transforming lives

With your help many more young people like Kieran, Gordon, James, Dan, Peter and Kara could have a future to look forward to. Please help us by sending a donation today.

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Picture your life just like a tree
You start as a seed buried deep beneath
Then you break through the surface
So now you can breathe
And slowly and surely grow to six feet
Your branches will thicken
And sport new leaves
The strongest trees in the world are surrounded by peace
So don’t be corrupted by the fire that lives in people.
Life is nothing but a struggle and far from easy
So listen carefully
When bad weather is set upon you
I guarantee you will lose your colour
Your flowers will begin to die
But not to worry my little friend
Cos I promise, you can make it through the winter
Smile when it is cold
Laugh when it rains.
Your flowers will grow back
Twice as big and brighter than ever before

Perry

get set!
The twice yearly newsletter from Amber – Spring 2013

amberweb.org

Email info@amberweb.org  Registered Charity Number 1051388
Amber has over the last 18 years worked with people who have a variety of backgrounds. One group are ex-offenders, and the Amber approach works particularly well in reducing reoffending. The reason for the success is that Amber takes away the need to offend, because people have somewhere safe to live when they most need it, they eat properly and they are surrounded by positive peer pressure. The importance of Amber to prisons and those trying to get their lives back on track is summed up by the comments below from Exeter prison.

“Amber is the only housing provider who will regularly come to HMP to meet potential applicants prior to release or court - thus enabling them to ask detailed questions, build up an initial relationship of trust with the Amber referrals manager and establish whether they will be able to realistically adhere to the programme. In practice this means that if they are accepted they are much better prepared for what to expect and are also more motivated to succeed. We have had cases where after speaking to Amber they decide that they are not yet ready - and this means that resources and accommodation places are not wasted - but it also offers them an insight into an alternative way of life which could result in a referral when they feel they are more stable.

In addition to the pro-active pre-release involvement, Amber is also able to assess each applicant on individual merits, rather than trying to adhere to a restrictive statutory eligibility criteria - this can enable some applicants to move away from an area where they are certain to reoffend.

One of the most valuable aspects of Amber is that they are able to offer accepted applicants a bed space on the day of release. There are almost no other housing providers in the South West who are able to do this. It seems so obvious - but in terms of what this means to the applicant the value is immeasurable. It reduces anxiety, enables them to make definite and positive plans leading up to release and psychologically it allows them to begin to make the changes in attitude and behaviour that will be essential to their personal development.

The programme offers alternative activities that many of our clients could never have conceived as something they would have the chance to do. Often the lack of self-confidence and a chaotic or traumatic upbringing has been a catalyst for substance misuse and offending behaviour - so it is incredible to see them further down the line having learnt an instrument, built an assault course or experienced kayaking - proving to themselves that they have skills other than [e.g.] shoplifting, that they are capable of more than they have ever realised before and that their future identity does not have to involve committing offences.

Without Amber, reoffending rates in the South West would certainly increase. More importantly - there would be a tragic waste of enthusiastic and talented young individuals trapped in destructive lives with no one prepared to give them the chance of a way out.

Thank you Amber!”

The St Petrocks / HMP Exeter Housing Team
Amber's new Induction Course

Amber has extended the number of practical qualifications for Amberteers to give them an even better chance of entering employment. Within the first 6 weeks young people joining Amber spend two weeks working towards an ASDAN Employability qualification and the first ‘Amber Induction Course’ took place in the weather temperamental month of March!

“The first week we were based at Exmoor Bunk House volunteering with The National Trust. We spent our first day basking in the sunshine whilst digging over allotments for a local primary school and litter picking a mile of Woolacombe Beach. Day 2 saw us cutting and burning gorse bushes trying to create a heathland for the local wildlife. It was hot work, as again, the sun joined us to lighten our spirits.

