

# Helping problem drug users into work

## What employment means for those in drug treatment, and how Jobcentre Plus (JCP) can support their recovery

Most of the 330,000 problem drug users in England are unemployed. Three quarters are on welfare benefits, and around half of them are in drug treatment. Over 100,000 heroin and crack addicts are receiving welfare benefits without receiving any treatment at all.

At the same time, a sizeable minority of drug addicts in treatment are holding down jobs, living stable lives and supporting their families.

Having opportunities to gain training, skills and employment can affect whether someone's drug treatment is successful. The security, routine and responsibility this provides can be a much-needed source of motivation to recover, offering incentives to participate in communities and maintain positive social interaction.

## Joining up services to support recovery

For a long time, drug treatment and training, skills and employment advice services have worked separately. This is changing. From 27 April, JCP advisers will help people who voluntarily declare their problem drug use to get referred to a drug treatment provider for an initial discussion.

Under this new agreement, JCP will support drug treatment providers by helping substance misusing clients on benefits to realise their training, skills and employment potential and apply this to their recovery. This fits the government's agenda to join up services which can help tackle problem drug use, to double the efforts in helping people recover.

## How employment helps drug users

Getting drug users who claim benefits into appropriate treatment is the first step to helping them regain control over their lives so they can overcome addiction, be safer and healthier and reintegrate into society.

Yet despite evidence that access to, and take up of training, skills and employment opportunities can aid recovery from addiction, only around half of problem drug users on benefits are in treatment.

Clients entering treatment report that their employment situation improves, while evidence suggests rates of employment and wages can rise for those who complete their drug treatment.

So by preparing clients in treatment for employment, and persuading employers to provide opportunities for them to work, JCP can play a valuable role in enhancing treatment outcomes; benefiting individuals and whole communities.

Equally importantly, if problem drug users are identified, JCP will be able to personalise and tailor support to their particular needs be it training, skills and ultimately employment.

## What does drug treatment involve?

The aim of drug treatment is to work with individuals to overcome their dependency. It begins with assessment by a local service, where the treatment options are discussed. On agreeing which approach to follow, the next step is to develop an action plan and a set of goals, which often look at other issues such as housing and family support.

Most people get drug treatment within their community, some require a period of residential care. Whichever course is taken, treatment should last at least three months as this is the period in which most benefits are achieved.

Our challenge is to get more drug misusers on benefit into treatment, in order to speed their recovery from dependency: and to get more drug misusers in treatment into work, in order to reintegrate them back into society.

## Key facts

- Currently 93% of drug users receive treatment within three weeks of being assessed
- The Department of Health is providing £9m to deliver improvements in the drug treatment and employment pathway
- There are approximately 330,000 problem drug users in England; three quarters of these are on welfare benefits
- 80% of people on court orders with drug rehabilitation requirements have unmet skills and employment needs
- Money invested in drug treatment saves society the crime and health costs of addiction. The Home Office estimates every £1 spent saves £9.50. NICE estimates the health and crime costs of each injecting drug-user is £480,000.

## The benefits of working: a case study

**Craig from Dudley began working in his 30s after more than 20 years of drug misuse. He was supported through treatment and into employment, initially with a volunteering placement, and later gaining secure, paid employment where he remains, stable and in treatment. Craig and his drugs rehabilitation requirement (DRR) coordinator Paul describe the impact Craig's employment had on his drug treatment and path to recovery:**

### **Paul's story (DRR coordinator)**

"From the word go Craig was clear that if he could get treatment for his drug misuse together with finding a job, he could move on to be drug free and make lifestyle changes. When he got his first placement he was maintained on methadone and doing well, but a forthcoming court appearance raised concern for his long-term success. The service providers got together to write a supporting letter outlining his commitment to treatment and employment and he avoided going to jail.

"When someone enters treatment it leaves a massive gap in their lives, everything before then revolves around drugs as using fills their entire day. Individuals in treatment need something to fill that gap, and working gives them opportunities to adjust from stopping using to being drug free and reintegrating. They step from one life into another and it's a massive learning curve. Partnership working between treatment providers and employment agencies initiates lifestyle changes."

### **Craig's story (ex problem-user, employed and in treatment)**

"I'm a good worker when I put my mind to it and much of my drug taking was through boredom. I had a chaotic, violent upbringing and was involved in crime and drug misuse from around age 10 to 38.

"By 35 I'd had enough of my life and needed to get my head screwed on. I saw an adviser at Jobcentre Plus and stuck with her, initially volunteering at a centre for the blind.

"Being at the centre really rewarded me. They heaped me with praise and I got to be at ease with people. I had always been in a world of my own but by giving practical help I felt myself again. My mind was busy. For once I wasn't waking up thinking about where the next drugs were coming from.

"At the end of my 13-week placement I had nothing to do again and relapsed. After a couple of weeks I went back to Jobcentre Plus and asked for a trial. I would have considered anything. I was placed on a trading estate where they liked my work, and I've learnt to operate the machines and make boxes.

"I've stayed in treatment throughout this job and they help me by fitting appointments around my shifts.

"My whole routine has changed. I see my baby girl every day and at weekends, I've made friends in work and I haven't relapsed the whole time I've been there. Sooner or later I'll live independently."

*With thanks to Turning Point for their help in locating this case study.*