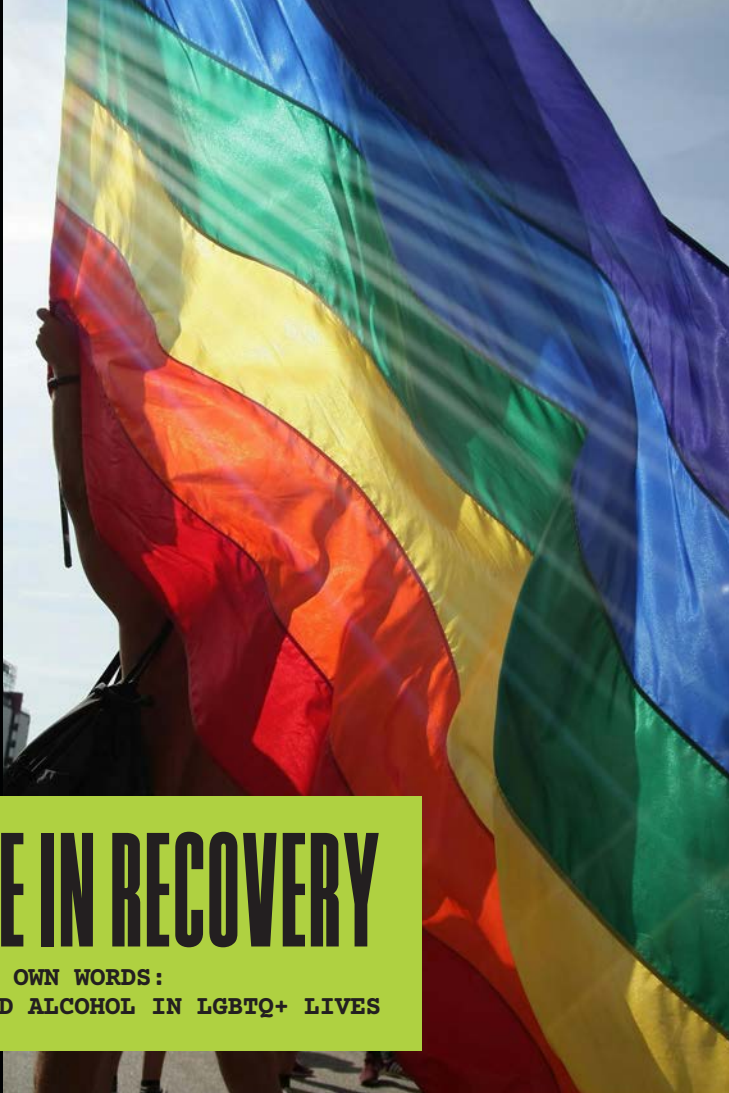


# BUZZ

**FREE**

Issue 4  
June 2026



## PRIDE IN RECOVERY

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:  
DRUGS AND ALCOHOL IN LGBTQ+ LIVES

## DON'T FORGET YOUR RIGHTS

Right to life

Right to the highest standard  
of physical and mental health

Right to a basic standard  
of living

Right to private and family life

Right to a healthy environment

Right to freedom from torture and  
other cruel treatment or punishment

Freedom from arbitrary arrest  
or detention

*The Charter of Rights for People Affected by Substance Use highlights just some of the key human rights you're entitled to by law. A full version is available online or point your phone camera at the QR code to open it.*

*If you need support, contact your local advocacy service – a map of these is available at [siaa.org.uk/find-an-advocate](http://siaa.org.uk/find-an-advocate).*

*For help with NHS complaints, contact your local Patient Advice & Support Service (PASS) for free on 0800 917 2127*



# MISSION STATEMENT



**"This is our magazine.**

It's about making changes and saving lives. We want less stigmatisation, less discrimination, to no longer be patronised.

It's about improving addiction services. It is about reforming the way people are treated by police, by GPs, in hospitals, in the so-called hotels we are housed in.

