

Innocent until proven guilty? How a false accusation fuels one man's mission

In this latest blog, Claire McGourlay, professor of legal education at the University of Manchester and executive producer of the [Manchester Innocence podcast](#), shares a story from the UK that reveals how miscarriages of justice can happen to anyone - with life-changing consequences.

One day in 2016, Greenwich University criminology student Liam Allan's life was turned upside down when – completely out of the blue – the police knocked on his door.

He was told he had been accused of rape and faced the prospect of spending years in prison for something he didn't do.

During two years of torment as the case was readied for court, at his lowest point, Liam even considered suicide.

But, just days into the trial, it emerged that more than 60,000 text messages between Liam and his accuser had been withheld from the evidence.

His legal team were given just 24 hours to consider and present the new evidence to the jury, but it proved enough to completely dismantle the case against him.

While the person accusing Liam had automatic anonymity, he did not, and Liam found himself at the centre of a media storm.

He said: "I went from villain to victim in seconds.

"Suddenly my face was everywhere. There were photographers outside my home and reporters at my university.

"Once you open that can of worms, you can't go back. I'm just a really normal person that just wants a normal life, but that's never really been possible."

Liam's elevated profile meant he soon found himself receiving more than 100 messages a day from people who had also been falsely accused.

So, along with his partner Hannah, who had also been through a similar experience, Liam formed 'The Defendant', a charity that helps people navigating the criminal justice system.

He said: "We wanted to create something practical and accessible. The aim is to be like victim support, but for defendants.

"We're not here to get people off their case, we're there to explain processes, manage expectations and, most importantly, provide emotional support."

The Defendant has given Liam a purpose in his life, even though he admits he sometimes longs to move on from the experience that has come to define him.

Liam said: "Until it happened to me, I didn't realise how many people go through this. It's a secret world.

"But, rather than dwelling on it and focusing too much on what happened, the most helpful thing now is to think about what you can do with your experience."

You can listen to the podcast [here](#).

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