

**Devon & Cornwall General Meeting
11 Oct 2008 in Exeter: Addiction**

We began the day with a reading from Advices and Queries 40:

Although it was disappointing that DCI Bradley, (Force Drugs Intelligence Officer, Devon and Cornwall Police) was unable to attend and talk to us about 'Counting the Cost', the other three presenters gave us thought provoking insights into addiction and substance abuse. There were about 20 of us in the audience (some of whom had been affected by addiction) and we were invited to participate in topics throughout the day.

Helena Chambers, from QAAD (QUAKER ACTION ON ALCOHOL & DRUGS) had two aspects to her talk:-

Part one) What is addiction? The personal experience

Part two) The legacy of QAAD - from the 19th century to today

John Lyon, a counsellor and Criminal Justice Worker at 'Turning Poin' is part of a multi-agency team delivering a Drug Interventions Programme.

John worked with us on the concept 'The Cycle of Change'. He uses this model with offenders.

After lunch and warm hospitality from Exeter Friends we re-convened to listen to

Chris Saunders, Manager of the OVIS FARM PROJECT

Chris told his own personal life story. His honest and open sharing of a childhood in Liverpool in the 70's; of family life with little communication; of an unexplained move to Devon; of the death of a much loved Grandad never talked about - touched his audience.

He remembered being bullied at school and rebelling against his parents. Playing up in class brought him attention from his peers. At 8 years old he was abused by a group of 15 year old boys whilst camping.

He became aggressive, isolated, fearful and attention seeking, At 12 he was smoking and drinking vodka. He was expelled from school at 14 for carrying a knife. At 18 he was sent to an adult prison and remembers this as a good experience, where he developed a work ethic. However, he re-offended and his stay in prison led to heroin addiction. He later began selling heroin to feed his habit, all the time trying to blank out the way he felt. When he was raided by the police he was desperately ill and was relieved to be caught. Following hospital he served a 4-year sentence.

He went in to rehab and began to explore who he was. He wrote to the manager of The Freedom Centre, a drop in centre for homeless in Barnstaple, and told him about the abuse he had suffered as an 8 year old boy. He began to realise that life is about choices. He could choose whether to live or to die. He could say 'no' to heroin.

His approach to recovery stemmed from the question he posed, 'How can I get out of this life-style? I want to change, but how?'

On release from prison Chris went to OVIS FARM. This is a Christian community on a working farm near Exmoor, North Devon. Residents generally come from a homeless background with drugs and alcohol problems. The farm's aim is to prepare each individual to return to an independent and productive lifestyle. OVIS is a 10 bedroom farmhouse set in 110 acres. Men between the age of 21 and 50 stay for a period of about 9 months, to learn the strategies for change.

After his stay at OVIS, Chris received a grant from The Princes Trust. He started work and received a Young Achievers Award. After a number of bad relationships with women, Chris married and he now works at OVIS as Manager of the project that helped him to turn his own life around.

OVIS Mission Statement reads,

"We believe that every body has the potential to achieve a plan and purpose for their lives. Our purpose is to see lives transformed. We do this by demonstrating the love of God in everything we do."

Chris believes that love is the key to change.

Susan Eckles, Okehampton LM