Changing lives: how Sean is helping others leave



After 20 years of drink and drug addiction, Sean turned his life around at a rehabilitation centre. Years later, he returned to help others on the road to recovery.

Right in the centre of Bristol, next to the busy bus station, is the city's oldest building, the 900-year-old National Lottery-funded St James Priory Church. On the same site is St James House, a residential support centre for people recovering from addiction.

Both are run by St James House Project Charity, with revenue raised by the church's meeting rooms and café helping to fund the support services.

Sean's story

Sean Dennedy works as a support co-ordinator at St James House, providing one-to-one counselling to people facing some of the most difficult times in their lives. It is rewarding work, made even more so by the fact Sean was once in their shoes.

"I was a broken man when I came here. I had 20 years of drinking and drug taking, and it got to the point where my life had spiralled out of control so much that I needed help. I just didn't want to live anymore."

Sean, from South Wales, took the huge step of accessing the charity's services, then at next-door Walsingham House.

> "I can remember the first day I came. It was like a sense of being home, safe. These people really cared and loved me, and there was nothing in it for them."

"There was no purpose in my life until I came here. Without this organisation, I think I would definitely be dead. This is where things started to change for me."

Complete circle

After he left, Sean trained to become a counsellor and rebuilt his life. He never forgot St James Priory, remaining involved with the place and people he had met.

When years later a vacancy as Support Co-ordinator came up at St James House, he jumped at the chance to go back and provide the support to others that had proved invaluable to him.



"I do one-to-one counselling with them, it's a pleasure really. You can see them going through that process and getting to the end, where they're a lot more complete."

"I've more or less done a complete circle."

An oasis of peace and calm

St James Priory is described as the beating heart of the site, offering a place of calm for people using the support services as well as many other vulnerable people in the wider community.

> “It’s bang in the middle of the city centre, but once you come here it’s like being elsewhere. It’s a little oasis of peace and calm.”

The Grade I listed church very nearly closed forever however, until National Lottery funding enabled a major restoration project including the creation of the community meeting rooms and café.

“There was water running down the walls. Without the National Lottery grant this place would have closed. Since we’ve had that money it’s brought the place back to life so I’m really thankful to the National Lottery players.”