



Storytelling project at Hydebank Wood
YOC in association with Quaker Service

Inside Out





“Looking back on my story, I feel bad. I regret all the things I’ve done. I would like other young people to read my story and think about what they’re doing with their lives. This could be you. Think before you do something and the risks of it. I wish I had done that, I’m impulsive, I don’t think before I do, I think after, it’s like an illness.”

The concept for this project was derived from a piece of work that we had recently completed with the ongoing teenage project at Quaker Cottage. ‘Our View’ was a storytelling project that we had used to engage with 21 young people from North and West Belfast. All the teenagers from the juvenile landing at Hydebank received a copy of the ‘Our View’ book and had the opportunity to read the young people’s stories. It was evident that they were interested in other teenagers’ life experiences. Some stated how they could relate to most of the young people in the book and how they shared similar experiences. A few stated that they had lots of stories to tell and wanted the opportunity to share their story and so the idea of helping them to do their own ‘storytelling’ project was hatched.

The process of storytelling as a means of self-evaluation and reflection for the teenagers has been a journey into the unknown. The translation of their past into words and images has been a thought-provoking and cathartic process for all those involved. I feel lucky I have had the opportunity to work with some of the young men at Hydebank Wood Prison. I feel the project has been a worthwhile exercise allowing the young people time to reflect and share their stories. It has been a learning process for all of us involved.

During the very first session it became evident how little confidence they had and how much they doubted themselves when it became clear that they were nervous even to put pen to paper. At the second session I had a further surprise. They all looked much more tired and depressed than the previous week - but then I discovered that they had been up most of the night as another young person who shares their landing had attempted to commit suicide. It was a harsh reminder that these teenagers are in prison and are met with daily challenges when they are trying to stay positive. I co-worked these sessions with Annie - the in house art therapist at Hydebank - and we decided to finish the last half hour of each session on a positive note with having some tea and biscuits, quizzes and puzzles.

During the first few sessions we covered identity and what makes us who we are. Each person got the opportunity to create a collage of their own personal identity. It was clear that each young person had experienced very personal and different difficulties or traumas in their lives. In some cases I feel society has failed these young people and it is clear that they can only too easily fall through the gaps. By no means am I making excuses for the crimes committed but I do believe that not everyone in life is dealt a fair hand. Some people get the support from family and friends to deal with their issues while others are forced to walk the path alone. Who are we to judge?

One teenager talked about how his friend's death sent him over the edge.

"My best friend's death made me feel very sad and angry. I was angry that he was dead and I couldn't see him again or couldn't say goodbye properly. I just wanted to drink and steal cars. It was the only thing that could take my mind off my friend's death."

After a few weeks of looking at our identity we began to make a time line of our life experiences and the key events which they believe have had an influence on their life's journey. It was clear that each participant had experienced a wide range of issues such as bereavement, behavioural problems, drug and alcohol misuse and peer pressure. Once the time lines were completed we encouraged the teenagers to begin to think about their life story. Then, using one-to-one interviews with the young men, they began to record their story using the previous work completed. One teenager started their story with:

"My mum died in a car crash when I was only a few months old. My granny has looked after me ever since. I have two sisters and one brother. One of my sisters died last year; it was all over the papers yesterday. She died from taking solvent and drugs. I think it just hit her in the heart. We had a brilliant relationship, we were really close and looked out for each other. She was 19. I found out when I was in prison. I was shocked... my social worker opened the door and said that my sister had died. The judge gave me 24 hours to go out and mourn; my father was given 12 days."

One young man was very keen to give a message to other young people who may be thinking about committing a crime:

"Looking back on my story, I feel bad. I regret all the things I've done. I would like other young people to read my story and think about what they're doing with their life. This could be you. Think before you do something and the risks of it. I wish I had done that, I'm impulsive, I don't think before I do, I think after, it's like an illness. I'm trying different medication for it and going to the ADHD clinic. Look at me now; I'm banged up and not getting out for at least two and a half years."

