



Diverse perspectives on health and illness

Experiencing homelessness

Presenter

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You will hear from John and Danny. Two people who have had very different experiences of homelessness. When course team member Julia Johnson met up with John, he had just taken up residence in a broken down old van in a Swansea car park. He had been there for three weeks.

John

I went up the police station, and I said I've found an old van, can I sleep in it, yes they said long as you don't do anything daft. If I want to smoke I come out and have a smoke on the, out here like. I was in that old building over there as I said earlier, and they chucked me out of there so. I don't mind where I sleep anyway, long as I've got a roof over my head isn't it, and comfortable. I've been in a mental hospital, I was there for nineteen years, so I'm cured now.

Julia Johnson

How old were you when you went there?

John

I was eight when I went in, and I'm forty two on Friday.

Julia Johnson

What happened then?

John

Well I lived on the roads then didn't I, my life was wasted wasn't it, you know wasted. Now it's about time that I got my act together isn't it. I'm an alcoholic and, I smoke and tell jokes to people. You know, well I'm a loner, as they say isn't it.

Julia Johnson

What do you do for money I mean?

John

Well I don't get no money do I? You know I I tell jokes and people might give me a cup of tea or something like that or a couple of bob like.

Julia Johnson

Do you get any money from social security?

John

No, because I haven't got an address have I? Postman can't come in here and say, here you are, back door.

Julia Johnson

So what do you do for money I mean?

John

Well I've got a bloke on the market I help him sometimes and he gives me a few bob like. But I couldn't see him today because he's on holidays. Tell the truth, I signed on yesterday, and I'm hoping to get a payment out of them. So, at least I'm telling the truth by that aren't I,

helping you back to work. Well I've got to sign daily see, and they might give me a giro if I'm lucky, if I'm lucky.

Julia Johnson

What happens if you get ill or something?

John

Well I go to the hospital don't I.

Julia Johnson

You go up to the accident and emergency.

John

Yeah.

Julia Johnson

Tell us about when you last went up to the hospital.

John

Yesterday, because I've got asthma right.

Julia Johnson

What happened when you went up to the hospital?

John

Well they give me a ventolin pump see. I walk down the hospital it's about four miles down the road then see. I went to casualty and told them I had a bad chest, and they give me some oxygen then and ventolin pump, but I put it in the van and somebody pinched it. So I've got to go and see what I can do now. Otherwise I'm in good health like.

Julia Johnson

Do they know you at the hospital?

John

Yeah.

Julia Johnson

Are they helpful?

John

Yeah, very helpful, well that's what the hospital's for isn't it? Well they give you medication and, cup of tea you know sandwich and, they give you tablets.

Julia Johnson

What do you do about washing and all that sort of...

John

Well I go up to the toilets up to the top there.

Julia Johnson

You were saying also, you, you've squad in the leisure centre sometimes.

John

Yeah, it's warmer over there, it's comfortable and, what have you.

Julia Johnson

Which bit of the leisure centre?

John

At the back, you know that big chimney.

Julia Johnson

Oh yes.

John

Just round the corner by there. If you'd like to go over after, and watch the warm air coming out. It's warm over there, if you stand there you get sun tan. I used to sleep there on pallets, and a blanket over me you see. And end of the day then I, I get up and, sometimes my bloody neck is twisted and, it's a hell of a thing. So I've got this thing now, it's like a mobile home like isn't it? As, the cold weather's coming now and I'm indoors isn't it, on the, complexed that's the word isn't it? Where ever I sleep, people move me on like, actually the police and that. But, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter where you sleep long as you're out the way, isn't it.

(Wildtrack chat)**Presenter**

Originally from northern Ireland, Danny is another man sleeping rough in Swansea. Now in his late forties, he moved to Wales some years ago.

Danny

Well I bought a house with my then girlfriend, in Hay-on-Wye, well the relationship after a year didn't work out. I broke a window in a shop and I got jail in Swansea, six months, well I do my three months. But when I come out, I couldn't go back home, couldn't go back to Helen so, I just stayed in Swansea. Then I started shop lifting, kept getting busted, pilfering little bits of this, little bits of that, and every time I got picked up I got jail. And then I thought to myself, well fuck it I'll stay here. So I've been here ever since.

Roughly seven years, I don't judge it day by day, but day by day it goes, the county hall, the bus station. I can't get accommodation, so I've just got to sleep rough. I would prefer to sleep indoors if I could get in. But I'm reluctant to even try. I've got a reputation as being an alcoholic, and it swings about. And so I try, and I just keep getting knocked back. I mean I've seen several Christmases go, the county security guards, they've seen me through a few Christmases, and they look after me generously. Christmas dinner, bottle of wine, packet of fags, every Christmas, they're tidy people, I know them all. After this next time, so I'm quite happy to stay down there. There is a problem though, too many people have got to know that I'm staying down there, and how easy I get off with it, if easy is the word, and they've started turning up, and they're fucking it up. So they're coming down now. I was there the other day, there were sixteen people there. Well, to think that a security guard's going to take sixteen people, so they just told us all to fuck off, well not exactly. Excuse my word. But words to that effect. Time we moved, so that was it.

I'm lucky though, some people do look after me. Samaritans give me blankets, I know various people in there, they give me a blanket now and again. What happens, when it comes to the morning, six o'clock I want a drink, because I'm an alcoholic, because I sleep rough. Alcohol keeps me going. So I nip up to the off license, leave my blankets, come back, half hour later, blankets are gone, and I'm on my horse again. I should be dead by now, well I was given six months to live, but I done them. Well they give me my weekly benefit, but then again, my benefit is benefit for other people, because they come down, and they take it off me. I get eighty quid. I buy a drink, make sure I've got a half a bottle of vodka, and after I've had that, I start to nod off. Obviously, half a bottle of vodka is going to do that. Empty my pockets and that's it, gone. By midday I've got nothing. So I've got to go back and inside oh cest la vie, cest la mort, this is life this is death.

It can be embarrassing, especially when I'm hung over, and I'm not feeling too good, walk along, and I've built up my confidence as best I can. You know what it's like with a hang over though. 'Excuse me mate, any spare change please?' 'Fuck off, get yourself a job, I've got to work for mine'. So what do you say? You know you can't turn round kick them up the arse, although you might feel like it, just have to swallow it and carry on. But then it demotes you, in your enthusiasm. I was begging in the office and it was pissing down with rain this Sunday night, this guy nearly battered the hell out of me, but a bloke across the road, saw what was happening. He came across he says, 'Are you alright?' I'm lying on the deck, I says yeah I think so. He says I saw what happened, get yourself a drink, give me five quid.

See when I've got a quid, I know I've got a can, so that's going to calm my system down. So I get a quid, I'll run off to the off license, buy a can, that'll do me. Well I don't go top shelf, unless I've got the money, like on pay day, I'll go for vodka, little bottle. I'll take myself out of the way. but you see on pay-day, I get the hangers on, and they know who gets paid when, and so they turn up, just to get the money. So they expect a fiver, but they don't do it one at a time, they come en mass. So a fiver isn't enough, it's got to be a tenner, well that's a percentage of your money vanished. Never see them again, till the next week, that's what pisses me off.