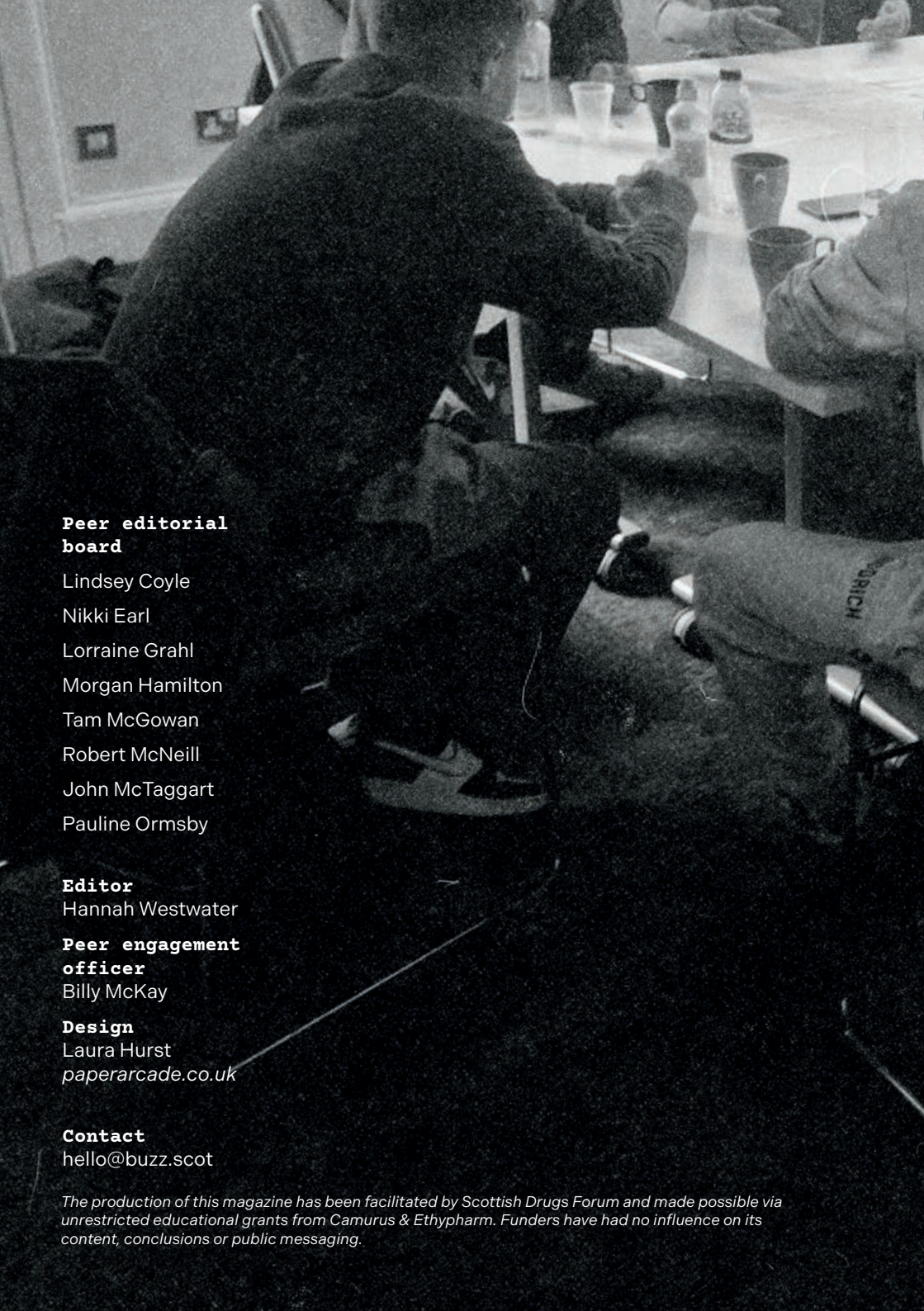
We want to be spoken to like human beings, not as second-class citizens. We want this magazine to allow better communication with the people that need to hear all this.

