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## **Stories of Resettlement**

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## 1. Introduction

This report presents the detailed stories of five men and women who have spent time in prison and are in the process of ‘resettling’ into life outside. The five are from different backgrounds and are at different stages of the resettlement process, but all have stated their clear desire to lead productive lives and to stay away from offending in the future.

The five stories that comprise this report are derived from two in-depth, one-to-one interviews conducted with each individual as part of a wider study of resettlement<sup>1</sup>. Supplementary material was gathered through interviews with staff at resettlement agencies which were working with the individuals, and through which they had been invited to participate in the study.

The five study participants spoke in interview about their experiences, including highly personal and sensitive matters, with a great deal of insight and openness. As a result, the stories presented over the pages of this report vividly and powerfully convey the complexities and challenges of resettlement.

The first story told in this report is that of Leila.<sup>2</sup> She is a 41-year-old mixed race woman with a long history of drug-related offending. She has, however, been out of prison and drug free for the past five years. A 29-year-old British Asian woman, Nadia, is the subject of the second account. She has served just one prison sentence – from which she was released a little more than a year ago – and is seeking employment and to establish herself such that she is able to take back care of her three children from the local authority.

John, a 33-year-old white British man, tells his story next. He received his first custodial sentence when he was 18, and years of drug-related offending and convictions for alcohol-fuelled violence followed. He last left custody two and a half months before he was interviewed for this study. The fourth story is that of Steve, a black British man aged 43. He was just 15 when he first entered custody; and went on to receive lengthy sentences for armed robbery. He had been released from a 12-year sentence six weeks before he was interviewed. Finally, Khaled is a 30-year-old originally from North Africa who has been living in the United Kingdom since he fled civil strife in his

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of this research was published by Clinks as ‘*Double Trouble*’? *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Offenders’ Experiences of Resettlement* (Jacobson et al, 2010). This report presents some of the findings of case study research conducted as a follow-up to ‘*Double Trouble*’. A companion document on the follow-up research has been produced, which draws out key findings for resettlement policy and practice (*Lessons for Resettlement*, Phillips, 2011). The interviews for the follow-up study was undertaken by a research team comprising Coretta Phillips, Andy Aresti, Sylvia Chenery and the author.

<sup>2</sup> All names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of participants.



home country at 13. He has served many prison sentences for drug and alcohol-related acquisitive crime and violence – the last of which he was released from around two years ago - and has also spent several periods in psychiatric hospitals.

Notwithstanding the many differences between the five study participants, some common themes emerge in their stories – in addition to their shared desire to make a success of resettlement. The other common themes include the value they ascribe to support received, at key points in the resettlement process, from certain individuals in relevant services who have treated them with warmth and respect, and invested time and trust in them. There are many references also to the importance of counselling and other such therapeutic work which has enabled them to confront and address their offending behaviour and what they perceive to be its causes. And they tend to talk fervently of their ambitions to 'give something back': to make amends their wrongdoing, particularly by helping others escape from cycles of destructive (and self-destructive) behaviour.

## 2. Leila

Leila is a 41-year-old mixed race woman who describes herself as a Christian. She is living in a housing association one-bedroom flat, and is working as a volunteer for the resettlement agency where we met her – conducting assessments of clients. She also has part-time paid work with a supermarket. She has a partner, and has two daughters from previous relationships. Her eldest daughter is aged 22 and has a three-year-old daughter of her own; the youngest is seven and was adopted at three months against Leila's wishes. Leila has a strong, close relationship with both her parents, who have always been supportive of her and cared for her elder daughter whenever Leila was in prison.

Leila has a long history of drug-related offending. She received her first prison sentence in her early twenties, and went on to receive several more, as well as non-custodial sentences. All her convictions bar one were for theft and going equipped for theft; the exception was a conviction for assault on a police officer. In total, she has more than 50 criminal offences recorded against her name; but has committed no offences since she was last released from prison in 2006.

### Drug use and offending

Leila's drug habit – which she was eventually successful in tackling – was long-running and severe, and involved the use of both heroin and crack. She started to use drugs at around the age of 20, when her elder daughter was a baby:

**[I was] a very naïve, very naïve young girl. It was introduced to me and I took it and from there it just snowballed. And then after that ... my life just completely and utterly became drugs. That was my life. My relationships was drugs, that was my love ... And all the other stuff that come with it, which would've been all the down stuff, the prison to the being in situations that are kind of dangerous for myself and things like that - they all came as part and parcel ...**

**... The first part of my using was, it was fun and it was exciting and it was getting off your head and stuff like that. But when it came to having a physical addiction to it all and then having to now support it and the things that I would've done to support it. And then the things that had happened around my family and stuff like that, I then really hated the person I'd become and I couldn't sit with who I was then. So I would use, I would take the drugs, I would just take them and take them and take them just to completely obliterate myself so I wouldn't have to think about it.**

Leila supported her drug habit by shoplifting underwear from large stores. Her convictions for 'going equipped' related to a pair of nail clippers that she would carry with her to remove the security tags from the packs of underwear she would steal.

**A lot of the times I could make a lot of money. I'd never say that I was good at it because I often got caught, but I could make the money. And sometimes I would make 100, 150, 200 pounds a day. In the beginning it was more about the more money I could take and then, towards the end, [it] was that I got enough money to get myself out of trouble so that I wouldn't be sick.**

**... The money would be around in the early days because lots of people would order stuff and there was also somebody that owned a market stall and you could get as much underwear – Marks and Spencers, British Home Stores ... all day long they would buy as much as you had. And I could get a range - you know the big washing bags, I used to be able to just fill them up with it all. That's how easy it was back then.**

**It'd get harder and harder and obviously because I'd become so addicted and my appearance had obviously started to change. You know, I looked like an addict, basically skinny, my face completely scarred, where when you smoke the crack you think you've got a little spot – because it numbs you, you'd dig at it, you can't feel it and the next morning you've just got this massive mark on your face. I started to really look rough and ill. So it was getting harder and harder to go in a shop and not be spotted, so towards the end it was something that I was happy with £40.**

Leila experienced harsh treatment and racism during much of the time she spent in prison:

**And [prison staff] can be very rude and very nasty... You're all locked up like animals. You're let out like an animal and then you're back in your cage; and then you can come out and have a bath if we decide that we've got enough officers, and you've behaved yourself... And they moan at you and say, 'Well, back in the day you were only allowed to have a bath once a week and you were allowed that much water... So you should thank your lucky - think yourself lucky.'**

**And there was racism. ... There was an officer that would call you Treacle. ... His excuse was that that was something endearing, but this was a very nasty officer. And Treacle was him being racist - calling me Treacle, in other words, I'm the colour of Treacle ... But there wasn't anything about you that showed compassion or empathy or anything. You were very, very happy to shut that hatch in my face and tell me, 'No', and slam it just half way through mid-sentence: you'll slam it – 'No!' – and slam the hatch in my face.**

## Impact of drug use and offending on family

One of the most profound repercussions of Leila's drug using was the adoption, against her will, of her younger daughter, who was born after a pregnancy during which Leila had continued to use drugs. In interview, Leila described to us the experience of having her baby taken away from her, although she evidently found this difficult to talk about:

The minute she was born – she was born seven weeks early I think she was – and this is how you know how my experience of social services is horrible - I hadn't even had the chance to sort of close my legs and clean up. The woman, the social services woman from the hospital, had come in there and was just firing questions and questions and questions. I couldn't even answer, I'd just given birth.... This woman, she didn't want me to take her home. She wanted to take her from me then so I was under really strict guidelines with her in order to bring her home. ...

