renewal

NORTH WEST

*Bringing Hope Through Jesus Christ*

# STORIES OF CHANGE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


01
Robbie

02
Neil

03
Abed

04
Becky

05
Paul

06
Scott

07
Jerome

# A WORD FROM OUR CEO

Welcome to 'Stories of Change': a collection of some of the lives changed through the help of Renewal North West and the Renewal Living programme.

The charity's name is based on the Bible's view of 'renewal': a changed life in line with God's will, for God's glory. We have made this our mission and have seen this happening in the lives of many different people.

Renewal Living provides vital supported accommodation for those on the journey from past offending, addiction and homelessness. The programme also provides employment and support to access health, mental health, and sobriety services.

It is a privilege for us to be involved, and it is a pleasure to share these stories with you and invite you into this privilege as well.

Accommodation is key to recovery - giving people a place where they can feel valued, cared for and loved - and we need more!

We are currently renovating a property in Stockport to give us more accommodation. Building work is underway, but we still have some way to go to cover our costs, and help is needed to finish this project.

If you are exercised to help in this way, please scan the QR Code or go to **www.renewal-nw.com/give** to donate.

If you would like to know more about the Renewal Living Programme and how you can get involved, please email me at **wesley@renewal-nw.com**.

# ROBBIE

Robbie was a heroin addict for 20 years and spent the majority of his early twenties in prison due to drug-related offending, including bank robbery. He became a Christian in Liverpool whilst on the run from prison and knew in his heart, from that point, that he had to go back to prison and finish his sentence. Whilst completing his sentence, he began reading the Bible and stopped using all his drugs.

The team at Renewal began visiting Robbie whilst still in prison, and upon release, he joined Renewal's residential programme. Once he finished the programme, he volunteered with us for several years before becoming an employee, as our Showroom Manager. He was, and is, a huge part of the Renewal family, being with us for 17 years in total!

## HEAR ROBBIE'S STORY IN HIS OWN WORDS

WATCH ON OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL:
RENEWAL NORTH WEST - ROBBIE'S STORY

# NEIL

## From Darkness to Light: The Resurrected Neil

Neil would describe himself as a blessed man: father to three beautiful daughters and husband of twenty-five years to a woman he loves and admires. He is also a musician, a Christian, a dog-lover, and a valued employee at Renewal North West. All these things are true, and looking at him, are unsurprising; with his calming demeanour and warm smile, why shouldn't he be those things?

However, Neil has lived two very different lives, and the Neil you see today – reliable, loving, trustworthy – is a far cry from the man who thought that he would die on the streets, seeking escape through drug use. He is also different from the man who was able to get off the streets and settle down, but was still dependent on prescription drugs, sleeping pills and antidepressants. So, how did this "final Neil" come to be? One word: Jesus.

Neil first heard the Gospel when he was in the thick of his addiction, going through a four-year revolving door of sofa surfing, hostels and rough sleeping on the streets. After crossing paths with a Christian homeless ministry and reading the literature they shared, Neil's friend became a Christian and insisted that Neil read the New Testament. After praying for Neil, his friend went home, leaving Neil and the Bible verses alone.

Matthew 11:28 weighed heavily on Neil's soul: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Neil felt weary and burdened, and his need for rest increased exponentially overnight when, years after coming off the streets and getting married, his 2-year-old daughter was diagnosed with cancer. The news sent Neil into a tailspin, once again needing to escape a reality he didn't feel equipped to deal with. He relapsed severely.

Neil wanted to live out Romans 12:2: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." And renew his mind, God certainly did. Neil found the strength to stop following destructive patterns because he no longer wanted to escape; God gave him the desire to be accountable, to be present, and to be dependable. When he was in the thick of his addiction, Neil was so focused on acquiring drugs that he walked through life with blinkers on. He remembers the joy he felt when, for the first time in years, his ears perked up at birdsong and he noticed beautiful flowers. Finally, Neil could see why Jesus died, because the world is a beautiful place. His life had felt utterly meaningless until Jesus claimed him, saying, "You're mine".

