

## Tam's Story

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Tam lived in Lindsay House and would come to the VC for help. Before the official food bank started up the Church and VC together ran their own food bank system. We had carrier bags with a few essentials in them: a pack of pasta, pasta sauce, some tins, a few biscuits, sugar etc., a few things that they might need to keep them going for the next few days.

Tam would come down to the unofficial food bank. One week he stopped coming and we didn't see him for a while. Then a year or so later he turned up, ran into the Village Centre and said,

“Joanne, I need help”.

I said “Where have you been?”

“Gaol, I've just come out of gaol.”

“O when did you get out of gaol?”

“Today, I just came out today.”

So Tam had been in gaol, came out that day and had come round to the 1st place that he thought he could go to for help. It was a place that he knew that he had could come to and not be judged. He would not be made to feel any less of a person than any other person that walked in.

So he said,

“I need some help. I don't have anywhere to stay. I can't get into a homeless unit.”

He was barred from various ones. Partly his own doing. But the ones that he was allowed to be in didn't have any space for him for the next few days. And he said,

“I don't know what to do and I don't have anywhere to go.”

“OK, let's get you sorted with a bed for tonight.”

So I contacted all the homeless units that he had said he was allowed into. None of them had space. I contacted shelter. They said,

“Yes, we can get Tam space somewhere in a couple of days”.

I said, “What's he to do for a couple of days?”

“Well, we can give him a sleeping bag.”

People were not particularly interested in helping Tam. He had been in and out of gaol his whole life. He'd been in gaol more than he'd been out! He was not worth helping. A hopeless case. He was to get a sleeping bag and sleep on a bench, and nobody particularly cared that this was a human being and that was what his fate was to be.

But we cared! So the Village Centre paid for him to stay in a hotel for three nights. It gave us three days breathing space to find out how we could get him somewhere to stay.

During his 3 days in the hotel I went with him to the Housing Department in Hamilton, and they were able to get him into a Scatter Flat in Burnbank.

He was not welcome in the group accommodation homeless units because he had in the past shown that he was not able to be in a group setting. He took a lot of drugs, sold a lot of drugs, got up to mischief, got into fights, he was not welcome. But he said to me that he wanted to change his life. He said to me,

“When I was in gaol I picked up a Bible because I had nothing better to do, and I started reading it. And I thought, do you know, when I get out of here, I'm going to go and see Joanne at the Village Centre and I'm going to change my life.”

I decided to trust that Tam was telling the truth, that he really did want to change his life.

I drove Tam down to his flat and we met a social worker there. We got him settled in his flat. And then I said to him,

“OK, so you're not allowed to take any drugs.”

And he said, “Well, how am I going to do that?”

I said, “I don't actually care, but you're not taking any drugs. And we're going to change your life.”

So he said, “OK”

And he went to the doctor and said,

“Here's my situation. I am addicted to...” There was a long list!

The Doctor prescribed some kind of blockers that would help and enrolled him in a methadone programme. He went to the chemist every morning for methadone, and various other medication to ease the process of withdrawal from these drugs. So every morning I drove down to Burnbank and picked him up. I brought him up here to the village centre and every day, from 8:30 in the morning till 4:30 Monday to Saturday he worked in the cafe for free. He worked in the kitchen because he was not the type of character who was going to be a delight to serve our clientele out front. He had scars and various stab wounds on his body. He had bullet wounds. He looked like he was withdrawing from all sorts of drugs. He was not a front of house person. So we put him in the back washing dishes. Then the chef at the time said,

“Do you want to come and help me prepare some of the food, I need an extra hand?”

So he then was helping to cook. We then put them through an SVQ in Cooking. He was with us every day Monday to Saturday. And then on Sunday, he would sometimes appear at church.

It was not all plain sailing! He was not always completely with it, because sometimes he slipped up and took the drugs he was not supposed to take, and it played absolute havoc with the medication that he was taking to stop him doing that. So it was not always a bed of roses.

The police contacted me and said,

“Do you have this man, Tam on your property?”

“Yes.”

And they said, “Well, we want to come and speak to you about the danger this man is.”

I said “OK.”

So the police came and they said,

“Do you know he's an armed robber?”

I said, “Yes. He's been very open about his past.”

And he said “OK, do you know he has been stabbed this many times from all the people that are after him. Do you know that he has stabbed this many people. He's been involved in this, that and this.”

I said, "Yes, I know this."

And they said, "Well, what are you doing?"

I said, "Tam has said he wants to change his life, and we are trusting that he does want to, and we want to help him do that."

And they said, "Well, we will come twice a week to see you, to make sure that you and your staff are all OK and we will come once a week to see him, to make sure that he is staying on the straight and narrow and he's not up to anything that he shouldn't be."

"That's great."

So twice a week, I met with the police to let them know what was going on. And once a week Tam met with the police. And some of those times he met with the police because he had been involved in a fight the night before, and the police actually were saying that they needed to take Him into custody. And I was then advocating for him saying,

"No, we're trying to help him change his life. We need to keep him out of gaol, and we need to work together on this."

And we managed to keep him out of gaol. So he was with us for a number of years. And he did a great job and gained experience in cooking and qualifications. His life changed!

We took time to build a relationship with Tam and find out why he was the way that he was. Nobody sits in primary school and when they are asked what they want to be when they leave school, puts up their hand and says, 'I want to be a drug addict and in gaol.' So what flipped Tam to make his life like this, because he never set out to be that.

When Tam was young, his dad was in and out of gaol, and one day Tam stole something from a shop and he went home and told his dad, and his dad said, 'Well done, son. That's great.'

Tam was praised for committing crimes. As he got a bit older, his dad got him involved in the criminal lifestyle and he was praised when he committed crime and punished when he did not commit crime. He was in that lifestyle and said to himself, 'This is what life is. It's what I'm good at. And this is what I'm praised for. This is what gets me affirmation and things.'

When he was 15, he stole his first car. And then he kept on stealing cars because it's an easy way to make money. His dad liked it. The cars got passed to his dad who sold them. This was a well-paid job that his Dad approved and encouraged him in.

He got caught and found himself in gaol at 16. It was the first time he was in gaol. From 16 onwards till he came to the Village Centre in his late 30s he spent more years in gaol than he spent out of gaol. When he came out of gaol at the end of five years for armed robbery he went to his mum's house and somebody else answered the door and said,

“We bought the house, the lady that used to live here died.”

So while Tam had been in gaol, his mum had died. He hadn't been informed of this, and he was not able to go to her funeral. His dad had died previously so now he had nobody apart from the people he'd met in gaol and criminals in the gang lifestyle he had been in. Those people were his people. Those were his family. He had nobody else. So that's why he was in the situation that he was in, and coming into the Village Centre and being shown a bit of love and care, and being shown that here were people who really believed in him, made a huge impact on Tam and changed his life.

Today Tam is a Chef in a Hotel on a Scottish Island. He rents a flat on the Island. He is not involved in crime or drugs. He is an excellent Chef. He is doing really well.

If sometime, you happen to be visiting an Island and go into a hotel for lunch, maybe you will eat a meal made by Tam. You might even see him, with the scars of a past life left far behind, and the joy of a new life born out of the love of God poured into him through Joanne and the Staff of The Village Centre.

