



PRISONS WEEK 2008 STORIES

No. 2 - from the Swansea Community Chaplaincy

My life now is so different to the one I once lived, the one that I still have so many regrets and hurts about, but these areas continue to be addressed and worked on in order to fulfill my desire of living a more fulfilling, rewarding and peaceful life!

I have known my Community Chaplain for a number of years, more recently on my last sentence. At the beginning of my sentence I was on remand for some time before I received the news that I was going to serve 4 years in prison for my crime. This came as a big shock to me and left me feeling very down. I knew that if I accepted Community Chaplaincy support I would not be left to deal with it on my own and I knew I had someone to discuss my lifestyle with who was genuinely concerned about my life and well being. I was treated as a real person and treated with respect. This is not to say that other agencies didn't care, but this man met me where I actually was, not where he thought I was at that difficult time in my life! It was nice to know I could be myself with him and not wonder if judgement would fall on me given my background.

We focused on the future with release and beyond in mind; where would I go? What would I do? Would someone employ me? What will life deal me now? I was then transferred to another prison to complete my sentence. My Community Chaplain kept in contact and I was released to a local Bail Hostel where I stayed for 3 months. I was terrified with the thought of being sent back to live in my home town as I felt that there was nothing but trouble waiting there for me and I wasn't ready to go back. I fought to have my probation license changed to live locally with the sure hope of a new start and employment in sight as I had been seeking employment in the construction field with certificates to operate heavy machinery; I could also set up accommodation to call my home. The struggle was worth it and my license conditions were changed. I had no local connection so had to find privately rented accommodation fast, if I didn't then returning to my home town was the only option. My Community Chaplain went with me to all the housing agencies and I signed up with them all in the hope of finding a place of my own. Nothing came up and I went into panic mode as my time at the Bail Hostel was running out.

My time at the Bail Hostel had ended and given that I hadn't yet found suitable accommodation, I was placed in a B&B out of town. My stay was limited there so I urgently needed to find somewhere else. I couldn't travel regularly so my Community Chaplain made enquiries with landlords on my behalf. Then the news came, "would you like a place of your own?" This was great news! Now I had a chance to prove myself. The Community Chaplaincy Project pulled some strings and managed to secure a bond for the flat for me. The flat needed refurbishing and decorating, where would I start? I was constantly encouraged to, "keep the bigger picture in mind." My Community Chaplain helped me and empowered me to approach this whole thing with a positive attitude, but it was hard at times. I scraped, filled, sanded, painted and painted again, papered and tiled. Carpets went down, pictures on the wall, food in the fridge. Resources were limited regarding furnishing the flat but again, my Community Chaplain used all his contacts and got things together for me. All this was mine, my own home at last! This was my desire!

Prisons week 16th-22nd Nov 2008

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Encouraging prayer for, and raising awareness of, the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prisons staff and all those who care.