the cause of my pain but also my means of forgetting it."

All Sarah's friends slipped away and she was sectioned for a month with alcohol-induced psychosis – but it was another seven years before she entered rehab.

"By my late 30s, I was bloated and depressed. Tests showed my liver was struggling. Exhausted with it all, I told my GP, "I don't want to drink anymore."

Help was at hand, as it is for anyone addicted to alcohol, drugs or gambling. Sarah finally went for a week's residential detox in 2017. She recalls: "We were supported with medication to help with the withdrawal of alcohol, and with group and one-on-one counselling."

She then connected with 5 WAYS, a recovery centre in Leeds run by an organisation called Forward Leeds that collaborates with the NHS on drugs and alcohol. It's just one of many great treatment services run by different providers across the country.

"I spent the whole week there. It's a very holistic approach. There's counselling and group therapy, and yoga, guitar classes and walks. I even performed at open-mic nights! The centre taught me how to live again."

Sarah is now inspiring others in their recovery from addiction: if you're worried you or loved ones have a drink or drug problem, her advice is to seek professional help.


**REACHING OUT**

"There are people and services that will support you. Talking to your GP is a good starting point. Google local drugs and alcohol services and ring their helpline to chat to someone."

"My worry before reaching out for help was that I'd be judged, but there's none of that – a lot of people who work for support organisations have experience of dependency. So know that you're not alone. Help is out there."

**Worried about your own drink or drug problems or a friend or relative's issues? Call national advisory service FRANK on 0300 123 6600 for confidential help and information**

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## Is it time to seek help?

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Is it time to seek help?

# It's time to tackle addiction

Beating a drink or drug dependency is life changing... here's how to get help

**W**ITH his 40th birthday fast approaching, Darren Lacey found himself at rock bottom. Years of alcoholism had left him homeless, jobless and with his relationship with his family hanging by a thread.

Then, while he was being treated for a breakdown in hospital, one of his brothers visited and told him he'd pay for a bed and breakfast for a week or two if Darren would finally sober up.

"I could feel that this was the last straw for my family," he remembers. "I thought, 'If I don't do it now, I'll lose them.'"

Darren was discharged from hospital on his 40th birthday, and immediately contacted a local service in Dover that offers treatment to people wanting to overcome drug and alcohol addiction.

But while around 100,000 adults in the UK enter treatment every year, many more need such help but simply don't know where to start. When they do, though, it can be life changing.

## 'I COULD SEE THE PAIN IN MY MOTHER'S EYES'

Darren's problems began when he was 17 and got a job in a pub. For years he'd been trying to hide the fact he was gay, thinking it was 'wrong', but being bullied at school for it anyway.

"Then I discovered alcohol – it gave me confidence and made me forget who I was," he says. "By my early twenties, I was drinking every day."

He was also taking recreational drugs such as ecstasy.

"It got to the point when I turned 30 in 2008 that I was waking up, drinking half a bottle of neat vodka, then 15 pints of strong lager and the rest of the vodka

throughout the day," he says. "Between 2015-19, I was in and out of jobs, homeless and using people for sofa surfing, but I'm "ing them off and spending a few months on the streets of Folkestone – lying, cheating, stealing."

"I'd lost all sense of who I was – there were huge amounts of depression, and I still wasn't comfortable with my sexuality. There were a couple of attempts to take my own life.

"My relationship with my family was very fraught. My mum, Ingrid, had tried to help. I love my mum to bits, but the stuff I put her through – the worry, the stress. Nobody should put their mother through that. I could see the pain in her eyes, but the alcohol and drugs had changed who I was.

"In the lead-up to my 40th birthday, I knew I needed to do something or I would not get to 41 – my body was shutting down mentally and physically. Or I would have taken my own life. I needed to change."

Then came that pivotal conversation with his brother.

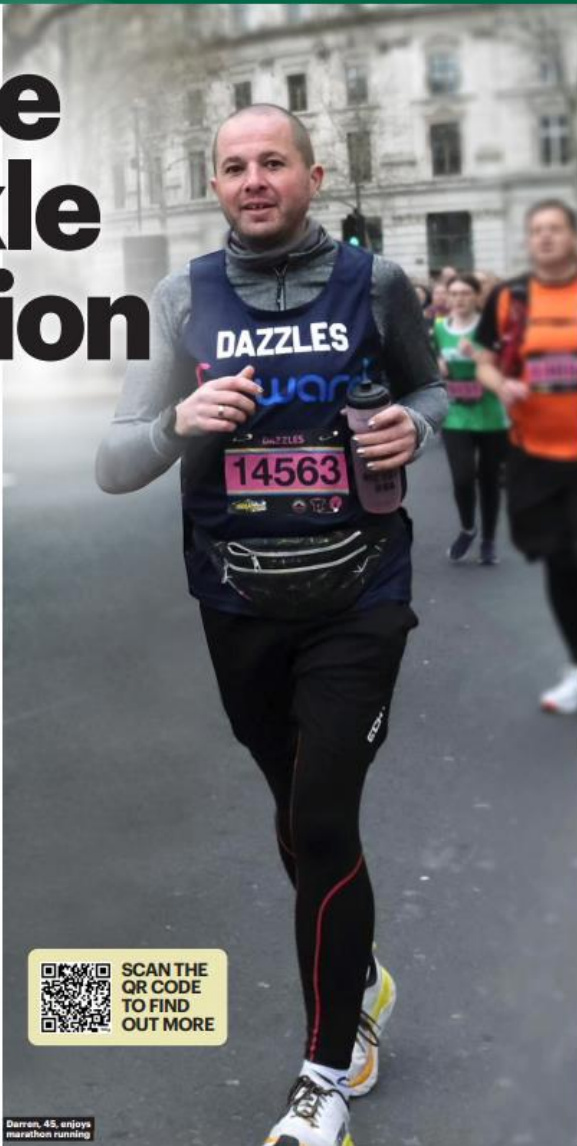
## 'THE PROGRAMME CHANGED MY LIFE'

Determined to change, Darren took the train to Dover to join a programme at the Forward Trust, a charity that aims to help people beat alcohol and drug addiction.

