

Tom's Full Story

25 minute read

Background

I'm living in York at the moment, been here for 20 years. Presently living in a York Housing Association and been there just over a year. Prior to that I was with an accommodation provider and two years ago, I was in hospital with alcohol addiction and I'd had quite a long-extended binge ended up in hospital in a coma, I was there for about two weeks and during that period, quite rightly, my landlady said she didn't want me back.

So, I basically had nowhere to live in York. So, from hospital, I moved to the hostel, I was there for a couple months. And then I moved into one of the accommodation providers properties on a street in York, that was shared accommodation, that's what they classed as tier two, tier one being a hostel and tier two shared accommodation. I was only there about a month because it was really bad. People that were there were quite badly in addiction, erm, fire alarms going off daily basis, usually two, three o'clock in the morning when they put the oven on, fallen asleep. So, I complained about that to people at the provider organisation and they were very quick, they got me moved from there to the place I was at in, again, that was a shared

accommodation tier two place, which I was very lucky. It was a very nice room.

I was there for about six months when I had a relapse, I was under quite a lot pressure at the time and I wasn't dealing with a very well, particularly, they were looking to move me on to my own place and the Job Centre was on my back about getting back to work and rather than talking, I kind of bottled it up and a bit of a relapse, well, a very big relapse and went back to the day rehabilitation centre, did the 12 week programme, I've been sober about two years now. And then the whole COVID thing hit just at the time they were looking at moving me out again.

So that was back on sort of reserve and then yeah, it was last July, I was offered a place on my own, my own place, which I took and yeah, been there for, as I said, just over a year now.

How did you find the hostels?

I found it, I mean, at the time, as I said, because I didn't really have any options, erm, accommodation wise. It was, I mean, to me when I first went in there, speaking to people there and they made it clear that as long as I sort of made the effort, erm, it would be a very short stepping stone to moving on through. They have this three-tier system and so yeah, to me, it was just a stepping stone. And at the time I was doing the first

time at a day addiction rehabilitation centre, which is a 12-week rehab programme, which was all during the day and then I was doing sort of meetings in the evening.

So, I wasn't really actually physically in the building very much and you know, I tried to avoid being there as much as I could. Um, it wasn't a particularly pleasant environment to be in and obviously, they do have issues with sort of like alcohol and drug use within the building. But I think it became clear to people there at the time that it wasn't, I wasn't interested in that and it was offered on a few occasions when I first moved in and I just knocked back enough that, I think people in general just left me to do my thing, you know.

Er, and then I was only there a couple of months again, I was quite lucky because going from hospital, they hold accommodation at a hostel for people in hospital that are discharged with nowhere to go. So, they move people on as quickly as possible. So, I was only there a couple of months.

How was your hospital experience?

To be brutally honest, I don't remember much of it, it is quite a big blank and I do have sort of quite bad memory problems, erm, always have but obviously it's been made a lot worse. In general, it's just general feelings about it that I have now seems to be quite positive. I don't know whether, you know, cuz, when I was there, I've literally

had no options, you know, I couldn't move back with a family that wasn't an option. And, you know, there's nothing there. So, general feelings I have about it, about that time were quite positive, that, you know, they did show me that there were options available and that, you know, you could work through the system to get yourself back on your feet kind of thing. So, in general, quite a positive thing.

What was your experience with alcohol/addiction services?

Well it was them that got me into the day rehabilitation programme because they said it would work alongside. I mean, I had been, had, various things years previously through the doctor being referred to help with the alcohol addiction, because obviously, it has been throughout my life. And so maybe the five, six years before I actually ended up in hospital had gone quite out of control and so yeah, I did already have previous attempts at sort of sobriety and things like that but they've been mainly, so like, based on a phased reduction type situation, which I just don't think works. And that was based on me, at the time I thought they only needed, I only needed to get control of the drink, I didn't realise it was the one that was always controlling me and you know, and it took that hitting the bottom to sort of finally, for the penny to drop, despite years of subtle hints, it never quite clicked in so um, yeah, I think

in the context of that, I think they were really good, as I said, they straightaway, they referred me to the day rehabilitation programme, I was taken in there and so, it was all part of the moving on and you know, they would always say, you know, we will get into the second tier as soon as possible. And, you know, they put it, it's a good spin, the hospital wants the bed back, and so we have to find you somewhere.

I think it for me, it was kind of combined because it was all happening at the same time, so I didn't really distinguish the two so I can't really say what would have happened housing wise if I hadn't done the day rehabilitation programme but to me, it was all part of the general um, because the people that I was speaking to, I can't remember who they were sadly, but, you know, they were always putting quite a positive spin on, you know, if you can get the, if can do the 12 week programme, you know, you get yourself sorted out, you can get yourself, so it's was always quite a positive, but they were always kinda done hand in hand because it was all through the provider, the day programme and the accommodation for me was through the same organisation so there was never really a distinction for me, it was all part of the same sort of programme.

