

## **Paul Hannaford - My Life: Old & Present**

Growing up many years ago in East London then in Essex I was a bright normal little boy who was obsessed with football & my dream was to one day play for West Ham. I was probably never good enough but age 8 that's what I wanted to do, come age 11 I left my primary & ended up in a great big secondary school with over 1000 kids in, so made lots of new friends. I was in a local football team & life was fine until come year 9 I got involved with some boys and they were weed smokers and like a fool I tried it. Within 6 months I started to smoke it every day losing complete interest in football, school & eventually got kicked out my football team and school ending up in a PRU pupil referral unit where I met a group of boys who were just like me, weed smokers & got very friendly with some of them & we become a gang.

It was a mixed bunch of black & white boys in our gang, we all got kicked out of the pru, so aged 15 I'm now on the street carrying a large knife and knuckle duster like the rest of the gang & started to commit crime every day, as my drug habit to weed had escalated to other drugs such as LSD ecstasy & lots of really strong alcohol and I was out my head every single day. Come age 16 I had picked up 15 convictions & was sent to 3 young offenders units. As time went on the gang chopped and changed but there was at least a core of 8-10 and aged 21. I become one of the gang leaders! And we would have many battles with other gangs in the area and I got stabbed 7 times in total, one nearly fatal as I was admitted into intensive care for a few days as I could of died!

I thought I was going to live the rest of my life like this but it come to a point one evening at party where some of my gang were and heroin was introduced. I never ever thought I would touch it because I had seen heroin addicts in the street and as far as I was concerned they were all scum bag junkies. But I got extremely drunk & stoned that night and curiosity got to me and I tried it & it took me to a very dark place because I stopped smoking weed & drinking and smoked heroin every day. Within a year my health suffered, I stopped cleaning my teeth would go weeks without bathing and ate very little losing over 5 stone and none of my family wanted much to do with me as I had put my mum & girlfriend through hell.

I became extremely lonely living in crack dens and starting to inject heroin all over my body, hands, feet, neck & then started crack. Within a short time I was injecting both, but crack makes your veins thrombosed and I had 2 needle heads snap off in my arms. I did have surgery to get them removed but doctors left them in my body & they still there today!

I was sharing needles with other addicts, it became normal, so at this point I had to start injecting into my penis & groin (which is the femoral artery) up to 50 times a day with the same syringe. Some days causing blood to squirt every where and I got many clots & large open wounds that bleed heavily every day!

Over the next 10 years my health got so poor I could hardly walk but I needed at least £400/500 a day to feed my habit, as I was a shoplifter and would run out of shops with large amounts of clothing stealing £2000 worth of goods a day. So I got myself a Handgun and started robbing all the dealers in my area & knew it was only a matter of days that I would be dead, and I was aware the police were also looking for me. So I handed my self in, which I now know saved my life, as they arrested me and I ended up in prison but the prison I went to sent me to an outside hospital because my leg needed to be amputated as it was so badly infected. However, the hospital managed to save my leg using 100s of live maggots to eat away all the dead infected tissue and I eventually had 20 skin grafts.

After doing my whole sentence in the hospital handcuffed to the bed I was eventually released and went to a rehab and I got better even though today my legs have never healed, they still bleed and I'm on medication for the rest of my life, as I've got 10 blood clots in my legs, I'm pleased to say I'm now over 10 years clean and sober. The rest of my gang weren't so lucky as 4 died from drugs overdoses and I went to 3 of their funerals & watched their mums burry them, another 4 have severe mental health issues and ones still in prison for stabbing a man to death!

Looking back when we were all young not one of us ever had a workshop at our school - pru and I believe we were all miserably failed. Everything I did was all related to drugs. I broke the law more than 5000 times, I went to prison 14 times and stole over £5million pounds worth of goods from shops but today I'm putting something back as I've dedicated my life to educating kids all over the UK in hundreds of schools from years 3-12 and spoken to 400,000 in the past 7 years, changing many young minds hoping their future won't be like mine or my old gangs!! A wasted one !!