He had no appointment but just walked straight through the door and asked for help – having visited several pubs in the town first for Dutch courage.

"The man on reception greeted me with a big, friendly smile, and a member of staff came down to give me an assessment. I spilled my guts out – years of anger, frustration, guilt, everything. I knew I had to be honest.

"It was the first time in my adult life that I felt listened to



Darren, 45, enjoys marathon running

and not judged. He was so kind and I thought, 'Maybe I've made the right decision'. He was in recovery himself – so maybe there was hope for me."

Darren was offered 'day rehab', a 13-week programme where you return home every night.

"I moved back in with my mum at 40," he laughs. "Initially I thought, 'I'm not sitting in a room talking about my feelings', but people were so open and honest, and seemed to be happy without a drink."

It changed his life. "The service was so adaptable," says Darren. "I started on a 12-step programme, but that didn't resonate with me, so they put me onto cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to change my neural pathways. That clicked with me straight away."

"The programme is very client focused, rather than one size fits all. Everyone's pathway is completely different. So if one way doesn't work, they try another."

"They encourage you to go to recovery meetings, they have follow-on peer support, online meetings every day, face-to-face meetings, outings to the beach for fish and chips, a safe community."

"If you have a wobble one day, you can put in a message and

someone will call or meet you for a coffee. They realise down days can be dangerous, so peer support is huge."

## WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

**'They're very client focused rather than one size fits all. Everyone's pathway is completely different. And if one way doesn't work, they try another'**

Not only is getting help vital, but it is also free and it works. So how do you go about finding treatment for either yourself or someone you love?

A great place to start for both drink and drugs problems is by calling FRANK, a confidential

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## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM TREATMENT



**ASKING for help is one of the toughest parts of seeking treatment, but once you've plucked up courage, what should you expect?** Your treatment will depend on your personal circumstances and what you are seeking help for. The first thing staff will do is ask you about your drug or alcohol use as well as your work, family and housing situation. Then they'll come up with a list of treatment options and agree a plan with you.

If you're seeking help for drug misuse, that might include a number of different therapies and strategies including being referred to a residential rehab service or for inpatient hospital treatment.

For an alcohol problem, most people receive help while living at home although some may need a short stay in a medical unit to manage their withdrawal symptoms safely. Whatever happens, though, you'll be given a key worker to support you throughout.

■ This article is part of a paid-for partnership with HM Government



## Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. It's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)

■ For confidential advice and information, call FRANK on 0300 123 6600 or go online to [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)



## HOW TO HELP A LOVED ONE

**SEEING a loved one going through addiction is horrific, but it's a delicate subject that's often difficult to broach. So how do you do it?**

"People say, 'Do it for your mum', but that piles on the guilt and makes that person feel worse," says Darren Lacey, who now works for a service helping others with addiction. "Instead, attend an online meeting of a

recovery group and listen to people talking about how they dealt with it and what they did. Find out what services are locally available and give them a call. Do your research before speaking to your loved one – don't go in all guns blazing."

Then, if they agree, contact FRANK or a local drug or alcohol service on their behalf to get the ball rolling.



# IT'S TIME TO TACKLE ADDICTION

Beating a drink or drug dependency is life-changing – here is how to get help

With his 40th birthday fast approaching, Darren Lacey found himself at rock bottom. Years of alcoholism had left him homeless, jobless and with his relationship with his family hanging by a thread. Then, while he was being treated for a breakdown in hospital, one of his brothers visited and told him he'd pay for a bed and breakfast for a week or two if Darren would finally sober up. 'I could feel that this was the last straw for my family', he remembers. 'I thought, "if I don't do it now, I'll lose them."'

Darren was discharged from hospital on his 40th birthday, and immediately contacted a local service in Dover that offers treatment to people wanting to overcome drug and alcohol addiction. But while around 130,000 adults in the UK enter treatment every year, many more need such help but simply don't know where to start. When they do, though, it can be life-changing.

**'I COULD SEE THE PAIN IN MY MOTHER'S EYES'**  
Darren's problems began when he was 17 and got a job in a pub. For years he'd been trying to hide the fact he was gay, thinking it was wrong, but being bullied at school for it anyway.

'Then I discovered alcohol – it gave me confidence and made me forget who I was,' he says. 'By my early twenties, I was drinking every day.'

He was also taking recreational drugs such as ecstasy. 'It got to the point when I turned 30 in 2008 that I was waking up, drinking half a bottle of neat vodka, then 15 pints of strong lager and the rest of the vodka throughout the day,' he says.

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**'THE PROGRAMME CHANGED MY LIFE'**  
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the town first for Dutch courage. 'The man on reception greeted me with a big, friendly smile and a member of staff came down to give me an assessment. I spilled my guts out – years of anger, frustration, guilt, everything. I knew I had to be honest. It was the first time in my adult life that I felt listened to and not judged. He was so kind and I thought, "Maybe I've made the right decision". He was in recovery himself – so perhaps there was hope for me. Darren was offered day rehab, a 13-week programme, where you return home every night. "I moved back in with my mum at 40," he laughs. Initially I thought, "I'm not sitting in a room talking about my feelings", but people were so open and honest and seemed to be happy without a drink.'



Darren Lacey



**'If you have a wobble one day, you can put in a message, and someone will call or meet you for a coffee'**

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pathway is completely different. So if one way doesn't work, they try another. They encourage you to go to recovery meetings, they have follow-on peer support, online meetings every day, face-to-face meetings, outings to go to beach for fish and chips, a safe community. If you have a wobble one day, you can put in a message, and someone will call or meet you for a coffee. They realise down days can be dangerous so peer support is huge.'

