Eight cans of lager for £6? Not good news for everyone.

Tuesday 12 November, 2013

A young Plymouth woman whose alcohol addiction led to a period of trouble with the police is coming clean about her own experiences to ensure others don't follow suit.

Sarah Whitcher, 26, started drinking at the age of 18. Coupled with a troubled home life, she soon found herself bingeing and causing trouble – actions often forgotten by the next morning.

After checking into a rehabilitation centre two years ago, Sarah was left unsupported on release, with no family and more importantly, local support services to turn to; something she wants changed.

Working with Fixers, a charity which supports young people to 'fix' the future, Sarah has created a short film, serialising her experiences to raise awareness of the dangers which alcohol can present.

Today, Sarah understands that her problem with alcohol is due to an addiction which changes her personality and leaves her unable to control her intake – something exacerbated by cheap offers found in local shops.

She said: "Alcohol to me is an addiction. There's always going to be a craving there. For me, drinking leads to crime.

"The problem with alcohol is that it's cheap and easy to get hold of. It turns me into a nasty person. I get very aggressive and horrible towards people but when I'm not drinking, I'm down to earth and kind."

Sarah took the decision to enter rehab two years ago after finding herself too often in trouble with the police. However, on leaving, she found it difficult to control her addiction with little support available to her.

She said: "I'd just go out and I couldn't say no. I'd have 10 pints maybe more and just get plastered. Sometimes I'd end up arrested and I'd end up on charges of assault, not recalling what I'd done the night before.

"It was two years ago I decided to sort myself out. When I left rehab I got back to Plymouth but there was no support there for me. I wanted to stay sober but unfortunately it didn't happen. I was put in a B&B next to a pub and an off licence.

"The problem with rehab is, once you're out you're on your own, there's still an everyday struggle and all you have to help you is willpower. You think to yourself one drink won't hurt, but it will, because one drink leads to another.

"There needs to be a lot more support for people that get out of rehab.
I have to work hard every day to keep myself sober because if I don't, I know where it's going to lead me."

To get her message across, Sarah held a screening of her film (click here to view) which was attended by local decision-makers including local Police Crime Commissioner, Tony Hogg and supported by Shirley Sinclair of Harbour Drug and Alcohol Services.

Shirley said: "The fact is, we have a very big and increasing alcohol problem in Plymouth and we don't have the funding to produce all the resources that we'd like to.

"So, if we can help Sarah speak to the people who are funding services that will only be to the good."

Sarah hopes her Fixers project has a lasting impact and improves support services available to young people. Now receiving support and working hard, Sarah wants others to be able to do the same.

She said: "I feel like you shouldn't have to go off the rails to get help that you need. I'm on a construction course and it helps me keep my mind occupied and I'm out of trouble when I'm not drinking.

"I look back at my past and I do regret what I've done. I feel bad generally towards the police because

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they were the main people that I targeted and I wish that I hadn't.

"I hope the film will make people sit up and listen, that there is a problem with alcohol in Plymouth, a severe problem, and that they do need to sort it out before it's too late."

Fixers is charity which supports young people across the UK to take action and change things for the better, addressing any issue they feel strongly about.

How each Fixer tackles their chosen issue is up to them – as long as they benefit someone else.

The award-winning Fixers project has already supported over 10,000 young people to have an authentic voice in their community.

Each Fixer is supported to create the resources they need - such as films, websites or print work - to make their chosen project a success.

Now, thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers aims to work with a further 18,000 young people over the next three years.

Photo attached. Captions:
1. Fixer Sarah Whitcher

For more information please contact Jatin Patel in the Fixers Communications Team by email jatin@fixers.org.uk or phone 01962 810970.

There are lots more stories about young people doing great things on the Fixers website, Twitter and Facebook pages:
www.fixers.org.uk
www.twitter.com/FixersUK
www.facebook.com/FixersUK

Notes to editors:

• Fixers started in England in 2008. Now with a £7.2 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers is extending into Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. To date, over 10,000 young people across the UK have become Fixers and created 1,100 projects.
• The Public Service Broadcasting Trust is a charity that brings together mainstream broadcasters, public and voluntary sector services, and viewers.
• The Big Lottery Fund (BIG), the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding, is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery.
• BIG is committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since June 2004. The Fund was formally established by Parliament on 1 December 2006.
• Since the National Lottery began in 1994, 28p from every pound spent by the public has gone to good causes. As a result, over £29 billion has now been raised and more than 383,000 grants awarded across arts, sport, heritage, charities, health, education and the environment.
• Margo Horsley, Chief Executive of Fixers says: "Fixers started in 2008 as just an idea… an idea given a voice by over 9,000 young people over the past five years. They have reached thousands of people with their work, on a national stage as well as in and around where they live. They choose the full array of social and health issues facing society today and set about making their mark. Fixers are always courageous and their ideas can be challenging and life-changing, not just for themselves."
• Peter Ainsworth, Big Lottery Fund UK Chair, says: "The Big Lottery Fund is extremely happy to be supporting Fixers to engage with more young people to change things for the better. Thousands of public-spirited young people across the UK are campaigning to make improvements in their own communities. By providing a platform to highlight their voluntary work and many achievements, Fixers demonstrates the positive contribution thousands of committed young people are making at a local level and challenges negative stereotypes."

Company Contact:

Fixers

T. 01962810970
E. sarahj@fixers.org.uk
W. https://www.fixers.org.uk

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