

Homeless



BANNED FROM A CITY CENTRE, THE HEROIN-ADDICT BEGGAR WHO MAKES £1,200 A MONTH

By Jaya Narain

He may look desperate for any spare change, but begging has turned into a lucrative business for Daniel Hill.

The 23-year-old drug addict "earns" an astonishing £1,200 a month scrounging from passers-by - and finishes every shift by going home to his bed.

But his "career" has been put under threat after a court banned him from his usual haunts in Bristol city centre.

If he breaches the injunction, he could face a council application for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order which could lead to a jail sentence of up to five years.

It represents a tough new approach to the problem, as in the past beggars have been dealt with under the 1824 Vagrancy Act, which can lead to a short spell in prison or a fine.

Hill claims that he needs to beg to fund his heroin addiction, despite claiming £40-a-week unemployment benefit and having a hostel bed paid for by the local council.

"The only way I can get the money for my habit is by begging on the streets," he said.

"If I wasn't begging I would have to start stealing because I spend a fair bit on drugs each day."

Powers to clamp down on begging have previously been used to bar vagrants from stations and trains, but Hill is one of the first to be banned from an entire city centre.

Hill was targeted in a £200,000 campaign launched last month by Bristol City Council to rid its streets of beggars.

PC Guy Lambert, who has been seconded to the council from Avon and Somerset police for 12 months, said: "He tells us he earns about £1,200 a month and it is all going on drugs.

"He is a nuisance to the public and we have got to send out the message that persistent beggars will be jailed.

"We have really come to this as a last resort. We have offered him every kind of help - from housing to drug abuse counselling - but he has turned it all down."

Hill is a common sight in the more prosperous areas of central Bristol, where he stands at cashpoints demanding money.

In the last month he has been arrested 11 times.

He is generally fined, but because he cannot afford to pay, magistrates count his time in custody - usually one night - as punishment and he is released back on to the streets.

He grew up around the Bristol area but was taken into care at a young age and has had no contact with his parents since.

He lived in care homes in Keynsham, near Bristol, and various parts of the city, leaving school with no qualifications before becoming involved in petty theft.

Hill was in trouble with the police throughout his teenage years but never received a custodial sentence.

After he started smoking cannabis in his early teens, he moved on to harder drugs and began injecting heroin three years ago.

He took up begging around the same time to pay for his habit and spends £50 on drugs on an average day.

He lives in a hostel in St Judes, Bristol, which also houses offenders on bail and immigrants awaiting asylum applications.

Council lawyers drew up the injunction against Hill, which is valid for 12 months.

It was granted by District Judge Bird at Bristol County Court on Friday of last week.

The injunction bans him from Park Street, Whiteladies Road, Corn Street and Small Street.

A breach of the injunction - which was served on him at his home - would lead to a charge of contempt, thereby giving the council grounds to apply for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order, which was introduced under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act.

If Hill were to breach this order, he could be jailed for anywhere between six months and five years.

Helen Parkes, of Bristol City Council, said: "We hope that this threat will deter him from begging in the future."

Hill said he would simply move to the outskirts of the city to beg, thereby avoiding a breach of the injunction.

He claimed he was on the waiting list for drug therapy and will stop begging when he beats his heroin addiction.

"There's no way that anyone on drugs can live off the little bit of dole money I get every week - it would be impossible," he said.

A recent survey by Cambridgeshire Police found beggars were getting up to £50 an hour, more than the Prime Minister or most business executives.

The survey, carried out in March this year, found that if vagrants begged for a 40-hour week their annual takings,

without having to pay tax or National Insurance, would total £104,000.

Inspector Alan Jarman, of Cambridge Police, said: "The message I want to get across is that if people are making £50 an hour, that's not to get them a bed for the night and a square meal, but to support their drink and drug habits."

The Government says that 50 percent of beggars have a drink dependency and 20 per cent have a drug dependency.

However the research in Cambridge showed the proportion could be even higher. The force found most of Cambridge's beggars are in their twenties and thirties and come from outside the city to prey on tourists and residents.

They were making a good living despite Government efforts to persuade people to give to charity instead of beggars.

Extract from *The Daily Mail*, October 19 2002, by Jaya Narain

"It seemed like one long terrible nightmare"

When Sally left home with her children, it was to escape her husband's violent temper.

