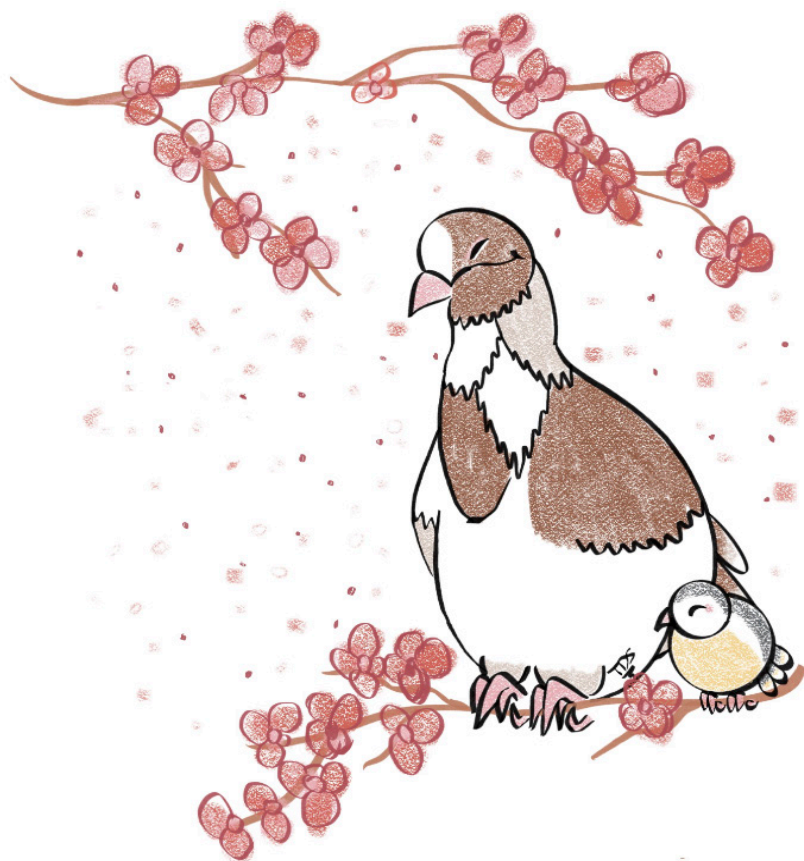


THE PIGEON PARK GAZETTE



Issue 5

Dean

Slav

Haile

Robert

Paddy

Roy

Glenn

Dave

Lee

Recently departed but never forgotten



Welcome to the fifth issue of The Pigeon Park Gazette

Since our last issue there have been a lot of deaths in the homeless community. The world is a poorer place without every one of these people and a day doesn't pass when we don't wonder what we could do differently as human beings to stop this from happening. One resident in a local hostel recently asked me why the hostel residents are more likely to die younger than those people who live across the road in the private mansion block? Is it some sort of government conspiracy? It's a reasonable question given the breathtaking differences in life expectancy between those people who are homeless and those who are not. Being homeless, you are at increased risk of poor health, that's a fact. From the lack of protection against the elements to exposure to pollution to poor diet to the increased risk of substance misuse to poor mental health to the risk of being attacked; being homeless sometimes seems like a vicious cycle that feeds itself.

Then there are the reasons that people are more likely to become homeless in the first place. Compared to the rest of the population, our patients are more likely to have suffered adverse childhood experiences or have been victims of crime, abuse, prejudice, hate and wars. These experiences have left them at greater risk of poor physical and mental health. Of course, your mental health will suffer if you're homeless. You would be inhuman if it didn't suffer. But have you tried to get an appointment with a therapist when you don't have a permanent address? Have you ever tried to make it to a routine medical appointment when you're trying to raise enough money to score so you don't go into withdrawal?

I don't want this to be all about how our surgery is different from all the other surgeries blah blah blah, but I do want to say that I'm proud that we never turn anybody away no matter what state they turn up in.

Meanwhile our new government has announced plans to build more prisons. What is unclear is if this is because they want to relieve the prison population of overcrowding, increase the prison population or maybe even (take a deep breath) reduce homelessness. Anyone who has been homeless for any length of time will tell you that it's sometimes impossible to survive on the streets without falling foul of some archaic law or other. But while prison might provide some of our patients with a bit of much needed respite from the streets, for many people who are leaving prison, the only place they have left to go is on the streets and everyone knows that is a sure-fire way of being picked up for some minor misdemeanour.

I hope this magazine is testimony to some of our community's creative efforts. If you would like to contribute any writing (fiction, poetry, letters), photography or artwork please ask to speak to Matt or Tanya at the surgery. Nothing will be outright refused but we can't have any racism, sexism or any other sort of human intolerance. Feel free to send me any questions.

We would love to hear any opinions about the topics raised in this issue.

Thanks for all your contributions. Your emails, poems, stories, games and conversations keep us going and inspire others. Thanks again to Tatiana for our wonderful cover.

I would also like to thank Anthony Lewis our new roving contributing editor at large! I would also like to thank Claire for helping on this issue.