She was newborn and I think it was within three weeks I was supposed to be in detox, and then from there on to a mother and baby rehab ... But ... that's when I run away and I run away with the baby. It was too much too soon. It was just too much too soon you know, and there was an Adoption Order put out on me, like I was going to - as if I was going to really kill or damage my child. And I got really scared of that ... And so I brought the baby back and I thought if I give it to my mum, leaving care with my mum and dad, and I run off again - and they took her three days later, they took her. She was three months old and they just come and took her, police. I wasn't there and I know my mum and my [older] daughter still hurt from it now. So yes, yes, see I get emo-...

Leila's relationship with her older daughter was also damaged by her drug using and periods spent in custody. She told us about how her older daughter would reluctantly and angrily visit her in prison:

My daughter was always angry ... When she was young she'd come [to visit] and she would be all, 'Mummy!' And she'd cry when she'd leave and that would be really horrible; and as she got older, to a teenager, she was very angry and she didn't want to come and see me but my parents, well actually they'd kind of say, 'You've got to go and see your mum. You're coming if you like it or not.' So she'd come there very very angry and really ruin the whole visit. ... And I'd see other mums that had children, daughters of that age, and these were women that obviously wasn't drug users ... The relationships that they had you could clearly see were really good. They would be sitting together, cuddling and things like that.

And that never, that doesn't even happen now you know. Me and my daughter's relationship is very very strained and it always will be ... I don't think that me and my daughter will ever have a close relationship and I think my mistake was that I tried to make up. ... My relationship with my daughter will always be strained, but I will always be there... There's nothing more I can do and I've come to that conclusion. ... It is really hard with my daughter and that is my own making, but I have to look at that she's an adult now. ... It's down to her now. I've done all that I can and I can't do no more with the relationship. I have to now wait for her and that's what I do. I'm having to wait for her to open up and let me in and that's all I can do, all I can do.



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Notwithstanding the continuing difficulties in her relationship with her daughter, today Leila is very attached to her 'gorgeous' three-year-old granddaughter:

**My granddaughter will never ever know nanny as an addict, you know. My daughter, she's been it all through her life, her mum's always been a drug user and she still suffers for it today, you know - and I can't change that. But I've always sworn that with my granddaughter it will be so different.**

### **Making a change**

When Leila was in her mid-thirties, she received a two-year sentence and, after being released on licence, was recalled to custody on account of further offending. It was while she was in prison on recall that she made a clear and firm decision that her life had to change. On release from custody she entered a drug rehabilitation programme, and with the exception of one relapse at an early stage has not used drugs since. She speaks of her decision to stop using drugs and make a new life for herself as having a spiritual dimension, and as the culmination of an internal process of self-change:

**And I can only say that it was a divine intervention just switched this light bulb on and just said, 'Leila, this is it now. This is the end of it now: you've got to move on.' ...**

**... I think you can throw everything at somebody but ultimately the decision does lie with them. It does lie with them eventually. For me it lied with me. It had to be my decision for me to say, 'This is enough. I can't do this anymore.'**

While Leila made it clear in interview that the process of self-change that she underwent depended ultimately on her own commitment and motivation, she also stressed that she was greatly helped by certain individuals and organisations along the way. These included a drug worker she had first met through an arrest referral scheme; and a vicar whom she had got to know outside prison, and who then came to visit her when she was next in custody:

... His name's John and he's a vicar and I don't know what happened and I can't remember how I got to meet him, but he opened his arms to me. And I used to go and see him every Thursday and just used to talk and he was a Father and he would pray for me. And we would talk and I'd meet him every Thursday. I'd go and I'd just sit in the church and I would just talk and openly. He'd ask me questions and I would tell him.

... He came into the prison. He sent me money while I was in the prison to help me with my canteen and stuff. He supported my mum wholeheartedly. ... And that's the only person that was there for me and that wasn't because he was part of an organisation where that was his job. He was just, he was just a Father, Father John who took a liking to me and gave me a special part of his life. ... Because he must've seen something in me - that's the only thing that I can think of.

Leila also spoke with great warmth and gratitude about the staff on the residential drug treatment programme that she attended – and particularly her key worker:

Well, what I can say about them is that they were such beautiful people that had so much compassion and empathy, and also a part of me was willing and was open for people to challenge me if they needed to ... And it was nine months and it was the best nine months that I'd ever had ... [Before] I'd had rehabs, little stints of rehabs - always just walked out. But this one, but again it was because I was ready as well - I know that now - but they were so beautiful.

My counsellor, key worker - his name was Jim and he was just amazing. The way he would get you to think and explore stuff and allow you to then come to the conclusion in your head. And it's not like what I've had before where they tell me my conclusion - they tell me why I did what I did. He allowed me to explore it all and he was amazing.

## Looking ahead

While Leila feels that she has already made enormous and positive changes to her life, she is aware that this is an ongoing process that she will have to continue to work on.

**I use the word 'resettle' because the massive part of what I'm doing is I'm trying to resettle myself back into society the right way ... And I'm achieving it gradually - it's still got a way to go, but there's no going back now you know. And it's scary and sometimes it can be really overwhelming in a negative way, but it also can be overwhelming in a positive way. So overwhelming, joyful, happy about it. But it's something that I've got to do. I've got to do for myself .**

**... I've still got a way to go but I've built up so much now and I'm so happy with and pleased with me right, that to go back that way it's impossible. ... The things that I done to my family were hurtful and to my children they were the hurtful things. ... And now the drugs have gone and the person that I am today – I love the person that I am today. And sometimes I just sit back and I just think, 'God Leila, look where you are ... Look how far you've come.' ...**

**It ain't easy, but it's easier than what I thought it was going to be, put it that way. [Because of] the *want*, the *want* to do it has made it easy - that I don't want to go back to jail and I don't want to go back to taking drugs. And I don't want to go back to hurting my family. I don't want to weigh about seven stone and look ill, look like death warmed up. I don't want to go back to that.**

In interview, Leila spoke also of the need for services that can help to provide the spark for others to make the kind of change that she has been through, and to support the process of change. Leila also believes that she herself is in a position to help others improve their lives, just as she had been helped in her turn. Volunteering in the resettlement agency is one way in which she is already doing this; moreover, according to one of the caseworkers from this agency, the fact that it is a highly professional organisation with staff predominantly from minority ethnic groups is empowering for her, as a mixed race woman herself.



