



Community Social Care

Homelessness: John's story

A cleared building site in Swansea city centre is now a car park. Here on a rainy day in October course team member Julia Johnson met up with John, who'd just taken up residence in a broken down old van. He'd been there for three weeks.

John:

I went up the police station and I said I'd found an old van and can I sleep in it? Yes, he said, as long as you don't do anything daft. If I want a smoke I come out and have a smoke out here like. I was in that old building over there, as I said earlier, and they chucked me out of there so I don't mind where I sleep as long as I've got a roof over my head and I'm comfortable. I've been in a mental hospital. I was there for nineteen years, so I'm OK now.

Julia:

How old were you when you went there?

John:

I was eight when I went in and I'm 42 on Friday.

Julia:

What happened then?

John:

Well my life was wasted, wasn't it, wasted, and it's about time I got my act together now. I'm an alcoholic and I smoke and tell jokes to people, and I'm a loner, as they say.

Julia:

What do you do for money, I mean?

John:

Well I don't get no money, do I, you know, I tell jokes and people might give me a cup of tea or something like that, or a couple of bob like.

Julia:

Do you get any money from Social Security?

John:

No 'cos I haven't got an address, have I? Postman can't come in here and say here you are at the back door.

Julia:

So what do you for money, I mean?

John:

Well I got a bloke on the market, I help him sometimes and he gives me a few bob, like, but I couldn't see him today 'cos he's on holidays. To tell the truth, I signed on yesterday and I'm hoping to get a payment out of them so at least I'm telling the truth about that, aren't I, helping you back to work, well I got to sign daily, you see, and they might give me a Giro if I'm lucky, if I'm lucky.

Julia:

What happens if you get ill or something?

John:
Well I go to the hospital, don't I?

Julie:
You go up to the Accident & Emergency?

John:
Yeah.

Julia:
Tell us about when you last went up to the hospital.

John:
Yesterday, when I got asthma, like.

Julia:
What happened when you went up to the hospital?

John:
Well they give me a Ventolin..... I walked down the hospital, it's about four miles on the road, see. I went to Casualty and told them I had a bad chest, and they give me some oxygen then, and Ventolin come. I put it in the van and somebody pinched it so I ... see what I can do now. Otherwise I haven't got anything.

Julia:
Do they know you at the hospital?

John:
Yeah.

Julia:
Are they helpful?

John:
Yeah, very helpful, well that's what a hospital's for, isn't it, well they give you medication and a cup of tea, you know, a sandwich, and they give you tablets.

Julia:
What do you do about washing and all that scene?

John:
Well I go to the toilets up the top there.

Julia:
You were saying also you squat in the Leisure Centre sometimes?

John:
Yeah, it's warmer over there, it's comfortable and what have you.

Julia:
Which bit of the Leisure Centre?

John:
At the back, you know that big chimney?

Julia:
Oh yes.

John:

Yes on the corner over there, if you'd like to go over after, there's lot of warm air coming out, it's much warmer there, you stand there and you get a sun tan. I used to sleep there on pallets, and a blanket over me, see. At the end of the day then I get up and sometimes my ruddy neck is twisted andgot this thing now, it's like a mobile home like, isn't it, the cold weather's coming on and I'm indoors, innit, and complexed, that's the word. Wherever I sleep people move me on, like, so actually the police I ask.