

## TPS\_Ashley.m4a

**Speaker 1** [00:00:03] Okay. So we're here at the Turning Point Scotland office up in Banff. It's a lovely day up here today. And we're with Ashley this morning who's a peer support worker at Turning Point Scotland in their Banff office. And Ashley has kindly agreed to talk to us about her experience of being a peer support worker and her journey to being one more generally, so welcome Ashley.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:32] Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:33] Thanks for coming along today. It's nice to see you again.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:36] You're welcome.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:38] Yes. So tell me a bit about your journey. How did you come to Turning Point and how did you end up being a peer support worker?

**Speaker 2** [00:00:46] Okay. My story and I have to go back quite a few years now and I will say I am 41 years old at present. And I'll take you back to I had my daughter when I was age 16, became pregnant when I was 16 and had her when I was still 16. And so, yeah, like I was a bit of a bit of a unruly child through every growing up, you know, undiagnosed ADHD. I was bit mischievous and liked to hang around with the boys and do boy kind of things. And so yeah kind of knew I wasn't a girly girl growing up and like I say I had my daughter at 16, I was in a relationship with her dad and we were actually in a relationship for 17 years. But unfortunately, at the age of 21 and I found myself on a flat one night and some people were smoking heroin through in the kitchen. So my natural, inquisitive, oh, what's this? I'm going to have some of this. Even so, I was told, no, you shouldn't. I had the attitude this is my reasoning, and I've always said the reason that I took heroin was because I had the idea of I can do what I want and nobody's going to tell me what I can and can't do. And that was my reason for taking it. And looking back, it was it's just madness. But that was my my green light to for me to say, it's okay. You can do this because no one can tell you what you can and can't do.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:36] What you're thinking.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:37] That was my attitude at the time.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:39] I think a lot of us youngsters feel quite, indestructible and rebellious.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:44] Exactly what it was. It was a total rebellion thing and it was, I will smoke this. Nobody's going to tell me what I can and cannot do. And so. There was no trauma or anything like I can say. It led me to getting into heroin. It was a pure fact of, I can do what I want. No one's going to tell me what I can't do.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:10] You hear a lot about.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:12] How people go into.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:13] I Self-medicating definitely sounds like it wasn't the case.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:17] It wasn't the case at all. It was just was in a house one night. Opportunity was there and I took it. And, you know, even though people within the house

did tell me not to and like I say, my attitude was, I can do what I want. And I'm 21 years old, you know, and full of experience and full of life. At 21 years old, I had no clue. And I was so naive. I had no I actually didn't even know how much physically addicted you could get to heroin. I actually had no clue about the physical, physical withdrawals or anything. So very quickly I got to realise the very quickly was in a few, a couple of days of actually smoking it and I did actually find myself, I had a habit because I was very, very unwell when I did not have this heroin.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:10] Just me in a couple of days.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:11] Within a few days of constantly smoking it for a few days then then one of the days that didn't have any, I was very unwell what's wrong with me and very quickly realised that if I went and smoked a pair of heroin I would suddenly feel a lot better. So that's the kind of that was my step way into it. That very gradually, yes, that I realised, oh, I'm okay when I'm smoking it and I've not got it, I'm not feeling very well. Oh I need to go and get some very, very naive at the time. Early, early twenties. So yes. That actually unfortunately proceeded for ten whole years, ten years that went on.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:01] That would have been the whole of your 20s then?

