UCL Remarkable Stories

Episode 4 – Leah and addiction

Transcript

**Mitesh Vagadia** 00:04

We are UCL and these are our remarkable stories. Hi I am Mitesh Vagadia, I work in the UCL students support and wellbeing team. In each episode I'll be in conversation with a UCL guests as they share with us their remarkable stories, experiences and life lessons. In today's episode, I'll be talking to first year student Leah about her journey overcoming drug and alcohol addiction. What she has learned from her experience and where she is today. What was your addiction and what did it mean to you?

**Leah Partridge** 00:51

I was a slave to substance substances. I abused alcohol primarily, but I wasn't particularly fussy I, my life unravelled as a result of substance misuse, which started when I was in my teenage years

**Mitesh Vagadia** 01:13

How old would you say?

**Leah Partridge** 01:14

I would say, I first picked up and experimented when I was about 13, 12 to 13. But I was never normal, when I would consume most things my relationship with substances was never just an experiment. It was consume as much as you could, until complete blackout, to being unconscious collapse brought home by the police on some occasions, and this is a 14 years old. 13-14 years old.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 01:47

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 01:49

Addiction for me is not just about the use of substances, so, I always felt separate, I felt that I lacked confidence in social situations. I felt like I was really naive up until a certain point, sort of my my upbringing, my early childhood, and then I got to the age of around 12-13 and something changed. I wanted to experiment, I wanted to see what the older kids were doing. I was drawn to rebellious, rebellious types that looked appealing to me that looked that looked appealing. I wanted to see, all the things that you're warned against all the things that you're told, don't try this. Don't do this. If somebody asks you this, say no, all of those things. I thought Why? I thought that sounds good. If that has that effect, what must what must be the reason for it? Even when I was having a drugs talk about what addiction was at school. I was like, I was curious about anything having that much power over you. And I didn't believe that that could ever happen. I remember being really curious about it. And then ironically, it happened to me. But at that stage, I had no clue. No clue at all. I was exposed to hard drugs quite early on. There were some instances in my teenage years sexual, sexual assaults. Some older men gave me heroin. I was about 14-15, that didn't really that didn't really appeal to me. It made everything slow and calmed everything down. At that stage I was very much into things that would bring me chaos, things that will be more exciting make situations faster speed. There was it was in the 90's, acid was a big thing then. I love the club scene, I love the feeling of connection I had with other people when I consumed that. I love the escapism of it. And alcohol was, was present throughout alcohol was present throughout I would always consume the strongest thing I could find to the maximum amount that I could possibly, possibly do.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 04:30

Before that you said it started early, quite early on, but 12-13 you started experimenting, and you you wanted to do all the things that people saying you shouldn't be doing and should stay away from. Tell me a bit about where that started?

**Leah Partridge** 04:44

That is really hard to, that's really hard to identify because when I look back at it, I can sort of, I can see it unravelling. But with the gift of hindsight, I think at the time we moved to a different location, a different county, my father got a good job and that's where the sexual assault happened. And that led me to have a breakdown in relationship with my mother. I was spending more time hanging around streets with kids that weren't really focused on education. They were, drugs were more available in those, in that environment in those places. And that's when I got into more trouble with older men. They were looking for young girls, they were looking for young girls and they were giving us drugs. That was more or less my introduction to drugs and and drinking became part of that. When I use the term drugs I mean Alcohol as well, you know, it was all tied in for me. But even before that, even before we moved, and I had that traumatic time, there was something in me which made me drawn to. It was like a curiosity. It was like this. You know, you hear people talk about a morbid curiosity about things or you know, this this floatation with danger and things I thought looked exciting things that I'd been warned off in the usual talks, things that people would say that that's not a good idea if this situation happens, and I just didn't have any of the, any of the fear, I suppose that that a normal person might have, that just wasn't in in me. There's addiction in my family. I don't know if that plays a part in in how I see things. Or just how I am. Whether it's a personality thing? I don't know. And I don't think I don't think that really matters, what I think matters is, is where, where it took me where those those early decisions that I made or layered on top of each other and chipped away a little bit more at Leah and let the drugs, drink addiction in a little bit more. And those things those decisions all mounted up and layered up and, and drugs, drugs became my answer to my problems. So the feelings that I wasn't good enough, the feelings that I didn't fit in. When I consumed drinking drugs, that stuff didn't matter. That stuff, I was part of, I was part of a group we were doing the same things. There was, there was peer pressure, definitely. But I would have never identified that then.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 08:09

When you're doing the drugs and alcohol and then starting out at the ages that you did, how did that impact on your education in your school then?

