

Drug Use and Health

DRUG TREATMENT and a holistic package of support is the most effective way of tackling drug misuse and reducing drug-related crime. This is achieved by helping users to get off and stay off illegal drugs. Treatment should be tailored to meet an individual's needs.

Many drug users are not registered with G.P's when they first come into contact with DIP and drug treatment agencies. Good links with G.P's are important throughout sports programmes for general healthcare provision.

The blood born virus training given to coaches was important to ensure the health and safety of coaches and service users.

"There appear to be marked improvements in patients' appearance and mood associated with a decrease in drug use when they become actively involved in the football programme."

Clinical Director, Bridge View Drug Treatment Service

Some service users reported a decline in drug use and a number expressed a wish to be drug free.

"Some of our partners' management were reluctant to acknowledge sport as a real treatment option. The huge positive feedback from both clients and staff has begun to change these perceptions and even some of our medical colleagues are now asking 'why can't we roll it out to all clients.'" Drugs Worker, Darlington

Sport and physical activity provide added value to current treatment programmes and are an important element that should be included within care plans.

"The lads who have been taking part in the coaching have come back in saying 'I didn't half sleep well after the football on Fridays' and 'I don't half feel better about myself – like I've done a bit'." Drugs Worker, Middlesbrough

The GENERAL HEALTH of drug users suffers as a result of dependency. Blood borne viruses, mental health problems, weight loss, fatigue, disturbed sleep patterns and other problems are commonplace. Improvement in some aspects of health can take a long time to achieve.

Following involvement in the sports programmes 64% of drug users reported feeling fitter, 63% felt healthier and 44% reported improvements in sleep.

The sports initiative also impacted on service users' sense of well-being with 57% reporting that they felt happier whilst 48% said that they felt less stressed.

45% said that they were continuing with other sports after the programmes had finished.

“This scheme enabled the service users to get involved in an activity that promoted their health both physically, mentally and emotionally. Some participants continued with a healthier lifestyle after the competition had finished by going for daily morning jog whilst some attempted to stop smoking and one individual stopped altogether.” Drugs Worker, North Tyneside.

Drug users commonly have very LOW SELF ESTEEM and little desire for self-care. Low self-esteem is a barrier to entry and progress in drug treatment and this needs to be addressed by treatment services.

The initiative found that there was a positive impact on service users’ self-esteem, with 56% reporting feeling more confident, 52% more positive and 46% feeling proud of their achievement.

“It builds your confidence up, it helps keep you motivated and busy, it’s dangerous being bored.” Service User, Durham

It also impacted on peoples’ appearance and cleanliness and gave them the opportunity to socialise outside of the world of drugs.

“A lot of clients want to be more active. Boredom and lack of self-esteem, self-belief and self-confidence are a major factor in their problems. The drug is an issue but in many cases not the source of their problems. Their problem is their mental health and the environment around them.” Key Worker, Durham

“With sport it engages your body and your mind. You’re giving them something to think about as well as giving them physical activity as well. I think if you feel better physically you feel better mentally – and if you feel better about yourself, you feel positive.” Student Coach, Northumbria University

Poor DIET & NUTRITION are well-recognized problems among drug users. Nutritional and dietary advice should be provided at all stages and tiers of drug treatment.

Following involvement in the sports programmes 41% of drug users reported eating better.

“It makes you feel better about yourself. You begin to sleep and eat properly and this makes you feel normal. It makes you think you’ve done something worthwhile, it’s good.” Service User, Durham.

The initiative can be used as a means of encouraging diet awareness and improving healthy living. This can be incorporated into service users’ care plans.

Education about diet can be done by providing fruit every week at training and at the tournaments. This ensures that service users are getting dietary requirements which they usually miss out on.

“The universities have said that we could possibly go in during the morning for some sports tasters and then have lunch at the university where they get dieticians to come and to show how you take a bit of pasta, a tin of tomatoes and a chicken breast and make a very good meal out of it. It might cost 50p instead of going to McDonalds where you’re spending £3.50.” Key Worker, Durham