**'MY MUM NOW BEAMS WITH PRIDE'**  
Getting help is worth it – just ask Darren. In the past five years, he's turned his life around so much that he now works as an inclusion coordinator for the charity that helped him. 'It's a hard journey, but it's a walk in the park compared to before. My life is infinitely better without alcohol in it. I live two minutes

**WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP**  
Not only is getting help vital, but it is also free and it works. So how do you go about finding treatment for either yourself or someone you love? A great place to start for both drink- and drug-related problems is by calling FRANK, a confidential advice and information line, on 0300 123 6600. It also has

details of the support available to both adults and young people on its website [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help). Local authority websites also provide details of nearby services and your GP surgery, practice nurse or health professional that can help. You may be offered treatment at the surgery or be referred to your local drug and alcohol service.

If you are not comfortable talking to your GP, you or a family member can approach organisations without a referral.

From the sea, I'm about to run my third marathon and my mum is beaming with pride. 'I'm living a happy and fulfilled life with a job I love at 45. I can't believe it – I never thought I could get to this point.'

SCAN THE QR CODE TO FIND OUT MORE



## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM TREATMENT



Asking for help is one of the toughest parts of seeking treatment, but once you've plucked up courage, what should you expect? Your treatment will depend on your personal circumstances and what you are seeking help for, so the first thing staff will do is ask about your drug or alcohol use as well as your work, family and housing situation. Then they'll come up with a list of treatment options and agree a plan with you.

If you are seeking help for drug misuse, that might include a number of different therapies and strategies including being referred to a residential rehab service or for inpatient hospital treatment. For an alcohol problem, most people receive help while living at home, although some may need a short stay in a medical unit to manage their withdrawal symptoms safely. Whatever happens though, you'll be given a keyworker to support you throughout.

This article is part of a paid-for partnership with HM Government



Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. If it's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)

## HOW TO HELP A LOVED ONE

Seeing a loved one going through addiction is horrific, but it's a delicate subject that's often difficult to broach. So how do you do it? 'People say, "Do it for your mum", but that piles on the guilt and makes that person feel worse,' says Darren Lacey, who now works for a service helping others with addiction. 'Instead, attend an online meeting of a recovery

group and listen to people talking about how they dealt with it and what they did. Find out what services are locally available and give them a call. Do your research before speaking to your loved ones – don't go in all guns blazing. Then, if they agree, contact FRANK or a local drug or alcohol service on their behalf to get the ball rolling.'

For confidential advice and information, call FRANK on 0300 123 6600, or go online to [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)

1. gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2020-to-2021/2020-21-substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2020-to-2021-report

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# It's time to tackle addiction

Beating a drink or drug dependency is life-changing. Here is how to get help.

With his 40th birthday fast approaching, Darren Lacey found himself at rock bottom. Years of alcoholism had left him homeless, jobless and with his relationship with his family hanging by a thread.

Then, while he was being treated in hospital for a breakdown, one of his brothers visited and told him he'd pay for a bed and breakfast for a week or two if Darren would finally sober up.

"I could feel that this was the last straw for my family," he remembers. "I thought, 'If I don't do it now, I'll lose them.'"

Darren was discharged from hospital on his 40th birthday, and immediately contacted a

local service in Dover that offers treatment to people wanting to overcome drug and alcohol addiction.

But while around 180,000 adults in the UK enter treatment every year\*, many more need such help but simply don't know where to start. When they do, though, it can be life changing.

**'I could see the pain in my mother's eyes'**

Darren's problems began when he was 17 and got a job in a pub. For years he'd been trying to hide the fact he was gay, thinking it was wrong, but being bullied at school for it anyway.

"Then I discovered alcohol - it gave me confidence and

made me forget who I was," he says. "By my early twenties, I was drinking every day."

He was also taking recreational drugs such as ecstasy.

"It got to the point when I turned 30 in 2008 that I was waking up, drinking half a bottle of neck vodka, then 15 pints of strong lager and the rest of the vodka throughout the day," he says.

"Between 2015-19, I was in and out of jobs, homeless and using people for sofa surfing but p\*\*\*\*ing them off and spending a few months on the streets of Folkestone - lying, cheating, stealing."

"I'd lost all sense of who I was - there were huge amounts of depression and I still wasn't comfortable with my sexuality. There were a couple of attempts to take my own life."

"My relationship with my family was very fraught. My mum Ingrid had tried to help. I love my mum to bits, but she still put her through... the worry, the stress. Nobody should put their mother through that. I could see the pain in her eyes but the alcohol and drugs had changed who I was."

"I spilled my guts out - years of anger, frustration, guilt, everything. I knew I had to be honest. It was the first time in my adult life that I felt listened to and not judged. He was so kind, and I thought maybe I have made the right decision. He was in recovery himself, so maybe there was hope for me."

Darren was offered day rehabs, a 13-week programme where you return home every night.

"I moved back in with my mum at 40," he says. "Initially I thought, 'I'm not sitting in a room talking about my feelings',

but people were so open and honest and seemed to be happy without a drink."

It changed his life. "The service was so adaptable," says Darren. "I started on a 12-step programme, but that didn't resonate with me so they put me onto cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to change my neural pathways and it clicked with me straight away."

"The people who run the service are very client-focused, rather than one size fits all. Everyone's pathway is different. So if one way doesn't work, they try another."

"They encourage you to go to recovery meetings, they have follow-on peer support, online meetings every day, face-to-face meetings, outings to the beach for fish and chips."

"It's a safe community."

"If you have a wobble one day, you can put in a message, and someone will call or meet you for a coffee. They realise down days can be dangerous so peer support is huge."

**Where to turn for help**

Not only is getting help vital, but it is also free and it works. So how do you go about finding treatment for either yourself or someone you love?

A great place to start for both drink and drugs problems

is by calling FRANK, a confidential advice and information line, on 0300 123 6600. It also has details of the support available to both adults and young people on its website [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help).

Local authority websites also provide details of nearby services and your GP surgery, practice nurse or health professional that can help.

