

edges

The National Voice of THOMAS



THOMAS - A Place of Discovery and Hope

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Change is Possible for Everyone

Reverend James McCartney
Executive Director & Founder of THOMAS

It's almost 25 years since I set up THOMAS and I am still learning about myself and others. In the early days, I tried to piece together an understanding of human complexity. I spent the first eight years visiting people on the streets of central London, with this publication, where I immersed myself in dialogue with people who struggle with homelessness and addiction. I spent 9 years living above our drop-in-centre working with some of the most disadvantaged in the community. I explored how people deal with difficult situations while others fall apart. I then hopped into the world of indigenous community where I began to make connections with others and build recovery hubs of change.

The THOMAS dynamic is a psychosocial environment, combining, social learning, cognition and the 12 step programme. In the words of Albert Einstein, "Any fool can know. The point is to understand." Inextricably intertwined with the recovery process is building

a social environment of positive connections with others that can ignite an inner connection of self-awareness and self-identification. Likewise, honesty and environment play an important part in the behavioural paradigm shift of change. Hence you can see why a residential setting can be useful in giving people the space for perceptual evaluation of self and past behaviours. Equally, it can enhance the cognitive process with reinforcement learning.

If you are struggling with drug and or alcohol addiction, you do not have to struggle alone. Why not come to THOMAS? This magazine provides a narrative of shared experience.

Change is possible for you. We are here to help.

Contact one of our Recovery Hubs:
Blackburn - 01254 59240
Salford - 0161 792 5982



I Started Using Drugs When I Was 13

James is currently in our Rehabilitation Unit

I started getting into drugs when I was about 13 years old because of the music I was into, old school dance music. I started smoking pot and drinking with friends up Little Harwood. This progressed to drugs which was a wide cultural thing then. That progressed into crime, burglaries, theft of motor vehicles. In 1970 I got about seven sentences. The last sentence in 2001 was for four and a half years for burglary, I served about thirty- one months. In 2003 my partner was also an addict and I was supplying drugs. Then I settled down with this girl and got clean and of methadone.

I was 2nd from the top of class and I got into Uni but got back into drugs, and dropped out of college, ending up in bad relationships both using drugs. Eighteen months later I got back with my ex-partner, but she relapsed. Since then I've been in hospital through an overdose. I was taking one drug to get rid of one thing and another one to get off that. But nothing works.

I don't know how I felt, like I wasn't loved. I was but it didn't feel like it and others were doing it. My dad was not there, my mum was always working. I didn't feel like I was loved, I were but it didn't feel like it. I had to fulfil something inside, the people I knocked around with did the same. The ones who carried on did more crime, had the same ideas, and the ones I gravitated to came from broken homes, one-parent families. There was something I needed to do.

When I was 17 I was sent to a proper prison. It turned me into a nasty person, being a bully it was survival mode. I was on the Scouse wing. Terrible things were happening in there, someone got his teeth knocked out. If you didn't do what they wanted. You have to survive haven't you and I ended up doing things which weren't what I normally would do. I went to Hartfield House in

Accrington, after prison and I was a bully and got in trouble there. There was bullying there too. I can identify with that sort of area that I lived in. My dad was pretty bad. At school my way was to deal with this was to react instead of not react. I was very academic at Secondary school, but I started smoking pot, drinking and sniffing glue, magic mushrooms. I had to see a social worker because I was always in trouble because of my bad behaviour nicking off from school, causing disruption in class. I had to see a Social Worker because of my bad behaviour. Even though I was academic and was top of the class in most subjects but my behaviour was bad. I was top of year three, I had that façade at school. It was for attention, thrust on me at junior school. I was in trouble on my first day at Secondary School.

Crime started at eight years old. Shop-lifting, take people's bikes from their gardens and wreck them. At 15 I would go into garages, then onto bigger things. One time I thought that I could always bounce back. Prison wasn't a deterrent. It never was. It was not external things but internal things that did it for me. Feelings about family feelings for my children, they're the things, I could cope with prison but not having my children taken away from me for seven years. There comes a time when drugs stop working, they don't take the badness away they feed the badness more, but they don't work. Alcohol the same, I'm not an alcoholic. But it doesn't work.

Sooner or later if I did think back now I wouldn't do those things but it's too late now. I was in hospital for three weeks in an induced coma, I was hallucinating and it was scary. When I came round, I could see things more clearly what the reason was. Seven days later I went into a hostel, but I was attacked by a group of Asians with a baseball bat. I couldn't go back to that place, mouse infested, it was bad, not fed properly. One of my mates overdosed and he was found dead in his room. It was a horrible hostel, the same environment, you can't get out of it.

I have been more open since I came into this rehab, than I did in prison and I have learned more about drug awareness. I need to learn and find out about drug addiction and keep learning and the 12 Steps. To people who are addicted, go to NA or AA, talk to others and listen to them. But get into rehab, listen to people who have been there far longer than you, they have done all that so listen to them they know what they are talking about. For my future I want to give something back to be honest, I don't want to fall back into the old ways. If you are an addict get help. Do it for the right reasons. Do it because you want help.