**Speaker 2** [00:05:02] The whole of my 20s from 20 to 31, 32 my life then consisted of having to have heroin every single morning so I could function and I couldn't get out bed unless I knew I was going to get some, so I would stay in my bed until I had organized where I was going to get from. I couldn't get up. I couldn't see to my daughter, I couldn't do nothin physically. I couldn't wash. I, I thought, I think there was probably a time for I went months and months if even a year without washing because as a pure fact I was in such a deep addiction. Getting washed was not a priority to me. To put cold water on my body scared me to death because it instantly put me into withdrawal. You know, it was to live living. I was basically I was a heroin addict for ten years. But I would say 99% of that time I was probably strung out, you know, in withdrawals because I didn't have the money to constantly keep this habit going. And so that actually led me into dealing heroin because that way I could sustain my own habit and also get money back in for another bit. That's my bit sorted for the next day. So I never set out to do that, but that's how it ended up becoming. So you're speaking like, well, at least eight years into my heroin addiction, that's when I turned to dealing to keep my habit going. And so that involved a lot of police activity as well raided, my door with my house, was raided umpteen times and I was stopped in the car loads of times coming to and from Aberdeen carrying drugs. I was just I was never actually caught with anything. And if I did have, I would have been in jail. And it might have actually been the end to my criminality and my addiction, maybe a little bit sooner. But I don't know. I had tried and failed multiple times on the methadone prescription, but in that time I was on my and I was going to seeing the CPNs. I was having to put in samples. I was lying, I was cheating I was going in there with other people samples. I was going in and tried to water down my own sample so that I thought that it wouldn't be picked up. It obviously it was every time but back then if you tested positive for drugs, while you were receiving your methadone prescription, you were kicked off your prescription for putting in dirty samples. And that was just the case with me umpteen times. You know, I could have been on 90 mil of Methadone but because I'd put in more than one dirty sample that was it you're off your medication. So very quickly I was taken off on like 90 mils of methadone back to square one using the heroin, but also craving to be back on methadone script because I didn't want that life, you know, and it was just very catch 22 all the time. And so I did try and fail a lot of times on the methadone prescription. And I have to say at the time

that was the only alternative. That was the only alternative that was available to help people in their addiction.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:47] So you've kind of had this horrendous time in your twenties for what perhaps is a bit of a young person's, maybe a bit juvenile and foolish decision to try a drug at a party.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:00] Very immature.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:01] Very. Quickly spiraled.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:01] Mmm-hmm

**Speaker 1** [00:09:03] Into dependency and criminality.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:05] Yes, I, for whole ten years, the trauma, the guilt, the shame that I brought on myself, brought on the family. You know, it was not just me. I therefore involved my whole family in this. And I was you could say Banff's number one heroin addict

**Speaker 1** [00:09:26] Huge consequences.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:28] Huge consequences for my whole family to be aware of this as well in a small time like Banff, it was was shameful.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:37] And how did you break that cycle?

**Speaker 2** [00:09:40] Em, what happened was and like I say, I tried and failed multiple times on my methadone prescription. So you're talking now ten years into my addiction, ten years worth of suffering and hell for my daughter as well. You know, my daughter's been brought up within this period. Social work were aware. Police were aware. Because my door was, because my house was raided again for like the I don't know I cant even put a number on the amount of times my house was actually raided. Social work become involved and rightly so. They said to me, if you don't stop what you're doing, your daughter is getting taken away from you. And that was. What I needed to be told because within that ten years. Yes, the police was, you know, but there was never no consequence. There was never no. If you don't stop this, this is what's going to happen. That was never said to me. So therefore, I was I was always getting off with it and always doing it because there was never consequences never.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:52] And then here, comes.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:53] Here comes this.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:55] Catastrophic consequence

**Speaker 2** [00:10:58] If you don't stop what you're doing, your daughter's getting taken into care. And I honestly, as a mother, I would I was I had her when I was 16. That was never, ever going to happen my daughter was never going to get taken away from me. I was never going to allow that to happen.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:14] And so it sounds like that's the start of things changing?

**Speaker 2** [00:11:17] That was the start definitely. My focus for getting clean yes was my daughter and that reason if I don't my daughter is no longer going to be in my care. I could not I could not live as a mother with with that. So, yes, I did everything social work asked me for and we was at the children's panels. The children's panel were praisin, were praising me, saying, look, you're doing so well. So I knew like they weren't against me. They were working with me and that was good. So like my partner at the time, Chloe's data like I said we were in a 17 year relationship. So I was gave the opportunity then again for going to methadone, which I did and I was successful that time. And so I knew, right, I've got this chance again. This is my last chance. Basically I'm on the methadone.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:16] You could feel that last chance saloon.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:17] Yeah and I knew again and it was a relief, you know, it was a relief for me to be able to say, right, okay, this time, can I do it, this time I've got everything in my power telling me do wanted to do it. And so, yeah, I had to set myself some goals and think, well, who are my, what do I want to do? Who do I aspire to be like? My, my granda, my granda was just everything to me. He and he was a nursing assistant. He was a character he was opposed to. I mean, he wasn't a great he didn't have this title job. You know, he was on postie. He was from Glasgow. He moved up here to during the war. He was then a nursing assistant. And just this whole character,

**Speaker 1** [00:13:02] I can see how much he meant.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:04] Yeah. And just a thought. No, he had obviously seen me being unwell as well within the town and stuff like that and he used to give me some money, but I again, it was like it was horrible because it was like, did I know he knew and things like that, you know.

