

Alcohol and Drug care pathways: Understanding the role of recovery communities in men's recovery



Mark, Male,
Age: 35
Lives in North
Ayrshire

Background

Mark has lived with addiction for much of his adult life. He feels his life has been defined by separation from others and his own sense of purpose. His addiction made him believe he wasn't good enough. He carries long-term stigma and negative self-beliefs.

Barriers/ challenges

- **Sense of separation from society**, feeling disconnected from communities, services, and social networks.
- **Ego masking / false identity**, where presenting a confident exterior prevents him from acknowledging needs or accepting help.
- **Given up hope / lack of hope**, making it difficult to engage with support, to believe change is possible, or sustain motivation.
- **"Glass half empty" mindset**, past experiences shape expectations of failure or disappointment.

Strengths

- **Lived experience** that can help others
- **Courage to be vulnerable and honest**
- **Strong empathy for peers**
- **Determination to grow and rebuild life**
- **Willingness to reflect on identity, behavior and patterns**

Key motivations

- **To feel connected and part of something** - being welcomed and understood by peers with shared experiences helps Mark to build trust and social confidence in a safe and non-judgemental space.
- **To grow and change his life** - seeing others recover gives him belief that recovery is possible.
- **To rebuild his identity and self-worth** - Mark wants to be the dad, partner, and man he always felt he could be.
- **To contribute and give back** - helping others through volunteering or offering his lived experience gives him purpose.
- **To stay accountable and responsible** - Mark wants stability, routine, and confidence in his own choices.

CHIME is a recovery framework that describes the key processes that support personal recovery.
Men told us they experience CHIME as

Connectedness:

- A safe base with men 'who get it'
- A sense of belonging and friendship
- Relief from isolation
- Opportunities for meaningful activities and days out and group bonding
- Positive role models and a reliable peer network

Hope and optimism:

- Seeing others recovery demonstrates that recovery is possible
- Lived experience is reframed as valuable not wasted
- Develop future ambitions
- Change in thinking patterns

Identity:

- Rediscover 'true self' beyond addiction
- Begins to see self in social role
- Reclaims self-worth through peer recognition

Meaning:

- Finds purpose in showing up, contributing, and volunteering
- Gained a renewed life direction he didn't expect
- Develops trustworthiness and responsibility
- Gains meaning through community engagement and helping others

Empowerment:

- Regains control of decisions and daily life
- Begins to trust himself
- Takes responsibility and shows accountability
- Builds confidence and consistency
- Becomes an example for others who are just starting their recovery



Sarah, Female,
Age: 40
Lives in South Ayrshire

Background

After years of struggling with addiction, Sarah now understands her addiction as an illness rather than a personal failure. She has care of her young children and maintains contact with her family. She has been linked into Harbour for around two years, where she first accessed 1-1 support before gradually being introduced to local groups and other women in recovery.

Barriers/ challenges

- **Stigma**, impacts confidence in help-seeking, fears losing her children.
- **Mental health/neurodivergence**, which can be hidden
- **Experiencing emotions previously blocked**, early recovery may feel unsafe.
- **Signposting**, not knowing where to start or where to turn.
- **Life and unexpected things popping up**, creating instability, and interrupting progress or routines that support recovery.
- **Ego**, difficulty accepting help or acknowledging vulnerability.
- **Shame**, impact on honest conversations.
- **Protecting my identity**, Fear of community judgement, and anxiety about negative consequences if social work find out about her addiction

Strengths

- **Willingness to engage in 1-1 conversations**
- **Ability to form bonds with others**
- **Focuses on the present**
- **Self-awareness helps her to make informed choices**
- **Open to reflecting and forgiveness**
- **Wants to help others**

Key motivations

- **Feeling connected to people who understand her** - Sarah wants to build relationships with other women in recovery. She feels safer in female only spaces.
- **Rebuilding her identity beyond addiction** - while in a safe and non-judgemental space, Sarah can separate herself from the stigma more by understanding that addiction is an illness, not her identity.
- **Feeling like she has a voice** - when she feels like she matters to others, it reinforces her progress.
- **Opportunities to give back and help others** - helping others strengthens her own recovery, builds her confidence, and reinforces her sense of purpose.