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Leila argued that the most important thing that resettlement and related services can provide is a sense of hope for individuals who might otherwise feel they have nothing to strive for:

**If you don't have a service to support the people that need supporting, then there's no hope for that person ... Ultimately, bottom line is that services provide hope more than anything. They will provide hope, and hope might sound like a small emotion that doesn't warrant a massive amount of money being given so that we can give people hope.**

**But I believe that it does. Hope's a tiny little word and funding a service is a massive task but you've got to give them something for them to ultimately make the decision that they want to change. And if you don't give them services to say that it's there for you, no one's going to change ... They're going to think, 'Flippin' hell I can't ... How am I going to do it? How the hell am I going to do it?'**

**You've got to give them hope. You've got to give them the opportunity and the chances, to show them what's there and to show them changes can be made. And when they've made that decision, that service is there.**

**... And for that one person that takes up all that's been offered to them, and makes real changes in their life and then becomes a really valid member of society - you've made a difference. You've made a difference, right. And ... my goal is to go on and show people that I was once like that. And again it goes back to give them hope and show them like you know what's bloody possible.**

**... I want to give people hope and inspiration, and that's the reason why I come here and I volunteer my services freely. Because I want to give people hope and I want to give them inspiration and I want to show them. I'd love to go into prisons - that'd be my ultimate goal, to be to go into prisons and work with people that were like me, that would turn up at these courses that they'd signed up for because there might have been the incentive at the end of it - the cigarettes and tea or coffee or something like that. And that was me.**

**...But by having somebody who has been exactly where you have been, lived the life you have lived, is now able to show them that it is possible. I want to give them hope and show others it really is possible to change.**

### 3. Nadia

Nadia is a 29-year-old British Asian woman from a Pakistani background. She was brought up in a Muslim family, but states that she herself has no religion. In 2008 she received an 18-month prison sentence for drugs offences – possession of class A drugs with intent to supply, and conspiracy to supply class A drugs – but does not have any other convictions. She reports that she has herself never used drugs. She lives with her partner in a housing association flat which she obtained through the resettlement project where we met her. She has three children from two previous relationships, all of whom are currently in foster care. She last saw them two months ago, and is hoping that they will come back to her care when she is more settled and financially secure.

#### Family background and relationships

Nadia describes her life so far as being full of incident, and says that friends have told her she could ‘write a book’ about it. She was born in Pakistan but came to England with her parents at the age of four. She was brought up in a traditional Pakistani culture that she was always inclined to rebel against – unlike her younger brother and three younger sisters – and within a family in which she was subjected to some violence. When she was 18, she was taken to Pakistan by her father and forcibly married to a man who proved to be highly abusive – both physically and sexually.

Nadia explained to us in interview that she had never felt at home in the culture that her parents had adhered to:

**I rebelled against [the culture]. Because how they deal with things, I just did not agree with it. Where I’m actually outspoken. [Laughs.] My dad didn’t like it. So in that sort of environment you’ve got to actually - now if you’re saying something, I’ve got to shut up and listen to it. Whether I like it or not. Now if I speak up you’re going to raise your hand at me, do you know what I mean? So that’s what I kept on doing: is saying my side. But my dad didn’t like it. He thought marrying me off would change me but it made me worse ...**

**... And [in the marriage] I wasn’t willing to get abused sexually, you know, get beaten up every minute of the day. I wasn’t prepared to do that and be part of that sort of lifestyle with them.**

Nadia told her parents of her husband’s violence and abuse, but they refused to offer her protection or support. For this reason she cut all contact with them – and has had no contact since. She left her husband when she was 21 and pregnant with her second child. Shortly after leaving her husband, she met a new partner, with whom she lived for five years and had a third child. In time, however, this relationship also proved to be a destructive one for

her. She had spoken to her partner of the abuse she had suffered at the hands of her husband, but then found that this was used against her - including the fact that the two children she had had by her husband had been, as she described it, 'conceived through rape'.

**Because where I actually opened up to him and told him exactly what I'd been through and everything, he actually kept on throwing it in my face. That, you know, you've got, you're bringing up two rapists' kids and stuff like that. So, I think, and I'm no good as a mum to them .. Yes, he was saying that to me, and this is the guy I was with for five years. So obviously that's why I split up with him because I was tired of sort of like having it thrown in my face. So I couldn't deal with the pain either. And the more he was saying it, the more it's just like I believed it. Yes I'm no good to my kids, do you know what I mean? So like, you know, I'm damaged. He called me damaged goods.**

## **A downward spiral**

Nadia left her partner, but became depressed and struggled to cope on her own with her three children. Feeling that she was failing them, she arranged for her ex-partner to take care of the children – including the two daughters from her former marriage:

**I was on like depression pills. And my head wasn't right. So I wasn't - I actually recognised for myself that I wasn't fit enough to actually look after the kids. ... Because to be honest with you I used to, I didn't want to get out of bed. And because of my thinking and my selfishness I would say - I think I'm using the right word, for myself - on those days, I never used to take the kids to school, that's how bad I was.**

Living on her own, Nadia continued to suffer from depression. This was compounded by the fact that, despite her ongoing feelings of anger and bitterness towards her parents and siblings, she greatly missed her mother. As her emotional problems spiralled, she took an overdose.

**And then, you know, just like when Christmas come I was missing my family and you know, all, especially my mum. Do you know what I mean, it was like I was 27 and sort of like, you know, I still craved for my mum's love to be honest with you. Because obviously, you know, she was the closest to me in life. So, you know, everything just got to me and everything. And that is when I took the overdose.**

It was in the period immediately after the overdose that Nadia became embroiled in the situation that ultimately led to her prison sentence. In an emotionally very vulnerable state, she got to know a man who she believed to be offering her support, but in fact wanted to exploit her vulnerability. She says that she agreed to help his drug

supply operation because he made direct threats against her and her children, and that she was 'stupid enough' to do what he said rather than go to the police. The result was that she served nine months in prison. She found the experience of going into prison shocking, and is adamant that she will never re-offend:

**And it's just like when I actually went to S- [prison], because that's where I got sent, I was just an emotional wreck because for one I've never been in a situation like that where it's going to land me in prison ...**

**... It's not in me to be a criminal. What I'm actually, like, I've done nine months for, I wasted nine months of my life, took my kids away from me, lost everything, for what? Do you know what I mean? So crime ain't something that interests me or I get a kick out of it. I find that highly embarrassing.**

