

This issue:
Iain Kemp from
**Outlook Members
Development Group,
Manchester**

'Be patient while you are developing the group, and be real about its aims and objectives.'

When and why did you start your group?

The members development group started in January 2007. Its aim is to involve service users in the running and development of Outlook and to use Drug and Alcohol Strategy Team (DAST) funding to benefit Outlook members.

How many members do you have?

The numbers attending the meetings can vary from three to 12. The average attendance is more likely to be four to six members.

How did you obtain funding?

We're funded from a DAST grant, awarded in April 2007.

Where and how regularly do you hold meetings?

We hold our meetings at Outlook once a week, on a Thursday afternoon.

How do you keep it going?

We try to enthuse new members of Outlook to get involved in the members' development group. We promote the group, develop realistic goals and aims, and manage group boundaries.

What have been the highlights so far?

The main highlight was a military challenge day for Outlook members and the staff team. We held it as a team building exercise in Liverpool.

How do you communicate with members?

We keep in touch by text message, letters, phone, noticeboard and word of mouth. Our website is online at www.east-manchester-outlook.org.uk

Have you any tips for others starting a group?

Be patient while you are developing the group, and be real about its aims and objectives.

My great escape

Bri Edwards tells the second part of his story. Down in London, his steady heroin habit required a steady income, so there was nothing else for it but to get a job – whatever that took.



Growing up in a fishing town like Aberdeen taught me a very hard lesson: that I had to work, and work hard, if I was to get anything out of life – and that included my dope.

I had made up my mind that if I was to stay in London and on my private script, which was my lifeline – or so I thought at the time – I needed a job. The next payment for my script was getting near and I had nothing towards it.

I took the tube to Tottenham Court Road. I had decided I would consider doing anything – and I meant anything. I had my drug supply sussed out and my accommodation was the best I could get under the circumstances.

As I wandered through Soho I remembered thinking would they want a male stripper – or maybe a doorman to keep all the perverts out? If that failed I could do the three-card 'find the lady' trick and rip off the tourists... all these thoughts raced through my head. All this job hunting was becoming work in itself.

Later that afternoon I made my way down Wardour Street and to my delight I saw an advert: maintenance man required. Right there and then I decided I would go and get that job. I walked down on the Dilly and saw some Junkie friends; they were either stoned or had just ripped off some money from another victim.

I asked them if they wanted to score some of my forthcoming script. They agreed and gave me £10.00. With this I could hire a pair of trousers and jacket for four hours.

I rang a big international company and got an interview for that afternoon. I got dressed, nicked a tie from a shop in Oxford Street, and paid a visit to the London School of Economics – my usual place for a hit, as their toilets were always clean. How I ever got to the interview in one piece I will never know.

This was a job with a major film distributors – a good job, and I was determined to get it. I had no previous experience in any form of maintenance except methadone. I met the personnel officer and thought to myself what a nice person she was. As we talked, I made up this story of how I had been privately educated in the Far East, there had been a fire, all my educational records had been lost and during the flight from the Far East to the UK my luggage had been

stolen including my CV... all total and utter rubbish of the first degree. She bought the lot. I was in, and I started the following Monday at 8.30am.

The next problem was how I was going to get up in the morning. Near where I lived there was a post office. I made contact with my area postie and paid him a tenner to wake me up for the first few weeks. My life was about to change; with this job I had cash and I could find a bed-sit, a flat, or possibly a shared house.

All these dreams went through my head. The reality was that I lived in a ten by nine foot room with no windows and bare floorboards. I stayed there for another 19 months. The job that I got was going to fuel my new life but instead it fuelled my appetite for more and more heroin.

My office was in the basement of a five-storey building. My job was to change light bulbs, load the coffee machines, and keep all the office staff going with stationery, and I managed this successfully for several years. One day I was called into the manager's office and asked if I would like to deliver film to a major studio. I readily agreed, the keys for the company van were thrust into my hands, and I was off to the film set.

This new job was permanent. I loved the freedom of the van and going out to various sites around the South of England. This was a dream to me. Driving to the film studio one day, I was asked to help move some scenery around. I helped willingly, and saw to my amazement that I was in the middle of the new 007 James Bond film. All the actors were standing around waiting for hairdressers and makeup ready to go on the film set. I said to myself, 'Bri, you have made it.'

During this time my addiction had hit sky high and all the wages I was getting paid were not enough. All my plans and great ideas of getting a home and security were going down the drain fast. One day I fell down some stairs at the office where I worked, and broke my ankle. I was taken to the local hospital, put in plaster, and driven back to where I lived.

All my dreams of being happy flooded my mind. I knew my life had to change, but little did I know what lay ahead of me. My life was about to change more than I could have ever believed.

Next issue : Bri leaves London