It was all moving towards that final goal of getting your own place, being sober, the theory of going back to work and sort of moving on kind of thing. So, I mean, I've done that. I can't actually remember the name of the thing

that did it but it was actually in this building here, did that for a while before, and then there's the guy at work they tried to help, occupational therapy, things like that. So, I'd kind of touched on it, but never really committed. Obviously, once you go to the day rehabilitation centre, it is a full abstinence programme, which was quite a big difference.

But again, I didn't really, I wouldn't say I didn't struggle, but I knew it was all towards the ultimate aim of moving on. And that was a thing with the rehabilitation centre, at the time, again with the sort of like the meetings, and things like that. So, it wasn't only them, it was other support. So outside of it and you know, then encouraging you to keep in contact with your peers, you know, so you've got the other level of support which I still have kind of thing.

Did you accept peer support?

Yeah, I mean that was strongly encouraged. Um, with going back I'm not sure if it was encouraged enough, or it was made as big a thing as it should have been. But I mean I was doing, the sort of like, the meetings and going for coffee and things like that with the peer group which was encouraged by sort of like the rehabilitation centre, and so yeah, I mean, I was doing probably five meetings a week and then that was again, it was a combination of getting the support but also not being in

the hostel, sort of sitting in your room because there's nothing, you know, they do have a community, sort of TV room, as it were, but I didn't really feel comfortable going in there. Um, apart from meals, I didn't really want to stay there. And so, you know, the meetings were an easy outlet kind of thing.

And then I was also introduced to the Never Give Up which is the charity at the Belfry Hall. They used to always do the meal on the Thursday night. So, there was two of the people from the rehabilitation centre were volunteers there, so I went just because it was Thursday night, there was nothing else to do and a couple of times for a meal. And then I ended up volunteering with them which I'm still, still doing to this day and, and I did find that a huge support particularly over Covid and the lockdown, and things like that, we did, because I didn't feel comfortable doing online meetings. I just felt it'd be quite a weird, alien experience sitting on your own talking about your feelings.

And so, I didn't do any of them, but we still through Never Give Up, we always did like a coffee morning type of thing, zoom on a Thursday, and I think that kept me quite sane throughout it and it's a bit weird because it's a church group I don't believe in God and don't go to church but you know they are incredibly supportive of everyone in the group no matter what. And then they started again now sort of like six months ago. So, I'm going to every Thursday so and which I, you know, kind of

fell into it almost by accident but it was one of the things they did, encouraged doing the volunteering and things like that. So yeah, I definitely found a lot of support through that kind of thing. And the meetings I, on the run-up to my first relapse, I stopped going to meetings, which is kind of the, you know, and I stopped doing all the volunteering things.

And then, as I said, there was a lot with the job centre, with work, the housing and it just all got to me. Where, this time with the lockdown, with stopping doing the meetings, I didn't find it quite as difficult. I think I was in a much better place myself. I knew people that when I had issues, I could contact and talk to you, kind of thing. So yeah, seems to have worked.

How was your experience with the job centre?

I mean because at that time I was just on the basic Universal Credit, and so, when I was at the day rehabilitation centre, it was fine, there was no pressure but the moment I left it, there's pressure on there, you know, to get back to work and they referred me to an employment agency and, and again, I think just with my head at the time because I just found it very... I felt, I don't know how to describe it, I felt I was getting pressured by them to find a job but then, the agency they referred me to were just completely rubbish and they didn't seem to know what they were doing, erm, I

mean, I had weekly meetings with them in the attempt to get into work and it was four or five weeks into it before they even sorted my CV out and then I got a random phone call off the woman saying, oh, we've found a perfect job for you, four hours a week working as a cleaner at Clifton Moor, I, I've no way to get there. And it just felt like trying to push me into it, it didn't matter, just anything, just get him off our book's kind of thing. Erm, and that and so the thing with sort of like the housing and everything, I just, I don't know, I just couldn't, it just didn't sort of cope with it and where now because I've had help with through, well, well, it was actually through the, it, it's weird how it worked but it was kind of through the Never Give Up and people that used to work at the day rehabilitation centre.

I was put in touch with somebody that works er, as a volunteer at Restore, who looked into the situation with the Job Centre and filled out the forms for me, because some of these forms, they're just absolutely crazy. I mean, I, I would like to say I'm quite an educated kind of bloke, but it blew my mind some of the time and, you put the wrong thing down and you know, you can get into real issues.

So that was a big weight off that she filled all the forms out, you know, contact the job centre, everything was sorted out and so I'm still, at the moment, not getting any pressure from them kind of thing. So, it's just one other thing off of the mind kind of thing.

Have you had any standout support?

