

# RELEASE

**Annual Review 2006-2007**

**Drugs, the Law and Human Rights**

**0845 450 0215**

**[www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk)**

# **Release Legal Emergency and Drugs Service Limited**

Charity Number 801118

Company Limited by Guarantee Number 1966619  
Registered in England

## **Registered Office**

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## **Staff**

**Ben Clark** Paralegal

**Niamh Eastwood** Legal

Advisor

**Jacqui Olliffe** Office

Manager

**Sebastian Saville** Executive

Director

**Colin Stewart** Drugs Advisor

**Gary Sutton** Head of Drugs  
Services

**Katy Swaine** Head of Legal  
Services

**Susan Willimott** Drugs  
Advisor

## **Volunteers**

**Sherri Snell** Tara Rez

**Keith Portt** Matt

McNamee **Shona**

**Easmon Dura**

Rochelle Devonish

**Pinar Coktas** Danielle

Gilbert **Adriana Bessa**

Gilbert Crentsil

**Qousain Baig** Nnamdi

Anierobi **Mohammed**

**Shah Alomgir** Funmi

Afolabi **Clement Lalor**

Kate Bell **Patrick**

**Kwaky** Monrufa

Khatun **Katarzyna**

**Jurkan** Alice Jarratt **Jo**

**Hughes** Genevieve

Horwood **Yesim**

**Hidirogullari** Maya

Parshotam **Antonia**

**Panayides** Jacklyn

Okrafo Smart **Ajibola**

**Oduwole** Salma Nuur

**Nurun Nessa**

Muhammed Nawaz

**Kelan McHugh**

Rebecca Lever **Shemi**

**Leira** Eveleyn

Livingstone **Paul St**

**Hiliare** Samia Shire

**Sadia Samed** Itricia

Roberts **Nadia Salam**

Tara Rajan **Samia**

**Quereshi** Munira Qazi

**Tracy Granger**

## **Trustees**

**Toby Faber**

**Dr Chris Ford**

**James Hardy**

**Ronnie Hooberman**

**Anthony Hyams**

**Andrew Macdonald**

**Sam Palmer**

**John Podmore**

# Chair's Report

Mick Jagger once said:

*'The new fashion is to talk about the most private parts of your life; the other fashion is to repent of your excesses and to criticize the drugs that made you happy in the other times.'*

That fashion continues with politicians and entrepreneurs the world over. These are the confessions of those who survived their dalliances with the world of illicit substances.

Release remains to support those who fell over the precipice, those looking over the edge and the family and friends attempting to draw them all away from the brink. Whilst there are some 300,000 problematic drug users it is estimated that, there are some 9 million people who have at some point taken illicit drugs.

The services provided by Release remain as important as ever as the debate gets ever more sterile and the damage to society ever greater. Our challenge, to stay at the forefront of the debate and to support those affected by drug use, remains undiminished as we approach our 40th year.

In order to meet these challenges the constitution of the Board has changed significantly and I have been delighted to welcome a number of new members who have brought with them a range of skills and expertise to support the Executive Director and his team. I believe we now have in place the most dynamic and effective Board that Release has seen for some time.

Ensuring not only the financial health and stability of the organisation but also the continued provision of high quality services, will be our main priorities. We will use that stability and the high reputation of Release over 40 years to continue our work at the centre of the debate to bring about positive change and constructive dialogue.

**John Podmore**  
**Chair of Trustees**

## **Executive Director's report**

The year 2006/07 was character forming for Release and for me personally. Release survived through its first year without any financial support from the Home Office since 1983 and I made it through a year of treatment for hepatitis C. The financial instability caused by the withdrawal of government funding felt similar to the physical weariness I felt from interferon. However, I am pleased to report that existing and new supporters of Release have stepped in and, approaching the end of 2007/08, it looks as if 2008/9 could be a big year for the organisation. On a personal note - interferon worked for me and Release will be doing all it can to ensure that all drug users can have access to this effective treatment for a life-threatening virus.

The heartbeat of Release remains the provision of expert information, advice and advocacy to those suffering as a consequence of drug use or drug policy. However, to reduce the harms that are caused by poor policies, we must retain our position of openly criticizing bad drug laws and supporting reform.

Release believes that drug use is inherent within society and that the continued criminalisation of those using drugs is counterproductive and is contrary to the principles of harm reduction. The organisation believes it is important to recognise the potential harms associated with any drug use but that this should be communicated to the public through health promotion campaigns rather than the opportunistic political rhetoric we have become accustomed to.

