

Lifeline Charity challenges UK drug law inconsistency

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Manchester Lifeline, an organisation which helps drug users, including many who are homeless, has plans for the distribution of injecting "kits" to drug users which leaves workers in danger of prosecution and possible jail sentences. The intention of Lifeline in supplying these kits is to minimise the risk of infection, in particular, HIV and Hepatitis C.

The boxes are designed to reduce the risk of infection and accidental death for injecting drug users. They contain a sterile heroin "cooker", filters, citric acid, water, hygiene wipes, nightlight and a box of matches. Needles and tourniquets would be provided separately. The provision of such equipment is prohibited under section 9a of the Misuse of Drugs Act:

- Supplying or offering to supply articles (other than a hypodermic syringe) for the purpose of administering a controlled drug, where the administration of the drug will be unlawful; and
- Supplying or offering to supply articles to be used in the preparation of a controlled drug for unlawful purposes.

The distribution of water for injections is also prohibited under the Medicine's Act (1968) unless it is under prescription. The key message is that supply of equipment for drug use is illegal.¹

In some parts of the country, the distribution of equipment such as citric acid has been taking place with the consent of local police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The supply of needles and syringes in efforts to minimise the harm injecting drug users do to themselves is undermined by the sharing of other equipment and the use of alternative substances such as lemon juice or kettle de-scaler in preparation. This situation is a frustration to frontline agencies working with substance misusers in tackling the avoidable health issues and deaths. The government's Home Affairs Select Committee has called for a change in the

law surrounding drug-taking equipment.

Kevin Flemen, Acting Chief Executive of Release, argues that the Government must address inconsistencies in the law and in prosecutions under the law: "The existing laws need to be overhauled as they are riddled with inconsistencies. It is unfortunate that the government response to revising paraphernalia laws has been so slow and cost so many lives that agencies feel obliged to work at the margins of the law to bring about change.

It is utterly ridiculous that shops on the high street openly sell paraphernalia for cannabis use and yet trained and experienced staff within organisations working with drug users are being threatened with prosecution for the supply of kits which save lives."

Emma Daniel of VHG comments: "It is unhelpful to compare this case with that of the 'Cambridge Two' as many voluntary sector publications have done. Lifeline has not yet done anything which breaks the law and they are clear about the route they are taking in trying to put pressure on the government for a revision of the current legislation. Hostels and projects supporting drug users should have a clear and legal drugs policy and staff trained to work within it - where this is the case projects should have no fears on the outcome of this challenge.

I would urge members to ensure that they are working within the law and whilst I sympathise with the motives of Manchester Lifeline I cannot advocate that organisations risk the prosecution of their employees as a means to bring about change."

*¹References: Injecting Equipment and Sharps Bins (2002) Kevin Flemen
www.ixion.demon.co.uk*



Newsinbrief

Young homeless people at greater risk of poor mental health

The Mental Health Foundation have launched a report 'The Mental Health Needs of Homeless Young People' (2002) which states that people living in bed & breakfast accommodation are eight times more likely and rough sleepers are eleven times more likely to suffer mental health problems than the general population. The report calls for greater inter-agency co-operation, early interventions and more specialist services for young people.

Supporting Ex-Offenders

'Not just bricks and mortar: the housing support needs of offenders and ex-offenders in Suffolk' is a report commissioned by Suffolk Supporting People and Suffolk Area Probation Service. They found that there is a lack of housing and support services for ex-offenders and in particular those with mental health or substance misuse needs. Further research is to be carried out into the support needs of black and minority ethnic offenders. For copies of this report contact the Suffolk Supporting People team on 01473 583404.

Big Issue Foundation gets Creative ID

Creative ID is an arts organisation based in Norwich which works with socially excluded people to provide access and opportunities in the practice of the visual arts. The organisation has worked with St. Martin's Housing Trust and the Big Issue Foundation. Running from 29th October to 6th January at the Norwich Playhouse is an exhibition of art produced on a six month project with participants from the Big Issue Foundation. For more details of the exhibition and the work that Creative ID do contact Alan Reid (Co-ordinator) on 07909 647314.