**Leah Partridge** 08:15

Because of the traumatic time that I was having, I started to drop out a little bit anyway and hanging around some rougher deprived areas, which is where my exposure was increased, especially as I was more vulnerable exposed to different circumstances people given me drugs for with different motivations. I was missing a lot of school anyway, to the point where they asked me to leave and then they looked at my grades and realised that despite missing all the school, I was still making grades when I turned up. That was still, yeah, but it wasn't really having a massive impact on my ability. So they said to me that I was welcome to come back.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 09:08

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 09:08

But, of course, the impact of that in itself. I was very much like, well, screw you. It's the school knew about some of the difficult difficulties I'd experienced. And they were really unsupportive, really unsupportive. They said to me, on one occasion, you've cried rape before or something along those lines, you know, really, really horrible things to say to a 14 year old girl. And I was aware of that I couldn't go into a place of learning and be there when that was a view held of me. How could I do that? So I was, I just drew away even more, I drew away, I withdrew self-excluded myself to a huge degree and hung around with people where I felt comfortable. And those were the people that were opting out. Those were people that were opting out of society might not have had a strong solid family might have had their own problems going on. Those are the people that I chose to hang around with. And that exacerbated my access to drugs and, and drugs access to me.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 09:38

Hmm.

**Leah Partridge** 09:43

Um,

**Mitesh Vagadia** 09:55

So where did you get to in school then? at what point did you drop out? How old were you when you dropped out of school? This was 15 when I was, when I was asked to, when I was asked to leave and I self-excluded. Then we moved back to my home county where I'd grown up and went back to the old school that I was at. I remember my mom saying to me, you know, we, will you go, will you go to this school, If you go back there. And I was, I was like, yeah, yeah, let's just go back there. Everything was was different than things weren't, weren't so messy. And even though they weren't, they were starting to get that way. But I was, I knew things couldn't continue how they were and I always had a bit of ambition. I always had a little bit of drive, and I knew that I was bright enable. So I came back to the school, but I couldn't fit in. I was a broken kid. By then I'd seen a lot of things. I'd lived a lot of things, and I was just different. I was different to how I was when I left. And yeah, I couldn't connect with those old friends. So I went to a few lessons here and there. I was only in my last year. And I sat my exams. I did enough coursework. Barely, I mean, very barely, but I did enough to pass and then I just sat, sat my exams and i and i did did well in all of them. Your GCSE exams.

**Leah Partridge** 12:01

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 12:02

What did you get?

**Leah Partridge** 12:03

Well, I got B's but I was in an intermediate bracket, you could only enter high intermediate, or lower because I'd miss so much school. They told me that you can only be an intermediate and I was like, no, I can do the high. But they said we're not chancing it going in in the intermediate. So, we went and the highest I could get was Bs, so I got B's. My mom didn't didn't think that I would get any GCSEs when I got my results, I didn't go down and collect them or anything, you know, I just waited for them to come through the post and when I got my results, my mom was, went to the shop and bought me a packet of maltesers, she was like, she's got bloody house. She's pulled it out the bag somehow. So, so I got the GCSEs but, you know, the emotional problems were still there. My mom pushed me to go to college and do that IB International Baccalaureate.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 13:04

Yeah.

**Leah Partridge** 13:05

 But she passed away shortly after and I dropped out. And yeah, my dad's started drinking. The family unravelled and my behaviour went, went downhill. I didn't, I didn't see the value in the education. And also, I didn't have any direction or know what I wanted to do with it. You know, it just all seemed very abstract. It was like, well, this is what you should do. And with that same curiosity and defiant nature that I had when I was told about, don't do drugs, don't hang around with the troublemakers. That same headstrong curiosity. I was like, well, why should I do this? That doesn't apply to me the rules don't apply. And so yeah, I dropped out of college.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 14:01

What did you do next when you dropped out?

**Leah Partridge** 14:05

Umm, drank a lot. Yeah, got really drunk. Got a job in Debenhams for a little bit and then there was a girl there whose mum worked in insurance and then I and then I worked there for a few years. This is around the time as well when I was going out and clubbing at weekends like normal kids do. But my Saturday, Friday, Friday and Saturday became Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And in that time, I wouldn't go home. And I would turn up to work in the same clothes, week in week out. I'll be walking into things because I was so so half cup. I was doing drugs in the toilets.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 15:04

This is while you're working at Debenhams?

**Leah Partridge** 15:06

This is while I was working in insurance. This started to happen. Around that time, I also got a job for IBM after the insurance. Then I was a project administrator for IBM, insurance was boring. I mean, I was good at it because I was in claims I was good at arguing with people and I was, I was very good at some. And again, I was sharp, sharp. I knew the law. I knew the law. I knew what the loopholes were, I knew how to apply that. So I was able, in fact, I was able to function getting away on a bare minimum, which is the only reason I didn't get sacked because I was phoning in sick all the time. Yeah, really, really chaotic behaviour. erratic behaviour. Yeah, I got a job at IBM after that. And then it was very much manage yourself as long as you do the work, it doesn't really matter how much you're on site, even though you're supposed to be there was it's so big no one was really monitoring that. And I was able to take full advantage and and just.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 16:14

What amounts of alcohol or drugs were you doing then at this stage?