With our organization staffed by qualified lawyers and experts on drugs and drug treatment, we know that what we provide to the public is unique. With the 1000 enquiries each month and the popular legal surgeries we also know that it is much needed.

With strong support from our largely new board of trustees – I am confident that we will be able to continue being there for those people experiencing problems associated with drugs, the law and human rights.

With this year having been hard financially we have decided not to print a glossy annual report and to remain environmentally aware we will distribute this document largely by way of email.

**Sebastian Saville**  
**Executive Director**

# HIGHLIGHTS 2006/07

This year the organisation has focused on becoming more business like in order to increase income. We have expanded both our legal outreach and expert witness work and provided training to those working with drugs users throughout the UK.

## Legal Outreach Programme

With the extension of the legal outreach programme the legal team saw over 340 clients in 2006/07. Clients accessing the service sought legal advice on a number of issues including welfare benefits; housing and homelessness; debt; police complaints and criminal injury claims.

It is our experience that the provision of the legal service encourages clients to engage in other areas within their local drug project. Many clients have said that in receiving assistance with their legal problems, they were then able to engage more fully with their treatment service.

### Extension of the Legal Outreach Programme (“LOPS”)

We are keen to extend what we see as an invaluable service to other drugs services in the London area and are hopeful that 2007/08 will be a year of expansion. If you are interested in learning more about the legal outreach programme contact Niamh Eastwood, Head of Legal Services, on 020 7749 4033 or [niamh@release.org.uk](mailto:niamh@release.org.uk)

### LOPs statistics:

- **The Caravan Project**

Total consultations	190
Total number of clients	58
Male clients	36
Female clients	22

*‘I had been sexually assaulted in my flat and was suffering harassment. A legal advisor from Release submitted arguments to the local Council, who were my landlord and I was moved to a new flat.’ (Female, 30)*

- **Drugs Advisory Service, Haringey**

Total consultations	232
Total number of clients	87
Male clients	85
Female clients	21

*‘I had been released from hospital and I had nowhere to go. Release got me emergency housing and help me with my benefits.’ (Male, 37)*

- **Hackney Drug Intervention Programme**

Total consultations	108
Total number of clients	49
Male clients	37
Female clients	12
* The legal service was introduced to the Hackney project in June 2006.	

- **Rugby House/Aftercare  
Hammersmith & Fulham**

Total consultations	119
Total number of clients	57
Male clients	33
Female clients	24
* The legal service was introduced to 61 Munster Road in June 2006.	

*'I had debts of over £100,000 with Release's assistance many of the debts were quashed or a minimal repayment plan was entered into. Four years later I was debt free.'* (Male, 35)

- **Westminster Drugs Project**

Total consultations	297
Total number of clients	91
Male clients	53
Female clients	38

## Helpline – new database

The helpline receives approximately 1,000 enquiries per month, the Release telephone and email advice service has kept staff and volunteers extremely busy.

The **Release legal team** took calls on a range of issues including criminal offences involving drugs; travelling with prescribed controlled drugs; advice on criminal records and employment issues.

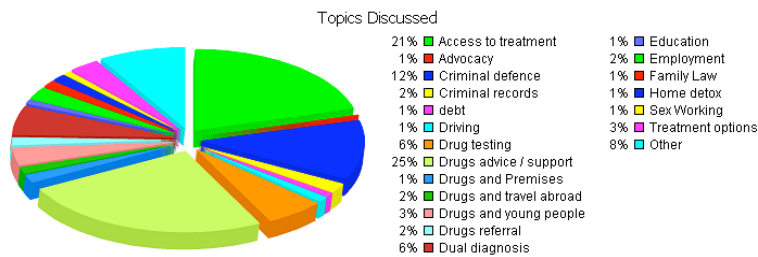
The **Release drugs team** took enquiries regarding drug detection times; drug testing analysis; dealt with calls from family members in distress and advocated on behalf of callers who were having problems accessing treatment.

In June 2006, we implemented a new electronic database, which is already making the collation and analysis of statistics much easier. The database has allowed us to be more accurate in our recording methods. This, in turn, has given us a greater understanding of the service we provide and has enabled us to become more focused in our funding approaches.