## **Moving on**

Nadia left custody a little more than a year ago, and since then has been seeking to build a more stable and secure life for herself. She believes that she has been helped in this process by counselling she received in prison and by the input of the community-based resettlement agency, T- (which had arranged our interview with her). She had been referred to T- towards the end of her custodial term, and it provided her with first temporary and then permanent accommodation. She told us that the agency – and particularly her key-worker, Jill - is also providing her with ongoing practical support on matters such as finances and job-hunting, and all-important emotional support:

**There's so many times I've lost hope. But then it's just like through T-, they actually encourage me even more, do you know what I mean? And that's why I haven't lost hope again. And I think if I didn't have T- and I didn't have a key worker, ... [I'd have] lost motivation ages ago.... So in a way all that I'm doing now and everything, and the motivation I've actually got ... is because of the kick I've got from these people. ... I mean Jill's brilliant - if I'm actually feeling down I just text her, and I'll tell her how I'm feeling. ...**

**They give you the confidence, they give you the encouragement ... And I talk to them as if they're my mates. Obviously they come across like they're on a job ... But at the same time they make you feel comfortable, what you're talking about, and what you want to talk about to them. So you don't feel as if you've got back off for a bit, or hold back on what you want to say to them... If it wasn't for these guys I don't think I'll be the way I am today - I swear to god.**

Nadia's children are currently in foster homes, because the local authority had concerns about the care provided for them by her ex-partner, and when she left custody Nadia felt that she was not yet in a position to look after them properly. Jill, her key worker from the agency T-, told us in interview that Nadia had voluntarily withdrawn

from custody proceedings relating to her children; and that the judge had commended her for this - stating that she clearly loved her children but recognised herself that she was not yet emotionally ready to take them back into her care. Nadia generally visits her children about once a fortnight, but at the time of the interview had not seen them for around two months. She explained to us the reasons for this lack of contact:

**I can't bring myself to actually see them because where I haven't got myself into a position where I can financially just go down there, support them what they need and that, I just feel ... At the moment I just feel like a failure to them. I know some people don't actually think that - you know, at least it's one contact – better than nothing. But everyone thinks differently and if I feel like a letdown and a failure, and I'm miserable, I don't want to be miserable in front of them. I want them to see their mum sort of like be smiles and everything, and, you know, able to provide for them and support them even when they're not in my care. Until I can't do that, I can't bring myself to see them. ...**

**... When I go down there I don't want to go empty-handed. I want to buy ... I know presents can't make up for the time I ain't seen them for two months now, but it'd be nice for them to actually just open something from me. Saying that, you know, I'm sorry I haven't seen you for a while, but it's not going to be forever like this.... I just want to do my best, yes I just want to do my best for them, do you know what I mean? I don't want to be - I've let them down already... But this time I'm not going to let them down.**

Nadia continues to have no contact at all with her parents or siblings, and is clear that she does not wish to change this situation:

**... I'm not even trying to get back in contact with [my family]. Because I'm happy without them now, do you know what I mean? I do, out of all of them I just miss my mum. And that's it. All I've got is memories with her and that's it. And I think that's good enough, because no one can hurt me from that, do you know what I mean? And I don't want to get hurt again by them, it's not worth it.**

At the present time, Nadia is very focussed on finding work – although she is anxious about her criminal record affecting her chances of doing so – and, through employment, achieving independence and financial security. She is clear about what she wants to achieve at this point in her life:

**I don't know if I should use that word 'desperate' to actually get back on the working line. I'm so**



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desperate to do that because I've never been out of a job for this long... And I still haven't got a job, and I'm just finding it really hard ... When I'm independent, got accommodation, I want to be able to pay for my own stuff ... and just say I'm not a person who wants to live off benefits because living on benefits you can't achieve what you want to achieve in life. ...

I mean I want to do my driving [licence]. I want to actually get into a good job and provide for my kids, and one day get a mortgage ... And my main goal is to actually get my kids back in my care ... [Social Services] actually said that three children, single, you're going to struggle. ... It's like proving myself to people. Until I've proven these people wrong, do you know, because they just seem to think I can't do it. And I'm on a mission, shall I say ... I'm more than determined to actually prove people wrong and also get myself back on that track where I just want to be going up the ladder, not going down the ladder.

## 4. John

John is a 33-year-old man who describes his ethnicity as white British and his religion as 'Spiritualist'. When we met him he was living in a privately rented two-bedroom house, which he shared with a 19-year-old he described as his 'kind of adopted nephew': the nephew of a friend who had recently died. He was working as a volunteer for the resettlement agency through which we had met him and was waiting to start an introduction to counselling course at a local college. He has two daughters, aged 12 and seven, from previous relationships, with whom he currently has no contact.

John has a history of violent and acquisitive offending, dating back to when he was 16, and has served a total of six prison sentences. He ascribes his offending to excessive drinking, a past dependency on heroin, and 'deeper-rooted' problems relating to a troubled adolescence. He had had no contact with his father when growing up, and his mother died when he was 14, at which point he went to live with his much older sister; however, he had a very difficult relationship with his brother-in-law and was compelled to leave home and live independently when he was 16. He supported himself by playing professional rugby: he signed a three-year contract with a local team. Within a year of signing the contract, however, he had received his first prison sentence – for violence.

### Cycles of offending and desistance

John spoke in interview of the conflicting pressures and opportunities he faced having left home at the age of 16:

**My life kind of went in two directions. You know, it was blossoming with good but then I suppose the delayed shock from the death of my mum, the couple of years with my brother-in-law and the whole life there ... then I hit 16 and developed friends and pubs and drink and all that kind of stuff. So I was professional rugby playing but at the same time ... getting in to fights and I had a lot of anger.**

The first prison sentence that John served was shortly thereafter followed by a second – also for drink-related violent offending. It was during his second spell in custody that he first tried heroin; on leaving prison, he developed a dependency on the drug, and his offending changed from drink-fuelled fights in pubs to shoplifting and other thefts to fund his habit; which in turn led to his third prison sentence. He was released from this third sentence at the age of 19 or 20:

**I'd come out of prison, robbed with the kid I got out with, knew that the police were after me so I was living at different people's houses ... [Then moved to London.] It's funny because I had a girl that went down there dancing and she worked at the Stringfellows – so I tried to find her. Couldn't find her - and then another kid who I grew up with, he'd moved down to London with his missus - I tried to find them ... and then I ended up just getting totally lost my first night in London, and then realising that obviously I've got a habit to kind of nurture so I was pinching... Living on the streets with a major heroin problem.**

Within his history of offending, John also has a history of actively trying to change his behaviour and lifestyle for the better. In 1999 he received a four-year sentence – the longest sentence he has served – for various offences including robbery and burglary committed to fund his heroin use. It was during this sentence that he decided it was time to tackle his drug dependency. While in prison, he undertook a wide array of educational and training courses, and managed to rid himself of the drug habit.

