

7 minute briefing: Supporting people with drug & alcohol misuse

For all those working with adults, children and families

Read Alex's story below about recovering from illicit drug use, as part of Recovery Month

Visit www.walthamforest.gov.uk/strategicpartnerships for other useful resources

01 ALEX

I'm in my late 40s and I've been temporarily housed in Waltham Forest by Newham Council. A lot of my support networks are in Newham but I've slowly got used to being here now.

I've been seeing my CGL Waltham Forest worker since March 2020.

07 WHAT CAN YOU DO IN YOUR ROLE?

REFER to CGL

CGL Waltham Forest continues to offer a service for all adults, young people and families needing treatment or support for alcohol and drug use.

Adults: [online referral form](#) or 0203 826 9600

Young people: 0203 404 1098 or email walthamforestyp@cgl.org.uk

WATCH the [bitesize video guide on professional curiosity](#)

TAKE UP FREE TRAINING for professionals

Contact Tiana Allen Tiana.Allen@cgl.org.uk for dates or to arrange a bespoke session to meet the needs of your staff

READ and obtain conversation prompts and information on how to [give advice to people around alcohol and drugs](#)

BECOME A LEAD for substance misuse or making every contact count.

Contact laura.davidson01@walthamforest.gov.uk for more information

06 REACHABLE MOMENTS

Communication and recognition of an issue are essential. It is clear from Alex's story that had they received more information and advice of support services available from the offset that their drug use may not have developed to dependency levels as services would have explored factors contributing to their criminal activities and a plan put in place to minimise the risks.

Recently the quality of referrals (people referred who then go on to engage in treatment) has increased from the criminal justice system and this is down to strong links, regular contact and positive working relationships.

It can feel daunting to start a conversation with someone about their drug or alcohol use. We encourage you to attend CGL's free training which covers a range of topics and aims to help professionals feel more confident delivering basic drug and harm reduction awareness to those with substance misuse issues.

05 WHAT'S GOING ON FOR ME NOW?

I've been sober for 6 months now. I'm maintaining my temporary tenancy. I'm starting to make contact with family, including my children that I lost contact with. I've started a course to learn some new skills that I hope will get me back into work.

I take each day as it comes and some days are much harder than others. I've learnt strategies that help me to cope though and there are support groups that I'm part of via CGL that are also a big help. I really wouldn't have believed this 6 months ago, but the future's actually looking bright!

02 ALEX'S STORY

My past experiences are quite painful. I grew up in a single parent household with very little. Growing up on the poverty line meant that getting into crime was 'normal'. I had my 3 children very young and despite working, I often struggled to even afford to feed them.



In my mid 20s I decided to start selling Class A drugs to get money to support my family. At the time I'd experimented with cannabis and had no issues so I thought this would be fine and no major problem. Shortly afterwards I started snorting cocaine and using other stimulants to help me keep up with everything. And then in my late 30s I tried heroin. And it just carried on.

03 THE WIDER CONTEXT

Having a drug habit and being involved in the criminal justice badly affected my personal relationships. I did 'sofa surfing' for ages and often had to live on the streets which was tough. Being referred to drug services was a lifeline at the time as by then I'd developed a dependency on opiates.

It wasn't until I started engaging in treatment that my recovery coordinator at the time started to address the social aspects that were affecting my successful recovery. We explored my housing, education/training/employment and benefits which I had never been able to do on my own. Had it not been for service involvement I'm pretty sure I would still be rough sleeping today or maybe much worse.

I think there were lots of missed opportunities for me to get treatment earlier. Being heavily involved with the criminal system from a young age, it wasn't until I started using heroin that opiate replacement therapies and referrals onto to drug services was explored with me.

04 WHAT SUPPORT DID CGL PROVIDE?

I started treatment at the beginning of the pandemic and my whole experience with the Waltham Forest drug service was positive. It felt supportive, joined-up and focused on my needs'. I was triaged, assessed and started on a course of substitute medication without delay.

Even though I've only had telephone sessions this support has been so important to my journey of recovery.

I feel like the partnership working with probation & my housing officer as well as being referred to the Criminal Justice Project, food banks and charity clothing services has helped me to maintain my recovery, especially as I was new to the borough and had limited connections here.

Substance misuse is only one aspect of a person's struggles. Without taking an all round, holistic treatment approach the battle for us service users will always continue.