I believe that everyone can make mistakes during their life and we should all have the wisdom not to condemn. I plan to work with the young men on their release as I feel it's important to help support and rehabilitate these young people back into society. To help them get an education, a job or provide them with the emotional support that they need to prevent them from re-offending. This is something which the teenagers have expressed an interest in and have even gone as far as putting their names forward to work with the art therapist Annie after the inside out project has finished.

I hope the Storytelling project has provided these young people not only with an opportunity to reflect on their own lives and the choices they have made but also on where they want to go in the future. A teenager from the project has stated:

"I don't want to be involved in crime all the time. It's not going to be easy; once you have a name for doing crime and all that, people just expect you to keep doing it and doing it. I don't want to be known as a jail bird. I want to get out, keep my head down, get a tech placement, and get a part time job."

I would like to finish by thanking the young men who took part in the project for being honest and courageous to share their story in the hope that other young people will benefit.

Rory Doherty
Project Coordinator /
Youth Worker Quaker Service

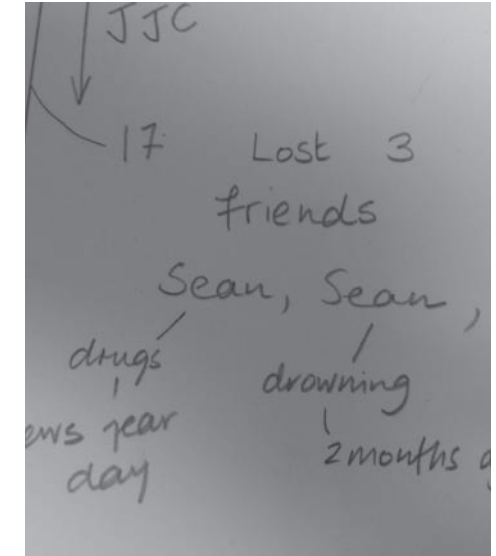
Conor



Today's date is the 27th of October 2011. I have been in Hydebank now for 10 months. Today I'm in a good mood because I had a visit with my mum this morning. It was a good visit. We always have good visits; I never had a bad visit with my mum. I had a good chat with my mum and we had a good laugh. The visit always lasts an hour.

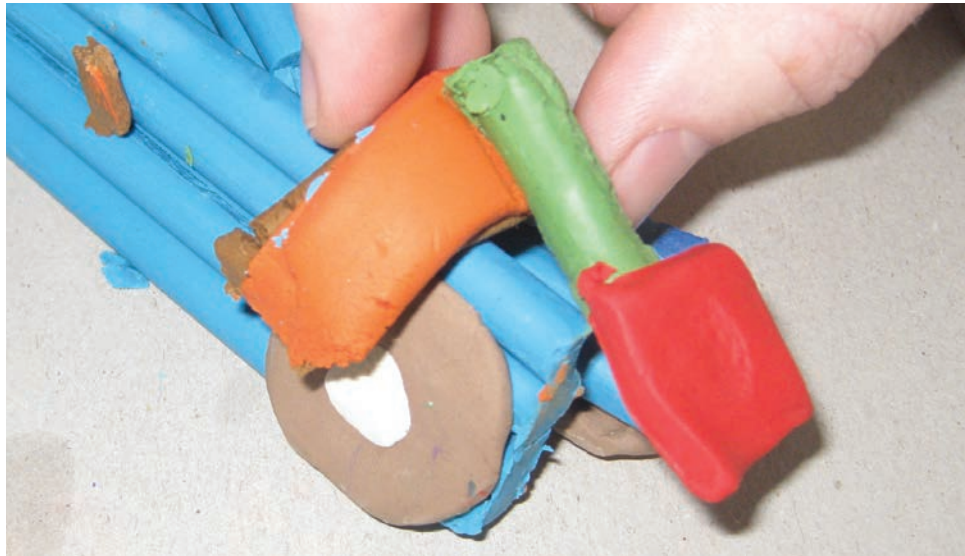
My name is Conor. I was born in 1993 in Derry and have lived there all my life. It's a nice wee place. It's the culture and the people in it that make it good. I have a wee brother and three big sisters and one wee nephew. When I was two, my mum and dad split up. My mum then met my step dad when I was five. I've always lived with my mummy. My childhood was brilliant! We used to go camping and fishing and to the amusements in Portrush. It was brilliant going on the go-karts and all - good aul craic.

