

My Story So Far

David Bird



After several experiences both bad and unfortunate in my childhood. I've decided to make this a synopsis of the events that have made me the person I am now.

Eleven years ago after a long string of bad decisions I found myself homeless in my home town of Wolverhampton. Exhausting all of my friend's charity I presented myself to the local authority. Back then there was no homeless unit to speak of.

I was told that there was no space in any of their hostels for adult males, a piece of A4 paper was thrust at me with a list of hostels in other boroughs. Until that point Wolverhampton had been my world, my bubble so the prospects of getting to and finding these hostels was truly terrifying.

The only bus I knew that went from Wolverhampton through two of the areas on the list was the 126, so I took the bus and literally looked out of the window for any hostel.

Getting closer and closer to Birmingham my thoughts were erratic to say the least. I knew nothing of the town yet alone how or where I could sleep rough. At this point I recognised a name on the list lit up in the dark "Fairlawns" it was a big building with just one entrance and it was late so not expecting to be let in I knocked the door. At this point I didn't know it but I was about to sign six years of my life away to one of, if not the worse hostel in Birmingham, purely because it was on a bus route.

The next morning I very quickly learned that I'd been placed in the main body of the hostel, what I would call the assessment unit. No food was allowed to be cooked in the rooms so breakfast was served in a communal dining room. I'd been a young offender in 1998 and the room was set up in a prison style.

I knew I was instantly being inspected for weaknesses and reason to be abused, the blood was in the water and the sharks were circling. I honestly think that without my prison experience of how to fit in with the culture (no matter how offensive) and how at times to become invisible I wouldn't have survived that first week.

So after continuing my chameleon act for a few weeks the staff saw I wasn't a bad tenant and decided to move me to one of the many shared houses they own along the Hagley Road. Again because of lessons learned previously I had managed to get myself out of a bad situation. We all wear masks despite the turmoil, fear, uncertainty and mental storms going on inside of us, I just happen to be very good at wearing mine to present whatever that particular person wants to see at that time.

The shared house was a massive relief; no violent parolees or drug addicts just the occasional alcoholic and every one pretty much kept themselves to themselves. I basically decided that this would be my life, my bills were covered, meals provided and I had a roof over my head.

It's at this point I always get asked the same question and I always give them the same answer "How did you live in that place for eight years?" There is a quote in Shawshank Redemption that sums my situation up perfectly so that is always my answer:

"These walls are kind of funny. First you hate 'em, then you get used to them. Enough time passes, gets so you depend on them."

A perfect summation of my start, middle and final acceptance of living for eight years in that hostel.

This was in no way a good way to live and affected my physical and mental health badly to the point where thinking of my situation and sheer boredom of the same day over and over made me depressed which in turn developed into alcoholism to numb my mind of the problem I'd created for myself.

In a vain effort to hide my alcohol addiction I would hide away in my room to drink eventually becoming a recluse. This in turn developed a fear of going outside of my cell, my safe place. Eventually I developed anxiety disorder. Combined with the stress of wearing my mask trying to hide from the world and an alcohol problem which had started to bring on seizures.

There are many events I've omitted from 2006-2015 mostly because the majority of society would find them horrific, mortifying, inhuman and downright unbelievable. I've decided instead to focus on what happened to change my life. That which guided me back into the world of reasonable normality. After a visit to my GP I mentioned my mental as well as my physical health. He prescribed some medicine as well as advice to stop the seizures but also handed me a leaflet for the NHS Hub.

I would have left this on the bus or just thrown it away but the number was Freephone and a morbid curiosity took hold to find out if I was just being overly dramatic about my health or if there really was something wrong.

After the initial call and many questions about my thoughts regards suicide and depression, an appointment was made to see someone from The Birmingham Mind Esteem Team. Sceptical as I waited a week wondering what to expect. When the time came a team leader came out to assess my situation to decide on an appropriate support worker. I will at this point admit it felt like so many organisations I'd used before, being passed from pillar to post, I couldn't have been more wrong.

My support worker arrived as promised and straight away identified which part of my life I wanted and needed to improve by using a recovery star chart. It sounds incredibly simple but just that one person saying, believing my problems gave me the impetus to not only take on board the steps suggested, but to follow them through, go out and make my own changes. She only showed a path to take but it was up to me to make it happen, so I did, which built my confidence and self-respect to new heights.

I could go on about all the great work done by myself and my support worker but I think the biggest show of gratitude and of a system working is this: In under a year I was out of the hostel living in my own safe secure home, became a secured tenant and I am now at the point of securing a job and giving back to society.

From eight years of being one of societies forgotten and ignored it took less than a year for one person to reverse my life.”

David Bird.

Hoping to be a Peer Mentor for Birmingham Mind