**Leah Partridge** 16:21

I was drinking. I'd go home and I'd have a couple of bottles of wine in a week, every night. At the weekends, the amount of alcohol and and various drugs I was putting away was astonishing, according to the doctor, I remember going in to see the GP and it being discussed that I had problem with alcohol. And I'm trying to work out the units that I'd consumed. And it was hundreds.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 16:53

In a week?

**Leah Partridge** 16:54

Yeah, yeah. And and I was still functioning at this point.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 16:58

Hmm.

**Leah Partridge** 16:59

The thing with doing drugs and having alcohol, is you can consume a hell of a lot more alcohol if you're doing drugs which will keep you awake and you can just keep going. So I turned into this like zombie machine, which started off partying with work in between, and then deteriorated to less and less of the work. More or more my health deteriorated into being physically unable to sit there and type and sweating and other various physical effects. And to Yeah, to it being less and less of work more and more illegal work.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 17:39

Hmm.

**Leah Partridge** 17:40

And, and over the course of a few years it took over. I was in this destructive relationship as well, which was no means one sided, destructive. We were both crazy. And it it's sort of culminated in a really violent episode. My head was kicked in, I had to take an extended time off work. And after that, what was left of my confidence, It was psychologically damaging this this relationship as well. There was a lot of abuse chipping away at any confidence I had, I thought I was going insane. I mean, it was a bit from the, from the chaos, but anyone that's been in an abusive relationship will tell you that, they make you start to question your your version of reality. And you're not sure where, where real life and where, where the abuse starts and stops, you can't pull it apart. And so I took an extended amount of time off work and I came back. I mean, you could still see that my face was damaged. And this is after about six, seven weeks, I think and I just I just couldn't do it. I came to work for a little bit and then I was at home, and just phoned up in the morning and said, I'm not coming back. Do I have to work my notice? And they were like, no, we'll still pay you. And I was like brilliant, not coming back.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 19:07

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 19:07

That led me to spend even more time at home and my home environment was really unstable, bearing in mind that there was addiction in the family. I'd moved out on several occasions, but because of my limited funds, and more chaotic lifestyle, I would get kicked out of places. They weren't. They were sort of like room shares as well and houses of other people that weren't necessarily, it wasn't stable. Let's just put it that way. You know, they're not places that you would want to live long-term or, so it was, I ended up going to live with this guy in his family for a bit. Spending a lot of time during the day out just because I had nowhere to go, which would invariably mean in the pub or, and I mean, these weren't nice family pubs either, these were, these were pubs where you could behave, how you wanted.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 20:28

How old were you at this point?

**Leah Partridge** 20:33

About 24-25, 26 I think that's how long this sort of phase went on for.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 20:42

Was that like the lowest point that you got to?

**Leah Partridge** 20:45

No, no way? No, I got. By that point. I was still able to leave the house. I didn't get clean until I was 35-36, 35. And so, yeah, there's a 10 years worth of getting a hell of a lot worse. Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 21:11

What's worse?

**Leah Partridge** 21:13

Okay, so worse is when you're so alcohol dependent, because this is the one that had the most physical consequences for me was alcohol. So alcohol dependent, that you're having seizures. Whenever you try and do anything, you can't leave the house, or when I did try and leave the house to get to services to go to groups to get help. I was having seizures and I was passing out and I was found on the side of the road. many occasions I had black eyes from where I would just pass out or have a seizure hit my head. I would wake up and I was covered in bruises and I wouldn't know from what I would wake up and in a pool of blood because of it. Various injuries. And some of them, I've been beaten up some of them. Those injuries I've just fallen over. Some of them are self harm, because I didn't know. I couldn't exist how it was anymore. But I couldn't get out of it either. I couldn't stop. I didn't know how to. And I tried and the thing with addiction is you, your head tells you that you just have to be a bit stronger. It tells you that you have to be that you can control it you can get the better of it. There's so much denial and even though, even though you're dying, even though all the evidence to the contrary, you still think that if you were just tried a little bit harder, you could get the better of it. And you say, you say to yourself, right tomorrow is going to be different. Tomorrow is going to be different and you go, do you mean it, You mean it? but you have lost all control? There is no choice anymore. People see choice when there isn't a choice. You're so riddled with compulsion and obsession, and you've been stuck on a loop for so long, it's like you are on autopilot, a really horrible, painful autopilot that you can't switch off and and you just keep repeating the things that are bringing you all this pain and everyone's abandoned you and you've pushed them all away. At one point before I got into treatment, the only thing left in my life was a dog. This was my dog, and it's only when he got ill, and I was unable to look after him. And, and someone reported him that I let him go. And I finally agreed to go to treatment.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 23:53

So how did you enter treatment? What was the process of that? Did you go to hospital and they they've referred you on or what happened?

