

## Andrew

Andrew was a 17 year old white man serving a referral order and community service under supervision of the youth offending team for threatening his sister with a knife. He had no qualifications, but was undertaking an apprenticeship as a chef; this appealing to him, because he was unable to learn 'through books', but could through 'practice'. He started his story by offering to talk about 'all the bad stuff' – the 'dodgy stuff' – which despite encouragement from the interviewer to go with 'whatever was easiest' was where he chose to begin. When Andrew was around six months old, his father had separated from his mother, taking his older brother – a stocky lad with severe learning difficulties, partial deafness and epilepsy – and sister – now a 6 stone 21 year old with 'bipolar' tendencies – away from his mum. Going back 16 years, Andrew's dad was known to hit the kids and their mum. As infants the boys had tried to intervene only to get punched themselves and thrown across the room: 'nothing we could do like'. Andrew's mother had to fight a custody battle to get the children back. The court's ruling against his father culminated in Andrew – then aged 4 or 5 – and his siblings seeing their father knock their mother to the ground in the street, before driving at her to run her over with his car.

This incident aside, Andrew's memories of his infant years were understandably 'brief' and sketchy; part recollection and part what he had been told by his brother and sister. Dad would 'get angry' and then 'take it out' on mum. His mum and dad would argue because he was 'cheating on her'. Andrew's father moved in with his girlfriend, leaving his wife and children with 'no money', and telling the kids that their mother was 'bad', 'no good', likely to 'ruin' their lives, and that they would be better off with him. Then after several years of absence, Andrew's dad began to reappear in the children's lives when Andrew was about 7. The kids decided to give him a second 'chance', but they soon came to the view that they were being used to look after the younger child in their father's new family while he worked. Wound up by hearing their father referring to their mother as an 'alcoholic', Andrew and his siblings decided they did not want to see him any more: 'I hated him so much ... even though it's been me mum there the whole time, he tries to make out she's all these bad things and [it's] quite clear she's not'.

As they reached their teenage years, Andrew and his sister started to get into trouble themselves – fighting with each other at home; Andrew's sister, from age 14 onwards, drinking heavily and picking up a reputation as a 'slag', attacking their mother and getting herself arrested; and Andrew himself excluded from school aged 15 after a long period of 'terrorising teachers' and smoking marijuana on the school premises. A fight with a teacher culminated in Andrew being branded 'the worst student' the governors had ever seen. Because he 'hated school' – not having been able to do much of the set work since the age of 11 and having a very short attention span – Andrew took the opportunity to stop going even after the exclusion was lifted with the offer of part-time return. But there was at least a hint that Andrew's withdrawal from school was also motivated by grievances at home:

Me mum used to call me [dad's name], if I'd like get suspended ... And it proper wound me up cos I just thought I didn't want to be nothing like him. I'm nothing to do with him and that's just not me. I don't hit women and I don't go round battering you if you've got no money ... In a way it used to trigger me to kick off more because I even thought me own mother doesn't believe in me.

Whilst his mother had dated other men, at least one of whom had been nice, the only steady relationships she had made the situation worse. In one instance, the kids moved in with their mother's new partner only to 'find out that he was a nutcase', a 'weirdo' who tried to 'shave' their mum's hair off and expected her to act as his domestic servant. Somewhere around this time Andrew began dealing cocaine, a local drug trafficker having 'treated' him 'like a son'.

Between Andrew and his sister, her reputation as a 'slag' became a source of conflict. Andrew got wound up about what other people were saying about her; she got drunk and would smash stuff up around the house, run at Andrew and his brother, whack and punch Andrew and his mum in the face. This would cause Andrew's brother to get scared and 'hysterical'. His sister would respond by calling their brother a 'backward' 'mong'; his mum would try to calm the brother down in the hope of avoiding an epileptic fit; everyone would take sides, often leaving Andrew feeling that it was 'all' his 'fault'. All of this was compounded by the things Andrew's sister said about him. She asserted that their dad never hit their mother before Andrew was born, and that their mother found out too late in the pregnancy to have him terminated: 'it was too late to get rid of you ... You're the reason that dad's not here now; you made dad start hitting mum ... You've just fucked everything up'. Andrew's mum had insisted it was all 'lies'. But Andrew was not entirely dissuaded. He had doubts about whether his mum had wanted him: 'she might love me and that, she does love me', 'she might regret it now by the way I turned out'. These doubts were probably exacerbated by Andrew's mother referring to him by his father's name when he was badly behaved. But they may also have been exacerbated by the revelations about Andrew's father's sexual violence towards his mother:

one night she was just like proper down ... One of her mates said 'what's up?' ... and she went, em, it was like fourteen years ago today ... somebody's ... raped me and then I just heard her and went 'what?'. She just went 'fourteen years ago today that I first got raped'. And then she said about four years ago your dad raped me like four times. And I went ... nothing really I could do in a way.