Peace and Love

Matt

Matthias.connor2@nhs.net

Van

Big police van,
Stacked, up with eight or ten men,
Muscles so hard they could hold up a dam,
First stop in the morning,
McDonalds of course,
To fill up their belly's, hamburgers a must:
And a nice fizzy drink,
To fence off the thirst.
If they eat any more their stomachs will burst
Second stop, in the evening:
A poor homeless comedian,
Lying on his own,
Not far from oblivion,
God only knows what's their slant on 'bohemian'
The big question at last;
Will they let him go? Or will they book him?

ANON 2025

Bread

I've been using my loaf to write poetry so I can earn some dough.
But most of my poetry is about me coming from the East End slums
and only earn me
crumbs. But I'm not
sourdough
because I've proven I can put in the work and generate enough to get
me a wholemeal.
and when I write something magnificent, I get given a lovely bit of crust.
I have a lot of people I love and want to butter their bread.
So for every poem I write, I make sure to cut and slice because I have
no intention of getting roasted, quite the opposite, I expect my works
of art to be toasted.
My pen is the French stick, and I'm self-raising my poetry with a flower.
So let us break bread, and I will break poetry's mold because, to be
honest, this may be the only poetry about bread you may ever hear or
know.

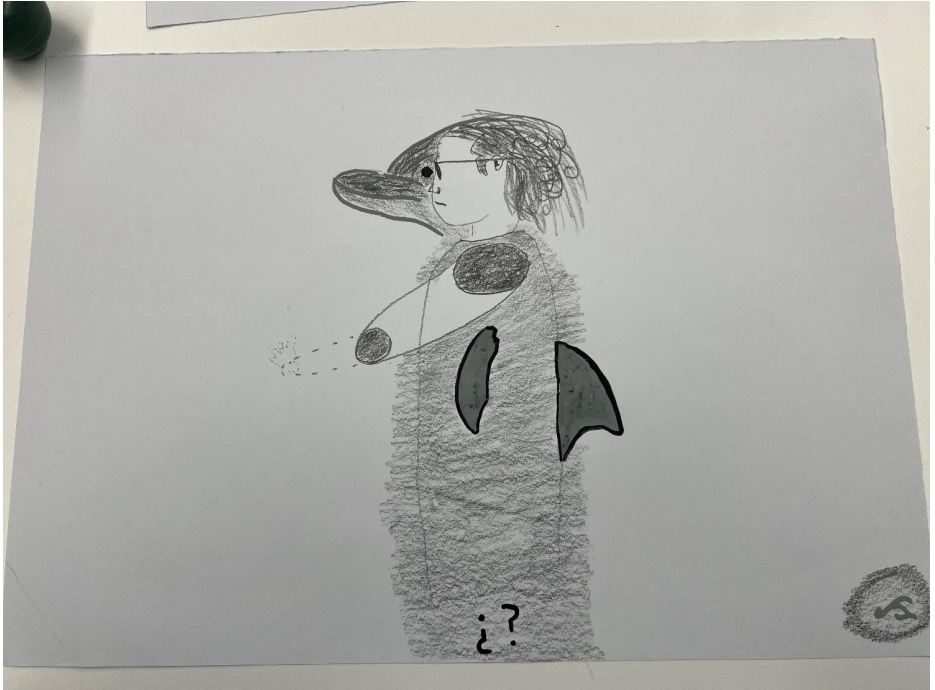
Anthony Lewis

Need to get an egg in life

My addiction keeps my head scrambled so if I give someone a mental
beating they get the right hump with me.
free-falling from off top of this wall, but I am King Anthony, who is a former
shell of myself
When did I become Humpty Dumpty?
I jumped into the boiling pot straight out of the frying pan pretending
to be sunny side up when I was feeling sunny side down.
Life was a joke because the yolk was on me
But I have always agreed I was a bad egg, even when I had free range to
roam, I continued to walk on eggshells, knowing my addiction, who is
the fox in this story, who keeps raiding my soul's henhouse
So I will continue to run, hoping my spirit doesn't get poached.

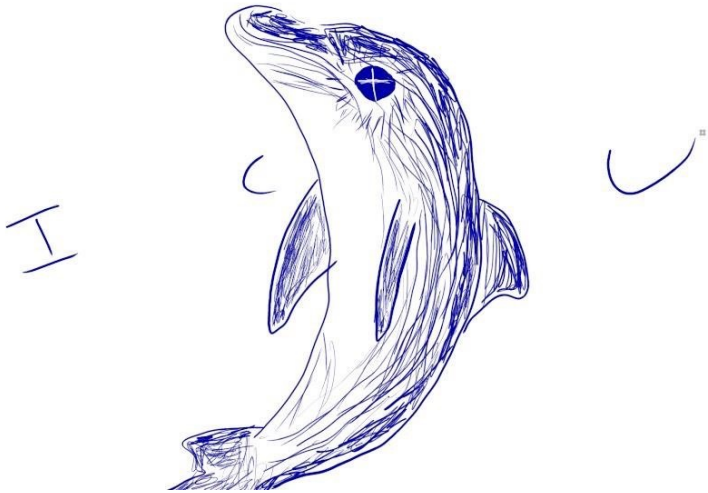
Anthony Lewis

Animals Among Us By Sasha



I've had a long life of hardship and experienced some pretty difficult situations when I was young without appropriate coping skills. Whether it's a dissociative response to my own body caused by this or an expression of a reality akin to those with dysphoria regarding their physical sex (which is different from mental experience of gender), I cannot say. I do not experience myself as human.

