

Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

Case Study: Flexible Backpay Persistence

Background

Stuart* has severe mobility issues following injuries sustained when he was hit by a car resulting in several weeks spent in hospital. Stuart was supported to obtain a methadone prescription through the local alcohol and drug service tudyas he has long standing dependency, however he has been unable to maintain this as during the initial titration period that requires daily supervision at a nominated pharmacy, Stuart has experienced difficulties getting to and from the pharmacy each day as required. As a result when an appointment is missed the prescription/process is closed, and Stuart resorts to using heroin again.

Stuart has stated he hopes to be accommodated in his own property and maintain a methadone prescription with a view to being substance free in the future.

Barriers identified

- Support required to access the pharmacy daily to access/maintain a methadone prescription.
- The waiting list for restarting titration/appointments to gain a new prescription is long and takes a long time.
- Support/Care required to support with mobility issues.
- Staff at customers accommodation failing to facilitate a taxi at weekends to and from pharmacy as agreed.
- Stuarts current choices (substance use etc.) are preventing professionals properly engaging to provide support.

What we did

Changing Futures liaised with Stuart's worker from the local drug and alcohol service and between us we made arrangements to pick Stuart up and support him to the pharmacy daily (in the week). It was also agreed with the manager of Stuart's accommodation that at weekends a taxi would be booked for him by staff to ensure Stuart keeps his appointments when we are unable to provide this support.

The rota that was devised between Changing Futures and the drug and alcohol service worked well, however on two occasions (both bank holidays) when managers weren't working at Stuarts accommodation, the instruction to book a taxi was not communicated and Stuart prescription was cancelled.

Changing Futures investigated to see if there was a pharmacy that was closer/easier to access but Stuart was already using the closest available.

A referral has been made to adult social care for an assessment to support with Stuart's mobility issues for which we are awaiting an assessment date. This has been chased up but this is still pending.

Changing Futures supported Stuart to apply for Personal Independence Payment which has now been awarded and a back payment was made in a lump sum. Although Stuart is now in receipt of PIP we believe the back payment has now been spent.

A senior mental health practitioner based within the local rough sleeper outreach team has been contacted to see if they are able to conduct a mental health assessment (to enable customer to access secondary mental health services) which has been agreed, Stuart is awaiting a date for this to take place.

Outcome

Stuart is regularly falling off prescription before the initial titration period has been completed, meaning he has to restart the process over again. However Stuarts worker from the drug and alcohol service has actively advocated on his behalf with the prescriber to enable Stuart to restart these appointments quicker than would be usual (removing the need for a face to face assessment before restarting).

As it stands at the time of writing Stuart is still not accessing a methadone prescription. Changing Futures have been persistent in visiting and doing everything we can to make this happen, yet despite our best efforts, as well as the efforts of the drug and alcohol service and Stuart's accommodation provider, this has not happened yet. Moving forwards, we will continue to have regular contact with Stuart in the hope that when he is ready we can support to get a prescription in place for him.

Due to Stuarts drug use and behavior in his supported accommodation he has now been issued a seven-day rolling notice and is likely to be evicted if this continues. If this does happen it will make an adult social care assessment more difficult, if not impossible, until Stuart is once again accommodated.

Changing Futures have been proactive and have already made a number of referrals to alternative accommodation providers on behalf of Stuart in case of this eventuality. If Stuart is evicted priorities will shift and Changing Futures will contact the local council immediately in order for a homeless assessment to take place, to ascertain if there is a duty to provide temporary accommodation.

Learning

Although Stuart expressed that obtaining and maintaining a methadone prescription was a priority for him, despite the best efforts of services to support him with this it has not yet been achieved. This however does not mean that Stuart will not achieve this, it may be that the timing/circumstances are not quite right for him to do so at present. It may have been the case that if the agreement to facilitate transport for him at the weekend was kept, Stuart would now be in

receipt of a prescription, however this is difficult to say. It does however highlight the importance of good communication between professionals and within services, and the possible negative impact this can have if we don't get it right. This case also highlights that when we work with people experiencing multiple disadvantages it is essential that we are patient and persistent in our approach as services, and that a person centered approach will increase the possibility of positive outcomes.

Flexibility has been demonstrated both by the mental health specialist within the rough sleeper outreach team that has agreed to conduct a mental health assessment with Stuart, and the drug and alcohol service who have done everything they can to get Stuart back into the methadone prescription process as quickly as possible when he has failed to attend during the titration period.

It is great that Stuart is now in receipt of PIP which will help with his mobility issues going forwards, but receiving a large sum of back pay as a result of the PIP assessment process taking such a long time can have a negative impact for people, and in fact be quite destructive, especially when people are still active in addiction of some form. It would be good if some flexibility could be offered in these scenarios to provide people a choice, whether they are happy to receive a lump sum, or for this to be paid in installments, for example.

* Customer name has been changed to protect identity.