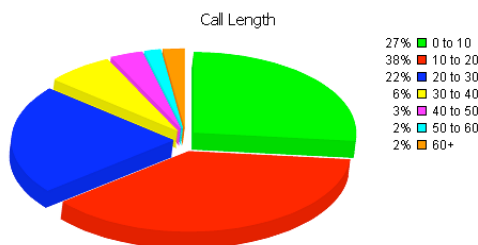
Here are just a few examples of the type of statistics that can be captured from the database:



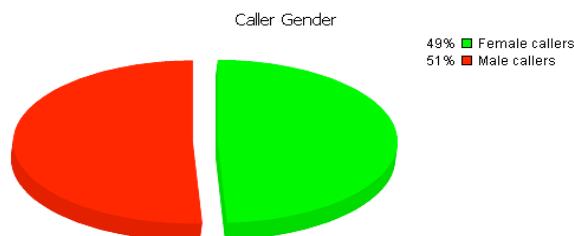
Many people who access support via the Release specialist drugs helpline are polydrug users but it is interesting to note that the total for crack and cocaine together is now more than heroin.



This is just a snapshot of the principal types of advice provided by those working at Release.



Release does not simply provide a signposting service. Callers are provided with detailed advice and support. With 73% of calls lasting over 10 minutes and 40% over half an hour it demonstrates the in depth service we provide.



Unlike most drug services— almost half the callers to Release are women.

## **Legal Outreach Programme – A Case Study**

Tom had been a client of the Release legal service for a number of years accessing advice for debts or benefit problems. In January 2007 he saw the legal advisor at his local drug project as he had been excluded from his home because the police had obtained a Closure Order from the Court. These orders can be obtained by the police where there is suspicion of Class A drug use and nuisance behaviour.

Tom had had a long term crack cocaine problem and had a dispute with his neighbour. The Release lawyer explained to Tom that the order essentially meant he would be excluded from his home for at least 3 months and was at risk of eviction proceedings as his landlord was the local council. The legal team at Release had had a lot of experience with this process and was able to provide in depth advice.

Tom was provided with criminal representation in respect of the Closure Order with the hope of appealing against the original order. At Court, evidence was heard from the neighbour who was in dispute with Tom, as well as his next door neighbour who provided evidence supporting Tom. Despite this, the appeal was denied, arguably Tom was victimised because of his drug use, as the evidence of nuisance was at the best flimsy. Tom's landlord started eviction proceedings against him whilst he was out of the property. Release organised for him to see a specialist housing solicitor and she successfully defended the landlord's claim. Once the Closure order had expired Tom was able to return to the property.

## **Specialist Drugs Helpline - A Case Study**

Caller contacted Release drugs help line as he was having problems with his local services. The client had made a request to be prescribed Subutex (buprenorphine) instead of methadone as he had found that it had worked well for him in the past. The caller also advised that if he used methadone it resulted in him using on top, this in turn would lead to crack and alcohol binges. The caller was in his early 30's and had used hard drugs since his mid teens and had a history of prolific offending.

The local service refused his request and gave several reasons for their refusal including issues around titration. After contacting the service it became apparent another reason was the cost implications – the caller was not involved with criminal justice services and no extra funding was available for Subutex via other funding routes. A Release drugs advisor contacted the local service but was unable to find a resolution to the matter. Another service in the caller's catchment area was contacted and, after listening to the caller's case agreed to prescribe Subutex.

The caller believes not only did this allow him to save his ailing relationship with his partner but, also, prevented his turning to crime in order to get the treatment he wanted. Eventually, his heroin and crack used stopped and he received assistance with his alcohol issues. He is now stable and still with his partner –he has also referred others to the help line for advice, assistance and advocacy.

## **Expert Witness Service**

It is well-documented by social scientific research that deeply held negative stereotypes of drug users and drug dealers are widespread in UK culture. This hostility, especially when combined with the tendency to uncritically accept evidence provided by law enforcement agencies, can result in difficulty obtaining a genuinely fair trial for those facing drugs charges. We believe that the expert witness service provided by Release goes some way to addressing this imbalance.

Sadly, the Release expert witness team lost a key member when Eddie Ellison died in January 2006. His unique skills and qualifications will be sorely missed. Fortunately, we have been able to recruit Allen Morgan who, like Eddie, is a former police officer with considerable experience in dealing with front line drug use - both consumers and suppliers. Allen will join Gary and Sebastian to make up a team with widely differing skills and expertise.

