

Winners of the Home Office's first annual Tackling Drugs Changing Lives awards collected their £10,000 prize from Drugs Minister Vernon Coaker and BBC news presenter Dermot Murnaghan on 23 May. An individual winner and winning team were chosen from 20 regional finalists in England and Wales. DDN talks to the winners.



➤ **David Gordon won the title of Drug Worker of the Year for his harm reduction work, running a mobile needle exchange from the Swaythling Clinic in Southampton.**

David Gordon's philosophy to 'hit issues head on as they come up, and not shy away from them' has characterised his harm reduction work in Southampton.

While working as prescribing co-ordinator for Tier 3 service New Road, he realised the needle exchange facility was neither adequate nor confidential. His response was to form a working

Best of the best



➤ **Marty Spittle was among the team from Cyswllt Ceredigion Contact, the Aberystwyth day service that won the title of National Drug Team of the Year. The service gives advice and support to drug users and their families.**

Since Cyswllt Ceredigion Contact was set up in 1992 by Gary Jones, who was himself in recovery, the service has aimed to be as accessible as possible to people who need help. The day service is free at the point of access, to remove barriers for those waiting to get funding, explains Marty Spittle, the service's business manager.

Now the eleven-strong team, which includes six clinicians, provides after-care and family services, as well as counselling, support and a drop-in facility. A recently won DIP contract gives contact with clients 'who perhaps wouldn't have contacted us before', she says.

Set in Aberystwyth, the service is used to dealing with people who are geographically and socially isolated, and helps them make the first step, Spittle explains. Winning three years' support

from the European Social Fund has helped them 'go global' with their online information service, which signposts people towards local services and gets others used to making contact, before they see somebody face to face.

Potential clients can get in touch with a counsellor via the website and 'talk' – with a webcam if they want to – in the hope they will come and make contact in person when they feel comfortable enough and sure of confidentiality.

Time is precious at the service, but they are committed to seeing people within ten working days at the longest. An initial half hour appointment will introduce clients to the kinds of support they need, whether it's help with housing, writing a letter to someone they owe money to – 'whatever reduces their chance of relapse' in many cases.

Winning the award has given momentum to an ambitious period for the team. They aim to create a second base in Cardigan, to save clients from travelling up to Aberystwyth; many are women who find it difficult to manage

group, which concluded that the needle exchange should become a stand-alone service – and from there he lobbied the DAT to tender for a needle exchange service in Southampton.

'I felt strongly that this had to be in the NHS, because we had the expertise and the professional departments that we could pull on to make it a quality service around infection control and wound care,' he says. His interest 'and the need to see it through' led him to apply for the job managing the needle exchange from Swaythling Clinic – and planning began in earnest.

Gordon set up the van for the mobile service, but says there were certain things he wanted to put in place before it hit the road. His first mission was to engage NHS colleagues in designing a patient group directive for distributing injectable water, to cut through the usual hassle familiar to anyone working in harm reduction.

Out on the road, the team then set about using word-of-mouth to let users know about the needle exchange, to circumvent the 'usual hostile reaction' from advertising through the general public. 'We wanted to get out there, find the users, and take it to the users,' he explains.

Cultivating trust between the

service and clients is vital to Gordon, who takes pains to explain issues of confidentiality to each new client. 'We were aware that lots of users who were in treatment were using on top, and that had been going on for years,' he says. 'So we felt it was a good idea to have a firewall of confidentiality that gave the client the option of telling us who they wanted to talk to and who they didn't want us to talk to.' This has worked well alongside a duty of care for exceptions, such as cases where clients might be suicidal, or pose a risk to the community.

Thorough planning has been key to an approach that's both proactive and responsive. Clients' phonecalls are directed straight to the van, which will come to exactly where they are – 'because the drug business is done very much on a serve-up basis, with drive-bys past phone boxes and on street corners'.

The user might call his dealer and arrange for him to meet him with some heroin in ten minutes; he then calls the mobile needle exchange, which 'has to be there in five, to get there before the dealer'.

Being this responsive has been hard work for the last three years, but there's plenty more in the pipeline. Gordon is in the process of expanding a partnership with the local working women's project,

and does outreach with streetworkers on a Thursday night.

He's involved in expanding the needle exchange's wound care service, and is planning to use his £10,000 prize money for a wound care room. Next on the list is a steroid users' clinic, which will keep records of steroid users and 'give the lads an MOT once a month, make sure things are working and they haven't got inflamed livers and so forth'.

Gordon is respected by service users who championed him for his award, and puts good communication down to the service's interpretation of harm reduction.

'We decided to stick to the UK Harm Reduction Alliance's interpretation of harm reduction as closely as possible,' he says, 'and that was about being non-judgmental. We don't coerce into treatment, we are involved through users' choice.'

'I'm not in the business of getting people clean and stopping people taking drugs – that's for other services. What we deal with is the frontline smack and crack users as they turn up, and the chaos they come with.'

It's an approach that's not only appreciated by service users who benefit, but by those who have judged Gordon's harm reduction work worthy of recognition. **DDN**

the practicalities of childcare, or getting back to pick up their children before the school day finishes.

Family work is a core part of the service, made a priority by director Maureen Fyffe. The group sessions are 'so powerful, there is so much pain', says Spittle, 'but you can see the release from people talking to one another'.

Judges picked out the team because they were impressed not just with the service, but the way in which they work alongside the NHS, Citizen's Advice Bureaux, social services, criminal justice, housing agencies and voluntary agencies to make sure drug users are in contact with the services they need.

Some of the prize money will go towards another counsellor, to keep step with the increase in referrals that has accompanied their success in making themselves increasingly accessible. **DDN**

Cyswllt Ceredigion Contact's website is at www.recovery.org.uk



Cyswllt Ceredigion Contact's winning clinical team (left to right): Susan Lee, support worker; Ivan Courtier, counsellor; Maureen Fyffe, director; Adam Weston, senior counsellor; and Annie Durrant, counsellor. The judges said they were an outstanding example of a service providing vital support and working well with other agencies, to provide the best possible service for drug misusers.

Runners Up

Regional individual winners:

East of England

Diane Barlow of Peterborough Community Drug Team

East Midlands

Andrea Fox of The Drop Inn project, Belper

London

Permindar Dhillon of the Drug and Alcohol Action Programme, Middlesex

North East

Sharyn Charlton of South Tyneside DAT

North West

Laura Brown of The Maden Children's Centre, Lancashire

South West

Andy Wright of Shaw Trust's Progress2Work

Wales

Bradley Fellows of West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

West Midlands

Noreen Oliver of the Burton Addiction Centre

Yorkshire and The Humber

Carol Darbyshire of Drug Sense

Regional team winners:

East of England

The Clockwise Centre, Essex

East Midlands

SPODA, Chesterfield

London

Health E1 Homeless Medical Centre, Tower Hamlets

North East

ESCAPE Family Support, Northumberland

North West

Addaction Cumbria Structured Day Care Team

South East

Brighton Oasis Project

South West

Gloucestershire Young People's Substance Misuse Service

West Midlands

The Manor Hotel, Walsall

Yorkshire and The Humber

Dads Against Drugs, Hull

The awards were judged by chief executives Martin Barnes of DrugScope; Vivienne Evans of Adfam; and Paul Hayes of the NTA.