

If I ruled the world

Chief executives of four voluntary sector providers started a debate on what's right and wrong with drug services.

Brian Arbery, Adapt:

'We've seen targets become an end in themselves.'

'Further treatment through more funding is the answer, not a postcode lottery.'

Ian Wardle, Lifeline:

'There is chronic short-termism. We are driven by short-term contracts.'

'The NTA is in a very difficult position. Part of the problem is that society approves of alcohol and disapproves of drugs.'

Karen Biggs, Phoenix Futures:

'Service providers and prison staff might have different cultures but we all need to work together for mutually beneficial ends.'

'Care pathways focus on community into prison and not very much the other way around.'

Mike Trace, RAPt:

'More long-term drug intervention programmes are needed, and they should be organised in a strategic way. Let's have one person whose job it is to oversee all the services in their area.'

'What we should be reviewing is whether our services are any good.'

DDN conference reporting team: Claire Brown, David Gilliver and Ian Ralph.

Web reports recording all sessions at the NOMS conference, including workshops, will be available from 12 November at www.drinkanddrugsnews.com

A mile in your shoes...

When DIP worker Iain Evans was asked to take part in a job swap with a CARATS worker, he thought 'how hard can it be?' Two months in Vicky Jones' job changed his tune – and that of his job swap partner.



Talking about their experiences on the pilot, both participants felt it had shaken their preconceptions to the core. More to the point, it had given them an appreciation of how things work 'on the other side' and given them building blocks for more effective working practices and better co-ordination of care.

Back to day one, and Evans said he jumped at the idea: 'I thought what could be easier? All your clients are under one roof. I thought there'll just be a few forms to fill in, then a referral to DIP. The reality – nowhere to hold a confidential conversation and an avalanche of paperwork – soon began to hit home.

He was also stressed by clients' expectations. 'Not all clients are willing participants, but they think CARAT workers can perform miracles,' he said. 'They're not happy when you give them a form before you can do anything for them. They vent their frustration when their needs aren't met.'

Another eye-opener was the amount of drugs circulating within prison: 'I woke up to the fact when someone asked me for a second detox because they were using every day.'

CARAT worker Vicky Jones thought it would be easy on DIP, driving around visiting people who were expecting it. But it wasn't. 'I was looking for non-existent addresses, arranging appointments to find they were not in when I arrived. In two days I'd seen no clients!'

Her vision that her turn as a DIP worker would mean

'a couple of calls, and then the job would be done' descended, in reality, into a catalogue of frustrations. 'It was difficult to place people,' she said. 'One person was barred from every hostel and had an ASBO for the city centre where the treatment centres were. I got him sorted – but when I checked up a couple of weeks later, he hadn't been to a single appointment!'

She experienced the disorientation of deadlines that shifted without warning. 'I thought getting an EDR [Earliest Date of Release] meant there was plenty of time. But HDC [tagging], days back, early release and appeals can disrupt the whole timescale,' she found. 'I had to chase around trying to get someone a methadone script who about to be released.'

Jones also thought it would be plain sailing to get clients into services when they left prison, but was tripped up by waiting lists, uncertainty of whether or not they showed up – and if they did, whether they were still motivated to participate once they were outside.

So was the job swap a useful exercise, despite its frustrations? 'Yes, very valuable,' they both agreed. 'I'd advise anyone to do a job swap, I can now appreciate what CARATs face,' said Evans.

'Having now seen situations first hand, I can pass on information more accurately and with more confidence,' added Jones. 'I shared this with my team so they can gain from my experience – and I know I won't be so hasty to judge!'