I don't want to mention names but the girl that referred me there, worked at the day rehabilitation centre at the time, she no longer does. And it was then she moved on to Restore so you know who I mean, and, it was her that put me in touch with the lady that did all that work for me. So, it was kind of a bit of this, a bit of that, that I kind of just ended up being referred to, to her and she was really helpful, as I said and, you know, so that all kind of happened just before, erm, lockdown.

And obviously, there was a lockdown but then within a few months of that starting, erm, the lady, you know, said, you know, you need to start looking at the next move kind of thing because I think, I'm my own worst enemy with anything. I just procrastinate I just, you know, but they were like you know you need to, so, but I didn't feel any extra pressure, it was just, I don't know whether it was because money was sorted out and I didn't get stressed by that I was just in a better place myself, but, you know, there is quite a few obstacles to overcome, erm, with the moving in but you know, there was nothing that fazed me too much, I knew it would kind of get itself sorted out eventually and I think cos that was the biggest thing with the provider at the or since I've been with the housing is they seem to have a lot of staff changes.

So, it is very difficult to know who you are actually dealing with on a month-to-month basis. And the time that I was there, most of the time it was with one woman, where we had a weekly meeting caught up with what was going on and then she left, and somebody else came in, and the times before that, like it was always, I think they're running your case, but it might be them and you never quite knew who you were sort of dealing with, so when I actually came to move on and move from the provider accommodation, into the accommodation, erm, the person that was in charge of my case at the time, er, they, they, it was their, it was the first time they'd done it and so I'm not sure what support they got their end, kind of thing, but it was all a little bit sort of hit and miss and particularly with the grants and stuff that you get like, you get like white goods and you can get one for like carpets and things like that.

But I think I had to push quite a bit to get those things done because I think once I've gone from that thought that I was moving from shared accommodation to my own accommodation obviously, an addict's brain kind of thing, I wanted it done. So, you know, so I don't know whether it was because it was their end or whether it was just in my head. And but, you know, a lot of the time I just had to step back, you know, because I moved into accommodation and it was going to be 3 months before you got carpets and things like that.

But then, you have to tell yourself it's better than sitting in shared accommodation for three months, you know, because, again, when I was there I didn't really interact with any of the other residents, so it was quite a difficult thing. Because I was on the top floor I was in the penthouse suite, so you know, I'd just come in, upstairs and that was it, kinda thing, and so I just have to compare, you know, but I was in the flat, didn't have any carpets, didn't have much furniture or whatever but, it was my own four walls kind of so, erm, I mean in general, I think the transition through the three tiers have been quite good.

And like, the biggest issue as I said, sort of their end was the staff change over and never quite knowing initially who I was to contact when things did go wrong and at that time there was a big issue over what is called the council tax, when I was getting letters from the council saying that I was owing them tax for accommodation when I shouldn't have been, and there was nobody that I, whenever I spoke to somebody they would say, ah, don't worry, we'll get it sorted, but nobody really said "no this is what we will do".

So, I just kept getting these letters constantly saying you owe us hundreds of pounds kind of thing, which obviously, at the time, added to the stress of everything else and the job and all that. Well done trying to put me back into work thing.

So, there was blips along the way but I think the general system that they've got does work and it certainly worked for me and I know other people, those kind of systems do work.

What worked well, what could be improved?

I would say having that, the continuity but that, that's just something, you know, people leave jobs, it was just very unfortunate that the woman I was, that I'd to know quite well suddenly left just as I was moving on.

You know, but that's just the way of the world, you know, that general thing of having the contact and knowing you can trust them and knowing that what they're doing, that they know what they're doing, erm, would have helped a lot, and but then again, it's myself, I don't, I struggle with authority in that way.

I would never go into the office and sort of say, oh, I tried to contact them and I was always fobbed off, kind of thing, and then never really knew who I should be, you know, because I was getting different messages from different people. So, having that continuity through, towards the end I think made a big difference and I would say that it definitely worked for me.

The system that they have in place and said the only biggest thing was the not knowing who is in charge of my case, if you put it that way. So yeah, I mean, the other thing is I don't know because when I left shared

accommodation, when I moved into my accommodation the guy came round, you know, to see me and I sort of said at that point that I was in my own flat and fine on my own. Erm, so I said to them, so I don't know what continuing support they offer is and I don't know the level about how good it is but that was something I said to them, you know, because I felt in a good place and I had the support around me that I knew I could sort of do it on my own kind of thing and so, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's, that's, that's what I've got.

I've got the flat it's all been decorated. Desperately trying to talk myself out of not getting a dog but that's a different story. But yeah, yeah, I like, in general, in quite a good place. And yeah, particularly compared to where I was, lying in a hospital, with absolutely no options whatsoever within sort of two years, yeah, quite a turnaround, yeah.