

Rob's story



Many people including myself didn't think I would see my 30th birthday.

I grew up in a pub. Drunken arguments and fights were a regular occurrence in our world. Me and my brother wandered the local estate from an early age. I was 5 when I had my first run in with the police, shoplifting from the local newsagents.

The lack of control at home meant I struggled with rules at school. By the age of seven I had my first permanent exclusion. By eleven I was smoking cannabis and drinking alcohol. The alcohol was easy to get hold of and I raised the money for cannabis through crime. I quickly moved on to amphetamines and LSD. I got into trouble with the police regularly, missed more and more school, and by 14 I was in specialist provision, where I met other boys like me, with the same disrespect for education. I was out of control, angry and violent - that youth everyone's scared of.

When I found myself in prison, I was determined to make it my first and last visit. On release, I looked for work and volunteered with community projects. I wanted to stay out of trouble. Then my dad died suddenly. I was 22. Everything went into free-fall. The anger built within me and I became involved in a fight which resulted in a 4 year sentence.

I moved into more violent circles and within months I had a serious cocaine addiction. I had to hide in my flat because I now had drug debts myself. Finally, I committed a serious violent offence and I was given an IPP - imprisoned for public protection - I was a danger to society and unsafe to be around. The only way I was going to overcome this was to change everything in my life.

I'd seen so many faces returning again and again, it was clear that, without structure and support, re-offending was inevitable. I had to educate myself as I couldn't read properly. I got counselling and accepted help from agencies I avoided in the past. Changing the habits of a lifetime is hard and at times I have stumbled, but I've done my best to use my time in custody effectively. I've got a partner and a baby now, so I've got to make it work.



I came across Good Vibrations in prison in early 2020. I'd never seen a gamelan before, so it was totally new to me and to the other men who took part. That meant we were on the same level, all out of our comfort zones. We had to leave our egos at the door and collaborate to master this unfamiliar set of instruments. And we had to encourage each other, or else the whole thing wouldn't work. This built confidence and self-belief. We took something we knew nothing about and in 5 days we were skilled and confident enough to showcase it to others, not just staff, not just family but fellow prisoners - that's massive. Good Vibrations gave me a safe context to try out being more confident, creative, collaborating with others – and that allowed me to believe in the better version of myself.

I don't know when I'll be released, but I'm determined to do something positive with my life when I am. I've even started writing a blog about my experience, something I never dreamed of doing a year ago. It's called [To Save a Drowning Man](#). I no longer want to be a problem in the community, but part of the solution, and I'm focused on remaining that way.