# ABED

"I worked in the showroom at Renewal North West for several years whilst completing my apprenticeship in Customer Service. I was originally going to do my apprenticeship at Manchester University, but Renewal said that there was a chance I could do it with them. Although nothing was confirmed, I trusted God and decided to withdraw from my place at the university. Later that same day, I got a call from Renewal to say that the apprenticeship with them was confirmed to start the following month!

Working at Renewal North West is really enjoyable, but it has also been a challenge at times. I tend to be quite an introverted person and being around people all the time isn't always something that comes naturally to me, but actually, the people here are the thing that make my job so good. It is a great blessing to work so closely with people that I can learn from, not only to improve my customer service skills, but also to encourage me in my walk with God.

At Renewal North West, there are so many good examples of how living out the Word of God can change lives for the better. It's really inspiring to be surrounded by people like that, but it also makes me examine myself and the way I live for God. These questions are worth asking, but the answers aren't always easy. I am happy to be changed by the Holy Spirit, even if it's difficult, as I know that this will be done in love. Something I heard recently triggered the thought that God will sometimes use rough tools to shape us, but the hand that is using them is gentle. I have seen this in my own life, and as I get to know God better, I am starting to truly understand how deep His love for me is. I am justified only by my faith in Him, and my failings pale in comparison to the salvation that He gives through His grace.

When I first joined Renewal, I didn't have much knowledge about how to organise my finances; thankfully, I was able to sit down with someone from Renewal who talked me through the whole process. It made me want to learn how to do things more independently, and I now feel so grateful to my family for looking after me for all those years, as I now have a much better understanding of all the things I took for granted before.

God has provided so many good things, especially during lockdown; an emergency led to me making some unexpected payments. I wasn't sure how I was going to cover these extra costs, but at the same time, a friend of mine felt like God was prompting them to give me some money; they had no knowledge of the hardship I was facing, but were obedient to God, and it was just enough to allow me to cover these expenses. It was incredible, and God continues to show His faithfulness to me in many different ways.

I have recently decided to get baptised. The conversation came about through the Bible studies we do at Renewal on Sunday evenings. I initially dismissed the thought of being baptised myself as I had actually already done it when I was younger. However, at that time, I didn't understand what it meant to follow God properly, with all my heart, soul, mind and strength as it states in Scripture. Although I am nowhere near perfect and God is still working in me, I am committed to living my life for Him and following His plan for my life. I am sure that this is the right time for me to make this public declaration of my faith. I truly believe that God has led me to work at Renewal in Stockport and that He wants me here still. This gives me confidence in my place here, and I am excited to see where God is going to lead me next.

# BECKY

When Becky first came to Renewal, she was spiralling, confused, and struggling with addiction. She wanted to change, but without the right tools or support, how was transformation supposed to happen?

The Renewal Living programme offered Becky the chance to dream bigger and connect deeper with God, and since finishing the programme, she has done just that. She is serving full time in Refresh as a barista and cook, and for the first time in ten years, is not on any mental health medication. Becky was told that she would be on medication for the rest of her life but has worked hard to build the resilience needed to live an unmedicated life. Through God's help, and the support of mental health professionals and the Renewal North West family, Becky is flourishing and confidently taking on new challenges.

One new challenge has been helping manager, Ellen, run Refresh Coffee House. Alongside developing and serving a menu of fresh sandwiches, pies, cakes and coffee, Becky also trains volunteers and looks after Refresh's budget and purchasing. Pulling on her years working in kitchens as a chef, Becky is bringing an affordable, nutritious and delicious menu to Shaw Heath, an underserved community.

Becky's faith has "massively grown" since the Renewal Living programme ended: she felt God challenge her about her faith and who she was doing it for – others, as a performance, or for Him? – so she decided to dig deeper into what God's plans for her could be. She realised that God wanted to lead her down the path of dealing with her mental health, and as she began exploring the possibility with her team, she realised just how deeply rooted her faith would need to be to make it through the psychological and physical changes that come from stopping medication.

