

St Antony's Centre and Modern Day Slavery



Marek originally came from a small town in Poland. He grew up, fit and healthy enjoying a good childhood with his mother and brother. He came to the UK to live with a relative and ended up working in his uncle's scrapyards. The intention was to improve his education to enable him to become an architect. However he was told that it would cost around £10,000 per year which he learned later wasn't true.

He ended up working 12 hours a day stripping scrap cars for parts. He wasn't receiving a wage but assumed that his earnings were being saved for his college education. Over a time his uncle became abusive and violent and Marek was denied the opportunity to mix socially.

On one occasion he was knocked unconscious and woke up in a pool of blood with a large gash in the back of his head. He was told to sleep it off in the office. On another occasion a large Stihl saw went into his hand and exposed the bone. His uncle wouldn't take him to hospital, Marek wrapped the hand himself and worked for the rest of the day. Another time he was hit across the face with a slate tile exposing gum and teeth. An abscess in his mouth was so painful he waited until he got the chance to leave and attended the hospital during the night. On arrival the abscess burst resulting in the removal of three teeth and a 2 day stay in hospital.

In constant pain from the work and persistent violence he still felt obliged to continue in the hope that the promise of college would materialize. He was engaged in dangerous work, recycling old fridges piercing gas canisters and cutting them up this included handling hazardous waste.

When asked, he told people he got his injuries from tripping or banging himself at work. He was instructed not to speak customers or anyone in authority who came into the scrapyards and to pretend that he couldn't speak English.

He lived in a cold and damp caravan with damaged furniture. He made a bed from wheel hubs and an iron gate covered in a foam sheet. He only had access to cold water and a kettle to get hot water for washing. A cold shower was available in an unheated outbuilding behind the scrap cars. Using a single camping gas stove he lived mainly on soup, beans and bread.

He was eventually rescued by staff from St. Antony's Centre and the police when they were alerted to the situation by a local priest. Police broke into the yard following which he spent 9 months in hospital and rehabilitation where his condition, Ataxia, was diagnosed, potentially caused by a trauma to the head. Today with a flat and working 4 days a week for St Antony's Centre he experiences independence and the freedom to live with dignity. With an identity and recognition by the UK

authorities he is helping others via active membership of a trade union and fund raising for the Ataxia Foundation. He also works with the Centre and the Police in highlighting the truth of modern slavery.

Marek has provided this information so that others might know what happens to those impacted by slavery , how it affected him and how people can help prevent it happening again.