You may be offered treatment at the surgery or be referred to your local drug and alcohol service. If you are not comfortable talking to your GP, you or a family member can approach organisations without a referral.

**'My mum now beams with pride'**

Getting help is worth it - just ask Darren. In the past five years, he's turned his life around so much that he now works as an inclusion coordinator for the charity that helped him.

"It's a hard, hard journey, but it's a walk in the park compared to before. My life is infinitely better without alcohol in it. I live two minutes from the sea, I'm about to run my third marathon and my mum is beaming with pride."

"I'm living a happy and fulfilled life with my job I love at 45. I can't believe it - I never thought I could get to this point."



Darren Lacey, left, found help to overcome issues with alcohol and drugs, and has since taken part in three marathons



## What to expect from treatment

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## How to help a loved one

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People say: 'Do it for your mum', but that piles on the guilt and can make a person feel

worse," says Darren Lacey, who now works for a service helping others with drug and alcohol addictions. "Instead, attend an online meeting of a recovery group and listen to people talking about how they dealt with it and what they did."

"Find out what services are locally available and give them a call. Do your research before speaking to your loved ones - don't go in all guns blazing." Then, if they agree, contact FRANK or a local drug or alcohol service on their behalf.



## Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. If it's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)

\* [gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2020-to-2021](http://gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2020-to-2021); [gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2020-to-2021-report](http://gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2020-to-2021-report)

# Reach DPS (Daily Express, Daily Mirror, Daily Star)



Is it time to seek help?

Produced in partnership with UK Government

# Struggling with drink or drugs? Help is out there

If you're having problems with drugs and alcohol, it can feel very lonely, but you're not on your own - and you can start taking positive steps straight away.

Whether you've already tried to get help or have had a relapse, support is available and there's always someone you can talk to.

## WORRIED ABOUT A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND?

Broaching the subject can be tough, but if you think someone close to you has a problem with drink or drugs, you can help to direct them to the right support and let them come to it in their own time.

If your friend or family member is happy for you to do so, you can contact FRANK or its local drug and alcohol service on their behalf. Call the service any time on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice.

## HOW TO FIND HELP IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

You can call FRANK any time on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice and information, including how to access treatment services and find support near you.

Go and see your GP, who can discuss your problems and get you into treatment. You may be offered help at the GP practice or be referred to your local drug and alcohol service.

Any health professional, including your GP or practice nurse, can support people who need help to access the free expert services that are near you.

If you're not comfortable talking to a GP, you can approach your local drug and alcohol treatment service

Free, accessible support is available - and here's how to find the best route to help near you

yourself without a referral. Alternatively, a friend or family member can contact them on your behalf.

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT WHEN I GET HELP?

Most people can get help to stop drinking in the community and if you need medicine you can take it at home or attend your local service daily. Some people might need a short stay in a medically supported unit where they can get safe treatment for withdrawal symptoms.

Your drug treatment will depend on your circumstances and could include different strategies. You could stay at home to have treatment or could be referred to residential rehab. Treatments are available on the NHS and will be free.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF

Our featured service providers are examples of the many great treatment services available to you, depending on your location.

Groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and SMART Recovery UK offer mutual aid. They're run by volunteers and offer free meetings in most areas. It can be nerve-racking, but you'll meet other people in recovery who know what you're going through.

## "There is a life without drinking"

Phil Hetherington's life has been transformed since he got support for his alcohol problem - he recently marked 365 days without drinking

As a teenager, the lure of cheap drinks and big nights out consumed Phil Hetherington. He lost his dad when he was 14 and went from job to job to fund his social life.

"I got a taste for alcohol. It took me away from real life and became a coping strategy," says Phil, now 42.

"From Thursday to Saturday, I went to pubs and clubs

in Hartlepool where you could pay £30 and drink as much as you wanted. Then, on Sunday, it was a pound a drink all day."

Despite being arrested for crashing his car while under the influence of alcohol, Phil, originally from Hartlepool, remained in denial.

"I had to find rock bottom before I could contemplate going into recovery," says Phil.

"I was just starting to get my life back on track and I'd had my first child when my mum died of cancer, so I went back to my old ways."

"I had no parents, I was lonely, I drank more and it was a vicious circle. That's when I crashed my car, got

arrested and lost my licence. But I still wasn't ready to stop drinking."

After relocating to Darlington and meeting his partner, Anne-Marie, Phil received a card for With You, a charity with 80 services across England and Scotland.

Following a three-day bender, he decided to reach out to them.

By this point, he was drinking so much that stopping immediately would have threatened his health, so he kept a diary and was given support from the service to cut down.

Additionally, he joined a 12-step programme organised by a local charity in Darlington, finding support from a community of individuals facing similar challenges.

"When you're in that dark place, you believe you're the only person in that situation," he says.

"But you go to your first group, realise you're not alone and you can chat it out.



GETTING IT TOGETHER Phil and Anne-Marie's lives have been transformed by his decision to seek help.

"Places like this are absolutely critical. They're often led by people who've been there themselves, so give it a go and start engaging because there is hope for you."

"Addiction is like a full-time job - you're not only thinking about drinking, you're also covering your tracks."

Having surpassed 365 days without

consuming alcohol, Phil now leads his own support group.

It provides activities like pool, dodgeball, and football to promote the mental health of others in recovery.

He has also transitioned to a new career.

"I was in paid work, but my heart wasn't in that job," he says.

"My heart was to help people in recovery, so I became a peer support worker."

"There are so many benefits of tackling your drink or drug problem. Not only are you going to feel healthy, you're also going to get all the amazing friendship and love you've been seeking this whole time," he says.

"There have been so many times I've sat there opening can after can, thinking, 'I want to stop, but I can't. My partner's going to be angry with me, but I'll deal with that.'"

"It's an awful circle. It doesn't matter how much you drink, the problem is still going to be there in the morning and it only gets worse over time."