Becky is proud to say that she is now off all mental health related medication and is experiencing emotions she's not felt in a long time. This is a victory but also a product of constant reliance on God; now that Becky can feel all her emotions, she relies on God's strength so that they do not overpower her. God gives her the grace to face everyday life and navigate the panic attacks and low mood that she often still feels. She is learning to regulate her emotions with God's help and is being faithfully supported by Renewal staff and management, who are cheering her on with every leap of faith she takes.

# PAUL

I have been married to Kirsty for over twenty years and we have five lovely children. I have been a Pastor and a Street Preacher, and I am currently employed as Renewal North West's Showroom Manager. I love Renewal North West and I see the work that the charity does as very much a work of the Lord.

I grew up in an average middle-class home, but rebelled when I hit my teenage years. I had always been interested in spiritual things, but we were never a church-going family and as I began to consider spiritual things, I became involved in the Occult. After reading several books, I began to practice witchcraft in what is known as the religion of Wicca.

Whilst still at school, I tried amphetamines and cannabis for the first time, and later on, as I started college, I tried other drugs, such as LSD, magic mushrooms and cocaine. My substance abuse began to get out of control as I had started drinking heavily and using household products as stimulants.

I tried to give meaning and shape to my life by visiting a clairvoyant and trying meditation. I looked into other religions, like the Hare Krishna movement. Each avenue ended in frustration. I began to experience terrible mood swings and memory loss. The mood swings that came with my drug-taking were causing a lot of tension in the family home and after a row with my parents, I left home and spent several weeks sleeping at a friend's house. My life had very rapidly become a total mess! It was at this time I began to think seriously about the existence of God. Was there a God? If so, which God? Which religion?

A chance encounter with an old college friend changed everything. It was the summer holidays and having not very much to do, I phoned her up and asked her if she wanted to go for a drink. She said she didn't go to pubs anymore. There was a noticeable pause in our conversation and then she said, "I've started going to a church, if you want to come along?" God's timing is perfect! A year ago, I would have mocked and sneered at the idea, but now I simply said "Yes."

I turned up at the church dressed all in black, with my hair hanging down in my eyes. I'm not sure what they thought of me, but the guy on the door embraced me with a massive hug, which really caught me off guard! Here was somewhere I actually felt welcome.

I sat through the morning service, and I had felt something. The words of the songs, phrases like "Lamb of God" and "The Good Shepherd," were drawing my thoughts. The meeting ended and I was going to go home. But then my friend said, "They have another service tonight, if you are interested?". I was interested, and that night, I experienced the love of God. I felt a presence and I knew instantly it was God. It was as if everything else, all the people, vanished away and it was just me and the Lord.

That night I was transformed; born again by the Spirit of God. I think of a verse in the Bible, Acts 2:39, that the promise of God's Spirit is given "to all that are afar off...". No one could have been further off than me and yet God's love drew me and saved me. What He has done for me, I am convinced He can do for you, whoever you are.

# SCOTT

40 years of fighting everyone and everything – through drink, drugs, violence and crime – had left Scott wrecked, and as he sat in prison, with a life sentence weighing around his neck, guilt found him and slowly began to suffocate. As he started processing a lifetime's worth of hurt, pain and resentment, Scott knew he was in desperate need of a Saviour.

Weeping and contrite, he gave his life to Jesus, and following release, started to give back to the society he had stolen from. Knowing Jesus has brought humility into Scott's world of pride and self-interest. His gaze has shifted from self-serving to community-loving, working full-time as a technician. He is now working in Renewal North West's electrical department, refurbishing second-hand items to provide his community with low-cost, high-quality items.

Becoming a Christian has brought Scott internal and external freedom, which, as you can imagine, is a big deal to Scott after experiencing confinement and control in prison. In fact, this is the longest Scott has been out of prison since he was 21, and he has developed a real sense of adventure. He has obtained a driving license after years of driving illegally without one, and the novelty of hopping into a car and ending up somewhere new has not worn off.