Primary school was brilliant craic, and I had loads of mates. I can remember getting lines at lunch and detention. I used to mess about, getting into trouble wrecking the place. Looking back, I regret it. I wish I had done better in school. School was the best days of my life. Secondary school was the same but with more trouble. I started getting into the wrong crowd. By the time I was 13, I started smoking dope. My friend's big brother had some, so we tried it and ended up liking it. It's one of those things you either like or you don't. I was smoking it every day. I can't remember the first time I took it. I didn't see any problem with it at the time. I shouldn't have taken it too far. I was using it too much and was taking advantage of my mum by getting money off her to buy dope and drink and all. I told her I was taking a wee girl to the pictures or bowling or something.



When I was 14, I started drinking; it was just a few bottles. I started because I was watching all the older boys doing it, and I was acting big. I loved drinking. It was good craic. (When I get out I'll still drink, no bother. I'll be drinking less, though, and I won't be taking drugs.) By the time I was 15, I was staying out every weekend taking drugs - any drugs I could get my hands on for the craic. I think smoking blow was a gateway drug for me. It was blow, drink, then other drugs. I was trying to act older than I was. I think I was trying to build myself a reputation.

I started getting into the wrong crowd again. Now, I was stealing at least two cars every weekend just for a bit of craic. At the time, I was trying to act big, showing off in front of people. One day I took it too far; I wasn't thinking straight. Then, I got caught.



I got sentenced to a JJC order (Juvenile Justice Order), but I breached it. A JJC order is where you meet your victim and have to say sorry and do what they ask you to do. For example, community service or someone asked me one day to do a charity run. I didn't get to do it, though, because I got lifted before the run happened. I wasn't sticking to my curfew or my tags and was still going out doing crimes. But, they couldn't prove it. It ended up they took me to court one day and sentenced me to Rathgael for six months. I got out just before my 17th birthday. On my 17th birthday I relaxed, I got all dressed up, and went to a bar with my big sister and a few of my mates. We had a drink and a laugh and took some MDMA, (the purest form of ecstasy). You don't eat it—you can rub it round your gums or put it in a skin and bomb it. Then, we all headed back to my house and sat up drinking all night. My mum put a big amount of trust in me and let me go out and have a bit of craic without phoning me all the time.

This brings me up to New Year's Eve. One of my best mates died. He choked in his own vomit. We were out partying for three days together and I headed back to my house to meet my girlfriend, then woke up with my phone ringing at 8 in the morning. It was another best mate – he told me the craic. He told me he was dead. I smashed the phone off the wall, got up, got dressed, and went out to see if it was true or not. I went up to his mum's house. She wasn't in, but his wee brother was there, and he told me it was true. After that, I just hit the drink, was back on the drugs flat out, and went back to stealing cars. If I had got counselling, I probably would have dealt with it better. But then I wouldn't have went to Hydebank and got myself sorted out. I would probably have ended up dead or still doing the same thing I've been doing.



My best friend's death made me feel very sad and angry. I was angry that he was dead and that I couldn't see him again or say goodbye properly. I just wanted to drink and steal cars. It was the only thing that could take my mind off my friend's death.

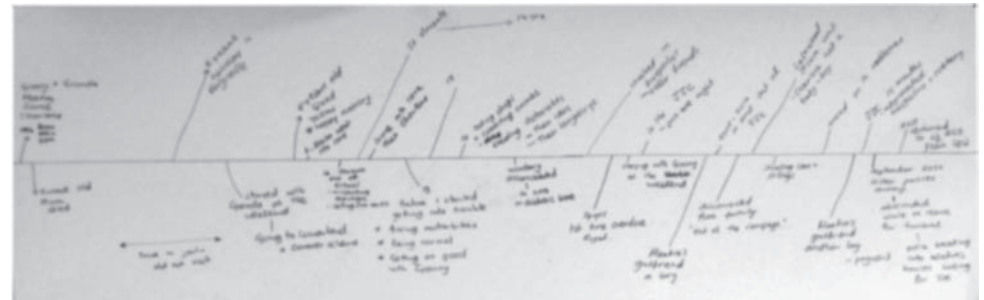
I was on the run, because I breached my bail and ripped off my tag. I ripped the tag off shortly after my friend had died. My friends were also caught and were taken to the police station. I managed to get away, although I ended up walking into the police station and handing myself in. I ended up handing myself in to the police for being in a stolen car. I had nowhere else to go. I was fighting with my mum, and I wasn't going to let my friends take the blame for something I did. I told them I bought the car and they believed me. They're not going to ever believe me again. Not a hope!

