

QUOTESofTheWeek

"We're very close. I know what my wife's done and what she's not. I know she's innocent and our nightly talk keeps us both going." Derek Salisbury, the husband of Barbara Salisbury, has publicly protested the innocence of the jailed former Leighton Hospital nurse. In an interview with a national newspaper, he revealed he speaks to his wife on the telephone at 8pm every day.



● Night call: Derek Salisbury

"I feel worse because Gaz would have been coming out of the unit about now. I can't believe that months later I'm no nearer to finding out the truth now than I was on day one." Grieving mother Pam Myatt is still waiting to discover whether wardens will be prosecuted for her teenage son's death, six months after he died in custody. Gareth, aged 15, died in April after being restrained by guards in his cell three days after arriving at the unit in Northamptonshire.

"The atmosphere is first class and we're having great fun. But the gaffer gave us a speech and told us it's time to get serious."

Potteries entertainer Jonathan Wilkes warning his Premiership XI rivals in football reality show The Match that they are in for a shock when they clash with his celebrity team today.

"We knew each other all the way through school, as we both lived in the village of Milton. He eventually asked me out and I was waiting for him to ask me. He was good looking and he's just as good looking now as he was then."

Phyllis Askey, a 93-year-old from Milton, who has just celebrated her 75th wedding anniversary with her 93-year-old husband George.



● In love: Phyllis and George Askey

"Our regiments are the backbone of the capability that exists. We are at war with the enemy and it's not a war which we can choose to walk away from. This is no time for reducing our armed forces. This is no time for reducing our defences."

Colonel Tim Collins, of the Royal Irish Regiment, hailed a hero for inspirational leadership during the war in Iraq has joined the fight to halt controversial plans to merge the Staffordshire and Cheshire regiments.

"I am in a state of shock. I have no idea how this could have happened. I have not been able to sleep."

Eileen Wilson, an 83-year-old cancer sufferer, has been forced from her home for her own safety after a malicious leafletting campaign in her Blurton neighbourhood claimed a paedophile was living with her.

"Sometimes when police advise parents their children have been doing something wrong, they often say they do not know what their children are up to, or don't believe it."

Inspector Dave Spoor, of Cheadle police, speaking after youths living in areas where police have special powers to combat troublemakers are being taxed to other parts of North Staffordshire by their parents to cause problems where the legislation does not exist.

A pioneering course has seen criminals publicly apologise for the misery they've caused, but one victim isn't sure it will work

Sorry may be the hardest word, but forgiveness is harder still

Six reformed criminals have publicly apologised for the heartbreak they have caused communities, their own friends and families. Crime correspondent SAMANTHA LAWTON asks how a groundbreaking course helped bring about change and whether their U-turn will last a lifetime.

HEARING the words "I'm sorry" from a group of ex-thieves, burglars and drug addicts, who together have committed more than 500 crimes, can leave some people cold and unconvinced.

The heartfelt speeches given by a group of 'graduates' to mark the culmination of a 12-week rehabilitation programme, spelt out their determination to ditch law-breaking and lead honest lives.

But for repeat victims, none of whom were present at the event, who have suffered the misery of having their homes ransacked and bags snatched by hardened criminals, last week's grand pledges prompted the cynical question 'so what?'

"When criminals are used to getting things for free it is almost impossible for them to do an honest day's work," said grandmother Alliea Allcock, whose Tunstall home has been burgled 26 times.

"I wouldn't trust them as far as I could throw them. As soon as they need something, they will be back to their old ways — there is no real cure for them."

However, police, probation officers and founders of the Beyond The Mask course, designed to help persistent crooks change their attitude to life and start being honest about their feelings, are the first to admit they cannot wave a magic wand.

"We don't profess to be able to prevent crime completely," said probation officer Gordon Brough.

"I don't think any programme is foolproof, but it is one of the best ones I've come across."

"Once the offenders have been through it, it stays with them and if they do re-offend, we find it is of a reduced nature. For example, a prolific burglar may be arrested for a minor shop theft. But they are more likely to be honest about it and we can work with them."

"When they stood up in front of their families and friends, they knew the apologies they gave must be genuine, or there is no point. When you pledge a change for the future, if you don't mean it, the communities you live in will hang you."