**Leah Partridge** 24:00

There's no NHS treatment centres, they're all local authority run. So, or private, yeah, local authority or private. I've got funding from the local authority. Because I'd gone, I'd been engaging with the substance misuse team, you go to the doctor, and they refer you to the substance misuse team

**Mitesh Vagadia** 24:17

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 24:18

And you engage with them and attend groups. And when you attend groups, that and they can see you're committed, then you can get put into detox or they can refer you to the local authority, you get assigned a social worker or care manager. And then you engage with them and do some work with them. And if they think that you've got potential if there's funding available, you may be a candidate considered for treatment. I'd been managing to show up for those groups, no matter what, which is often while I was found in the streets unconscious, because I've managed to get myself there, but that was all I could do for the day.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 25:09

So would you go to these treatments and be drunk when you got there

**Leah Partridge** 25:12

Hammered.Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 25:15

And they were happy for you to come in.

**Leah Partridge** 25:16

I wouldn't say happy.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 25:18

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 25:19

I wouldn't say happy but as long as I would just sit there and wasn't abusive, and was able to be coherent enough to take things in, so I would consume enough to stabilise myself to get me there.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 25:31

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 25:32

And I'll definitely be intoxicated. Bearing in mind at this stage as well, all my basis for normal functioning had fallen away. So I had no sort of reference point for normal relationships, anything like that. I'd lost the ability to function and have conversations. Normally, I had only been going into shops to steal alcohol for a long time. I was only going out at night to do that, I was being very furtive, I was not operating within normal parameters of society at all. So I would get myself there. And if I didn't kick off through fear or now no, but if I if I didn't kick off if I just sat there and got myself there, that wasn't enough to get to get me into detox initially.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 26:25

So by this point, is the alcohol the main thing that is the addiction and the drugs is now taking a backseat?

**Leah Partridge** 26:33

It was the alcohol that took over most, yeah, there were times when I put the alcohol down and in my drug increase in another area would would just go through the roof. Yeah, it would massively increase. The alcohol is what gave me more physical consequences. And it was my favourite thing. It was my favourite thing out of all of them, except when I was going out clubbing, I think, but that has long stopped. You know.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 26:57

Why was that your favourite?

**Leah Partridge** 26:59

The alcohol, Um. I like the fact that everything was funnier even though obviously, I mean, this is the insanity of it, even though everything I've just explained to you there's nothing funny in that. But I still I found things funny. I thought I felt like I was the life and soul of the party, sociable. I've I felt like I had no inhibitions, all those hang ups about myself that have all that not you're not good enough. You don't fit in, all of those things, they fell away.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 27:35

Did you feel like a different person?

**Leah Partridge** 27:37

Yeah. Total escapism, total different person. And I and I was nowhere in reality, I wasn't in reality. Learning to deal with being in reality, and to just accept it is what recovery is. That's what recovery is, learning those things, learning how to put back in those skills have interaction with other human beings learning how to manage relationships, learning how to listen, learning how to care about other people learning, empathy and compassion. Realising that the world is not a hostile place, not everyone's out to get you that not all institutions will let you down, that you're not going to be constantly rejected, judged. And that some people will like you and some people won't, and that's okay. And you can deal with that. So it's things that a lot of us, a lot of people must learn at some point that I didn't. Or the fact that for me, those thoughts in my head, were really loud. cripplingly loud. So that's one of the reasons why substances were so appealing to me. But I didn't, I couldn't have told you that at the time. That wasn't, that's looking back on it now. And then we move into substances. And looking at what I'm left with and the work I have to do to stay clean, and to challenge that. That it's like radio paranoid in your head or it's like radio, you're not good enough in your head, like your affords. People call it imposter syndrome. But it's bigger than that. It's not just applicable to say, being at UCL or it's applicable to everything. It's it's painful, you're painfully alert and sensitive. So yeah, drugs and alcohol was my, was my antidote to that. But yeah, I couldn't have told you that at the time. There was still it was more, for some reason it looked appealing and that still doesn't explain why I had to go so mental with it either because you could have just like some people do have a few glasses of wine and take away then the inhibition. And I was never like that. I wanted more I wanted so much. I have no off switch. And I can still have no off switch but with other things like, for example food or shopping can go if my emotions are not managed. Those are the things that will go first.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 30:21

How long did you have to go to treatment before being referred to detox?

**Leah Partridge** 30:25

Yeah, I went for a long time. I think the first time I went, they got me in reasonably quick because I was very, very physically ill. And also the process changed that it got privatised, different companies came in, they have different processes. And the first time it was much easier to get somebody in, I think the first time was in about 2012, I think I got into so yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 30:54

What happened that time?