Our final day of volunteering was great, but the warm sun was nowhere to be seen. We went to Mortehoe to rebuild a Devonshire Wall. It’s a bit like a dry stone wall but made with mud and a real form of art. This involved going to a slate quarry, selecting suitable sizes and shapes of slate and making wall ends to allow a gate to hang from the wall. The wind was cutting right through our waterproof and our fingers didn’t work, but we carried on, producing a strong solid base to our Devonshire Wall.

The second week was spent at Bythesea Lodge, learning about job research, team working and setting goals and targets. Overall, our first Induction Course was a success. It didn’t go to plan, but what in life does. The Amberteers can vouch for that!”

Steve Upton, Amber Trainer

Ashley Court Inter Team Assault Course Challenge

At Ashley Court, we recently held an inter-team assault course challenge. Team members including Mark, Tegan, Alex, Dave, Lee, Liam, Matt, Ben, Charlie, Sam and Matt ran the course and all got covered in thick mud from head to toe. It was a great morning’s entertainment for competitors and spectators!!

Poor Charlie lost a trainer in the water crossing, and it hasn’t been seen since… but we have checked the water quality and it’s still ok.

It enables you to give to Amber spontaneously in response to social media, SMS, email and QR code campaigns AND you can use your internet browser as opposed to downloading a native app.
Get Started On Sports Coaching

In March myself, Lee Leroy, Dan Allum and eight others participated in a ‘get started with sports coaching’ course run by the Princes Trust, Exeter Chiefs and South West Communications. The 5 day course was run at the Exeter Chiefs rugby stadium where we were able to gain the RFU Rugby Ready certificate and also qualifications in Emergency First Aid and First Steps Into Coaching.

The final day of our course was coaching a group of children aged 10-12. We put a plan together for the hour long session using all the skills we had learnt throughout the week. When the kids arrived we were all slightly anxious but once we started we worked really well as a group and pulled it off with full marks. Most important of all there were big smiles all around, from the kids as well as ourselves, which is the aim to a good coaching session.

Liam Walker, Amberteer

Team Amber Cycling

Everyone enjoyed cycling in Haldon Forest, so once back at Ashley Court we spent a week converting a trailer, some angle iron and loads of steel into a bike trailer so we could go out on more bike rides.

The angle iron was welded to the trailer as the foundation and we then used a bike to measure where to bolt the bits of steel that would hold the bikes in place. When we had 36 strips of steel each bent in an arch shape we had to drill holes to bolt them in place, so we got a metal drill bit and got started. It was a great team effort and when it was put together we all chipped in and painted it black and them Team Amber Cycling was ready to hit the trails!

Charlie Batten, Amberteer

Testing cycling skills

My first outing with Amber was a great day mountain biking on Haldon Hill near Exeter. Amberteers from all three teams at Ashley Court took part which was a really good way of getting to know everyone. I’d never done this before but at least I could remember how to ride a bike and although some of it was a bit scary and some trails were easier than others, I didn’t fall off once - although I nearly did a few times!

Jay, Amberteer
Amber initiative

The water well money saver!

28 Amberteers in the house use a lot of water, approximately £12,000 a year in fact, so we had a plan, to use the old well to save some money and hopefully make use of that money in other areas of the house.

We began by clearing all the dirty water from the well so only the clean water was left. Next we dug a trench from the house down to the well in the woods. The trench had to be a foot deep for the water pipe that would take the water from the well to the laundry room, and for the electric cable pipe going from the house to the well. It also had to be deep enough to stop the water freezing and the pipe breaking if it got very cold.

The project is now finished and all laundry is washed by our own fresh free water - cool!

Tegan Doidge, Amberteer.

A hidden gem

After years of being hidden under carpet and thin hardboard that had thousands of nails in it, the wooden floor in the entrance hall at Farm Place has been beautifully restored by Amberteers. They spent a couple of evenings removing the nails, cleaning the original oak floor and sanding it with an electric sander that gave a great finish. Then it was three coats of high quality floor varnish and the oak floor looks outstanding – and it is now low maintenance.

A cable reel ‘turns’ seating area

In the belief that summer will arrive one day, Mark and his team and ‘maintenance’ Jeff began work on a seating area at Ashley Court.