"We are not magicians. They know they can't erase the past, but they can reassure their victims and help make them feel safer in their communities."

Ten of the city's most persistent criminals, who are part of Stoke-on-Trent Police's Prolific Offenders' Project, were picked to take part in Beyond The Mask, run by Newcastle-based Nigel Booth Training (NBT).



● Changed life: Shane Leese, one of the former offenders, speaking at Cobridge Community Centre

Picture by Phil Radcliffe

All are serving community-based penalties or licence periods and most have spent time behind bars. Some are also undergoing regular drug testing to beat the habits behind their constant law-breaking.

But to be allowed on the course, funded by the Stoke-on-Trent Drug Action Team, all must have shown a commitment to changing their lives for the better.

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with one single step", said 40-year-old course founder Nigel Booth.

"We need 100 per cent commitment from them and the most challenging aspect of it is them being able to be honest with people about how they are feeling and be themselves."

"We teach people how to bring about a long-term major change in their lives and live out their dreams."

"They take part in practical activities which help them empathise with victims, build confidence and trust and be analytical about themselves."

"They learn that telling one lie leads to another and another. Before they know it, they are hiding behind a mask and believing they are a person who they are not."

"It's only when you put that person in a safe environment, even though they may be a bit scared, they can learn how to get off that roundabout."

"We have done the course a couple of times a year for a few years, but we have had some fantastic results this time."

"Standing up in front of the people who mean the most to them and who they have hurt badly was probably the most difficult thing they have ever done."

"They have said sorry to their families thousands of times before, to the point where it means absolutely nothing. But that night they gave the most warm-hearted, meaningful pledges and really meant it."

"The course is improving all the time, but the proof is in the pudding. People say the police and probation have little effect on criminals, but hopefully this kind of thing can give them a bit more faith."

Lee Bailey, aged 23, of Normacot; Shane Leese, aged 27, of Blurton; Paul Woodcock, aged 30, of Longton; Lisa Salt, aged 30, of Longton; Stan Sellers, aged 29, of Meir, and Steve Whalley, aged 36, of Burslem, were presented with certificates to mark the completion of the course.

Many have improved their job prospects by getting gym trainers' qualifications, fork lift truck licences, and literacy and numeracy skills.

Police say a small number of persistent offenders commit the majority of crime in the Potteries — and taking just one off the streets has a major impact on people's lives.

PC Paul Harrison, of Stoke-on-Trent's Targeted Policing Initiative, said: "The police don't normally get involved in cognitive behavioural change programmes."

"They are the ones who lock up criminals and put them in prison. But I fully back this course. It has helped break down those barriers."

"We know exactly what is going on with them and if we see them going down the wrong path and returning to crime, we can address it very quickly so it's a win-win situation."

But 71-year-old crime victim Mrs Allcock, whose home is fitted with eight security cameras and iron bars on each window, remains sceptical.

"I think it would have been better if

all those victims had been there to hear these apologies, but I wonder if they would have been able to face them," she said.

"It must help some victims to know that their criminal is sorry and realises what damage they did, but it really depends on the person."

"If the people who have stolen from me apologised, I would judge for myself how much truth there was in it, but it seems like an easy way out to me."

"I know the probation service and police have to try everything they can but I don't think this will work in the long run."

"It is more of an easy way out and slap on the wrists for them. Give them a pat on the back and a certificate, but wait and see whether they really mean it."

samantha.lawton@thesentinel.co.uk

Casting the net to catch those caught in the web

EMPLOYERS in Staffordshire and Cheshire are facing an invisible challenge as they attempt to monitor their workforce's internet habits.

Companies fear hours of work time may be lost by workers visiting on-line betting or shopping sites and statistics show more than a third of employees admit looking at non-work related sites a few times a day.

While employers will notice workers reading the newspaper at their desk or having one too many cigarette breaks — reading a betting website on-line or choosing your shopping from the Tesco's website can all be done more covertly.

The alleged misuse of the internet was thrown into the spotlight earlier this month when 10 NHS staff were suspended from the University Hospital of North Staffordshire following allegations they used the internet system while they

By Alison Marsh

should have been working.

Meanwhile research by Vault.com also suggests 38 per cent of staff use the internet for personal use a few times a day, while only 12 per cent say they would never do this because it is unethical.