The truth might be hard to hear. You might not always agree with us. But we can promise to be honest."

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**Buzz** is by people with living experience of drug use, for people with living experience. It is designed to get vital resources into the hands of people across Scotland who need them and shine a light on the realities we face – our differences and the things we have in common. We hope it might reach people who hold assumptions about drug users too, who might recognise that some of their ideas aren't the whole picture.

We won't always agree – with each other or with you – on the solutions, or the right language to use. But we agree that reducing harm is an important part of turning the tide on Scotland's drugs crisis, and that data alone doesn't shift policy or perception. People do.



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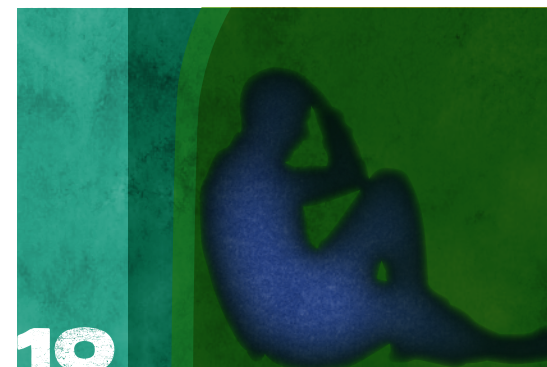
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# NEWS

## HIV TESTING IS EASY WITH FREE HOME KITS

**Free HIV tests are now available for people in Scotland to do in their own home.**

The kits can be ordered online and posted straight to your door, in packaging that won't let the postie or neighbours know what it is.

"Knowing your HIV status is really important, but we know it's not always easy for people to get tested," Alan Eagleson, head of Scotland services at Terrence Higgins Trust, told Buzz. The charity is running the testing project, with backing from the Scottish Government.

"Stigma, fear of being judged, difficulty getting to services, and previous negative experiences can all get in the way," Alan added.

"HIV self-testing helps remove some of those barriers. It's free, discreet, and



can be done in your own time, in a place where you feel comfortable."

There are around 400 people living with undiagnosed HIV in Scotland, and as many as 1,400 who are diagnosed but aren't engaging with treatment.

Most people who test will get a negative result, but testing regularly is an important part of looking after your health.

The virus is passed on via bodily fluids, so you're at highest risk of contracting it through unprotected sex or sharing needles.

Anyone who does test positive can get care and support really quickly. And HIV treatment has changed a lot since the early days – it means people can live long, healthy lives with the virus, and can't pass it onto others.

# ONE YEAR OF BUZZ

by Nikki Earl

**Buzz magazine. What do I get out of it and what's different to before?** When the chance to apply to be part of a new magazine that would be for people like us came up, I jumped at the chance.

When I got it, it was great, but I quickly went oh no what have I done.

I needn't have worried though, because since our first editorial meeting we've all gelled amazingly. We naturally bounce off each other and we're all comfortable enough together that we can be vulnerable, and that makes all the difference.

The nine of us come together from all over Scotland. We all have different backgrounds and have had different challenges with drugs, so we all have a unique lens on how we see things. And for a country-wide magazine trying to make a difference to people who use drugs and are in recovery, that's really important. The guy in the Highlands has to feel just as represented as the girl in Glasgow, and Buzz prides itself on having a diverse group from as far-flung as Elgin, Perth and Kilmarnock. We have a good gender mix too so that we are seeing stories from as many viewpoints as possible.

I think this is the most important aspect of Buzz because, being that this is the first of its kind in Scotland, I feel we have a duty to make as many voices heard as possible.

So far I've been involved with all the main stories and had a personal story of mine printed which is an achievement I'm really proud of. I have also represented Buzz on panels at events attended by politicians, activists, families affected by drugs and many more, which was terrifying but I loved every minute. Every time I'm in that position and push through that's when it feels like an accomplishment.

Before I had no structure in my life beyond chasing Valium. Now I have the magazine and all the opportunities that come along with it, like the podcasts or the conferences.

