

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT NETWORK - visit to the Drug & Alcohol Detoxification residential facility at HOWARD HOUSE, OXFORD

In 2009 LINK reported to JHOSC that the Oxford DRP (Drug Recovery Project) in Walton Street, a drug and alcohol detoxification unit for homeless people had been closed without public consultation. JHOSC supported the LINK request that this service should be reprovided and after discussion the PCT and Drug and Alcohol Action Team opened Howard House in November 2010. The service is run by SMART. Two LINK members 'entered and viewed' Howard House on 14th June 2012:

This House is different from the other Care Homes visited by LINK members. It provides short (approximately ten week) courses to enable drug and alcohol addicts to detoxify. So the standard questionnaire provided by LINK (for homes catering for permanent elderly residents) is not appropriate. Nevertheless we tried to answer variations of the questions suggested.

The home was clean with a good smell. Staff and residents were welcoming. Furnishings and surroundings (including a garden) are pleasant and well-maintained - mostly by the residents as part of their treatment. The residents also do the catering (with advice). It has ten single bedrooms (all with private facilities). It is registered with CQC, but has not been inspected yet.

The ten residents usually comprise six men and four women (occasionally eight men and two women). About one third are drug addicts, one third alcoholics and one third both. Approximately half are homeless and Howard House receives housing benefit for them. The others have their own accommodation and their housing benefit has to pay to keep this accommodation for their return after treatment. This immediately leads to financial problems for Howard House as the budget is based on the provision at the previous treatment centre which catered almost entirely for homeless people.

Admission follows multi-professional assessments and there is a waiting list of about ten people.

Naturally most residents enter with fairly chaotic and unhealthy life-styles. There are mental health issues for many of them. As well as the drug reduction treatment, the staff also try to provide an orderly domestic programme including advice on healthy eating, cooking and conflict resolution.

We did not see any of the treatment, which consists of a mixture of structured group work and individual work. There are four full-time professional workers, plus a specialist addictions nurse and weekly visits from a specialist GP.

Howard House also has about ten volunteer 'mentors' - mostly past residents - who help to motivate those undergoing the treatment. Residents leaving the house will be accompanied by mentors at all times. There are classes onsite in gardening, yoga, acupuncture and art. Residents may go offsite for other activities (such as Alcoholics Anonymous). The hope is that after finishing the course, residents will continue with some of these activities.

The measure of success is whether residents complete the course - target 70% and actual result about 76%. Clearly a better measure would be whether they stay dry, but collecting this data is difficult. Some relapsed patients are given a second opportunity.

We were shown round by residents who were full of praise for the House and the programme. Disabled access could be improved.

Pamela Fletcher and Dermot Roaf
Authorised visitors