The grey area of when possession becomes possession with intent to supply continues to provide the majority of our cases. Thankfully, we saw the Home Office abandon its ill-considered plan to introduce a 'threshold' system that would have seen individuals caught with certain amounts of drugs as automatically presumed to be supplying.

## **Policy Work**

### **NICE guidelines & Orange Guidelines**

Release was invited onto two major studies in 2006/07. Gary Sutton, Head of Drugs Services at Release, was part of the working group for the new Orange Guidelines ('Drug Misuse and Dependence Clinical Guidelines') published by the Department of Health.

Gary was also invited to give evidence to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence ('NICE') in relation to the application of drug treatment within the United Kingdom. In particular, he gave evidence to NICE on the delivery of substitute prescribing therapies within treatment settings.

### **Policing Cannabis as a Class C Drug: To Police or not to Police?**

Release was represented on the Advisory Group for this research undertaken by King's College London.

### **Cannabis Guidelines ACPO**

Release was invited to comment on the new ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) Guidelines for policing cannabis. The Guidelines were introduced in January 2007 in the hope that there would be cohesion amongst officers dealing with low level cannabis possession cases.

The Guidelines for policing cannabis continued to support a presumption against arrest in cases of simple possession. Officers were advised to issue 'cannabis warnings' and the matter to be recorded locally, this would mean the person caught in possession would not have a criminal conviction.

### **Thresholds Consultation**

The Home Office launched a consultation paper on 30 November 2005, in respect of the proposed threshold amounts in relation to s.2 of the Drugs Act 2005. Section 2 intended to introduce the presumption of the intention to supply a controlled drug. Essentially, this provision meant an individual caught with a certain amount of drugs in their possession, 'the threshold amount', would have been presumed to be supplying.

Release expressed opposition to this provision considering it to be both unnecessary and unworkable. We submitted our response to the consultation paper highlighting the inherent difficulties in imposing this legislation. In October 2006 the Home Office Minister, Vernon Coaker, announced that the Government did not intend to implement section 2 of the Drugs Act 2005. This decision was based on the responses to the consultation paper.

## **Conferences & Events**

### **NORML's 2006 National Conference**

Sebastian Saville provided expertise on UK and European developments on cannabis use at the annual NORML conference held in San Francisco

### **The 16<sup>th</sup> International Harm Reduction Conference Vancouver**

The 16<sup>th</sup> IHRA Conference was held in Vancouver, Canada, in April 2006. It was an opportunity for Release to present and discuss its' work in the UK with those working in the field internationally. Particularly, it was humbling to see some of the innovative harm reduction initiatives being introduced throughout the world in conditions that we could not imagine.

Niamh Eastwood and Sebastian Saville were in Vancouver as presenters, panel chairs and to show documentary films at the conference film festival.

Vancouver was a spectacular setting for the Conference, not least because of the amazing advances made by the State of British Columbia in areas such as medical cannabis, drug consumption rooms and projects supported by and inclusive of users.

***NB Attendance at conferences abroad were specifically fundraised for and did not come out of the Release budget***

### **UK National Drug Treatment Conference**

Sebastian Saville described his personal experience of undergoing treatment for hepatitis C.

## **Pride 2006/07**

Members of both the legal team and drugs team manned the Release stall at Pride in August 2006. We were on hand to give advice on harm minimisation and legal matters.

Interestingly, Sussex Police had decided to introduce the use of an ion testing machine at the celebrations, as well as employing the use of sniffer dogs to detect the presence of drugs. Pride, historically, has always had an intrinsically safe environment, with little violence and generally an overwhelming feeling of goodwill. It was therefore surprising that there was such a large police presence with the addition of high tech detection equipment.

Release will be working on a new rights card in 2007/08, which will question the legality of using such detection methods.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers are a critical part of the organisation. Release has always been reliant on the support it receives from volunteers. This year was no different with dedicated individuals volunteering for both the legal team and drugs team. Volunteers were involved in assisting on the helpline and undertaking research.

We were also pleased to be able to provide our volunteers with a comprehensive training package and continuous learning and mentoring from Release staff throughout the year. We believe that this enables our volunteers to develop their roles within Release and enhances their future careers.

## **Preview 2007/08**

### **RELEASE'S 40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

2007/08 will see Release celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The highlight of the year will be our Anniversary Conference on 18 June 2007. Speakers include Simon Hughes MP, Ethan Nadelmann, Simon Jenkins and Release's co founder, Caroline Coon.