LIVING IN A SHED

James Shares his Story

I have been here in THOMAS for 3 weeks. I had split up with my partner of 20+ years, she had thrown me out and I was living in a shed in the back for 3 months. I went to Achieve in Gateway in Eccles for 10 weeks and then to SMART meetings, then AA meetings. I was given an interview and came into THOMAS the following week.

I have discovered lots of things about myself and people like me who are in the same position. In the way that I am, an addict, just a drunk and take a smoke or two, it doesn't matter what it is you we are addicted to it's more about your personality that makes you do these things.

I started drinking years and years ago even at school, getting caned and strapped for doing wrong things, but they seemed to me to be minor things like forgetting to do homework, but it continued through my teenage years, rebelling I suppose, then I learned that mine was addictive behaviour. I thought my teachers had it in for me, others forgot their home-work and nothing was done. I felt like I was being picked on but I accepted that because of -authority – then even the police could give you a clip round the ear just for walking on the railway and not prosecuting you. I didn't think it was wrong, but we knew it was dangerous. Looking back smoking and having a bit of cider at 18 was just experimental. At 17 I was working and with having money and going to Wigan Casino all- night dancing, there was no alcohol, so we took pills and smoked weed and things.

Gambling – I have lost loads and loads of money. My partner gave me a share of the house years ago, but I gambled it all away, we would get back together so nothing changed. But now she has had enough she is selling the house, but I will not get a share so it's back to square one. But living in a shed is awful. I would go to the baths for a shower, but I was isolating myself, unless I was walking the streets and coming back with cider, smoking weed and sleeping on an old sunbed with cushions and an eiderdown, but it was still freezing, up at six in the morning because it was that cold.

I went to the doctor's and he said it would be better to get help. He could not refer me to Achieve I would have to do it off my own bat, which I did. They suggested THOMAS House and after 10 weeks they had a spare bed for me.

I did work but I always got the sack because I was not turning up because of the drink or not doing the job properly, so I stopped looking for jobs. Employers don't want people who have worked 5 months here and 3 months there. I worked at the SCB which was a good job, good wages but got sacked. I worked for 5 years on night work and still drank because there were no bosses around and I worked on a frame, so no one would see me or know. But it's always been the same, the alcohol and drugs always messed everything up. That's teenage experiments but not at 58, I was heading for the gutter as they say so I needed to change.

I discovered that I am aggressive and things like that, I know I can say 'but it's addictive behaviour' I think control is massive because that is where I was with my partner. She was sick of me, so I had to go, but I can see that was me. I was the alcoholic, unreasonable behaviour very unreasonable. I definitely, don't want to be in this position again. I was aggressive, fighting all the time, I was arrested just before I came in here, drunk and disorderly, but never charged, just spent the night in the police cells at Swinton. I need to change. The only way to do it is the Steps, listen to what they are saying at THOMAS House and meetings. I do listen, I do more than I share because at the moment I feel new. I do find it hard to say things because I don't know what I am saying, or how it sounds. I believe in God and praying but that hasn't stopped me from all the bad behaviours and everything. So, I know I have to keep up with the Step work, but do my Life Story first.

I've seen people relapse and that's my fear. I don't want to relapse I want to keep on the right track.

NO LONGER IN A SHED

*James Speaks to Edges 12 Months On.
His life Has Turned Around*

I have been with THOMAS for 12 months on Halloween. I have just done Step 10 and I work with ANTZ Junction 2 days a week as a volunteer. We restore tables and chairs sometimes change them into bookcases and things.

The last 12 months have been a rocky road, I began to realise all my defects. I've changed so much, I am more positive, my thought processes have changed. I was so negative before but now I have things pointed out to me.

I live in a Stage 2 house alone, there was another member here but he has moved on to better things and it's my house if you will, and coming from a house for 7 people, staff etc. all of them busy making meals it's like my house. I do 4 nights a week at meetings and I clean for my brother and do 3 groups as well.

When I first came here I had a beard as big as my head, but I shaved it all off, I was living in a shed, physically and mentally ill, down and out. All of this that I have now come through at THOMAS.

They made me well. Living in a community and shaving my beard has taken 10 years off my age so people say. It has been good. Living in community was harder at first than I had been used to. I work with 1st and 2nd Stage people and seeing what it has done for me encourages them. Everyone gets on well, there is unity, everyone helps each other, not like outside, no one helps outside.

Volunteering at ANTZ has made me part of that. I have enjoyed it and I may start my own business when I leave, I liked it before but now I have had a new look at it.





Success is not a Percentage

Rachel Walker
Blackburn Residential Service Manager

Today I received a phone call from a guy that came through rehab in 2012. Well what an inspiration it was speaking to him. It reaffirms how rewarding it is to work with people crippled in their life by addiction and how abstinent 12 step recovery works.

He was an extremely complicated man, endured years of substance abuse, troubled childhood, a high profile offender, spending many years in the prison system; his last sentence was 8 years, he had many violent offences along with un-diagnosed mental health problems.

By the age of 37 he had had enough, broken in mind and spirit ...

