

Lee's story – with Suzanne, Lee's mum's too.

Lee: It was my mum who finally got me arrested for burglary and put a stop to it all. I started on heroin when I was 12. I'm 23 and been clean for one year now, prison helped sort me out. I used to get it from a lad who'd been in prison a few times. He gave it to my best mate and me. We smoked it on foil.

It fair knocked the stuffing out of me. Made me very sick. I was addicted by the time I was 13 and a half.

At first I just took it once a week, then twice a week and then three times. Then one day I stopped in and I wasn't very well without it. I went to my friend's house and he told me I was doing a rattle. I punched him.

I started injecting at 14. I started wagging off when I went to secondary school. Primary school was ok but I didn't like the bigger school.

Suzanne: *We had no idea what he was doing? Secondary school is too big for some people. I didn't know he was wagging off. No one contacted me. We did things as a family and had a good life, like holidays, swimming and activities. He wasn't left unsupervised. I didn't return to part time cleaning work until he was 12, and then in the evenings when my husband was at home.*

We started to see mood changes at 13ish but thought it was teenage hormones. Then I spotted the black hessian hanging down from under the bed frame, it'd been ripped. So we turned the bed upside down and found syringes and foil sellotaped under the bed. And later we found them stuck behind picture frames on the walls.

Lee: At the start I used bits of money in my savings to buy the heroin. Then I asked mum and dad. I'd say a pair of trainers were £100 when they were £80 – then use the £20 to buy drugs with. Or I'd say I was going to the pictures and things like that.

I was still interested in girls though. Lots of people on drugs aren't bothered about sex. I had a girlfriend and she moaned at me about taking drugs and then she dumped me.

I did have one job when I was 17 earning £1,200 a month as a fork lift driver. But I'd blow the lot in three days on gear and rock (cocaine)

Suzanne:

He used to stalk me for money. It was like having a horrible dark shadow with me all the time. He's had thousands of pounds off me over the years. His dad and I would argue about me giving it to him. I was a soft touch I suppose. He was violent and threatening to me. My other son would rush to protect me. I used to hide when I saw him coming. I had to hide my bank books too. It was horrible. I really hated him. He wasn't what I'd brought up. He was a little monster. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. I think maybe he was spoilt. We gave him everything he wanted. I did try and get him help, taking him to the hospital for methadone treatment but he always went back to drugs.

Lee: I was 15 when I was first arrested for shoplifting. I got a conditional discharge and £50 fine.

I started burgling people's houses & garages at 16. I never got caught until a year ago when I was 22 when I broke into mum's place. I knew the pitfalls to avoid. I'd take anything I could. Electrical equipment, figurines, jewellery – anything I could get my hands on.

I got picked up by the police lots of times. Lots. But they could never pin anything on me. I learnt all the ways from people who'd been doing burglary for years. So you could say I was good at it.

I've done prison once, serving my sentence in Shrewsbury and Blakenhurst. I got 12 months, served four and a half months and six weeks on a tag when I was released to my girlfriend's house. She's been such a good influence on me.

I was 21 before I started selling the gear. When you sell it you don't have to rob as much. But I got a worse habit as I took more drugs.

When I went into Shrewsbury I knew everyone – it looked like the whole of Stoke on Trent was in that prison. The other prisoners started jeering when they saw me because I'd been so good at not getting caught.

Suzanne:

The worst thing he did was to rob my house. I had a lock on my bedroom door where I kept anything of value away from him. Before I went out I locked the bedroom door and put the house alarm on. When I came back the door was smashed in – he'd known the alarm was on and he'd broken into the house five doors up and

gone through the loft space and come down the loft hatch onto our landing. He took everything, a play-station, money, jewellery, phones. I knew it was Lee. I rang the police. After 10 years of this, I'd had enough.

I was relieved when he went to prison. I thought I'd be safe again. It was like a huge weight lifted from me. I got my life back. It was lovely.

I never went to visit him in prison. I did write but I always said I didn't want to see him again until he was back to the normal son I knew and loved.

Lee:

I started on medication in prison to help me off drugs. It took about one month for me to get my sleep pattern back.

I know that if mum and dad hadn't been there for me so much I would have gone to prison sooner.

My daughter was born on November 18th while I was in prison. So I missed the birth. I didn't know until three days after she'd been born. My girlfriend told me that if I didn't get off drugs then I would never see her. It was a big motivation for me to stop.

The police officer on the Targeted Policing Initiative came to see me in prison, as he thought I might be suitable to go on the scheme on my release.

It was where I went into the police station every day to see the probation staff, and also get help for drug treatment and be tested twice a week so they knew I was drug free. I agreed that the police would monitor me too – so they would know if I was committing more crimes.

Since I've been on the scheme I've renewed my forklift truck drivers qualification and I go to the gym once a week. I also did the 'Beyond the Mask' programme, which has really helped me. It's in a group with other participants and we look at our backgrounds and what we have done and consider the victims. And we look at the changes that we want to make and how to get there.

I want to get work and earn money. I'm decorating the house at the moment and making it nice for my partner and our daughter.

Suzanne:

I was with Lee's girlfriend when the baby was born. She was the splitting image of him. I cried my eyes out. She's 10 month old now and they live round the corner from us like a normal family. It's

marvellous to see him. He's not gaunt and hollow anymore, he's gone from being under eight and a half stone at over six foot, to 11 stone. He's filled out and looks like a normal healthy person. I'm very proud of him, this scheme with police and probation has really helped him and kept him occupied while he adjusts to being a normal person again.

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