Road to recovery

28.10.09 Society Guardian | Finding long-term solutions to drug addiction

The centre firmly dealt with the underlying issues… What the treatment’s given me is life. Without it I’d be dead
Lisa Carey, page 3

Why rehabilitation matters to us all

The rehabilitation of drug users is important not just for addicts, but for society as a whole, reducing crime rates and strengthening communities, says Terry Kirby

Addiction to hard drugs – whether it is heroin, crack cocaine or any of their derivatives – is an acute problem for society at large as it is for the users themselves.

Drug users commit crime to fund their habits, they often have other health and social problems and frequently inflict misery and mayhem on their families and friends. It is therefore in the interests of all that resources are devoted to their treatment and reintegration into communities.

This supplement, sponsored by the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse, the government’s special health authority, examines how those resources are currently being deployed in the battle against addiction.

On this page, we discuss how the NTA, charged with overseeing drugs treatment services, is now focusing on improving treatment programmes aimed at increasing the number of users entering long-term rehabilitation and resettlement.

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To punish or to treat?
**Tough on the causes of crime**

A government initiative aimed to break the link between drugs and crime by targeting users while they are in the criminal justice system.

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**A long-term solution at last?**

Records from a new study by the University of Bristol show that targeting drug users who are in contact with the criminal justice system can reduce drug use and its associated crime.

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**The real cost of addiction**

The cost of addiction is not only financial but also affects the individual and society as a whole. Addiction is a chronic disease that affects people of all ages, genders, and social backgrounds. It can be caused by a variety of substances, including alcohol, nicotine, and illegal drugs.

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**A new way to beat addiction**

New research has shown that a combination of therapy and medication can be effective in treating addiction. The study suggests that a personalized approach to treatment, taking into account the individual's needs and preferences, can improve outcomes.

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**Why drugs workers are so crucial**

Drugs workers play a vital role in helping people overcome addiction. They provide support and guidance, helping individuals to make positive changes in their lives.
Building a life beyond treatment

The government has launched a pilot scheme to target the many underlying social needs of recovering addicts

Cathy Pryor

Standing on the long, flat, grey sands of the beautiful National Trust-owned beach at Formby, north of Liverpool and looking out towards the Irish Sea, the notion of deprived city areas and severe drug problems seems a very long way away.

Sadly, however, that is not the case. In this part of Sefton, there are pockets of council housing where poverty and unemployment is ingrained and where there is a high incidence of substance abuse. It is here that Sefton Drug Action Team (DAT) focuses its resources and it is this area that is likely to benefit greatly from the radical project that the team currently have under way.

Sefton is one of seven partnerships of the government’s pioneering Drug System Change Pilot Programme, which is aimed at helping drug users achieve better outcomes from treatment.

The pilot scheme, which runs from March to August, is a joint venture between National Health Service Trusts, police, probation services, Job Centre Plus, and local authorities. It involves working closely with Sefton Council, Merseyside Probation Trust, local police, along with health, probation and prison services. These are important links with organisations such as Job Centre Plus and local careers.

One of the most important aims at Sefton is to involve service users past the point at which their drug use ended, at which point they were cut off and thrown to the wolves,” he says.

In the past, treatment focused pretty exclusively on drug use and took people up to the point at which their drug use ended, at which point they were cut off and thrown to the wolves. “If you’re homeless, the chances that you’ll get help is minimal. If you’re sleeping under the pier in Southport, you’re not going to successfully engage in treatment’.

To achieve this, Sefton is running what Sefton DAT, has been a service user for 35 years. In the past, treatment focused pretty exclusively on drug use and took people up to the point at which their drug use ended, at which point they were cut off and thrown to the wolves. “If you’re homeless, the chances that you’ll get help is minimal,” he says.

Paul Caddick, 39 and now drug-free, was once a self-confessed ‘chaotic drugs user’ who started on solvents at 13. By his 20s, he was in and out of prison for shoplifting to fund his habit. He served in short-term sentences.

Now he works with the DAT as an advocate, helping drug users to access services and representing their views to service providers. He can vouch for how welcome the changes are: “As soon as I came out of prison I would relapse because there was no aftercare. … Most of the lads would come out and get money in their pocket and go out to do drugs again.”

Peter McDermott, 53, a consultant to the DAT, has been a service user for 15 years. Addressing the breadth range of drug users’ needs rather than leaving them to fend for themselves is vital, he says.

If they had other needs they would often be made to jump through hoops to get help, he says. “I spent about a service at London where if you were homeless and wanted help with that, you needed to demonstrate some kind of commitment, which meant phoning on a daily basis. Well, if you’re homeless, the chances that you’ll have credit on a mobile phone are slim.”

“Because the people who use the services are not consulted, so what you get are professionals with their own ideas of what will work, which don’t take into account the realities.”

McDermott says an involvement of people such as himself and Caddick will help to counteract “them and us” mentality that has characterised drug services in the past. “One of the good things about Sefton,” he adds, “is that it is working hard to break that down.”

Weblink

Sefton Drug Action Team: sefton.gov.uk/
default.aspx?page=6438

If you’re sleeping under the pier in Southport, you’re not going to successfully engage in treatment.

Consultant Peter McDermott (left) and peer advocate Paul Caddick of the Sefton Drugs Action Team

Christopher Thomond

If you’re sleeping under the pier in Southport, you’re not going to successfully engage in treatment.

It’s not only people with drug problems who benefit from effective treatment. Their friends, families and neighbours also feel the positive change – as does wider society

Drug treatment in England has come a long way since 2001. Then, the average waiting time to be seen was nine weeks. Today, it’s under a week

Hoping improved access, we’re now concentrating on moving all drug users through their treatment successfully, and helping them to sustain their recovery

For users, effective treatment means less drug use, better health, and improved social functioning. For everyone else, it means reduced crime and safer communities

Drug treatment can help break the link between drugs and crime. It’s estimated that the crime committed by users who take class A drugs costs us up to £14bn a year. Research shows the number of ofences they commit while receiving treatment drops substantially

Drug workers help users to get better and becomes free of dependency. They also help former addicts to reintegrate with society, to be active citizens, earn their own living, and keep stable homes.

We all need treatment for drug misuse

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