Now in 2018 his life is transformed he completed our 12 step primary treatment program and then moved on to our stage 2 supported housing service for 6 months, before gaining his own property, he continues to do remarkably well, 6 years clean & sober, he is very involved in NA, he is working. He gained employment in 2013 and has continued in full time employment to this day in various roles within the recovery field. He has a partner who he has been with for 5 years; he has rebuilt family relations and has regular contact with his daughter, whom he sees regularly.

He ended the call by saying "Thank you Rachel, and thank all the team at THOMAS, I love my life now, I love waking up everyday, I never believed recovery was possible, you

guys showed me it was."

I am often asked, what is our success rate? I say success is not a number or a percentage; it is watching people develop and change their life, from the inside out; it's not only recovering from substance misuse, but learning to live as a member of the community, to work as a member of the community, and above all to be a member of the community.

Sadly not everyone reaches this stage in their life; it is heart breaking when people fail and relapse back into the madness of addiction. For some they feel they can't, or simply aren't ready for a new way of coping with life. inevitably a relapse is not just for a day, it will be for months or even years even before the desire for change attracts them once again, even more sadly we lose people to their addiction, all too young and all having the potential for change buried so very deeply within themselves but never reaching that point in their lives to make those changes.

At Witton Bank we treat alcoholism and drug addiction as an illness and promote abstinence as essential for long-lasting recovery, we believe that freedom from drug or alcohol dependency is achievable by all, regardless of age, gender, race, culture, religious belief or personal history. It is our core belief that every person has the innate resources to be able to change their psychological and emotional dependency on mood altering substances. We also believe that without rehabilitation the individual's chances of staying abstinent after a detox are slim to none.

We continue to work with many agencies in Blackburn and the surrounding area in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our clients.



I LIVED WITH LOTS OF TRAUMA

I have been addicted to drugs throughout my life. I started drinking at 11 years old and I used my first substance, then another. Two years ago I got addicted to heroin and lost my house, my work, my son. I came into THOMAS once before, but I only stayed 6 weeks, then I left and relapsed. It got worse, a lot worse, I was out there for eleven months and I ended up going to prison.

I had nothing, no family around me. I had to go out, get drugs and I ended up going into prison. That's when I came here in January straight from prison. I had put my addiction before my son, my business, my mortgage. Everything came second to the drugs.

I went through a lot of trauma but before I got diagnosed with mental health problems from being young. I had psychosis, I self-harmed. This gave me a release and took me away from my feelings. At eleven years old I was introduced to alcohol and I tried drink to oblivion. My mum did not know how to deal with it because there was a lot of trauma so she left it, so she left me to it. I had never had that support round me, so I drank. The psychosis was really bad when I was young and with the drink and drugs it made it worse and either the medication made it worse or I didn't give it a chance.

I was put in a psychiatric ward, but I left. I used drugs instead of medication. I really struggled with people and I struggled with socialising when I came out. I was paranoid, I heard voice and the voices were getting really bad. My son is 15 and he lived with me until two years ago. We were close it affected my relationship with him. But I am trying my best now to make it up to him. He's got me back now and he is an inspiration. He looks a lot happier now. He really struggled when I was in prison. He went to my sister's, but he was stealing, he was expelled from school and my sister couldn't cope with him anymore and she ended up calling Social Services.

He was disruptive he was put into care. Someone told him about my addiction, so I explained everything to him. He knew about my addiction. Since I have been in THOMAS he seems more settled, he is back at school, his behaviour is back, it's amazing and it's good we have an amazing, better relationship.

Prison scared me. I stole to feed my habit, I was caught and arrested lots of times, but in prison I was put on the medication I should have been having all the time and it was the start of me being stabilised. I didn't have a criminal record until about two years ago and I had never been to prison before. When I was told that THOMAS had a place for me I was glad because I had a little taste of it from before, it gave me a bit of hope. I had been in and out of hospitals since I was young. I was sectioned because of my mental health problems and the drugs which I thought would make it better made it worse. It made me really poorly, I had always had problems and I took amphetamines and In 2013 I had a breakdown and I was in hospital for six months. Drugs did that, it took me a long time to come round. It took a lot out of my life because of the years I have spent in a psychiatric ward. It's really scary.

I have been in THOMAS nine months now. It was really hard at the beginning. I struggled emotionally but I have people with lots of patience around me and tried my best. It's been hard emotionally. I had to wait quite a while to do my detox because of my mental health. I had to be there four weeks and THOMAS worked with me, didn't rush me, took their time with me.

After the detox my emotions, my feelings started coming back, and it was really hard, but the staff and everyone here have helped me to face that. I have never done that before and it's benefitted me in lots of ways. It's really hands on and ANTZ Junction has also helped. There are two parts to it we restore furniture which I really like, that's tables, chairs, wardrobes, anything made of wood. It's good and they give you lots of skills, it has been good for me and good to know how to do it because you can use that at a later date.

We also restore bikes for resale so it's really good. In a few days I am moving on to Stage 2. I hope to widen my network of recovery and I am hoping I will do voluntary work and an extra day on Wednesday's at ANTZ Junction. Also, they are finding me some courses to do.

