

WHY DON'T WE JUST...

...STOP STIGMATISING PEOPLE IN POVERTY?



Ray Wright

I read that Michael Caine said he shouldn't pay tax in this country when there are three million layabouts on benefits. How does he know that?

When you're an ex-offender, like me, you go for job after job after job. And people say they can't take you on. They don't say it's because they don't trust you - but that's what they think. No one gives you a chance.

You start to wonder why people don't want to talk to you. Then you realise that it's because of your background.

Then you feel like giving up. A lot of ex-offenders go back to what they know. They get asked to work 30 hours a week for nothing at the Job Centre. A lot will think: stuff that.

It's crazy but, for many people, the amount they get paid is not as much as what they can get on benefits. Sometimes it's easier to be on the dole.

Many people get disheartened. They don't see the point anymore. And that's where depression starts to set in.

We have to avoid people getting to that stage where they give up.

I've slept rough. When I'd done ten years in prison, I was addicted to drugs when I came out and I couldn't live with my family anymore. I used to sleep in empty flats and then go to my mum's house for a shower. Some of the other people in the group have slept in doorways.

There's very little out there when people get out of prison, and you take drugs to numb the pain.

I'm part of a group set up to tackle stigma in Salford. We've called ourselves the NICE (Non-judgemental, Integrity, Compassion, Equality) group. We hope to have a voice in the community. And I hope people will listen because then they will know there are people like them who want to create change.

I don't just want to help myself - I want to stand up for all the other people in the group who are struggling. I attend lots of groups, I'm clean and I'm working. I've got a good life now. But I want to fight for others and tackle stigma.

Ray is a member of the NICE anti-stigma group, set up by Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty (www.stigmastories.com)

SUDOKU

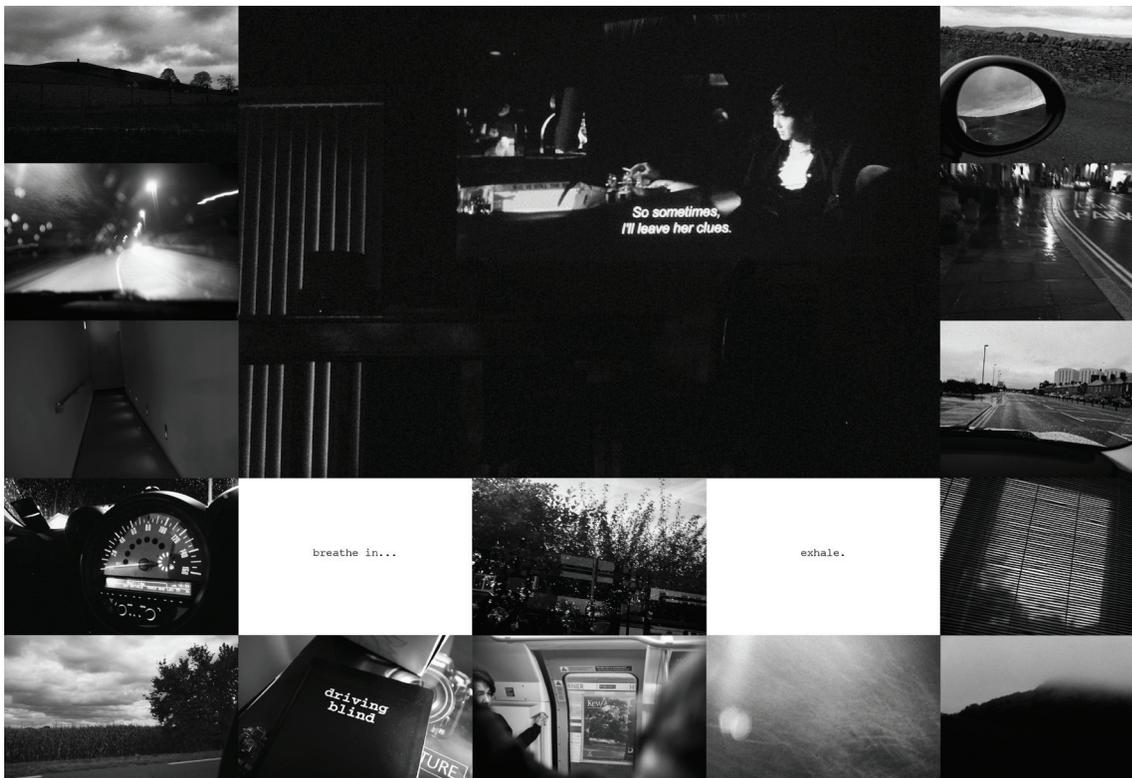
2								4
5		4		2		7		3
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SOLUTION

9	7	8	2	1	4	3	6	5
4	2	3	6	5	8	9	1	7
1	3	9	5	6	2	4	7	8
7	4	2	8	9	1	5	3	6
8	6	5	4	7	3	1	2	9
3	8	6	7	4	9	2	5	1
5	9	4	1	2	6	7	8	3
2	1	7	3	8	5	6	9	4

Complete the Sudoku puzzle so that each and every row, column and region contains the numbers one through nine only once.

LOOK



An image from the series *Speak My Language* by OCA photography student RobTM. Inspired by Christopher Petit's film *Radio On*, the series draws on the techniques of the European film movements *La Nouvelle Vague* and *Neuer Deutscher Film*, with their sometimes surreal and disjointed narratives. *Speak by Language* features in *6 Personal Explorations in Photography*, an exhibition by OCA photography students at Bank Street Arts, 32-40 Bank Street, Sheffield until 1 August.

NEXT WEEK...

TWIN PEAKS,
ROGER SCRUTON
AND MORE

The Open College for the Arts (OCA) is a thriving online community of more than 3,000 people studying creative arts subjects at higher level. An education charity, OCA offers BA honours degrees in photography, painting, creative writing, visual communications and textiles. Students can also study fine art, music, drawing and sculpture. OCA has no minimum entry requirements and students can enrol when it suits them. From September 2012, fees to reach degree level are less than £8,000 in total.