

## Lee's story

*I first saw Lee when he was moving into O'Hanlon House. He had been on the streets for several weeks. During that time, his friends suggested that he should take his clothes off while he slept, so that when he put them back on again in the morning he would feel the benefits more. He also took his new trainers off because he had blisters. His clothes and trainers were stolen while he was sleeping. He had kept his trousers on, and checked into the hostel in those. This interview was carried out six days later.*



I've never really excelled at anything. I've always just been very average. I've never worked. I'm registered disabled.

I come from Chesterfield originally, then moved to Sheffield, Nottingham, Grimsby, Lerwick in the Shetlands, then all the way down to Margate, all over really. I went to Lerwick because an ex-girlfriend had family there. The holiday turned into a stay.

I used to have a really bad drug addiction, and used to shoplift to fund it. I used to get caught and get put into prison. When you're in prison they can send you anywhere, wherever there is space. Then when you're released from prison, they put you in the local area. That's why I've got about a lot of places. Like here, I got out of Nottingham Prison about two and a half weeks ago. The people in Nottingham told me to come to Oxford, the night shelter will give you a room. So I came down here, thinking that it had all been arranged. Once I got here and knocked on the door, they said that half of Oxford needs a room as well. They pulled the wool over my eyes in Nottingham. The minute I leave that prison gate, I'm not their problem no more, you know what I mean?

I got the train to Oxford, had never been here before, found the night shelter by speaking to homeless people and beggars. I thought that, with me being registered disabled and out of prison, I'd be a priority need but no. I have no local connections, and they're big on local connections around here. I'd also have problems getting council accommodation for the same reason. I was on the streets in Oxford until a few days ago. It felt like a lifetime. I literally had to sit and beg for something to eat. That's when I had everything stolen. That was the first time I was on the streets in a town where I didn't know anyone. In other places I knew the area and the people.

I started shoplifting again just to get something to eat. I got caught. I thought that they wouldn't let me go, but they did. You get to the point where you get so cold and that out there, you think to yourself, if I was in prison now I'd have a bed, a TV, a kettle, a gym, I'd be doing things every day. Is that so bad? It's better than being on the street. I think that's

why the prison population is so massive. The homeless life is so bad that it's better to be in prison. I know people in prison where, when it gets close to their release date, they will deliberately assault a staff member just to get extra time, because they're so scared of getting out. They're institutionalised.

Drug addicts just get shunted away, they're treated like the lowest of the low in the system. There's more drugs in prison than anywhere else because all of the dealers are there in one place. If I'm on a methadone prescription I'm OK, but if I'm not I just start using again. That means I'm into crime again, which I don't want to be. You get out of being institutionalised by having stable accommodation, having a good support network around you, just having a decent standard of living.

I'm the way because I am because of my childhood. It was quite bad and I don't like to talk about it. I got sexually abused by my father when I was 18 months old. He got sent to prison for that for eleven years. That's why I don't talk about it. When he's up for parole, they write to me and ask me whether I think he should be paroled. But I think that he should stay there for the rest of his life. They say that he's changed, but a leopard don't change his spots. People can change the way they look and what they think, but they can't change what's inside. After an act like that, I don't think that it's possible. It's too late.

My mum has never really talked about it over the years. It's just something we never talked about. I knew where my mum lived, but she moved house while I was in prison and I've lost the telephone number. I don't really get on with her boyfriend. *[From now on, when Lee refers to 'dad', he means his mother's second partner]*. I've got my dad's number, and I could ring him and ask him whether he has her number. I talked to him about eight months ago, before going into prison.

My dad's a self-made millionaire. I had a brilliant start, lived on a posh farm, private school, everything. My dad still lives there. He rents houses to people and he put me into his houses. They got burnt down when I was in hospital. My dad said "that must be your friends". I don't know who did it. He has tried everything. He paid for rehab, but I ended up running away from there. He gets very frustrated with the way I am. It got to the point where I just thought that I didn't want to put no more shame on the family. So I moved away.

I had a younger brother, Martin, who died of an overdose on October 12<sup>th</sup>, two days after his twenty-first birthday. We were close as kids, then kind of drifted apart, but the last few years before he died we were quite close. That's something else we don't really talk about.

My mum and dad never got married, but had a common law relationship. When they split up, my dad pulled a fast one on my mum. The morning that they went to court, he offered her £250,000 just before the trial. My mum took it and spent it in about a year.

I've been in a lot of hostels. Some people in this hostel are friendly, but a lot of them just keep to their own little crowd. Everyone's complaining about the TV being turned off at night. It's on from 10 in the morning until 11 at night. Why shouldn't it be on all the time? There are no TV sets in people's rooms. You can buy one if you want. O'Hanlon House is quite relaxed about who can drink in its wet room. In other hostels only long-term alcoholics signed off by the doctor are allowed to drink. But here people who just drink for any reason can go there. It's a bit like walking around a pub, and causes problems.

I live on the top floor now. When I moved in six days ago, I was on the ground floor, but they moved me up. I share a room with young lad, who has never been in a hostel before. I chat with him. He's OK, a bit timid. I had a nightmare last night, woke up screaming, and he thought he was being attacked. It scared the life out of him.

I don't know whether I'll be moving out soon.