

Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

CASE STUDY Dual diagnosis & GP shared systems

Background

'Customer A' experienced trauma due to bereavement and sexual/physical assault which resulted in poor mental health. They ruminated about their past experiences and the people who had harmed them and their family. They had a previous heroin addiction and were receiving daily scripts but were using other substances which could result in them being aggressive.

They had numerous prior convictions and were well known to the police and had been supported by services for years. The customer had lost their property due to it being hijacked by associates and had been rough sleeping for several weeks. Services were coordinated around the customer and it became apparent that poor mental health was the priority concern and if this could be addressed then substance misuse and reoffending could be reduced and eventually cease.

On release from custody it became apparent their mental health had worsened and we attempted to take them to MH services but they absconded. Police were called to inform them that the customer was at risk due to poor MH and they were picked up by the police two days later under the influence and taken to the MH services. Changing Futures were informed that a bed had been found while the customer 'sobered up' and a discharge meeting was called by the hospital for three days hence. At the discharge meeting the focus was on substance misuse and we advocated on the customers behalf. The customer was quite abusive in this meeting towards their service coordinator as they blamed them for them being detained, but we were able to influence the MH practitioners to keep the customer on the ward for another week. At the next discharge meeting the customer had been titrated from their medication and medication was changed. Stay was extended another week and then at the following discharge meeting we were informed that the customer was being detained under the Mental Health Act Section 3 and they remained in hospital for six weeks in total. On discharge the customer was able to realise that they had suffered from many delusions and that these were not true.

Customers goals and aspirations

- To obtain a property close to family.
- To be free from substances to keep themselves and family safe.
- For family to be proud of them.
- To continue to engage with mental health services as they had recognised they had suffered from delusory thoughts that had influenced subsequent behavior.
- To not reoffend and live a quiet life.
- To have no contact with former associates who had a negative effect on recovery.
- To volunteer with an animal charity with a long term plan to obtain part time employment.
- To look forward to a positive future and with help of services not dwell on the past.

Barriers in the system

- Focus on substance misuse and that this is the cause of poor mental health and not always the result.
- Housing providers focusing on past behavior and issues instead of current presentation. This results in customers having no suitable accommodation.
- Housing providers looking at simple solutions without listening to the customers lived experience and what accommodation is needed to sustain their recovery.
- Little or no mental health support whilst serving a custodial sentence.
- Confusion by GP surgery regarding future medication. The customer has to supply the surgery with a list of medication and then order it two days in advance.

Barriers to be addressed with customer

- Suitable property not yet obtained as customer recalled.
- To learn from past mistakes or missed chances.
- To find suitable accommodation in readiness for next release.
- No lone working with the customer on release.

What we did

In late 2022 the customer was arrested on several occasions and the focus was on substance misuse and anti-social behavior. On the two occasions we were informed of this the Service Coordinator contacted the custody suite. On the first occasion they had already been released but on the second occasion it was requested that a mental health assessment be conducted. There was some opposition to this due to the customer being under the influence but we discussed them keeping her in custody due to MH concerns. Two hours later they were released without an assessment and a few days later arrested for a more serious offence that resulted in a custodial sentence.

Changing Futures advocated for the customer in the ensuing discharge meetings that resulted in the customer receiving treatment for their mental health that explained the delusional thoughts that were vocalized by the customer on their release from custody, when they were not under the influence of any substances.

Temporary accommodation was secured that was in the area of choice (albeit shared accommodation) which the customer would not have accepted in the past. The customer realised that location close to family was more important than the 'type' of accommodation.

Changing Futures coordinated support from other agencies and influenced them regarding the reason for offending. One police officer who attended the first discharge meeting stated that it gave him an insight into the customer and their past that he had not known before. He has been very helpful in keeping the customer safe and has influenced other officers.

On release from custody Changing Futures supported the customer to get welfare benefits in place and to attend necessary appointments. Their Service coordinator sent an email with the list of medication to GP surgery to order meds as the customer would have had to present at the surgery with the medication boxes to order their next prescription otherwise, which likely would have led to the customer not having their medication for a period of time.

Outcome for customer

The customer was recalled to custody to serve the remaining month of their sentence. Although the intervention up to yet haven't resulted in the customer sustaining their recovery we have developed a relationship that, hopefully, we can continue in the future. The customer had done well following their discharge and was proud when friends and professionals could barely recognise them due to their improved presentation and demeanor.

The customer would likely have been rough sleeping again without Changing Futures intervention. This was becoming increasingly dangerous for them as they were vulnerable to others at all times. Offending would likely have continued and escalated and there was the potential that they may have done serious harm to individuals due to their delusional behaviour. This could have resulted in potential harm to others and longer custodial sentences, and in the long term, serious harm if not death could have occurred.

Learning

The focus on mental health and not substance misuse as the primary issue worked up to a point with this person. Mental health and substance abuse go hand in hand and should be treated together. The assumption that substance abuse causes mental health and behavioral issues is not always the case, It is recognised that individuals often 'self-medicate' with substances to alleviate their poor mental health caused by adverse experiences and past trauma. This is often forgotten when dealing with an individual who is continually coming to the attention of the police and other agencies when their behavior is causing damage and harming the public, and this is understandable to an extent, however without a coordinated approach and a shift in thinking this will continue to happen at significant cost.

GP's need to have notification of their patients medication from, in this case, mental health services and the prison service. It should not be the responsibility of the patient to provide a list of medication, and if joined up information systems were in place this would prevent periods of people not receiving the medication they need.