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# The ASBOs of The Atlantic

By CHARLOTTE MARTIN

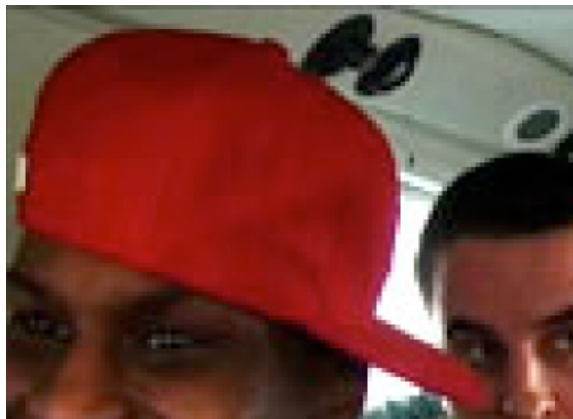
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**CROSSING** the last T on his UCAS form, Chris Tahaney can hardly believe he is applying for Edinburgh University with the same hand that was mutilated in a vicious gang-related machete attack just a year ago.

For Chris, 20, once part of the notorious Glaswegian Valley Gang, life was once a constant stream of crime.



He has been in and out of prison for serious assault, GBH, theft and criminal damage - all committed during a reign of terror that left him notorious in his local area.

But, thanks to a Prince's Trust scheme led by comedienne Sadie Kaye, Chris now looks forward to a university degree in Spanish and a lifetime working with others less fortunate than him.



Hitting home ... the boys speak to ex-prisoners outside El Rodeo

most dangerous city in the world.



Second chances ... Sadie, Geoffrey, Sam and Chris

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He was one of three young ex-criminals taken on a voyage across The Atlantic to the Caribbean and Venezuela to experience life outside his estate for a second chance.

The trip, shot for the online Community Channel, was by no means a perfect holiday, culminating in a frightening excursion to the most violent prison in the world, El Rodeo, in Venezuela.

Alongside ex-heroin addict Sam Todd and Geoffrey Nganga, an orphan who served time for drug-dealing, Chris embarked on the two-month trip to the

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The challenging voyage, coupled with the frightening sights of the gun-filled city of Caracas, gave the boys the short, sharp, shock they needed to change their lives of habitual offending.

Sadie says: "The trip took these boys out of their comfort zones. Guys like them lead such narrow lives that they only appreciate what they have in their own community. For some, if they just leave their postcode they are stabbed.

"Taking them away from their surroundings gave them a chance to see what else there is in life and the seriousness of El Rodeo prison shocked them into action.

"The results were phenomenal. These lads have turned their lives full circle and have a whole happy future ahead of them."

**Here, Chris and Geoffrey talk to CHARLOTTE MARTIN about their experience.**

**Click on the link below to watch the film.**

**Chris Tahaney, 20, from Glasgow.**



Reeling in his new lifestyle ... Chris

"In a big city like Glasgow, it's tough trying to escape crime in impoverished areas. I never went anywhere, I didn't know what life was like elsewhere.

"By the time I was 14, I was drinking heavily, got in with the wrong crowd and joined a gang that terrorised the neighbourhood and fought with other gangs. I was constantly in and out of prison.

"Violence started at 13 with knives, by 18 and 19, it was guns.

"I lived in fear. I had no life, no job, no real friends, no prospects. I had to change things.

"I applied for the Prince's Trust initiative after my last stint in jail.

"The visits to the islands and the boating trips were great fun, but Venezuela was 1000 times worse than any prison I had ever been to. Prisoners had weapons, frequently murdered one another and the guards were worse.

"There are 6 million handguns in Caracas. As part of a charity event, The Alcatraz Project, we spoke with street gangs to encourage them to disarm and I realised I could relate to them, and help them change in the same way I had.

"Since returning to England I have been helping with numerous charity projects including a horse riding initiative for disabled people in France and I start my course to study Spanish in September.

"This will help me to go back and give my life to charity work in Venezuela.

"Sadie essentially changed my life - she's such a warm, incredible person who I thank for having faith in me."

**Geoffrey, 20, from Tottenham, North London**



Sailing through career breaks ... Geoffrey

"My mother died when I was 11. I have never known my father.

"She was the centre point of my family. I was constantly looking for something to fill the void.

"While she made sure I studied hard, took extra-curricular activities and did my best, without her I had no drive left in me.

"I drifted into drug culture which is rife in the poor areas of Tottenham where I lived.

"By the time I was 12, I was taking drugs and soon dealing in them. After getting put in prison I decided to change my life. Lucky for me, Sadie chose me to give a second chance to.

"The trip gave me experiences I could only have imagined before. Sailing the ocean, meeting the warmest people on the Caribbean islands - it opened my eyes to the world.

"The El Rodeo jail was barbaric. The police chief told us about a prisoner who cracked another's skull and ate his brains to show the other inmates he was tough. He barely got punished for it.

Advertisement "I found it incredible what humans can do to one another if they are backed into a corner of violence. I realised that in no way did I want to be part of a criminal life anymore.

"I am now working with the National Youth Theatre whilst holding up a part time job in a vintage clothes shop in posh area Notting Hill. Things are definitely on the up.

"I hope one day to write documentaries and feature films."

***Sam Todd from Southampton was unable to speak to us before this piece was published. He now teaches sailing with the Discovery Sailing Project, which uses sailing as a therapy to help other young offenders.***

***He's planning to sail back to the Caribbean with Sadie and a fresh team to build orphanages in Haiti later this year.***

**Sailing with Sadie will be broadcast on Community Channel on Saturday 1st May at 9pm and online at [www.communitychannel.org](http://www.communitychannel.org). Community Channel is a Media Trust initiative dedicated to showcasing real life stories from around the world that inspire action and involvement. The channel is broadcast 24 hours a day on Sky 539 and Virgin TV 233.**

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