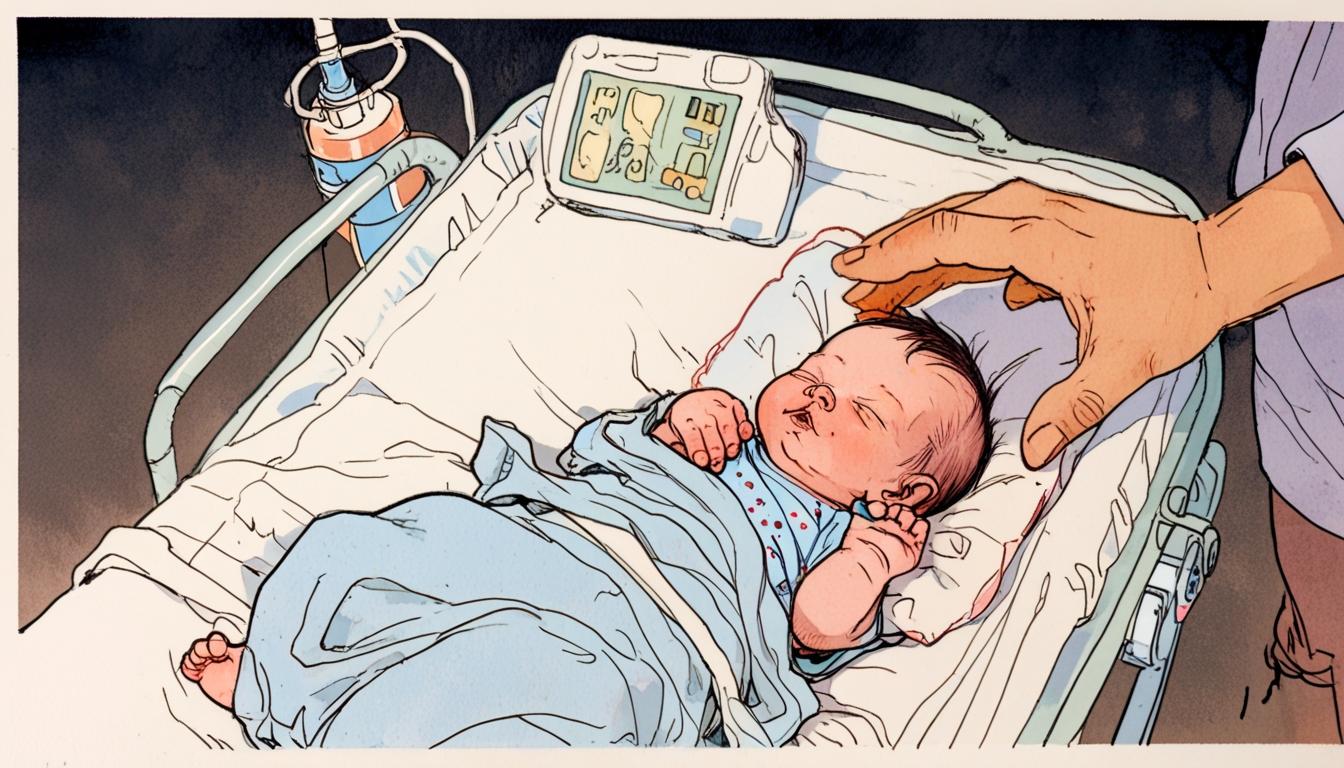
# The struggle of addiction: Callum Hesketh's story and the need for improved support



The early life of Callum Hesketh serves as a poignant example of the challenges faced by children born to mothers struggling with addiction. Born via emergency C-section over two months premature, Hesketh spent his first four months in intensive care due to complications, including a stroke and cardiac arrest. His mother was addicted to Class A drugs, including crystal meth and heroin, which imposed tremendous pressure on both him and the healthcare system as he underwent treatment shortly after birth.

