



**Drug and alcohol users are finding help within their own community through RAPt's new day programme in Tower Hamlets. DDN went to see a service already in demand.**

➤ A stone's throw from the shiny sharp-suited thoroughfare of London's Canary Wharf, RAPt is celebrating the official opening of its Island Day Programme.

It's a brave move for the organisation, whose full name is The Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust, as for the last 14 years their work with drug users has been based in prisons. This is the first time they have set up a service within the community, and as RAPt chief executive Mike Trace points out, people have to turn up in a prison setting. The community programme depends on each individual's commitment.

'It's interesting to see whether people can go home, deal with problems, and still commit to this programme five days a week,' he says. 'First indications are good – and we're very excited about that.'

Councillor Judith Gardiner is only too aware of how much Tower Hamlets needed the service. Before entering local politics she was a probation officer and had difficulty finding places for clients. Services were directed at white heroin users, taking no account of the area's ethnic diversity, and alcohol services were very difficult to get hold of.

Measures like alcohol exclusion zones merely move problems on, says Cllr Gardiner. She welcomes services that will reach people and change their behaviour before they get entangled in the criminal justice system.

Tower Hamlets' DAT co-ordinator Gilly Cottew said the new day programme provided realistic options at last for those who could not contemplate rehab as a practical option. Many people, particularly in the Bangladeshi community, had strong family ties, and 'didn't find it appropriate to go halfway across the country', she said.

'It's important to say that there are other options other than residential treatment,' says RAPt senior manager, Dave Mulvaney. Along with Lifeline, based just around the corner, The Island Day

Programme aims to catch people in their net of services before they are pulled back into the criminal justice system.

But, as Mike Trace puts it, RAPt does not 'just parachute in'. Dave Mulvaney explains that the programme looks for 'a fundamental change in attitude and behaviour' from all those who become involved.

The drug free environment requires commitment to abstinence, he says, and participants are breathalysed or swab-tested to make sure they are drug and alcohol free within 48 hours. Then the serious work begins – gently at first, with motivational enhancement therapy and skills training to prepare them for treatment; then with 12 weeks of individual counselling, group therapy, life stories and embarking on steps one to three of the 12-step programme. Fellowship meetings with Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous and Marijuana Anonymous are an important part of the programme, particularly as clients move into their aftercare phase of support and relapse prevention.

Peer support and role models also play a vital part in the programme. Since it opened its doors to clients last October, the centre has welcomed and nurtured people of all ages and backgrounds, all of whom want to stay in their local community. Those who are relatively new to the programme tell of the support and inspiration they get from those who are further into recovery.

Ronnie, a smart young 32-year-old in a suit, has dropped into the centre on his way home from work in Carnaby Street, to be part of the official opening ceremony. He contacted the service five months ago because he had reached the stage of wanting to die. Addicted to drugs for more than 20 years, he realised he had hit rock bottom. 'I had no job and the bailiffs were banging on the door,' he says. 'I sellotaped up the letter box... my life was absolute hell.'

When his brother and then his best friend decided to seek help for their own addiction, they persuaded him to go to Narcotics Anonymous – who put him in touch with the Island Day Centre.

'When I came in I just cried,' says Ronnie. 'I couldn't do it anymore. I felt like a loose cannon. Staff said I was like a World War Two bomb, jumping around in water.'

The programme has not been easy, but it helped Ronnie get on course to change his life. He realised that he had 'kept doing the same things over again, expecting a different result'.

Now he's making progress, and although he's 'still crawling like a baby', Island has helped him to lay foundations to start living the rest of his life. 'Everyone here cares about you,' he says, which has helped him put new value on his life. 'We may suffer from the disease of addiction, but it doesn't make us any less worthy.'

Sarah had used crack and heroin for 15 years and been in and out of jail for eight years, before coming to Island. She had benefited from Clouds – 'a fantastic rehab' – on the suggestion of her counsellor at HMP Cookham, but realised when she emerged that she had no structure in her life.

Island filled the gap, helping her to integrate back into her community – an experience that Cathy is also now benefiting from. Approaching 50, and with 30 years of opiate use while she struggled to bring up her son, she had been 'slave to the chemist and the doctor' and describes her life a short time ago as torment.