Eye Sea You



It comes with a lot of waking up in the night, sweating as I experience physical flashbacks (due to aphantasia, and the way I process in touch/smell rather than vision/hearing, as most people).

I'm a
Girl~

I'm a
Boy!



Either way, I'm made
of J♡Y

There's still a lot of room for me to express myself in beautiful, positive ways, despite my challenges in interfacing with others.

Altered State

Awake in a dream like ketamine twilight
The sun overhead like the moon at night
Don't fight - drift. That rift is the soul
Wholly dark and massive, stark and passive
Serene
Unreactive

Dreaming awake like reality's fake
The moon below like solar glow Shout and scream - that abyssal ravine
is NOTHING you've ever seen

Except in dreams
Except when awake
Life's at stake
It doesn't mean
ANYTHING
hole's a hole and sleep is sleep
Don't keep running - naught shall ye keep
Don't keep shunning - pain shall ye reap
This truth of nature, sooth in stature The gaps and what we lack
are ALL WE HAVE
to build, to yield, our sword and shield both

Let me sleep, let me rise
I walk the skies and seas
I run with beasts, unpoliced but for the
STRENGTH of my conviction
No contradictions lie inside
Paradox? Assuredly
And worriedly naked, I my fear forsake
To brave the day the depths the moon

It will be over soon.

Sasha

The World I Love

Is not not lost
Everything is still
Here,
My home is
still my retreat everything is still near

the world I love is not lost

everything is still here

Nothing has gone away

there is nothing left to fear

Georgie 2025



Georgie 2025

Good Times

Fields of animals running loose what a great sight
Little birds chirping all day and night A country farmhouse therapeutic
break Near to a beach and also a lake.
A homeless white witch turned up at our door
Just before we ate so well after four
All of a sudden she's climbed a big tree
Hugging it singing tree's set her free
We offered her some food and a place to rest
Then she tried to put our generosity to the test Asking at nine in the
morning can I have my own room
Tanya put her straight you can do one on your broom.
We all cracked on with a bit of communal cooking
A casual affair no need for a booking
Then there's paddle boarding and picnics down at the beach
Tanya's a pro and willing to teach
If you fancy there's plenty countryside walking
Or relax by the log fire laughing and talking All in all it's a great little
break
If you get a chance its one you should take.

GE - 2025



Dean

You keep saying that I'm the problem,
So why are you always chasing me?

You keep saying that you have no love for me,
So why then are you crying for me?

You keep saying that I'm the problem, You say that you hate the way I
look at you.

Is it because you see you looking back at you?

Here's a problem.
You keep saying that you want to be with me.
So why then are you always hiding away?

A problem shared
Is a problem halved

Anon

Walking in the Street

When I go out, I love the street is
Very sometimes breezy or sometimes very warm When I also go out
there's air rushing about there's full air that makes me feel very Calm.
When I'm stuck in where I am all of the time there's no breeze or air
it makes me feel in a tomb most of the time, and I can't Even sneeze. I
love living in most of the dark so if I'm just walking its lovely because
I feel so free again being in the dark. Because it's still lovely sitting and
walking in the dark

Especially if you notice a park with just for me
A swing will be just fine being alone in
The dark and so free. It isn't on lovely in the dark
But especially for me I just need the
Air that just blows over me as I walk in
The street the lamps they have put there just Get in the way but when
I walk past them I just have to say I really wish they go Away. Because
I feel so much better what more can I say. So, I've had a walk in the
street I feel much better when there's not so much heat.

Tracy

Glenn's Journey

By Matt



I have known Glenn several years. We meet in the local park where we put the world to rights inbetween trying to control our dogs. We both grew up in the north of England in smaller, less exciting towns orbiting Manchester where we both gravitated towards from an early age because of the music, fashion, nightlife and art. In many respects going out in Manchester led me to London in search of even more adventures (and record shops) and the same can be said for Glenn except that's where our adventures begun to diverge. Through the recreational drugs that were widespread in Manchester clubs Glenn had moved onto harder drugs. Soon, he had sold his records, clothes and stopped going to clubs altogether. It's very hard to imagine the man he is now with the man he was then but as Glenn will tell you he wouldn't be here if it wasn't for his past experiences that nearly finished him off. Today, Glenn is 22 years clean. He is a successful writer and director, working on his first feature film. I wanted to know a bit more how he got from A to B via the rest of the alphabet. I wanted to know how he went from having one pair of trainers literally hanging off his feet to needing to rent a storage unit to fit his new ones in. This is an edited version of a chat we had in his garden shed.

