



PRISONS WEEK 2008 STORIES

No.3 from the North Staffordshire Community Chaplaincy

Ryan and Amanda

Ryan was born in South Wales and arrived in North Staffordshire in company with his mother and step father. He completed mainstream schooling, achieving GCSE grades B in subjects such as Maths, English and Geography, moving onto further education achieving a City & Guilds certificate. He accepts he was a *'bit of a rogue'* as a youngster, *'breaking into the odd shed'*; although up until he was seventeen, he avoided coming to the attention of the Police. His life changed when he returned to South Wales for a while, due to a family illness. His criminal activities increased, due to coming into contact with *'the wrong sort'*, extending to car theft and low level drug misuse. He finally came to the attention of the Police and began to acquire a criminal record. After a short while, he returned to North Staffordshire and continued his involvement in crime. He met a girl, but the relationship broke down when she became pregnant. This upset him and he *'quickly went off the rails'*, progressing to more serious crime and use of hard drugs such as, *'speed and heroin'*. Between the ages of eighteen and twenty two, he spent two spells in a Young Offenders Institution and between the ages of twenty two and twenty eight years has been in prison on twenty three separate occasions. His longest spell outside prison during this period was four months. He is addicted to heroin and is currently prescribed methadone in an effort to break the addiction. Ryan has two children aged ten and nine years, whom he does not see at this stage of his life.

Amanda grew up in Nottingham and *'lived in a kid's home from the age of nine years'*. She remembers her mother *'encouraging her to get drunk when she was nine years old'*. She hated the kid's home and was resentful of the home and her mother. She was sent to a Secure Unit when she was fourteen, due to her causing a fire at the home. As a youngster she sniffed glue and Tippex, took soft drugs and accepts she was *'an extremely stressed out child'*. As she got older she moved onto hard drugs such as heroin, to which she is addicted. She is currently prescribed methadone in an effort to break the addiction. Amanda has two children who she loves, aged fifteen and five years. Until recently, she has lost contact with her children.

Ryan and Amanda met each other at a North Staffordshire Hostel following Ryan's last release from prison. The Hostel was the *'only place where they could find a warm bed to sleep in'*. Both had slept rough until this point. They quickly *'became a couple'* and were determined to *'make a go of the relationship'*. Their plans quickly went wrong, when Ryan was *'kicked out of the Hostel for using drugs'*. Amanda soon followed when she *'sneaked Ryan in one night'*. At this point they became homeless and *'slept in squats, skips and behind shops in Hanley'*. They *'had no money and lived off Ryan's ability to graft (steal) and joint shoplifting'*. *'We were using heroin and at £20 for half a gramme, needed to graft hard for food and the heroin'*. Meaningful help during this period was in short supply. *'We asked my Probation Officer for £7, which would have paid for a bed for the night, but all he could give us was £2 for a burger'*. Just at *'their lowest point and probably just in time'*, they came into contact with the Community Chaplaincy team via an acquaintance who took them in for a night. *'He was being supported by the Community Chaplains and was living in one of their houses. He gave us a bed for the night and the next day we bumped into Steve and Roger (Community Chaplains).'*

Continued overleaf...

They listened to us and arranged for us to stay there. You can't understand what it meant to be off the streets and have somewhere to stay where we weren't being threatened with eviction before we had time to settle'. The Community Chaplains have agreed to offer Ryan and Amanda a formal tenancy agreement to live in the house, which they now share with 'the Good Samaritan who took us in'. The Community Chaplains have provided much appreciated advice in relation to housing benefit support and 'for the first time in years we have a home address and somewhere to call our own'.

*Now living as couple, they 'are spending spare cash on things like an iron, cutlery and a duvet. We want this place to be nice, where our kids can visit'. Asked what the Community Chaplains bring to them, which is different to other support agencies, both are clear, 'time to listen to us and never let us down. People such as the Probation and Drugs Hab are too busy. Stoke is full of drugs, so they are bound to be too busy to spend quality time with the likes of us. They do their best and are smashing people, but they are too busy. The Drugs Hab training programme has been cut from an hour and a half to forty five minutes. We only have to pick a phone up and Steve and Roger are there. Steve and Roger are good people and really care about us'. Given a 'wish', both do not hesitate with their answers, **'We just want to be to be normal like you.** We just want to shop for nice things, meet nice people and have a nice home to come to. I (Ryan) want to train as a Social Worker and help others, like Roger and Steve are helping us.*

Amanda is bubbling, *'my daughter is visiting at the moment. I hadn't seen her for years, as she had no-where to meet me. She found out I was here a while ago and just turned up on our door step. We all hugged each other and cried. She comes here every day now and we are becoming a family. Steve is arranging for us to attend a barbecue. We can't wait to meet nice people who won't judge us for what we have been'. **Ryan is proud** to point out, *I've been out of Prison for fourteen months now. This is the longest spell out for a lot of years. I don't want to let people who care about me such as Roger, Steve, Amanda and her daughter down. Most of all I don't want to let myself down because, enough is enough'.**

Prisons week 16th-22nd Nov 2008

www.prisonsw.org

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