

My name is Simran and this is how CGL Newham Rise has helped me

“Looking back on my life, my affinity for alcohol started when I had my first experience of being intoxicated at around the age of 15 and progressed on from there. At first, it was quite a normal teenage situation where drinking with my friends was the ‘cool’ thing to do and I liked the way that alcohol made me feel. I struggled with my sexuality from a young age and when I hit puberty everything became very clear to me that I was different from everyone I knew and hiding my true self was one of my top priorities.

“Alcohol gave me a much-needed escape from my constant fear of being ‘outed’ and being the ‘crazy, fun and wild one’ at school gave me the ‘street cred’ I needed to feel accepted by my peers. As I got older my relationship with alcohol only got stronger and it was totally normal to find me at a house party or any other social gathering quite intoxicated and entertaining my friends while pretending to be the ideal ‘popular heterosexual athlete’ that I thought was far more socially acceptable than my true self. This continued through my teenage and university years.

“Throughout my working career I worked in industries that were very conducive to alcohol and drug use (Public Relations and Hospitality) which only fed my addiction. I carried on as a ‘functioning alcoholic’ throughout most of my adult life which resulted in many accidents that required hospital interventions and as this behaviour was ‘normal’ for the people I associated with, I didn’t realise that I had a problem until I was in a bad car accident where I was hurt (thankfully no one else was involved). This accident resulted in some trouble with the authorities and with no previous experience being in trouble before, this was my first wake up call.

“I was in my late 20s when I first decided to get help for my alcohol problem. From that point on, I tried many different forms of therapy (medication, CBT, mutual aid groups, 1 to 1 therapy, couples counselling etc) and was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. At this point I was still drinking but thought that going through the motions of trying to get sober was good enough to get my friends, family and my partner off my back. This continued until the pandemic hit and I was stuck at home with no responsibilities and that’s when my addiction had complete control over me, and I was drinking to blackout daily, hiding alcohol from my partner around the house (and hiding spots out in the local area) and became completely dependent on alcohol to get up in the morning and function. I was stuck. I felt like I was just existing at that point and nothing I had previously tried had any effect on my drinking. With my mental health at its lowest, my relationship with my partner failing and my family worried for my mental and physical health, I decided to check myself into a 28-day rehab programme. This was the first time I had ever had group therapy and had a therapist who had addiction in their background, and it was a game changer. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was gaining control over my addiction. Although my time in rehab was the most mentally challenging time of my life, when I completed the programme and returned home I felt like I had made a significant change in my mind and had been given the tools I needed to stay sober, enjoy life, and manage difficult situations with a rational and sane approach.

“I was able to stay sober for just over a year before I had my first relapse. This was soul crushing as I had stupidly thought I was ‘fixed’ and let myself drift into

complacency. I had to go back to the drawing board and look inward to see what happened and when I started the relapse process. Although I had hit a rough spot, I sought help and started the work on myself needed to understand my relapse and use the experience to make me stronger and more self-aware so that I would be able to recognise the signs of relapse and stop the process before taking that first drink. Unfortunately, I relapsed a few more times before I was able to use the recovery capital I had built up to prevent future relapses.

“Moving forward, I re-entered the recovery support community, started to attend regular meetings with mutual aid organisations and engaged with CGL as a service user. CGL helped me get back on track and when I was discharged, I started to volunteer with CGL as a Peer Mentor. I was then able to support others struggling the way that I had at the start of my recovery. Giving back and helping others gave me new perspectives on my sobriety, mental health and addiction. Something had changed in me over time which led to my decision to change my career path to helping others full time. After gaining experience volunteering, I now have a full-time job with CGL and really enjoy the work. Supporting other people with addiction issues gives me a sense of fulfilment that I haven't had in previous roles, and it helps me keep on top of my own sobriety.

“I'm a firm believer that people can progress and make positive impacts to their quality of life through the recovery process, and I feel honoured to be able to support them along the way as I was supported in my time of need.”