“A Better Song to Sing”

Rev. John Michael is a Franciscan and part of the THOMAS Team

‘Often I try

To analyse the quality

Of its silences. Is this where God hides

From our searching?...there is no other sound

In the darkness, but the sound of a man

Breathing, testing his faith

On emptiness, nailing his questions

One by one to our untenanted cross’.

R.S. Thomas

I have been aware for a long time of what I call the void in all human affairs; the disorder and meaningless and futility which we can find in our own experiences. I’ve discovered also the need to knock on the head the exhausting efforts of trying to make sense of an insensible world. I have often come across in our Drop-in a disturbing honesty, especially amongst the younger people, savaged and wasted by addiction, and partly savaged by the mental health systems.

They consider their lives to be of no importance or meaning in a world that they perceive does not care. At worst when those on the edge are left behind big time, by a society that is shockingly unaware that, like Greece and Rome, is collapsing in on itself with rampant individualism or lack of empathy and a loss of altruism.

As Rabbi Johnathon Sacks, the former Chief ~Rabbi wrote ‘more and more work that was once done by families and communities, is today done by the state. It’s outsourced to government agencies. The result is that you get a bigger state and a smaller society. That is really bad news, because in the social context some win and some lose. The winners win and the losers lose. You don’t have this sense of shared identity and the losers very often are the ones who don’t have access to networks of support. They are lost, vulnerable and alone.....they find themselves as ‘strangers in their own land’.

Almost everyone I meet in our ever increasing Drop-in seems to be a victim of the breakdown in society that

Rabbi Sacks writes about above.

Also they seem to be part of the breakdown of family life in general, sucked into the loss of the sacredness of things, like the bonds that connect us, loyalty, love, compassion, beauty and most importantly the sacredness of marriage and family life as the stable foundation of society. Of course this can be found almost everywhere, when a society like ours is experiencing the new dark ages, a coarseness in both language and behaviour becomes the norm and along with the paralysing disillusionment of loss of faith, what else can we expect but chaos, and even despair?

It’s not easy to keep hope alive in this context and to have integrity at the heart of things. And yet I do see this hope in many of our staff and volunteers, who are here, day in and day out, offering friendship and professional help and good food. And those who do eventually want help to get out of their desperate situation, do catch a glimpse of this hope.

Personally I have to keep looking to God in the dark places and also in beauty and culture like choral Evensong in Blackburn Cathedral, where in an almost empty Cathedral, except for some clergy and a few choir parents, the beauty and transcendence of the Scriptures with some of the most magnificent music ever written to accompany those words, is sung by the choir to give glory and honour to the God who is mysteriously present in our world, no matter how painful and chaotic it is. But this is no fairy story and mature faith does not guarantee happy outcomes.

A number from our Drop-in have died this year, some have become more ill and isolated with the use of Spice on top of everything else. Some have had their children taken from them. And then there’s the government’s introduction of Universal Credit. No matter if in theory it might be a good initiative the execution of it has been insensitive to the needs of the people it is meant to help, demonstrating again

the enormous chasm between those at the top and those at the bottom. All this can make dismal reading. But it's true, and it's only when we focus hard on these truths that we have a hope in alleviating them.

THOMAS tries to do this by working for what is just and hopefully giving a voice to the voiceless. We still have a number of our staff who have completed our re-hab and now volunteer at our Drop-in, and some become full members of staff both at our rehab and at some of our other projects. Whilst we have our feet firmly on the ground for someone like me I need my heart at my head if possible, in heaven as well, so

that I can offer more than is seen in the slings and arrows of everyday life and say as I often do to those who have reached that awful lonely place that addiction and all that goes with it brings there is a better song to sing than this'.

Because it is in the dark and empty spaces of human life that we might just discover what the American historian Will Durant wrote 'to offer people a new form of human hope and a new courage in human effort.



Therapeutic Work Activity – what does it mean?



Jean Thompson is our new Social Enterprise Manager

Social enterprise and therapeutic work activity – what does that mean and what on earth has that got to do with THOMAS?

Social enterprise is a business methodology offering real services and jobs but all of the outcomes (even profit) are intended to support social values and create opportunities for community regeneration and (in THOMAS's case) those who are living in deprivation, suffering from addiction or those who are marginalised. Enterprises are developed to create opportunities for work experience, volunteering and ultimately jobs in services and products that will bring in revenue that will sustain the business. This revenue will be channelled back into the activity to enable the social benefits such as confidence building, ability to focus on tasks, create self worth and increase of self esteem to continue and grow.

One of the main benefits of THOMAS operating social enterprises is the therapeutic work activity that the enterprises can offer to our participants and those in recovery. There are so many proven and recognised health benefits from working with your hands in a productive, creative and positive way.

benefits from gardening, painting and baking etc., other practical and physical work is no different.



Our initial focus is furniture upcycling and shabby chic with a little furniture creation from palettes and discarded restaurant furniture. We are also re-igniting the bicycle workshop in Salford, working with scrap and unclaimed bikes from Greater Manchester Police.