**First six months while I was on remand, I was there still using. Not regular, but whenever it was available and things like that. As soon as I got sentenced and moved out of T- I just thought, 'Right...' That's what I needed really. I'm hundreds of miles away from home, no friends or family speaking to me, you know – and just on my own...'**

**I knew I didn't want to be that person, so I just trained and trained and trained and trained and trained and went back to being – well, it got me through my life prior to that, obviously, my training for rugby stuff and fitness - and I just did as much as I possibly could to educate myself. ... I did all my qualifications and I did all my English and my Maths, and then I got gym instructor, personal instructor [qualifications] ... I did about 46 qualifications altogether ... On release I stopped at my sister's one night then my friend put me up. I went back to rugby at T- on a semi-professional basis, moved in with one of the rugby lads and then got back with my partner to my eldest daughter. We were together about six months but way too much had gone on between us. We separated then.**

**And then I'm kind of left [in my early 20s], a very big aggressive guy with a big chip on his shoulder because I didn't want to be called a smackhead and that, so I had a massive point to prove. I'd not dealt with absolutely anything that had happened with my mum and it all after that. I just buried my head in the sand ...**

His release from prison in 2001 was followed by a period of desistance from offending. However, although he was now free of his drug habit, he continued to drink heavily and in time started to re-offend – receiving his next custodial sentence, for violent offences, in 2004. The years 2006-9 were a similar period of desistance – during which he successfully set up his own building company - followed by episodes of drink-related violent offending, for which he was sentenced in 2009 and again in 2010.

## **Moving forward**

Nevertheless, the past two years have seen him make renewed efforts to tackle his offending and the problems that he believes to be underlying it. He has proactively sought and undertaken various medical and therapeutic interventions, and is confident that these will, finally, enable him to put his offending lifestyle behind him. Today, John feels that the combination of treatment for his alcohol problem, counselling and hypnotherapy has had a significant positive impact on him. Additionally, he was interested to find that a recent psychiatric report on him mentioned ADHD:

**It's come apparent only quite recently that there's the possibility of ADHD and I'm just waiting now to go on vitamin trials, to see and what I'm hoping is that they actually stabilise me completely and that you know address me impulsive behaviour. Because I'll be at that stage where I'll have done the counselling, done the hypnotherapy ... and that will just leave me then where I'll be at the point where I can say, 'Right, I'm not drinking, I've done my counselling, I've done my hypnotherapy, I've done everything ... I've got stability in my life, let's try this medication,' and if that stabilises me more and combats the impulsive behaviour, then I know I will have finally cracked it.**

**... Until I were clean, it were just a repetitive cycle. It would always be that way... Although I've been clean 12 years, the aftermath of being clean is – you know the psychological damage and then obviously the replacement with drink and things like that ... Yes, because I was like hiding away from issues and you know full of anger, full of resentment and full of bitterness and now I know why.**

John also believes that through his voluntary work and counselling training he can 'put something back' by helping others avoid the kinds of mistakes he has made. His key worker from the resettlement agency for which he is currently volunteering as a peer mentor - and of which he is himself still a client - told us in interview that John is highly motivated in all his dealings with the agency, and entirely reliable. John began the peer mentoring work while he was still in custody, and was glad to be able to continue it on the outside.

**For the last probably six, seven years I've been on like a journey in myself, in developing myself and addressing a lot of deep-rooted issues and things like that ... And what I've found is because of my life experience and the times in prison and out, and things I've been through, most clients I come across now ...I can see where they're coming from....You know and I think – for me in that system, in the system on the other side of the fence sort of thing and giving people a direction and trying to learn from my mistakes, I know I've got a hell of a lot to offer ... My counselling course starts in three weeks, so I'll have an added string to my bow, where I can actually be a counsellor in the role itself, or in any other role that I come across.**



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For the time being, however, John remains under the supervision of the criminal justice system. He was released from his last custodial sentence just two and a half months before we met him, and is currently on licence. He is also on police bail, having been arrested for a public order offence – which he insists was a very minor incident - two weeks prior to the interview. He is therefore at risk of being recalled to custody; but he is hopeful that this will not occur as he has a good relationship with his probation officer, who recognises ‘the work I’ve done since getting out in December, and also other stuff and getting my college thing - and everything’s going in the right direction’.

## 5. Steve

Steve is a 43-year-old man who describes his ethnicity as black British and his religion as Church of England. He was released from his last prison sentence just six weeks before our interview with him; since then he has been living with his brother in the family home. He is currently single, and has five children from previous relationships. He reports that he is close to all his children, as well as to his brother and sister. His mother recently passed away, while he was still in prison.

Steve has a history of crack cocaine use, drug dealing and violent offending. He received his first custodial sentence – a four-year term - at the age of 15, for the violent robbery of a post office. He subsequently received a six-year sentence for armed robbery. His last sentence was 12 years in length (of which he spent eight in custody), for another armed robbery and discharging a firearm. On leaving prison, Steve started to volunteer as a mentor for a community organisation which provides support for drug users. He is also completing a degree in addiction studies which he began in prison. His aim is to gain paid employment as an addiction counsellor.

### Getting into crime

Steve was brought up by a single mother in a large inner-city estate which has a reputation for drugs and violence. He was drawn into crime, he told us, through the combination of his fearless nature, his desire for material things that his mother could not provide him with, and a lack of guidance.

**I just wanted things my mum couldn't afford to give me no more so I thought, 'Well, I'll learn to steal,' because all of my friends around me were doing something, so it was only a matter of time before I stepped into that career. I had no one - I had no role model to show me there was another choice I could take in life ... to show me, 'Well, you can take that road or there's another road.' Where I come from, I come from [P- Estate] and it was just a natural: either sell drugs or be a criminal. And I happened to just be good at the two of them. ... And making the decision to just go and commit crime - I didn't have no fear factor about me. ... Natural to me to just be a little scallywag.**

**... I started out I wanted a pair of Adidas Kick [trainers] ... and I asked my mum for the money and she said, 'All right. I'll give you a tenner and if you can find the rest and put it there with your pocket money, you can have them.' And I just went out and made the money and paid for them, mum's tenner in my pocket. And I thought I was the man. ...**

As he found that making money through crime was easy, the crimes became ever more serious:

**And as a child growing up you want more and more and more. And I think I grew up too fast. ... I was the youngest out of my friends. I was the youngest. And anything they got up to, I kind of clocked on real quick ...**

**... I had too much too young. And then once you start biting that cherry, you want more and more and more. You escalate to things, isn't it? You want a nice chain. You want a nice jacket. You want a nice car. As you get older, the things you want are bigger and more expensive. So it just went hand-in-hand with the game, to me.**

After serving a lengthy period in custody for the post office robbery, Steve worked legitimately for a period; but the business he was working for went bankrupt and he:

**fell into things I know what to do... You just gave in what was easier for you, wasn't it?... I had prepared myself to just step out of work and start selling drugs straight away.**

