

“What will you do with 'YourTime'?”

The history of a unique employment programme for individuals recovering from addiction

In 2004 Brent Clark watched an unemployed Welsh ex-miner fumble his way through an art class at The Hanbury Project, a community project in Spitalfields. The ex-miner sat uncomfortably making butterflies. Brent, the manager of the project, thought how inappropriate and undignified the task was for a man of such skill and experience. Soon after, a workshop was set up in The Hanbury Project which taught basic woodwork and furniture restoration skills and gave people like the ex-miner a chance to get their hands dirty again.

The birth of the New Hanbury Project

In 2005 The Hanbury Project and Spitalfields Crypt Trust merged, meaning a move to Shoreditch High Street where the project was renamed. The New Hanbury Project was born. Brent, no longer The Hanbury's manager, took on the new role of development manager and then joined with Graham Marshall, CEO of Spitalfields Crypt Trust.



Graham was passionate about offering real work experience to the clients of Spitalfields Crypt Trust. Thus, the New Hanbury Project was different from its predecessor, focusing more on those in recovery from addiction and aiming to give people real and practical life skills. The New Hanbury Project was able to offer a high quality D.I.Y course giving people to the chance to develop skills in painting, decorating, tiling and furniture restoration. The conjoining of Brent and Graham's visions led slowly and organically to the birth of YourTime.

From a nice idea to a real business

When the vicar of a local church mentioned the need for some decorating, Brent jumped at the opportunity to use the skills that were being nurtured at The New Hanbury Project. This became YourTime's first job. It was a big job, which paid only £600 and took a small group of men several weeks to complete. In the end, the job was done so well that members of the congregation asked to use the service. All this work was done voluntarily.



At the time, pre-cuts, the government offered funding known as the 'Future Job Fund', meaning that the YourTime employees were able to have their wages paid for them, at minimum wage, for the first six months. The fund enabled YourTime to develop from a project/nice idea into a real business. Two men, Rob and Sid, started paid work four days a week. This hardworking, reliable pair took on the roles willingly, having previously given their time and labor voluntarily for many months with no knowledge that it would lead to paid employment.

Although organic in its development, YourTime has not been without its challenges. Neither Brent nor Graham had any experience running a business or any training in painting and decorating. Each step involved a lot of rectifying mistakes. However, through sheer determination and hard work, particularly that of Rob and Sid, YourTime continued to expand.

The next step after overcoming addiction

YourTime can be simplified by the title of 'work and therapeutic intervention fused together'. It is not-for-profit and is entirely designed to help people. It acts as part of the ongoing care after the initial experience of rehabilitation to make sure people are moving forward with their recovery.



YourTime is about giving people who have overcome addiction the opportunity to get experience in a real work environment. A recent study by UKDPC called 'Working towards recovery' found that two-thirds of employers said they would refuse to employ a former heroin or crack user, even if they were otherwise suitable for the job. This means that many who are in recovery are very unlikely to find employment.

By working through YourTime, people are able to gain work experience and skills resulting in a respectable CV and references for future work. It gives people the chance to prove that they are both skilled and perfectly capable of continuing in a working environment. YourTime aims to reduce the stigma attached to individuals in recovery. It also sets out to eradicate the hopelessness of the employee by providing an encouraging and graceful – not to be confused with soft – support system around them as they take on new responsibilities.

How it works

All the employees of YourTime have been through the programmes of Spitalfields Crypt Trust, having either lived in Acorn House (SCT's abstinence-based supported house) or been part of The New Hanbury Project. The project managers assess people in the programmes and determine who is ready to take on the role of employee. Most of the time, this has been a very successful process. However, the nature of working with people in recovery from addiction means that YourTime must be prepared to support those who relapse.

Thankfully, YourTime's relapse rate is enviably low; there have been only two relapses to date. If people relapse, they are asked to take three months out, at which point they can rejoin the team if they are ready.

What's next for YourTime?

YourTime has come on leaps and bounds from the dissatisfied Welshman. Currently running a cleaning business in addition to the painting and decorating, YourTime is set to grow even more over the next few years.

YourTime truly is unique, with its focus on providing employment – and a support system – for people in recovery. An influx of job offers means more money is being generated, which increases the opportunities to help more people along their course of recovery. While someone concerned about profits might see only the potential to make a lot of money, Spitalfields Crypt Trust is blessed to have a humble and hardworking management team that is focused on helping people succeed in their recovery. The better the businesses are, the better the work experience is and the more money they can make – which means YourTime is able to provide support to even more people who desperately need it.

