

**IKF, Male, 26 years old, Peer Educator**

Before I knew Burnet Institute, I came to Pyin Oo Lwin to take methadone maintenance treatment (MMT). When I started on MMT, I did not have any acquaintances and nowhere to hang around, so I used to sleep at the room that I rented. Since I was alone in the room, I felt very bored and wanted to go to the village for drugs. One day, I met with the outreach worker and counselor from Burnet Institute. They invited me to their office by handing out their visiting card and provide health education session with some refreshments. I told them that I will go there but did not actually go because I did not want to go or relate with any office. Later, one of my friends asked me to go and drink coffee with him at the office and I agreed to go with him.

When I got there, I met some other friends sitting in the chair watching movies, chatting each other and playing carom board so they could forget about drugs a little bit rather than stay alone at their home. Even if we are on MMT, we use drugs occasionally just for fun, especially when we meet with our old friends and have some money in our hand. But if we come and rest at the drop in centre (DIC) and watch the movies, we can reduce our drug craving to some extent. Of course, we reused drug when someone came and convinced us to do so.

The reason I did not want to relate with offices is that I did not know Burnet Institute office is a health services center for drug users. So I was afraid of being arrested due to my drug use status. I trusted more and more in Burnet Institute after I received counseling and blood screening test for HIV, HBV, HCV and STIs. They are very patient and listened to us. Always willing to help us whenever we needed. We can ask what we are not clear of even through the phone because they gave us their visiting cards with their number on it. All Burnet staffs are very friendly.

After attending SHG training organised by helping hand, one peer educator (PE) post was vacant at the Burnet Institute. The outreach supervisor asked me whether I was interested in that post. I was available at that time. So I joined Burnet Institute as one of the PEs. Previously, whenever we met our friends, we discussed the drug market. We did not know the risks of needle sharing. Now I know how to reduce the harm related to drug use.

Before I was on MMT, I tried to detox at home. I suffered terribly from withdrawal symptoms for 7-8 days. My mom felt so pity to see my suffering and she sent me to the drug detoxification center at Ohn Chaw for 27 days. They gave me methadone only for 13 days followed by oral medicines. It was not enough for me so I consulted with the doctor. The doctor told me about the MMT program and I enrolled in the program. Five days after MMT started I still craved for drugs. Now it has been three years I am on MMT and do not use drugs anymore. Now I am trying to tail off MMT from 16 drops to 14 drops. I also quit smoking.

I used drugs because I liked the feeling of getting high. However, as the time goes by, I had to use drugs not for the feeling but for relieving withdrawal symptoms. So I decided to quit using drugs and I went to my mom and confessed to her about it. Since my mom did not live with me, she did not know I am on drugs. My mom worried about relapse when she left me

alone. However, she trusted more in me after I was free of drug and quit smoking. I might have become a thief without my mom. My sister also supported me a lot throughout these years.

I attended up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard but did not pass the exam. After that I was sentenced to prison for two years because of a gang fight. I started using opium at 17 because of peer pressure. Opium was very cheap at that time. Later on the price of opium increased and I started using heroin instead because it is more cost effective. But I had to use more frequently than when I used opium.

I had an experience of overdose in Moe Goke. I was suffering cold turkey on that day and in a rush to inject. So I injected the drug without mixing with water. Within a few seconds, I felt air coming out of my ear and my head went down and felt asleep. My friends slapped me on my face and put salt water into my mouth and I was already at home when I woke up. It was in the jungle and naloxone was not available there. After that I tried not to inject drug in rush even if I suffered cold turkey.

After the project closes, I am going to establish a small restaurant. I am interested in cooking. There are very few restaurants that sell steamed mushroom, mustard and fish. I can do these things very well. I am going to sell these things with BBQ and cold drinks. I am divorced and have no plan of getting married again.

My message for peers is do not hesitate if you have decided to change and move forward. If you have decided to quit using drugs, just do it. Parents and all relatives usually support to quit using drugs. Many drug users used to hesitate to quit and it was the same with me. It was more than ten times I decided to quit the drugs. Those who want to quit the drugs are the same. There is no aim and goal for a drug user. Every day he/she has to struggle with searching for drugs whether it is by robbing or cheating others. We have to take almost 1-2 years within the MMT program. Be brave to move forward and face the challenges.