

#5 Feeling trapped in a vicious circle



A couple of people talked of feeling caught in a cycle of difficulties, and of searching for a way out. Both described how drug use sustained the cycle.

The first of these, a young Black man, talked of an unstable childhood with a father who was often absent for long periods. His parents came to the UK from a country in Africa and his early life was affected by this move because his father had to keep returning to Africa due to immigration problems. He talked of the instability of his family life, living with different family members and his parents having different partners.

She was married twice that I know of, and the same with my dad, you know? I've been living with dad before, I've been living with my mum before. I've lived with my uncle before, I've lived with my aunt, I've lived with my cousins. I've moved around quite a lot and that's just because I didn't feel okay and they didn't feel okay with me, you know? So, moving around,

you're not stable. You're sometimes in a place where you know you're becoming a burden but you can't do much. If you had the money you would do different. But, you can't. It was kind of a rollercoaster ride for some years. [Storyteller 6]

He also described a culture clash caused by not belonging in either place: "So, growing up here and being kind of like you're from back home, sometimes having to bring back home here, and going back home and they don't get you."

His parents split up when he was seven and he described them as telling different – but misaligned – stories about what was going on. As a teenager, he spent a lot of time with friends who got up to "a lot of mischief" but he did not join in with this at first. There was an overall sense that he did not fit in with his friends and peers. He talked of liking jazz but peer pressure discouraged him from enjoying this. He liked indoor sports but "it just wasn't cool".

He began using cannabis at school and eventually it became a habit. He was thrown out of his home and became homeless. He entered a cycle of repeated arrests and hospitalisations that he found hard to break out of.

I was becoming aggressive to some people. I was going to places I shouldn't and being picked up by the police. Once it becomes where you have legal problems and some social economic problems at the same time, you find yourself in trouble. And, I kept getting in trouble and it kept flagging as he's unwell. He needs to be sectioned. So, I would go back to my mum's place and I wasn't welcome. I would be... like kind of... the police would be called by the neighbours because I wasn't supposed to be there. The police would be called by my mum and then the police would just keep sectioning me and taking me to hospital. So, that's why it's happened so many times. Not that I've been unwell repeatedly. But, just that I'd been in some places where I shouldn't be.

I believed I was going crazy and nobody would know what was going on and that I would just be on drugs forever and they would be giving me all kind of concoctions and I would never leave the system. You know, it was a cycle where I would keep getting arrested. The police would keep bringing me to hospital. It was just not stopping. You know, it kept happening. The sectioning kept happening, the arrests kept happening. I went to jail a few times and they remanded me a few times. It was just a cycle that wouldn't stop until I met [name of service]...

Finding the Early Intervention in Psychosis service was a kind of breakthrough. He managed to move himself to a different place in his life with their support. The service gave him practical support as well as the opportunity to talk to a psychologist, which he found reassuring: "After talking to the psychologist I felt reassured in myself that what I was doing was right. Before that I didn't really talk about my situation with anyone." They also helped the family to understand what was going on for him.

Finally, he felt that he was breaking out of the cycle of repeated arrests and hospital admissions.

I've met some very helpful people. They have made me feel welcome at the service and I've moved on with my life in a good way. They helped me when I had no other person to go to that was like a professional, to get help from.

And, really, what they did for me is, when I entered the community again to have someone to go to, to go and see. To have people around me that could follow-up my progress and it was all about me not going back into what I was in before and making sure it was not a recurring cycle and making sure that if I need any help with employment or housing or financially, that I would get it.

Looking back, he was able to take responsibility for some of his mistakes as well as appreciate the opportunities that the service had given him. He also described having one good, loyal friend and finding an appreciation of his own skills. Music was a great help: "I don't know how to explain but when I listen to

music I feel more okay in myself, listening to the right song at the right time."

Reflecting on his start in life, he was able to understand the peer pressures that had influenced him and to also re-connect with his younger self and the hobbies and interests that he once enjoyed.

They just hang around and smoke with people or make trouble with people. They want to do the typical young black guy stuff. I didn't like all the young black guy stuff, is what I'm saying. I didn't feel comfortable stepping out of there until a few years recently. What it was like, you sit by yourself, you have an opportunity to talk to different people and you say, "This is not me." I just kept saying to myself, "This is not me. What is me?" I had a notebook there and I wrote down stuff in the notebook and I would show people. You meet people and you talk to people and they want to know about you. There was not much to say about myself so I knew I had to pick up some hobbies. I knew I liked stuff before so that helped me draw a conclusion that I should get into what I liked before, as an adult. It's not too late. Galleries I will visit.

He expanded on this by describing how the environment in which he grew up had limited his and other people's expectations, and the extra effort it took to break out of that.

But over time influence takes its toll on some people. So they can't do exactly what they should do. They can't behave in the way they ought to. It's like a step backwards. So what they want to do and the way they want to behave is fine and dandy, they can if they want to but it's more difficult for them. Home is difficult, the estate is difficult, school

is difficult. There's a lot of obstacles placed in front of them that make life a little bit where they have to work twice as hard. They might want to be a certain profession they can't do because there's no support. They may want to help people and it's not cool to help people. A lot of stuff is frowned upon and a lot of stuff is just really difficult for them.

There was a sense in his story that finally he had found his place in the world. He was volunteering with homeless people and had been on a training course. He was also considering going back to study, as he had left school with poor GCSEs. He described himself as "submersed in the music culture" and had recently brought a drum machine.

I see myself as being a lot more stable. Before I was very inconsistent in what I did. I would start stuff halfway and leave it. I would have interests in one field and just kind of hopping from one place to another. A lot of bouncing around is what I did over the years. I wasn't settled. I wasn't consistent. I wasn't showing signs of someone that is dedicated to anything. So, now I've become interested in what I'm interested in and I take it seriously and there's been no problems.

All these things together led him to feel that he was currently in "a great place".

...with the support for me. So, these kinds of things don't happen again. I've become a lot older, this was a few years ago. And, I've matured. It's helped me mature, you know? Having a long time to think, having my own place, being financially independent, working with people who have problems like myself, but maybe more so than myself.



THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF MEDS

A joint reflection from Gary and Dolly

“ Our own experience of a vicious circle is around medication. They give you anti-psychotic medication to stop the voices. Anti-psychotic medications have a sedative effect – they take away your sense of self and your ability to do things that are meaningful to you. You feel disconnected from the world. So you become depressed, and then you are given anti-depressants.

The depression feeds into your psychosis, into the negative voices. So you have more anti-psychotics. These come with side effects, such as dribbling, obesity, diabetes and a lack of motivation, so you feel more unwell than when you were only hearing voices. ”