



Local charity Swanswell maps the way forward for drug users

An innovative new 'personal map' out of drugs, piloted by drugs charity Swanswell, has been given the thumbs up by an influential national health body. The new tool for drug workers to help drug-using clients was endorsed by the influential National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) at a conference on 18 February.

Originally developed in the United States, the Swanswell project was part of a UK-wide programme sponsored by the NTA involving 2500 service users in Manchester, London and Birmingham. Clients were found to have better contact with services and higher levels of participation; more motivation for treatment and better support among their peers.

In its study, the NTA showed that this visual technique – which enables drug workers to represent their clients' thinking in a series of personal maps – improves the engagement and motivation of drug users, a crucial factor in their successful treatment and recovery. The NTA is now recommending Swanswell's innovative approach as part of the suite of interventions – or 'talking therapies' – that are available as a proven techniques for improving treatments for drug mis-users.

Sian Battle-Welch is Team Manager with Swanswell and based in Birmingham. Her service piloted the mapping exercise through its Birmingham Treatment Effectiveness Initiative (BTEI), which currently uses maps to visually represent the clients' journey through treatment.

Sian described how this approach greatly improves treatment and momentum into the recovery and strengthens the bond between client and keyworker:

*"When a client's needs are represented like this, treatment can be managed more effectively. Mapping isn't a new technique but we've introduced more systematic approach when we see them first so we can detail a client's past and present circumstances. This shows them and us just how far they've come and what further challenges they might face. **It encourages clients to get more involved in their care and treatment and they continue to remain in services.**"*

"Personal maps provide a new opportunity for clients to reflect, mentally and physically, and become a real aid for clients and staff here."

Sian feels strongly that the motivation of both staff and clients has increased greatly and that the improvements brought about by BTEI have dovetailed into all their services:

“I’m bowled over by the evidence. This approach creates a new space for exploring problems and solutions and this can apply to other areas - alcohol, diversity, harm reduction – we’re using it to join up services and are much more efficient in transferring clients between these services.”

Chief Executive of Swanswell Debbie Bannigan said:

“I am delighted that our work has been singled out by the National Treatment Agency. Our staff work with people experiencing problems and difficulties with their drug use, to help them find positive ways of overcoming its harmful effects on their lives, relationships and personal health. The success of treatment like this shows that Swanswell is at the forefront of treating some of the most vulnerable people in our community.”