

A patient's journey

Nathan
Patient, US

Nathan's journey

“I had reached rock bottom, but through determination and humility I worked my way back up. I attended meetings. I found a job where I started cleaning toilets and where I am now Head Supervisor. Gradually, with the help of the treatment program, I got my life back on track.”

Nathan started college at 18, only to get drawn into drug and alcohol use. Dropping out of his studies, he began a 20-year struggle with addiction. Now, aged 38, Nathan is in recovery after enrolling in an innovative treatment study. After more than two years in recovery, he is starting to rebuild his life.

Can you describe your struggle with addiction?

At college I got into opiates, speed and alcohol. I quickly fell in love with the feeling of getting high and not having to deal with reality. These feelings took control of my mind, my body and my life, and I gave into it every time. It became a constant cycle of insanity.

For a while I managed to hide my problems from my family and friends. Only when I tried to commit suicide, around the age of 21, did they become aware of my struggle with addiction. From that point on I was in and out of rehab, but I never truly committed to recovery. I was always doing it for other people, to please my family. Never for myself. And as soon as I was out of treatment I would relapse back into my addiction.





“When Nathan came to us, he was really struggling with the symptoms of opioid use disorder. But he showed a real motivation to participate in the program and follow our treatment protocols. In addition to medication, our program included psychosocial support and counseling. We’ve built up a strong relationship based on honesty and trust, and over time Nathan has achieved excellent disease control.”

Amit Vijapura MD
Medical Director, Vijapura Behavioral Health LLC.



Inevitably, addiction also damaged my relationships with people. I became a master manipulator and liar, and would tell my lies over and over until they became truths. It destroyed my ability to communicate honestly with those around me, and it eroded their trust in me.

What was the turning point for you?

It wasn't until I reached rock bottom that I finally reached out properly for help. I was homeless and knew I couldn't go on living the way I was. One of my old friends got me into a halfway house. From there, I was referred to Dr Vijapura. He put me on a treatment program that included medication and counseling and I began my journey to recovery and stability which I have maintained for close to two years now. It's been a real test of willpower and commitment, and I've had to be honest and transparent with Dr Vijapura at all times, otherwise it just doesn't work.

How does it feel to be in recovery?

It feels fantastic. The treatment program has brought clarity to my mind and helped me live a normal life. I'm able to make the right decisions and I have a new lease on life. And through the process of recovery, I have rebuilt my relationships with my family. I'm close with my sisters, and I often visit my father and stepmother in the country, where I help them on their farm. They trust me again.

Alongside the treatment program, I've been attending meetings and Bible class, and working at a local store, where I am now the Head Supervisor. I'm proud of not having given up, of not having given in. And now I have a future to look forward to. I'd like to finish my studies, and maybe use my story to help others. Because if I can do it, anyone can.



A patient's journey

Miguel
Patient, France

Miguel's journey

“My involvement with Auto-Support des Usagers de Drogues has enabled me to overcome feelings of stigma, and I'm able to use my experience to help others.”

Miguel's journey with addiction began at the age of 15, when he started taking cannabis and LSD, turning then to cocaine and heroin. After school he went to university, then began working as a Spanish teacher. He got married and started a family, but his drug use continued, getting steadily worse over time. Only now at the age of 61, after three years of treatment, does he feel he finally has a normal life and, following deep personal tragedy, has rediscovered love and hope.

Can you describe the early years of your addiction, and what your life was like at that time?

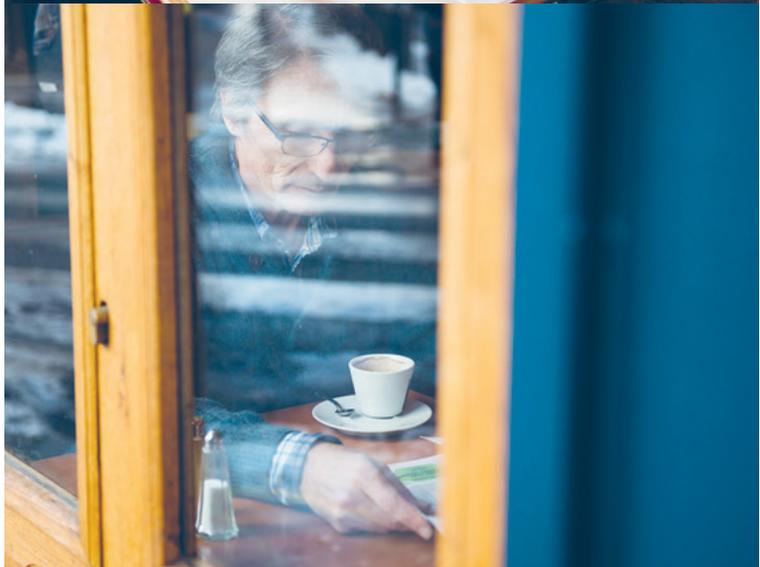
I was influenced by 1970s culture and wanted to open my mind. During the 1980s, I was living in Paris and then Madrid. It was a time of cultural change, particularly in Spain, and lots of people were experimenting with drugs. I was a successful professional – perhaps not the expected profile of a drug user – so I had money, and drugs were easy to find. I began sniffing and smoking heroin every day, occasionally shooting. My wife was also using, so I didn't have to hide what I was doing.

When did you realize you had a problem that needed to be addressed?

The turning point came when my wife committed suicide. It was very shocking and upsetting for me. I was left with two children and had to carry on working so I could support and provide for them. I wanted to stop taking drugs, but I didn't want to enroll in a treatment program because I was worried about the stigma, about the reaction of the social services.

It was post-2000, when my sons had finished their education, that my struggle with heroin got really bad. I quit my job and spent the next few years injecting and living as a drug addict on the street. I would steal tools from construction sites and sell them to earn money. It was a very chaotic period and things really went downhill for me.

Then one day, I was so ill I couldn't even get on a bus. Some friends of mine found me and saw the state I was in. The very next day, they took me to a treatment center and I enrolled in a medication-assisted treatment program.





“I have my family back. I am living life again.”

How did you respond to the treatment?

I took my medication daily and I was analyzed every two weeks. It was hard, but I kept going because I knew this was a way to stay safe from harm, and my life began to normalize. During this period, I also met someone and rediscovered love, and this further motivated me to stop taking drugs. It’s fair to say the medication-assisted treatment made a positive difference to my life.

Along the way, I found ASUD (Auto-Support des Usagers de Drogues), where I now work. My involvement with ASUD has enabled me to overcome feelings of stigma, and I’m able to use my experience to help others. I provide insight into patient needs and treatment efficacy from the perspective of

a drug user, and I can help speak for people whose situations I understand. Not only that, we as an organization fight against the stigmatization of drug users as criminals as this goes against the progress of rehabilitation. I know that medication-assisted treatment must be as widely available as possible, and that we must have different products to meet different people’s needs. Through advocacy and insight, I want to help make a difference, and I’m pleased to be able to put my past experiences to good use helping others.