The rise of internet technology means some Staffordshire companies are coming up with ways of regulating their workers' internet habits.

While few have gone for an outright ban, many larger companies now have some form of internet user policy in place, but smaller companies are more likely to rely on trust.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire University and Britannia Building Society all have policies in place which employees must abide by when using the internet.

Around 1,300 staff at Britannia Building Society have

access to the internet and with that come some rules and regulations.

"We realise in any big organisation there are lots of people who can access the web and it is actually very difficult to do the job without having access, but nonetheless there needs to be some basic standards of behaviour," says Graham Leftwich, of Leek-based Britannia.

"About three years ago it was made widely available in the business and while the vast majority of people would use it for their jobs we have always had to protect against the small minority who may visit some questionable sites."

"They might go on to sites with viruses which would put our systems at risk because there are all sorts of viruses floating around the web so we have the firewall to stop anything untoward coming in."

"Then we also have a policy which means everyone who has access has to sign up to basic standards of individual behaviour, which includes not viewing inappropriate websites in the office, which we don't want our customers coming in and seeing."

"The policy was revised about two years ago and commits individuals to minimum standards of behaviour, nothing which you wouldn't expect. It is largely based around trust, although if people access sites they shouldn't our IT team would monitor the sites being used and make the necessary stops."

He adds: "We are quite happy for people in their own time to look at holiday websites — we wouldn't want them to do the booking on Britannia's research — but they can do the research at the office as long as it is in their own time."

Similar policies are in place at Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire University.



● Surf control: Britannia Building Society worker Ben Matthews looks on the internet at his office in Leek

Picture by Paul Pickard

"We do have an internet policy that employees have to sign up to if they require internet access and we have limited the usage they can have to sites not relating to the work area," a city council spokesman said.

"Obviously employees can't get on to unsuitable sites, but there is, however, a career progression element of our internet policy so they can use the internet for learning during their free hours at work."

University employees are allowed to use the internet for personal use but are subject to limitations, including not using the internet for a profit-making nature or anything that conflicts with the university business.

But while most larger companies have some sort of regulating policy in place, smaller companies are less likely to have strict controls.

Over at Keele-based Net Marketeers, employees have no restrictions on internet use.

The company, which designs internet systems for different companies, views the internet as a vital part of each employees' job and, with a team of only five, says it would be extremely obvious if anyone was abusing the internet.

Although illegal websites are restricted, employees can go on practically any other website and there is no internet users policy to sign-up to.

"Guidelines are not really necessary," says creative director, Martin Ellis.

"If we were a big organisation it is something that might become an issue."

"People can use the internet within their own time but not for hours on end."

"If they were booking a holiday at lunchtime or looking at

the news on-line all within reasonable usage that would be OK."

But through working with other companies setting up internet systems, he knows that this is not always the case.

"We build companies' internal internet systems but we don't deal with control of the actual user."

"We sometimes get asked how they can control it but we don't ourselves provide that."

"Generally it tends to be companies where you would have lower paid staff who tend to be doing monotonous jobs or people who send e-mails when they shouldn't."

He adds: "It's a bit more obvious if someone is reading the paper all day but if they start browsing BBC news on the screen for a long time it could be the same as people taking 20

minutes."

Mr Ellis suggests monitoring is just technology catching up. Companies already monitor phone calls — to check employees are not calling their cousin in China — now they have the technology to check internet access.

Learning about check systems and security for company's internet sites now forms a significant part of the business and computing courses at Staffordshire University.

Jonathan Westlake, a lecturer and researcher in computers, says the most common sites employers want to avoid allowing workers access to include betting, lottery sites, shopping and, of course, pornography.

"There is a balancing act needed to research and encourage open access and widen communications and e-mail, but at the same time you have got to police it and see what people are accessing at work is to do with work," he says.

"It is always difficult to strike a balance. Unless you sit by someone's shoulder and monitor it."

Companies have different options. "You can restrict internet access completely so the browser option is not available on employees' screens," says Mr Westlake.

"Firms can remove this from the build of the PC but it is rather draconian and extreme. You can provide instructions and rules of play about how people should use the internet — an internet code. But we are talking about something a bit like a Highway Code where some people will go the wrong speed and some will go down the road the wrong way and there are only so many traffic lights you can put in place."

alison.marsh@thesentinel.co.uk

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