The first stage was to dig a circular hole in the ground 2ft deep, then to place a large cable reel into the hole. When that was done the team back filled the soil and levelled the ground. The next stage of the operation is to obtain and place telegraph pole sections into the ground to make the seating area – then we’ll be ready for those warm summer days!
Amber Drinks Party – another great evening

Once again we are indebted to Jack Barclay for letting us hold our annual drinks party at their wonderful showroom. “Six of us were asked to help with speeches. Barty used a foghorn to get everyone’s attention as three of us took our place on stage to be handed props by the other three, the ‘Prop Masters’, which we had to hold up to punctuate the main points of Barty’s speech. It got a lot of laughs. Then it was time for us three on stage to give our individual speeches. While I was talking I was reliving the things I was talking about. I started to feel a little emotional and got a little choked up over it, but I finished my speech without any big mishaps and I think it went well.”

Jason, Amberteer

A big thank you to everyone who helped us raise over £10,000!

Amber Sleep Out – in November!

The first Amber Sleep Out saw staff from companies Taylor Wimpey, Airbus and Marriott Bristol Central give up their beds for the night and raise over £7,800 for Amber. It was held in partnership with six other charity Sleep Outs across the UK, creating the first national Sleep Out aimed at raising awareness of youth homelessness as well as vital funds. But the Sleep Out wasn’t just about raising money and awareness, it was also a lot of fun!

There was a performance from the Bristol Royal Mail Choir that was featured in Gareth Malone’s 2012 BBC 2 programme ‘The Choir – Sing While You Work’, a Zumba session (great at warming you up!) and after a comedy hour led by local comedian Mat Ewins, people settled in their bags for the night – well most! There were a few that stayed huddled around the BBQ embers talking the night away, there was even an impromptu guitar session from the Chief Executive!

At the crack of dawn a delivery of bacon butties and hot drinks arrived courtesy of Marriott hotel. This was eagerly consumed before people, a little bleary eyed maybe, made their way to work.

A Grim Challenge

Outstanding performances from all at ASB Law who took part in this year’s GRIM Challenge on behalf of Amber. Our huge thanks to all those involved for enduring freezing conditions to complete an 8 mile demanding course through ice and muddy waters; they were all amazing!
Amber and community

A very big ‘thank you’ to Suzanne and the other WI Volunteers who came to Amber to deliver the Lets Cook Local course and made it not only very informative but lots of FUN! The Amberteers who took part thoroughly enjoyed the course and now have some of the skills and knowledge they will need when they venture back out into the community.

Shannon, who took part in the course, absolutely loved it and has since applied to Trowbridge college to do a catering course and also sent numerous applications for catering apprenticeships. She was thrilled to be invited for an interview at one of Marco Pierre White’s restaurants, The Pear Tree in Melksham! She now has something positive to work towards and is really excited about her future.

Janine Cliff, Team Leader

Flippin’ pancakes

Amberteers at Bythesea Lodge and Farm Place supported their local communities by taking part in their annual pancake races once again.

In Trowbridge the Bythesea Lodge team took 1st and 3rd place in the men’s race while in Horsham the Farm Place team started well but didn’t quite make it to the final.

“We were ahead at the beginning but the other team caught up and it was a tie, so we chose Daniel to race the Y.M.C.A team runner to decide the winning team. Unfortunately we lost so did not make it to the next heat but we had an exciting day and really enjoyed the race.”

Danielle, Amberteer

The Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Sarah Troughton, visited Bythesea Lodge

“I was impressed by the safe, practical home Amber provides for young people in Trowbridge and it was a pleasure meeting some of the young people there...I enjoyed seeing how they are researching the skills needed for their future job ambitions”.

Like Dwayne in the last newsletter
I was fortunate to go to Borneo with Raleigh International and I learnt such a lot about myself as well as having the time of my life!