**Speaker 1** [00:13:23] So was he kind of part your motivation as things were starting to turn round? [Yes. Yes]. To aspire to be like him?

**Speaker 2** [00:13:29] Yes but unfortunately, he passed away. So that gave me actually more of a drive to say. Right. I'm going to show to him because actually he actually he was still alive. No, I'll just rewind a little bit back my focus. Therefore when I got when I got that you know from ththe children's panel and social work. If you don't stop what you're doing. So I knew I had to do something, Well, what? What can I do? What can I do? I need to work. I really need to work. I need to prove myself. I've had jobs in the past. I mean, I've always been a worker. I don't like not working. And I like to earn my own money [you knew perfectly well]. Exactly. Just being normal. And so I knew I was like, well, nobody's going to employ me. Nobody. I knew that I was unemployable, basically. I knew that with in Banff and I thought, well, what can I do? What can I do? And I actually did go and apply for a job and I never got it. And the lady said. We appreciate your honesty, because I was very honest with them. I was near and trying to get into recovery and get better and I was looking for a job, I was honest. And she says, look, she says if you were maybe next year in your recovery we would have took you. She says, but I really appreciate your honesty. And she says, I think I may have someone that can help you possibly. Would you be interested in doing volunteer work? Nah or volunteer work! I was like, Yes. Okay. So I volunteered in a cafe. And over the course of the summer and working into the cafe, which is like bacon rolls and serving coffees and stuff like that. So I volunteered there for the course of the summer and I loved it. There was actually a job coming up at the nursing home up it up at the top of the town. So I thought, right, I'm going to apply for a job at the nursing home. I really want to be a carer.

**Speaker 1** [00:15:34] And to do with like we were saying with your grandad?

**Speaker 2** [00:15:38] No, he was still alive. I mean, he was still here then. So. And the lady from did you know the cafe? She gave me a good reference. I went up to the nursing home. Obviously honesty. All of it I knew had to be honest. If I wasn't honest, I knew someone else was going to take great pleasure and say did you know

**Speaker 1** [00:15:59] Going back to Banff being a small town....

**Speaker 2** [00:16:01] Did you know she was a heroin addict. Do you know who she is and what she is and what she's been? I knew that already. I knew people are ready to jump in. And so I thought, I'm going to.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:12] Get there first.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:13] Get there first, be honest to talk to the boss, the lady, the, the nursing home. My past told her explained to her how keen I was to get back, get into work, you know? I just needed somebody to give me a chance. I explained that I had went for a job previously and she says, Has your past stopped you from getting a job? And I says Yes, it has it. She looked at me. She says, Well, not here. It won't. And I was like, Oh my God. I was like, Thank you so much. So that lady that said that to me, not here at all. Like she gave me the chance. And I'll never, ever forget that that one person giving me that chance. I grabbed it and I tell you, I've never looked back because that was an opportunity that I probably might never have got again. So therefore, yes, she says, I'll give you a trial a couple of weeks. So I did my trial, I got taken back into the office and I was told we've been hearing some very good things about you, Ashley. Okay. Could just say we would like to offer you a full time post, she says. But upstairs in the nursing unit, 24 hour care, we really think you'd be suited for up there. It's like I have never been upstairs. Never. It was like 24 hour, 24 hour and care and also palliative care as well. And so yeah. And I went upstairs to work and actually worked up in the nursing home for like four years and got my SVQ up there. So yeah, my granddad, my granddad was still alive then when I worked at the nursing home, but he did pass he did pass away at Christmas time in December. And so that was yeah, that was a sad time. But I kept going, kept going and kept me focussed on my work and my recovery. But within that time also I remained a little bit. I also got myself a dog, a German shorthaired pointer dog, and he was my saviour in my recovery. He got me out every single day. He had a, I had a focus. And we just loved the outdoors, you know, the fields, the woods, the beach, everywhere. My surroundings here in Banff was just fit I'd took for granted for like 20, 30 years, was just absolutely beautiful stories. And this was my eyes was finally opened to what actually is here in banff.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:44] Your dog showed you another side to this small town you were living in

**Speaker 2** [00:18:48] It was always it was always the opposite end as well. We used to go there, didn't ever come down to the shops. We were just always a way to the countryside. It was, yeah, there was that total different way of life.

