



A year with WYCCP by Edward Butler

This year has got to be one of the best years I've had in a long long time. I am 57 years old and I've been on drugs since I was 18. I first met Oliver (WYCCP key worker) on F wing when I was serving six months for shoplifting to fund my habit - I had been on the streets since my mother died three years ago. I had lost all my self-respect; in fact, I didn't like myself much at all and a lot of my family, I believe, felt the same. I agreed to start going to WYCCP thinking that all they were going to do was tell me how bad drugs are and how they screw up your life, but they didn't say anything like that at all because they knew that I already knew that. I met Jeni, who became my regular link worker and

she actually helped me get my self-respect back.

This year has been incredible. I've done things I didn't think were possible. At WYCCP, they know how to talk to people on the phone, how to get me things I am entitled to. I could never do that because the social, water board, electricity board - in fact, everyone – would always treat me like a fool and try to get rid of me ASAP. When WYCCP spoke to them, they all started to do their jobs correctly. I could never repay WYCCP for what they've done for me, even all my family think that WYCCP, Oliver and Jeni have been the best things in my life for a very long time. How WYCCP found me I do not know, but thank God they did because I really believe I would have been dead or back in prison without a doubt.

Just a few of the things WYCCP have done for me this year: glasses, teeth, a home, self-respect, and respect from all of my family, employment support allowance, treatment for my hepatitis C and my chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, personal independence payment, and a bus pass. It was everything I was entitled to but I didn't know about it at all. I'm on a regular script but I have slipped up and used drugs a few times. When I told Jeni I expected to be told off, but no, she told me that I was only human and made me believe it and that made me feel good about myself.

Every time I tried to thank the guys at WYCCP they wouldn't take any of it, they said it was me who needed a pat on the back for doing so well. All I did was visit WYCCP once a week and take my mail. If I had a problem I would text Oliver and he would phone me back – all of my problems were tackled ASAP by Oliver or Jeni. They have become more like friends than workers, I didn't know people like these existed. Why every jail in the country doesn't have a WYCCP I just don't know. It really is hard to describe what WYCCP do for people like me. I am so glad and grateful they came into my life when they did.

I know I am going to lose Jeni who has been my link worker all year but I wish her the very best in whatever she does in the future and I hope she has learned as much from me as I have from her. She is a bright and very intelligent lady and I will miss her so much. It doesn't seem fair that all she has done for me she has done for free and in her own time, so I must thank her from the bottom of my heart. For every phone call she did for me, every letter she wrote, every chat we had, even every cup of tea and biscuit, but most of all every goal she has helped me achieve.

There are thousands of people in jails all over this country who get freed not knowing what they are entitled to or how to go about getting it, so most go back to crime because it can be

easier to commit crime for money rather than get on the phone to the social to get what they are entitled to, so that's why the guys are crucial at WYCCP. I truly believe that they more people there are that can do what WYCCP do for ex-offenders like me a lot less crime would be committed.

I did notice that Oliver and Jeni spent a lot of time on the phone just telling people how to do their jobs correctly - it sounds stupid but it is so true. I know because I've talked to these sort of people who just want to get rid of people like me, but when anyone from WYCCP talks to them, they seem to listen and get things done. So thank you WYCCP for everything you have done and are still doing for me.

Edward Butler December 2014

Eddie has agreed to be identified in this.