The expedition was divided into phases and we were divided into teams to make sure that we experienced as much of Borneo as possible. Phase one was trekking for 12 days and then scuba diving where I passed my PADI open water License. Phase two we went to Danum valley, a big conservation area where I helped build a concrete water tank for fresh water and got to see a lot of different species of animals like orangutans, snakes and spiders. The final phase and my team got all the glory as we got to finish the kindergarten which Raleigh was asked to build. We then had a big ceremony to open it to the village.

I was really lucky as my expedition celebrated the ten year anniversary of expeditions to Borneo and as part of the celebration we got to climb the highest mountain in South East Asia, Mount Kinabalu. Awesome!

I made many friends from all over the world. Together we shared a life changing experience that will see us stay friends for years to come.

Stuart, Amberteer

........... Jared, Danielle and me are the next lucky Amberteers to go on a Raleigh International expedition. We go in June but we had to pass an assessment weekend first, which was held in the Yorkshire Pennines.

We were put in groups, Jared and me in one and Danielle in another. Day one involved an activity based on trust and building team leadership skills and one based on understanding the environment around us. Day two was a 7 hour trek through amazing Yorkshire countryside and included activities that tested our strengths and weaknesses as a group. We then pitched our tents and cooked our 'noodles and spam' in mess tins but it got so cold and damp that we were allowed to camp indoors in the nearby building. I’m not sure I’ll need to camp indoors because of cold in Costa Rica!

We all had a brilliant time and made some really good friends and now cannot wait to go!

Dan, Amberteer
Trip of a lifetime – a berth on the Tall Ship race

Growing up was not the best time for me. I was beaten by my Dad, who was an alcoholic, and picked on at school because of my stammer. At 15 my girlfriend fell pregnant and we had a lovely little boy but I didn’t dare tell anyone in case Dad hurt them too. Then my little boy died, just 2 years old. Mum and Dad split up. I turned to drink and drugs and lost my job. Drinking so much I got into fights, did burglaries and was arrested. I was 19. A visit from Mum led to me at last opening up about my past and I was put on probation instead of going to prison but couldn’t cope and got arrested and was facing an 8 year sentence. I tried to hang myself and then met someone who knew Amber which became a glimmer of hope. I wrote a letter to the Judge and asked for one more chance and I got it!

I left Amber in January and work part time in a clothes shop. I'm not working with boats yet but my plan is to gain practical qualifications to get me into the business and I'm currently applying to do a plumbing/electrician course.

Amber taught me how I could change my whole life around. Staff put their heart and soul into helping us, it’s tough love really and I cannot thank them enough. I feel proud of myself now and I have never felt that before, and strong. So much so that I told Dad about my son a while ago. He was so sorry and apologised and at last we have a proper healthy son and Dad relationship.

Kieran, Amber success

March 2012 and I’m at Amber. The first 2 months were hard but then I visited my family for the first time and realised how much I wanted it to work out. I got involved in all Amber offered, including a week sailing with the Rona Sailing Project. That was brilliant and I knew working with boats was what I wanted to do. Two weeks later I heard I’d won the Rona Amory Award and could apply for the Tall Ships Race – and I’ve been accepted! I sail on the two week berth from Aarhus – Helsinki in July and can’t wait.

I've always been interested in helping people and while at Amber I attended an Open Day that led to a job as a part time Support Worker for vulnerable adults. So I left Amber and 6 months later I have been promoted to full time Support Worker. Thanks to Amber I have gone from strength to strength and my job, I love it to bits!

Kieran, Amber success

Routine at Amber helped me no end

I was out of control and being a general idiot really. My adoptive Mum couldn’t handle me and in desperation she got me arrested as she thought it was the only way to help me. She was right because I was referred to Amber and haven’t looked back.

I was angry and aggressive when I first arrived - wanting to be Top Dog! – so it probably took me a couple of months to really settle down. And although I may have found it a pain at the time, the routine at Amber helped me no end. It was like being at work and it worked wonders.

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Gordon, Amber success
Riding to success

James grew up in a dysfunctional family, his behaviour was anti-social and he was heavily into alcohol and cannabis.