**Speaker 1** [00:19:00] And you found like therapeutic?[ Definitely massively] I am hearing you say that was a big part of your recovery.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:06] Yeah, definitely. It was getting outdoors, having a focus, getting out every single day

**Speaker 1** [00:19:11] Rain or shine every day

**Speaker 2** [00:19:13] Just breaking that repetitive cycle as well of you know, who you're hanging around with that whole cycle. So yeah, I mean I worked at ARI, I worked at the nursing home for four years and then I just felt this was I wanted more. I wanted more. I wanted to be more than just a carer and the position in the nursing home was you were a carer or you were a trained nurse. [Okay], I wasn't a trained nurse and I don't think I was ever going to be a nurse. I wasn't going to go to university. I would have to go to college for a couple of years. I'd have to go university. That that wasn't within me. I didn't I didn't have that learning academic like that had on me I just wanted to work and so yeah, found myself quite thinking after doing my SVQ, I want more a lot more. I want more than this. And yeah, you I see idolised my Grandpa and my dream was to work at ARI, you know, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. And I knew that he would be so proud of me if I was to ever go and work in there. And so that was a dream that I pursued and I applied for three jobs at ARI and I got offered two out of the three jobs. So, yeah, I couldn't believe it. I just. I grabbed that opportunity so that was 2014. So, I moved into Aberdeen. I split up with my ex partner and like I say I was doing well in my recovery and I. I moved in Aberdeen and I started working in ARI and just. Oh, the learning, the experiences. I started off as a nursing assistant, and actually worked my way up to senior nursing assistant. They were encouraging me to go for the fast track in nursing and stuff like that - absolutely loved my job and I worked in ward 101 initial assessment, very busy ward, very busy ward and having people coming in and being assessed and then moved on to other wards. And I just, I just thrived there just absolutely loved it and I found my comfort zone as well - helping people and especially those people that I found coming in with addiction problems, mental health problems and.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:31] Especially I imagine.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:32] And been really, you know, having that being relatable to them because without them actually knowing you know, just having that compassion that maybe other staff members didn't necessarily have because they didn't know what that situation felt like to be in

**Speaker 1** [00:21:47] Astonishing Ashley. So it sounds like that your thirties were so very different to your twenties.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:50] Yes.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:51] that step wise kind of building of a way out of what had been, you must have felt like a very different person in that time.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:00] Yes, I just knew that I was very determined to reach my goals I knew the lifestyle and life that I had had for ten years of hell. I was doing everything in my power to completely flip that on its side and say, right I'm living my best life now. I'm out here helping people and I am I'm proving that I am a good person. You know, I'm bringing pride back to my family. You know, I'm rebuilding bridges, basically.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:34] It's sounds like a lot of strength to me to go from what you've outlined in your twenties to what you've outlined in your thirties. Where does that strength come from?

**Speaker 2** [00:22:43] Honestly, I don't know, my determination in my addiction was very strong in like for good scoring and what have you. So like I knew I was a very determined person anyway, so I just used that determination in my recovery.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:02] The other way. [Yes]. You used to get out of the situation and like you were saying that that period in your twenties, it wan't.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:10] It was hell yeah, it was hellish.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:13] And it needed a lot of determination in another destructive way. But you turned that around and used that. [Yes]. To get out of that. Okay.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:21] I had to. Yeah. And I realised once I was once I was on that path and something clicked like that was it - there was no going back once I was on that path that was me, I was on it and I was running and I was never coming back. I was never going to move back to Banff. I was in Aberdeen, my focus was on my work and I got a new partner. We were lucky, we got engaged, we were looking into getting married and yeah, so I was just really focussed on the I was just loving life my daughter was 16. She was, she was living with her dad and me and my partner ex-partner had split up and so yeah, 2014, 2015, 2016 I was living my best life working in ARI, living with my partner. Actually moved in with him in Inverurie so therefore was travelling back and forth to ARI just getting on with life you know having a good wage coming in every month just living my life and be still been in contact with my daughter. She actually she was that she was growing up she was having her own life. She actually met her partner. They actually bought a flat in Aberdeen. So, you know, I had had contact with her in Aberdeen, I had my job in Aberdeen and things was going really good, things was going well. And so take you up to 2016. I got married I got married and therefore I fell pregnant. So wow here's me the grown up daughter, working in ARI, my daughter's like 18 years old and here's me pregnant? Its like okay. It's not what I planned. Not what I expected at all. But that's what happened. That's life. And so, yeah, I had my little boy and then I went, I was off maternity leave and I went back to work and my daughter was actually looking after him in my partner, my husband was looking after him as well. So yeah. And then and then my daughter actually fell pregnant as well. And then I fell pregnant again with my little girl. And so yeah, I was working away in ARI, and but we had a family tragedy. So I just had my daughter then as well. So it was 2018. I realised that I wasn't really wanting to go back to work. With my two babies, I had a lot of anxiety and post-natal depression.