The workshops and retail outlets offer a supported work environment but unlike many real work environments our staff understand that our participants and service users will have good days and bad days and will offer assistance, friendly ear (or shoulder) should the need arise. Whilst there is no particular time pressure for the work activity, there is however structure, a code of conduct and health and safety rules that all are expected to follow. This structure and self discipline is very important for those who have previously led very chaotic lives.

The work activity assists individuals in the development of concentration, focus and therefore promotes calm and mindfulness, which is a valuable addition in the recovery process. So many of our Service Users have found this therapeutic work activity to be greatly beneficial and it has been a source of comfort and creativity when progress in other areas has seemed difficult.

THOMAS recognised the different opportunities that social enterprise could bring some time ago and the original THOMAS vintage furniture shop was opened on Darwen St in Blackburn offering volunteering opportunities and placements in furniture restoration.

This has now been replaced by a new shop/ workshop in King St Blackburn and a further retail outlet in Accrington on Union St. Our workshop in Clifton, Salford has re-opened with an increased number of workshops including a dedicated craft room and bicycle repair room. This has created much additional interest and therefore an increased number of participants.

It is also envisaged that in the next 12 months we will be looking to diversify into other forms of activity such as a gardening service, PAT testing and handyman service. This will enable THOMAS to make a wider and more diverse offer of therapeutic activity, help individuals to build skills and confidence and also increase their employment prospects.

The Social Enterprise team who work alongside our service users have witnessed on so many occasions individuals grow and develop in confidence, skills and ability which is so rewarding and why they do the job. Please come along and visit one of our shops/workshops, you will be amazed at the quality of products and the imagination and dedication of our participants.





Life is Much Brighter Now

I came into THOMAS straight from jail. THOMAS was my last hope really. Because of drug and alcohol addiction I had lost my children, I had no one to care for me, I was on the streets. I had no family to support me through drugs, alcohol and violence. I got myself into jail, went out and straight away picked up using again. That's when I realised I couldn't do it on my own. In jail they talked about the THOMAS project and someone from there came to see me. There was a problem at first because I didn't come from this area, but I needed help. I was released from prison and one of the fellows who works at THOMAS picked me up. On the way there in the van he talked to me about the stuff they do here. So, I came in, I settled in pretty well. It's been emotional, I must say but I think that's what it's all about. Getting into your emotions. It's nice to be able to do things that I've never been able to do because of the drugs and things.

I have children. I knew I couldn't go on like this, it's not fair that they are suffering because of me. And I have suffered as well because that was my background and why I came to THOMAS. Facing issues like emotions, family is a big one and here they are helping me here. I can't swim so they are helping me to learn. They have so much time for you. When you are feeling down and you can't explain or understand what it is they break it down and explain it to you.

You start to be aware more of your feelings, identifying it, you know I have never been in rehab before, never, this is my first time. I am discovering a lot about myself. I am getting quite a shock with

that. Power, prayer, exercise, fitness, I am proud of that and it helps you to feel good about yourself. Starting to love yourself, I have never done that. Everybody loves you, but a big part is learning to love yourself. It's a good feeling here deep down genuine, nobody wants anything from you. We sit down in the morning together and we all talk, 'just for today'. We speak about how we are all feeling that day staff as well. I do believe in God and I started going to Bible classes in jail. It's just knowing that the Higher Power is – I can't do it on my own, I need a Higher Power, somebody other than myself. My Higher Power is everyone around me, someone who can give good direction. I always think there is someone up above looking after me, but I haven't quite got my head round that one yet.

We got to groups and they are good in the café and the lads go as well. Monday there are alternatives 1 week it could be ANTZ where we do furniture restoration. Tuesday, group then gym in the afternoon. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday we do STEP Work. At STEP 3 we read the STEP then ask questions about it. GOD, WILL, CARE, what do they mean to us? Groups all day on Wednesday, unless someone is doing their Life Story. Thursday group, then IT and computer class. Friday, we clean the house and then do catch up on the week. Sunday we have recreation, then manicure etc, the work gives you a positive feeling.

I was eight years old when I started on Cannabis. My family were users and drug dealers. At 11 I progressed to Ecstasy. At 21 I was injecting heroin or anything. I used to collect battery acid. All the family were users and it went on and on. The only place to get away was jail. I couldn't say how I felt but I was lonely. Why did this happen to me? I wanted to have the life I never had as a child. I thought the kids would be better off without me. I made it worse by trying hard to stay in a violent relationship, but the kids got hit. I had stopped everything but the Cannabis and drink which was normal in my family. This is my last hope really.

I want to help others now as I have been helped



I fell apart when I was at University

Kate Speaks to Edges

I have been addicted to alcohol from an early age. I started drinking at 14 and I always drank more than the others. I was nearly always sick. I met friends in the park and I always had to be carried home. That progressed to recreational drugs. I started drinking in pubs and clubs and using drugs. I was leading a double life because I was quite studious and academic at school. I got good grades. I was always hard on myself and I was proud too. I loved school really but I put a lot pressure on myself.

