



Drunkenness, resisting arrest, possession of offensive weapon, motor vehicle offences, breaches of court orders, multiple problems...

“Nothing but a sponger who doesn’t work and abuses alcohol” was the judge’s comment when he sentenced Ian, aged 25, in 2008. Six months’ imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, with requirements to receive Alcohol Treatment, attend Probation’s Think First programme, be subject to a Curfew Order while on a tag, accompanied by an Order not to enter any licensed premises for 18 months – all were intended as a last attempt to deal with his criminal activity via a Community Order.

His immaturity and lack of discipline could be traced back to a difficult childhood. Father died suddenly when Ian was 12. He describes himself as out of control by the time he left school at 15. Important relationships at home were dislocated. His alcohol consumption was already massive.

The Offender Manager needed to understand the sources of past behaviour, while finding practical ways and means to help Ian deal with the present. The key issues: alcohol consumption; homelessness; poor relationships; no job, few basic skills; were inter-related. In preparing the Supervision Plan, the OM had to map out the right sequence of events to deal with them, making sure that Ian grew more aware of the impact of his crime and supporting him in complying with his curfew, motivating him to grit his teeth and get on with it.

Ian took time and a lot of work to regularise. He was seen individually by his Offender Manager two or three times a week for nearly a year. Motivational work was the key in getting him to deal with the alcohol issue. He eventually moved on to regular counselling with one of Essex Probation’s partner organisations.

Finding regular affordable accommodation is often a knotty problem, and Ian, used to sleeping on friends’ settees, was no exception. His moving around also affected his ability to comply with the tagging condition. Probation’s Accommodation Officer; along with a local voluntary organisation, got involved.

Seven months after the beginning of the Order, the Offender Manager sent him back to court, for breaching it. As he had been trying to knuckle down and was working hard, the court decided to add three months to his supervision. Four months later, he was in breach yet again, for entering licensed premises. The exclusion zone included all premises selling drink, included supermarkets. By the skin of his teeth, he walked out of the court, with another extension, and with an additional requirement: 40 hours Unpaid Work. There was no doubt in the mind of the Offender Manager that he was making progress, however.

Six months on, we are cautiously optimistic. During this time, he has found somewhere to live, for himself, his young girlfriend and their young son. His curfew was completed, with difficulty. He has finished the Unpaid Work hours. Learning Basic Skills via local college tutors has been a long-term project. "Again, a lot of motivation needed, but he has kept going and made some progress," says his Offender Manager. He achieved a Fork Lift Truck licence, and did the Progress to Work course, for weeks. He is coming to the end of the Think First programme, engaging well and pleasing his Offender Manager with his honesty and self-awareness. While he is able to drink occasionally, he believes he is still at risk when out with his pals.

"This has been, and still is, a huge Order in terms of effort, both for him, and for Essex Probation," says his Offender Manager. "We're not out of the woods yet. Crucial to keeping crime-free is getting a job. No luck on that score so far, though we are keeping him motivated. His settled relationship will help keep him focussed. But when I look back to the chaotic young criminal he was, I have to be impressed."