A second long sentence followed, and then further drug-dealing and other offending. He gave up his own use of crack cocaine, but his involvement in violent crime continued. He described to us the circumstances of the offence for which he received his last sentence:

**I would love to can say it was drugs what made me commit my crime; it wasn't, it was greed. My crime was not drugs motivated. It was greed. I was robbing drugs, man. I got my 12 years for robbing 4 kilos of heroin and £30,000. So I was robbing ... a drugs man. They were in a gambling house selling boxes from the gambling house. My mate's bought a box, walked out with it and rang me and said 'Steve, they're idiots there selling drugs, you might as well just go and take that off them,' and that's what I've done. I got nicked - the place was being watched - they've seen me walk in there, I'm a known bloody robber! [Laughs.] All hell's broke loose when I walked back out. I got 12 years.**

While in prison, Steve continued to break the rules, just as he was breaking them outside – and had the reputation to match:

**Normally I was the person selling, supplying the drugs or getting the drugs in the prison; doing something. I was in the drug culture. And even when I wasn't doing nothing, I was talking to my mate [Scott] one day. He's doing a bit of serving up. We're coming back in off exercise; this officer said, 'Oh, Scott - you must be with the big boys now, then, you and Mr Woods [i.e. Steve] walking up and down.' So he's really basically saying, 'Well, Woodsie must be supplying you.'**

## **A process of change and getting an education**

In the course of serving his last prison sentence, Steve made an active decision to change. It was time, he felt, to move away from crime:

**Life is about a choice and I'm too old to be making bad decisions now. I'm 43 years old. If I went back to jail – if they gave me 12 years last time, what are they going to give me this time? They're going to throw away the key and IPP [indeterminate sentence for public protection] me. And I'd just be another statistic with 99 years on the computer. I don't want that. It's about a decision to make and I choose the right decision: to do legal things. ... To stay clean and do legal things.**

Speaking to us in interview about this decision, he framed it in positive terms: that is, he decided not simply to stop committing crime in the future, but to do something constructive with his life - and, indeed, to draw on his criminal past in order to make a contribution:

**Because if I put just as much energy into doing legal things, I see that - well, I can see that I have a future doing something productive. Even if I stop two people in my lifetime of taking drugs or help someone in their lifetime in my career of counselling, I feel like I've done something and given something back.**

It was with these goals in mind that he decided to start studying. He first undertook an access course, and then wrote to various charities to raise funds that would enable him to undertake a degree in addiction studies, by distance learning:



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**I thought to myself, 'What could I do where I can come outside and have a job and it's legitimate?' Yes, I made that decision in [name of prison]. That's when I started the studying because I had an objective and a goal to work towards. And once I had passed it and I got the funding for the first year, my aspirations and dreams got bigger and bigger.**

Embarking on education in prison evidently felt like a new departure for Steve. By his own account, his literacy skills had been very poor:

**It wasn't up to scratch, put it that way. But I had no reason for education. The money I was handling - I could count my money. That was all that counted.**

But the encouragement and practical support provided by the prison's education department were highly influential:

**They helped you. They motivated you. They pushed you. Any obstacle you came across, they was there to help you. All the rest of the prisons, I never got no help.**

**... I wasn't half ready education-wise. Couldn't spell, couldn't read properly or nothing. But the teacher said, 'Well, if you want to do that, if you pass that literacy course ... that will bring you up to O level standard. If you pass the access course, that's when we can put in for your funding.' And they pushed me from one teacher to the other, all the way until I had actually got my degree papers and got the funding.**

**... I don't think I would have really made it [without them]. Sometimes I was: 'Oh, I can't be bothered to do all this studying.' ... I would say to the teacher, 'Well, I can't take this study. It's killing me.' [She'd say,] 'Well, take a break. Take a week off. Just do nothing for a week. Work is not going nowhere. It's going to be there when you go back to it.'**

However, when he was transferred to another prison, he encountered problems:

**There were untold obstacles. I was in [name of prison] using a computer with my memory stick. That's a B-Cat. I've gone to a C-Cat, which is supposed to be opener. Can't use my memory stick. Can't use the computer. 'But I'm doing a degree - you've seen me - all my paperwork's here. You know I'm doing a degree. I can't use the computer because you've got silly stupid rules.'**

For 18 months, Steve says, he was unable to study in the C-Category prison because of the practical obstacles that were put in his way. With the support of his tutors, he wrote to the charities that had offered him funding to tell them about the difficulties he was encountering; and he protested to the Home Office. Ultimately the prison changed its policy, and prisoners are now permitted computer access and to have memory sticks, provided they are left at Reception.

**See with me, if I know I'm right and I'm trying to do something right, you can't put something in front of me and think I'm just going to just lay down. I'm just not that person. I don't think that's in my DNA. I keep on fighting. And that's what I had to do. ... And in the end it got it freed up for everybody. If someone else, like in my position, they can download their work - what took me 18 months achieve, was five minutes it took them.**

## **Other needs and other help**

Towards the end of his time in custody, although he was progressing with his education, Steve continued to struggle with other matters. He had many run-ins with the prison authorities over his use of cannabis. When his mother died, in 2009, he put his studies on hold.

**When my mum passed I was grieving but didn't know I was grieving. I just dealt with it. Because you're in jail, you're doing a long time, you're old dear passes - I was very close with my mum. And you put up barriers, don't you, so you don't break in a certain way.**

**So when my mum passed, I dealt with everything but I didn't grieve. And because of these barriers, I built them in cement and mortar. I've not done it in breezeblock where I can pull it down and analyse myself. So I've put this big bleeding brick wall around me and no one can't get to me. And I'm not letting nothing in and I'm not letting nothing out.**

**And it became a stalemate where I was smoking a lot of cannabis in there and they was nicking me and I'm saying, 'Whoa, it's not the end of the world. I'm not taking heroin. I'm not taking crack. Look at them taking heroin and crack. You're not killing them but you want to crucify me for a joint.'**

The prison arranged counselling for Steve through the drugs service, and also put him in contact with the community-based resettlement agency through which we subsequently met him. Together, the counselling and the informal support work undertaken by Mike, from the resettlement agency, enabled Steve to confront and address his problems:

Mike coming in to see me every two weeks and I had a counsellor coming in to see me every week. So while she was stripping me down and making me aware of my co dependencies and my borders I was putting up through the grieving, Mike was getting through to me another way and – it's liked they picked me up, dusted me down and said, 'Right, come on because there was nothing wrong with you in the first place. You just needed a little bit of guidance.' And that's where I am now.... I don't think I would have been as strong as I am now without that ...

You know sometimes you go through life and you have obstacles but you don't really face them, and then when you do face them you're getting the wrong outcome. ... I was moving careless in the jail and I didn't care. And they readjusted me ... And when they set that process in action, they saw the before, the middle and then they saw the after. And then they said, ... 'This is the normal person we know.' The after was they got back Steve without all the attachments and the strings. And I think that more than anything, more than anything, prepared me for what I am now today.

