

# 'It's not a life to live and it's time for a change – not just for me but for everyone'

Early in 2009 *cjm* spoke to *Tony*, aged 20, who has been in prison since he was 16, about being in care, being in prison and his plans for the future.

Known at one point as 'wards of court' and then, following the 1989 Children Act as 'looked after children', around a quarter of those in the prison system have been in the care of a local authority at some point. Early in 2009 *cjm* spoke to *Tony* (aged 20), who has been in prison since he was 16, about being in care, being in prison and his plans for the future.

Tony talks about coming from a family where a lot of conflict took place. He was in and out of care between the ages of 10 and 16 because of a very conflictual relationship with his relatives. He relates one incident, aged 13, when he used some of his grandmother's hair gel ('she used the good stuff') which created an argument between them that led to him leaving the house and putting himself back into care because 'it was better than having to put up with that'. He describes him and his mother as 'chalk and cheese' and never being able to get on for 'more than the length of a dvd'. He also, with some respect, describes a woman who was looking after two other children and doing three jobs.

Tony stopped going to school at the age of 14 and turned to cash-in-hand work that included working in the kitchen of a greasy spoon, being paid to collect glasses at a local pub employed by a man who was not his uncle but he says 'acted like one'. Because he got into trouble at school it seems that his absence from class was never followed up. Aged 16, out of care and on his own, Tony got a full-time cash-in-hand job working for a carpenter whose business collapsed when the owner lost the use of his hand due to an injury received when playing sports. Out of work, with bills to pay, Tony says that he turned to street robbery to survive and quickly found himself in the criminal justice system.

Tony listens to a lot of music in prison. One of the few programmes he listens to on the radio is Prime Minister's Question Time. Unimpressed by David Cameron, Tony likes Nick Clegg because, 'he always points out the contradictions in Gordon Brown's arguments'; 'sick of Brown' Tony would vote Tory 'to get Brown out', but won't because 'the Tories want to put more people in prison'.

When he was sent to prison on an IPP (indeterminate sentence for public protection) he says that he was given drugs for 18 months to sedate him. The arrival of a new doctor in the hospital put an end to the sedation and Tony

was then asked to go on anger management courses. When asked about the impact of the course Tony says 'the only problem with the anger management course is that it did not stop me getting angry'.

One of Tony's reasons for speaking to *cjm* was that he wanted to give advice to anyone in the care system about how to keep out of the criminal justice system. He had contacted an organisation called the Careleavers' Association (he had been sent a CLA leaflet by his 'leaving care' team in the local authority he grew up in) to offer his experience and advice to other young people in care or leaving care. Tony is determined that his next parole hearing will be his last – he keeps out of trouble in prison and is improving his English language skills. The CLA visited Tony to talk to him about his experiences for *cjm* and he agreed to answer the following questions in writing:

## What advice would you give to young people in care about how to stay out of the criminal justice system?

'I would say stop and think before you rush in and say no to people who want you to get in trouble with the police. And do well at school or college and get an education behind you and get a good job because a life of crime don't pay. You may get away one time but in the end you end up in prison, and that is no life'.

## How old were you when you went into care?

'I was about 10 when I went in to a children's home. I was in at least six children's homes and between four and six foster homes. I also lived in friend's houses and in a mate's car in a garage – it was not nice'.

## How did being in care make you feel?

'It made me feel not wanted and scum and not loved by my mum. It was not a nice feeling'.

## Did you make any friends in care?

'No, I didn't really make friends. I always chilled out with others but I kept myself to myself'.

## What was good about being in care?

'There was nothing good about being in care but when we were feeling low there was always someone to talk to'.

**What was bad about being in care?**

'Not being able to see my brother and sister and my friends and being able to go out whenever I wanted to'.

**What did you like about school?**

'I like music and maths because that is what I was good at'.

**What did you not like about school?**

'I didn't really like school. I don't really know why but if I had a chance to go back and do it again I would because I was kicked out of so many'.

**When did you leave school?**

'I got kicked out of school at ten and from then on I was in and out until I was 14 or 15'.

**Are you taking any courses in prison?**

'Yes I am doing a music and English course'.

**What do you plan to do when you get out of prison?**

'First I need to keep my head down and find a job and somewhere to live. Then I am going to a studio and make

my album and send it off to a record label and see if I can get signed up and try and get on with my life and settle down with my girlfriend and get married and live life together as happy as we can'.

**Is there anything else you would like to write about being in care or being in prison?**

'Being in care and being in prison are two different things. I know it can seem like care is prison but prison is the worse place on this earth. Getting told when to get up and doing the same stuff everyday. Being locked behind a door for most of the day and having to watch your back from day to day – it's not a life to live and it's time for a change – not just for me but for everyone'.

'I just want to add something about life on the outside. There are too many people getting killed with knives and guns and sometimes I think it is safer being in prison than out; but as I said we need to stop and think and change our lives because it only takes a minute to mess yours and someone's life up forever'. ■

Information about the **Careleavers Association** can be found at [www.careleavers.com](http://www.careleavers.com)



UNIVERSITY OF HULL

## Restorative Justice: The Inside Story

# MA in Restorative Justice

**Are you interested in exploring the potential of restorative justice to repair the harm caused by crime? Then the University of Hull's Masters Degree offers a unique chance to study this fascinating and important subject in depth.**

Using distance learning, this course will encompass everything from Peacemaking Criminology, International Restorative Processes and Victims, Rights and Justice to Research Skills and Key Practices, with a dissertation in your final year. You will be taught by academics at the forefront of restorative justice scholarship who are developing other exciting projects such as an international conference and research programme around the theme of restorative values and ethics in society.

**For informal enquiries please contact Gerry Johnstone, Course Director by emailing [J.G.Johnstone@hull.ac.uk](mailto:J.G.Johnstone@hull.ac.uk)**

**For further details visit our website**

**[www.hull.ac.uk/marj](http://www.hull.ac.uk/marj)**