### **NEW PUBLICATIONS**

2007/08 will also see the launch of Release's exciting new online Legal Manual for those working with drug users. We will also be launching a new publication 'Drugs and the Law'.

## **Bankers**

Cooperative Bank PLC  
80 Cornhill  
London  
EC3 3NJ

## **Auditors**

Lubbock Fine Chartered Accountants  
Russell Bedford House  
City Forum  
250 City Road  
London  
EC1V 2QQ

## **Funders**

Our thanks go to the following organisations and individuals who have provided funding to Release this year:

Anonymous Donors  
AB Charitable Trust  
Andrew Meikle  
Ajama Trust  
AW Trust  
BRITS Trust  
Bridgehouse Estates  
Felix Dennis  
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation  
Infinity  
M.N. Rothschild  
Old Possum Trust  
OSI  
The London Legal Support  
Trust  
The Anonymous Donor  
3DD Entertainment  
Miscellaneous Donors

## **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to all our volunteers, and to everyone else who has contributed to Release's work during the year.

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2007**

	<b>Unrestricted Funds £</b>	<b>Restricted Funds £</b>	<b>Total Funds 2007 £</b>	<b>Total Funds 2006 £</b>
<b>INCOME AND EXPENDITURE</b>				
<b>Incoming resources</b>				
Incoming resources from generating funds				
Voluntary income	71,668	195,489	267,157	249,950
Activities for generating funds	90,089	-	90,089	119,953
Investment income	455	-	455	417
Other income	7,215	-	7,215	2,000
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<u>169,427</u>	<u>195,489</u>	<u>364,489</u>	<u>372,320</u>
<b>Resources expended</b>				
Costs of generating funds				
Costs of generating voluntary income	(958)	-	(958)	(35,071)
Fundraising costs	-	-	-	(1,336)
Charitable activities	(216,763)	(151,098)	(367,861)	(362,458)
Governance costs	(6,512)	-	(6,512)	(6,515)
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<u>(224,233)</u>	<u>(151,098)</u>	<u>(375,331)</u>	<u>(405,380)</u>
Net (outgoing)/incoming resources for the year/Net (expenditure)/income for the year	(54,806)	44,391	(10,415)	(33,060)
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>				
Total funds brought forward	<u>10,607</u>	<u>1,500</u>	<u>12,107</u>	<u>45,167</u>
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<u>(44,199)</u>	<u>45,891</u>	<u>1,692</u>	<u>12,107</u>

These summarised financial statements may not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of the financial affairs of Release Legal Emergency and Drugs Service Limited. For further information, the full annual financial statements, the auditors' report on those financial statements and the Directors annual report should be consulted; copies of these can be obtained from the Company Secretary at 388 Old Street, London, EC1V 9LT. The full annual financial statements, from which these summary financial statements are derived and on which the auditors gave an unqualified opinion, were approved on 7 December 2007 and have been submitted to the Charity Commission and the Registrar of Companies.

On behalf of the board

.....  
Trustee  
Date: .....

**BALANCE SHEET AT 31 MARCH 2007**

	2007 £	2006 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>		
Tangible assets	2,727	9,881
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Debtors	30,989	28,023
Cash at bank and in hand	60,203	100,728
	<u>91,192</u>	<u>128,751</u>
<b>CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year</b>	<u>(92,227)</u>	<u>(126,525)</u>
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>	(1,035)	2,226
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<u>1,692</u>	<u>12,107</u>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<u>1,692</u>	<u>12,107</u>
<b>FUNDS</b>		
Restricted income funds	45,891	1,500
Unrestricted income funds	(44,199)	10,607
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<u>1,692</u>	<u>12,107</u>

**Auditor's statement**

We have examined the summarised financial statements comprising the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet as set out on pages X to X.

**Respective responsibilities of Directors and auditors**

The directors are responsible for preparing the summary financial statements. Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statements with the full annual accounts and directors' report, on which we reported on 7 December 2007. We also read the other information contained in the summary financial statements and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statements.

**Basis of opinion**

We have carried out the procedures necessary to ascertain whether the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full financial statements from which they are prepared.

**Opinion**

In our opinion the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2007.

**Lubbock Fine**

Chartered Accountants  
Registered Auditors  
Date: .....

Russell Bedford House  
City Forum, 250 City Road  
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