

My experience in recovery

My name is Michelle and this is my experience as a woman in addiction recovery.

It was in 2012 that my husband made contact with ReGen. I had pretty much hit rock bottom and He got the number from a mate that had alcohol issues. I found it too difficult to reach out to anyone, especially now that the majority of my new social circle were parents from school and day care. I was ashamed because I had children who needed me and I was not available for them and I also believed that people would think that I didn't love my kids. I was also scared that authority (DHS) would take them away.

I remember the intake assessment and how bad I was feeling. I felt disgusting as a woman and ashamed as a Mother. I was frightened because I had no idea what would happen to me and how my kids would cope without me.

The Services I used at ReGen were outreach, catalyst, counselling, momentum and Curran Place. I'm happy to say that I didn't feel any discrimination with outreach or any of the ReGen services.

I have used Curran Place four times. You couldn't have your kids there and this made it hard for me to focus on my treatment because of the guilt and worry about my kids. It is hard to go through a detox when you are thinking about your children. It's great that this will be changing soon, but it's been a big barrier for me.

I didn't drink during the pregnancy. I started drinking when the babies were about 3 months old and this stopped me breast feeding as I preferred to drink. The community Nurse came to visit about four times and I remember that the discussion was only about the baby and feeding. I was too scared to tell her that I wasn't coping because I worried that I might lose the kids or get locked up....but she never really asked...

I joined a mothers group when my first son was about 4 months. At The first meeting I felt terrified and was riddled with anxiety. It was awful and I felt so isolated. I remember looking at the other Mothers and wishing I could be like them. I didn't want to go home with my son and be alone. Why didn't I reach out then?

My husband's mates took him out a few times after the babies were born to give him a break, which is great, but I never had that kind of support. He would never admit to his friends that I was not coping as a Mother. My Family didn't really believe how bad I was feeling, they just thought I was stressed because of money pressure and having a new born baby, which was true, but it was more than that!

There is a big difference between being stressed and having suicidal thoughts and hallucinations. That's when I turned to alcohol and benzos.

In 2013 I embarked upon a new journey – a sober life – I went to my first rehab. It was 80% male and I felt intimidated because I could tell I was being checked out and was hit on a couple of times. I felt unsafe and it was near impossible to focus on my treatment. I overheard a guy saying "how could a Mother do that to her kids", He was talking about me. I felt judged as a woman and a failure as a mother.

Whenever I cried or showed any emotion the blokes would not take me seriously and accused me of attention seeking.

Needless to say this rehab didn't work out for me.

I was lucky enough to get into Bridgehaven, where the kids could stay with me and there was family support available. I know plenty of other mums who haven't been so lucky. I also got to face the root cause of my addiction.

Even now that I am still in recovery and always will be, I wouldn't tell other parents in case they judged me and felt uneasy about leaving their kids with me.

I once saw a specialist about another condition I have, and when I told him that I was a recovering alcoholic, he looked shocked and said that he would never have guessed it. This just proves that we as a society have a certain image of an alcoholic woman in our minds. This needs to change and by telling my story I hope to contribute to this change.

If I had survived cancer I would be proud to tell my story, but surviving addiction and mental illness would pose a different kind of judgement.

I am a woman and a girl
I am a mother and a daughter
I am a wife and a sister
I am a colleague and a friend
I am in addiction recovery and will fight it until the end!

Thank you.