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Broadmoor patient “determined to get heard” in landmark case

Adam James speaks to Albert Haines, the psychiatric patient due to make legal history when his appeal against 25 year of detention is open to the public

September 23, 2011

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A man detained at Broadmoor high-security hospital has spoken of his “determination to get heard” ahead of becoming the first psychiatric patient to have an appeal against detention open to the public.

Albert Haines, aged 52, has been held under compulsion in Broadmoor and one other secure mental health unit for a total of 25 years. Psychiatrists argue he poses a danger either to himself or others.

But in an interview with psychminded.co.uk from inside Broadmoor, Mr Haines insists he is not mentally ill, is not dangerous and is in despair about a failure to be released from detention after more than two decades.

In what is a landmark case, his mental health tribunal, which will decide whether he must continue to be detained under mental health law, will be open to the public and media.

Mr Haines, presently in a Broadmoor personality disorder unit, said: “Yes, I do have problems – but I do not have a mental illness. And I am not a danger to anyone.

“I have no faith in the mental health and I have a determination to get heard. Some staff have been supportive of what I am doing and have wished me luck.”

Mr Haines was detained in Broadmoor in 1986 following two convictions of attempted wounding.

“I accept what I did was not right,” said Mr Haines, adding he would have “preferred to go to prison” rather than being detained as long as he has in Broadmoor, the Berkshire home to some of Britain’s most notorious criminals such as Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe, and St Bernard’s Hospital, in Southall, west London.

He says he is willing to comply with conditions to be released from his mental health section, including residency in specialist 24-hour supported accommodation and adhering to medical and social supervision.

Mr Haines argues that the effects of sexual and physical abuse and were at the root of his earlier criminal behaviour.

But, in a written statement, he argues that such trauma has gone “unrecognized and reported by professionals for the past 25 years.”

“Counselling has just not been offered to me. I have asked for it ever since I can remember,” he says.



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Mental health tribunals have until now always been held in private, usually in hospital. Psychiatrists consider them to be in the best clinical interests of patients, and ensure that confidentiality and medical details are protected.

Around 25,000 private tribunals per year are held in England and Wales.

A first-tier tribunal had, in 2009, refused Mr Haines's appeal on the basis that his intention was to air "subjective grievances".

But at an upper tribunal in February three judges ruled that under Section 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights psychiatric patients deprived of their liberty have the same right as a non-disabled person to have their case heard in public.

He said there was particular public interest in Mr Haines's case due to the length of his detention, and a 2008 change in his psychiatric diagnosis.

Mr Haines' solicitor, Kate Luscombe, said: "My client has been detained for 25 years and has lost confidence in the system. He hopes that this hearing shall allow an opportunity for public scrutiny of his case."

Terry Simpson, chair of the UK Advocacy Network, an organisation of mental health self-help and support groups, said: "Deprivation of liberty is a serious matter, and decision-makers ought to be happy about public scrutiny.

"If a person is happy to go public then they should have that right."

Mr Haines's sister, Denise, said the public hearing has been "a long time coming."

"My brother should never have been put in Broadmoor, and definitely not for so long.

"Last Christmas he phoned me in tears because he was refused dinner as he did not want sit with the other patients.

"He is just not in the same category as the other patients."

In a written court statement, Dr Kevin Murray, clinical director at Broadmoor expressed concerns that the public hearing - to be held at Field House Immigration and Asylum Court, London - would set a precedent for patients.

A West London Mental Health Trust spokeswoman said that, due to patient confidentiality, any discussion of Mr Haines's case was "best left to the tribunal room."

She added: "Having said that, it's important to understand that the risk patients pose will typically vary over time and it's very unusual for patients to remain in a high-secure hospital for so long - only 1 in 20 patients remain in Broadmoor over 20 years.

"Patients with complex mental health problems often find it difficult to engage in the kinds of treatment that clinicians believe is likely to be most helpful; it can be painful and difficult work."

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Albert Haines, from Hammersmith London, spent much of his early years in care, as did his three sisters and two brothers.

Mental health professionals described him as “emotionally maladjusted” when aged five.

From the age of 16 he lived in hostels and bed sits, together with periods of homelessness.

In 1979 he was convicted of criminal damage, and in 1980 for possession of an offensive weapon.

He was 22 when first admitted to a psychiatric unit. From 1986 he was held in Broadmoor and, from 1992-2008, at St Bernard’s Hospital, in Southall, west London, where he once took a fire extinguisher up to a laundry room ceiling cavity “as a protest against 22 years of bullying and intimidation by the system”. No one was hurt.

In a 19-page tribunal statement seen by psychminded.co.uk, Mr Haines complains of medication against his will, psychiatrists diagnosing him with different disorders and multiple assaults by patients.

Mr Haines concludes: “As a vulnerable young person, I went to the experts looking for help. What I got was multiple psychiatric diagnoses, forced medication and incarceration.”



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