Newsinbrief

Six years of Jimmy's jaunts

One of the annual highlights for the guests (oh yes, and volunteers and staff too!) at Jimmy's nightshelter in Cambridge is Jimmy's 'Jaunt'. For the last few years, staff member Pete Cornish has undertaken the huge task of organising a sponsored walk to fully pay for guests to spend a day out at a theme park – and then organising the Jaunt itself. On each occasion Revelations restaurant in Newmarket has provided the most delicious lunch spread, so providing even more incentive for everyone to join in. This year 27 walkers plus Toby the dog and baby Chance, safely ensconced in his pushchair, left Jimmy's heading resolutely towards Biggin Abbey just outside Cambridge, with the promise of lunch on arrival.

So far there have been six Jimmy's Jaunts: around 400 guests, volunteers and staff of Jimmy's, Emmaus and the Newmarket Open Door project, have headed off for days of fun and adventure at a number of theme parks including Thorpe Park, Chessington, Alton Towers and Pleasurewood Hills.

There are just too many wonderful memories to cover them all here, but just a few highlights:

Jimmy's guest Arthur was in a wheelchair – he had so many rides as his

fellow day-trippers discovered that you could go to the front of the queue when accompanying a less-abled friend.

One guest was heard to say that he gets really ill travelling and even Group 4 don't like taking him anywhere.

In 2000, more physically and mentally draining than any adventure park, was spending six hours on a coach without air-conditioning – on the hottest day of the year.

One staff member, who received hefty soakings on the various log flumes this year, has already started on 'operation keep dry' for 2003.

After a deep sleep in the coach, one guest awoke at Thorpe Park and thought he had magically been transported there.

Spot prizes are (not) awarded for the guests who forget the time or lose their way and almost cause the coach to leave for home half empty – funnily enough, it's nearly always the same guests who win these.

Plans are already underway for the 2003 walk and Jaunt. Everyone is looking forward to Pete finding another picturesque route, and then hunting down the scariest rides. Of course, there are always those who prefer the swan pedaloos....

Richard Howlett, Nightshelter Manager



Guests, volunteers and staff at the beginning of the walk in 2000

Taking Stock

Whilst neither magical nor a mystery, the Housing Directorate's tour for new staff, councillors, and tenant representatives was a success. Entitled Taking Stock, the bus tour looked at housing management issues, combined heat and power (CHP) technology, the work of the Community Wardens, empty properties, and new housing association developments. The bus journeyed through Mile Cross and Earlham. The Community Wardens were established at the end of July 2001 and the 17 Wardens operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. To date, they have dealt with nearly 6,000 incidents, including getting emergency repairs carried out; helping to resolve neighbourhood disputes; carrying out residential checks and marking property. Tasked with reducing crime and the fear of crime, the Wardens undergo an approved SITO (Security Industry Training Organisation) course as well as training in first aid, use of fire extinguishers, management of aggression and dealing with drugs paraphernalia before taking to the streets. In the afternoon, briefing sessions were lead by



Stuart Mudie, Kevin Marshall, David Jones, and Jenny Surey. Over 40 people attended for discussions on the latest Housing Strategy, the Bed & Breakfast Action Plan, the Housing Investment Programme and the Department's restructuring. Representatives from Orbit HA, Broadland HA, Cotman HA, and VHG also contributed to the day's proceedings. The tour emphasised the dedication of staff, councillors, and residents to Norwich's housing issues. Adam Banham, Norwich City Council.

VHG receive ProHelp

ProHelp is a national network of professional firms each of which have offered to provide professional and strategic support, free of charge, to voluntary and community groups in their local area.

The firms undertake one-off projects which can include feasibility studies, structural surveys, marketing and business plans, legal and accountancy advice and property valuations. The guiding principle of ProHelp is that members' approach this sort of work in the same way as they would any fee-paying customers.

VHG requested that ProHelp provided some immediate help with IT which had been causing VHG various problems and to provide us with a longer term development plan to enable VHG to fundraise to improve the IT. Frances Holmes arranged for Stephen Williams to provide VHG with some consultancy and some immediate trouble shooting.

