

Owen's Story

Owen (20) began using cannabis and alcohol as a young teenager, and soon progressed onto using heroin. Due to his heroin use, his family relationships deteriorated until he was moved into a foster home. Owen committed crime over a number of years to fund his escalating heroin habit, and as a result of this he spent some time in prison. He also lost all contact with his son. Recently, Owen has decided to take a second chance on the Nene project, as he feels he is ready to rebuild his life and leave his heroin addiction behind him.

Owen first experimented with drugs at age 13 and it soon became a regular occurrence. He started off with cannabis and alcohol and used them as a way of blocking out the problems in his life.

'I smoked cannabis and that. I've smoked cannabis since I was about 13. I drink alcohol quite a lot as well, gets rid of my problems and that.'

Owen had grown up seeing his father using heroin regularly in the house. When one of Owen's friends offered him some heroin, he decided to try it for himself, despite the fact that his father had tried to discourage him from trying it.

'I seen my dad do it before when I was younger. I was round my mates and that, my mates were doing it, so I thought, 'Yeah, all right then, I'll try it'...At first I was like, 'Nah, I don't want to do it, it'll kill you, and that' and they were like, 'No, it won't. No, it won't if you're smoking it.' So I thought, 'All right then', and I tried a bit and it was that addictive. It was such a buzz that I thought, 'Oh, I like that.'

Soon, Owen's heroin use escalated from smoking to injecting. He found that as soon as he began to inject his addiction became a lot worse. He began to want to use heroin on a daily basis.

'One day there was no foil and there was only pins [needles] and that, so I thought, 'All right then, I'll inject some.' And then I injected some and then every day, I just wanted it every day. I just got so hooked.'

Owen's escalating heroin use began to cause problems with his girlfriend. She left him soon after taking their son with her.

'When he was first born, I used to live with them and that, for a little while. But then she found out that I was using and she left me. Wouldn't let me see the kid, if I knocked on the door now she'd say, 'Go away.'

Owen moved back in with his mum and continued to use heroin. At first, she was unaware of his habit, and Owen was funding his heroin use through money given to him by her. He was also selling possessions from around her home. When his mum realised that he had a heroin problem she asked him to leave the family home.

'I was hitting my mum for money all the time for it and everything...my room was disappearing and she was like where's that gone and I had sold it...My mum gradually knew what I was doing and then she chucked me out of the house and everything.'

Owen moved into a foster home where his heroin use escalated further, he attributes this to the fact that he was so unhappy about living away from home. Despite the best efforts of those around him to discourage his heroin use, Owen's heroin problem increased.

'I just used to get really pissed off basically when I was in the foster home. I wanted to live back at my mum's and I was using more and more, and it was getting to the point where what anyone said I'd just use more and more and ignore it.'

As Owen's heroin use increased, so did the amount of crime he was committing, to the extent where he was offending on a daily basis. At this point, Owen was less interested in his personal well-being and hygiene than he was in obtaining heroin.

'And then I went out shoplifting to get it every day, literally, selling all my stuff, my clothes and everything. I looked like a real bum, a proper tramp for a few years.'

Owen eventually moved back home and by this stage was willing to agree to her rules and attempt to change his ways.

'I went down my mum's one day and she was in tears. She couldn't handle it anymore and was like, 'Oh, you can come and move back in, but if I see you doing it in the house then I'm going to chuck you out.' She goes, 'I don't mind you doing it, but not as much as you are doing it, I don't want to see pins. I don't want to see marks all over your arms.' So I was like all right then.'

Throughout his drug-using career, Owen felt that his addiction was taking control of him and that he was acting in ways that he would not have done had he not been using heroin. However, at the time he did not feel guilty about what he was doing, as the need for heroin outweighed any remorseful feelings he had.

'I didn't care because I needed it because it got that bad. After a while, it's like a medicine, you need it every day and if you don't have it you are ill. And you'll do anything, physically anything to get that £10, just to get that next bit of brown. It's bad.'

As a result of committing crimes to fund his heroin addiction, Owen was sent to prison, where he spent two months. Whilst in prison, Owen ceased all drug use apart from temazepam, which was prescribed by the prison doctors. He found the withdrawal from heroin extremely difficult, both physically and mentally.