Glenn: I had been homeless the first time in the nineties in Liverpool. When I was 18, I was in a rehab in Birkenhead, and I left, and I was good for a bit. It was the type of place where they tried to do controlled drinking, so if you weren't doing your drug of choice, it was fine. It was a therapeutic centre, so they tried all these different therapeutic methods like shouting at pillows. I was just getting pissed every night and then I got kicked out of there, so I was in a hostel for a bit. I guess it depends how you define homeless. There were periods when I was sleeping at people's houses and on sofas. I didn't have an official home. I was sofa surfing. Then in my early twenties I was back in Bolton, and I was getting into real trouble with the drug dealers and gangsters. There was a heavy bunch that had taken over Bolton in the late nineties. I was caught in a car with two gangsters, me and my mate. We were buying 'some' drugs but we got caught with everything and they wanted us to plead guilty for the whole lot but we wouldn't. We went to magistrates and gave our pleas. They were putting real pressure on us to plead guilty. They were killers.

Matt: Would you have got a long sentence?

Glenn: We would have got about 8 years. When they arrested us, it was part of a wider operation, and a load of other people got nicked as well. There was a thing in the Bolton Evening news. It was like a pyramid with the main guys at the top. Me and Dave weren't even on the bottom we were that low down. When they caught us, the police asked us 'do you know who these guys are?' The main guy was eventually shot by a hitman. It went to crown court. We pleaded not guilty. We had been bailed to our parents' houses, and they were all on remand. It didn't stop them from sending cars to park at the top of our road to intimidate us. The first day at crown court the younger gangster pleaded guilty and the big guy, a proper northern steroid head jumped the dock to batter the younger gangster. They took everyone down to the cells and separated us all and our brief was that they thought that the big guy would now plead guilty. We went back up and they pleaded guilty and the judge kind of went 'what do you want to do with these two dick heads?' and the CPS was kind of like 'whatever!' I walked out of court like Gerry Conlon from In the Name of the Father. 'I'm a FREE MAN!' My Mum was like you've got to leave town because these lot won't forget this, so she packed me off.

My cousin David had bought a flat in Stratford in East London. This was 2002, years before the Olympics. You couldn't walk out of your door without seeing one of those yellow police incident signs asking for people to call this number if they saw anything. You would walk past three or four of these on the way to the shops. I was living there for a few months. My cousin had bought the flat with his boyfriend Garry and, needless to say, I didn't get on with Gary! I was super narrow minded. I love our David but immediately I was nicking off them so I could smoke crack. The crack was a lot bigger than you got in Bolton. I used to have to go to Moss Side when I was in Bolton, the other side of Manchester. In Stratford it was regularly available. I got into crack quite spectacularly. David threw me out. That's when I was really homeless. I was living in crack houses and shooting galleries in Forest Gate. I'm surprised I didn't get murdered it was that bad. That's when I thought I need to get clean.

Matt: What made you think you needed to get clean then, why didn't you just carry on as you had before?

Glenn: The consequences were pretty bad. I was cut off from everybody. I was lucky because I was kind of tricked into getting into rehab. I had been saying I want to get clean right from the get-go when I was 17/18. But you don't really want to get clean. You just want a life without the consequences of the lifestyle that you're living to get the drugs. You don't really want to get clean. There was no burning desire to stop using. I just wanted the consequences to stop but the consequences aren't bad enough to make you stop you using because your baselevel changes. You start off by saying I'm never going to inject and six months later you are injecting. You are robbing from your friends and family. Your moral compass isn't what it was six months on. I was battered; I got into trouble with gangsters. It didn't stop me from going into places where the same gangsters might be just because I wanted ten pounds worth of heroin.

Matt: Were you getting scripted?

Glenn: Oh yeah. I think I was on a script from when I was 17/18. Using on top. The scripts just a parachute to stop the cold turkey. A lot of the time I would sell the script. If they gave it me all at once I would sell it for a tenner and then you would be fucked because you didn't have your parachute.

Matt: What made you go to your first NA meeting.

Glenn: I had been in a lot of detoxes since I was about 17. I was in 3 or 4 times. H & I (hospitals and institutions) would go into detox centres to host meetings. I had been dragged to a couple of meetings from rehab, so I was aware of it. The first time I became really aware of them was when I was in my late teens, and I was at my mum's house and she was away for a few weeks. I had all the local junkies there. I had this one lad round, and he was called Crispin, and I couldn't get rid of him. We would go out grafting together. Our main graft was going door to door selling shammy leathers, clothes pegs and cleaning products. We would go to Cost Co and buy cheap shit and go knocking on people's doors selling clothes pegs. You would make ten or 20 quid each and you would go and score and then you would go and sell a few more bits. I was sort of lumbered with Crispin. It was like a co-dependent relationship. You always take someone hostage and before you know you've spent six months with some lad you've been doing drugs and graft with.

I remember he still had some money left over and I had spent all mine, so I said, what are you doing tonight? He said I want to get clean and there's an NA meeting behind the Quick Save on Deane Road in Bolton. I was like, what the hell are you going there for? I just thought it was a mad religious thing. All I heard was people preying and shit. Anyway, I went and I only went because he had money and I was going to use with him. I thought he will split his gear with me afterwards. I turned up and he didn't show up and I have never seen him since. I have no idea what happened to him. I went into the meeting and the lad that was chairing the meeting was someone I had used with and I knew he had used like I used, and I learned that he was two years clean. I couldn't believe it. You what? Not even a draw? Not even weed. Not even a drink? Nothing?!

