



## **Dealing with Addiction: A mental Health Challenge**

*By D'arcy Gauthier*

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My name is D'Arcy and I am an alcoholic and addict. This is normally how I introduce myself at AA meetings and discuss the topics picked out at the meeting.

My story is similar to that of many people — many people who you may not realize struggle with addiction. Growing up, I was a very insecure child, always trying to please those around me in order to be liked and respected. I experienced the anxieties most teenagers suffer: I wanted to be good-looking, liked by girls and wanted everyone to like me. I also aspired to have a career I loved, to marry a woman I loved even more and to be the best dad I could ever be.

At the age of 14, I had my first drink and I felt this sudden peace. All my anxieties seem to disappear (once I got over the burning sensation). What I did not realize was that was the moment that would dictate the rest of my teenage and adult life. At the age of 19, I met a woman. We dated, moved in together, talked about our future together. However, I was incredibly unhappy and felt that this was the best I could achieve. In short, I settled. I was finding that my alcohol consumption had skyrocketed. I gained over 70 pounds. I turned to drugs. I engaged in things that I am not proud of and will probably never feel comfortable talking about. But the drugs and alcohol were my escape to help me forget I was likely going to marry someone I could never truly love.

At 27, I finally had the courage to leave that relationship. Things got worse. What I had done to make myself happy, ended up making me feel more alone and depressed. Suicide was on my mind. In order to calm those dark and sinister voices, my alcohol and drug consumption went up. I could no longer function without the effects of drugs and alcohol.

Several months after turning my life upside down, I started with the public service in the Employment Insurance call centre. I met my best friend, who I eventually married. Our future together was so full of hope and potential. But I could not shake my addiction. I always thought I could quit when I wanted—turns out I was incredibly wrong. When I met my wife, I could not admit I was an alcoholic or drug addict. I just passed it off as being a guy who loved to party and drink at home, alone if necessary.

I had what I had wanted as a teenager — career and marriage — but it still was not enough to save me. I continued to deny I was addicted. I took medication for depression. Then for bipolar disorder. I was institutionalized three times in a matter of 15 months for suicidal thoughts and addiction. I had taken unpaid sick leave several times, I was seeing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) appointed counselor, and I was under the care of a psychiatrist. I was taking six different antidepressants and antipsychotics, I had a kidney removed, I suffered high blood pressure and I smoked, drank and did drugs. I was a ticking time bomb.

I was through with living. I had contemplated suicide on several occasions but could not go through with it. Continuing in my addiction was my way of taking my life away. I knew that if I continued, eventually I would just never wake up.

Finally in August 2015, I had enough. Well, my wife had had enough. It was either I give up or I seek help for my addiction. I enrolled in treatment and 35 days later, I came out a new man, full of hope. I'm celebrating one year of continuous sobriety on August 26. I have achieved this with a lot of work, regularly attending AA meetings, and the care and support from those around me, especially my loving and caring wife. I have no fear of telling people of my addiction struggles because I know it really helps me in my recovery to identify and connect with other addicts. Sharing helps.

I am incredibly encouraged that the employer and union are making headway in creating a mentally safe workplace. If it were not for my team leader at the time, my manager in the call centre, the EAP and the Joint Learning Program workshop, I would not be here today sharing my story.

Share your thoughts and be part of the initiative.  
Visit the iService Mental Health site: <http://iservice.prv/mentalhealth>

