



Case Study: Modern Slavery

P3 Lincolnshire Street Outreach Team



Andrei's story*

I came to the UK on the promise of a friend, Ion*, a guy I had known since kindergarten. He promised me a good job and help to sort out my papers, and to get my National Insurance number.

At the beginning it was ok. I stayed with him and his girlfriend but I had my own room. His business is buying and selling furniture secondhand. So he got the calls and was talking to people on Facebook and I was the driver and in charge of the physical work.

Within two, three weeks, everything started to change. I was squeezed, like a bird trapped. Ion didn't pay me anything. I remember the longest amount of time I had to work was from 9am until 5am next day and I had to sleep from 5 'til 9, four hours, then back to work. It was every day, I didn't have one day off, no Sunday, no Saturday, nothing.

At first he said we have food for four months, don't worry about anything. But after two, three weeks they started to change - this food was not mine anymore, it's his girlfriend's and she was really over-possessive. Then my passport went missing for two weeks.

At that time I started to think they are trying to do the Chinese water torture you know, step by step.

I started to save money from tips, that people would pay me for moving furniture inside or upstairs. From this, I would need almost four months to get the amount of money to buy a ticket to go back to Romania.

At the house, the conflicts got bigger and bigger by the day. I said to Ion I can't live with this anymore, so he sent me to his flat (which he had been sub-letting).

He told me in a month we made nearly £4000. But I didn't see a penny of it.

"I told Ion I'm going back I don't want to be involved in this anymore"

When I asked about money, he would say we have to pay the rent, we have to buy another car, pay the rent for his shipping containers. What about my salary?

He found out that I was saving money from tips. He said: 'Where did you get all this money?' I said I made it from tips, I didn't steal it from you. He was very angry.

I have a friend who's British. He came with me for deliveries while he was staying with me for a few days. He opened my eyes. He said 'Andrei, you are delivering furniture and it doesn't have this label: 'fire resistant'. This furniture must have these labels, this is the law.'

I met one customer who worked for the council and he said these electronics - what about the PAT test? He explained to me why and how I could get into trouble because I'm the one delivering the electronics.

So I bought the ticket and the transfer to Romania. I told Ion I'm going back, I don't want

to be involved in this anymore.

The van broke down a few days before my flight, about 7km from his house. I had to leave it there; I told him where it was.

We had an argument the next day. Ion wanted my help to empty some shipping containers. I said I'm going to take my belongings, and leave your house and in two days I'm going back to Romania so it doesn't matter.

I asked a family I knew if they could accommodate me for two nights.

On the morning of my flight, the police called me. Ion had told them I stole the van, three laptops, phones and some money.

I told them where the van was, I had put the keys through the letterbox that morning. Ion only gave me one laptop but I left that in my old room. I left the phones on the bed.

The police asked where I lived. But I was just staying with the family, I didn't know the address by memory. I said, I can show it to you, no problem. Because I didn't have the address she read me my rights, and they took me to a cell.

They went to the family's house and asked if they knew me, but they said the wrong name – family names and saints names come before the given name in Romanian. So they said no. They came back, got a warrant and searched their house. There were two-year-old children there, everyone got scared, they didn't understand what was happening.

I stayed in the cell for seven hours.

"At that point, I became a homeless person. In six minutes, I lost everything."

Then they found the van. And they found the laptop. And using CCTV they proved that it was the one I'd been using so they said you are free to go. It was six minutes before my transfer. I needed to be at the pickup point. The police woman said she tried to call the transfer

company many times but nobody answered.

So I missed my transfer, I missed my flight. I returned to the family; after 5 hours they were still trying to tidy up from the police's search. They said we like you but you can't live with us, this is too much.

At that point, I became a homeless person. In six minutes, I lost everything. Because one guy lied.

I didn't know where to turn. I had no money. The airline didn't want to understand. At that point the stress was immense. Most of the people I was in touch with turned their back on me, because the police were looking for me. You could see on their faces.

I called my friend and said I'm homeless. He said try to find some WiFi and I will send you a message. He sent me three options, one of them was P3. He said they are doing repatriations, you should try them first.

I sent a Facebook message saying I am homeless, they passed it on and Renata called me. She found me in the morning. I remember my limbs were numb, couldn't feel my legs. She took me to have a hot drink, bought me some porridge. I told her I didn't have enough for the flight. My morale is very very low.

When you are becoming very tired, you need somewhere to crash. I was trying to move a lot. It wasn't freezing, but when you're staying in one place the ground gets very cold. During the night, you realise you're alone. You can't call someone to say 'I need someone to encourage me'. I can't disturb my friend because he's does enough. I'm stuck.

Sometimes I was trying to have a purpose. I was lucky, I'm not a smoker, I don't drink alcohol at all. Because in this situation you could drink a lot, you could go to the extreme very soon.

It was for four, five days or nights, I'm not sure. In all this time, Renata put in 1000%. She made some calls and said to me I must have confirmation from the police that you are free to leave the country. As soon as she had that confirmation, she spoke with her manager and

we got the ticket and some money for transport at the other end.

"You need to understand first – how, when, why, and then make the judgement"

You can't understand unless you're in that situation. If you see me full of dirt, or smelling, you will judge me. Oh that guy hasn't washed for a month. But why? I was working for 48 hours, in 48 hours I slept for five hours, so then you can understand how I was smelling after that much hard work. So you need to understand first – how, when, why, and then make the judgement.

I came back to the UK. The police told me the investigation is over. I can say I started a new life here. I went straight to a manager I knew at an employment agency and he found me work at a flower company. I started labour work but the owner found I had more experience than she realised - I was in the UK 10 years ago, doing horticultural work at RBS Kew Gardens. So she promised me that she will send me to Holland to take some training courses. She will help me with my National Insurance number, and help me if Brexit is a problem.

And now I have my own flat that I'm renting with a small garden. I have almost everything I need. I have electricity, I have furniture.

Everything turned when I came back, because of my friends, the manager at the agency.

I will volunteer, I would like to volunteer for P3, but I also have my own ideas about doing more. In Lincolnshire there can be done so many things.

**Names changed to protect client's identity.*

P3's Operations Manager for Lincolnshire, Jonny Goldsmith:

"Andrei was believed to be a victim of modern day slavery. He was given advice as to how to enter the National Referral Mechanism but he chose not to and instead stated he wished to return home. We were then able to facilitate travel and reunite him with his family. We offered Andrei advice as to eligibility for welfare assistance, housing and work if he wanted to return."

Pictured below: Street Outreach Worker Renata Jackute, who supported Andrei to return home

Front page: Stock photo by Allef Vinicius c/o Unsplash.com

