



Client Story – Sue Parker (NORCAS Ipswich)

From a young age, I seemed to have developed an unusual relationship with alcohol. When others my age had drunk too much and experienced the headaches, sickness and embarrassment of a particularly heavy drinking session, they had calmed down and drank a little more responsibly. I on the other hand always seemed to be the one with her head in the toilet, drinking a little excessively whenever I was fronted with a party-like atmosphere.

The drink acted as a way to block out my depression, it numbed the pain and eventually the drinking barrier had become a habit which was difficult to break. Throughout my 20s and 30s the partying died down a little, but the drink habit stayed with me. I would drink most weeknights to wind down, never excessively but probably more than was necessary and then on Fridays I would drink extra, at the relief that it was the end of the week. It had become a routine. My husband didn't really see my alcohol intake as a problem and my friends had never commented on my drinking habit.

Semi-retirement saw the drinking levels climb at home, sherry before dinner, a glass of wine to accompany the meal and a whisky or two after.

Constant publicity in the media made me realise my drinking 'habit' had become a drinking problem, this is an important factor to me because it does go to show that Government policy does work and it is helping to save people's lives, including mine. Reading about recommended units and all the dangers that go hand in hand with excessive drinking made me realise that I needed help and so my doctor referred me to Alcoholics Anonymous.

I went along to one AA meeting and really felt that it wasn't for me. I knew they helped a lot of people but everyone is different and I knew it wasn't going to work. After that experience I felt worse than ever and began to feel that there was nothing I could do and it was going to be all downhill from then on. Eventually I stopped calling friends at night and if they rang I was 'in the bath'. My self-esteem plummeted the more I drank and there were thoughts of suicide and self-harm, but I was normally too drunk to do anything about it even if I wanted to. I was drinking the equivalent of

two bottles of wine in alcohol units; treble whiskey, 3 or 4 Sherries and numerous gin and tonics.

I had to see a different GP about a repeat script and she asked me about my drinking. I confessed and told her that I didn't feel that AA could help. The GP wrote down the phone number of NORCAS in Ipswich, Suffolk. From that time on everything changed.

NORCAS welcomed me to my first coffee morning on January 14th 2008. I made a diary of my drinking habits and immediately cut down to 10-12 units a day and a new spirit measure made me realise I was drinking even more than I thought.

And so the recovery started. The coffee mornings were a revelation. Men and women spoke openly about their progress, or lack of it. People supported each other and as we were all at different stages of our journey there was always something to learn from each other. We were supported by facilitators and it became apparent that if a member of the group had a crisis then the staff on hand would help there and then. Early on I became aware that a lot of us at the group had problems with depression as well as alcohol. This, in its way, was also comforting as it always is to find out that one is not the only person with a problem.

Once the counselling started the process became even more positive and after some months I found myself able to moderate my drinking to within safe limits. I know that I am very lucky to be able to do this as it isn't for everybody. That is what is marvellous about the NORCAS approach....there is no "one size fits all", we are treated as individuals. A big turn-around moment for me was having the money to fund my own counselling sessions, purely from the money I saved curbing my alcohol intake.

I now work with Suffolk user forum, a local charity which allows me as my prime role to speak to well respected individuals within the Mental Health Trust, on behalf of the generic service user. By allowing me to speak on behalf of the patient I am regaining my own self-esteem and also helping others, the same way NORCAS helped me.