I had never met anybody completely sober or completely clean off drugs before. I had met people who were just doing the script who said they were clean, and I've met people who just smoked crack who said they were clean or just drinking alcohol because they weren't doing heroin or whatever. That was the night I thought if he can do it there is a way that I can do it. Now don't get me wrong I still had years left of using but I lodged it in the back of my head that here was a way out of this.

Matt: Was he the guy with the trainers you told me about before?

Glenn: He had on a nice pair of trainers on. That was the first things I clocked. He's got nice clothes on. I've always liked nice clothes. Nice trainers, nice shirt. I've always been aware of that even if I didn't have a pot to piss in. You know what else that happened that night? There was a bunch of other lads at that same meeting who were around the same age as me. I didn't know them, but they were having a laugh after the meeting. There was a comradery, and they were like me. They weren't neeks. I was like, I want to be like that. So, it seemed attractive. I didn't know how they got it, I just knew it was something to do with NA.

Years later I'm homeless in London. Sometimes I would be in the hostel, sometimes I would be on the streets. Old Street, Hackney, all of them places. I went to a meeting because I wanted a using partner so I thought I would go to NA and find one and there was a guy at the meeting, some proper, big cockney geezer. He was all like, you've got to go to Bournemouth mate. It's got rehabs, the recovery is there amazing. I was like, Bournemouth sounds great.

Then what happened was that shortly after I came into a bit of money because I had been in a 'car accident' the year before and they had paid out. I got a few grand, but it was paid in instalments. I had spent the first couple of grand in a about a week in the crack house. I had rung my mum begging for more money. Mum, just put twenty quid in me account, just put twenty quid in. I said to her, that other money's due, and I can give it you back then. My mum said, I've been on the internet, and I've heard about this place in Bournemouth. I said, why do I keep hearing about Bournemouth? This is the second time in about 24 hours. My mum said that this guy runs a rehab and if you give him that money, he will get the rest from the council. So, I gave up the right to another two grand because my immediate need was twenty quid. I went with her idea and signed the money over to her and she gave it to Steve at the Providence Projects in Bournemouth and within a couple of days I'm in a rehab just because I wanted twenty quid. I just went where the money took me. I had no agency. I went in and it was a 12-step rehab. In this case it was very CA (Cocaine Anonymous) centric. Even when I left, I just carried on doing what they told me. After 12 weeks I went into a dry house in Bournemouth. This was the early 2000s. I was in one for 6 months and another for 6 months but what I did in those places was keep on going to meetings. In the move on dry house, I got a job in vintage clothes shops. The guy who ran it was five years sober. I love old clothes. I looked like Mr Retro. I was looking like an eighties casual. It was like being in Mr Ben. Then, his friend got me involved in his business selling midcentury furniture. The obsession went into objects, trainers, design, music. If it wasn't for those two people I would have probably gone into counselling at the drugs services because that's what a lot of my peers went into. A result of that job is what I do now. After a few years sober I went to Uni and did a degree in fashion. I stayed in Bournemouth for 9 years. I met my partner there via mutual friends.

Matt: What advice would you give to your twenty-year-old self?

Glenn: The problem is that the twenty-year-old me would not listen to anybody. This is the problem. I knew I wanted to get somewhere but I had no idea how to get there. My immediate need was to find ways to consume and use. I think you must get to the point of submission where you are completely almost humbled or humiliated into making that change. It's not the same for everybody. I don't think it has to get to a point where you're completely fucked. I've seen people get sober and stay sober years before things got to that point. I can only speak for myself but that's what had to happen.

I didn't have any hope. There wasn't any hope for me and then I started seeing glimpses of it. Like those lads after the meeting. That moment when I thought I want what they've got. Gradually I was shown this is the only way you can do it and to take that opportunity. It's hard though because if every drug addict or alcoholic listened there would be a lot less of us. It is a mental illness.

Matt: What about loved ones? What about if you're worried about a love one who is struggling with addiction?

Glenn: This is horrible but it's the truth. You've got to stop enabling them. I went back to my mum countless times. She tried managing my using. Buy this much a day and you will be okay, but it was never enough. If I got used to twenty quids worth a day I would need 40 quids worth. When the enabling stopped and I was kicked out and sent down to London. That's when I was forced into making a change. It's horrible because I won't lie, I have seen people take the opportunity and I have seen other people absolutely crumble. It's hard because they are your loved ones but whilst they are being enabled you are perpetuating their chance of destroying themselves.

Matt: Do you still go to meetings?

Glenn: I still do at least two meetings a week. I try and get to more. I still sponsor people and take them through their twelve steps. I still do the rest of the program myself. This morning, I woke up and did my morning pages. I write my step 10 and how I'm feeling and all that kind of thing. I have a routine that I still do that helps me because I still have the same illness that I had 22 years ago.

Matt: Does it matter what kind of meeting you go to?

Glenn: Any meeting is a meeting but gradually you will find the one you feel more at home with. I'm doing a lot of AA meetings at the moment simply because I have a friendship group who are at AA, and I enjoy it and get a lot out of it. A year from now I might be back in NA, or I might be back in NA tomorrow.

