

Jamie

My name is Jamie. I grew up in a small town. I didn't have the best home life. I dealt with a lot of physical abuse growing up from my mom and I found out that one of the biggest ways I could cope even if I didn't like the taste or like it overall was drinking. I hid alcohol in my locker at school. I carried a water bottle around with me so I always had alcohol. People didn't notice if I was drunk they noticed if I was sober. My senior year of high school, I went to a party. I was 18. I overdosed on alcohol. Also overdosed on opioids for the first time.

Active addiction is a roller coaster and every time you get to the top, you think that dip will be the lowest one. And then you get back to the top again and it just gets lower each time until eventually you even out and find recovery or you don't and you keep living that roller coaster life. For me, the absolute lowest point was at 21. At that point I was using more than just alcohol. I was in an abusive situation with a partner and I found out I was pregnant and I was terrified. I had a couple of broken ribs. I was not allowed to go to a hospital and all I could think about was the fact that I wanted to get high — that would make the pain go away. It would make all of it so much better. At that point I had overdosed three other times. I knew the next time it happened I would die. I was so scared. So I made just the split second decision. I packed up everything and I put myself in a detox center. You make that decision in a split second and if you don't go for it, if you don't act on it, you're going to have to wait for that split second to come back. You don't know how long that is going to take.

It was a very difficult year. I had quite a few instances where I returned to use and I really struggled. Then about a year in, I met my husband and I realized that I could be a person again. I went back to school. I have an associate's degree now. I'll eventually go on and get my bachelor's. I got a job as a recovery coach in Ashland where I am from, I was working with youth who a lot of them are about the same age as I was whenever I started using. I remember hitting my first year and looking back. I was in a place that I never thought I would be. I say that is how you make change. You do it one step at a time. You do it one day at a time and you keep doing whatever is best for you.

There's this idea that anyone who does drugs or drinks in excess and is in active addiction or has been in active addiction that they are this bad person. The people in active addiction are people. A lot of what I do, I talk about recovery allyship* and with that I talk about the need for us to treat people as not just people who are in recovery, but people who are in active addiction like they are people. They are human beings because they are and they deserve to be treated with respect and dignity and I know that it is a struggle, but our worth does not start when we enter recovery — it starts when we are born. And that's the biggest thing I want to push to people. It does not matter whether someone is in active addiction or recovery or some of the bad things. They are still people. They have feelings. And whenever you give people the time and the room and the safety nets to get into recovery, most will.

***Allyship**: a lifelong process of building trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals; not self-defined – work and efforts must be recognized by those you are seeking to ally with; an opportunity to grow and learn about ourselves.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/shereatcheson/2018/11/30/allyship-the-key-to-unlocking-the-power-of-diversity/?sh=3a685c5c49c6>