I was anxious too, trying to excel at sports as well. I felt part of them. When I was at Uni I took a job near the university in a bar and I was drinking again. I was always drinking to excess trying to be the last one up, I never knew when to stop. This unmanageability, the double life, the lies trying to cover it up.

I was self-medicating too not speaking about my feelings. My dad was an alcoholic and I knew from an early age that there was something not right. He was not an aggressive drunk, he was very quiet, but

I knew something wasn't right. I used to sit on the top of the stairs and listen to my mum shouting and my dad would be very quiet. I could not express my feelings, I just thought if I could do well at school, but I was drinking and buying drugs.

My dad is in recovery now which is amazing. He follows the AA 12 Steps and has a massive devotion to the 12 Steps, he lives and breathes it. My mum got ill and had a breakdown. My sister got ill when I was at university during my last two years she was diagnosed with body dysmorphia and I did my best, trying to look after everyone, I tried to cope and be the strong one because that's what everyone thought I was.

I was doing well at university studying but underneath I was crumbling, yes, I was drinking more and more and taking drugs; my sister became ill all at the same time. She tried to take her own life. There was a lot of illness at home and I definitely tried to use drink as a way of escapism also to manage those feelings.



Spice Nearly Killed Me - Michael Shares his Story

I first came to THOMAS to look around the house. I was brought by Stuart. I had just finished Detox and was clean of all substances. I shortly relapsed and couldn't come into the house, the police tried to refer me. I had 3 times tried to get to THOMAS, but I couldn't get clean. I went back to prison many times and still couldn't get clean. I was using substances in prison.

First in prison at 17 years old, I was arrested for aggravated burglary and was given 18 months in juvenile prison. I was 18 when I was given the sentence. Serving juvenile was like being at school. People there were my classmates, friends my age from the school. I was serving time with my younger cousin, he has now passed away killed in a joyride in a stolen car a week after I came out. I spent my younger years in Higher Broughton, my mum and dad worked a lot so I spent time with my nana, my mum's mum. I went out with my cousins, roaming the estate. I've seen a lot going on round there. Joy-riding cars every day and riots at night time. Turning street lights out, always police around and stolen cars.

I was 9 when I had my first cigarette. I was with my sister and her boyfriend gave me a cigarette, I enjoyed that. I had a girl friend at 11 and she was

older than me she was 15 and her brother gave me some weed. I remember I went white and I was sick all over. But still kept on smoking it. I enjoyed my weed. I smoked most of my life till I came to THOMAS.

I started using Ecstasy first around 13 still remember taking it and walking round Manchester city centre carrying a wrench, a spanner and a screwdriver. I went around smashing 10 cars, looking for keys in the bonnet where they were hidden. I watched a programme on TV at my sisters and there I was on TV stealing, but we didn't know we were being watched on TV by a programme called Rat Trap. I was sat there saying that's me. We never ever got arrested for it.

Then alcohol drinking on Friday night. Out doing things, beating up students. Drink then cocaine at 16 do that every Friday and it became a weekly thing. I was £100's in debt, I still owe £1200, it got higher and higher, so I started stealing to pay my debts off. Sometimes I had to get my mum to bail me out. I started knocking around with the wrong ones and smoking Crack cocaine, when I was 17. That got really bad, it took over my life, the greater part of my life out stealing every day. The craziest street robberies, burglaries and down to shop lifting.

I was doing that and I went to prison. Once I asked a judge for a prison sentence because I had had enough of Cocaine and Crack and he said how does 4 months sound. I said yes and put my thumbs up. I went to Walton and I started smoking Heroin in prison. My first adult prison when I turned 21 and I was doing that every day during my sentence. This went on until I was 31. I have done 4 methadone detoxes, the 5th one I have just done. I have been in prison 30 times at least, maybe more. Highest one was for 18 months. I've done a lot of prison sentences for different crimes. I was in Forest Bank serving a year and the drug worker mentioned THOMAS . I thought about THOMAS myself. I knew someone who had come through and had done well and achieved, so I asked to be referred and I was accepted. I am abstinent. The staff and my peers are brilliant, I have never felt as welcome anywhere else, we are well looked after.

My feelings are coming back and I need to make amends to the people in my life which I will do in time. I have a daughter who isn't yet back in my life, she is 13. I existed out there but I can see clearly now and THOMAS has brought me back to life. I am proud I see good every day. My sister passed away in 2004 in a tragic car accident with her boyfriend and 2 children. 17 years ago, I started smoking Crack cocaine and I look back and blame it on my sister's death. Now I see the problem and THOMAS has shown me this.

I did Spice in prison and I nearly died, I had a fit and the nurses and doctors round me asked if I knew where I was. I knew I was in prison. I had scraped out the Spice from the sink which had dried out and smoked it. Spice is ruining lives in prison. It's rife, people are making Spice and nearly dying, having fits, banging their heads against the walls. They are picked up and put back on their beds by inmates and the officers don't see it. When they are being taken out on stretchers others are laughing, it's not funny. When tobacco was banned in prison people then smoked Spice on its own, this is more dangerous, it's really bad in every prison.

But I have put it all behind me now, I never want to see that again and if I can help others in future that's what I want to do some day.



