
Substance Misuse Consultation

March 2016

Healthwatch Blackpool



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1 Introduction

1.1 Details of visit

Details of visit:	
Service	Drug and alcohol services throughout Blackpool
Service Provider	Horizon, (ADS, The hub, Delphi medical, Renaissance, COAST)
Date and Time	Throughout March 2016
Researcher	Steven Robinson
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1.2 Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Blackpool would like to thank the service providers, service users, visitors and staff for their contribution to this consumer review.

1.3 Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific dates set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

2 What was the purpose of our visit

Healthwatch Blackpool has previously engaged the residents of Blackpool to ask them about any issues, experiences and concerns they have had with health and social care services. We received many responses by individuals who said that substance misuse was a big problem for Blackpool. The majority of residents told us they felt that young people and adults have nowhere to go to get help or access rehab services. Residents of Blackpool indicated that due to Blackpool's high transient population and its reputation for 'party' tourism and culture it can be difficult to get help.

Blackpool has higher than average estimated levels of opiate and crack cocaine use, almost three times the national average. Injecting drug use in Blackpool is also estimated to be considerably higher than average at over three times the national rates. An estimated 28% (40,000) of Blackpool residents drink to hazardous or harmful levels, and there are over 4,500 alcohol-related admissions to hospital amongst Blackpool residents each year.

(Data taken from Blackpool's Joint health and wellbeing strategy 2013-2015)

2.1 Methodology

Healthwatch Blackpool wanted to understand the services that Blackpool residents could potentially access to support their recovery. Healthwatch Blackpool decided to contact Blackpool Council's public health commissioning team to explain we were beginning a review into addiction services. They asked us to contribute to the commissioning process and undertake a review of certain drug and alcohol services. This would allow us to make suggestions based on feedback from services users that would have a direct influence on how services are designed in the future.

Horizon is the drug and alcohol support organisation who run services throughout Blackpool. They are responsible for all the programs available to help the residents of Blackpool. ADS is the recovery and criminal justice provider within Horizon, and Delphi Medical provide the clinical element of support.

We contacted several key people in Horizon Blackpool who arranged for us to come down and speak to people in various stages of recovery. The groups we arranged sessions with were:

- **Renaissance** (*Support group based at Horizon on Dickson road*) - Visited 15th of March
- **COAST** (*Community Orientated Abstinent Structured Treatment*) – Visited 14th of March
- **The Hub** – (*Young people's information and one-to-one support*) – Visited 17th March
- **Delphi** – (*Clinical drug services based at Harrowside*) – Visited 11th of March

COAST (*Community Orientated Abstinent Structured Treatment*) is a 12 week therapeutic community rehabilitation programme which aims to provide structured therapeutic treatment within the community, followed by integration back into society through employment, education and volunteering. Renaissance is a similar support group based at Dickson Road. The Hub helps support young people aged 18 - 25 with their substance misuse issues. The Hub provides community outreach and sees young people at a variety of locations in Blackpool, at their homes or centres. When we visited the Hub, we saw young people at the CONNECT and young people services building in Blackpool town centre.

We saw some people in groups and some on a one-to-one basis. We asked them:

- What in your opinion *is* helping you in your recovery?
- What in your opinion *isn't* helping in your recovery?
- What do you feel would help you in your recovery that you aren't receiving now?

We ran groups sessions with COAST and Renaissance. These were very open discussions around the 3 questions and allowed us learn more about the services the individuals attended. We asked Delphi staff if they could distribute our questionnaires and collected responses. As many of their clients are seen at home we felt it was appropriate to respect their privacy and ask them to fill out a questionnaire. At The Hub we spent a day speaking to young people on a one-to-one basis.

Before all interviews we explained why Healthwatch Blackpool was attending, what our remit is and that the information recorded was voluntary and all the data would be anonymised.

Healthwatch Blackpool saw:

- 5 People at COAST
- 5 People at Horizon
- 11 young people (under 25) at The Hub
- We received 12 handed in responses from Delphi



2.2 Results of our consultation with drug and alcohol clients

Overview & summary

We discovered that clients found it difficult to differentiate between the services that supported them, although this did not have a detrimental effect on their overall experience in fact quite the opposite. This was particularly evident when people were telling us about the drug and alcohol intervention and outreach team based at the hospital. Many we spoke to had been supported by them and were now on the road to recovery in a different group. To clients it was all part of the same service. This accurately represents the fluidity and flexibility of Horizon. Sometimes clients were moved to help support them better, with little or no disruption to their care or support. Often we were told of a particular staff member who had gone above and beyond what was expected by the clients. Many had moved to Blackpool from other places around the UK, and said that the services in Blackpool are better than any they had experienced before. For many it was the 'out-of-the-box' thinking and their approach to support that meant the difference between recovery and relapse.