I was in the police station for three days. I was interviewed and then brought to court on Monday morning. I got remanded to Hydebank and have been here for 9 months. The time flies in here—you're always busy. It's not the worse place in the world, although I'd rather be out. I'm hoping to get out three days before my 18th birthday and that's in December this year. I want to stay with my mum until after Christmas. Then, I want to go to Liverpool—over to my big sister. She hates drugs and if I mess up once, that's me done. Her boyfriend is giving me a job doing labouring. I'll get a few hundred pounds a week. I want to save up and get myself a nice wee flat, a wee car, and send my mum a few quid to pay her back for what I owe her.

I want to get out of the area I live in to stop me coming back to Hydebank. I want to stop running about with the crowd I was hanging out with. It won't be easy, but it's all about making choices. If I could turn back time, I wouldn't drink as much or take drugs as much either. And wouldn't do crime at all. It's not worth it in the end. Fair enough, you get a buzz of a night or two, but it's all about the consequences after. I didn't have any remorse for the people I hurt or did damage to when I was on drugs; but off the drugs, I have thought about everything I have done and realize I wouldn't like it done to myself or my own family.



Sean



My Name is Sean. I was born in Belfast in 1994. I have lived with my granny all my life. My mum died in a car crash when I was only a few months old. My granny has looked after me ever since. I have two sisters and one brother. One of my sisters died last year; it was all over the papers yesterday. She died from taking solvent and drugs. I think it just hit her in the heart. We had a brilliant relationship, we were really close and looked out for each other. She was 19. I found out when I was in prison.

I was shocked... my social worker opened the door and said that my sister had died. The judge gave me 24 hours to go out and mourn; my father was given 12 days. I didn't end up going back to the prison – I went on the run. I went on the run because my head was melted. I wanted to be with my family. The police were looking for me everywhere; I went on the run for four weeks. It took them four weeks until they caught me, BALLOONS!

When I was younger I did my own thing. I used to buy old motorbikes, fix them up, and then sell them on to make money. I started doing it at 11. In school I was the class clown showing off all the time. I didn't like school apart from reading, I liked reading stories and reading newspapers. I moved from mainstream school to St. Vincent's, it's known as the second chance school. I liked it there because there was more help and the days weren't as long. I got to do more things like art and cooking. We got to go out on wee trips and got to wear normal clothes it wasn't like normal school more like tech.

At 14 I moved into my first children's home. It was mad! I moved there because I started taking drugs and drinking and thought if I went there I could get away with everything because they couldn't tell me what to do. When I went there you could do what you want when you wanted. No one could stop you. It was the children's home staff telling me what to do, but I just laughed at them and told them to fuck off. It wasn't like my family telling me what to do.