■ Stephen Williams, Alizian
"I was asked to volunteer with this scheme by Gary Towers, Deputy Regional Director of ProHelp. I have never volunteered before but I have experience in the public sector and an understanding of the problems faced by organisations in the voluntary sector. I run my own IT business which means that I have the time to volunteer and can be available during office hours. I have now assisted 4 schemes through ProHelp including VHG.

The main ways in which I can help

organisations is in SOS calls when they hit problems with their IT which need immediate assistance in order to continue their day to day work and in helping organisations decide what their needs are in terms of IT development for

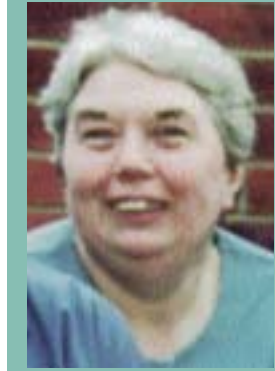
funding bids. In most cases organisations know where they need to be but the voluntary sector seems to be the poor relation in terms of IT and is in need of more funding. I get personal satisfaction from helping voluntary organisations maximise their funding for IT by assisting with drawing up development plans with managers."

■ Frances Holmes, ProHelp
"We have a very 'down to earth' approach. When an organisation contacts us to request professional help I will usually come out and meet with the manager to talk through their requirements and what we can offer face to face. In my experience often perceived needs can be different to actual needs and I can use my business experience to help identify what help is required. The message I really want to underline is that managers ask – we will be able to inform them quickly whether or not we can help. Organisations do not have to jump through hoops to get assistance, all that is required is to complete a brief and simple application form which can be completed when I visit if necessary."



Pictured left to right: Stephen Williams, Frances Holmes and Joan Kinnings-Smith.

Tribute to Margaret Cross



Few people who knew her will not know by now of Margaret Cross's untimely death at the end of June this year.

VHG and its members, possibly more than many other organisations will feel a great loss.

It would be difficult to guess how many people's lives Margaret touched in the course of her time working at VHG. I'm sure many saw her, as I did, as the constant, the bedrock of the organisation. What ever your business Margaret would be there to welcome you and ensure that you were looked after, she was never too busy that you would be bypassed. To staff she was all you would want of a colleague and friend, to the members she was the trusty support we all depended on. Most importantly to the clients of VHG she was the motherly soul who greeted each newcomer and who relentlessly, without judgement, provided a shoulder to those longer term ones.

Margaret retired from VHG towards the end of 2000 to spend more time with her daughter and grandchildren to whom she was devoted. She didn't however give up caring or being interested in what we were all doing. She kept in touch with many of us and always championed the cause of supporting the homeless whenever the opportunity arose. She didn't even completely give up work, as she became a willing and much welcomed locum to the night Shelter and latterly Bishopbridge House. Naturally there is sadness that Margaret died so young and without spending the anticipated time with her family, however it is her life that we will remember her for and that I know will give reason for many, many people to be glad.

VHG Board Member.

Training Dates

FIRST AID FOR
FRONT LINE WORKERS
17/09/02 09.30-13.30
Norwich Trainer: St. Johns Ambulance

INTRODUCTION TO ADVOCACY
25/09/02 09.30-16.30
Norwich Trainer: Ann Beattie

MANAGING DIFFICULT PEOPLE
02/10/02 09.30-16.30
Norwich Trainer: Maggie Wheeler

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING
07/10/02 & 08/10/02 09.30-16.30
Norwich Trainer: Brian Walker

BASIC DRUGS AWARENESS
22/10/02 09.30-16.30
Norwich Trainer: Simon Floyd

INTRODUCING SUPERVISION
30/10/02 09.30-16.30
Norwich Trainer: Maggie Wheeler

MANAGEMENT OF
AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE
08/11/02 09.30-16.30
Norwich Trainer: Bob Banham

VHG AGM

16TH OCTOBER 2002

VENUE: ST CATHERINE'S CHURCH
HALL, MILE CROSS, NORWICH.

SPEAKER KEVIN MARSHALL,
NORWICH CITY COUNCIL

11.30 - 12.30

FOLLOWED BY A FREE BUFFET

FURTHER INFO
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING
OUR TRAINING OR A TRAINING BROCHURE,
PLEASE PHONE KERRY ON 01603 617299.

