

STEVE COLBY: ENGLAND

My name is Steve Colby and I attend Hertford Probation weekly along with having weekly drug tests and visits from the police. I am 23 years old and was born in Stevenage. My parents split up when I was in infant school. I have one brother, one sister and a step family from my dad's side. I lived with my mum until I was eight years old. I was physically abused by my mum. I was subject to beatings most days or before I was going to bed. I was physically scarred by this and have marks on my back. I was then moved to my Dad's while I was at junior school and was there until I turned 17. During that time I started to commit offences such as shoplifting and criminal damage.

During my teenage years, I spent a lot of time hanging around the streets of Stevenage or St. Alban's. I quickly became addicted to cocaine and hung around with older men at one point. I stayed at a hostel but I was thrown out for drug dealing.

I spent time living in the YMCA hostel in Welwyn but this ended up with me going back to jail and I had an unhappy relationship with someone who didn't support me and encouraged me to commit crime so she could have money for cannabis and her child. Finally removing the bad people from my life is the step forward I really needed but I chose not to at that time. My Dad took me shoplifting and at times encouraged my behaviour and even bought stolen goods from me and my friends.

After my Dad remarried I went to live with my Auntie, but my Uncle was an alcoholic so this did not offer me a stable home life. I first went to jail for six months for shoplifting and burglary offences. During this time my Auntie came and visited me. I was very scared and upset being there.

I left prison and I was out for around two months, and then I was returned to prison for four months for robbery. This time my outlook was different and prison life was easy and I knew people in there, and I found the prison routine an easy way to live. I have been to prison seven times since the age of 18 and during my time at Woodhill, I was attacked by another inmate and received a broken nose. In prison, I learnt new ways to commit crime and came

out a lot more criminally minded. Having a buzzer in your cell was like having your own personal butler and I never once missed being out, because life in jail always made me more money once I was released putting the things I learnt into practice. I found my prison experience easy and it was like being at a holiday camp. I didn't worry about paying bills or having to find somewhere to live. In prison everything is given to you and I never found it boring as there was always something going on or someone to talk to. Most of my circle of so-called friends were in prison.

Since 2012 my life has taken a big turn and I haven't committed a crime since the middle of 2011, but I was convicted of an attempted burglary in January 2012. After the court case I volunteered to have a buddi-tag which is a new system put in place by Hertfordshire police, and is a 24 hour tag that is GPRS¹ and knows where I am at all times. I now work closely with a Police officer who visits regularly to see how I am getting on. My life seems to be changing each week and I've even got myself a few temporary jobs. I've had enough of committing crimes and I do feel appalled at some of the crimes I have committed and I feel sorry for what I did to certain people by making them a victim of my crime. I do feel that some of the things that I have done could have been prevented.

I have received massive support from my Probation Officer and the Police via the buddi-tag. My new girlfriend has made a big impact in my new outlook and always supports me, even through the tough days and I had a baby on the way, which also made me want to change but sadly we lost the baby and my girlfriend had a miscarriage. It was a tough time and there was a point when I didn't think I'd keep on the straight and narrow, but with my girlfriend and my Probation Officer, I kept out of trouble. I have stopped talking to certain friends and this has helped me focus and not be tempted to go back to crime

I was a heavy cannabis user and the past four months I have cut down considerably and even received two negative drug tests. There has been down sides and I regularly have mood swings and I do find it hard having no money, and I was better off when I was committing crimes. I always had money and I felt life was so much easier. I didn't care about anyone around me. Now I can at least have a quieter life and not be harassed by the local police.

¹ A General Packet Radio Service. Denotes a form of electronic monitoring [Ed comment]

There are days when I could easily go out and to commit crime, but my life has taken a big turn and I would never turn back now as I have come so far.

There are a few reasons why I turned to crime in the first place. I always wanted new things such as the latest phone or a new pair of trainers. I also had a drug addiction and because I could commit crime I always had money. I would do as I pleased. Not having a close family unit didn't help and I have tried to build a relationship with my mum, but this failed and I won't be contacting her again anytime soon. My dad had helped me out the past few months and we talk regularly on the phone and that is all. I have my own family now and I can do this myself with the support of Probation and my girlfriend. I am looking for fulltime work and support myself the right way.