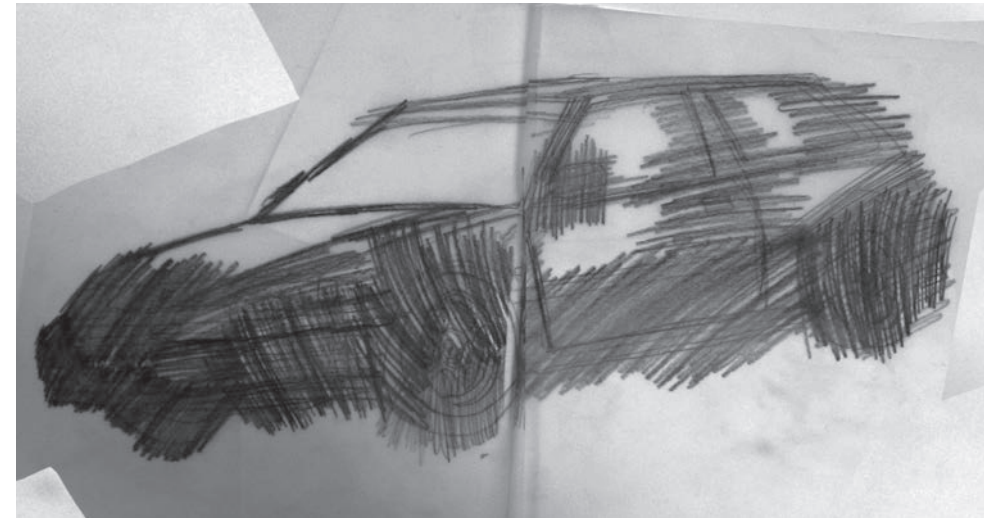


When I was in the home, I started drinking and taking drugs a lot more, doing it with older people - they were about 5 years older than me. I used to go out and take drugs with them; then, I started getting into stolen cars as a passenger, then, I started driving them myself. At the time it was powerful; I liked to show off. Your adrenalin goes. I liked to drive them at high speed. You get a good buzz. When I was in the home, I started off doing petty crime - thieving and criminal damage. Then I started moving on to car crime and burglaries. By this time, I was on drugs every other day - tablets known as blues. It was good - they gave you balls to burn. I ended up over dosing a few times on them. In total I overdosed 10 times, and I was in hospital each time. I just didn't give a fuck. I was off my head. Looking back now I regret it. Once I went to jail I was thinking, "what was I at?" I didn't care about anyone else but myself.

About two weeks before Christmas in 2009, my kidneys give in. There was a blockage in my kidney because of drug misuse. I was in hospital for 2 weeks over Christmas... it was fucking shit. I was stuck in the hospital bed, while everyone was out partying. I wanted a proper Christmas dinner with my family. After Boxing day, I did a runner. I ran out of the hospital and met up with friends. The doctors were saying it was life threatening, and that they wanted the children's home staff to keep a close eye on me. But after a couple of weeks, my kidney sorted itself out.

Shortly after that, I was in and out of JJC (Juvenile Justice Centre). It was for car crime and burglary. Then I was in and out on bail and got involved in a robbery. I did six months on remand and then got out on bail. Two days later, I was involved in an aggravated burglary and a police chase and have been back in Hydebank ever since. I'm doing a 6 and a ½ year sentence now. I was doing the crimes because I was on drugs and thought I could get away with it and thought I was a big boy but it wasn't worth it.

