

SUCCESS STORIES

## The path to a happier life: overcoming alcoholism

Oliver grew up in a large family in the early seventies on a small family farm. He emigrated to find work in that period of his life he became alcoholic. Oliver informed me that in his earlier years as a young adult when he was away from home he had an issue with drink that as he expressed unfortunately led him to becoming dependent on alcohol which eventually developed into him becoming alcoholic. His growing dependency on alcohol and its consumption led to regular bouts of depression and anxiety and states of poor physical health.



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Name of the interviewed	Oliver H
Type of farming activity	Equine Breeding
Mental health issue and affecting factors	The impact of an alcoholic addiction on Oliver's mental health and wellbeing. Oliver recognised that his addiction was seriously impacting on his quality of life in terms of work, his relationships with family, and friends. It was also affecting his physical and mental health and on occasion he experienced thoughts of suicide

### What is your story?

It evoked a lot of stress; anxiety worry and multiple concern. As Oliver stated "At the worst level it brought me close to suicidal thoughts and self-harm". He lost a lot of self-confidence, experienced low self-esteem, felt lonely and isolated. He found himself for a long time in a state of denial that he had a problem with alcohol.

### Handling the situation

The main support Oliver received was Alcoholic Anonymous AA through the recommendation of someone who was watching out for his best interest and who understood the difficulties Oliver was experiencing with alcohol. When Oliver found out about the AA service at the outset he was reluctant to attend meetings. However, he decided to find out more and with the support of his friend he commenced attending regularly. He learned about the importance of adhere to the AA member's programme.

It was important for Oliver that he met with "good people" who cared. He slowly and gradually took their advice to seek out the support that he eventually secured and engaged with commitment and hope to the AA Programme

The first meeting he attended ; a member told Oliver "that he did not have to drink again that day." He was 27 years old; the person who said this to him was 57. He advised Oliver that he was saving him 30ty years that he himself wished he had before he found his support through AA. That said Oliver expressed his gratitude to that person and went onto say how he had died at 87 but died sober

Oliver is now a contented person, worked hard to raise the funds to buy his own farm and commenced breeding equine stock on his holding.

### Conclusion and tips

Oliver unreservedly said Yes. He regained his physical health, as up to that point in time when he got the support he needed, he had a long-term ulcer problem caused by his alcoholism. That was cleared once he became sober , thereafter his general health improved and his eating habits. Ultimately he felt much healthier, more energetic, and hopeful about life and going forward. In terms of his mental health, his self confidence and self-esteem improved. He got the courage to believe he could work hard, earn, and save for the price of a farm so that he could return to his roots.

In addition, Oliver in recognising and experiencing the benefits of being a member of AA inspired him to voluntarily set up a rural AA meeting for people experiencing issues with alcoholism. He hosts an open AA weekly on a Friday evening.

"I am a confident and more content person and know that there are more positive ways of dealing with setbacks and disappointments"

### Tips to other farmers

Oliver in addition to what he shared within his story wished to add how strongly he recommends the importance of a person to recognise and or to take notice of them drinking patterns. He especially highlighted that if it becomes apparent that drink is being used as an unhealthy coping mechanism to address issues such as loneliness relationship problems, stress anxiety and so on, the reality is that such an approach he said will only exacerbate the problems and undoubtedly create more as it did for his life until he got matters sorted.

**'Seeking help and support is a crucial first step to recovery'** He also emphasised that It is very important not to be in denial of the warning signs of alcoholism and to seek help and support as soon as possible through talking to someone that understands and can be trusted.

'Talking is very helpful when sober: Seek out alternative activities that do not involve drinking. Set goals to overcome alcoholism'

'Be mindful if family and friends START showing concern about drinking patterns, do not ignore their concerns'

Be aware that if alcoholism is a problem for you, you are not alone and or the only one dealing with the negative impact of alcoholism. Find out about support groups in your area that help their members to overcome alcoholism. Going to your GP/Family Doctor is an important first step for proper medical guidance and support.

It is important to raise alcohol awareness among farmers and to encourage open and honestly conversations about alcohol use and its triggers

Alcoholism is a worldwide epidemic and there is substantial evidence to suggest it was a significant cause of concern during the Covid-19 epidemic . Although facilities that served alcohol were closed people were able to buy in off licence facilities and home drinking became a major public health issue.

Moderation is a key factor. It can be noted that alcohol when taken in social company and in moderation can actually be beneficial as on such occasions it reduces loneliness and isolation.

From Oliver's story it is evident that excessive drinking is harmful and can lead to alcoholism Farmer's may use alcohol as an unhealthy way to cope with high levels of stress. As expressed by Oliver this can be due to a combination of reasons, such as loneliness relationship problems, isolation financial worries . However, it is also important to bear in mind that some may have a family or personal history of alcoholism or a mental health condition like depression.

### Some additional information:

#### Binge Drinking

An issue not raised in Oliver's story concerns "binge drinking" which is invariable defined as consuming five or more drinks on an occasion for men or four or more drinks on an occasion for women. It has also been noted that persons who binge drink are not necessarily dependent on alcohol. Rather they are packing their drinking into one or two 'heavy sessions' in the week.

However, habits or practices of this nature can lead to alcoholism . Binge drinking and it is associated with particular risks to health and can have negative effects on a person's physical and mental health.

#### Weekly low-risk alcohol guidelines

"The Irish Health Service Executive (HSE)"

The recommended weekly low-risk alcohol guidelines are less than:

- 11 standard drinks for women
- 17 standard drinks for men

Drinks should be spread out over the week.

Have 2 to 3 alcohol-free days per week. Drink no more than 6 standard drinks on any 1 occasion.

The less you drink the lower your risk of developing alcohol-related health issues."

In Ireland a standard drink has about 10 grams of pure alcohol.

- a pub measure of spirits (35.5ml)
- a small glass of wine (12.5% volume)
- a half pint of normal beer
- an alcopop (275ml bottle)
- A bottle of 12.5% alcohol wine has about 7 standard drinks.

### Questions worth considering that may help you consider if you have reason to be concerned with your drinking patterns,

Have you ever considered if you drink too much?

Do you think you need to cut back or take a break from drinking?

Do you think your drinking habits are impacting on the quality of your life?

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