There's no better feeling than looking around a room and seeing other people all with the same goal in mind. Now I feel like I'm part of the movement that will affect change in Scotland and it's some buzz.

The self-test home kits let you choose between doing a finger prick blood test or an oral swab, and you'll get your result in minutes.

"In Scotland, we know there are higher levels of HIV risk linked to injecting drug use, so it's vital that people have access to testing and information in ways that feel safe, accessible and free from stigma," Alan said.

It's free to get tested in person through every NHS health board across Scotland, as well as at the Terrence Higgins Trust centre on Glasgow's Bell Street.

The charity did a survey in 2023 that showed nearly half of people in Scotland would be ashamed to tell other people they were HIV positive. Only a third of people said they knew people living with HIV couldn't pass it on if they were on treatment.

Order a test online at [hivselftest.scot](https://hivselftest.scot) or find your local sexual health service at [nhsinform.scot](https://nhsinform.scot)

# TRACKING THE TRENDS

What we're hearing about Scotland's drug scene, from professionals and from our communities

"I tried that ketamine before New Year, it's fuckin' nuts. The only reason I tried it was 'cause my two mates had ordered a bag of coke and got gave ketamine instead of the white.

"One of them went and took a big line of it. 'Cause she didn't know it was ket, she freaked out really bad. It wasn't funny for her and it defo gave her a fright.

"There's been loads of people selling it here and quite a few of my pals trying it for the first time in the last week or so."

South Lanarkshire

## WHO'S KET FOR ANYWAY?

**O**ver the summer it's especially important to look after yourself when using drugs. Heat and dehydration are no joke.

It's festival season too, which means people might use drugs they're not used to, or use them with other drugs for the first time

And as the weather heats up, we've clocked some interesting things happening around ketamine use in Scotland.

Out of 1,096 samples sent to WEDINOS (a drug checking project in Wales) earlier this year, 34 of them were ketamine. It might not sound like a lot but it's a significant number for Scotland.

Nearly 40% of that ketamine was missold, meaning the person who bought it thought they were buying something else.

What people thought they were buying

What they got

MDMA	→	KET
COKE	→	KET
METH	→	KET
COKE CAPSULES	→	KET
AMPHETAMINE	→	KET+MDMA
KET	→	DIAZEPAM

According to recent WEDINOS samples

A lot of folk think of ket as a young person's drug, but the figures we're looking at show that it's a real mix of ages using it. It ranges from a 15-year-old to a 66-year-old, of all genders, and that's only the people who actually sent samples in.

There's also been an increase in fatalities linked to ketamine. It's likely because of polydrug use. We know it's really dangerous to use more than one drug at once, and ket is no different. Most commonly mixed with cocaine – you probably know it as Calvin Klein or CK – the risks are high because coke, as a stimulant, can make it seem like ket isn't doing much. So people take higher doses of ket.

In some cases people are mixing downers, using ket alongside things like alcohol or benzos. This can make you pass out and vomit while unconscious. This is a risk with high ket doses too when the stimulant starts to wear off.

Despite a rise in deaths, ket-related ambulance call-outs have dropped. This could be because people are becoming ill and dying really quickly, and the people around them panic. It's important to get help for anyone around you who looks like they might be in trouble, even if you're not sure what they've taken.

STAY → SAFER

- **Space out use:** start with low doses, leaving at least 20 minutes in between.
- **Drink water, especially beforehand:** You should drink water before, during and after use, but it can be easy to forget when you're using drugs, so make sure you're drinking plenty ahead of time. Some of us have set alarms on our phones to remind us to drink water in the past. Do it safely with small sips of fluids through the day – no more than a pint per hour.
- **Eat, but at least a couple of hours before ket:** the drug can make you feel or be sick, which is really dangerous if it makes you drowsy or lose consciousness, so don't eat right before.
- **Don't take more ket to help with bladder issues:** this is a known side effect of ket use. It might be tempting to take more if you're in pain but this will make the problem worse.
- **Get to somewhere safe, with people you trust:** ket can make you dizzy and off-balance. Make sure you're settled somewhere you're at low risk of hurting yourself, and don't use alone.
- **Crush the powder finely:** this will help reduce damage to your nose.
- **If someone passes out put them in the recovery position:** make sure the people you're with know to do the same.
- **Avoid ket if you feel low or anxious**

