



Navigating the **future**

Aftercare was always seen as something separate to treatment,' says Darren Worthington, chief executive of the treatment agency, Smart. 'More often than not, people would be catapulted across into aftercare without any real planning. The two should be working in conjunction with each other.'

Setting up the Access 2 programme, the agency aimed to provide those leaving treatment and prison with the chance to gain recognised qualifications, which they can then take into the workforce or continue onto further education.

People accessing the programme will have the opportunity to learn a combination of skills to help them handle everyday scenarios, such as dealing with emotions and improving communication skills. They are also prepared for employment by helping them with interviewing, CV writing and how to use a computer.

Those who are referred onto the scheme are contacted at around six weeks before they are due to leave rehab or prison and are provided with a mentor and a care plan. Once they start the aftercare programme a

Back on track...



Danielle, 27, is currently working as a mentor for Smart. She started using drugs at the age of 13 and at 15 was addicted to heroin and crack. She has been clean for seven years.

'Before doing the Smart mentoring course I had never been to college, passed an exam or even written an essay. Going to college and doing the Access 2 course made me realise that the only thing I knew about drugs was how to take them. The programme has given me the confidence to do the job that I am doing now at Smart. If it wasn't for the mentoring programme I wouldn't have even got past the interview stage.'



Paul, 38, completed the Access 2 course and progressed to become a mentor to help those with a similar background to himself. He now gives talks to police and probation about his experiences.

'I was involved in a fairly hard-core London criminal scene – a lot of it to do with drugs. Without the support of Smart I would be back in London and back to my old way of life, so thankfully I have stayed positive and persevered, listened to good advice and stuck with like-minded people. I know I now have a great deal to give back to the community and people in similar positions to myself.'



Donette, 43, completed the Access 2 programme last year and now has links with the social services' children and family teams. She is able to help those who are in the same position she was in a couple of years ago.

'Two years ago I was sitting in a cell. My kids had been taken away from me and I had just about lost hope. Smart sorted me out somewhere to live and things started to improve. It's still one day at a time, but I've won the kids back and feel like I'm alive again.'

For an ex-substance misuser with a criminal record, finding employment can be a daunting task. Prejudice, learning difficulties and confidence issues are just some of the demons they have to face. Darren Worthington tells **DDN** how Smart's Access 2 programme is helping people in Oxfordshire make the transition to work.

case manager sets a long-term goal that identifies three key options: education, training or mentorship. When the clients feel confident enough to start working, the team will identify local employers and help them to fill out application forms. If they want to continue their education, they will be able to access courses and training through Ruskin College in Oxford.

Another route from the programme is towards becoming a mentor, where clients can use their own experiences and additional training to support others in services throughout Oxfordshire. This has proved a successful part of the course, according to Worthington, and 27 out of 200 members of the mentoring programme have moved onto full-time employment during the three years that the programme has been running.

'Of the 200 [mentoring members] you have to appreciate that not everyone wants a job in the field. Some are just taking up the programme because they feel a social duty to offer something back before they finally move on.

'We encourage mentors to take clients out to the cinema and social events. At the moment it seems to be pool that they have brushed up on!'

Clients employed as mentors will have experience of a working environment – providing them with confidence and skills they can demonstrate to future employers.

Throughout the course a training facilitator is on site to offer tutorials and provide support for those having difficulty. Clients can also attend weekly learning support groups where they can discuss any difficulties with recent graduates. 'It's a confidence issue. They've been away from classrooms for about 20 years and just the thought of getting back into a learning environment scares them rigid. Having someone who's actually done the course can act as a motivator,' says Worthington.

Many of the clients have been accessing the service, as a means of support, for over a year. 'People are still coming back to see a caseworker because they feel they need it and we wouldn't close the door on anyone,' he adds.

The Access 2 programme is in partnership with Ruskin College and all courses are equivalent to NVQ level three. Everyone attending will need to have a basic standard of reading, writing and arithmetic. Those who are not yet ready for the courses can brush up through the classes that the college provides.

'Presently, we have placements in the drug support field but we are looking to extend that to other employers this year,' says Worthington. 'I'm also talking to the Open University at the moment about developing the NVQ further.'

According to Worthington, there is a community centre feel among the clients, with people free to come and use the facilities as they please. As well as the Access 2 courses there are many alternative therapies available such as reflexology and acupuncture. 'We are in a period of experimentation and it feels great. It's quite rare in the drugs field today that you've got a little freedom to experiment,' he says. 'I'm not going to rest on my laurels and say we've cracked it, but I think we're a little bit further down the road than most people.' **DDN**

Darren Worthington is chief executive of Smart.

The Access 2 programme covers the Oxfordshire region and is available to ex-substance misusers. For more information visit the website, www.smartcjs.org.uk



There's a group of kids on my estate who I'm convinced are trying to deal drugs to my son. Who should I go to for help? They're very intimidating and I'm frightened of the repercussions, but more than anything I'm worried for my son.
Kathy, by email

Frankie

Dear Kathy

I thought I would ask the government's well publicised 'Talk to Frank' website about your dilemma at www.talktofrank.com. This was their offering:

'FRANK understands this is a worrying time for you.

You may benefit from an in-depth confidential chat with an advisor about your concerns. Please feel free to phone the helpline to discuss your concerns with an advisor. The helpline is confidential and available 24 hours, seven days a week.

You may wish to search for free local help via the following link : www.talktofrank.com/multimap.aspx?id=278

If you want to know any more, or would like to talk to one of our advisors about this, call 0800 77 66 00 and tell them you've been asked to ring for more information. Alternatively, you can get more information at www.talktofrank.com Hope to talk to you again soon.' **FRANK**

I have to say I was disappointed at the standard automated response, but I'm passing it on in case you want to call them or follow the local link. Good luck,
Caitlyn, Stirling

My generation

Dear Kathy

I can understand your concern for your son but you have to be very careful about jumping to any conclusions. You say that you find these kids intimidating but you don't say in what way they are intimidating you. Is it possible that it is a generation

thing? Remember in the 1960s older people found hippies and lads with mop top haircuts intimidating!

You also say that you are convinced they are trying to deal drugs to your son, have you spoken to him about this? You seem to be implying that he has no choice in the matter when he obviously does; he has the ability to say no! The problem seems to be not with the kids on the estate but with the lack of communication between you and your son. He probably has a far better understanding of the situation than you give him credit for. Talk to him, he may surprise you.

Good luck
Jeremy, via email

Hanging around

Dear Kathy

I appreciate your dilemma; groups of young people hanging around can be intimidating even if they don't mean to be. I'm sure that hanging about on the estate is not their ideal thing to be doing but it is usually caused by boredom and a perception that there are no alternatives, and often lead to drug taking.

Have a look at what schemes and opportunities there are for young people in your area and maybe get involved in the running of one of them. If there aren't any maybe you could get together with some of the other residents and start one!

You have the power to take action in your area and be part of the solution. If you get involved and interact, and get to know these kids as people, you might no longer find them intimidating.

Raj, Milton Keynes

Reader's question

I run a house for four people recovering from Drug and Alcohol problems. They all attend treatment during the day and I offer support in the evenings. I would like to offer more help and in time work on the treatment side. The Organisation I work for have offered to put me through training. Could anyone advise me on the best route or suggest appropriate counselling courses to get me started?

Thank you

Chris Gibbons, by email

Email your suggested answers to the editor by Tuesday 20 February for inclusion in the 26 February issue.