**Leah Partridge** 30:56

I was put into a detox centre, specialist detox centre, which is part of the NHS, which is shut down now. And you're sort of locked up, you are locked up for a couple of weeks, and they medicate you, so that you stop having seizures and things like that. Now you're not comfortable, they don't medicate you so that you're comfortable. Apparently, if you go to private facilities, it's a little bit more like that. But this isn't, this was full on hallucinations, shakes, sweats, didn't know where you were, that sort of thing. And, and, and they tell they tell you that this is just the beginning, the easy bit. Of course, you don't listen to any of that at the time. It certainly doesn't feel like that. And I came out after that. And I was with another destructive partner at the time and I and I started drinking again fairly quick, even though I was very adamant that I wasn't going to there's still part of my addict nature, which was, I don't need to be there. It was all a mistake now that you know how bad it can get. And now you know, these coping mechanisms, you could control it. But it went downhill again very, very quickly. I got very ill and they put me in again few months later. And then off the back of that time, I've got 14 months clean.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 32:22

Okay.

**Leah Partridge** 32:24

In that time, I was doing lots of groups at the substance misuse team, all about emotional coping skills, life skills, those sorts of things. But I wasn't doing any healing. I wasn't going any deeper doing any healing and I wasn't connecting with other people. I was going home and sitting there with my dog, who was still in almost in a really codependent relationship with this dog. I hadn't done any work externally. I'm repairing relationships and or learning how to manage them or or getting friends that were doing a similar sort of things to me or look at social media and just look, look, look at my friends all going out. And I'll say friends, I mean people, I went to school with looking at them or going out and being like, I'm not doing any of that I'm just not doing anything. I'm missing out on life. And so to be part of that life, I have to drink or take drugs, I have to. That's what society does in the UK. That's what social life is, doing that. And so, so yeah, I relapsed. And then I was using again for 15 months and it got even worse, it got really, really dark. By this point, I was using heroin, which had never appealed to me but by now I just wanted everything to shut down but really shut down. I wasn't dying. I kept waking up again. And, but I couldn't see a way out my idea of what recovery was the first time was was pretty shit. I was like, well, if that's the option that's not appealing even or not appealing enough. And so I just, I just spiralled really quickly and, and yeah, drinking drugs took hold again quite badly. But there was still something in me which wanted saving. And I refer to it as like that last little bit of a candle before it goes out that last bit of a flame. That's not my spirit, that was like it and it was about to go out. And there was something in me which just, I don't know something in me which just was like, well, it wasn't going out for a start. It was like it was about to go out and it was and I was like, I didn't really care if it did, but it wasn't going out and so existing like that, is so horrifically painful. I cannot possibly explain to you, I just can't convey that. And so I would go to these groups again and a social worker that I had before was welcome in. He was brilliant. He was like, yeah, come back in come back to these groups. And I was a handful. I was I was very intoxicated. Some of them, some of them were had to be taken outside. But I turned up week in, week out and, and my social worker, who I'm still friends with today, and friend of the family go out and have dinner and things and which is beautiful. It's a really beautiful relationship. And he didn't give up on me, he saw something and he was like, okay, if we can just get get you in, there's a chance for you. And so and so I went to treatment for five months.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 35:46

But that was funded by the local authority? and the social worker?

**Leah Partridge** 35:50

Yeah, he It was a social worker that working for the local authority, who got the funding awarded,

**Mitesh Vagadia** 35:56

So he did the 5 months.

**Leah Partridge** 35:57

Five months and then after that, I said to them, what do I do? What do I do now? I was out of options. I was, I still had a level of denial. Even at that stage, I was still, even though I'd had treatment funded, which isn't an easy thing to get. I was still walking around really ungrateful to be there thinking I didn't need to be there, thinking that I was a fraud. You know, that's the power of this, of this illness, how much it takes hold of your, of your thought processes and your reality. And so, but I was aware that there was enough evidence that I did need to be there. You know, there's still a part of you that can work out rationally that after a certain period of abstinence anyway, you can get enough perspective to realise that you are going to die. And if you carry on doing what you're doing and your thought processes can't be trusted, so I said to them, what do I do and they recommended that I get into a 12 step recovery fellowship programme, which I did. So that's the Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous. And when I did Narcotics Anonymous, because it's for all addiction, all substances.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 37:13

Was does that involve and what do you mean? What do you do there?