You go where you there's people you identify with. I was in a CA rehab, but I went to NA because there they were talking about heroin and I was like, they're my people!

Matt: And if rehab or detox is not available?

Glenn: I have seen a lot of people get clean in the rooms without rehab. Detoxing on the street or whatever.

Matt: Is there anything you want to add?

Glenn: I know there are a lot of different ways, but NA worked for me. I tried a lot of different ways before I got to NA. What I can say is if you come into the 12-step fellowship with an open mind and do as you're told there's a good chance, you're going to get sober and stay clean.

Return to Glastonbury

By Tanya

Following our successful trip in November 2024, we organised a return 4-day stay in May. Before I write a little something about our trip I would like to say a very big Thank You to everyone at The National Educational Union, who choose us as their good cause and raised £750.00 in their annual Christmas raffle. I would also like to Thank Patti and family who asked people to donate money to the Cardinal Hume Centre in memory of her son, Daniel, who passed away far too young. Daniel was a patient at the surgery, he has left a huge impression on us all. Daniel brightened up our day he was an interesting character full of kindness and warmth, he was attentive towards others and like many of our patients extremely talented. If he were with us today, Daniel's name would be on the list to visit the farm.

Anita and I were fortunate enough to accompany 6 patients to The Paddington Farm Trust. Our little break took place between 19 -23rd May. I drove my little car and a friend of mine borrowed the surgery his car, which we insured and was driven by Grant. We left the surgery at 10:00am stopping off for some, petrol, light snacks and drinks for the 3 ½ hour journey. After a couple of wellbeing breaks, we arrived at the farm at around 3pm and for some it was like arriving home. The sun was shining, the farm was buzzing with activity, campers erecting their tents and lighting camp fires.

The first evening saw everyone settling in, we cooked a chicken curry and Ray baked his famous Apple Pie (baked on a plate). Food delicious and the company fantastic. We all agreed that we would head to Weston Super Mare the next day as the forecast was looking warm and sunny, which is exactly what we did. In the morning we made sandwiches and packed the freezer box and headed to the beach. The tide was out when we arrived, the sea very calm. Together we pumped up 2 of the paddle boards (which is quite a job) and set up the badminton net ready for a game or two. Peter and Lewis headed into town to explore. Anita, Brett and I had a go at paddle boarding and swimming in the sea, there were donkey rides and school children running around free. The seagulls circled us and pounced on ever crumb that was dropped, Peter had his hamburger whipped out his hand by a pesky bird.

When we returned to the farm it was all hands on deck, everyone had their own job to do, our resident DJ got the tunes going, Jess and Ray in the kitchen baking macaroons and prepping a Spanish omelette, Anita preparing the hamburgers, Grant starting the fire – a feast in the making.

Midway through our food prep a visitor appeared she had been told by a café in town that the farm provides free accommodation for voluntary work on the farm. All the staff had gone home for the evening and the farmer had suggested that she return in the morning. Between us we discussed what we should do and it was agreed that she could stay for dinner and have the sofa for the night. Upon hearing this she climbed the tree and stayed there until dinner – we had our very own tree fairy. That evening we climbed the Tor and watched the sun go down over the Mendip Hills, sunset was magical. Our tree fairy decided to sleep in the barn on top of a haystack.



The next day saw some of us working on the farm, planting lines of beetroot and courgettes, removing the weeds. We met and spent time with volunteers who visit the farm each week, shout out to JP, Brendan, Glen and Rob (the farmer) who was extremely patient with us, especially when our planting lines went a little skewed. We all tucked in to lunch, every ingredient selected and picked from the farm – the meal was incredible and more enjoyable sitting and sharing it with the volunteers.

Some of us walked into town for a spot of food shopping and another walk up the Tor, coming down we took our shoes and socks off and experienced the ground under our feet. We passed goddess fairies and Buddhist monks whose goal was to make it the top of the Tor. Whilst in the town we bumped into an ex-patient of the surgery, who had been travelling back to Somerset and had decided that he liked Glastonbury and was chilling on a bench in the middle of the town. Much of me wanted to bring him back to the house, but this would have required a group discussion and decision. Before leaving we made arrangements to meet at the Tor the next evening for sunset, we left him sitting on the bench content with life. It's a reminder how small the world is and to always be kind as you never know who you'll meet on your journeys. Sadly, he did not make it to the Tor the next evening, our paths will cross again, I am sure.

Our final day was spent back on the beach; however the wind had picked up and the tide was out. It was definitely a kite day! The beach is very muddy with sinking sand. We had arrived early that morning and we were really excited to get back on the paddle boards. So there we were pumping all 4 boards up, when the beach rangers drove up and suggested that we needed water...you don't say. We sat patiently waited for the tide to come in, the wind seemed to be getting blusterier and so we decided to head to Clevedon which has another beach and a manmade boating and swimming lake. Boards deflated and inflated again and we got on the lake and had some fun. Lewis went off on a walk and came back having found the Poets Walk which was inspired by English Poets, Coleridge and Tennyson who visited Clevedon in their day. He was thrilled to bits.

