

Woman who began injecting heroin aged 15 releases pictures of herself in the grip of addiction and

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Mum-of-one Rachael Keogh, from Dublin, who has lost ten friends to drugs since Christmas, says marks on her arms remind her of how far she has come.

A FORMER heroin user has released shocking photographs of her as an addict and now - showing the difference going clean can make.

Rachael Keogh, 39, from Dublin, says she's "proud" of the scars on her arms, insisting: "They always remind me of where I'm coming from."

Rachel Keogh first took heroin at the age of 13

The mum-of-one hit the spotlight in 2006 when she revealed she was at risk of losing both her arms after years of injecting heroin.

And Rachael, who has lost ten pals to drugs since Christmas, insisted the public don't realise that addicts still face a huge battle after quitting.

She said: "When you take away the drug, that's when the real problem materialises.

"That's why people tend to relapse."

Rachel was at risk of losing both her arms

She added: "Issues that make up addiction don't materialise when you're drug-free.

"You become seriously depressed, suicidal.

"All of these things you can't cope with, normal daily tasks. And if you can't find the right treatment, more often than not, people go back using."

Rachael, from Ballymun in Dublin, began smoking hash aged just 11 and tried heroin for the first time when she was 13.

She told Ryan Tubridy on RTE Radio 1: "I went to a disco in the back fields of Ballymun and I didn't come home

until I was 26. That's what it felt like.

I went to a disco and I took ecstasy and I didn't come home until I was 26.

I felt like I was grabbed by the scruff of the neck by this mammoth entity that I couldn't get out of until I was 26.

By the age of 15, Rachael was injecting heroin into her arms, while shoplifting and working the streets to feed her habit.

Rachel as a child - she began injecting heroin at 15

But being jailed for her petty crimes exacerbated her issues, explaining: "You're being pushed into a drug culture.

"It was like being sent to a school to learn how to become a better criminal and a better drug addict."

By her mid-20s, Rachael's drug use was so severe that she'd worn away the flesh in both her arms and docs warned they would have to amputate.

She said: "It was a horror scene altogether. My veins started to collapse. I had nowhere to inject into.

I ended up injecting into capillaries which are really small veins which can't handle heroin. The citric acid burnt through my skin."

Her frantic mum published photographs of her injuries in a desperate plea for help and she was ultimately placed in a rehab centre for three months.

Rachel has written a book about her heroin battle

Rachael wrote a book, *Dying to Survive*, about her difficult recovery.

A ten-year anniversary edition is now out.

But Rachael admits the past decade hasn't been plain sailing. She said: "I did relapse after ten years in recovery and that is just the nature of addiction.

"It was the classical thing, I thought I could have a drink again and I ended up using again.

"It's very frustrating but thankfully I had a lot of support."

- The Sun