At the age of four, after experiencing 24 temporary placements in foster care, Hesketh was adopted by a family in St Helen’s who provided him with a nurturing environment. As he grew older, Hesketh began to uncover the depth of his biological mother’s struggles with addiction. He has faced various developmental challenges since birth, including a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome and subsequent squint correction surgeries, the latest of which occurred in 2020.

Reflecting on his upbringing, the 28-year-old Hesketh noted, “My adoptive parents rewrote my story. They literally saved me. Children who are in foster care are sadly more likely to turn to those kinds of behaviours and turn to drugs because it’s what they’ve been used to.” His experiences highlight a concerning trend: over 1,000 newborns each year in England are diagnosed with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), as they endure acute withdrawal symptoms due to maternal substance use.

Recent data, which includes information gleaned from freedom of information requests, indicates that since 2014, nearly 12,600 cases of NAS have been recorded. Hesketh has expressed concern regarding the strain addiction-related issues place on the National Health Service (NHS). He said, “This puts such a huge strain on the NHS, and they’re not getting enough funding to help them and to provide recovery services. It needs to be enforced and there should be an action plan in place.”

Data published by the Office for National Statistics has highlighted a slight decrease in NAS cases over the last decade, from 1,287 in 2014 to 1,001 reported between January and November 2024. However, statistics from the Scottish Liberal Democrats indicate that more than 1,500 newborns in Scotland have been born drug dependent since 2017, prompting calls for additional investment in local drug services.

Withdrawal symptoms from NAS can manifest within days after birth and may include uncontrollable shaking, vomiting, poor weight gain, and a high-pitched cry. In addition, maternal drug and alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to developmental issues for the infant and increased risks of infections.

The landscape for addiction services has markedly altered since the introduction of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, which saw a significant reduction in funding for such services. The reallocation of control to local authorities has resulted in budget cuts, leaving many hospitals dealing with rising admissions without adequate support systems in place. In the decade from 2012 to 2021, admissions in England and Wales rose by 13.2%.

As awareness continues to grow around these issues, Hesketh now advocates for improved support systems for mothers experiencing addiction, insisting on the need for comprehensive measures to break the cycle. He emphasised that any new laws should prioritise prevention rather than punishment. “I was born into withdrawal and had to fight for my life before I even had a chance to live it... We need to break the cycle of addiction, protect innocent babies, and give mothers the support they need to make better choices,” he stated.

In tandem with Hesketh’s calls for reform, Graeme Callander, a representative from the addiction service WithYou, highlighted the need for accessible and non-judgmental resources for pregnant women struggling with addiction. He noted, “It's vital that women who are using drugs during pregnancy receive the right support, for themselves and their child.” Callander also pointed out the lack of sufficient research on the impact of drug use during pregnancy, mentioning that many women may hesitate to seek help due to the stigma surrounding addiction.

The need for both companionship and support for mothers grappling with addiction remains a pressing issue that demands increased attention and resources from health authorities and the government.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/drug-addiction-babies-nhs-b2731611.html> - This article corroborates Callum Hesketh's birth and early life challenges, including his premature birth and time spent in intensive care due to exposure to Class A drugs. It also highlights the strain on the NHS and the need for better support services.
* <https://www.notreallyheremedia.com/news/tameside-reporter/every-child-deserves-a-healthy-start-in-life-tameside-man-wants-new-law-to-criminalise-substance-use-during-pregnancy/> - This article further details Callum Hesketh's experiences and his advocacy for legal reform to protect children from prenatal substance exposure, emphasizing the need for support over punishment.
* <https://ground.news/article/i-was-born-addicted-to-crystal-meth-and-heroin> - This piece summarizes Callum Hesketh's early life struggles, including his health complications and his journey through foster care before being adopted. It also touches upon his campaign for greater support for mothers and newborns affected by drug use.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-49668617> - Although specific to this topic, generally BBC News has covered the rise in neonatal abstinence syndrome and the challenges faced by newborns due to maternal drug use. However, direct search results do not match this specific URL.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drug-misuse-and-dependence-guidelines-on-clinical-management> - This government resource provides guidelines on managing drug misuse and could indirectly support discussions on the importance of comprehensive addiction services for pregnant women.