

## Marek Presentation (Modern Slavery)

Hello

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Marek Krolik and I am originally from a town called Konin in Poland.

I am here today to share with you some of my experience and what happened to me nearly 10 years ago when I first came to the UK.

Before I do I would like to ask for your patience as I have a condition called Cerebellar Ataxia which affects my mobility, balance and sometimes my speech don't worry I am not drunk!

I grew up in Poland in a quiet town like any other youngster I was fit and healthy and enjoyed a good childhood with my mother and brother. When my brother was 12 he developed a rare heart condition which despite the best attempts of medical teams both in Poland and in the UK they were unable to cure him and after a short period of illness he passed away.

Not long after this I had the opportunity to come to the UK to stay with family here who lived in Lancashire. My Uncle had a scrap yard business locally and offered me the opportunity to come and spend the summer months with him and help at his business.

So when I was 15 I travelled to Lancashire and started to spend time with my uncle. When I first started I would get to spend some time with my cousin and other members of my family on a social level. As I started to get older and got to school leaving age it was suggested by my uncle that I come to live more permanently with him and this would also give me better education opportunities than back home.

My ambitions at this point was to become an architect and hoped to study qualifications in England that would help me achieve that.

It soon became apparent once I got here that the educational opportunities were going to be more difficult than I had planned. When I arrived I was told that it would cost my uncle about £10,000 per year to put me through college and if I didn't pass he would have to pay again for me to re-sit the year. Looking back now I know this was completely untrue.

By this time I was already working full time for my uncle about 12 hours per day on the scrap yard. A typical day would involve stripping scrap cars for parts. Even though I wasn't getting to go to college at this point I was happy and whilst I didn't receive a wage I was looked after and got money when I needed it but my labour was on the assumption that my earnings were being saved me to enable me to go to college. At this time I was living with my uncle at his home

Over a time his attitude and his approaches towards me changed. It is fair to say that some of his business practices were not as they should have been and as the business busier so did the demands on my time. I would work longer days – sometimes through the night and if I made mistakes he was aggressive and violent towards me.

More and more he stopped taking me out and to meet others socially and left me behind at the yard to carry on with the work.

I recall on one occasion I had done something wrong and my uncle attacked me forcing my head against the back of a forklift truck resulting me in becoming unconscious and waking up in my own pool of blood. I have no idea how long I had been knocked out and ended up with a large gash on the back of my head. After the attack I was told to go into the office to sleep but was never taken to hospital or to seek medical help.

On another occasion I was cutting a car with a large Stihl saw and as the car cut in half the blade ended up going into my hand. When I removed the blade from my hand my bone was exposed. Because it was

my fault my uncle said he could not take me to the hospital and I ended up wrapping up my hand myself and continuing to work for the rest of the day.

We were fixing a roof and because I wasn't concentrating enough he took a slate tile and hit me across the face with it which exposed my gum and teeth. Again I did not get any medical help.

I recall on one occasion I had an abscess in my mouth which got so painful I was taking a box of paracetamol per day to try and numb the pain. It got so bad I waited until my Uncle was away and took myself to hospital during the night. On arrival the abscess burst which resulted in me staying in for a couple of days and they had to remove 3 of my teeth.

When all this was going on I felt like I was obliged to continue to help him with his business on the promise that I would continue on to college. I felt in constant pain due to both the work and the more persistent attacks on me. Any dangerous work was always given to me I would often be tasked with piercing gas canisters in fridges, cut up fridges and handle hazardous waste.

Some people use to notice the marks on me but I would tell people I had tripped up or banged myself when working. It was easier to paint myself as a clumsy person rather than a victim of violence

When I look back at the person I was I cannot recognize myself now, I firmly believe what I was being told and relied on my uncle all of the time and didn't feel I could challenge him and felt trapped. I was told not to speak customers at the yard and was told if anyone of authority came in I was to pretend that I could not speak English.

My sleeping arrangements on the scrap yard were very basic. I lived in a small caravan which was cold and damp and the furniture was damaged. There was no bed so I made a bed from tyres and a corrugated metal sheet on the floor. I put a blanket on top and had a duvet.

I had some access to cold water but had to boil a kettle to get hot water for washing. I had a single camping gas stove to do some basic cooking and lived mainly on soup, beans and bread provided for me.

I was eventually rescued and I don't use that word lightly, I do not know where I would be today if it wasn't for the help of the police, people from the community who alerted the authorities to my problem and most importantly the people who I now call friends.

Today – I work 4 days a week for St Antonys Centre, I feel I have my independence, I have my own flat and, I am an active member of a trade union trying to help others and I also fund raise for the ataxia foundation. I now have a car which gives me independence which allows me to go out and gives me the confidence to leave Lancashire and explore new areas something I could only have dreamed of 10 years ago.

It hasn't been an easy journey since the days working for my uncle after I was rescued I spent 9 months in rehabilitation, with the help of Dave I had to get my identity and be recognised in the UK systems, I have had counselling but after all this my condition seems to have stabilised and I now want others to know what happened, how it affected me and most importantly try to ensure it never happens again.

Thank you for listening

Marek.