When the Journey of Life is Handed to You

By Les

Love is the conflict of night and day,
Love is the journey of celestial play,
Love is the path that all must choose,
Love exists for all to lose.

Faith is the clay that molds a man,
Faith is the force that says we can,
Faith is the glue that holds us true,
Faith is a hand that pulls you thru.

Pain exists to show we feel,
Pleasure excites the cosmic wheel,
Love is Excalibur with hardened steel
and the actor picks just what to reveal.

When the journey of life is handed you,
Be brave and strong and just push thru,
For the time of life is yours to choose,
And love and faith will help you lose

To share the stage with all you meet,
To shine a light on all you greet,
To laugh and dance and sing your song,
Will help you show that we all belong.



I Came to THOMAS From Prison

I came out of prison and came to THOMAS on my own bat. I was here a while it took a while to detox because of a medical issue. I've just done my life story, it was hard to do but I've done it. I did a group feedback and started the Step 1 which was hard. Step 2 what they call a Solution and I believe there is a solution now. I am proud of myself really with the progress so far. I found it pretty easy to put the drugs down to be honest. 20 years now using drugs which started in prison when I was 21 years old.

I went into prison without an addiction and came out with one, that is where I was introduced to Heroin. I kept the addiction secret for a while, for 2 years till my partner found out. That was it my secret was out everyone knew about it except her. That led me down the path of destruction and chaos.

I was introduced to Crack when I came out of prison. I had a go at cannabis when I was a kid but it wasn't really my thing, I don't like weed. Crack got a grip of me for a while with the Heroin. It took me back to jail. In the last 20 years I have been in and out of jail, since the age of 14 to be honest. Prison is the way I have been brought up. I felt safe there, I didn't feel comfy outside, I didn't last too long outside because I couldn't manage outside.

I understand now, it's not just about putting the drugs down, it's about looking at yourself. It's about you and as I said I am currently on Step 2. There is one question on this I'd like to refer to. Why do you think recovery is for you? Why not, it's there, it's possible for anyone if you want recovery. I am sick of the lifestyle I have had for all these years. Life was unmanageable, now I am finding myself, I am not aggressive anymore. Looking at myself and if I fail in any situation I will admit to it. That's strong

really because I have always denied it and now I seem to be on the right track.

12 Steps and coming into THOMAS – Higher Power, I had never really heard anything like that. When I was in prison, I got 5 years for violence, a drug-worker took on an assignment to work with me and teach me. I'd had enough I recognised I 'd had enough and asked for some guidance. I see her as the higher power because initially she is this, she put me in this. People get a buzz now they say, seeing me as I am now because they've never seen me like this before, not committing offences, not using drugs, that's massive for me.

In addiction I was a nasty person, not putting anyone first but myself. Now I see there is a solution and I want that solution, I need it.

I'm just happy at the progress I've made so far, and I believe if I can continue to do the Steps and make amends to those people I hurt I'll be even more of a better person. People who are still using are asking me about the THOMAS Project. Passing the message is, in my eyes that's good enough for me. Basically, it can work for me so why can't it work for you? Do you really want it? That's just me really the way I am, like I said putting down the drugs I found pretty easy. Only 4 months in but I like the staff, they are just like us really all addicts working the Programme, through the Project. That's the way they are and I have nothing but respect for the people. Friendly Fellowship, it's massive. I've been an addict all these years and I've only just heard about it when I first walked into a meeting 4 months ago. And I am still here so you know. Who is keeping me here? Maybe it's my mother who has gone and is putting things in my path, I see her as my guardian. That's just me.

I have the direction and that's what I need. In addiction I was a nasty person but today I am alright, I am approachable. I'm passing the message to new lads who come into the house. They'll follow in my footsteps, if they see me doing my stuff and following my lead. I see that as they'll grow from that and as you do the work you'll tell others, that this stuff really works, you just have to stick it out. So long as you do the work you'll be ok.

I say the Serenity Prayer, touch my mum's picture, I haven't used to-day and I keep it in the day. As long as I keep doing this I know I'll be alright.

Bernard shared this story with Edges in 2017. Since then he has grown from strength to strength. He continues to be an inspiration to many people. 2018 has been a great year for him.



I DECIDED TO END MY LIFE BUT INSTEAD I FOUND GOD

John has had a drug problem for many years.

I am addict. 2 years ago I felt the presence and the need of God in my life. What led me to that experience, I will explain. I had been for years battling my alcohol and drug addiction; trying to control my use and be a 'gentleman drinker' and also trying to stop altogether. I failed every time and my drinking and drug use was making all my family miserable and me for that matter. My children have seen me in some terrible states; I was horrible to my kids and ex-partner and my mum. I was arrested a few times for assaulting my family members like my brother. It was also affecting my work and every other aspect of my life. I would wake up most mornings, completely unaware of the chaos I had caused the night before. I blacked out a lot. I also went to work withdrawing all day everyday until I got home and had a drink to stop the jitters.