ADDITIONAL COURSES
IF THERE IS A NEED FOR A COURSE AND
WE CAN ATTRACT DELEGATES WE WILL
ENDEAVOUR TO ARRANGE IT IF YOU MAKE
US AWARE OF THE NEED.
WE CAN ALSO ARRANGE "IN HOUSE"
COURSES FOR YOUR STAFF FOR A SMALL
FEE ADDED TO THE COST OF THE TRAINER.
VHG IS WILLING TO HELP YOU SOLVE YOUR
PROBLEMS AROUND STAFF DEVELOPMENT
AND IF WE CANNOT HELP YOU WE WILL
FIND SOMEONE WHO CAN.

Maintaining Independence

Norwich City Council surveyed clients, housing officers and support workers on their satisfaction with the 'floating support' scheme. Floating Support is a scheme designed for people to live independently whilst receiving support. The support, depending on the individual's needs, can include assistance with completing forms, budgeting advice, or crisis management and intervention. Agencies, such as Julian Housing, are contracted to provide support workers for new and existing Norwich City Council tenants. The rules of the new Government initiative named Supporting People allows the service to be paid for via transitional housing benefit.

Recent questionnaires to people with Floating Support tenancies revealed the scheme to be working successfully. A tenant wrote, "I've had some problems in the past and I feel I am making good progress with the continued help of my support worker. I really enjoy having my flat and



Workers from Julian Housing Support in a conference

the responsibilities that come with it." The vast majority of tenants agreed Floating Support helped combat rent arrears, solve neighbour disputes, and maintain properties.

Surveys of caring agency support workers and Norwich City Council housing officers revealed methods to further improve the service to tenants. A formal procedure is being written to enable housing officers to identify tenants who, potentially, need Floating Support. Training to further the knowledge housing staff have of the various caring agencies is being planned. From September the reorganisation of the Council Area Housing Management service will be complete, allowing the improved operation of Floating Support. The partnership between the caring agencies and Council continues to evolve as well; guidelines are being set for the sharing of non-confidential, tenancy related, information with housing officers.

From Julian Housing:

Julian Housing has provided support to people with mental health problems since the early nineties. Until now this type of support has been available primarily for tenants of housing association tenants. Supporting people has 'levelled the playing field' enabling Julian Housing Support to work with Local Authorities and their tenants.

Our experience is that tenants really appreciate this type of flexible support which enables them to establish and maintain their independence.

Adam Banham NCC

A day in the life of...

I have worked in the past for Housing Associations and Local Authorities and I am now working in the voluntary sector as Residential Services Development Manager for YMCA Norfolk. Having experienced working in housing from many angles, I find that the fast moving adaptability of a voluntary body is exciting. I manage a range of work that the YMCA carries out, including providing outreach support to asylum seekers in the county on behalf of Social Services and running tenancy support schemes in several areas.

Most days I will see at least one member of staff for a supervision meeting. The nature of our work is such that staff hear harrowing tales of what both asylum seekers and tenancy support clients have had to endure in the past. Therefore a very necessary part of my day is allowing staff the opportunity to debrief and offload some of this, and help them to balance their workload and priorities.

I am based at the YMCA's corporate offices in Trowse, very near to Norwich, but will

normally spend at least some of the day at our 90 bed hostel in St. Giles, or seeing staff in King's Lynn or Great Yarmouth. Since the change to the homelessness legislation we are setting up a supported lodging project for young people on behalf of Great Yarmouth Borough Council. This exciting new work is funded by the Homeless Directorate and brings

me to Great Yarmouth several times a week.

The floating support scheme has made such a positive impact on the lives of our clients in Norwich that we are expanding this work over the county.

As part of the senior management team of YMCA I am involved on some level in all work and I am very proud of the diversity of our role in the county. We recognise that putting a roof over someone's head alone doesn't solve all their problems. One of the best things about my work for the YMCA is that we are free to address the bigger picture rather than just housing.

Angela Harper – YMCA

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VHG

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