**Speaker 1** [00:26:01] And your family's suffered this tragedy

**Speaker 2** [00:26:04] My family suffered this. This major tragedy. And I my my daughter and her partner had actually bought a house in Macduff, and so they had moved back to Macduff. I was living in Inverurie, my husband. I wasn't going back to work. I had two small babies and the chance came up for a house to rent in Banff - my husband's cousin had the house for rent. And we came back here one day, was picking up, was collecting photos my husband's a photographer and was collecting photos for him to scan and he came out the house and he says oh Stuart's doing that house up, going to be putting it out to rent, and something just clicked in my head, and I thought - will we rent it? Will we actually? And we went home to Inverurie, and I just started bawling and greeting and just broke down. And I

was. And I was like, you know what? I've got nothing here. I've got no family. I don't know anyone. Do I really want to bring my babies up in Inverurie? Like I say, my daughter just suffered the tragedy had moved back to Macduff. Everything was just seemed to.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:16] Pulling you back

**Speaker 2** [00:27:17] Pulling us back here to Banff

**Speaker 1** [00:27:18] Yeah, yeah

**Speaker 2** [00:27:20] Do I want to come back to the life that I had left before? Yes, I did. Not not the life that I want to come back to, the town that I'd left before, but not the person that I was before. But I wasn't the same person. I was, I completely changed my mind. Yeah, I was married had two kids, was well in my recovery. And and everything was just bringing us, drawing up back to Banff. So yeah, we moved back to Banff four years ago and I've suffered quite badly with depression and stuff then. Not going out, not getting dressed, because the family tragedy we had suffered. I was I was actually put on medication to help me with my depression and which gradually did, so over the couple of years. Yes, I was feeling a little better. We got a different house cos that was just a rented one. So we got our own council house. Finally I felt it's my house. You know, it's I can settle a bit more as well because there was always that it wasn't my house and I've never quite settled there. But once I got my own house and I knew I was settled, kids was going to school and everything, found myself, you know, mentally feeling a lot better. And I met in with an old friend of mine at the school one morning and he said, hi Ashley how you doing and that? God you're looking well. How long's it been now since you've been in recovery? That's that's been ten years. And he said ten years! Like wow he was like, oh, my goodness, I know these meeting, you need to come along to one of these meetings. Medication recovery and me meetings, started up with a girl called Victoria and she'd started them up. You need to come along I was like ok. So I did went along to one of the meetings and I was there and he asked me to do a share, share my story.

**Speaker 1** [00:29:21] A bit like we are.

**Speaker 2** [00:29:23] Exactly like this. To do a little share your story from where you come and into recovery and what you've done to maintain recovery and what have you. And yeah, started going to a medication recovery and me here in Banff , that was the start of this year.

**Speaker 1** [00:29:40] So what was that like your first encounter with Turning Point?

**Speaker 2** [00:29:43] Yes. Yes. That was my first encounter with a Turning Point again from 15 years, ten years or ten years ago I did access Turning Point then we were in a very quite new then and so like I say, it was it was actually Turning Point Turning Point actually didn't do much, back then - they did have a needle exchange and everything, but it was more like your CPN from Kessock clinic. It was Kessock clinic.

