

Court File

THE following have been dealt with by North Staffordshire magistrates recently. (G) denotes a guilty plea, (C) a conviction.

Graeme Andrew McCulloch, aged 33, of Suffolk Road, Lightwood, speeding, (G), fined £600, licence endorsed six points, £35 costs.

Victor Omonigho Owonka, aged 30, of Grove Place, Shelton, driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence, driving without an MOT, (G), fined £80, licence endorsed five points, £35 costs.

Timothy John Roberts, aged 25, of Ford Green Road, Smallthorne, driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence, driving without insurance and an MOT, failing to produce driving licence, failing to produce insurance and MOT certificates, (C), fined £350, licence endorsed eight points, £35 costs.

Richard David Wilshaw, aged 25, of Orford Street, Newcastle, driving without due care and attention, driving without insurance, (G), fined £420, licence endorsed eight points, £35 costs.

Gary Paul Bickerton, aged 22, of Waterhead Road, Meir, theft, (G), conditional discharge for 12 months, £51 costs.

Lorraine McMahon, aged 42, of Bath Street, Coalville, Weston Coyney, theft, (G), fined £100, £51 costs.

Patrick John Woodward, aged 27, of Frank Bott Avenue, Crewe, driving while disqualified, driving without insurance, wilfully obstructing a police officer, (G), Community Punishment Order for 120 hours, disqualified from driving for two years, £43 costs.

Blair John Jebson, aged 25, of Maidstone Grove, Bentilee, stopping on a pelican crossing, (G), fined £60, licence endorsed three points.

David Brian Lovatt, aged 26, of Harbourne Road, Cheadle, driving while disqualified, driving without insurance and an MOT, (G), Community Punishment Order for 120 hours, fined £300, disqualified from driving for 12 months, £43 costs.

Andrew David McStay, aged 29, of Jason Street, Newcastle, driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence, driving without insurance and an MOT, (G), fined £125, disqualified from driving for six months.

Christopher John Morris, aged 25, of Caverswall Road, Weston Coyney, driving without insurance, (G), fined £200, licence endorsed six points, £35 costs.

Ken Jimmy Anglin, aged 34, of Ruxley Road, Werrington, driving while disqualified, driving without insurance, breach of a conditional discharge, (C), jailed for four months, disqualified from driving for four months.

Lawrence Bentley, aged 41, of Lane Farm Grove, Sneyd Green, possession of a Class-B drug, possession of a Class-C drug, (C), Community Punishment Order for 80 hours, £120 costs.

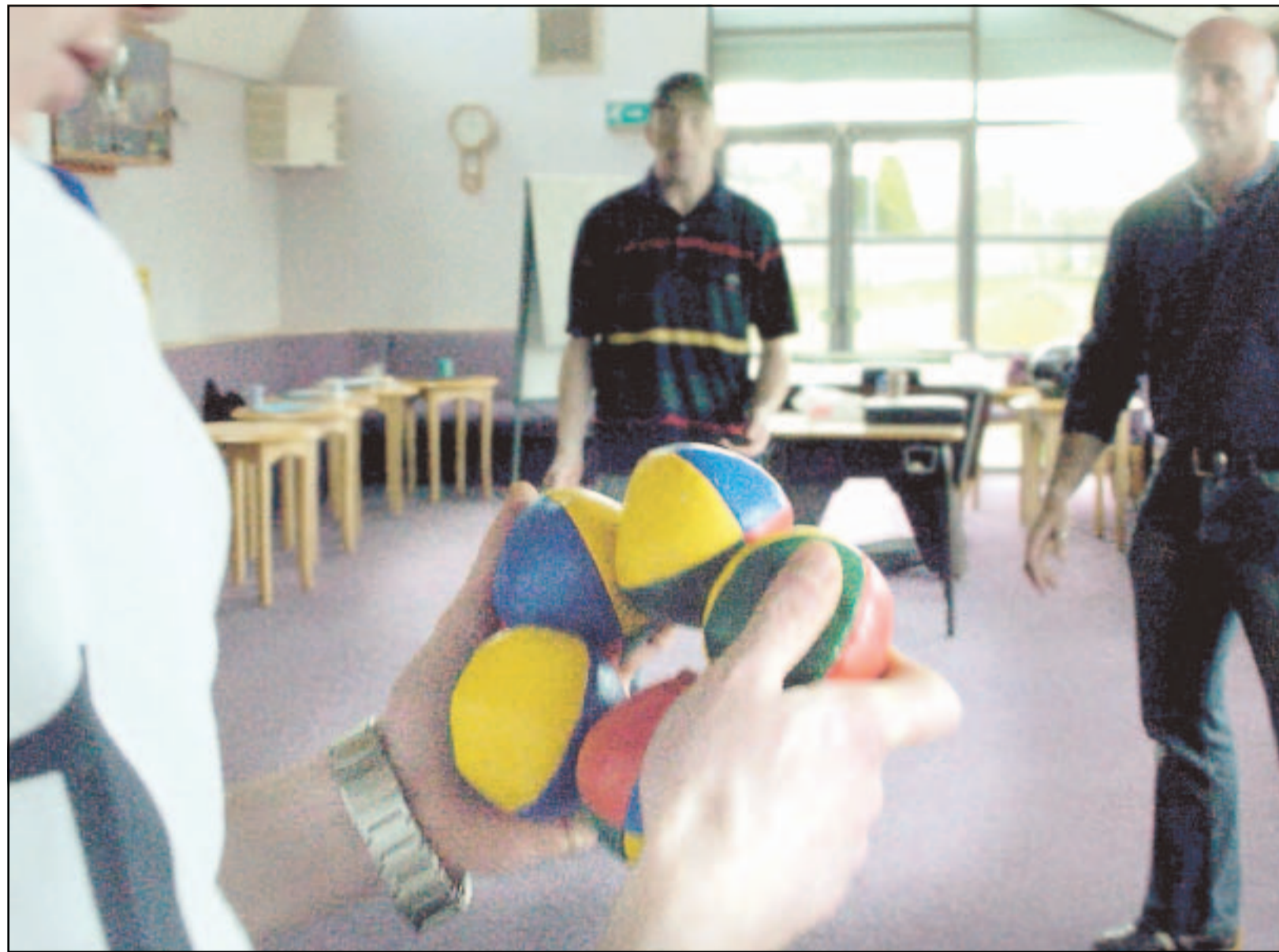
Neil Vincent Howell, aged 34, of Reppington Road, Sneyd Green, theft, (G), conditional discharge for six months, £80 costs.

