

Prison and Drugs *I've had enough.*

Bobby is going through our Rehabilitation Programme – He shares his story

I started using drugs from an early age at school; alcohol was the first one, then Cannabis. It was like they were socially acceptable for people like me from a council estate. There was a group of us and we just kept trying new things, while we were still at school we were trying trips, magic mushrooms and sniffing solvents. All the older lads in the crowd I was in at the time were using. It was what was acceptable, it was what everyone else was doing, you wanted to be accepted and not left out. But I guess my background before that didn't help. My mum left when I was ten, I was left on my own, passed from pillar to post and ended up living with my dad when I was 13. I moved into his house but was left to my own devices to do my own thing. Crime became a big part of it.

But I had a lot of good times as well. I did normal things like going on holiday and stuff. I was the youngest son in a family of four, I had three older sisters and before my mum left, everything was OK. But I remember the bad news—it's the furthest back I can remember, when my mum left. I don't blame her for leaving, she had to. But I was left on my own, I was ten and it was scary. It made life hard.

I was OK while I was at school though. When everything was sort of normal I did really well. Even at high school I passed every one of my mock exams, but because I'd started to truant a lot, I wasn't allowed to sit the GCSE's.

I'd become really unruly and I just couldn't be bothered to go. I was expelled a couple of times too but that was mainly because of my lack of attendance. When I was expelled from one high school, no other school would accept me. I used to play truant so much that a woman from the school board would come and pick me up, to make sure that I went to school. But then I'd just walk in and walk back out. I don't know what it was, if I was insecure or what, but I just couldn't take discipline at that time. I liked to do my own things and that, and have a laugh. No one could make me do otherwise.

At this time, using drugs was helping me fit in with other people. I didn't class myself as a criminal at the time; I was a druggie, yeah. But I was committing crimes.

I first went to prison when I was sixteen. I should have gone to a detention centre like a children's home but I was classed unruly. I was sent to a young offenders institution. It was for 17-21 year olds and I was only 16. That was for chargeable and equipped. There were four of us. We were burgling pubs everywhere around Preston town centre at the time. They got us on a charge of going equipped because we had a 2 inch screwdriver in the car, a tin of freeze foam for security alarm bells and a pair of socks that were meant to be used for gloves.

I did four weeks on remand at that time. Then I got my judging chamber after four weeks. So I was released. But it just progressed from there, car crimes and burglaries.

I was doing it to make money. I was buying drugs, going out drinking, buying ecstasy tablets, and buying nice clothes. When I turned 18 I ended up in Whetherby institution. I did a seven-month sentence in there, then got released. At 19 I went to Lancaster farms prison. It was a brand new prison so it wasn't really like doing time. All my friends were there too. The jail itself was clean, the structure, everything, it was a good jail as jail goes, you make the most of what you've got. I went back to Preston as an ex-con after my 21st birthday and that was a big shock to the system.

I've been in and out of Preston, Avery, Lancaster Castle and Kirkham. I've done long and short sentences. I had my eighteenth birthday inside, and my 21st. I missed Christmases, New years and holidays. I've missed out on a lot.

I started on heroin when I was 19. I'd just been released out of Whetherby; it was my second day out of jail. The girl I was with then was 8 months pregnant. I'd never even seen heroin before; I didn't even know what it was. It was brown and I thought it was another form of cannabis. It was nine months before we realised what we were taking, because we were smoking it, I never thought it was heroin. Heroin was a drug you saw on the big billboards, you'd drive passed in the car and see grim images of needles stuck in flesh. That was the only heroin I was aware of. I didn't realise what we were taking.

I started doing it with five other lads. Now four of them are dead. One of them hung himself in Preston prison. Three have overdosed. The first overdosed after taking heroin for only two years. Then one lad went into rehab after leaving



prison, he couldn't stick it and he quit and overdosed at home. My brother-in-law overdosed in 1998. He had two kids with my sister before he died, now she has to bring them up without him. The fourth is in jail now doing a six and a half-year sentence for supplying.

I decided to come to THOMAS because I tried every other option to change in the past but somewhere down the line I've always relapsed. I tried getting clean myself but I wasn't aware until I came here that being a heroin addict, I wasn't just addicted to heroin, it was every drug. I'd be clean off drugs done my rattle, not have a problem, but I'd go out every weekend and get drunk. It might be two months or four months down the line then bang, I'd come to outside a dealers, drunk, tenner in my pocket so I'd score a bag. I'd think I wouldn't wake up rattling and no body would know. That's how it starts again.

I've never asked for help before. I always thought I could do it off my own back. But this time, I've just had enough of the lifestyle, going in and out of jail. Missing out on a lot of things, seeing my daughter grow up.

But I was man enough to ask for help this time. There's not a lot of help out there for people like me, but I met Pam in Preston. She interviewed me twice, the second occasion she offered me a place at THOMAS.

I was released from Preston on Friday the thirteenth of December and I came here on the 6th January. I'd never met anybody else who'd been in my predicament with my problems and sorted them out and kept that way. Out there, there are people who've never taken drugs and there are people who are still taking drugs. There's no one in the middle, I've got no one to relate to. Since coming into the THOMAS rehab I've seen that there are people out there who I can relate to and are willing to help me. People who understand the problem with drugs, all drugs, but mainly heroin.

As I look ahead to the future there's a lot I'd like to do. Like the things so many people out there take for granted. Just to be normal, be happy. Have my own little flat, not be on bail, no worries, not having to go grafting. I want to break the cycle and have a normal life.