It was Brett's turn in the kitchen and boy did he rustle up a fantastic meal, using up all the leftover food, we ate a Kings feast. Music, singing and laughter, few games of chess and jigsaw puzzle on the go. In the evening, we headed up the Tor to see the final sunset and then went on a mystery tour looking for Gog and Magog, known as '@the Oaks of Avalon' legend suggests that the two trees are said to be the traditional point of entry onto the island. Darkness crept in and we all got a little scared, our fear not helped by Jess and Ray jumping out the bushes, so we turned back. Returning to the farm we toasted marshmallows over the fire that Grant had started and spent the rest of the evening chatting and watching the stars overhead.

Our time on the farm rapidly coming to an end, not before booking a return in November 25 and June 26. We have started raising money for the next two trips. Please share the following link:

https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/tanya-obrien?utm_medium=CR&utm_source=EM

If you are interested in finding out more about the short break, please speak with the reception team who will be more than happy to tell you all about it.



‘All I wanted was a fair shot of life’

My experiences in the Private Rental Sector after being homeless

By Brian (not his real name)

After being homeless for over a year in London I was found a place in a hostel. For the first time in as long as I could remember, I began to have hope for the future. The staff in the hostel were kind hearted souls and I registered at the Dr Hickey Surgery who encouraged me to start thinking about my mental health and how that might have impacted my situation. I joined a local gym, and I began to attend AA meetings and go to church. With a little encouragement I even started writing poetry.

I knew there wasn't much chance of getting a flat of my own, but I was apprehensive about sharing a house because of my anxieties about others. I was assured that I would be placed in a studio flat in a shared private rental house so it would be as good as having my own flat. Not being from London. I was unfamiliar with the new area but when I asked other people, they all reassured me it was a happening area on the up. I began to make plans for my future. I was estranged from my son's mother but slowly I could envision living in a place where I would be able to make amends and maybe even have my son come over to stay one day. I hadn't seen him for two years.

Things began okay. It wasn't exactly a studio flat. More of a room with a tiny shower cubicle where a cupboard used to be. While it wasn't exactly a kitchenette it did have a sink with a tap and a microwave oven. Still, I was hopeful, and I continued to make plans. I also wondered who the other tenants in the other rooms would be since I had been the first to move in. I began to look forward to their arrival. I grew optimistic about meeting new people. But one by one and bit by bit my dreams for a new life began to crumble. There was the drunk, psychotic women in the room next door who would scream abuse through the wall at me all night long; then there was the spice dealer and the other spice users who would bring people back to the house night and day. The noise at night would keep me awake and I soon began to self-medicate just so I could sleep. I felt like a new face in Hell.

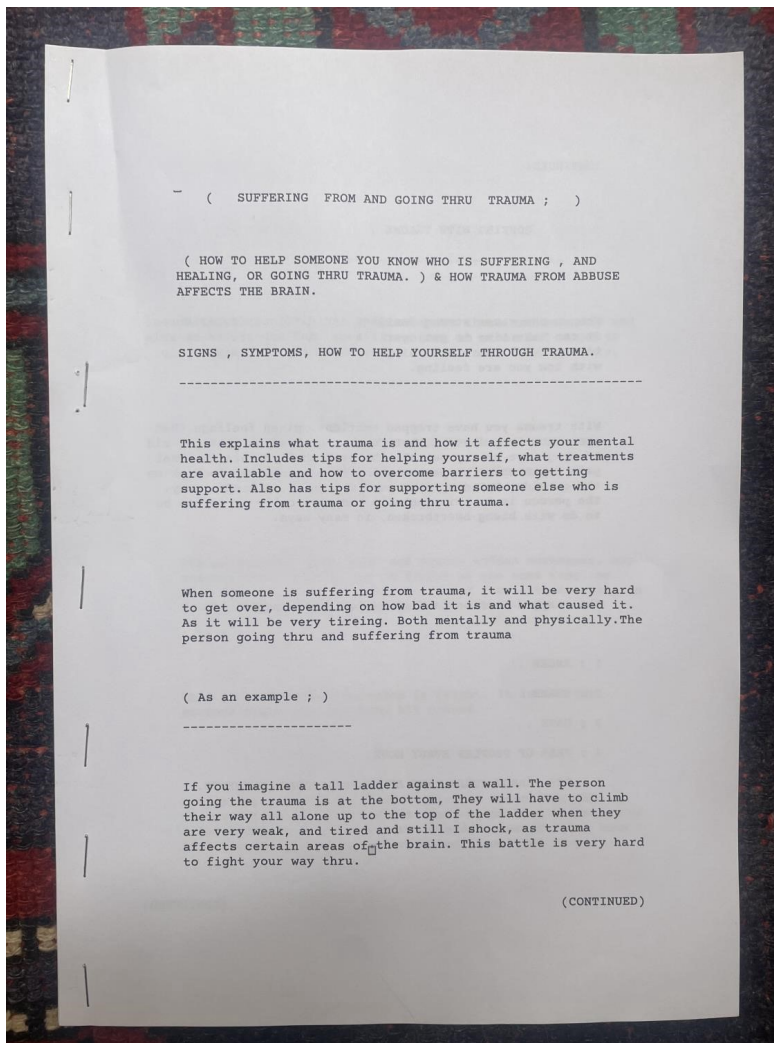
When I couldn't self-medicate any longer, I pleaded with the drunk woman to quieten down and that's when she attacked me with a knife. The police came and spoke to her but said it was a mental health issue, and they would let her mental health team know in the morning. The mental health team said it was a behavioural issue and that seemed to be that. The next day I called the agency

