



Client Story – Dean Croft (NORCAS Norwich)

I had always associated with guys who were a lot older than I was and by the time I was 14 I already smoked heavily, drank too much and played around with weed. At home I witnessed the volatile and violent relationship my parents shared. My dad would beat my mum and was constantly letting me down, which is probably a contributing factor to my troublesome behaviour at school.

By 15 I had been kicked out of education, I was a regular weed smoker and dabbled in acid and Ecstasy. During a period of arguments with my mum's husband, I had my first overdose on Ecstasy and lucky to be alive I moved into a shared house with 11 other people and started to smoke crack. Things started to get progressively worse and at my worst point I mugged a taxi driver to find the money to feed my habit. Back and forth from my mum's house, I started experimenting with harder drugs and after about a year I overdosed on heroin. I would fight with my mum constantly and again in desperate need of extra cash, I robbed her house causing criminal damage - a very low point.

I tried to cut back on the drugs and get my life back on track, I had a council house but my so-called friends were selling drugs from my property. After a while I felt scared of going back to the place, it had been taken over and become a crack house. I was sleeping at mates, kipping on sofas and avoiding the property completely. I had always had a very close relationship with my Nan and so I was devastated when I heard she had died, it tore me apart and I decided to go back home again. I was very depressed and I missed my Nan, it was one of the lowest points of my life. I sat at a dock for hours and the police eventually found me there crying.

Getting into a hostel in Stevenage was a stepping stone in the right direction and it was where I met the future mother of my daughter. It was a complicated relationship; there was a lot of jealousy which caused arguments. We had been together 5 years, when we decided to try for a baby.

When my daughter was born I was dealing weed for money and when my girlfriend went to visit her son, which would be every other week, I was smoking weed and taking drugs just like before. This went on for about 9/10 months, before a serious argument broke out. I am ashamed to say I grabbed her by the neck, threw her out

and smashed up her possessions in the heat of the moment. She later moved to Norwich taking our daughter with her.

Selling weed kept me afloat for a little while and my sister put me up, so I had somewhere to sleep for a while. Desperate to be close to my daughter I slept rough in Norwich, for the opportunity to see her more often. Eventually, a friend offered me a more long term arrangement while I fought to see my daughter. I had a nervous breakdown in the safe haven and took an overdose on anti-depressants. Struggling with anorexia, lack of money and my underlying drug problem I was in no fit state to be a father.

It was at this point the light bulb finally switched on – I realised I wanted to show responsibility and be a good dad to my daughter and in 2008, I finally began the slow journey to recovery. I got off the streets and into a direct access hostel and started to slowly move forward.

My ex-partner told me I could have contact with my daughter on the condition that I got myself onto a drugs programme. After meeting a key worker from NORCAS in Norwich, I re-evaluated my situation and saw an opportunity to become clean. With the help and lots of support from the homeless outreach worker at the charity and their programmes for addictive behaviour I managed to stop the harm and destruction I was doing to myself.

Whilst in recovery I volunteered with the Salvation Army and it was here that I rediscovered my passion for food. Both my dad and my granddad were good cooks and I had obviously picked up the family trait!

I love shopping for ingredients, planning recipes – everything about food and cooking. I love it when people say they enjoy what I create. It is really good to bring people pleasure through my food, rather than pain.

I am very proud to say that I am now embarking on a career as a trainee chef and am currently studying at College for an NVQ, level 2 in culinary skills. I cook in a number of well-established kitchens and hope to progress enough to own my own establishment in the future. I realised that the only people I want to know are the people who can influence me in a positive way, not make my life terrible.

I am now the Father I wanted to be, I am in a new flat, working hard and am very grateful to the people at NORCAS who have helped me turn my life around and I have a great deal of hope for the future.