

Outside Edge. My Story.

I first heard about the Outside Edge Theatre Company in 2008. I was just over one year clean from mind-altering substances. A couple of my friends in recovery were Outside Edge members but despite their encouragement I couldn't find it in me to turn up at the Tuesday night group. I was always going to do it next Tuesday but that day never came. Looking back, my inability to turn up was driven by fear and a preconception of what The Outside Edge Theatre Company and its members would be like. Contempt prior to investigation! Despite not doing very well at school I always-got good reports from the drama teacher, it was one of my favourite lessons. But having left school and almost immediately gotten involved in drugs, anything that I had shown promise at was snuffed out, and my creative flare went up in smoke, literally. In 2010 I was invited along to a casting for a Sony 3D Champions League advert. I'd never done anything like this before and was only in this position because a friend of a friend had advertised on a social networking site. I dubiously went along to the casting and two weeks later I was told that I'd been picked as an extra! On the day of filming the Director on the shoot told me what he wanted me to do and I gave it my best shot. I remember being in 'The Zone' losing myself, really feeling what I was doing and getting in touch with my emotions. Later the Director told me that I'd done a great job and I ended up getting my four seconds of fame in the final cut which was televised throughout the Champions League campaign in 2011. That evening on my way home I recalled how much I'd loved drama at school, and then I remembered what my friends had told me about The Outside Edge Theatre Company. In that moment I decided that I was going to go along and get involved. Sadly a long time would pass before I made it to the Tuesday night group. A few weeks after the Champions League shoot and at just over three years clean, I relapsed on crack. Once again my creative appetite, along with all things wholesome was extinguished. Fortunately for me, after six weeks of horrendous using, (I nearly died from a heart attack) I reached a very painful and emotional rock bottom and with that came a desire to get clean again. Very quickly I found myself over three months clean again, at which point the opportunity to go to rehab presented itself. I was in treatment for 6 months and in the aftercare stage I discovered Vita Nova Theatre Company in Bournemouth. I attended their workshops once a week for twelve weeks and there my passion for creativity and my desire to become a member of The Outside Edge Theatre Company was rekindled. I arrived back in London on the 6th of October and wasted no time, lest my negative thinking take hold again! On the 11th of October I attended the Edge Tuesday night group for the first time. I almost didn't make it, my preconceptions and fear almost winning me over again, half an hour before the group started. I arrived early and was greeted by The Outside Edge Theatre Company's Creative Director, Phil Fox. He welcomed me, and explained that the Company was currently working on the early stages of a musical. Immediately my thinking took the path of 'you can't get involved' they've already started' 'they're probably a real tight group and you are an outsider' 'you're not good enough' Then Phil told me that if I threw myself in and got involved I'd have my place in the musical! I waited anxiously as members poured through the door. I was greeted by smiles, hugs and friendly faces. Some of which I recognised. This combination relaxed me and put me at ease. Phil had told me to throw myself in and I did just that, joining in the various games, improvisations and rehearsal. If I'm honest, it was

scary stuff but the energy and encouragement of the group carried me through. From walking through the door nervous and fearful, that evening I left the group feeling confident, proud and like a fully-fledged member. Over the following weeks I attended the Tuesday night group regularly and gave it my all. Six weeks after joining the Company I played Dr. Lou Cipher on stage at Oxford House in 'Substance Misuse The Musical' on stage! Me! Who had spent so long in darkness, now on stage shining? Looking back today I can only attribute my ability to have performed on stage that evening, to the nurturing, supportive, encouraging and non-competitive spirit of the other members. I have been an Outside Edge Theatre Company member for nine months now and in that time I have been very committed, turning up early and regularly for the Tuesday night group. I even turned up at the Tuesday night group on Valentine's Day 2011. I was in a relationship at the time! In the time I have been a member I have performed publicly in 'Substance Misuse The Musical' four times and toured the UK for six weeks with a play called 'Double Whammy' which we performed in prisons and drug and alcohol services around the country, putting on just over thirty shows and finishing with three public performances at Tara Arts Theatre. I continue to be involved in upcoming projects and I'M LOVING IT! I have made good friendships and have been able to extend the same Outside Edge warm welcome and encouragement to newer members. At The Outside Edge Theatre Company, through drama and music, I have been able to recreate the extreme highs and lows of drug use in a healthy and constructive way, as well as being able to explore many issues, including addiction, in their many faces, from an 'outside looking in' perspective. My confidence has grown, as has my self-esteem and this has spilled over into my day-to-day life. As well as acting I have uncovered a talent for writing and photography, things that had lain dormant within me for years, and I am slowly developing belief in myself and my abilities. The Outside Edge Theatre Company is my playground, here I can play and express myself like I never have before, with like minded people and without fear of judgement or being wrong. Today I can confidently say that The Outside Edge Theatre Company is a very well oiled and central part of my recovery machine. Together with all the other parts, which consist of 12 step meetings, step work, sponsorship and service, they make up the engine that drives my life. My 'Raison D'etre' I look forward with excitement to what I know has yet to come... Mark