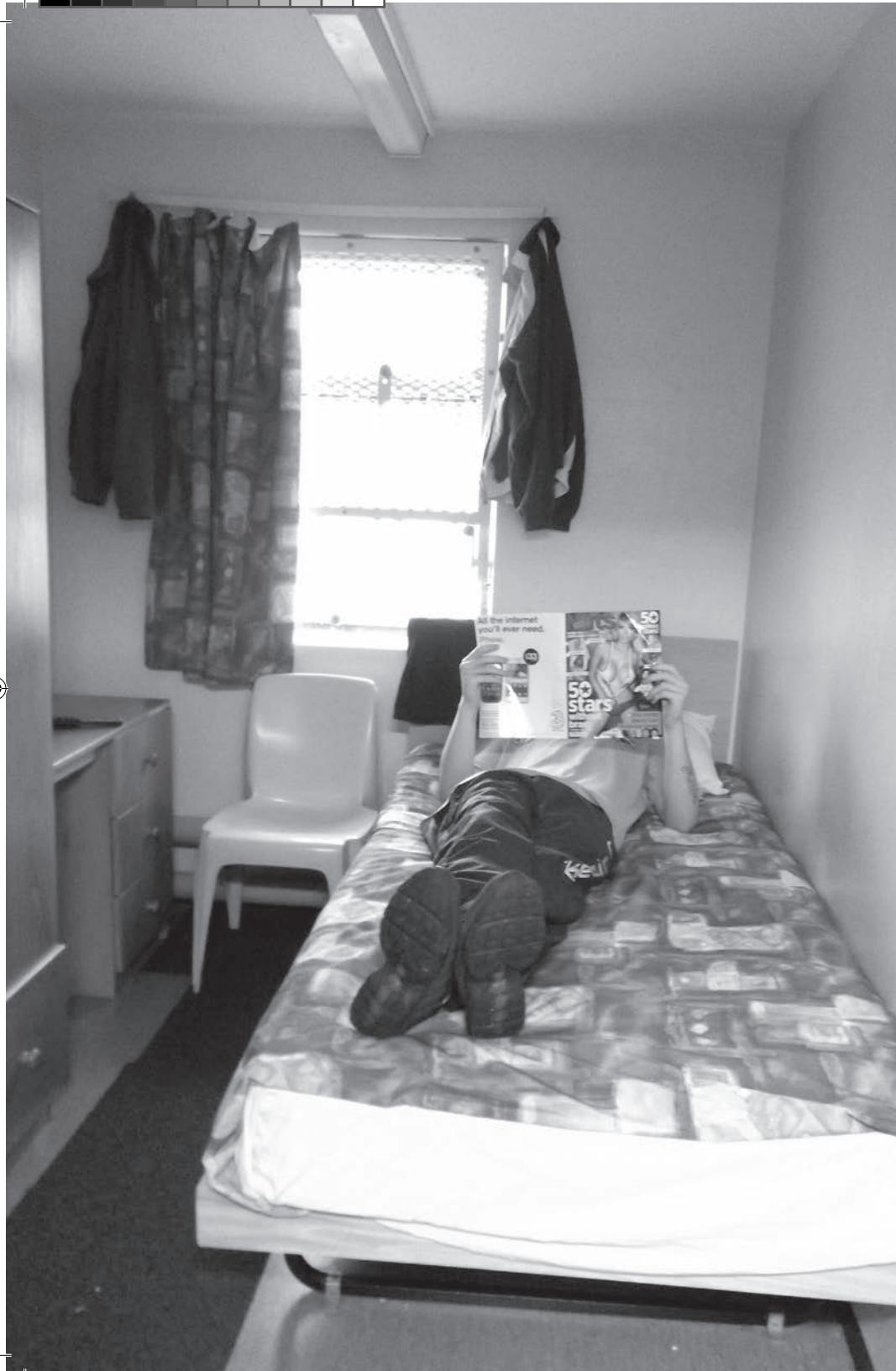
I wish I could turn the clock back to when I wasn't involved in serious crime. It was drink and drugs and showing off in front of older people that got me involved in serious crime. I want to get out and make my granny happy. I have had loads of time to think what I want in life and for when I get out. I want my granny to be proud of me, I don't want to be involved in crime all the time. It's not going to be easy; once you have a name for doing crime and all that, people just expect you to keep doing it and doing it. I don't want to be known as a jail bird. I want to get out, keep my head down, get a tech placement, and get a part time job. I only want to go out at weekends and have a drink with people who are not involved with crime.



In here you have your good days and bad days. It's crap missing your family - it melts your head. I see my granny every week. It's sweet, although it's only for an hour. When I get out, I'm going back to live with my granny, chill out, and go and see friends and family. I plan to stop running around with all the headers. I don't want to come back to jail. I want to find a wee girl and settle down with her - someone who will keep me out of trouble. Some wee girls do that.

My advice to other young people would be just listen to your family. Don't be trusting other people who you do crime with. They're not friends; they're just associates. A friend would always be there for you - someone you could trust with anything.

I want to go on holiday when I get out. I want to go to Spain or something with some wee hussy.



James

My name is James, and I was born in 1994. I have a close family. It's just me, my mum, and my wee sister. My sister is five years younger than me. I would look out for her-tell her what to do and what not to do-to help keep herself right.

I had a bad childhood. I was always getting in trouble. I was always messing about doing mad things. I was a wee menace. I was running about breaking windows and stealing things. Looking back, I did it for a bit of craic. There was fuck all else to do. I was born in North Belfast and lived there most of my life. If I was to describe the North, I would describe it as mad. There's lots of drinking, rioting, joy riding, and drugs.

