



MIDDLESBROUGH COMMUNITY CAMPUS: BRETT'S STORY

Jill Theobald
meets one
of the many
Community
Campus
success stories,
a man who's
rebuilding his
life in more
ways than one

Brett is 46 and has been involved as a volunteer in the refurbishment of a property in Middlesbrough that will provide two self-contained flats to house Community Campus clients.

He's been involved from the start working two to three days a week, clearing the property, chipping off plaster, preparing walls for damp-proofing and finishing, and, recently, has had a go at bricklaying.

His previous work experience was more than 20 years ago on a government scheme helping the elderly where he received a £10 top-up on his benefit.

Brett first came to Community Campus for help with housing. He was in bed and breakfast accommodation and had lived an unsettled life for more than five years, moving from one house in multiple occupation to another.

He originally had a council flat but lost it and became homeless due to problems linked to substance misuse. His housing options were limited because of his housing history and low income – he was excluded from help through the council and renting privately required money that he could not afford. At worst, he slept in a derelict house with rats for company. At best, he found accommodation in an environment surrounded by other drug users, dealers and crime.

Since being with Community Campus, Brett has seen a number of things change. His housing has improved – he now has a self-contained private rented flat, obtained with help and ongoing support through the organisation's tenancy deposit scheme.

Through his volunteering he can see the progress that has been made refurbishing the flats and his own contribution to it. At the same time, he recognises his housing and volunteering have helped reduce his illicit drug use.

'It helps staying off the gear when you've got something to do', he says.

His health is affected by long-term drug misuse and depression. 'Working makes me feel better while I'm doing it,' he explains, although he is doubtful he could get a paid job doing a similar kind of work because he gets tired easily and has to stop to take regular breaks.

He says he's surprised he has stuck at volunteering for as long as he has, but pays tribute to Rob, the site supervisor, who he describes as 'really good, he lets you get on and do what you can and doesn't make you do things you don't want to or can't do.

'I don't think I would still be doing it if Rob wasn't there.'

Where Brett lives now is better than his previous accommodation, although affordability remains a major problem, particularly with fuel costs.

He has privacy and can lock his door and is not 'tortured by unwanted people coming in and using the place to do drugs'.

The ongoing plan is to build a positive housing history that will enable him to access more affordable social housing which will greatly improve his chances of dealing with the issues he's facing.