"And trust me, there is a life without drinking."



SCAN ME

## "I finally thought enough is enough"

Drugs nearly ruined Connie Wilton's chance of being a mum, but now she's clean after getting the help she needed

Connie Wilton was just 11 when her dad was killed in a road accident.

She went into a spiral of substance abuse, smoking cannabis and moving on to class A drugs and found herself in abusive relationships.

By the time she became pregnant in 2020, she was desperate to get help.

"That's when she found Phoenix Futures in Sheffield which employs a whole-family approach, providing support for both parents and their children."

"My issue was drugs. I was all messed up. It was being around the wrong people and going down the wrong path," says Connie, now 37, from Greater Manchester.

"When I fell pregnant, I thought enough is enough, and became determined to change my ways and surroundings."

Going into treatment changed her life.

"I was a mess when I walked in and now I'm more confident and have my self-esteem back," says Connie.

"I don't have cravings and I've got the willpower to carry on."

Three days after enrolling with the local service, Connie gave birth and embraced the assistance provided.

Despite facing tragic events, such as the passing of both her mother

and brother while she was in placement with the service, she exhibited remarkable resilience and continued her recovery journey.

She left in May 2022 and, rather than spend Christmas alone, returned to the service for the festive season.

Embarking on a fresh start in Accrington, Lancashire, Connie is now raising her two-year-old daughter, Ruby,

caring for her dog Rex; and working with horses, as part of her ongoing efforts to rebuild her life.



FRESH START Connie Wilton embraced the assistance provided

And she has this advice for anyone thinking about getting help:

"You've got to do it for yourself or nothing is going to change. Grab it with both hands and give it a go. You'll feel 100 per cent out of your comfort zone but have faith. All you can do is give it your best."



# Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. If it's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](https://talktofrank.com/help)

# Mediaforce (regional titles)

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH HM GOVERNMENT



## Reach out for help: how drug and alcohol recovery services could work for you or a loved one

**B**en Bristow, from Reading, realised he had a problem with drinking and had tried to get help in his 30s. He became serious about confronting his issues with alcohol when he was 40; with the help of his GP.

Now aged 47, Ben, pictured below, has been sober for three years and eight months and has completely changed his life after seeking help.

"I was a bit of a nightmare, getting drunk all the time. I wasn't arrested or fighting or anything like that. I was just a pain in the backside, so I'm very lucky my family supported me," he says.

It all changed for Ben when his girlfriend left him. "We had a big bust-up and she told me I was a very heavy drinker. I broke my hand after punching a wall and ended up in hospital.

"My GP was informed - when I went to my check-ups, we spoke about my drinking and he directed me to a local drug and alcohol recovery centre," he explains.

Any health professional, including your GP or practice

**If you are worried about a family member or friend, or think you may be dependent on drugs or alcohol, support could be just one phone call away**

nurse, can help you to access the free expert services closest to you. With the help of his key worker and by going to SMART recovery sessions, Ben managed to reduce his drinking then, at the same time as the centre was taken over by the service provider Change Grow Live, he reached a turning point.

"I thought I've lost too much, too many friends and too many jobs". I've had quite a few long-term relationships and most of those have been destroyed through my drinking. And that's what's changed. I was like, 'I have got to get my life back together'."

Ben says the future is a lot brighter for him. He goes out on walks,

enjoying nature and life and now volunteers three days a week at the centre, and hopes to become a key worker in the future.

"I wouldn't have got sober without their help, and I wanted to give back what I'd learned to help other people in similar situations."

He's candid about his journey to recovery and the work it has taken to become sober: "You cannot, I believe, recover without being honest with yourself and those around you. You've got to realise where you've gone wrong. Be very honest with yourself."

The centre that helped Ben is just one example of the many great treatment services run by different providers. If you are worried about yourself or someone else not only is getting help vital, it's also free and it works.



### How to get support

If you, or someone you know, is experiencing problems with using drugs or alcohol, it's important to know that treatment is available, treatment works, and you can access it easily.

■ Call FRANK anytime on 0300 123 5400 for confidential advice and information, including how to access treatment services; you can also check out [talktofrank.com](http://talktofrank.com)

■ Your GP is also a good place to start if you or someone you care about wants to get help. They can discuss your problems with you and get you into treatment.

■ If you're not comfortable talking to a GP, you can approach your local drug and alcohol treatment service yourself without a referral, or a friend or family member can contact the local service on your behalf. You can find details of treatment services on your local authority's website.

■ In addition to treatment services, there are mutual aid groups that offer support from a community of people in recovery. These include Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and SMART Recovery UK - and for families and friends Al Anon and Families Anonymous.

■ Drug and alcohol problems can be a hard subject to discuss, especially if you think your friend or relative has a problem. Try to stay open-minded and remember that, with the right help and support, most people overcome problematic use before any serious harm is caused.



You can call FRANK anytime on 0300 123 5400 for confidential advice and information. Scan the QR code to find out more.

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## Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. If it's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)

## Help is out there for substance abuse problems

If you, your family or friends are having issues with alcohol or drugs, there are lots of ways to access free and confidential local support from experts

If you need help, free help is available, and you can directly access it, without the need for a referral. You can also access it through your GP, who can discuss your problems and get you into treatment. You may be offered treatment at the GP practice or referred to your local drug and alcohol service. Don't forget that any health professional, including your practice nurse, is trained to support patients to access the free expert services nearest to them.

It's important to remember that most people overcome dependency before any serious harm is caused - if they get the support they need.

### GETHELP

Alternatively, you can contact your local drug and alcohol treatment service without the need for a referral, or a friend or family member can contact them on your behalf. Calling FRANK, the national drugs and alcohol information service at any time will get you confidential advice and information, including how to access treatment. You can also find these details on your local authority's website.

Partners, friends and family members of those who are experiencing substance abuse issues can be key to helping them to access treatment; you can help them by contacting FRANK or a local drug and alcohol service on their behalf if they consent.



