

Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

Case Study: Cuckooing, Coercion and Control

Background

Concrete's Changing Futures Case Co-ordinator Charlotte has supported George* for the past seven weeks. George is a vulnerable 38-year-old man with learning difficulties. He was independently managing his own Stoke-on-Trent City Council tenancy for around a decade before being referred to Changing Futures earlier this year following a section 42 safeguarding assessment.

A section 42 enquiry relates to the duty of the Local Authority to make enquiries, or have others do so, if an adult may be at risk of abuse or neglect. This happens whether or not the authority is providing any care and support services to that adult.

About three years ago George was introduced to 'monkey dust' (*psychoactive substance*) and quickly became addicted. He had no history of drug use other than his monthly anti-psychotic depo injection that he received for his schizophrenia. As a result of the drug addiction he stopped looking after himself, rarely showered, stopped eating properly and didn't dress well. This prompted concerns around self-neglect.

Alongside this, George's neighbours started to complain about visitors to his flat. It turned out that George was being coerced and controlled by drug dealers who were taking advantage of his vulnerabilities and using his flat as if it was their own.

When George received his benefit payments each week, dealers would follow him to the bank and take his money from him. He was left with £50 a week for his bills and food. Very often George would have no money to feed himself, so he'd beg and borrow from other people, including friends and family. This caused close relationships to break down which isolated George even more. He was very much alone and under the control of others.

What we did

Seven weeks ago, George was referred to Changing Futures and allocated his Case Co-ordinator, Charlotte. She tried to track him down for three weeks, but he was never at home. He was scared to be there and would rather sleep rough on the streets to avoid the dealers. When Charlotte finally found him at his flat, he was skinny and looked very unwell. She introduced herself and asked if she could help him. He said, 'yes please.'

Following this first meeting, things moved very quickly. Charlotte worked hard with her team at Changing Futures to secure George a stay in a hotel. Due to the visitors at his flat he was likely to lose his home - he was at risk of homelessness if he stayed there.

Charlotte secured food and clothes for George and left him to stay at the hotel. When she returned the next day, he'd washed, dressed in new clothes and ate properly for the first time in two weeks. He was beaming from ear to ear and kept thanking her for her help.

Despite this positive start, Charlotte was aware that George had tried to leave the lifestyle before but ended up returning after just a week. She knew things had to be done differently this time, so she worked quickly to put those steps in place.

Charlotte got in touch with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and arranged for George's property to be boarded up and the locks changed. George was adamant that he didn't want to return to his home or that lifestyle, so she made sure it wasn't an option.

Outcomes:

George started to quickly reengage with CDAS (local drug and alcohol service). He started learning how to say no to monkey dust and worked on coping mechanisms. In the seven weeks since Charlotte started working with George, he's only taken monkey dust twice, which she says is 'massive for him'. Now his social worker is also looking into rehab or a detox, which George is happy to do.

George now has good peer support in place and regularly attends an Expert Citizens community hub (on a daily basis). He's been on an organised coach trip to Blackpool and is enjoying social activities. George is keen to keep himself busy, so Charlotte will be working with him to find voluntary work and activities that he can get involved in.

George is also working on rebuilding relationships that he lost due to his former lifestyle. He's in contact with his siblings and has even been to see his mum, who has dementia. She encouraged him to continue his new path and he told her, 'I'll be OK – I've got Charlotte now.'

The biggest barrier for George is his housing. As he was so coerced by drug dealers there is a worry that they will find him wherever he goes. George is vulnerable so Charlotte is hoping to secure him some supported accommodation, which can offer him additional support alongside Changing Futures. This will be the next step in George's journey.

Charlotte says it's a long road ahead for George, with lots of work still to be done, but she's proud of him and his progress. This is the longest that anyone has been able to successfully engage with him and it's all down to the enthusiasm, resources and partnerships that Changing Futures provides.

*name changed to provide anonymity