CHIME is a recovery framework that describes the key processes that support personal recovery.
Women told us they experience CHIME as

Connectedness:

- Relationships formed
- A place that helped her “build herself back up”
- Introducing her to trusted friendships and other women
- One-to-one support and introductions to local community groups

Hope and optimism:

- Builds belief through peer stories
- Increasing confidence in her ability to stay abstinent
- Shifts from negative to more positive thought patterns
- Has a vision for a ‘peaceful life’

Identity:

- See addiction as an illness not identity
- Actively challenges stigma and misconceptions
- Rebuilding self-confidence and self-value
- Develop greater compassion for self

Meaning:

- Feels worthy, valued, and listened to
- Re-engages with people and activities
- Reclaims roles and responsibilities
- Experiences increase in happiness and purpose

Empowerment:

- Feels safe, heard, and able to be herself
- Growing confidence to reconnect socially
- Processes trauma and develops forgiveness
- Takes control of day-to-day recovery
- Open to supporting others through peer roles



Margaret,
Family member
Age: 45
Lives in North Ayrshire

Background

Margaret has been supporting her adult son through long-term addiction. Before engaging with Harbour Ayrshire, she carried significant guilt, shame, and a sense that she had somehow caused or failed to prevent his addiction. She rarely spoke about the situation due to stigma and embarrassment, often masking her distress from others.

Barriers/ challenges

- **Co-dependency**, which can create complex dynamics, emotional strain, and difficulty setting healthy boundaries
- **Multiagency working between services**, families are often excluded from decision-making and find it difficult to navigate disconnected parts of the system.
- **Professionals don’t listen to people with lived experience**, families report feeling unheard, misunderstood, or dismissed by services.
- **Stigma**, associated with having a family member with addiction.
- **Persistent feelings of guilt and shame**, internalised blame that discourages families from seeking support early..
- **Groups don’t suit everyone**: men don’t generally access family support.

Strengths

- **Listens without judgement**, validates other's emotions
- **Contributes to creating a safe, equal, accepting environment**, where others feel they are not alone
- **Embraces learning**, now able to recognise enabling behaviour and confidently put healthy boundaries in place.
- **Can reflect on her own patterns**, this level of insight supports sustainable recovery for herself and those she supports.

Key motivations

- **To maintain healthy boundaries with her son** - Margaret cares deeply for her son but needs to prioritise her own mental health and stability.
- **To learn about addiction and recovery** - she wants to make informed and confident decisions when seeking support for her son and herself. Margaret can learn and grow in a safe and non-judgemental space.
- **To build a peaceful, hopeful life** - regardless of her son's recovery status.
- **To support other families with similar experiences** - by sharing lived experience, helping to reduce stigma.

CHIME is a recovery framework that describes the key processes that support personal recovery. Family members told us they experience CHIME as

Connectedness:

- Found a safe, accepting group of people
- No longer feels alone
- Values honest relationships
- Friendships built on truthfulness
- To be able to contact a peer in time of need

Hope and optimism:

- Hearing others’ stories and learning that addiction is an illness helped her let go of self-blame
- Now knows she can live a peaceful life even if her loved one remains in active addiction
- Gave her coping tools and a belief in “planting the seed”

Identity:

- Re-discovering who she is beyond her son’s addiction
- Feels valued, respected, and able to be her authentic self
- Has overcome stigma

Meaning:

- Finds purpose in sharing her experiences to support others
- Raising awareness and reducing stigma gives her a strong sense of contribution.

Empowerment:

- Increased knowledge about addiction improves ability to set boundaries
- No longer feels guilty for taking responsibility for own recovery
- Uses her experiences to empower others