'I didn't have it and I felt rough and everything. I felt really bad, it was horrible. I can't describe how it was. I ached. One minute I was hot, then cold. I hurt. It was horrible.'

When Owen came out of prison, he was no longer using illegal substances. However, very soon he found himself socialising with his old friends, and he soon fell back into the heroin-using lifestyle.

'Then I chose to do it again. I could have been clean, but all my friends were all around me again and I was like, 'Fuck it, I might as well get into it.'

Owen did want to change though and has, in fact, previously received help through the Nene project. He also found a job in Nottingham where he moved for nearly four months. As he was living away from Peterborough, he decided that he did not need to be on the Nene project and he stopped taking his prescribed methadone. For nearly four months, Owen was able to hold down his job and refrain from using any heroin.

'I was working, getting up every morning with something to look forward to and not getting up thinking, 'Where am I going to get some money from?'...I was working five days a week, coming back at the weekends and just drinking. I wasn't on the methadone, I was fine.'

Although Owen was not using heroin, he was using alcohol to block out his problems.

'I was just drinking to block it away. If I haven't got brown, it's got to be drink. I'm always gonna resort to something, always, just to block it out.'

However, Owen did eventually relapse back onto heroin and one weekend when he was back in Peterborough he stole from his mum so that he could buy some. The guilt of stealing from his mother was a turning point for him, and he immediately went and asked to rejoin the Nene project. At this point, Owen realised that he was in serious need of help.

'Then I came back and I stole off my mum again. I felt that low and really bored, depressed and there was nothing to do and I went and used, injected. I was sitting there in town and I just started crying and I came up here and said, 'Look, I've got to get back on this project or I'm going to lose it again.' And my key worker got me straight back on it.'

For the past two weeks, Owen has remained on the Nene project and has been trying to refrain from offending and using heroin. He has been starting to rebuild his life with the help of his mum and new girlfriend. Owen is still on methadone and although he is still tempted to use heroin, he has found that keeping himself busy is a very effective way of refraining from using heroin. His mum has played a central role in helping to keep Owen occupied as well as ensuring that he takes his methadone properly.

'At the moment, I'll have it [methadone] and think, 'Shall I go out and get a bag?' I said to my mum, 'Look, don't let me out of the house. If you see I'm bored or I say I'm bored don't let me out of the

house. Find something for me to do. Even if it's housework or something, just to take my mind off it.'

As Owen has only recently rejoined the Nene project, he has not yet been stabilised on methadone. Due to this, he has experienced some difficulty with resisting the temptation to use heroin, and on a small number of occasions has smoked the drug. However, he has cut his use down dramatically, and in the future he plans to completely abstain from heroin.

'I have slowed myself down, like I was doing one bag a day, but it's like I haven't even touched gear over the weekend. Last time I had a bag was Monday. That was it and I haven't touched any since.'

The main reason for Owen using heroin is boredom. However, as he still occasionally uses heroin, he also occasionally has to offend to get the money for the drugs.

'When I need money, I think, 'Shall I go out and offend?' and some days I do. Some days I wake up without a penny in my pocket. It's boring, I've got nothing to do, so I go out and offend. Not every day though.'

Owen appreciates that as part of the process of refraining from heroin, he has had to change the people that he socialises with.

'I tend to stay away from them people. I don't hang around with them people. They'll just get me back into the same old crap.'

Although Owen realises that the methadone is helping to cut down his heroin use and offending, he does not want to stay on methadone for too long due to the stigma associated with it. He has found that in order to cover up his heroin addiction and his use of methadone, he has been forced to lie to various people.

'Now I'm on meth I don't want to be offending...I'm trying my hardest to sort out, I'm on a script of methadone and I don't even want to do that. When people see me walking out of the chemist and that...they're like, 'What are you doing in there?' And I'm like, 'I'm just getting something for my mum.' I have to make excuses because I don't want them knowing that I'm a heroin addict...and I don't like lying.'

Owen's plans for the future include moving away from Peterborough as he feels that it offers him too much temptation to use heroin. He plans to continue to get help to overcome his heroin addiction, so that he is able to build a new life and get a job as a carpenter.

'I want to move to Nottingham...Get away from this town because everyone I know is using, and I know enough people, and every time I go into town it'll be like, 'Shall we get a bag, shall we do this, shall we do that?' Temptation. I want to get the help and sort it out.'