**Speaker 1** [00:30:11] It was a different shape.

**Speaker 2** [00:30:12] Different. It was yes. To what it is now. And I was aware of Turning Point. My auntie actually worked for Turning Point as well, doing the needle exchange. And so and I was a Turning Point yet, but I've been involve with my ex-partners stuff and so I was always aware of Turning POint



**Speaker 1** [00:30:27] You knew...

**Speaker 2** [00:30:28] So when I actually came back to Banff and yes Karen came along to one of the meetings in Banff. And I actually was doing my main share then. And after the meeting, she says, I remember you. And I say do you? I can't remember you. She says, I remember you. But it was like from years ago and she went yeah. And I was mortified. So I was like, I can't remember you. So I can only imagine what you remember of me. Me from then. She's like I can't believe it's you, you know, like, yeah, it's me. And so yeah. Go talking and obviously explained been in recovery since then. And she's like, wow, she's like Ken like. Obviously, you could be a benefit to us. And I think Karen one of the first things she mentioned to me was like working with in prisons and stuff like that. Wow it just appealed to me massively. So yeah, got involved in the Turning Point.

**Speaker 1** [00:31:27] And so that was kind of you coming to take up a peer support worker role.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:34] yes

**Speaker 1** [00:31:36] And I can hear clearly how that appealed from your lived experience. [Yes], from your [voices at same time]

**Speaker 2** [00:31:45] Well, what a peer support worker is like, you know, they're looking for someone that's been, you know, in that position as well. At some point in their lives or, you know, can relate to in some way and are now in recovery and now can show people well look. Yes, I was in your position. Yes. I felt as though it was impossible as well. But you can do it. Look at me. I can, you know. I done it. You can do anything.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:10] So how does. I understand, I get that. But how does that work in practice? How do you connect? So this is the last year or so you've been/

**Speaker 2** [00:32:19] Just the last year.

**Speaker 1** [00:32:19] working with Turning Point a peer support worker. So tell me about how that works. How do you connect with people? Where are the the spaces and the forums and the process?

**Speaker 2** [00:32:31] Right well you see we we hold fortnightly medication and recovery meetings and I facilitate them and medication recovery and me meetings are about being stable on medication, finding acceptance, you know, for being stable on medication or looking to go on to medication prescription or come off one, but also incorporates mental health as well. So open to just anyone seeking recovery, in recovery or you know, but whatever stage you're at. And we come together and and, you know, share our stories, but not we don't focus on the, you know, the sad stories of the past. We focus we keep the focus on recovery. How do you do how do you maintain it, what you did to help you? Recovery is personal to everyone. Everyone is different. You know, what worked for me won't work for people. It might work for some. You know, it just it's such a personal journey, people's recovery.

**Speaker 1** [00:33:34] So, and how many people are showing up to the... So that's the medication recovery and me. [Yes]. Every fortnight...

**Speaker 2** [00:33:40] Every fortnight we've got actually got two meetings I do one in Turriff and I do one in Banff the Banff one has been running for a year. Victoria set that up I just I just took over facilitating in August but being present at the meetings since the start of the year. The Banff meeting is quite a big meeting we had fit 12 to 14 people come regular yesterday it was actually a smaller meeting, but so much more intimate and a lot more time for people to speak as well and yeah, the meetings are just really for people to come along and share. And we do like to check in over the past two weeks how's your past 2 weeks ben, you know, anything you want to go off your chest? It really is a good place for getting things off your chest, for venting, you know, for relieving some stress. And then

**Speaker 1** [00:34:30] Being heard ...

**Speaker 2** [00:34:31] Being heard of course, the connection. People can be sat in very, very, very lonely. But even just coming to the group, you know, is a big part of their day. People look forward to it and having that just to meet there. And they are in the same company with likeminded people, you know, people whose be there in recovery, seeking recovery. And yeah, just just having a common ground for everyone, you know, to be, to be on the same level, you know, is just that just compassion and respect

**Speaker 1** [00:35:04] Its really powerful. What you said about, you know, having discussions with the overall direction that recovery is possible.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:12] Yes, we keep, we really do keep the focus on how to recover and things that work well, we do a lot of tool work, work on the flip chart, you know, things that work and you know, things like in your reactions, how you react to people. It's just like skills like that, you know, and like keeping and things, you know. We call it your hula hoop. It's a hula hoop, tool, you know, things that you don't want to let in other people's, like, you know, influences and what have you. You need to look after yourself. Your mental health. It's all about boundaries as well. Setting boundaries. Being okay with saying not to people, you know, don't be people pleasers, you know, it's like life skills