She will have been 90 days 'clean' next week and says the most important achievement for her is being able to live in her old familiar neighbourhood, knowing she can be strong.

And so the stories of hope continue. Taz, a Bengali, was suicidal six months ago from nine years of coke and crack use.

# Bringing services to the door



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Chris had spent 14 of his 30 years on crack and heroin, reaching such a low point that 'going to prison saved my life'. Forty-six-year-old Charles found himself flung from a stable job and loving family by being introduced to crystal meth.

For each of these people, Island is proving to be the bridge back to their community, and to reality.

'It was OK being in rehab, but it was a cotton wool environment,' says Chris. 'Here the real work takes place... I'm finding out a lot about myself.'

Between the prison CARAT workers and the team at the Island Day Programme clients are being given the support they need to integrate back into society.

Ronnie is an inspiring example of someone coming out the other side. 'I have a job and responsibility. People look up to me at work. I'm about to go on holiday,' he says, as if he can hardly believe it himself. Considering he wanted to die just a short while ago, that's not a bad five months' work. **DDN**

For more information on RAPt's Island Day Programme, call 020 7538 0184 or email [info.island@rapt.org.uk](mailto:info.island@rapt.org.uk).

## Supportive ANSA for nurses

ANSA has supported nurses working in the substance misuse field for the past 23 years. Now, more than ever, the association plays a key role in representing the nurse's voice to decision-makers, as Malcolm Carr explains.

The Association of Nurses in Substance Abuse was formed in 1983 as an interest group for nurses working in drug and alcohol services. Many who work in the field now will have no memory of those dark (and sometimes heady) days as the field of substance abuse (as it was then called) moved care from the Regional DDUs (Drug Dependency Units) to the CDTs (Community Drug Teams) during the last 15 years of the twentieth century. Strange to think now that in those early years of ANSA's existence, many nurses worked in unsupported and isolated situations and, as a single professional organisation, ANSA was often the only support system available.

Reflecting on the last eight years we have seen the introduction of a Drug Czar, long term strategic planning, the development of the NTA and millions of pounds poured into services. None of this was conceivable in 1983. Services developed during the life of ANSA have indeed undergone many changes and have rapidly expanded.

Throughout its existence, ANSA members have discussed, supported and raised concerns about the way services have developed. Recent hot topics have been Nurse Prescribing, which ANSA has broadly supported (with an awareness that it is an area which needs ongoing development, both for individual practitioners within specialities and for the nursing profession as a whole) and the health agenda. For many nurses a real issue continues to be the need to keep the health of service users as high on the agenda as socio-economic issues, particularly in relation to the harms associated with alcohol and drug use. ANSA has always included tobacco in its scope.

One of the coming hot topics will be the role of the nurse and recognition of nurses as specialist practitioners within the field of substance misuse. Nurses are skilled

professionals who have a major contribution to make to the workforce and whether a mental health trained nurse or a general trained nurse, the contribution is a key and important one. As a professional group, nurses may not always have been very articulate at describing their contribution but are key players in the multi-disciplinary team. Because nurses train with a health remit, they are able to interject health needs into care in a different way to generic drug workers and counsellors. Those nurses who move into the substance misuse field, either from a psychiatric or general nurse background, are able to add a unique and disparate knowledge set into their role.

ANSA is a membership organisation; its officers are elected at an annual three-day conference and are unpaid. We welcome members from other disciplines as associate members but only nurse members have full voting rights.

We recognise that nurses no longer work in isolation and indeed ANSA recognises that as an organisation, it cannot stand in isolation – but we are unashamedly a nursing organisation, and will continue to be so. ANSA has over the years given input to the Department of Health, Home Office, NICE, NTA, ACMD, RCGP and many other working parties. In doing so we are able to speak directly to our membership and give them opportunity to feedback their thoughts to the corridors of power.

*The ANSA booklets which cover several different aspects of the nurses role in the field should be available (in PDF) on the ANSA web site which is due to be re-launched in a few weeks at [www.ansa.uk.net](http://www.ansa.uk.net). Watch this space for an announcement.*

**Malcolm Carr is vice chairman of ANSA. To enquire about membership, call 0870 241 3503 or email [ansa@profbriefings.co.uk](mailto:ansa@profbriefings.co.uk).**