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How CDT clients helped shape the 2008/09 treatment plan

The first ever national service user conference was recently held in Birmingham. Read what Coventry's representatives thought of it.



Service users featured in new advertising campaign

The Lowdown is written by service users in Coventry

You spoke, we listened

service user input into the new treatment plan

All treatment services—including CDT—are reviewed every year to see what's working well and what could be improved. And, every year, a treatment plan is produced and details the changes to be made over the coming 12 months.

In recent months, more than 35 service users took part in consultations to discuss their experiences of being CDT clients. The purpose of the consultations was to obtain current users views on how services in Coventry are performing and identifying possible improvements for inclusion in the city's 2008/09 treatment plan.

Three separate consultations brought together:

- clients in treatment with CDT
- needle exchange clients

The groups discussed various aspects of current drug use and treatment.

The consultations found that the average price of drugs such as crack is £20 a stone, cocaine £35 a gram and heroin can be purchased for as little as £10 or £20 a deal. Many users said the quality and purity of drugs is lower than in previous years with the purity of crack estimated to be 70%, cocaine 35% and heroin 35%.

One of the main areas of discussion was about residential rehabilitation. Service users wanted clearer guidance on the application process for residential rehab—some individuals even said that they had been given the forms to take away and complete by themselves.

The groups also wanted to see managers involved in the application process and better feedback on how decisions had been made—particularly if their

application had been turned down.

The groups also wanted to have clearer information on the financial contributions that they had to make to the residential rehab service. Some clients described being taken by rehab staff to a cash point and instructed to withdraw cash for their placement.

As a result of this feedback, the new treatment plan includes a range of activities that will see:

- all decisions on rehab placements discussed by an independent panel
- letters explaining the decision completed for every application
- better use of clients' experiences in rehab units to decide on which providers to use in future
- a significant increase in the number of clients accessing a rehab placement
- better information about rehabs for the CDT waiting area

Further consultations will take place in the near future.

‘nothing about us without us’— national user conference

More than 400 people from around the country who have been in treatment descended on Birmingham recently to attend the first national service user conference—‘Nothing about us without us’.

Service users were joined by around 200 professionals and policymakers to find out what is needed to improve

treatment services.

Four service users from Coventry accompanied Abtar Sanga, who co-ordinates local user involvement, to the conference. The articles on these pages summarises the views of the day and recommendations for future work with service users in Coventry.

‘what am I doing?’

On the way to the conference I thought to myself ‘what am I doing?’ I thought the day was going to drag on and that it was just going to be boring but, in fact, it was entirely the opposite. It was good to hear the other people's views and opinions and how other parts of the country are affected by drug use.

I went to this conference unprepared and not putting much in as it was my first conference....I sort of took a back seat. I still got involved but not to my fullest ability.

After lunch we were split into groups - there were eight service user representatives on my table from all over the country and we had a discussion on what we felt is needed to increase the impact of user participation. Our group thought we should:

- develop a national connection so if a service user moves to another town they don't have to start the whole process of treatment again—such as doing an assessment
- more discretion with needle exchanges and drug tests as people felt degraded asking for needles or having to walk through the CDT reception area with urine samples
- more incentives for people to get involved with user groups
- develop a national connection between the service user reps in order to share

information and get involved in doing street surveys to get other people's views.

Male service user, aged 29

being listened to...

Thank you to all the people who made such an effort to organise a forum where service users like myself had an opportunity to be involved and have our voice heard by the governing bodies that provide treatment to users.

It was great to network with other groups and find out what other groups have done to improve services in their areas.

Hopefully, we can bring the good points and hard work done by groups in other areas back to Coventry and implement different strategies that have worked.

I do feel that parts of the day could have been run better however, I left with a feeling of security and motivation – secure in the knowledge that others have a voice that is really being listened to by policy makers. I feel motivated at seeing the success other user groups have had with the continued support of the different service providers.

Male Service User aged 39

‘we have a lot to offer’

During the morning of the conference there were various guest speakers such as Glenda Daniel from the Oxford User Team (OUT) who spoke about treatment planning and the role of Drug Action Teams and what they were meant to do. She said that in Oxford:

- service users are represented and consulted during any draft stages and processes and that they are involved in the process right the way through
- help meeting the childcare costs and transport is provided for service users
- advocacy and support services are aimed at service users
- a service user that is displayed prominently in drug services to promote advocacy
- service user involvement was part of all reviews of services

During the afternoon we were placed on different tables to speak to people from different parts of the country in a structured debate about service user involvement.

One of the subjects we discussed was whether to make service user

involvement more professional—I think that this would be a way forward. I don't think it is about paying service users for the time but to give them the training and skills they need to make the changes they want to happen. It is easy to give people money to give their opinion but it becomes too much about their own personal grievances. I feel it would be better to involve those who are serious and committed and then they can gain experience and training and give something back to the service.

Service user involvement needs to be more structured if people are to shake off the image that service users are unreliable and unintelligent. We have a lot to offer the service and it may take time to train people but there will be benefits.

I thought the conference was very helpful and it was good to see how service user involvement is taking shape around the country.

It has also made me see how much service users have to offer drug services and made me more positive about looking at a career in drug treatment.

Female service users, aged 29 and 39



Question time at the Nothing about us, without us conference (above) and group discussions (right).

Photos courtesy of Drink and Drug News



service user involvement

Service user involvement is important because it means that YOU have a voice in how agencies like CDT are run and an input into planning for local services.

It's well-accepted that service users should be involved in all key aspects of decision-making in relation to their care and that carers should be involved as fully as is agreeable to the user.

The way we involve CDT clients and others who may be using drugs but are not in treatment is quickly taking shape. Students on the council-run community Drug Awareness course are working to develop mechanisms to obtain users views and feed these back in to the planning and delivery of services.

Current developments include meetings to develop aims, objectives and an action plan for a service user group and visits to outside agencies such as the Oxford User Team to look at models of good practice which could be adopted here in Coventry.

Consultation events for service users will take place over the year and key areas to examine will be promoting crack services, women's services and bringing people in to treatment.

For more information about service user involvement contact Abtar Sanga, deputy Substance Misuse Service Commissioner and Co-ordinator, on 024 7683 2804.

getting OUT and about

On April 10 2008 Emma Carnal and Carol Jacobs visited the Oxfordshire User Team, (OUT) to find out more about the user involvement work taking place there.

After the visit to Oxford we decided that we would like to develop service user involvement in Coventry and make it as meaningful and productive as possible. We want user involvement to be voiced, listened to and acted upon as we believe that it can lead to better drug services and more people completing their drug treatment.

We want to develop:

- Service users delivering education to their peers and other professionals through training and information.
- User consultation
- Production of a newsletter
- Peer Led advocacy
- Questionnaires asking for service users feedback
- User representation within services in Coventry supporting drug users
- Developing work in drug using communities

The aims of Coventry's User Involvement Group are:

- To represent the views of local users to the drug treatment services and the regional drug user forum
- To ensure that service user involvement is representative of the drug using community in Coventry
- To provide information and advice for drug users
- To provide peer led services.

To ensure that drug services are involving drug users in the way the services are run.

Service Users will benefit because:

- More users will know what rights they have.
- They can become fully involved in the planning of their treatment so that it is better suited to their needs.
- They will have access to advocacy services.

They can make changes that will help benefit others.

Interested in being involved? Contact Abtar Sanga, Coventry Community Safety Partnership, on 024 7683 2804 for more details.