**Leah Partridge** 37:16

So there's 12 steps and you work through them and they're about making peace with your past, admitting how powerless you are over substances. And they're just all about healing. They're all about healing they're about learning about relationships, learning about yourself. It's a spiritual programme, so it's about and when I say spiritual, it doesn't mean like religious, spiritual, it means spiritual, so you're repairing your soul. So you're learning to live in a kind way, compassionate way. And it includes treating yourself with kindness and compassion as well forgiving, those sort of values, those sort of principles, spiritual principles they're called and you attend meetings, and I still do a lot of meetings, I still do about three, four meetings a week where we all get together. And we exchange stories about the week we all speak. We may listen to a speaker. Last night I was a speaker sharing my story. We all swap phone numbers, you've got an immediate group of people around you, that need you as much as you need them. We all get clean and stay clean together. So we support each other. And through doing that, I was able to overcome fear about relationships, not fitting in all of those things. those thoughts still apply even when you're sat in that room full of other people. But by talking about it and working through it and realising you're not the only one, and somebody else will be like, Oh my god, yeah, I'm going through the exact same thing in my head. And by bouncing those ideas off each other. You can slowly get through it and last week, I had to really hard day and I just thought if I just get to a meeting tonight, and I just offload is a wrong word. But if I just get to a meeting, I know that I'll feel safe, I'll feel held and I can get through another day, and it'll be a good day one, it'll be a good day one. And sometimes the best I can do is to get out of bed, show up for life, and get to a meeting, and stay clean. And that's a good day. That is a really good day is a day hard one. And it's another day that I've survived and it's another day that I can learn from. It's another day that I didn't cause any harm to myself or to anyone else.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 39:42

You hear about people recovering, but actually, like you said, healing yourself, healing your soul. If you could go through all the rehab, you can go through it doesn't matter if you're not ready to heal yourself.

**Leah Partridge** 39:53

Exactly. And that's hard, it's hard. It's about facing the darkest aspects of your character. It's about looking at the concequences of your behaviour, taking responsibility for what's yours, what's your part in things? And what's not as well. I'm somebody that really blames themselves for a lot of things. And I'll take too much responsibility for things that actually might not have been anything to do with me. Some people aren't able to recognise when they've been wronged you know, it's it's something, it's about your distorted perceptions, putting them, aligning them a little bit more helpfully. The main purpose of all of this is to help you to live, help you live a peaceful life. It's not about success in terms of money, jobs or anything like that. It's not about that sort of thing. It's about inner peace. And I have got that today. I have got that. Most of the time, it doesn't mean that that voice isn't there. Even when I was asked to do this, I thought I was thinking to myself, you are not good enough, you're not good enough to be here. I was having doubts about being good enough to be at UCL last week. today, I don't feel like that. But there'll be other days when I do feel like that again. But it's challenging that thinking and realising that you do. You do deserve to be here. Your story is your strength. And that's what sets you apart as well. It doesn't doesn't make me worth any less than anyone else. I have to challenge that stuff all the time.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 41:36

Remember, the last time we met, he said something about addiction doesn't discriminate.

**Leah Partridge** 41:43

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 41:44

What do you mean by that?

**Leah Partridge** 41:45

What I mean by that is, when you're in it, you can think that you're the only person that is experiencing it. And then if you go a bit wider than that, you can think that it would only be people from a certain background, your background people that have had hard times. But actually when you get into the recovery community and when you go a bit wider, I've met people from aristocracy that have to do the same things that I have to do to stay clean, because addiction doesn't discriminate, doesn't matter who you are, the upbringing you've had, the amount of resources you've got, whether you've had trauma, whether you've had lovely loving parents, solid family, all of those things, if you are somebody that's prone to it. I do believe that there were usually things that trigger it. But that may not be the case. Some people cannot identify any of that stuff and it can still bring you to your absolute knees. And people still have to do the same things that I have to do to recover. But to truly recover that is about the healing process. And being abstinent without using is is a painful thing. That's really painful. I tried that for the 14 months and and that didn't work. But yeah, to recover, you have to maintain it and, and the people that I meet through doing that all walks of life, it doesn't matter who you are where you come from. Nobody has above addiction, and nobody's beneath it, but it will take you down to the bottom.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 43:22

Before you came to UCL, what were you doing?

**Leah Partridge** 43:27

So, I knew that I wanted to get a degree, that was my thing. That was my thing I wanted to, to make amends to myself. And part of the healing process is we make amends to others and amends to ourselves. And that can include social amends as well. So I was doing some voluntary work, I was running a women's support group. I did an access course to get there. I didn't have a levels to get here. So I needed the qualifications. And I needed the confidence as well. I needed to introduce myself to a learning environment again. And I was really aware that I needed to have a personal statement. And they needed to be something in there. And I just thought, there's no way I can put anything that I've been up to in my personal statement. I thought there's no way there's just no way. Oh, no. I was tempted for half a minute, because I'm actually quite proud of my achievements now, but it's not a risk I was prepared to take. And I asked a few people as well. And they were like, no, no, you can't put that. So, so yeah, I thought I'd always wanted to travel. And I knew I wanted to do something around society and learning about people civilization, so I was in two minds, anthropology or sociology at the time.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 44:57

When did you realise that you've got this place at UCL. How did that unfold?

