

“I want to live and die sober”

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There are over 100,000 Irish people who are dependent on alcohol, according to a study by the Health Research Board 2021. A study by Maynooth University in October 2023 has found that a quarter of adults in Ireland — almost 1 million people — experienced living with a problem drinker as a child. The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) comparison study also found that living with a problem drinker is significantly associated with PTSD and CPTSD (Complex PTSD). Alcoholism takes a toll on all relationships, particularly that of parent and child.

Paddy Creedon, aged 73, talks to us about how having a child got him on the road to recovery. Paddy shares that in the summer of 1976, approximately 6 months after the birth of his first son, he was watching ‘The Late Late Show’, which was exploring alcoholism recovery. Marion Rackard, then age 20, appeared on the show and discussed her father’s recovery and the pain of having an alcohol-dependent father.

It was his first time seeing someone really influenced by alcoholism, and that it hugely affected him, and his road to recovery began there. Paddy recalls one day, in November 1977, he was 27 years old and two weeks sober and took his son to the zoo. As they were going home on the bus, he says “I remember he fell asleep, and I was crying because I couldn’t stop drinking.” He describes the day as “life changing” and hasn’t taken a drink since.

Growing up, Paddy’s house was an alcohol-free environment, and very anti-drinking. He says that as a teenager he experienced anxiety, and had an outlet in GAA, but at 20 years old turned to alcohol as a “cure”. By age 24, he was alcohol dependent. Paddy describes alcoholism as “When you take the first drink and you can’t stop”, saying “it gets worse and worse”.

Paddy found support in AA meetings throughout his recovery process and now dedicates much of his time to helping others who are struggling with addiction. He is a Family Interventionist, and acts as chairperson in family interventions. A chairperson is not family, is not judgmental and is there to keep the meeting on track. He works with people as young as 18 or 19. Paddy shares that once in recovery- i.e. two continuous years sober – one is expected to “give back”, which is what started him on his journey of helping others.

He is currently on the board of Voices of Recovery Ireland, to which he was nominated by Marion Rackard. Now 46 years sober, Paddy has “lived experience” and is an inspiration to many.

Paddy states that “having found recovery, I found my real self.” However, he notes that he missed the first year and ten months of his first born’s life, as he was absent “physically and mentally”. Recovery has made a huge difference in his life and the life of others, as he is now very present in the lives of his children and grandchildren. While parenthood led him on the path to recovery, “on its own it’s not sufficient”.

At the beginning of his recovery Paddy’s primary motivation was “I can’t let him grow up seeing me like this”. Now, he says. “I want to live and die sober. In recovery, I became the dad, the parent and the person I wanted to be.” While in Paddy’s case parenthood helps on the road to recuperation from alcohol harm, he attests that you have to want to recover for yourself, too. In his words, “I got sober for Keith, I stayed sober for myself.”