Anthony David Light, aged 21, of Grocott Cottages, Barlaston, failing to comply with a red light, possession of an offensive weapon, two offences of possession of a Class-C drug, (C), jailed for three months, disqualified from driving for three months.

North Staffordshire magistrates court service points out that each sentence of the court depends on the seriousness of the case and the personal circumstances of the offender, including any previous convictions.

Former drug addicts on course to start their new lives

Course turns criminal hedgehog into flower



NEW STARTERS: a Beyond The Mask session at Cobridge community centre. Pictured are ex-offender Thomas Lear and course leader Nigel Booth

Picture: Matthew Page

"I'D SAY I was a like a leopard before, because they never change their spots. Now, I'm more like an eagle. I'm above it now, I can see everything clearly."

These words are spoken by a one-time drug addict and criminal who has almost given up the bad habits which have dragged him down and inflicted misery on his family and community.

"Everything is different now, sitting here with you lot and not being smacked up. There's not one thing in my life that isn't different."

This man, who asked not to be identified, is one of seven men taking part in Beyond The Mask — a 12-week course to help challenge thought processes and behaviour.

Nine started and two have dropped out along the way.

At the beginning, each had been asked to name an animal or object which represents their character and life.

At the time, they were still caught up in the aftermath of a grim cycle of crime and drugs and their philosophical answers gave a telling insight into their minds.

Philip Robinson, of Leek, originally saw himself as a lamppost — someone who had to be switched on and told to think.

But three-quarters of the way

A group of former criminals are nearing the end of a programme aimed at steering them away from a life of drugs and thieving. Crime reporter **Samantha Lawton** gives a fly-on-the-wall account after observing one of their life-changing lessons

through the course, this has now changed to a set of traffic lights.

"I can think for myself now. The amber light is a contemplation period where I think before acting," said the 25-year-old, who is now free from heroin and crime.

Another course participant, who asked not to be named, revealed his first choice as a hedgehog — a prickly creature which was afraid of being hurt.

Now, he sees himself as a flower. "I have grown, bloomed, wilted and my seeds have fallen off but I have grown again," he said.

And Thomas Lear, of Biddulph, has yet to pick a new simile but said three months ago he felt like a mole.

"I was burrowing around trying to find a way to get out," said the 26-year-old, who confesses to thousands of thefts but has been crime- and heroin-free for 10-months.

It's obvious to anyone watching that those involved have received a major boost to their confidence.

They are open, relaxed and most importantly, prepared to be honest about their innermost thoughts — even if it sometimes means admitting they are wrong.

In the first few minutes of this week's session, at Cobridge Community Centre, Bursley Road, Cobridge, the group took part in a regular team-building exercise.

They stood in a circle in the middle of the room and threw balls to each other in a fast-paced routine designed to build up trust and communication.

It was clear that this relaxed everybody, ahead of the more tricky, soul-searching discussions.

Every action and emotion people experience in their daily lives was analysed — the reasons behind it and the ways to change it.

The group also focused on how to break addictions to substances.

Course leader, Nigel Booth, of Newcastle-based Nigel Booth Training, said: "We must understand how we

can turn away from any kind of physical behaviour — breaking the cycle not just for today but forever.

"When we are here, it is very simple, but it is when you are back out there it's very hard.

"Your conscious and sub-conscious minds will be arguing, like having a two-way conversation with yourself.

"You may be craving heroin or whatever it is and the logical answer, to sort out the craving, will be overwhelming. Then the pain and void will go away."

All were attentive through the talk and chipped in with their own harrowing experiences.

By the end of the session, the mood was optimistic.

Mr Booth told them: "You are now at a stage where you've got the resources to go out and do what you want to do with your life.

"If you follow the processes we have talked about, you can't fail.

"You have the final piece of the jigsaw and it's up to you — you can show that picture to the world or take it to pieces again.

"You're not a special breed of people who were born to offend, what happened was that you put drugs into your body and got used to it."

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