As well as providing a home, income, and employment, the Renewal Living programme aims to provide it's service users with opportunities to build new circles of community and support. For Scott, one opportunity began at church through his love of prayer. After attending his church for a number of years, he is now Mission's Secretary, highlighting areas that need prayer internationally. The appointment means a lot to Scott, as by giving him a responsibility, they are demonstrating their trust and confidence in him.

Scott represented the charity at the Christian Resources Exhibition. It was his first time at an exhibition, sharing his story with those interested in the Renewal Living programme.

Scott is passionate about Renewal's mission of 'Bringing Hope Through Jesus Christ' which has led him to begin a qualification in Biblical Christian Counselling. He hopes to become a support worker within the Renewal Living programme, using his experience to support new clients in their transition from prison to one of the supported accommodation properties.

Looking at Scott's life, it is amazing to see not only his transformation but also his determination. It takes strength to the replace the habits of a lifetime and carve out a new path for oneself, we know that the only lasting source for this strength is our Lord and Saviour, who is the only one to bring about true transformation. To quote Scott, "to God be the glory, great things He has done"!

# JEROME

Hello, I'm Jerome, and I used to manage Renewal North West's eBay project. I now assist the logistics team, organising the collection and delivery of secondhand items. I heard about Renewal through a friend who was already working there, and he explained that it was a Christian charity and that I needed to attend a Bible reading at the start of every day.

To begin with, I was tested by it; although I thought I was a Christian already, I didn't really understand the Bible. Over time, I felt that changes were happening in me, and I got particularly concerned about the word 'sin'.

During the morning Bible Time, it kept coming up that we (as humans) were all sinners. And, although I agreed that I've made mistakes, I'm not really a bad person. Over three months, I fell into a depression, which was a hard time for me. I later found that this was actually the Holy Spirit working in me, making changes.

ne of the things I have learned as a Christian is that you have to accept that you're a sinner. In the past, you may have done things your own way, but when the Holy Spirit comes, He changes your heart completely. You no longer feel like you're the same person, and you just have to do what the spirit is prompting you to do.

I know that God is in my life now. For example, we had a railway donated to the charity, which came in really old, tatty cardboard. We listed it on eBay, it sold, and we promised delivery, but we didn't have a box for it. I went home that evening thinking, "How am I going to post this item?".

> "I was just an employee. I didn't expect the Holy Spirit to work on me."

The following day, there was a knock on the warehouse door, and it was someone from the unit next door. The first words to me were, "Can you use any large cardboard?". I don't believe in coincidences. No, this is God with me, helping me in my work.

It's hard to recognise the person I was when I joined Renewal; it's just a complete transformation. I was just an employee, so I didn't expect the Holy Spirit to work on me. I'm just such a different person, but I'm still learning. This is the thing about becoming a Christian: it's now an ongoing process that I can't go back on.

# RENEWAL LIVING HOUSE RENOVATION

Renewal Living is a 24/7, 2-year programme providing housing, skills development and support to those with experience of offending, homelessness, addiction or long-term unemployment. The charity has bought a new property so that we can meet the growing need for immersive, long-term support.

The property has been stripped out, and building plans have been drawn up, meaning that site preparation is now complete!

We aim to complete the project within 12 to 18 months; however, we still need to raise funds to cover all the costs involved. As so often happens, the price for these projects continues to increase, so we must continue to make the need known and look to the Lord for His provision.

Contractors are due to start work in September 2025 with the installation of a damp-proof course, followed in October 2025 by structural repairs such as installation of a new floor and staircase, replacement of the first floor floor boarding, and preparation for the installation of insulation. November 2025 will see the first fix for electrics and plumbing.

If you are exercised to help in this way, please scan the QR Code or go to **www.renewal-nw.com/give** to donate.

If you would like to know more about the Renewal Living Programme and how you can get involved, please email **wesley@renewal-nw.com**

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