"It's cliché to say 'Without this person I'd never have recovered', but in my case it's true".

Everyone we spoke to was extremely happy with the services available and nearly everyone told us the only change they'd suggest is more awareness of the services offered at a GP level and for the general public. The only other common suggestion or criticism of the service was the fact that some of the groups were mixed with people in different stages of recovery. Many said that the addictions of alcohol and drugs were very similar and people were battling the same social issues, so they had no problem with being in groups of other or different drug or alcohol addicted clients. The issues they did have were that some groups require abstinence whilst others do not, and these groups can sometimes meet together. This caused discomfort and issues with some people and it was felt that it wasn't helping their recovery.

"It's difficult not to think about getting a drink when you can smell it on someone else."

In your opinion what is working and helping you to recover?

COAST

Many of the individuals who we spoke to at COAST told us that the outreach team's* efforts and the detox houses are instrumental in their recovery. All of the individuals we spoke to had been contacted by a staff member called Tom who they said they were extremely thankful as he had 'supported them from day one'.

*Horizon's outreach team based at the hospital

"They work with us at our pace."

We asked how the service supported them and what they thought had helped them the most. One person at the group session said people who get the aftercare and detox are far less likely to re-use. The group agreed with this statement.

"You can fill your weekend and week days - you're less likely to drink if you're busy."

We asked the group what else they thought was key to them abstaining from substances and preventing relapse. Overwhelmingly it was the activities available. Many said it wasn't the activities themselves but the social aspect of COAST that really helped. Many said they were too busy in the mornings, evenings and weekends to even think about drink or drugs, and that being around people who understood was a key part of their recovery. These activities are a vital part of recovery for the group we spoke to and without them the group all said they feel they may have relapsed.

"I've been through detox before but this wasn't as regimental, it's more relaxed and without the detox and COAST I'd never have got sober."

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In addition the group valued the key elements of the programme itself. They felt the ‘3 strikes and you’re out’ rule was firm but fair, and that the 12 weeks was flexible and reflective of the understanding the staff have of the nature of addiction. Some said they felt that the 12 week programme isn’t enough but they have been reassured that there is still support after this time, so they are confident that they will recover and not relapse. The group also told us that they had been supported to set up their own successful peer group (Blackpool’s *Enough is Enough* group), stemming from an idea one of the clients had. This means clients have a room and a space to support one another which they wouldn’t have had without COAST. As before they said this keeps them from relapsing and has allowed people to control their addictions as well as help others.

“People aren’t just left without support.”

Renaissance

The outreach team (based at the hospital) were again mentioned when we visited Renaissance. The encouragement and support to help ‘recover when you’re at your lowest’ was the reason many people had stayed clean and recovered. Many said it was the best part of the service they received so far.

“They challenge us to get things off our chest but are really informal.”

“They give you hope.”

The service tries to find and contact those who do not attend meetings and do not judge. This was very important to the clients. They also said that the morning support groups were best. Other things the group liked were the activities such as the board games.

Many reflected what was said about the COAST group, as some had been to both services. They felt the services worked very cohesively together and the attitude and dedication of the staff was paramount to their recovery. The outreach team in particular played a massive role in supporting everyone we spoke to at COAST and the group at Renaissance.

The Hub

The Hub’s approach to young people is on a one-to-one basis and it is this method that many of the people we spoke to preferred. The clients at the hub all told us that staff cared and often went out of their way to do extra holistic work to keep them on a path to recovery. All the staff were singled out by name as being very professional but firm.

“It’s somewhere I can go where I’m not judged and receive personal help. They understand and I feel like they care.”

“Wayne listens to me and is helping me get back in education. They also help with other things that got me on drugs in the first place.”

The young people told us the service supports the person not the addiction, and some said that they never thought they would be as far in recovery or abstinent as they were. One client told us they suffered from anxiety and depression and had severe body issues. A member of staff went out and helped them pick clothes so they didn’t feel like people look at them and thought they were a drug and alcohol user any more. These small impactful actions contributed to positive mental wellbeing for all the people we spoke to and also helped keep young people off drugs and alcohol.

As with COAST the young people are encouraged to volunteer and get into work or education. Many come from challenging backgrounds and told us it was their environment that was the biggest barrier to overcome. Volunteering helped them do something worthwhile and education allowed them to plan for the future. This was very important to the young people as the majority explained that no-one had ever supported them before.

“They’ve given me printed schedules for all my appointments, meetings and other things I go to, [it helps with clients’ OCD] and I’ve cut down my drug intake to a level that I’d never dream of. My care plan is progressive yet challenging and they’ve been there each step of the way.”

“The best thing is being able to speak with someone who listens. Carla is very lovely and caring, she’s helping me build a future.”