**Leah Partridge** 45:01

I applied to some top universities. I looked at the courses and I just thought, okay, so I'd love to study in London. It's on a train route, I could do it. And I had no intention of moving at the time. And I just thought, okay, so I'll choose a couple of universities in London. They were real outsiders to me, I just thought I had no hope. And in fact, I thought everyone would laugh at me if I told them I'd applied. I thought, I'm not going to tell anyone because people will just laugh they'll be like, you know, you're above your station Leah. There's no hope. And.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 45:37

You didn't tell family. Anyone that you're applying to these Universities.

**Leah Partridge** 45:41

I told my am Narcotics Anonymous group just because I had to manage my anxiety and my feelings around it because it's a big thing. You know, when you take those chances and put yourself out there, and rejection can be really hurtful. And so I, I told those, those people and I was share about it at meetings. I can't remember if I told my family. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I know I didn't tell them for a long time. If I did tell them I think it might have been sort of last minute, because I set an entrance exam for LSE. And so I think I told him about that. But yeah, I got straightaway I've got into the local university. then a week later I got into the other university, which was a Russell

**Mitesh Vagadia** 46:29

What was it?

**Leah Partridge** 46:30

Southampton University and got into that without interview or anything, they just offered me a place. And then I've got King's College. And then UCL was, kept me hanging. But I hadn't even allowed myself to dream about it, like coming to these top universities. And then when I did when I got the email said we'd like to offer you a place I've still got those emails have still saved them. I was like, god, you know, I don't want to use the language on here to describe it. I was I was overcome I was in tears for on and off for days in tears about it and I could quite easily cry again now, because I was like, I know that I can do it if someone just gives me a chance. I know that I know I can do it. I know it will be harder. Now, my brain doesn't work like it used to when I was young, I was sharp. I was on it. But now it's it is a little bit harder. My memories damaged. When I first got out of the first detox, I couldn't talk. I had a stutter stammer, I've really I couldn't string a sentence together. And now I talk and I'm quite lispy and that's a little bit due to the damage I've done. You know, my speech was really impaired. So if that gives you an idea of a few years ago, that's where I was at. So mentally and cognitively I have done a little bit of damage. So now I have to work that little bit harder. It's not it doesn't come so naturally, but it's still there. And I'm still, I know I can do it. And I knew if somebody, if I could just make somebody see that I've got something to give. And, but without telling them too much, because I didn't want to be judged on all the stuff that could be taken really negatively, you know, so, and that's why it's important to me to do this podcast because if all if I can give anyone any message in this is, your story is your power. That's what sets you apart. That's what makes you, you. And never be ashamed of that. So yeah, that's.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 48:38

And then you applied for a scholarship as well right?

**Leah Partridge** 48:42

Well. Yeah. I I initially was looking into some funding because I hadn't thought through the logistics of living in London, and also studying in London. And train fares really expensive. So I was looking at a little bit of help with travel and then it was coming up with, oh, try applying for this bursary try applying for that. And I and I applied and I was just I was just honest. To Yeah, to a degree. I was honest, I just answered the questions. And.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 49:16

Did you put anything about your addiction down in the statement?

**Leah Partridge** 49:19

They said, have you ever been in under local authority care or has an extended hospital stay and at the time of not long been our treatment a couple of years, maybe not even that? And I said, Yeah, I said, I've been in an institution for five months under the local authority. I didn't even know if it counted. But I thought I'll just put it in. I'll just be honest, and I didn't know if it counts against me that because of the type of thing it was, it wasn't like I grew up in care, which I knew wouldn't count against you. I just thought this is a grey area, but I'll chance it. I thought I've got the position now I've got in so they're not going to then turn around and say you can't come in because of this. I thought that was very unlikely. So I just gambled and I thought I didn't include it. And yeah, I was just doing some work at the rehab that I went to. And I was sat there with with colleagues, they were now colleagues and I got an email. And you know, I had to check that it wasn't from a scam. It can't be for real. This can't and it was. They don't put much in the email either. It's just that we're pleased to tell you, you've been awarded the Rhodes Scholarship. And I was like, oh, my God, and it tells you how much for and then I've got my colleagues to read it. They were like, yeah, yeah, that that looks real to us. That looks real, and, and I was in shock. I was an absolute shock. I left it for a few days to sink in. And then I phoned up to check that I wasn't paying head on. And that that was really happening. And I still don't, I still don't believe that it's gonna go into my account when another instalment is due, or something, you know, I still check That account online all the time to check that it's like really happening.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 51:04

So you're a rhodes bursary scholarship holder.

