



What was life like for you searching for work?

There is no denying that searching for work is indeed a difficult process. However, I just had to think of the alternatives, prison life (all be it 18 years ago) - getting involved in things that would harm others and my family. The search is hard but the reward is higher than anything else in life. Love comes close as an emotion but it's the feeling of being accepted again by someone and knowing that in fact, your past is gone and your future is here and waiting for you. It can be turned around in an instant, but it's all too easy to believe in the negativity of life, especially if that's where you have come from. People are compassionate and someone will see you for the individual you are. Patience is key.

What made you think you could change?

Change happens regardless of whether or not you notice it. We all grow out of things, some later than others, but essentially if you have the desire to want a better quality of life then what is there to stop you? More than likely it's experiences growing up, abuse, people telling you that you're not capable, when in fact we all are. It's just that some can't grasp it as confidently. For me I was fortunate but that did not make it any easier. In fact I'd say worse. People would say to me "how come a middle class, private educated boy is here in prison?". My reply would often be, "I made a mistake", but there's always more to that. My privilege does not define me or mean that I have access to the next level in life.

How did Clean Sheet help you?

They gave me continued support and acknowledged that I was struggling and that I need to find work. The people there were fantastic in providing me with jobs to apply for that were within my capabilities. It's rewarding when someone else tells you to apply for a role even if you don't get it but you're encouraged by the fact that they are keeping an eye out for you. I received a great communicative response to my questions and thoughts about work and eventually this all culminated in me finding work. I was never questioned or made to feel like a victim or a menace. It was all a very level playing field.

So, what's it like to have a job?

This is easy. Freedom. The ability to know that firstly at the end of each month you get paid and you can do what you want. You have no debt. You can pay your rent, eat, sleep and you feel stable and secure. There is nothing worse than not knowing where you're going to end up each night, and I've been there for a while. It's a massive relief. You're doing something positive which not only reflects yourself but also your ability to be someone and actually have some self-respect. Now I know that if a mate comes to me for help I can be there for him, the same for other friends and family.

Anything else you'd like to comment on?

Just to say that the change has to come from within. Prison is the most demoralising place to exist and once you're out there is little to make you feel better about yourself. The last thing you want to do after months or years of being banged up is to suddenly be released with no support. I mean where does a caged lion run to? But if you have an idea of what you want then there are people like "Clean Sheet" who will support and guide you towards a better life. I mean what can be worse than prison life?