

Meet Josh

“I wanted to feel nothing, because feeling different was worse.”

Josh was raised in a middle class family. Growing up, he loved sports and hanging out with friends. From the outside, he was like every other boy his age; but inside, a secret was tearing him apart.

“After I went through puberty, I struggled with my sexuality. At first I tried to tell myself it was just a phase...” But the phase lasted. As time passed, Josh realized he was gay. Fearing rejection from friends and family, Josh hid his sexuality and continued dating women.

In high school, Josh dabbled with drinking and recreational drugs. When he got to college, partying became a priority. When he was using, he could ignore his true self and pretend he was like everyone else. But in running away from himself, he became aimless and dropped out of school.

Over the next few years, Josh joined the service industry and worked hard to achieve full time employment; in his off-hours he continued to use.

“Cocaine and alcohol were my drugs of choice. The party never ended for me, but the end consequence of chaos was always the same.”

Time passed and Josh met a stable partner who made him happy. With this newfound support, he took a leap of faith and finally came out as gay. With this new lease on life, Josh was hopeful for his future, and bought a house to celebrate new beginnings; but by that time it was too late: without realizing it, Josh had become an addict.

Near overdoses started adding up, his family grew frustrated with his behaviour, and his partner left him because of his addiction. In 2014, before the development of our new Community Addiction and Mental Health Centre, a trip to CCH’s ER was serious enough to land him in Toronto for rehab. Josh was optimistic after treatment, but old habits resumed almost immediately once he came home.

“A few too many drugs and casual hookups later,” Josh’s world came crashing down around him. Little did he know the biggest scare of his life would ultimately lead to his recovery.

After a night of unprotected sex with someone new, Josh received a startling confession: the man he’d slept with had HIV. Thanks to early detection, Josh was able to access anti-HIV

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treatment that eradicated the infection from his system. Three months later, he would test as HIV-free. A terrifying close call, the experience gave Josh the courage to seek help.

“Emotionally, going through that experience was incredibly difficult; but now I see it as a blessing in disguise. Coming out the other side made me realize how tired I was of everything – the way I thought about myself, the way I was abusing myself. Something had to change.”

Josh decided he was finally ready to cut drugs out of his life. His case was picked up by the Addictions Services team at CCH and he was diagnosed with a concurrent disorder, which meant he was unknowingly suffering from a mental health issue on top of his substance abuse. In Josh’s case, discovering he also suffered from bipolar disorder helped some of his past make more sense – he’d always chased the highest highs, and suffered from the lowest lows, as far back as he could remember.

To more effectively treat his concurrent disorder, the Addictions Services team encouraged Josh to enrol in their Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), a six-month intensive program that would teach him tools to better manage his mental health while curbing his drug use. Today, Josh is eight months sober and a member of the DBT Alumni, a group of former clients who meet to support each other in their continued journey to wellness. DBT is only one of the many services offered at CCH’s new Centre.

“When I pass by the Community Addiction and Mental Health Building, I smile. I am so thankful for this place. Through all this therapy, it’s been a sanctuary for me. Every day I wake up and say, ‘will I use today?’ but I know the answer is ‘no’ because I have the tools to help me live my life better than before.”

Meeting Josh, it’s impossible not to wish him well in his journey to continued sobriety. He still needs to work on his progress every day, but now he knows, “I’m a kind and gentle person and if I can change one mind by telling my story, I believe I can change the world.”

You may know someone like Josh

For those struggling in silence, there’s help right here at home. That’s why the team at Cornwall Community Hospital Foundation is proud to fundraise for our new Community Addiction and Mental Health Centre. Thanks to donors like you, we’re over halfway to our \$1.2 million goal. Please give today; your donation will help someone like Josh start their journey to sobriety.