“They reached me in my area and don’t judge me. They’ve helped with my withdrawals from drugs and supported me each step and given me honest useful advice, I feel like I can do anything with my life.”



Delphi

People praised the fact that treatment was available from day one. It was important to be able to have everything from the first day of their recovery and not wait. One of the services Delphi also offers (which several clients said they really appreciated) is vaccinations and referrals to other clinical services. They said issues like these are often overlooked by substance misuse users and not considered a priority.

“They do everything necessary to help me in my recovery.”

“They look at the person and wellbeing not just the addiction or misuse problem. Everyone is friendly and understands me and my needs.”

Another area that received praise was the detox houses. While these houses aren't run by Delphi it does however highlight the fluidity and response of Horizon to support people seamlessly. The Detox Houses were highlighted as a vital part of recovery. Those that mentioned the houses said they were hygienic, clean and the staff were very supportive. Several people mentioned their GP and how sometimes they can't be seen on the same day by them. At Delphi they could be seen the same day and also received home visits. People praised the dedication of the staff. Some said that the old service wasn't as good and now with the holistic approach and outreach they had been able to stay off the drugs.

In your opinion, what *isn't* helping from the service you receive?

COAST

One of the main issues all the group-based services told us was the mixing of people with different care plans and abstinence targets. Many said that it was very hard to keep abstinent when people in the same groups were often intoxicated or under the influence of substances. Many welcomed the inclusion of other clients but felt that there should be no mixing of people in different stages of recovery.

“When you're trying not to think of drink and you smell it it's really difficult to keep focussed.”

“We sometimes have to spare groups and space, and it's hard when people are intoxicated or on drugs and you can smell it.”

The second issue that came up was around their GP and their lack of knowledge of services. Before they came to Horizon no one had any idea how to get help themselves. They didn't have any knowledge of Horizon, COAST or other services, and neither did their friends or family. Everyone in the group had gone to their GP for substance related medical issues before they came

“[The GP] refused to sign me off to get help, they just told me to stop drinking and didn't look at the wider picture. Thankfully I got a second opinion and was signed off. This meant I could continue with COAST and now I'm back working.”

to COAST and none of their GPs referred them to drug or alcohol services. Many said they would still be using if it wasn't for Horizon's outreach team at the hospital. People felt that their GP hadn't given them the level of care they should have done. Even going back to the GP and explaining what COAST was and how it was helping wasn't considered by one GP.

One person we spoke to said that they knew of people who came to COAST and begged for help saying they were really struggling. Because they had gone over their 12 week period they were told to leave and that nothing could be done. Some of those people ended up re-using because they felt had no other option.

Renaissance:

Again this group echoed the feeling that GPs are unaware of the services available, and that having mixed groups wasn't always helping. All the individuals at this group said when they went to their GP they were just told to stop drinking or using drugs. They all said more help could have been offered at the GP level. They also reiterated the need to have separate groups as it is 'not fair' to those who

“[I like] all the multi-agency working (education, housing, benefits and work). If this stops people won't be able to improve themselves and will re-use.”

are struggling to stay clean and going through withdraw symptoms.

The Hub

"I have to carry a bag with me because they give me so much information. I have mental health issues and they always give me information in a style that suits me."

Nearly everyone we spoke to said they wouldn't change a thing about the way they were treated or the staff. However clients did have an issue with the building and its location. Some of The Hub's appointments are in a well-known sexual health clinic*, and they were worried about how it looked to outsiders. Some told us they were diagnosed with anxiety or depression and it was hard to come into a building and deal with the fear they might be seen by someone they knew. Predominantly the females said they struggled to even walk in.

"Getting here can be difficult for me. I don't like going out as I have anxiety issues. Everyone knows this place as a sexual health clinic it's not nice coming here."

**Healthwatch Blackpool would like to state that we saw the young people at a multi-purpose building in Blackpool which has sexual health and counselling services. The hub also provides support for young people in other areas and visits them at home. The Hub tries to see young people in locations that suits them.*

Delphi

Some felt that it was difficult to get the help they needed due to issues they had with the referral process. While no one was specific in their answer many said they felt that help could have been given earlier if their 'warning signs' had been picked up sooner. They felt there had been missed opportunities to receive help. Again like the other services this could be at the GP level. One person said it was difficult for them to travel daily to the location of Delphi's clinic for tests as they suffered from anxiety. One person who filled in a survey was given a key worker who was a different gender than them and said they felt uncomfortable, this was rectified but they weren't consulted first. Delphi does not have keyworkers so this is an observation of Horizon in general not Delphi.

What changes could be made to make a difference to the services you use?

