



Community Social Care

Homelessness: Paul's story

v/o

Paul has been in and out of homelessness for most of his adult life. Now aged 32 he's working as volunteer at the Cyrenians. He's sharing a house with some other volunteers.

Paul:

I'm from a place called Happy Valley, just outside Porthcawl, but it's in Porthcawl like, and there's a holiday camp, and I spent all my life there with like all my family, like my mother's there, my brothers and sisters are there, with my friends there, all of them, and I'm the youngest, so by the time I left home all my family were married, all happily, you know, all like the '90's families then, I thought all that would happen to me, but it didn't. In the beginning all my 20's has just been in and out of hostels, getting streetwise. I got a daughter of 11 and back in '91 we were there on the caravan site and things were going fine, and there was a breakdown in communication between me and my ex-girlfriend, and she told a bunch of lies, lied to me about she was playing darts when she wasn't, she was doing the opposite, enjoying herself, so that's how I was made homeless first because she spent the rent cheque for the caravan off the council. So the first place that I went to was Stovey Down, but they call that heartbreak hotel like, and that's just outside Portcawl but it's closed down now, it's all been demolished, and it was an old RAF complex where in the Second World War they used to use, you've got to presses buzzers, it's very, you know it's not very like '90's, in fact very like Victorian when you walk in, and that was run by Social Services, and you walk in and everybody when you walk in they check your pockets, you're escorted into the building, and they ask your background, they do police checks. The way that I felt it was being like out in Russia or something like that, you know, and this is what I have found in a lot of like hostels they do treat you like a prisoner because when you go into these places they class you all the same like a number, all of them do like. Like myself I've had a good upbringing, you know, and from what I've done out of my life I've achieved a lot more than anybody else has. Everybody thinks like that people go into homeless hostels they're all alcoholics, drug users, but that's not the case. As I speak there's people being made homeless now by most of the time all I can say is it's like, I think some of the reasons is like a breakdown like of families, mostly I wouldn't say all of it is to do with drugs, I would say it could do with, like your mother could have married somebody else, and it could be a breakdown there, it could be loads of reasons, social reasons, and all the people that I've met like, you know, they've been in homes or their marriage has broken down, but most people that I have met I could trust them than somebody that had everything. All that's needed is a chance. I've been interviewed by people that are working like in hostels and they're younger than me, even Social Services and they're trying to tell me what I should do like, you know like fair enough, like when they were born I was just leaving school and I had a job, I had everything, but as soon as something like happens, you know your family goes, the only thing that I didn't do, I didn't hit the bottle, I knew where I was going, I knew I had to make a start, I knew that I couldn't do that where I was 'cos the facilities wasn't there, so when I did travel I wasn't scruffy or anything like that, I always made sure I just put my thumb out like hitchhiking around the country, and at the end of day I think it's a cheap way to see like the British Isles, you know, didn't need British Rail or nobody, I did it all by my finger and my thumb. I used to get money every two weeks but you've always got to make sure that it all goes by like your initials, A, B, C, D and all that. Lucky enough I went to the right place where my money always carried on every two weeks, so I was only there what fourteen days and I would be back in Swansea and having a couple of beers with my mates, and I would go off again then. As soon as I hit the M4 I'd decide then – is it Leeds, is it Kingbridge, but I always avoided like London 'cos if you go to London that's a catch-22, you won't get nothing there. Going round you know out made me fit, it was a good education, seeing, I'm just like a normal class bloke you know, working class, and all my family like was working, I was working to a certain point but when you do lose your job and

then you've got to pay bills off, you've got to pay this off, and then that's when the breakdown of a relationship can come then, because all the good life has gone, and then if you can't support a child or whatever, and that's what happens, you just go your own ways then. But like to me some people say I'm glad that I'm not homeless any more but to me being homeless it does give you a lot of knowledge what's going on. I see a lot of people now that say they've been homeless and they haven't been that homeless, like if they'd been homeless they would know a lot about it. They think being homeless is just like kipping out but I always say if you've been homeless you want to get out of it, and you do get people that when they go into like an hostel for the first time and they're not used to it, they never stay there, 'cos sometimes you are safer out on the street than you are in an hostel. You get beaten up, you get threatened, it all depends on a guy or whatever, you know, if you do get like picked on or whatever, and that's when the streetwise like comes in, you know, you have to sort it out like in seconds, you know. It's just like if somebody came up to me and like started picking on me, there's only one way you're going to sort it out, you're going to have to do this person like, you've got to sort him out in your own time, you've going to have to hurt him 'cos he's going to hurt you, you know, and a lot of people are not used to that. You go into some hostels and it's like Dracula's castle, you know smelly people in their beds, having fits, people being sick, the smell of disinfectant. At the moment I'm waiting to get a place for me and my son if I can. Because I do voluntary work for the Cyrenians I'm in Oxford Street; it's a place for staff of the Cyrenians, it's there for you until you find a suitable place for yourself, and it's just a normal place, you know, it's not like, you're not restricted, you know it's like you know you've got to be in bed by eleven o'clock or half past eleven until the morning. But I've been here, I remember years ago, I'd gone out from here when I first came to Swansea about ten years ago, and went to a night club in the middle of the night and we had sleeping bags chucked down from upstairs off one of the boys that we know, we stayed over at the beach until the morning. And if you do meet somebody in a night club and they say oh where do you live then, oh you're not going to say heartbreak hotel, are you, that building, the one with the green door. But I could never go back to an hostel now, I'll never be homeless again 'cos I've wised myself up. I know where I'm going like in life. All I want out of life is what's best for my son 'cos he's, I've got a daughter of 11, time is like running out, but one thing that I will do is that my son and my daughter will never be on the street, never like, 'cos I know what it's like.