



## At the age of 15 I lived with a drug dealer

**Wes is in our Rehabilitation Unit. He came to us directly from Prison.**

I found out about THOMAS during my last sentence that was at Lancaster Castle. Pam came in to see me and within a week or two she had the ball rolling to get me a place at THOMAS. I never thought about rehab before because I'd never had a chance, the length of time you had to spend doing it and the funding, getting a place and everything just made it an unrealistic option. But THOMAS has given me a place and I'm grateful for everything they've done for me already. I've gained things being here, like optimism that I haven't felt in ten or eleven years.

I first started taking drugs when I was fourteen. I came across a big drug stash with some local drug dealers. I stole a lot of it. I had to pay money back to the dealers so I had to go out burgling and that started my life of crime and drug use. My Mum tried to get me help, taking me to CDT's and Drug line for help, but nothing seemed to work for me. I don't know if I was just in the wrong frame of mind at the time, I was having fun. But I was lying to her, being stupid and negative. I've been in that cycle now for 10/11 years and the lies begin to get unmanageable and too much. I've wanted to change for a long time but just didn't know the way to go about it. There are times I've thought of ending my life but I wouldn't like to put my parents and my family through that. I want to be there for them. Everything's going right for me now. I know the things I can do. I know what I'm capable of and I know where my life's gone wrong. There are things I've realised in here that I haven't picked up on before. I've done drug courses before and they just didn't work for me.

The worst period of my life was leaving home for the first time when I was about 15. I went to live with a drug dealer in a flat. All it had was a settee, no other furniture. I was selling drugs for him, I was paid in drugs and raising a habit. I was doing four, five, six or seven bags a day I had the same clothes on for about six weeks. Everyone was telling me I looked a mess. At that age I just wanted to be with my family but I was too ignorant and I didn't want to show them I couldn't cope. That was the lowest stage of my life really. Going out and having to feed my drug habit, pinching off the wrong people, dangerous people. They'd come after me with knives blades and axes. I had a number of situations where I thought, "there's no way out of this, I'm dead." There were times when I just wanted to end it. I had a time when I cracked up on crack cocaine, I got locked in a police station for three days, they couldn't interview me because I didn't know where I was, I was in a bad state. When I came out of it I realised what I'd done and how stupid I'd been. It comes to something when you want to end your life doesn't it.

I had to pay back the dealer who's stash I'd pinched when I was 15. I owed him £5000. I'd never even seen £100 before so I didn't know how to begin paying him back. He got someone following me round while I was having to go round doing house burglaries to pay him back. There was no way out of it. In a way, because of my age there wasn't much he could do, so he was giving me a bit of leeway. He was just scaring me really. But my mum and dad found out about me burgling. I had to leave home because they were trying to lock me in the house for six weeks at a time, grounding me, trying to stop me thieving. I couldn't stay in the house though because I had to raise the money to pay the dealer back. I had to leave home, and that's when the drug dealer took me in. I stayed with him for about three months. Then I got arrested by the police for a burglary and my dad had to come to court because of my age. He told social services to take me away because I was uncontrollable. Then the drug dealer and his girlfriend came two weeks later because I had another appearance at juvenile court and he acted as my legal guardian. I got sent to a young offenders institution for three months. I was in 100 man dormitories where at that age everyone just wants to fight and prove themselves. I was getting my head smashed in, dead legs, everything. That was another scary experience.

The things I've been through have made me a stronger person. I started off with nothing, and I've got nothing now, but I know what I can get if I work for it. I'm not scared to work and I've learned that there's a lot more out there than this. I've wasted 11 years of my life, the people who've grown up around me have achieved all sorts of different things and I was doing a lot better than some of them at school. They've got a lot more now than I have, they've got jobs and they're stable. I have nothing, I'm still living out of penny in my pocket and I have no security. That's not the way I wanted it to be.

The pattern for me over the last few years has been getting out of prison, spending the last days of the sentence thinking what job I can do. Mainly thinking of raising money through thieving and going back into drugs because I don't know any other path. I was institutionalised and scared of the outside world. If I had to be out there I just wanted to do what I knew best which was drugs, I'd let them block my feelings out. I couldn't relate to normal working people and I was scared of being released. I was paranoid and frightened; I'd break out in cold sweats in prison. You're supposed to look forward to getting out of prison but I felt like I might as well kill myself. I didn't want to be released; I knew I'd put my family through the pain caused by my lifestyle all over again. My life was like a yo-yo. I knew where I was going wrong and what I was doing, I just didn't know where to get help, and I didn't have the will power to change. Then Pam came into the prison and interviewed me, she put me in the right direction and told me that THOMAS was here and that I could get help.

For people still out there using drugs, there is help, just try it. Good things can happen, I've been in your shoes and I think I've been in worse states at times. I never used to think I'd be able to change, I thought I was a step above everyone else and I never thought I'd get off drugs. I've been in the THOMAS reconcile project now for six weeks and the change is phenomenal. I'm so much more positive now, I know in what direction my life wants to go, and I know there is help out there for us. We've all been good lads in the past; the drugs have just brought us down. I've missed out on a lot of good parts of my life. I'm 25 now and I just want to start rebuilding my life, get some security and stability around me, a good working job. I don't want much; just to settle down.