I went to three primary schools in total because of my behaviour. I was mad in school, doing loads of shit. I went to a primary behaviour school at 10 and then to a secondary behavioural school. I kept getting suspended, and I was too hyper for the normal school. I had ADHD. I took medicine but it made me not eat and stay up all night. In school there were always people going mad, wrecking classrooms, breaking windows, fighting, and smoking dope and all. You couldn't learn anything in it. There was constantly something going on, taking your mind off what you were doing. Thinking about it now, I wish I could have learned something at it.

I started smoking blow when I was 10 years old. It was peer pressure that got me started. There were older ones offering it to me in the street, and I wanted to try it. At the time it was good, it gave you a buzz and got you happy. But, it plays up on you; it got me paranoid and got me into debt. I remember thinking people were always looking at me.

When I was 13, I broke into a school and stole equipment and ended up getting arrested for it and went to Rathgael. I stole the stuff to get money for blow. I was smoking about £30 a day. It started getting me paranoid, and when I didn't have it, I had to go and steal something from the town to pay for it. I stayed in Rathgael for a week, then got bail. I kept breaching it and getting put back in. I kept breaching because I was breaking my curfew, which was 6pm.

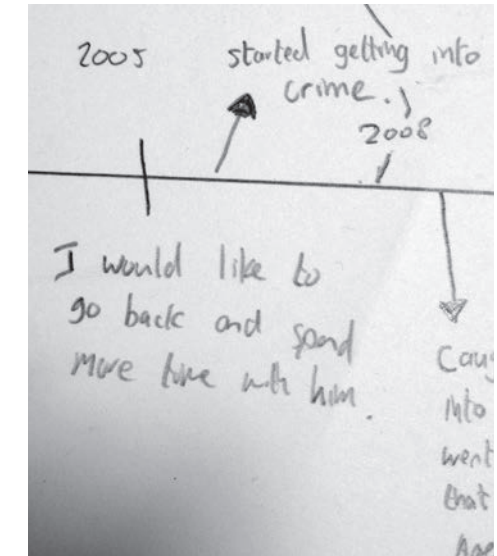
In 2003, I was in a children's home. It was mad. You were barely allowed to go out, unless they brought you out to play pool or something. At the start it was bad: getting took away from my family; getting told when you can and when you can't see your family. It was hard. I had to stay there for a while before they could start family contact. I think, looking back, it made my behaviour worse, although it was supposed to help my behaviour. I started mixing with the wrong crowd in the home-again, smoking dope and messing about. Then in 2007, I moved back to my mum's house. It was the best thing that ever happened to me from the time that I was put in the home. My behaviour improved, and I was being good until 2009. Then, I started stealing from the town again, got caught, and got 8 months in Rathgael. I started stealing again because I got in with the wrong crowd. It was because they were doing it. There was nothing else to do; I think that's why most people were doing it. There should be more activity centres or things like that for people not to be bored.

In 2010 on the 12th July, I was rioting in North Belfast. I lived close to it, and it's on your door step, so it's hard not to get involved. The riots were crazy-so many people were at it. I was getting a buzz out of it. I was throwing bricks and petrol bombs at the police-the scum. I seen police getting hit with all sorts, getting their tyres punctured. Three jeeps got stuck and surrounded; people were trying to open the doors, breaking wing mirrors and their lights and the plastic shields on the windows. I was shot with a plastic bullet on the neck and on the arm. It was sore, very painful. It didn't stop me, so I kept going. I was there until 1 or 2 in the morning. It was finished, then people were leaving. I was doing it to riot at the police for the craic, not because of the Protestants marching. There was nothing else to do! What else can the young people do?

Three weeks after the riots, I got arrested for hijacking, rioting assembly, criminal damage, 2 accounts of attempted GBH, and possession of a class b drug, grass. They caught me with their CCTV cameras. I am waiting to get my sentence in November. I got bail and was on the run from the peelers. I had nowhere to go and was drunk out of my head, so I hijacked a car, picked up my girlfriend, and then ended up flipping it on its roof. I knocked down three garden walls, and the car was a write off. I got out then and got her out and phoned the ambulance for my girlfriend; she was OK. I ran because the police where looking for me. They got me the next day, and I've been in Hydebank since January.



