

Don't end up in here like us, say killers

The prisoners involved in the youth and community project are disarmingly honest about their lives, especially in a question and answer session at the end of the play. The main actors, Jason and Steve are serving seven years for manslaughter and life for murder respectively.

Steve went out on a drink and drugs binge when he was aged 19 and killed a taxi driver by stabbing him 58 times.

Steve said: "I deserve to be here. But I made my family victims too. They've had their windows smashed and been threatened. My sisters have had to change their names, their whole lives have been wrecked because of me. The man I killed had five daughters. Their lives have been wrecked too, by a moment of madness."

Jason, 21, was involved in the recent killing of a Milton Keynes student kidnapped and dropped from a bridge and left to drown.

Jason was the driver of the car. He told the whole story how a night out and a lift home for a friend turned into a nightmare and led to death of an 18-year-old.

During the play many others gave their testimonies, including Sean, of Northampton, serving three-and-a-half years for handling stolen goods after a raid of a county post office. He said: "I got £2,500 for driving a car. But I can definitely say that if the clocks were turned back it wouldn't be worth it. I worked out every day of my sentence would have been £4.50 of that money."

Frazer, of Milton Keynes, is serving ten years for intent and conspiracy to supply heroin. He said: "I started stealing sweets at ten years old, egged on by my friends. And 20 years later I wished I'd stood up to them and said no. "By the age of 14 my parents threw me out. I'd stolen everything they'd worked hard for. I slept where I could, smoked puff because I thought it made me look cool. I was 16 when I took heroin for the first time. "By 22 I'd been to prison and I cared for nothing and no-one. I stole anything I could and ended up selling drugs which is why I'm here today. I've had 17 years in prison after stealing sweets, I'm living proof that small crime lead to big ones."

Burglar Jimmy, 44, who has spent little time out of prison since 1968 said: "When you leave prison you get £50 if you have somewhere to go and £100 if homeless. I've been unemployed since I was 18. Who is going to want to give me a job? "I've lost my family, my kids, everything which makes life worth-while. It isn't easy to be accepted on the outside and that's why people go back to crime and drink and drugs. We thought we were Jack the Lad but look at us. Why does it take us so long to work out that crime has cost us our lives?"

Former Army captain Tony, 49, a well-spoken man serving a long time for manslaughter after shooting someone over a relationship. He said: "It doesn't matter where you come from, you are all the same in here. I deserve to be here. There's no getting away from bad choices. I have four grown-up children and nine grandchildren who were 174 miles away. Prison is not fun."

Frank, of Corby, convicted of drug offences and violence, told the audience: Don't any of you leave here and forget what you've seen today.

"The 20 guys sitting here won't see their families tonight, or go home for Christmas. If you feel pressure from friends to get into trouble then they're not your friends. It's cooler to stand up to them than follow the herd. Don't feel ashamed to talk to someone about your troubles either. We've done rotten things and no-one wants to know us. "We may have thought we were great at that time but we know now that we weren't. Do anything you can to avoid ending up here like us."

SMALL CRIMES TO BIG CRIMES

Hi! I got done for Conspiracy to supply a Class A Drug, heroin. And with Intent to Supply a Class A Drug, heroin. I got sentenced to 10 years in total. When the judge sentenced me, he gave me 5 years for the Conspiracy to supply and 5 years for Intent to Supply to run concurrently.

I've learned HOW SMALL CRIMES LEAD TO BIGGER ONES. I started stealing sweets from a shop; I wasn't even ten years old. Why? I did it because my friends would say, "Come on - go and get some Yorkie Bars mate", and I did.

Only 20 years later I wish I had just turned round and said NO! But that was only the start of things. By the time I was 14 and my mum and dad had enough of me I was stealing things out of the house, things which they had worked hard to get, and in the end they threw me out, they'd just had enough. I got arrested by the police for TWOC - known to the likes of me and maybe some of you, as joyriding. I had to go to the court for that, it was my first time in court. I was only 14 at the time and the Judge, he sentenced me to 1 year in an Attendance Centre and 2 years on a Probation Order. Thinking back on it, I'm lucky to be alive! I lost control of that car, and ended up in a bad car crash. After that I got thrown out of school, my mum and dad couldn't cope with me. I had nowhere to live and I had to sleep wherever I could - that's when I got involved in Drugs.

I started to smoke Puff (Cannabis) because I thought it made me look cool, and fit in better. But as time passed I moved onto harder drugs! I was 16 years old when I tried Heroin for the first time. Since that day my life hasn't been the same. Within weeks I had my first addiction to drugs, and to have addiction, you need money to feed an addiction. Within months, shoplifting wasn't bringing enough money to feed my habit. So I turned to credit card fraud which ended with me being arrested and put into prison for a short spell. By the time I was 22 years old, Heroin had completely taken over my life, I cared for nothing and no one, I lost all respect, I started burgling houses, sometimes 3 a day. I'd go out dipping (which is pick pocketing), I'd steal purses out of hand bags - people like your mum, I'd take it not even thinking how they would be able to feed their children.

Then I found a new way to feed my drug addiction - by selling drugs, and that's why I'm in prison today. Sometimes I look at the other prisoners and think to myself - they're lucky!

Now I bet you're thinking how can you say they're lucky? Well I'll tell you why. Because some of them have only just started to walk down that path, I ran down it. And believe me the only thing you'll get out of drugs and crime is a lot of pain. So if someone should ask you to steal something, no matter how small it is, just say NO and think for the moment where those Yorkie Bars have got me.

I've had a 17 years prison sentence, that's half of my life since I started stealing.

From Yorkie Bars to shoplifting, to Fraud, Burglary, and Ram raiding and finally to Drugs. I'm living proof that small crimes lead to bigger ones.

