

Operation Dismantle

'I am serving three years and nine months for a crime I don't remember'

By [Paula Roberts](#)

GIVE me prison life any day. So says Robbo who is in his 40s and has racked up a massive 172 convictions since 1971.

He openly admits he is a prolific offender and drug addict and has been involved in the vicious cycle of offending and serving time in jail for the last 26 years.

He is an old hand at prison life. He knows how it works and what to expect.

Robbo was speaking during a session of Bournemouth Threshold Dialogue at Dorchester Prison - a structured support session for prisoners which aims to reduce reoffending.

The Daily Echo was exclusively invited to attend a session in the prison chapel.

Our group had seven prisoners, two police officers, a prison warden, a probation representative as well as Prison Dialogue project leader Vince Miller and regional manager Jane Ball.

Robbo told the group that he had been addicted to heroin for 27 years and a criminal for 26.

"You give me prison life any day. I would rather do a big sentence in prison, I know I am sound. I could handle it better here than out there, I am clean the majority of the time and I don't have to worry about anything.

"I am a prolific offender and drug addict.

"I hate burgling, I hate robbing, I hate doing everything. Drugs are the worst. I have seen lots of my mates kill themselves. I have got a problem I know I have but it stems from childhood. It just does my head in."

He said had been offered a lifeline by the Pier Project - a Bournemouth Police initiative which identifies prolific offenders and helps them into treatment - but was back offending within days.



PRISON BARS: But prisoner support sessions aim to reduce reoffending

Another prisoner, Lee, said he had taken part in Dialogue before.

The 26-year-old, who is serving his 18th jail sentence, said: "I am serving three years and nine months for a crime I still don't remember. It was a petty thing really but obviously it was quite serious for the victim. Since I got that sentence I have been recalled three times.

"I have been given X number of chances, including from the Pier Project to get into treatment but I have not been ready to really seize it. I am a chronic drug addict and you need to be 110 per cent ready to have any sort of success and I have only been 99 per cent."

Lee said: "I don't feel ready to come off drugs at the moment. I have stopped using the illicit drugs while in jail and keep myself occupied with education and try to get myself into things like this.

"Prison Dialogue is a good thing, I come up here often and every time I do I leave with answers to questions. It is a place where you can come and have a good moan. I have never heard a bad word said about this group, it's really good. It's something to look forward to."

Speaking about his crimes and the future, Lee added: "I don't intend to commit any more crime. I don't like committing crime. I hate myself when I burgle someone's house, it's something I despise. I hate myself when I take people's property. I hate myself using drugs and sticking needles in myself. What I do enjoy is being high and the chaos that comes with it. "I am ready to stop, but it's the how' to do it."

Dread has been a drug user for 27 years but over the past eight years has enjoyed a four-year clean spell followed by a three-year clean spell.

During his clean time he took an Open University course on counselling, set up football teams for children and spoke with young people who had been given ASBOs. He also got to spend some quality time with eight of his 12 children who he is still in contact with.

But the temptation of going back to his using ways soon returned.

He told the group: "I started doing stupid poxy crimes and it escalated. I have landed up in jail again after all the work over the last seven years to fight to stay clean. Because I couldn't get the help I wanted when I wanted it, I am in here.

"All I wanted was help when I was asking for it. I know I am not special and am just known for being a prolific junkie but I just wanted help."

Vince Miller said the main aim of Bournemouth Threshold Dialogue is for offenders to work with agencies in prison and in the community to reduce re-offending.

"We see people getting quite angry blaming everyone else for their situation. We work through things with people to the point when they realise they need to make their own changes and break their offending cycle and we will help stabilise them and hopefully stop them coming back through the system.

"We do see people change over a period of weeks but I see that with other interventions in prison as well. I don't think we have a magic wand."

Superintendent Stuart Katon, of Bournemouth and Poole Police, speaking after the session, he said: "We need to help and support them to make the transition from chaotic drug-using criminality to living a normal life in the community. Through the prison and community dialogue initiative we firmly believe this can be achieved.

"We hope to continue the support offered during Prison Dialogue when people are released into the community so it's a seamless transition from Prison Dialogue to Community Dialogue.

"If we are successful there we are going to reduce their drug addictions and, in turn, see a reduction in local acquisitive crime. If we get it right it's a win-win situation.

"We need to break the cycle between drugs crime and prison and if the right support is offered at the right time we firmly believe this can be achieved."

He added: "Our primary aim is to help rehabilitate chaotic offenders, however if they decline to accept this help and continue to commit crime, make no mistake about it they will be targeted and dealt with accordingly."

21st February 2008

[Courtesy of the Daily Echo, Bournemouth](#)