# PRIDE, GRIEF, SURVIVAL

LGBTQ+ people who use drugs face stigma and services that aren't built for them. **Buzz** hears why decent support means understanding the whole person

**I**t's hard enough to talk openly about drugs. It's hard enough to talk openly about sex, identity, shame, trauma or mental health too. For LGBTQ+ people dealing with substance use issues, all of those conversations can pile on top of each other. People are often left feeling like they have to hide parts of themselves to get support.

The link between being LGBTQ+ and substance use is well known. Research in Scotland has shown that people in the community are more likely to have difficult relationships with drugs or alcohol, and more likely to struggle with their mental wellbeing. They're more likely to be on low incomes too.

Ask why, and there's no one answer. Discrimination and stigma makes people feel like they can't be who they are, and they're often treated poorly by the people around them. Some people use drugs or alcohol to cope with stress or feel more confident if they're always having to defend themselves. A lot of the culture still centres around bars and clubs, and alcohol companies still sponsor Pride events.

Mohammed is 27 and in recovery. At first, it was booze – “in my late teens I started meeting men, usually off Grindr, and I was so anxious. I had to be drunk to do it,” he tells Buzz. “Even then a lot of the guys I'd meet would already be drunk or doing drugs, partying.”

That's where the tie between substance use and sexuality started for him, he explains, but – like for a lot of people – it was just one piece of the puzzle as he tried to cope with past traumatic experiences. By the time he was 21 he was dependent on booze. “It didn't matter if I was going to hang out with people, I just drank all the time,” Mohammed says.

Then he was introduced to crystal meth. A guy he linked up with offered it

## 'MY DOCTOR ASKED IF IT WAS LIKE BREAKING BAD'

as an alternative since drinking wasn't doing it for Mohammed anymore. He wasn't sure what it was, and was already drunk, so took it. It became his go-to.

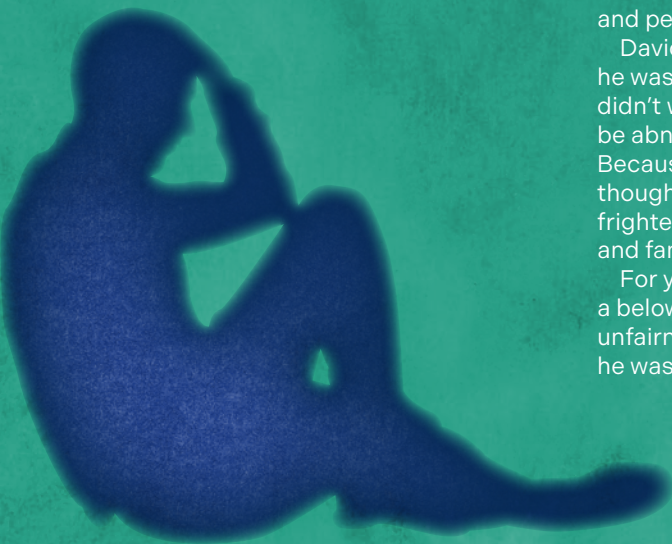
“The chemsex scene is the reason I'm jobless and having to focus on getting sober,” Mohammed says. “But the same thing happened as with alcohol. I was dating someone, but I needed the substance more than the connection with him or anyone else. It doesn't actually work, it takes away the very thing you're trying to get from it.”

“You're by yourself, you're using, and you're either just creating new traumas or not processing the old ones.”

Mohammed decided he needed help after a couple of years, then found a lot of doors shut in his face when he asked for it.

“Professionals gave me nothing,” he says. “The first time I went to my doctor felt like a sitcom. He was basically like, ‘we have meth in Scotland?’ and asked if it was ‘like Breaking Bad’. I was sitting

# 'I NEEDED ALCOHOL TO MAKE ME COMFORTABLE IN MY OWN SKIN'



there desperate for help, I'd been awake for days, and this was an actual GP."