FRANK (talktofrank.com/help) is available to help you or your loved ones with problematic drug and alcohol use - and it's free. You can call FRANK anytime on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice and information, including how to access expert treatment services. Look up FRANK's directory of adult and young people's alcohol and drug treatment services now to find the right support near you

At your first appointment for drug or alcohol treatment, you will be assigned a key worker who will support you confidentially throughout your journey to recovery. Expect staff to ask you about your drug or alcohol use, your work, family and housing situation, and to talk you through all of your treatment options and agree a plan with you.

### JOURNEY TO RECOVERY

Your key worker will help to plan the best treatment for you, which may include various different treatments and strategies. If you need medicine to help you stop, it can usually be taken at home or when attending a local service daily, although some people need a short stay in a medically supported unit so they can receive safe treatment of their withdrawal symptoms or other problems. This may be as an NHS inpatient or at a residential service, depending on your situation and the assessed medical need.

There are also lots of groups within the community of people in recovery that offer support - including Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and UK SMART Recovery - and, for families and friends, Al-Anon and Families Anonymous. Alongside your designated treatment plan, these volunteer-run groups can provide you with extra support. Remember that expert help is out there.



Enabling recovery; partners, friends, and family of people who experiencing problems with using drugs and alcohol are often key to helping them to access treatment



### Darren Lacey

Charity worker, Dover

Darren Lacey, 45, works for the Forward Trust charity in Kent as an inclusion coordinator.

From the age of 17, he worked in pubs and bars and often lived above them. "It's difficult to pinpoint the time when it turned into a dependency or addiction," he says. "With alcohol consumption, a tolerance builds up. By my early twenties, I was drinking every day."

Over the next 10 years, Lacey's dependency increased until he was drinking a bottle of vodka along with 15 pints of strong lager each day.

"I could see the pain and worry and stress in mum's eyes, but you can't force someone to seek help until they're ready - that can be hard to accept," he says.

Lacey was in hospital seeing a clinical psychologist for his alcohol addiction when one of his brothers offered to pay for his accommodation to help him straighten out.

"I was discharged from hospital on my 40th [birthday], and got a train straight to Forward Trust in Dover, who my consultant had mentioned could help me," he recalls. "It was the first time in my adult life that I felt listened to and not judged."

The treatment service tailored an alcohol pathway programme, including day rehab where clients go home each night, so he moved back in with his mum. Initially reluctant to share his feelings with other people, Lacey now says that the support he received from sharing with the group changed his life.

"Just having that group of 10 people from all different walks of life - police, solicitors, pub workers, cleaners, shelf stackers... we're all still in touch now," he says.

"I'm living a happy and fulfilled life - and my mum is beaming with pride. I've found myself a job I love."

Lacey adds: "I'm still a work in progress, but the best thing is the self-acceptance and happiness I now have in myself. I'm healthy and about to run my third marathon. And I'm now helping others. I've found my voice."

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Is it time to seek help?

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# GETTING HELP FOR DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION COULD BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK

If you or someone you know needs help you can call FRANK at any time on 0330 123 6600 for confidential advice and information

Having come through the Christmas and New Year party season, there will be many among us who are feeling the weight of alcohol and drug use. What begins as recreation can lead to dependency and addiction, whether it be drinking or the use of drugs such as cocaine and cannabis.

If you see the signs of addiction in yourself or a friend or loved one, the help they need is available and it might be easier to access than you realise.

The first step is communication. It can be hard to acknowledge that you are struggling and equally hard to approach someone you know about problems they may be facing. It's important to remain positive and open-minded, while bearing in mind that most people will overcome their problematic use before any serious harm is caused. If your friend or family member is happy, you can contact FRANK or the local drug and alcohol service, on their behalf.

There is an unhelpful stereotype of the 'Trainspotting-style' all encompassing addiction to substances like heroin or crack cocaine but many people struggling with alcohol or so-called recreational drugs like cocaine and cannabis will be highly functioning, suffering quietly while holding down careers and other responsibilities. Nobody should assume treatment is 'not for me' - professionals are there to help.

If you feel you or someone you know would benefit from help, get in touch through the resources listed on this page - it could be the first step to a better, healthier and happier life.

The role of friends, colleagues, relatives and partners can be crucial in helping those struggling from addiction issues in getting the help they need to get back on their feet. Those who know someone going through addiction know the toll it can take not only on that person but on those around them, so helping them find a road to recovery can be beneficial to a wide circle of people. Treatment is always the best option for improving the quality of a person's life, from both a health and social perspective.

Some people facing difficulties will be put off from seeking help because

they've tried in the past and found it either hasn't worked for them or they weren't able to get the support they needed. But it's important that this doesn't stop you making contact - you might find you have a much better experience this time round, particularly as services have improved as more funding has gone into them over recent years.

At your first appointment for drug or alcohol treatment, staff will ask you about your drug or alcohol use as well as asking about your work, family and housing situation. You will then be able to mutually agree on a treatment plan - or plans - that works for you. You will be assigned a keyworker who will be on hand to support you through your treatment.

Most people receive support while still living at home but specific

plans could also involve a period at a medically supported unit, either as a hospital inpatient or being referred to a residential rehabilitation service.

You or someone who is worried about you, can call FRANK anytime on 0330 123 6600 or go to [www.talktofrank.com/help](http://www.talktofrank.com/help) for free, confidential advice and information, whether that's to talk about alcohol or drugs. They will also be able to tell you about the treatment options available to you, with a directory of adult and young people's alcohol and drug treatment services.

You can also bypass your local GP if you feel more comfortable directly contacting your local drug and alcohol treatment service.