responsible for the property and asked if they had any self-contained flats. I said all I wanted was a fair shot of life. They reminded me that I had signed a six-month contract at this place. Any hope of having my son stay over one day had gone up in smoke. That's when I decided I would be better off on the streets. At least that way I might be able to get a room in a hostel again. At least on the streets I knew where I stood. Later that afternoon I presented myself as homeless at the council's offices, but they advised me that they had no obligation to help me because I had made myself intentionally homeless. What was now even worse, was knowing that while I slept rough my housing benefit was still paying for my 'studio flat.' My only hope is that the months left on my contract will pass without incident and then I will be able to start again. I won't lie there have been days when I wish my life would come to a premature end. Alcohol lifts my mood and so does the comradeship of some of the people I have met on the streets, many of whom have had similar experiences as me. My GP wants to put me back on mental health meds because he thinks it will help. So far, I have resisted his advice saying I know best except the more my mental health suffers the harder I find it to imagine a future for me. At least the sun is out. Maybe I will make an appointment to speak to the GP.

Do any of our readers have any stories they want to share about the private rental sector? Can it be all bad? Since the demise of social houses an industry has developed around supplying landlords with tenants on benefits. The landlord of these properties doesn't have to get involved letting these agencies do the work for a commission. Many of these agencies have regal sounding company names that wouldn't have sound out of place on a Monopoly board. However, instead of refusing DSS tenants (as many landlords once did) they now actively encourage them. As Brian explained to me over a coffee in Victoria, 'as soon as they found out I was on PIP for my mental health they said I could move in right away, no more questions asked, taking my Universal Credit login details so that my rent could be paid directly to them.'

Claire

Claire is someone I speak to when I am visiting hostels. She has recently undertaken a huge project writing about her mental health and the treatment available to her as a patient. There isn't a week that doesn't go by when she hasn't generated more and more pages on her research into this massive subject. She does most of research online or from books she has read or from talking to her psychologist. This is the first page from her ongoing project.



Karalyn's Joke Page

What do you can somebody with no Nose?

Know body knows!



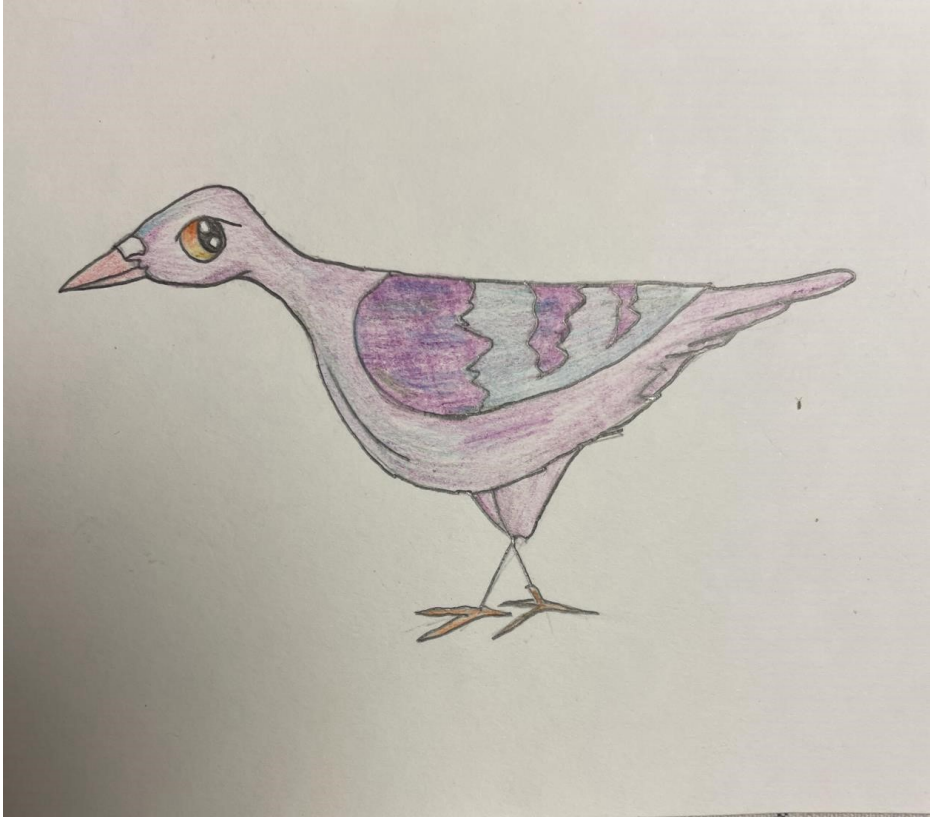
Why did the girl take a pencil to bed?

To draw the curtains!!!



Titi

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Jack Mellor

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