He was referred to addiction services, but he was told they couldn't do much other than put him on the waiting list for rehab because they didn't have a treatment plan for crystal meth. Detox clinics wouldn't take him. He often felt like the people he went to for help saw it as "entertaining", because chatting to someone with a meth problem was new to them.

Services show a real lack of training and understanding of the specific drug trends within the LGBTQ+ community, says David Barbour, senior coordinator of communications at Alcohol Focus Scotland.

"Thinking particularly about crystal meth and GHB," David says. "And that's only when people feel comfortable accessing the help. A lot of services aren't obviously inclusive.

"It's not just the drug and alcohol services side. LGBTQ+ services tend to focus on either mental health or sexual health, but haven't always looked at the relationship between those things and substance use. It's not very joined up and people fall through the gaps."

David spent his teenage years hoping he was just going through a phase. "I didn't want to be gay, I didn't want to be abnormal or weird or perverted. Because I knew that's what people thought about gay people. I was frightened that I would lose my friends and family."

For years he was "probably building a below-the-surface rage from the unfairness of everything". Then, when he was around 18, "alcohol came along".

He decided he was going to come out, but had to get blackout drunk to do it.

With time he decided he was "fine", but looking

back knows he was still struggling with his identity.

"It was sort of like, what's the map now for what I'm supposed to do in life if it's not a wife and some kids? I was still so worried about fitting in too. I was really pleased when my friends would say, 'you're cool, you're not like the mad screaming camp queens'. And I'd think good, that's right, I'm one of you. It was so messed up, I just desperately wanted to be one of the lads so I could feel safe."

He'd missed out on learning to manage sex and relationships like most people do in their teens. "I didn't know how you were supposed to tell someone you liked them or ask people out. So I needed alcohol to make me semi-comfortable in my own skin. I ended up suffering from anxiety and depression, and my drinking got progressively worse until I eventually managed to stop."

A rise in abuse towards the LGBTQ+ community – especially trans people – in recent years is making it harder for people to ask for help. "I get so angry because I know the impact that had on me," David says. "Knowing everyone else thought my identity was perverted or weird."

Trans people are feeling more and more worried that staff at services won't be welcoming to them, says Whitney Welsh, wellbeing support worker for the LGBTQ+ service at Glasgow's Murray's Initiative.

"There's concern about how people will treat them or think about them," she says. "Not knowing if it's safe to open up about your identity or if other people will marginalise you in group-based services.

"And things like – is there a policy that's inclusive of trans people using the toilet, or are there single-style washrooms? Quite literal barriers to getting in the building for support."



It takes a lot to get to the point of asking for help, Whitney says, so when you also need to figure out if a service might be hostile towards you, a lot of people are lost.

"I have had some people tell me that they've had bigoted statements directed at them from other service users," she adds. Whitney's heard that some organisations have had to advertise LGBTQ+ drug support programmes less in recent years because they started attracting "negative attention from people against trans inclusion".

But the support is there for people who need it, when they're ready for it. Whitney runs a substances peer support group for LGBTQ+ people. Some people who go along say they've used other services but haven't felt comfortable talking about gender or sexuality, and that's what they need. Others say they can get support in loads of other places, but it's the only place they can meet other people in their community.

"There's a lot of value in meeting others who've had similar experiences," she says. "It's cathartic not having

## 'RECOVERY IS ALL ABOUT CONNECTION'

to explain everything about what you've been through, and have people just understand."

For Mohammed, now more than three years into his recovery, it was recovery cafes then support groups just like Whitney's that helped him start to rebuild. Arts-based support groups too.

"I can talk about all this, getting into drugs through gay culture, and it doesn't faze anyone," he says. "Recovery is all about connection and I've been getting that. I learned I can meet gay people outside of drug scenes. It's just been good."