This went on for years, until one night I got home from work and waited for my partner at the time and my kids to go to bed. I had had enough of life and my addiction and all the pain I had caused everyone. I decided to end it all and kill myself. So I took a massive overdose of all the tablets in the medicine cupboard. I left the house and headed for the field so I could die in peace; but I collapsed in the street and was found by a passer-by. I was rushed to hospital where I nearly died. When I woke up I was in the Critical Care Unit with tubes and monitors everywhere. I felt so alone and useless at that time. When I was on the unit I saw two people die and for some reason which I can't explain I felt the urge and the need to go to church which in the hospital was a multi-faith room. As

soon as I was able to get up and walk I went everyday and prayed. And for the first time in my life I felt comfort, even though I had lost everything due to my addiction and the final straw of my suicide attempt. All I had left was God and to be honest He was the only thing that could make me feel comfort at the time. Before this experience I was probably one of the biggest atheists, Anti-Christ people you could meet. I would tell anyone that God wasn't real and if He was He was evil because of my life and everything that went wrong. I had no faith.

I would like to say my life has been a bed of roses since I have had God in my life, but it hasn't. I have lost my faith many times in the past 2 years; failed attempts at rehab and psychiatric wards because of my addiction, but every single time I have been at my darkest and lowest points I always reached out to God and I got through.

5 months ago I was trying to get back into THOMAS rehab and I prayed to God every single day to get back to THOMAS. Within a month I was in hospital yet again, an intervention by God and I was detoxed by the HALS team and back in THOMAS. I honestly believe God works through people and since the first week in rehab I have been to Church every Sunday and pray daily and not just for myself, I pray for how I can serve others and God. Now 5 months on and 128 days clean and sober I'm in the Second Stage at THOMAS and a future I'm excited about. Going to college and doing courses and I'm slowly getting my family back. That's thanks to God and the people that serve him at THOMAS. I will never lose my Faith.

Mental Health – an increasing problem

James McCartney MSc (Psych)

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Mental illness is putting unprecedented pressures on public services. The escalating level of demand is distressing and disturbing not only for the mentally ill but for the many professionals having to deal with an overstretched service and overworked human resource. Although over the last several decades there have been extraordinary strides in collaborative thinking and joined up working and a revolutionised approach that has moved from large institutions to care in the community, we still face a challenge in how to ensure that everyone, no matter where they live or who they are, has access to services of good and effective quality. This was the clear and precise recommendation from the Care Quality

Commission's assessment of mental health services (2017). However, is the Government listening? Well, we will still have to wait and see!

If we are to tackle the interwoven challenges, one thing is clear, community based approaches will play a defining role in building and maintaining sustainable mental well-being. We are now in the aftermath of the austerity period. There is a possibility for us now to re-assess the way forward. Therefore a sense of relief after an austerity programme that lasted almost 8 years, stemming from its introduction in 2010. There is no doubt cuts to date have disproportionately hit some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

Mental health problems range from a variety of disorders with the major categories being: neurodevelopmental, schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders, bipolar related, depressive disorders, anxiety, obsessive disorders and trauma and stress related disorders. More needs to be done in reaching out to these vulnerable cohorts. A recent report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate and Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (2018) has confirmed that police officers are increasingly being used to pick up the pieces of a broken service. The report highlights that the police are often overwhelmed and can't always respond appropriately. It also supports the view that people in mental health crisis don't always get the help they need. THOMAS has first-hand experiences of the problems.

Within drug and alcohol treatment throughout the UK there is an increase in day PSI's, utilising a comprehensive and impressive framework of psychological theories. Yet we often work with cohorts of people who struggle with the cognitive process and the ability to adapt to change. Adapting and changing your mind according to the situation is tricky and needs a lot of conscious effort. Over the years I have watched how levels of stress can increase as people progress within recovery as they have to navigate the brain's executive functioning in new situations. This is the multitasking part of the brain, working with emotional control, impulsive control, flexible thinking, working memory, self monitoring, planning, task initiation and organisation. These are the multi-skills needed for the work environment.

More research is needed within educational psychology on the learning dynamic within the adult domain. Educational psychology needs to bypass its protective walls and provide a greater contribution in the therapeutic domain. Prolific histories of substance abuse in adolescence have created turbulence in the transitional stage

into adulthood. This can create some problems in rehabilitating some people into the workforce. Hence we need to expand that bridge between educational psychology and therapy to facilitate a deeper learning in occupational psychology. The challenge we face with our recovery models is how to provide employment opportunities for adults with sporadic work histories at best and non-existent at worst?

Our clients remain central to our learning. THOMAS has a determination to provide greater opportunities for those who have limited work experience, the main focus being social and occupational integration, igniting the cultivation of employment rehabilitation.

A Recovering Addict

Anon.

Set free from the chains
That bound me so long
To a life, where I begged, stole and borrowed.

You could see in my eyes
That inside I died
Yet I still had my pride left to swallow.

My world fell apart
And to my knees I did fall
For the first time my soul cried out.

God if you're real, then why can't I feel;
I need help today, not tomorrow.

So I picked up the phone
And my soul led me home
To a place where freedom begins.

My problems are being solved
I now get involved
I'm no longer on the MARGINS.

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