The conflicts between Andrew and his sister had led to the police's visits becoming quite regular in recent years. One such incident followed Andrew's sister getting drunk and attacking her boyfriend with a glass bottle, then attacking their mother. When his sister started attacking him, Andrew punched her in return. His brother called the police. On another occasion Andrew woke up to find his sister drunk on a bottle of whiskey, calling their dog 'a slag'. Their mother's appearance was greeted with violence from Andrew's

sister 'punching her just literally trying to kill me mum'. Andrew started 'punching' his sister 'as hard' as he could, until she hit the floor, noting that as she hit the floor she was smiling a 'proper evil smile'. The fight continued with furniture being 'smashed', until Andrew's mum rang the police and got his sister arrested. More recently, the violence had commenced with Andrew's sister insisting again that 'mum didn't want him'. After an hour of arguing, Andrew 'snapped', picking up a knife and told his sister to 'get out of the house now'. He began 'battering' her boyfriend, who arrived on the scene trying to tell Andrew 'what to do' in his own 'house'. Following another call from Andrew's brother, the police arrived and arrested Andrew, his conviction for affray leading to a sentence of attendance on a knife crime programme and the youth offending team supervision he was now undergoing.

Where things were going to go from here was difficult to judge. Certainly some of the efforts being made to get Andrew's temper under control were making a difference. 'Last year ... if something wound me up or if something made me click I wouldn't stop until it was out of me head'. Previously, when professionals had shown an interest in the family, they had tended to focus on Andrew's brother: 'we just weren't that important in a way'. Post his conviction, Andrew had found he could 'get stuff off' his chest by talking to his case manager: although he was quite right that much of this had come rather too late and only after he had got into serious trouble.

[When] You get help is when you've been arrested and you've been put on something like this. Then you get all the help that you've needed like ... But then when you're just a normal kid and that unless you've got some big name like, you're dad's a multi-millionaire behind you or something, then they'll get listened to. But if you're not, if you're like me or any other lad ... that comes to YOT, ask any of them ... 'have you had any help before you got put on YOT?' they'd say no. ... YOT should be given to kids like before they get arrested, they'll all say yeah. I'd guarantee it. ... I know they warn you about stuff in school and that but they don't have counsellors. They don't have anybody where if you just think 'ah I could do with telling her this' ... I'd never tell the teacher anything about my life ... because teachers don't listen to you so you feel, you think if the teacher's not going to listen to you no one else is going to listen to you. You can't exactly talk to your mum about it if it happens

This opportunity to talk had generated some tangible changes. Andrew stopped drug dealing – the fear of imprisonment evoked by his detention in police custody playing on his mind. He had also apologised to his sister, and while they still argued this was more just like any brother and sister would. But there were still challenges to be overcome. Most of Andrew's own relationships with girls had been 'nothing like proper special', the longest one – of nine months – ending when Andrew battered the girl's father, he having said 'if you break my daughter's heart you dirty ... prick I'll break your legs'. Andrew was 'gutted' when he realised his own anger had effectively cost him the relationship. In addition, Andrew still wanted his dad 'sorted out'; he fantasized about killing his dad, 'rip[ping] his head off,

'batter[ring] him if he [ever] touches his mum' again; the rape revelations appearing to have given him a moment of clarity about many of the untruths he had been told. The problem, as Andrew put it, was that he knew that 'what you see when you are little can affect you in two different ways. One like where ... I just don't want to be nothing like him ... [and two] but you end up being like him anyway'. In another relationship he had had with a girl he had come close to hitting her. She would text him incessantly suggesting if he did not text straight back he was being unfaithful. Andrew remembered thinking 'I'll punch you if you don't shut up' but also that had caused him to reflect:

I'm not him. That's not me. I've never hit a woman in me life, never will

I just hate people hitting girls ... There's never a need to hit a girl unless she's full on punching you ... unless it's some big mad ... mad woman.

In the event, the former girlfriend had actually slapped Andrew, but he had 'just pushed her away, called her 'cheeky', and ending the relationship a week later.