

My name is Natalie Jacobs, and this is my experience as a substance user, this will tell you where I was and where I am now. I started using crystal methamphetamine, also known as known "TIK," when I was 27 years old.

I had recently lost my mother, who meant the world to me and was my everything. My mother's death seemed like the center of my universe had been taken from my heart and life. I just wanted to die as well. I met my first boyfriend who had introduced me to the substance at the toughest time of my life. I wanted to die, so I thought that if I could consume as much TIK as possible, I would be able to end my life.

When my attempt failed, I started doing meth mainly on weekends when I went to visit my boyfriend's house. We smoked roughly 2.5 grams, for which I paid between R150 and R200 at the time. My addiction grew stronger, and I began using crystal meth during the week as well. This was a drug that I enjoyed, and I had no idea how much it would change my life and family. After that, I started smoking it at work as well.

My second boyfriend was extremely abusive. It was only after I had married him that I learned what kind of person he truly was. I was only married to him for 9 months, but that short time felt like my life was in hell. He would beat me up every single day. I recall him telling me I had to stand still, then pulling out a knife and bringing it down below my waist. He almost killed me. That was the moment I decided that if I want to survive, I needed to walk away from him. I also remember having to sell my items to maintain our addiction, I sold my clothes and gold; at this point, my meth intake increased to 7.5g per week.

I then moved back to Woodstock and lived with my sister, and she got me a job at her friend's car wash. At that time, I was still using crystal meth. My friend who is also on crystal meth started working there as well. That was a huge problem because we started doing drugs at work. My boss found out that we were doing TIK at work and asked if we wanted help, my friend was not interested, but I said yes; I was not in denial as I knew I had a problem, and that I would not be able to do this on my own – I needed help.

I was sent to a rehab center and did an outpatient program for people who use drugs, and that did not help me at all. They did not use a person-centered approach, everything was done in groups, there was no one-on-one session, the program was set, and you could not have the services needed. It's important to note that my intake increased, and I started using more than I did before.

My friend then informed me about a female support group that was held at [TBHIVCare](#) drop-in center every Friday for women who use drugs, however, I was not still contemplating whether I should go there or not. My friend said I should go with her and if I did not like it then I wouldn't have to go again.

Today I can boldly say that that was the right decision because it changed my life. The woman support group was a safe space for women who use drugs where we could share our joys, sorrows, and problems; no one was judgemental, no stigma or discrimination that we as women who use drugs normally face. They listened to our stories, they showed us compassion and empathy towards us. They also reminded us that we have the right to live our lives the way we want, and no one can take that away from us.

I wouldn't be here today had it not been for that intervention. I am now working for SANPUD as a Community Linkage Officer, where I can give back to my community and raise awareness about [harm reduction](#) and what it entails. SANPUD has given me the platform to help women who use drugs who are going through similar experiences that I have gone through, and I can be the support for them that I did not have at that point in my life. I am proud to announce that today my crystal meth intake is at 0.05grams per week, and slowly and surely, I see I will be getting off it.