## 'SOME THINGS WILL ALWAYS FEEL COMPLICATED'

by Lorraine Grahl

**W**hen I was younger, I thought I'd earn respect if I pulled a stunning guy. So I'd kiss boys at the dancing and feel nothing.

I didn't know how it felt to be excited about someone until I started going with girls. When it came to telling my dad that I was gay, I was terrified. It took me all night and most of my poor dad's beers, but I told him. First thing he said was: that's okay, why couldn't you have told me before? Do you think I'm an ogre?

He immediately made it all normal, not a big deal. I loved that.

But at some point substances and my sexuality became tied together. I didn't have the confidence to be who I wanted to be without drink, but time spent in hostels and the jail played a part too.

I've always been a tomboy and I felt more accepted for that in these places than in society outside. And I could be openly gay. The people in the homeless scene, to me, have always been the most accepting and least judging when it comes to sexuality. But the same people making me feel comfortable in myself were also using drugs, and that's how it started. These environments gave me my first taste of being completely myself for the first time, but they also set me on a path I'm still dealing with in my mid 40s.

Being in recovery from drugs usually means being in recovery from other things too. For me, one of those things is domestic violence. Healing from that also means making sure I don't pass on those behaviours with new people. It's a terrifying catch-22 that can play out if people get into relationships when they are bursting at the seams full of trauma. So much of life and relationships is about unpicking toxic cycles, no matter your gender or sexuality.

#### LGBT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

0800 464 7000  
helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk

#### MURRAY'S INITIATIVE

0141 353 1800  
lgbtqi@murrays.scot

#### GALOP

LGBTQ+ domestic abuse support  
0800 999 5428  
help@galop.org.uk  
galop.org.uk [webchat]

'COMING OUT  
DOESN'T CHANGE  
WHO YOU ARE.  
BUT IT CREATES  
MORE SPACE  
FOR YOU TO BE  
EXACTLY WHO  
YOU ARE'

There are plenty of things I wouldn't change, and some things that will probably always feel complicated. Being able to come out at 25, and getting to accept myself, can't be separated from my experiences of homelessness and addiction.

Coming out doesn't change who you are. But it creates more space for you to be exactly who you are. At the end of the day, I just like good movies, having a laugh, pizza, animals, and kind, happy, friendly people.

I hope one day we can see beyond sex and gender. I'd like to see it just stop being interesting because it's so normal. Things are definitely on their way to being more accepting, and I'm really happy for all the LGBTQ+ young people who are absolutely owning it. So to any dinosaurs reading – from one old lesbo dinosaur myself – society is going to move on, whether you like it or not.

# THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

A McTominay overhead kick sparked Scotland's journey back to the World Cup. At Street Soccer Scotland, football's helping people make comebacks of their own



Photo: Jon Brady, flickr.com/photos/jonfaec  
Glasgow hosted the Homeless World Cup in 2016

**"Everybody's up to high doh," says Gerry Britton, chief operating officer at Street Soccer Scotland.** "In a good way!"

Scotland's return to the World Cup this summer after 28 years away "pulls us all together", according to Gerry, giving people something to look forward to in a year when times are tough. For a lot of people, what happens on the pitch is just an excuse – to have a laugh with their pals, to

feel part of a community, or to enjoy a bit of hope and noise in among the everyday grind.

It's the same idea behind Street Soccer Scotland. Every week, around 1,600 people of all abilities take part in free drop-in football sessions, across 25 different parts of the country. The programmes lift people out of isolation – some players are homeless, others are refugees or people seeking asylum, others are struggling with substance

use or poor mental health. It's a fun and supportive environment for folk to meet new people, get some extra support and have a run about if they want it.

Most of the staff came through the programme themselves, so have lived experience of what the players are going through. They get to know the players and, where help's wanted, connect them with services to help them start rebuilding their lives. It might be support to get back into work, the chance to do some qualifications, money or housing advice, or help to re-engage with family.