But soon she found her problems were far from over.

For a time, she and the children lived in a small rented flat. But when her husband found her and started coming round and threatening her, she had to move again.

The next "home" she had was a cramped single room in a bed and breakfast where she was placed by the local council. There was hardly any room to look after two young children.

Later the council moved her to a hostel where she had to share with lots of other families. There she faced another blow - her little boy Sam, then aged three, had to have a serious operation. Far from family and friends, it was an ordeal she had to face alone. "I used to look at Sam and think I might lose him," she remembers. "It seemed like one long, terrible nightmare."

We first met Sally when one of our workers visited the hostel where she was living. Because she wasn't local, but had moved into the area to escape from her husband, the council was reluctant to re-house her. But we contacted them to press her case, and after a short period in a temporary flat she was able to move into a small terrace house.

Sally was drained emotionally by what she had been through, and didn't have a penny to spare. So we helped her move in. We provided things she needed, like pots and pans. We gave her paint and brushes to redecorate. And we continued to visit and offer practical help, such as finding Sam a place at a local school.

Sally is typical of many homeless people. She wanted so much to get back on her feet. We helped her find the strength to start again. "I'm happy again now," she says. "At last I can give my kids a decent home."

You can give homeless people what they need most - the chance to help themselves.

If you think sleeping rough's just a matter of finding a dry spot where the fuzz won't move you on and getting your head down, you're wrong. Not your fault of course - if you've never tried it you've no way of knowing what it's like, so what I thought I'd do was sort of talk you through a typical night. That night in the Vaudeville alcove won't do, because there were two of us and it's worse if you're by yourself.

So you pick your spot. Wherever it is (unless you're in a squat or a derelict house or something) it's going to have a floor of stone, tile, concrete or brick. In other words it's going to be hard and cold. It might be a bit cramped, too - shop doorways often are. And remember, if it's winter you're going to be half frozen before you even start. Anyway you've got your place, and if you're lucky enough to have a sleeping-bag you unroll it and get in.

Settled for the night? Well maybe, maybe not. Remember my first night? The Scouser? 'Course you do. He kicked me out of my bedroom and pinched my watch. Well, that sort of thing can happen any night, and there are worse things. You could be peed on by a drunk or a dog. Happens all the time - one man's bedroom is another man's lavatory. You might be spotted by a gang of lager louts on the lookout for someone to maim. That happens all the time too, and if they get carried away you can end up dead. There are guys who like young boys, who think because you're a dosser you'll do anything for dosh, and there's a psycho who'll knife you for your pack.

So, you lie listening. You bet you do. Footsteps. Voices. Breathing, even. Doesn't help you sleep.

Then there's your bruises. What bruises? Try lying on a stone floor for half an hour. Just half an hour. You can choose any position you fancy, and you can change position as often as you like. You won't find it comfy, I can tell you. You won't sleep unless you're dead drunk or zonked on downers. And if you are, and do, you're going to wake up with bruises on hips, shoulders, elbows, ankles and knees - especially if you're a bit thin from not eating properly. And if you do that six hours a night for six nights you'll feel like you fell out of a train. Try sleeping on concrete then.

And don't forget the cold. If you've ever tried dropping off to sleep with cold feet, even in bed, you'll know it's impossible. You've got to warm up those feet, or lie awake. And in January, in a doorway, in wet trainers, it can be quite a struggle. And if you manage it, chances are you'll need to get up for a pee, and then it starts all over again.

And those are only some of the hassles. I haven't mentioned stomach cramps from hunger, headaches from the flu, toothaches, fleas and lice. I haven't talked about homesickness, depression and despair. I haven't gone into how it

feels to want a girl-friend when your circumstances make it virtually impossible for you to get one - how it feels to know you're a social outcast in fact, a non-person to whom every ordinary activity is closed.

So. You lie on your bruises, listening. Trying to warm your feet. You curl up on your side and your hip hurts, so you stretch out on your back so your feet stay cold and the concrete hurts your heels. You force yourself to lie still for a bit, thinking that'll help you drop off, but it doesn't. Your pack feels like a rock under your head and your nose is cold. You wonder what time it is. Can you stop listening now, or could someone still come? Distant chimes. You strain your ears, counting. One o'clock? It can't be only one o'clock, surely? I've been here hours. Did I miss a chime?

