

# Journeys

This section in our magazine called "Journeys" consists solely of the stories of people in recovery. Listening to the stories of those who have recovered has proven to be a highly effective manner in which people contemplating change are thus encouraged. Stories spark hope, ignite belief and demonstrate the truth that living without mind altering substances is not only possible, but positively rich and meaningful. Please send us your stories of recovery to help pass the message of recovery on to those who need it. Stories can be sent by post to Genie In The Gutter, 88 Rodney Street, Liverpool L1 9AR or email them to: carolynedwards@genieinthegutter.co.uk

## JOURNEY STORY by Charlie

When I was using drugs I was living in hostels. My first thought when I woke up in the morning was all about drugs: how I would get them and having the means to get the money. I used to sell the Big Issue so I would be out at nine in the morning. I wouldn't eat breakfast and sometimes I wouldn't even get a wash or brush my teeth or put clean clothes on. I'd basically get out of bed, get dressed, often back into dirty clothes and go out and sell the Big Issue in town. Whether it was snowing or raining; or boiling hot I'd still have the same clothes on: a big thick coat and a bag over my shoulder. I'd soon hit the pitch in town and start selling the Issue. After about an hour to an hour-and-a-half, depending on how many I'd sold, I'd then go and score, that would go on all day. Sometimes, especially at weekends, it would go on till 10 or 11 pm. Sometimes I would think it was nice! Well at least I didn't have to ask anyone for money, or burgle houses, rob from shops or take money off someone deceitfully. I was resigned to that lifestyle; I thought there was no way out.

At night, back at the hostel, I would sit staring into space wondering how the hell I had got myself into all this. I felt so sorry for myself and would ask myself how I could get out of this mess. They were not good times; I couldn't cope with my feelings, sat in a room in a hostel on my own and even though there were certain people I would associate with I was still very much alone. There were agencies I could use, like the Whitechapel and the Basement but I very rarely bothered.

The hardest part of it all was seeing people who I knew or who I grew up with: the guilt and shame was overwhelming. But what made me feel ten-times worse was when I used to see a member of my family; that was too much to cope with. I would walk away or walk around the corner to avoid them, with tears streaming down my face. It just felt like there was no way out.

*“ They were not good times; I couldn't cope with my feelings ”*

On one of my 'normal' days I got talking to a guy who worked in one of the hostels I was staying in. He made some phone calls and managed to get me into a treatment centre in Bristol. I stayed the course: seven-and-a-half months. Then I moved into a dry house. It was based on the 12-step programme. When I was there I did whatever they asked me to do but I didn't understand it. Once I'd left within seven weeks I was back in Liverpool and using again. I used again for the next seven months. That was the worst seven months that I have ever experienced. It's what happens once you have had some clean time because you know there is a way out. You can't resign yourself anymore to there being no way out, ignorance is replaced by knowledge.

So although I had relapsed something had stuck with me: I

knew I could recover. I moved to Wales, was still using, but knew I wanted to stop. I walked into the local Police Station one morning and said: 'I've had enough'. I had no fines, so they couldn't arrest me but I did have a bag of heroin on me. I put it on the desk. They asked me what I wanted. I told them that I wanted to go to prison. But they said that I would only get a month for that [possession]. So I admitted to a charge of selling class A drugs. As soon as they put me in the cell I was aware that I was going cold turkey but I didn't care. I was given three years in prison. I spent fourteen-and-a-half months in locked up.

*“ I walked into the local Police Station one morning & said: 'I've had enough' ”*

In January 2005 I finished a Treatment Substance Offenders Programme that looked at my behaviour and my drug use around that behaviour alongside my criminal activity. I was referred to the Park View Project straight from prison.

At Park View I was introduced to the 12 step programme again and was attending Fellowship meetings. I started to question of myself, my behaviour, my thinking; and with the help of the staff at Park View I found what I think is the biggest tool I have ever got - my voice. I was finally able to speak up and share how I was feeling. I completed the programme at Park View and found a flat with the help of their resettlement worker. When I moved in there I had nothing and I was scared of being in the flat on my own without using drugs. Many people helped me, giving me bits and pieces for the flat etc. Family, friends, Park View and other agencies all gave me so much help and I got used to staying in the flat on my own. I kept going to meetings, I was doing voluntary work and I had so much support. This was the first time that I felt that I wasn't alone. I had people to help me; I had people to talk to.

Since then I haven't looked back! I got a job on the fixers programme and as part of the programme I got a placement at Park View and when a job came up there I applied for it and got it. I still work there now as a key worker, passing on a message of hope and recovery to people who still feel alone. Those horrible feelings, the loneliness, the despair, that I felt, they all went. There was one day since then that I had that empty feeling of being completely alone, but I had my phone; the one that I used to phone my drug dealer from. This time I used it to phone my sponsor, and then a friend and another friend after that. Once I explained what I was going through to them that dreadful lonely feeling in the pit of my stomach went. I went to bed that night and slept like a baby. It was nice!