But a lot of people just want to get the place out to begin with. "People might think of an 11-a-side game for 90 minutes," Gerry says. "It's five-a-sides, that's the football element, it's all ages and abilities. And it's just dipping in for 10 minutes if you want to, just watching or playing the full session."

The project runs youth sessions as well as additional support needs programmes, and one for people in prison. There's a women's programme too, and it recognises that a lot of women won't have had the opportunity to play football growing up the way a lot of guys did.

"The chances girls are getting now to play football are brilliant," Gerry says. "That wasn't there two or three decades ago. So you've got a lost generation of women who are finding out for the first time that they actually do quite enjoy it, or they do like that sort of environment and atmosphere.

"It's all player-led in terms of the activity. It's often football, but it can be boxercise, a Zumba session, just going for a walk. It's just important to be doing that 45 minute physical activity and doing it together, not doing it in isolation.



Photo: Jon Brady, flickr.com/photos/jonfaec

"Then you've got the other 45 minutes – a cup of a tea and a blether, sometimes a game of bingo. There you've got the chance to be signposted to various support and services."

The organisation – which runs in London too – also has a social enterprise called Kitback that collects and sells pre-loved football tops. It raises money for the programmes, but it creates volunteering and work opportunities for players too.

Then there's the Homeless World Cup. Teams from as many as 75 countries, with players who've been experiencing homelessness, compete in the tournament in front of huge crowds every year. Street Soccer Scotland takes the nation's players, both men and women's teams. Last time it was Oslo, next time it'll be Mexico City. There's been a bit more successful than in FIFA's World Cup – Scotland won in 2007 and 2011.

"This is the hook for bringing people together, at Hampden or in Oslo or at one of our weekly sessions," says Gerry. "It's the power of football."

**Visit [streetsoccer.org.uk/play](http://streetsoccer.org.uk/play) to find a session near you**

## HELP & RESOURCES

**For injecting equipment and needle exchange points:**  
[needleexchange.scot](http://needleexchange.scot)

**For your local drug service and where to get naloxone:**  
[scottishdrugservices.com](http://scottishdrugservices.com)

**For naloxone delivered to your home, or support for families affected by drugs:**  
[sfad.org.uk](http://sfad.org.uk)

**For advice on drugs, alcohol or mental health:**  
[wearewithyou.org.uk](http://wearewithyou.org.uk)

**For support if you've taken drugs or are thinking of taking them:**  
[knowthescore.info](http://knowthescore.info) or 0800 587 5879

**For a digital drop-in support service aimed at under-25s:**  
[crew.scot](http://crew.scot)  
Email: [dropin@crew2000.org.uk](mailto:dropin@crew2000.org.uk),  
Text: 07860047501 for free  
Message: @crew\_2000 on Instagram

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** 0800 9177650

**Narcotics Anonymous:** 0300 999 1212

**Cocaine Anonymous:** [helpline@cauk.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cauk.org.uk) or 0800 612 0225

**Gamblers Anonymous Scotland:** [gascotland.org](http://gascotland.org) 0370 050 8881

**For advice on financial problems:** [turn2us.org.uk](http://turn2us.org.uk)

**For more information on harm reduction, treatments and your rights:**  
[sdf.org.uk](http://sdf.org.uk)

# MAT STANDARDS

If you're getting medication-assisted treatment (MAT) - like methadone or long-acting injectable buprenorphine - services in Scotland have to meet a basic level of care when supporting you.

The MAT standards outline how they should do that, and are meant to make drug treatment safe, effective and helpful for as long as you need it.

It's important to know your rights so you can make informed choices and advocate for yourself.

**1** When you first attend a treatment service and ask for help, the service must offer you the medication you need on that day

**2** The service must give you information and support you to choose which medication you take, and which dose

**3** If you're not in treatment and known to be at risk of harm, services must offer you the support you need to get into treatment - especially after a near-fatal overdose

**4** Services must give you sterile injecting equipment, naloxone, advice about safer drug use, hepatitis and HIV testing, and wound care where appropriate

**5** Services must support you to stay in treatment for as long as you feel you need it