Looking back on my story, I feel bad. I regret all the things I've done-all the crime I've done and the messing about in school. I'd have a better education. In the future, I want to have my own house and a job. I want a job cooking, to be a chef. I want to settle down and have about 20 kids...only joking. I would like other young people to read my story and think about what they're doing with their life. This could be you. Think before you do something and the risks of it. I wish I had done that. I'm impulsive; I don't think before I do, I think after; it's like an illness. I'm trying different medication for it and going to the ADHD clinic. Look at me now; I'm banged up and not getting out for at least two and a half years.



Artist's Statement



Everyone has a story to tell...

As an Art Therapist working in Hydebank Wood I am privileged that I get to hear young people's stories. Frequently their path from childhood to imprisonment has been far from straightforward. It can be shocking to hear of bereavements, being in a number of different homes and witnessing violence in early childhood. Enabling the young person to work creatively through these events forms a large part of my work.

My experiences in Hydebank seem to contrast sharply with the one dimensional way that young offenders are portrayed by the media. They are often described as unfeeling and uncaring, or dehumanised using language such as 'hoods' or 'thugs'. A young offender's 'story' is of little or no consequence.

The 'Inside Out' project has given a number of young people in Hydebank a chance to tell their stories and to have them published. It has given them time and space to reflect on what their lives have been like so far. They have had an opportunity to think about how they would like their futures to be. I am keen that this will start a reflexive process for these young people. That is to say they will be able to change some of the behaviours of the past to create a more successful future.

All the young people engaged well in the process of the project. Everyone made a least one piece of art and all enjoyed taking photos. It was impressive how much care and attention went into the art making, everyone wanted their work to be the best it could be. I am very proud of all the effort that has gone into this project, and the hard work that the young people have put into making it a success.

It is my hope that the Inside Out booklet will be read by a wide range of people both inside and outside the prison service. I think that these are the stories that need to be in the thoughts of policy makers and politicians. I hope it will assist them and others to understand and develop ideas that can best help our young people build a brighter future for them and their communities.

Annie McIntyre



Conclusion

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has contributed throughout their history to improvements within prisons and to the welfare of families and prisoners including the work of Elizabeth Fry in the early 19th century. Quaker Service, a family welfare charity which provides a range of services for vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Northern Ireland, has been working with prisoners and their families since 1972. That was when we opened what we believe to be the first visitors' centre in the UK and Ireland at the Maze/Long Kesh Prison. And we have been providing practical and emotional support for families of loved ones at Maghaberry Prison through our work at the Monica Barritt Visitors' Centre since it opened in 1987.

The Mission of Quaker Service is to play a practical role in reducing violence, suffering and disadvantage by providing services which support, value and empower people. Our core aims include giving a voice to those who are often unheard and being responsive to new opportunities which enable individuals and families to reach their potential. We believe these aims have been central in this new work with young people at Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre. This "Inside Out" programme is a natural extension to our work with teenagers at Quaker Cottage in west Belfast where we hope to be able to continue to support some of the young men on their release from Hydebank.

Quaker Service wishes to thank the Prison Service for opening up this opportunity and special thanks to Annie McIntyre the Art Therapist who worked alongside Rory Doherty, our Teenage Group Worker, to deliver the programme. Thanks also to BBC Children in Need who fund the salaries of our Teenage Project workers.

Our main thanks must go to the 3 young men who participated in this project. We admire their bravery in telling their own remarkable stories and their desire that others should learn from their experiences. We hope that they will continue to grow and realise their full potential and we wish them every success for their future.

Quaker Service would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Joyce Neill, a founder member and life long supporter of the charity. This project was financed through a donation from Joyce's estate and from her family who asked that it would go towards our work with young people both at Quaker Cottage and Hydebank Wood.

Janette McKnight
Director Quaker Service



The stories revealed in this book are real stories from real lives, but in order to maintain personal privacy, details have been altered to prevent identification of particular individuals in some cases.

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