COAST

Many from the COAST group were aware of the possibility of potential cuts due to reports in the local newspapers and rumours heard from outside the service. They were concerned that if they even needed help again it'd be unsuccessful because the things that work about COAST might be first to be cut, such as the activities. The group said this worry about services being there in the future was both an encouragement to get clean but equally a worry as the activities and social groups meant so much and were a key part of recovery. This was the main thing they'd change, they said this pressure wasn't fair on the staff who go out of their way to help them so much and if they were more in the know and there was clear information it'd make the service even better and more transparent.

"We have everything here, job help, counselling, benefit housing support. They don't take over - they support."

The group also said that funds towards promoting the peer group would help as they'd be able to do outreach themselves and give flyers to people who need them possibly reaching those who are in need but unlikely to seek help. They also suggested that they could do their own activities and awareness raising of COAST and other services. Finally it was raised by the group that GPs need to know more about the services available and should be referring and letting people know more. They acknowledged that this maybe wasn't a change to drug and alcohol services but said GPs should learn how important positive mental health and wellbeing is.

"We're not addicts, we're people."



Renaissance

Again the changes suggested were very much in line with the changes suggested by the group at COAST. GP access and awareness of services, and direct referrals were popular suggestions for services. There were several additions however. Some clients were in the detox houses and while they were at the houses receiving support they were told they were some of the last people to go into detox as the services were closing. They said this was an incomprehensible idea to them as many services require people to be off substances before they engage, and that they should keep the detox houses and close non-community rehab services. Many had been to rural rehab and said when they leave and come home they just pick up where they left off because the reasons to drink are still there.

“Where will people go to detox before they can access services?”

Other changes the group suggested was more volunteering opportunities and potentially paid work or job trials. They said this would help them more and it would give them something to do while staying clean.

The Hub

Nearly all of the people who we spoke to suggested a social group would be a good place for them to go and meet people in the same situation as them. Others said that a proper purpose-built building would be a huge help and allow them to feel a little more relaxed. A few said they do not like coming to a sexual health clinic and they would change the appointments to a better place if they could. People also said more awareness and outreach is needed to schools and youth groups, as they would have accessed the services if they had known it was available earlier. One person suggested the website and digital presence needs to be updated as the website was not useful or a good reflection of the services. They said they and their friends often research services online before contacting them and potentially more people could be helped if they had a better website.

“They can’t do enough for me I’ve never had a problem”

‘I have anxiety and I’d rather go to a group where people knew and understood me and my situation. We could support and learn from each other.’

One said they were worried about what they would do if they relapsed and fell back into using drugs. They would have liked more information and reassurances that if they did relapse they would be supported to come back and try again. One person also added that if they have had a bad week they spend the session talking about it which is good, but they then worry that they will not have time to

prepare for the week ahead, so if they could have the option of a 2nd appointment it would be better.

Delphi

Some people felt that they were pushed into doing group work and would have preferred a choice to have one-to-one work. Delphi doesn’t run group work and support individuals one to one. This experience is based on Horizon not Delphi. No one suggested anything to Healthwatch Blackpool that could improve their experience or make a difference to them in regards to Delphi. The individuals who returned the survey were happy with the service they received.

“It’s Heaven-sent that they there’s so many clinics around, we’d be in a very poor state if there weren’t any of these clinics.”

2.3 Findings

- The work done by all staff members and services has a huge positive impact on the people who use the services. They were overwhelmingly positive of all the treatment and the attitude and dedication of the staff.
- The closure of community-based detox houses is concerning, when it was felt rural detox houses primarily remove the client from the area temporarily, but did not help address the existing and remaining social issues on their return.
- The mixing of groups to include clients at various stages of recovery of differing substances appears on the one hand to generate good conversation about shared social issues and show good progression of others and what is possible, but on the other to frustrate those who are abstinent and further in their pathway when they can smell people being on substances or being intoxicated around them.
- There appears to be a lack of awareness and/or direct referrals into the services at early intervention stages, such as GPs. This pushes back the preventative support until the situation becomes more critical (i.e. the client is in need of support from the hospital).
- The appointments at the Hub are sometimes inside a known sexual health clinic which concerns some service users who fear they may be judged by others. Some people have suggested a standalone or purpose-built building for this service would be better for them.
- Many clients, friends and family have no awareness of the services that are available before they are referred to them.
- Some of the online presence of the services is not effective enough, and content and presentation could be improved upon.
- Some young people at the hub felt that if they could socialise with people with similar backgrounds it could help them to encourage each other to recover. Regular social groups or activities would be helpful and beneficial to themselves and others.

2.4 Service Provider response

We are pleased with the feedback that our young people gave to Healthwatch and feel it is a fair report. The feedback was positive and staff felt the consultation was well run and they were kept informed throughout. We will be looking into the findings in more detail to look at the possibility of introducing changes in line with these findings. We are starting a recovery group in the immediate future for our young people and will look at continuing this if there is sufficient interest.

Thanks

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