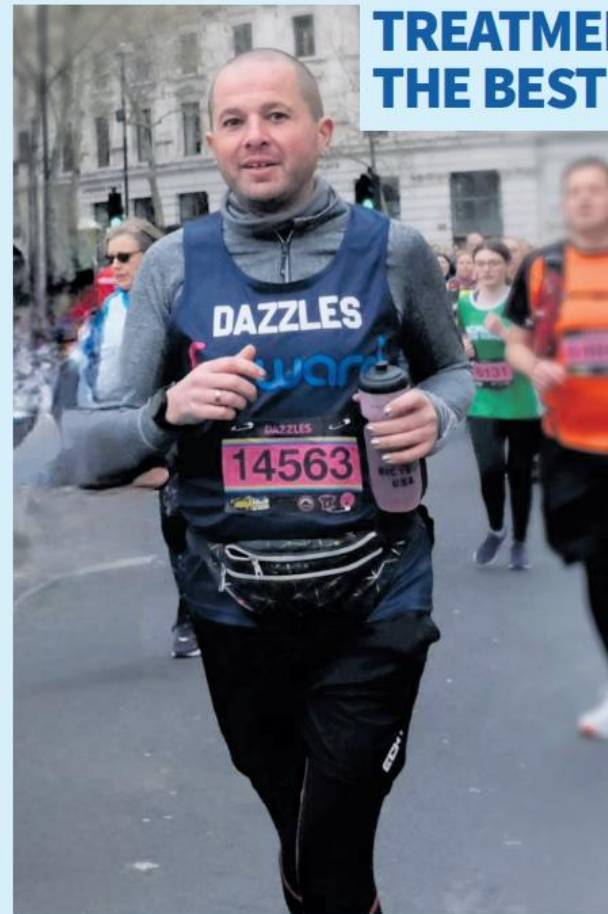
Your GP or practice nurse is also a good starting point to talk about problems - they will be able to help put your issues in context and provide you with options for potential treatment. Everybody's journey will be different and help will be tailored to best suit the issues you are facing.

In addition to treatment services there are mutual aid groups that offer support from a community of people living in the community, including Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and SMART Recovery UK, and for friends and family AI Anon, Families Anonymous. These volunteer-run groups play an important role in providing additional support for many people. Each group is different, so if one isn't for you, try another.

**“**  
The role of friends, colleagues, relatives and partners can be crucial in helping those struggling from addiction issues  
**”**



talktofrank.com



## TREATMENT CHANGED MY LIFE - THE BEST DECISION I EVER MADE

Darren Lacey is 45 and lives in Dover. He sought help and now works for the treatment centre that helped him beat the alcoholism he had struggled with for years

**WAS YOUR PROBLEM WITH DRINK, DRUGS OR BOTH?**  
Predominantly drink but also pub drugs during the 1990s - I was going to raves and using ecstasy.

**HOW DID IT START?**  
From the age of 17, I worked in pubs and bars and was surrounded by drink. Growing up, I knew I was different to my brothers and the other boys at school but I wasn't until secondary school that I figured out I must be gay. I hid it through secondary school although I was still bullied. I discovered alcohol and it gave me confidence and made me forget who I was. In the 1990s, it was alcopops and raves, the pop music scene was huge and it felt like a community where nobody really cared and I forgot who I was.

**WHEN DID IT BECOME A PROBLEM?**  
It's difficult to pinpoint the time when it turned into a dependency or addiction. With alcohol consumption, a tolerance builds up. By my early 20s, I was drinking every day. It got to the point when I turned 30 in 2008 that I was waking up and drinking in the morning to get going then drinking all through work. Very few non-alcoholic drinks were going through me. I was drinking half a bottle of neat vodka when I woke up, then 15 pints of lager and the rest of the vodka throughout the day.

My relationship with my family was fraught, I'd lost all sense of who I was. I'd gone to my GP about my alcohol use but there was no investigation, no talking therapies and that confirmed to me the stigma around my sexuality and addictions. It was a very difficult time.

My mum had tried to help. I'm a size confessed manny's boy and I love my mum to bits; the stuff I put her through, the worry and stress, nobody should put their mother through that.

**WHAT MADE YOU FINALLY SEEK HELP?**  
It was my 40th birthday and I'd been hospitalised and was having a real

crisis. Once I was discharged I got a train to a Forward Trust treatment centre in Dover, where my consultant had mentioned could help me. It was scary walking in that door for the first time but it was the best decision of my life.

**WHAT HAPPENED?**

The man on reception greeted me with a big, friendly smile. I sat in the waiting room - I didn't have an appointment, anyone can walk in at any time - and a member of staff came down for an assessment. I spilled my guts out - years of anger, frustration, guilt, everything. I knew I had to be honest. It was the first time in my adult life that I felt listened to and not judged. He was so kind and I thought 'maybe I've made the right decision'. He was in recovery himself - maybe there was hope for me.

He recommended I start a weekly alcohol pathway programme. I did a six week programme, learning about the effects of alcohol on the system, the basics around why we were drinking. Then they offered me a 'day rehab' - you go home to your own bed each night - so I moved back in with my mum aged 40. That programme changed my life. Just having that group of 10 people from all different walks of life - police, solicitors, pub workers, cleaners, shelf stackers... we're all still in touch now.

**HOW DID THE TREATMENT CENTRE HELP YOU?**

They were so adaptable. You start working on a 12 Step programme but that didn't resonate so they adapted it for me. They put me onto something called 'smart-based CBT' to change my neural pathways and it clicked with me straight away. They're very client focused - not 'one size fits all'. Everyone's pathway is completely different. And if one way doesn't work, try another.

That 13 week course sounds short but it's intense. It's an introduction to leading a life of abstinence. They encourage you to go to smart recovery meetings, they have follow-up peer support, online meetings every day, face-to-face, outings to

go to the beach for fish and chips. It's a safe community. If you have a wobble one day you can put in a message, and someone will call or meet you for a coffee. They realise down days can be dangerous so peer support is huge.

**WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR THOSE IN RECOVERY?**

When I work with my clients, I say you have to be open and honest, hide nothing. No one is going to be judging you, there's no stigma. It's a hard, hard journey but it's a walk in the park compared to my life before. And mum is so proud. I speak to her every day, we do video chats, she chats to my colleagues and I can see now the joy in her face. She was recently diagnosed with cancer and it's nice that I can be there for her - and she doesn't have to worry about me, she can focus on getting better. That's the biggest gift.

**AND HOW DO YOU TELL SOMEONE THEY NEED HELP?**

If you're worried about someone, do an online meeting of a recovery group - turn the camera and mic off if you like - and listen to people talking about how they dealt with it and what they did. Find out what services are available locally and give them a call. Reach out to a local treatment centre online - they'll answer any questions and if they're in your area, make a referral and get someone to give you a call. If they're not in your area, they can help find another organisation to give you advice.

**HOW ARE YOU NOW?**

I'm living a happy and fulfilled life at 45 and my mum is beaming with pride. I've found myself happy in a job I love - I can't believe I'm doing this. I never thought I could get to this point. I feel no stigma any more about my sexuality - listening to other people's stories makes me realise I'm not alone. I'm still a work in progress but the best thing is the self-acceptance and happiness I now have in myself. I'm healthy and about to run my third marathon. And I'm now helping others. I've found my voice.



Is it time to seek help?

Help is available if you are worried about alcohol or drug use. If it's time to talk visit [talktofrank.com/help](http://talktofrank.com/help)

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News

## Drug and alcohol support could turn your life around

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Phil Hetherington, 42. "I got a taste for alcohol as a teenager. It took me away from real life and it became a coping strategy" (Supplied)

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It's difficult to pinpoint the time when it turned into a dependency or addiction," says Darren Lacey, 45, who lives in Dover, Kent.

"With alcohol consumption, a tolerance builds up. By my early 20s, I was drinking every day. It got to the point when I turned 30 in 2008 that I was waking up and drinking in the morning to get going then drinking all through work."

Darren didn't seek help until he was 40 – but now his life has been transformed after he got support for his alcohol problem.

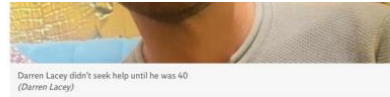
"I felt like a little child. Why couldn't I do this for myself? I could see the pain and worry and stress in mum's eyes but you can't force someone to seek help until they're ready – that can be hard to accept."

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Darren's turnaround shows just how transformative help with an addiction can be. Treatment is available, treatment works and you or your loved one can access it easily.

Drug and alcohol problems can be a hard subject to discuss, especially if you think your friend or relative has a problem.

It is important to try to stay open-minded and remember that, with the right help and support, most people overcome problematic use before any serious harm is caused.

### HOW TO FIND HELP

- You can call FRANK anytime on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice and information, including how to access treatment services.
- You can also find details of treatment services on your local authority's website. FRANK has a directory of adult and young people's alcohol and drug treatment services
- Aside from calling FRANK, a GP is a good place to start if you or someone you care about wants to get help. They can discuss your problems with you and get you into treatment.
- Your treatment will depend on your personal circumstances and what drug you are seeking help for.
- You may be offered treatment at the GP practice or be referred to your local drug and alcohol service.
- Any health professional, including your GP or practice nurse, can support people who need help to access the free expert services that are near you.
- If you're not comfortable talking to a GP, you can approach your local drug and alcohol treatment service yourself without a referral or a friend or family member can, contact the local service on your behalf.

"I got a taste for alcohol as a teenager. It took me away from real life and it became a coping strategy," says Phil Hetherington, 42.

"From Thursday to Saturday, I went to pubs and clubs in Hartlepool where you could pay £10 and drink as much as you wanted, then on Sunday it was a pound a drink all day. I had to find my rock bottom before I could contemplate going into recovery services."

After moving to Darlington, Phil was given a card for the Forward Trust, a charity which runs 80 services in England and Scotland as well as an online chat support service.

He enrolled on their 12 Steps to Recovery programme surrounded by a group of people going through the same thing.

"When you're in that dark place, you believe you're the only person in that situation. But when you go to your first group, you realise you're not alone and you can chat it out. Give it a go and start engaging because there is hope for you," he says.

"Addiction is like a full-time job – you're not only thinking about drinking, you're also trying to cover your tracks. I wouldn't pay bills so I could buy more alcohol, but it all comes out in the wash eventually."

Phil has been more than 365 days without drinking alcohol, and he now runs his own support group offering activities such as pool, dodgeball and



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Phil has been more than 365 days without drinking alcohol, and he now runs his own support group offering activities such as pool, dodgeball and football to support the mental health of other people in recovery.

### WHAT DRINK AND DRUG TREATMENT INVOLVES

What drug treatment involves:

- Your treatment will depend on your personal circumstances and what drug you are seeking help for. Your keyworker will work with you to plan the right treatment for you.
- Your treatment plan may include a number of different treatments and strategies.
- You may have your treatment while living at home, as a hospital inpatient, or referred to a residential rehabilitation service.

What alcohol treatment involves:

- Most people receive support to stop drinking and recovery support in the community.
- If you need medicine to help you stop drinking, it can often be taken at home or when attending a local service daily.
- But some people will need a short stay in a medically supported unit so they can receive safe treatment of their withdrawal symptoms or other problems.
- This may be in an NHS inpatient unit or a medically supported residential service, depending on your situation and the assessed medical need.

If your friend or family member is happy, you can contact FRANK, or the local drug and alcohol service on their behalf. You, or the person you are worried for can call FRANK anytime on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice and information.

In addition to treatment services, there are mutual aid groups that offer support from a community of people in recovery.

These include Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and SMART Recovery UK – and for families and friends AI Anon, Families Anonymous.

These groups can play an important role in providing additional support for many people. They are volunteer run and each group is different so if you go to one that isn't for you, try another.

More about: [Addiction](#)

For further information on the Press Partnership please contact: [andy.ravan2@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:andy.ravan2@dhsc.gov.uk)