

## Sarah Statement

As a young child Sarah was bubbly, sparky and liked to perform – such was her sociable and outgoing personality. She was kind, caring and funny. During her teens and 20's she was the original party girl, but also held some prestigious jobs and travelled a lot. It's fair to say she lived life to the full!

Her lifestyle led to her being dependent on alcohol and a string of abusive relationships ensued. An undiagnosed Mental Health condition was also lurking in the background and her life became quite secretive with family contact sporadic.

Sarah became a mother quite late in life. She adored and loved her son, but the magnet of alcohol proved too much and he was adopted. This led to alcoholism spiralling out of control during the last years of her life. Just as things hit rock bottom a much needed lifeline was thrown in the form of medical detox followed by therapy and a residential stay at 'Safer Places' in another town.

This was a maddest turning point and one we will all be forever grateful, as Sarah slowly became the person she once was and her health improved – as did the future.

Unfortunately the fairy tale ended when she returned home without ongoing support (for which there is an urgent need for change!). This time things were worse than ever. Sarah ultimately could not look after herself, was vulnerable and her health rapidly declining. Her flat was being used for cuckooing, most of her 'associates' were either plying her with alcohol or stealing.

We were desperately trying to get the help needed, but getting pushed from one organisation to another (instead of various services working together for a plan of action or communicating). If these type of policies were in place, Sarah could still be alive today.

Her death has been difficult to deal with and left us with anger and frustration as to the way she was treated (or not) because of alcoholism. It also seems to be a postcode lottery in terms of what services are available or plans that can be acted upon. The outcome could have been completely different if the work from 'Safer Places' had been implemented in her home town. What an absolute waste this was not the logical action taken!

Alcohol addiction (as with other addictions) and the lack of the right support stripped Sarah of her life, but she has left a huge legacy behind at 'Safer Places' where her story continues to be told – treat the person, not the addict.

- Changes are needed whereby all organisations are collaboratively involved

- Family or people close to the patient also need support and given an appointed contact
- All services have to work together and communicate, with individual plans acted upon for each patient. Not just ticking boxes, waiting lists and failed follow ups.
- Professional training should be given to help understand the complexities of addiction and to identify 'fluctuating' and 'executive' capacity. This would especially benefit emergency services attending these people (especially recurrent callers) by giving power and direction to the right available help urgently.
- All professionals should be able to identify a persons needs just by seeing them in their own home. An efficient and quick referral system should be in place.
- Not enough is being done for vulnerable people with the complexities of addiction. 'No funding' is not an excuse when money is not used un an effective way to put in place policies that work and action taken.

Sarah's family and real friends.