Steve particularly valued the relationship he built with Mike, an Afro-Caribbean case worker:

Me and him just hit it off straight away ... And he kind of taught... where I was at that time, I didn't give a shit. And you know what, I know I'm a lump – that's the attitude I had. ... But at that time, I was a time bomb, and I was going to go off in the wrong direction. And he saw that in me. And he didn't tell me to do nothing. He just pointed it out how I was behaving and made it... the glass is half full or it's half empty. Which one you want it to do? And I just started thinking and engaging my brain...

He's got a thing about him whereas it is what it is with him, and he doesn't dress nothing up... If he sees you coming at him and you're chatting bullshit he'll tell you, 'Look, right now I think you're talking shit. Get to the bottom of what you're dealing with because I'm not wasting my time sitting here with you.'

## Work

Part of Steve's decision to change his life was his growing realisation that he could do meaningful and rewarding work in the community, helping others who were liable to get into the kind of trouble he had been in for so many years. Before he left prison he contacted a number of agencies offering to do volunteer for them; on release he already had two interviews set up, one of which led to the mentoring work he is now doing. Reflecting on this work, he told us:

**What's weird to me now is because I used to take drugs back in the day, is actually sitting in the groups and watching people I used to take drugs with - I'm the counsellor and they're on the groups. And I went to work last week and I walked in and I seen a guy - I've known him 20-odd years. And he see me and he goes, 'Oh, are you all right, man?' Because I've not recently just got out as well, so he's seen me and he's gone, 'All right? What are you doing here?' And I said, 'Boy, I've come to work. I work here.' ... I used to be the man in the middle: either supplying them or taking it with them. ... I'm still in the area, but I'm on the other side of the fence.**

Steve knows what he wants from his work:

**So it's about a choice isn't it? As if you go left or if you right. Well, I choose to go straight. Because straight right now is doing the best thing for me. I can see if I put the same energies I put into selling drugs and doing crack into something productive – I can see myself getting more out of it. More out of it as in I've got a decent job earning £30k per year.**

**... I'm not going anywhere and it's a good feeling to know that I'm still going to be here doing what I'm doing. So it can only get better as far as I'm concerned. It can't get worse because I'm at rock bottom now already. So any step I take higher is better.**

Mike, Steve's key worker from the resettlement agency, told us in interview that he's fully confident of Steve's ability to make a success of his new role: 'Because he's a very good talker, very good worker, very eloquent. And he has a reputation that people will know, and they'll have that kind of respect for him - and him changing would be a really really good sign for other people.'

## 6. Khaled

Khaled is a 30-year-old Muslim originally from North Africa who has been living in the UK since he was 13. He is currently living in a 'dry house' – hostel accommodation in which no drugs or alcohol are permitted – having completed a residential drug treatment programme. He is waiting to move into more independent accommodation, but cannot do so until he receives confirmation from the Home Office that he has indefinite leave to remain in the UK. He is undertaking various courses, including a literacy course and training for work in the building trade. He is also doing voluntary work in a charity shop. He has three children from two previous relationships with whom he does not currently have contact. His siblings and parents were killed in civil strife in his home country after he had left.

Khaled has a long history of alcohol and drug problems (including use of Class A and prescription drugs), mental health problems, and violent and acquisitive offending. He has served many custodial and non-custodial services – the majority of which have been for theft – and is currently serving an 18-month suspended sentence. He has also spent several periods in psychiatric hospitals, the longest of which was for five months. Homelessness has been another common feature of his past.

It was clear from how he spoke in interview that he is enormously critical of his past offending and other destructive behaviour, while recognising also that many of his problems are rooted in traumas and deprivations he experienced throughout his early life. However, since he last left custody two years ago, he feels that he has been developing a positive and constructive approach to his life – helped by the input of drug treatment and other support services, including the voluntary agency through which we met him. This, he believes, has enabled him to move out of the 'deep hole' he had previously found himself in.

### Early life and loss of his family

Khaled was born and raised in a village in North Africa. His early childhood was deeply scarred and disrupted by the extreme violence and civil strife which began to plague his home country from the late 1980s. In interview, Khaled described witnessing violence as a young child, and also having been sexually assaulted by police officers who had effectively abducted him – an experience which, he said,

**just stayed in my heart; it was like someone burned it you know?**

At the age of 12 he fled his home country for France, without his family:

**I hid in a boat ... When I ran away and started living in France it was a war. I saw like bodies with no heads or just heads when I was young.**

In France he lived rough in a market with 'other north African kids', and began sniffing glue:

**I started sniffing glue when I was young. Because I came to – you know I came out of my country when I was 12 years old..... I did glue, I did glue. Glue was, yes it was nice. I hear music when I take it.... Yes, it was like I heard 'hmmmm'. I had my eyes open.**

When he was 13, Khaled smuggled himself from Calais to Dover, under a lorry. In England, he was taken into care. At the age of 17 he heard that his parents and siblings had been killed in one of the massacres that were sweeping parts of his home country at the time. He dates the start of his offending career and serious drug taking to the loss of his family:

**I wanted to kill myself then. I hanged myself. I was in a children's home when I done it and they took me to this mental hospital and kept watching me and stuff. I just started smoking pot, drinking, you know? Any drugs you get me, I'll take. I didn't care...**

**... None of my family members are thieves so.... none of my family members – when I was younger I wasn't taught to thief. ... My family are very, very strict, very religious. And when I lost my family then I just started going all mental man. ...**

Khaled described to us his gradual immersion into a way of life dominated by drug use, offending, and successive encounters with the criminal justice system. He received his first sentence – a community order – for his involvement in a fight in which, he said, he had been defending himself against racist violence:

**[The first community sentence] was when I went out and I took too many benzos and I had a blackout and I went to like this place outside London and I just ended up getting in a fight, someone got stabbed.... [Received a community rather than custodial sentence] because someone was calling me a Paki ... they admitted it in court in front of the judge.... they chased me down the street with bottles, so I defended myself.**

A series of custodial sentences followed. The first was five months in length; and he was arrested again two weeks after release:

**My head was all over the place, man. I don't even remember getting nicked. I don't even know I'm in a cell...**

**... In and out; it's like in my heart I live in prison. Yes, so I'd go in and I'd go out, back to crack again, back to benzos, back to... And getting nicked again, leaving one place, moving to another place. I was all over the place.**

**... And the screws they say, 'Oh you're back again.'... Even when I commit a crime I don't – I drink, I take benzos ... I'm in a blackout... And I wake up in the cell - I say, 'Officer what am I here for?' So he says to me, 'You're in a lot of trouble son.'...**

As well as committing violence and other crimes against others, he frequently harmed himself and attempted suicide. As a result he found himself in a psychiatric hospital on several occasions:

**I used to cut myself with razors, very big cuts on my body ...**

**... It's like [the police] caught me walking up the train tracks. I just started walking down, started walking. Then once I jumped from this house. I jumped, broke my leg, and the police took me to a mental hospital.**

The self-harm and suicide attempts were, it would seem, outward manifestations of intense hatred he directed towards himself:

I hated myself. I didn't want to look at myself in the mirror. I just wanted to take drugs and drugs. And even the police, they said, 'What's happened to you?' I was a nice person. They said, 'You are a nice bloke, why are you [doing this]?' ... I even admit sometimes now I get pissed off with myself, why did I do that, why did I waste all this time? I could have done better things, you know ...

