

# **Life in 8 Mile is Hard**

**by**

**Emmanuel Onom**

My name is Emmanuel. I will be living in 8 Mile Settlement for the rest of my life. I don't know where I'll end up or what my future holds for me. People in 8 Mile call me 'drug body' and a criminal, because I am not perfect in their eyes, and I am always misbehaving in the community. People ignore me because I was educated in the wrong way and my self interests were wrong.

From the beginning I learnt how to live corruptly in 8 Mile. I started to move around with my peer group, my street boys, when I was only in Grade Two. I used to watch movies in the street and the big boys would send me to buy their smokes, their drugs, and their alcohol. I would go around with them in the cars that they stole and we would go to town (Port Moresby city) and then come back again to 8 Mile Settlement. I was taught very early on how to smoke drugs and to drink alcohol.

I learnt how to see valuable things, and I learnt how to steal them. I have stolen cars, computers, mobile phones and many other things. I had to steal to survive. In 2000, in Grade Four, I had to leave school because my relatives refused to pay my school fees. I lost interest in school and I didn't care about getting an education at all. I stayed in 8 Mile Settlement and found my own way to survive in life.

I know I was educated wrongly by the street boys, but I began to use the skills I had learned to survive in this world. There were many days when I had nothing to eat, and I went hungry. Sometimes I never ate all day and all night, and I went to sleep hungry with no proper home to go. I began to realise the amount of poverty that existed in the community and at the same time, I never had any guidance or help to look after myself.

I needed to steal to survive.

To enjoy life I had a little bit of alcohol, and I bought this with the last money I had from any lucky steal that I had done. The next day I would have no money again, and so I would go out and steal again. You can not know how hard my life was here. You do not understand.

I went to jail for two years, and even when I came out of jail, I could not live the quiet life, and I went back to stealing. I still can not live quiet because for me to survive I need to steal, and to be honest, I do not know where my life is going.

I do want to thank Mr David Motsy and Mr Sean Davey for educating me and for giving me a good understanding of the real life. I am going to change my life and I am going to change myself because of this workshop that we did this week in the 8 Mile community.

June 2009

*Written with the assistance of Emmanuel's friend Desmond Venigo*