It took him a while to settle into Amber and to overcome his acute paranoia, a result of the drug abuse, where he couldn’t even eat his meals with the other residents.

But he was desperate to change and when his confidence began to grow he started taking part in as many activities as he could.

James loved anything ‘hands-on’ and was part of the Amber football team that played the local police; he gained a Conservation Volunteers award in Environmental Practical and Conservation Skills, and helped with projects on Amber’s canal boat.

James discovered an interest in horses and with Amber’s help he got a two week placement at a local racehorse welfare charity where he learnt to ride and they told him about a 12 week residential course at Northern Racing College. James completed the course after which he was offered a job in their racing stable as a stable lad where he is today. He is now training to be a jockey and has been given his own horse to train on.

James is proud of his achievements and it means so much to him to see how proud other people are of him. He believes in himself which he never did before.

“I’ve come such a long way in the last 20 months and it is all down to Amber, thank you guys!”

James, Amber success

I’ve made my family proud

I was mixing with the wrong crowd and started smoking cannabis. Messing around with drugs ruined my relationship with my family so I left home and ended up over 200 miles away and homeless.

The Youth Advisory Service referred me to Amber which was a major turning point. It offered such a lot and I gained qualifications, did volunteering work with the National Trust and went on a Princes Trust week long sailing course.

Eight months ago I got accommodation with a housing association and a job in care. I am also on course to get my Security Industry Authority license and I’ve applied to the army to be a medical technician.

Amber made me more confident and a lot more mature; they ‘turned me from a teenager to a young man’. No way would I be the person I am now if it wasn’t for Amber and since being at Amber my relationship with family is better than ever before. I’ve made my family proud, so much so that my brother James recently ran the Disney marathon for Amber!

“Dan, Amber success

“It was ridiculously hot but hey that’s my fault for choosing to go Florida to run a marathon! I visited Dan when he was at Amber and it is fantastic place. You all do a brilliant job and I can’t thank you enough for what you have done.” James Carter, supporter
Amber helped me achieve

I was abused by a family friend from a young age but no-one realised. When eventually it was discovered, the man was sentenced to just 3 years. What a big sentence for scarring my life for ever. This is where my life turned upside down. I got expelled from every school I went to and smoked weed all the time, so at 12 yrs old my parents signed me into care. I suppose they did that to try and help me out but it was the start of a downward spiral into drug addiction, burglaries, stealing, homelessness and ultimately prison where I heard about Amber.

When I first arrived at Amber I was very unsettled and ended up getting suspended for two weeks, which made me realise that if I wanted to sort out my life I was going to have to work very hard. I quickly realised that the more I helped myself, the more Amber would help me achieve what I wanted in life, which they have. Not only do I have a great relationship with my kids and family because of the progress I have made, I also met my fiancé Kara at Amber and 6 months ago we moved into our own flat and I have a great job at a large leisure centre where I am doing a customer service apprenticeship. I am very lucky to have what I have and so grateful to Amber.

Peter, Amber success

Amber transformed my life

At 16 I was homeless and became trapped in a relationship with an older man who introduced me to heroin. When I eventually managed to escape from the relationship I was homeless again and stayed with other drug addicts who taught me how to fund my drug use through crime. I eventually got into trouble with the police and was remanded.

I heard about Amber when I was in prison which is nearly two years ago now. There is no question that Amber transformed my life. They gave me a new outlook and hope in life, helped me gain the confidence and self-belief I lacked before and helped me rediscover myself.

Just six months ago I got a job as a waitress in a coffee outlet in a large leisure complex and I have recently completed my training to be a Duty Manager, which means running all of the catering outlets (the communication and leadership skills Amber helped me discover already reaping rewards!)

It was at Amber I met my fiancé Peter. We have a lovely flat and I am so happy to be enjoying life and in a positive relationship with someone who I really connect with. I am also on great terms with my family now and it feels really good to be honest and to share with them what I am doing rather than lying. I could never have achieved all this without Amber.

Kara, Amber success