What's that? Sounds like breathing. Heavy breathing, as in maniac. Lie still. Quiet. Maybe he won't see you. Listen. Is he still there? Silence now. Creeping up, perhaps. No. Relax. Jeez, my feet are cold.

A thought out of nowhere - my old room at home. My little bed. What I wouldn't give for - no, musn't. Musn't think about that. No sleep that way. Somebody could be asleep in that room right now. Warm and dry. Safe. Lucky sod.

Food. God, don't start on about food! (Remember that time in Whitby - fish and chip caff? Long, sizzling haddock, heap of chips like a mountain. So many, you had to leave some.) Wish I had them now.

Mum. Wonder what Mum's doing. Wonder if she wonders where I am? How would she feel if she knew? I miss you, Mum. Do you miss me? Does anybody?

Chimes again. Quarter past. Quarter past one? I don't believe it.

DSS. Are they considering my claim? (Not now they're not - they're sleeping. Snug as a bug in a rug.) Do they know what it feels like, kipping in a doorway? No.

And so it goes on, hour after hour. Now and then you doze a bit, but only a bit. You're so cold, so frightened and it hurts so much that you end up praying for morning even though you're dog tired - even though tomorrow is certain to be every bit as grim as yesterday.

And the worst part is knowing you haven't deserved any of it.

Extract from "Stone Cold" by Robert Swindells

School: Roundwood Park School

Theme: Homelessness

Texts: Extract from novel "Stone Cold" by Robert Swindells
Poem "Hungerford Bridge" by Katie Campbell
Daily Mail article on homelessness
Advert from homeless charity "Shelter"

"Hungerford Bridge" poem by Katie Campbell

Who are the speakers in stanza one?
What is referred to as "Exploitation"?
When do you think this poem is set?
How are different attitudes to homelessness explored?
Why does the poet introduce the idea of rubbish?

Daily Mail article on homelessness

Who could face a jail sentence of up to five years?
What has the government been trying to persuade people to do?
How balanced do you think this article is? Explain your answer.
Why do you think the article uses words like "scrounging", "haunts", "nuisance", "prey"?

Shelter charity advert

What is the name of Sally's young son?
Why did Sally have to move to the hostel?
What did the charity do to help Sally start her new life? Find at least three examples.
Find three examples of emotive language used in the advert.
What is the effect of placing the charity's website in the bottom corner of the advert?

Extract from "Stone Cold" by Robert Swindells

What is the effect of the repeated use of the word "you" in this passage?
List five of the dangers of sleeping rough mentioned in the passage.
What is the effect of the questions asked at the end of the passage? What do they reveal about Link's state of mind?
How do you respond to the following phrases:

- "One man's bedroom is another man's lavatory"
- "There are guys who like young boys, who think because you're a dosser you'll do anything for dosh"
- "DSS. Are they considering my claim? (Not now they're not - they're sleeping snug as a bug in a rug)"

Please sir.

Can you spare...Can you afford...

Please sir.

Dirty layabouts, sorry Darling.

These alleyways; next time we'll bring the car.

Hey man got any change?

Change? Change? They've got to do something about this. I mean this is disgusting, atrocious. This is our Capital City.

Please man I'm starving.

Darling, haven't you...

Don't bother, they'll simply drink it away.

But he's shivering.

Darling, relax, it's all part of the act.

Please sir.

Look at that one down the way, with his dog. Now that's what I call Cheap Emotion. Exploitation.

Oh disgusting. Imagine cuddling next to the creature like that. It's so unhygienic.

He probably does it for warmth.

But think of the fleas! Hurry Darling, we'll be late.

Please sir.

No, I haven't got anything.

Nothing to give...

But Darling I saw you give to that man with the flute...

Yes, but that's entertainment.

Help me sir.

Something for nothing that's what they want. Well life's not like that.

Excuse me please, can you...

Oh hurry hurry hurry past looking straight ahead away. Ignore the shit in the streets.

As long as you don't step on it you can keep your shoes clean.

Please sir.

Is that lump one of them in the corner? No it's too still; just rubbish I think. Perhaps it will blow away into the river, all the rubbish.

Nothing ever disappears for ever.

From "Hungerford Bridge" by Katie Campbell