

Tom's Story / #4Tom

Tom took his life in March 2019 aged 22 during the comedown after taking cocaine. Tom was a healthy, happy boy, he was not depressed or had any prior history of mental illness. Tom had a full time job, went to the gym and had a long term girlfriend, he was very invested in his future; he booked a holiday just the night before. Tom was brought up in a loving family with an older brother and sister and had a happy childhood. Tom took cocaine recreationally, usually every few weeks or so. This was not condoned by us, as a family we have no experience of drug use at all, but have come to realise that cocaine use by young people is very normalised. In 2017 after taking cocaine for three consecutive nights over a weekend, Tom attempted to take his life. Fortunately he was at home and we saved him. Tom attended private rehab and did not take cocaine for over 18mths. It was very hard to get help when Tom, aged 21, was crying out for it. We believe there is a gap - there is help for 'drug addicts', help for mental illness, and if these boys don't present as either, they don't feel they have a mental illness and they don't see themselves as having a drug issue, as so many are taking cocaine recreationally.

Unfortunately at Christmas last year after a night out with friends, the first for a long time, Tom took cocaine again. Over the next two months the pattern was back and in March after a 3-night binge again, while we were away, Tom took his life.

Tom's inquest detailed that the amounts of cocaine in his body were high. The coroner requested information from us detailing evidence behind the link between cocaine use and suicide (the paper can be found on our website). Since then we have worked closely with the coroners office on data collation and are also working closely with the Jacob Abraham foundation. We have recently joined forces with Nicola of Jacob Abraham foundation and Maggy Corkhill to form Co-Alc Alliance. Alongside this, 4tom is raising money in Tom's memory, aiming to prevent suicide and hopefully preventing any family going through this nightmare. Our focus is young males and cocaine use. We are aiming to run workshops in male-dominated workplaces and workplaces for family and friends to raise awareness.

As a family we have also worked with South Wales Police on postvention/aftercare, as we felt there were lessons to be learnt on how to deal with families in these circumstances.

The work of 2 Wish Upon A Star has helped us very much, we work closely with them by promoting their work, supporting families, and also raising money for this charity. We have also produced short films to raise awareness.

I hope this helps briefly describe what we are doing and want to do in memory of our much loved son and to hope to stop this pain being felt by other families.

- Nicola Smerdon and Family

For further information on any of the above, copies of the awareness films, information on our work with the coroner, work with the Co-Alc Alliance, or copies of research papers etc. please contact nicola@4tom.org

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4Tom.org

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