**Speaker 1** [00:35:58] Yeah. You just understanding ourselves

**Speaker 2** [00:36:01] Building confidence. Yeah

**Speaker 1** [00:36:02] And maybe having different perspectives

**Speaker 2** [00:36:04] That is what helps as well. Everyone's got a different point of view on things and like I say what works for some may not work for others so it is and just taking a little bits away and we have like lots of information and things that. Signposting and places to go and get help and what have you and so yeah being a support worker and do my facilitating in meetings and everything, I just I'm just actually blown away in everything that I've learnt as well. I'm always learning doing courses, I've done interview training to be for the MISQ project. For the MATS standards Ive done training to be an interviewer to see if these MATS standards have been implemented in services and so like I'm actually whereas I was a big part of the problem in society I'm now part of the solution.

**Speaker 1** [00:37:05] Come full circle.

**Speaker 2** [00:37:06] I've come full circle from where I was. Being a heroin addict. I am now sitting here today. Ten years into my recovery worked in ARI achieved my goals I

wanted to achieve so much training and peer support worker. I've also done smart training and the training to be a locality interviewer and.

**Speaker 1** [00:37:34] It's just phenomenal.

**Speaker 2** [00:37:36] Yeah, just just love, love it all this. The training and the opportunities I have got and opportunities are still arising I'm grabbing every single one of them because I just love I love what I'm doing. I love the fact that I can help others that were in the same situation I was. I understand. I know. I've got empathy. I know exactly how that feels.

**Speaker 1** [00:38:02] This is the whole lived experience kind of logic, isn't it? To use that to help others.

**Speaker 2** [00:38:09] And if anyone had said to me. Ashley this is what. I couldn't ever see me getting better. I couldn't see me getting past that withdrawals. I couldn't see me ever being clean, but.

**Speaker 1** [00:38:23] Maybe tells a very clear story about what is....

**Speaker 2** [00:38:26] Yeah, hope and determination and just just a real focus for. I wasn't a bad person. I am a good person. Let me prove this you know. Just let me be me and I'll show you who I am. I am not my addiction. I am Ashley, you know.

**Speaker 1** [00:38:45] Well Ashley shared a lot of who you are and your story. So very grateful. What an amazing journey. From that Hellish time that you described in your twenties where maybe one foolish decision [exactly] led you down a dreadful path and how you turned that around. You broke that cycle. [Yes.] Even in the face of tragedy.[ Yes. ] Depression and how Banff drew you back

**Speaker 2** [00:39:11] I know. I know. And honestly, I love it here now I love being home. I appreciate so much more for for what it is and I just I just loving it.

**Speaker 1** [00:39:24] Making yourself and your family and I'm sure your granddad, too. Yes. Very proud

**Speaker 2** [00:39:28] There you know, it's and you know, my kids can grow up in Banff now and they're not going to get to pointing a finger at them, your mums a heroin addict. And I think, you know, they can hopefully the and I'm going to be honest with them anyway. Like honestly there's nothing that.

**Speaker 1** [00:39:41] Sounds like you always been.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:42] Yeah, exactly.

**Speaker 1** [00:39:43] Yeah. Um, so this podcast series is about recovery stories, so this might be an unfair question, but I suppose to finish off. And thank you again for being so candid and sharing today. But if you had one message from your recovery, your journey, what would it be?

**Speaker 2** [00:40:06] I'd just like to say that my main message is recovery as possible, it really is possible. I was, I didn't ever think it was going to be when I was in that situation. But yes, I've I've I'm glad that I am sitting where I am today. And the reason I am doing this

as well and I feel so passionately about it is for the ones that aren't here today, that have lost their lives during any active addiction or any other mental health crisis. [And it's your motivation] doing it to support the ones that haven't got a voice anymore. I, I recover loudly so that people don't suffer quietly, you know? Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:40:52] I think it's a hugely powerful message, actually. Ashely, thank you again for sharing. Yeah, that was that was a fascinating story to listen to. Thank you.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:04] Thank you. You're welcome.