I was in a deep hole man. I was scared to talk to people. I was scared to – I wouldn't let no-one approach me. ...

... People used to like me, I used to be a nice person, but the drugs and the drink made me like a bastard, not a good person you know? ...

... I was thinking myself as - I don't know - as nothing. A scumbag, something, you know? Like I was stealing, I was lying. I was robbing, I was fighting, I was rude to people, you know? That's an animal, man.

Recurrent homelessness was another problem which fed into the vicious cycle of offending, drug use, self-harm and imprisonment. Khaled explained that on the occasions he was discharged from psychiatric hospital, accommodation was arranged for him; but, in contrast, he would typically be released from prison with nowhere to go and no one to turn to:

You know I don't have a mum and dad here to assist me you know? And I lost all my friends when I was using. No-one trusts me no more. I go back to the street, the first thing I do, I have to go and rob £40 and go buy drugs and drink. ... I lost all my friends. No one's going to trust me; I've no one to call to go to. Even though I call them they refuse me. So I don't know where to go. I had nowhere to go. So I found myself lost ...

You go to prison, you say, 'Oh, this time I'm going to stop. I'm going to go out there now. I'm all right, I'm sorted, I'm healthy.' But as soon as you go outside you've got nowhere to go. ... If I'm cold, if I'm really cold, I need vodka. And I go and drink and ... from there [I'm in the] deep hole again. ...

... I stayed in certain parks. I used to sleep on buses. I asked for someone's travel card, when people leave the station– I used to take it and get on a bus, go to the end of the line and the bus driver would say, 'You have to get off.' And I'd have to get off and walk to the other side and wait for him and it was really cold. And I'd have to get on the bus again.

Basically it was very rough. I always would sleep in this park and these people, they used to come with food, charity people, church people. They used to come and give us food. ... They gave us warm soup... We got hot soup. They'd bring hot soup; they'd bring warm rice with chicken. At least you've got something in your stomach, you know? At least they care. They used to come and wake me up. Yes, it was very nice man, very nice.

## **A new journey**

Khaled believes that a turning point came in his life after he was released from custody the last time, around two years ago. His probation officer referred him to a drug service, where he met a particular worker who he developed a strong connection to:

**You need some help. Someone to pull you or something to pull you out. ... Someone to trust, you know... I'm at this house in London, and I met this Jane, Jane Robbins ... I started going [to the drug service]. You know, she believed in me, that woman... That's when I started opening up to her, to Jane. She listens to me, she kind of cares, you know?**

**And as well, on that period of time, I end up in hospital with pneumonia - and she come and visit me. She brought me some grapes when I was in hospital. I have no friends, man ... and she come and visit me, she brought me grapes, you know. People care about me, nice, man, because I don't have that.... And I started hooking into Jane, telling her everything. And she believed me, she never like doubted me or looked at me wrongly so, so from there yes, my journey started.**

Through the drug service and with Jane's active support, Khaled entered a drug detox and then a residential rehabilitation programme which he completed. This in turn led to his move into the dry house where he is currently living. It was after he entered the dry house that he also came into contact with the resettlement agency, L-, through which we met him. L- has referred him to counselling, raised funds to enable him to join a local boxing club, and provides ongoing practical and emotional support:

**L- have been help to me ... since I used to come here crying, man. Sometimes I was thinking am I going to upset them? I used to come here every day, but they said to me, I told them of my past life, and she said no, no, no - I need time ... Anyway, any time I needed to come here and I'd come, they were always there for me. Always listen to me, always help me.**

**... I told [my key worker] all about my life, and from there she get me appointments ... And I can call her at any time, or I can come and see her any times ...**

**They made me like myself again. You know it's like a very big - I used to hate myself. I used to head butt walls, I told you. I'd jump from windows. But now, I don't feel about myself that way.**

Khaled's key worker from L- told us in interview that the counselling has been highly beneficial for him, and that they are hoping to refer him for some specialist therapeutic help. She also said that his involvement in the boxing club has 'worked wonders for him': the physical activity, the social input, and the sense of purpose it has provided have lifted his mood and decreased his levels of anxiety. She added that he has not been drinking or used class A drugs since he started boxing. She is therefore in the process of looking for charitable funds that will enable him to extend his membership of the club.

## **Where he is today**

Khaled spoke in positive terms about his 'new life' and what he hopes to do in the future:

**I enjoy my new life. I remember what I've done before and the place where I was: the deep hole. I remember that deep hole, man. I don't want to go there again... I enjoy [my life]. I have courses, I go boxing, I've got into boxing again. ... I like helping other people you know?... I want to do something with my life, man.**

He stressed that he is particularly eager to find work:

**I don't know, I just feel - a big man like me, going into the job centre - it's low, man. Like, you know, I like to work for my money. I like to go and work, make a living like normal people. Yes, because and I never thought that I would become the person I am now.**

He is developing a concept of himself as a good person who has something valuable to offer those around him; and whereas he compared himself to an 'animal' in the way he lived before, he now sees himself as a 'human being':

**...It's nice the more that people like me, and before I never thought that I'm liked by people. .. But no, people do like me, they approach me, you know?  
Nice, nice people man. They invite me to their place or house. [New people I've met] in the boxing club.  
Yes, yes, I feel I'm a human being. ... I'm a normal human being. ... I never thought that I would make it. ... I just, I just put in the work, you know. It's come to a stage where I've had enough, man.**



supporting voluntary organisations that  
work with offenders and their families

And he wants to give something back to those who have helped him get to the stage he is now:

**I really, really appreciate [the help from the drug worker and the agency L-]. I don't know if I'll win the lottery one day – honestly, I would help them myself ...**

**I would like to be a volunteer, maybe; maybe I'll go for a course. Try and be - you know, I can talk to people? Maybe try and go into prisons, talk. ... Yes, I want to help them, I want to give something back, bad things I've done in my life. I want to make them - make myself feel happy about myself ...**

**I'll be happier, because I'm giving back something - then you sometimes if you think, I stole from that man ... And I want to give something back. Makes me feel proud, man.**

But although he has a wish to make amends for what he has done in the past, he also recognises that the past is something that cannot be changed:

**I know I can't change what happened in the past. I know I'm not the only one. There's plenty of people out there and - you know, it's life: I mean sometimes, for people, life can be a bitch.**

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