**Leah Partridge** 51:07

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 51:09

What is that? What is that? What does that mean in terms of financial?

**Leah Partridge** 51:12

That means I get maintenance allowance and full fees for all my education three years. So I will leave University debt free.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 51:22

Wow

**Leah Partridge** 51:27

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 51:28

Do you, did you ever think this would happen to you?

**Leah Partridge** 51:31

I didn't think I would ever even get in? You know, I didn't I didn't think something would like that would happen to me, things like that don't happen to me.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 51:39

Well, they do.

**Leah Partridge** 51:39

That's like the that's like the equivalent of winning the lottery or something. But to me, this is even more precious because it's not chance, like in the way that a lottery would be. This is this is hard won. And this is this is recognition that actually what I've been through does mean something and that people want to help and again, that's that's something that I would urge anyone else to, to bear in mind if they were into your mind and just be like, I've got something to give, I've got something unique to give, whatever that may be, however, out there, it may feel to you personally, that someone will value that experience. And yeah, I got financially rewarded for the thing that I wanted the most, the thing that I wanted the most was an education, the degree and that and that's why it's so special to me, because it's for that. And it's like, Leah, this is the path that was meant for you. This is who you were meant to be. This is what you're meant to be doing. And this is why this is coming to you. Because this was this is supposed to happen like this. You know, like I say, I'm not a religious person, but sometimes you can sit there and you can look at things and the remarkable turnaround and think, god this is just falling into place in a way that you couldn't make it up. So maybe there is something in that I don't know, maybe there is something in destiny or fate or something. But I also know that I'm better, better for the things that I've been through. I'm better place to be here, the things I've been through than if I hadn't, because that's what makes me able to give the contribution that I can to my fellow students, to my assignments to everything, everything I put myself into here.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 53:34

So you've been here since September?

**Leah Partridge** 53:35

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 53:36

What's it been like?

**Leah Partridge** 53:39

It's been a whirlwind for the first first term, I was commuting two hours each way commute so that is hard, because I get really tired easily as well now, I do do need to sleep a little bit more if I was younger, but so it's hard to keep up with studies as well. And to start with my anxiety was through the roof. It's an intimidating place to come, especially if you if you've never even dared to dream about being somewhere like this, then you realise how special it is. But at the same time, I've been going around with a massive grin on my face, like if people could see me and if anyone's watching, sometimes they'll just see me have a little giggle to myself, because I can't quite believe that I'm here and this is really happening and that I'm doing it. And that's enough for me, you know, just just to be here. I'm so so grateful to be here and I just think I'll do my best. Of course, I'll do my best but if nothing else, I've turned up and I've tried, I've tried my hardest, and I know I'll get a degree and the rest of it doesn't really matter. You know, it's not about getting a first it's not about that. For me, it's about making the most of my time here. Making the most contribution in terms of helping other people. If I can you know, supporting others sharing openly about where I've come from in the hope that, that will help someone else to also that it will open other people's eyes to their preconceived ideas about someone like me an addict, you know, you don't have, just because I can present like this now is a world away from how it was presenting a few years ago, and also the person that was presenting a few years ago, no one would have put that person here either it's just about maybe being a little bit more open to, to addiction to somebody's path to where they could be, where they should have been. You know, like if I can share any of that experience with anyone. Then my my job here is done. You know?

**Mitesh Vagadia** 55:57

I've got one final question.

**Leah Partridge** 55:58

Okay.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 56:00

If young Leah was sitting right there, and we could talk to her and you can talk to her and say something to her, what would you say to her?

**Leah Partridge** 56:10

It's really hard. It's really hard to speak to young Leah, because I think half of me did have vision. Half of me did see myself there. A lot of me cared too much what other people thought. When I was good in class before things started to unravel. People would mock me for being a boffin is what I got called things like that. And I got, I felt so different. I just felt so different and separate. And what I would tell her is that you're not different. You're not separate from everyone. Everyone's as scared as you are. Everyone, even if they're given that perfect image of a swan being graceful is underneath pedalling as fast as they can to keep afloat, no one knows, knows the answers. You have to have self-belief and and the belief that your differences are what makes you special. Just Just do your best. It doesn't have to be the best, but show up. Just show up. Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 57:23

So you're now 38 is that right?

**Leah Partridge** 57:25

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 57:26

And this is UCL on a scholarship.

**Leah Partridge** 57:30

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 57:31

This is your remarkable story. Thank you so much for sharing your story.

**Leah Partridge** 57:39

Your Welcome.

**Mitesh Vagadia** 57:49

If you have been affected by any of the topics raised in this episode, please do visit the UCL student support and wellbeing website, where you'll find a number of helpful resources. Thank you for listening. In episode Five I'll be talking to UCL student Alex about her journey overcoming and managing an eating disorder.