



LEGAL OUTREACH SURGERIES

EVALUATION 2012

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Release currently delivers unique legal outreach surgeries in 10 treatment centers in London, and we wish to expand the service to more centres to meet an escalating and unmet demand. Illicit drug misuse currently affects over 50,000 people in London, and just over half are receiving treatment. Many of those in treatment will have a plethora of legal issues ranging from income welfare allowances and benefit entitlement; debt; housing including homelessness to name but a few areas. This evaluation report considers the affect and outcomes of our current legal outreach surgeries, which has been compiled using data fed back from 246 current service users, and 37 treatment staff, as well as data from 89 prospective service users. The feedback gather from both current and prospective service users clearly establishes the continued and expansive need for the service, as corroborated by current and prospective treatment centres. Expansion of the legal outreach surgeries is dependent upon funding, which is addressed in the recommendations with a growth plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK Drug Strategy (published December 2010) identified the need for a 'whole systems approach' that addresses issues of housing and inequality - the legal surgery goes to the heart of this principle.

Substance misuse and dependency are often misunderstood medical and/or psychological conditions that are frequently portrayed as an individual 'life choice' to use substances whether legal or illegal, regardless of the harm caused - be it to the individual, family, or society. Legal welfare services are rarely extended or offered to this group of people as they are often considered undeserving of legal help, so they carry the burden of vilification and stigmatisation. In the main, substance misuse and dependency for many generally occurs after a specific event, situation, or trauma, so the substance misuse itself was not the cause but does exacerbate the problem.

Drug dependency is a health disorder with social causes and consequences. In medical terms, it is a chronic condition characterised by relapse and remission. However, it does not fit the popular perception of diagnosis, treatment, and cure. There is no instant remedy.
National Treatment Agency

Often those who use drugs problematically will have a myriad of social and legal problems. For most people they will not be able to address their substance misuse problems when their lives are in chaos and they possibly face bailiffs knocking on the door, their income benefits being stopped or being evicted from their home. The stress and distress caused by such problems will inevitably lead to increased levels of drug use and for some it will exacerbate their mental health problems. The legal service provided by Release ensures that these issues are addressed and provides an environment for those who use drugs problematically to engage more fully with the services of the drug treatment centre. Furthermore, we often hear from clients that their initial engagement with a treatment service is as a result of hearing that a legal surgery is available to those accessing these services. It is this that ultimately motivates them to contact the drug treatment service.

The Release legal outreach surgery is a unique service as it is only delivered within alcohol and drug treatment centres. The service has been in operation for over 20 years and during this period has had to adapt to service user needs due to changes in the law. The legal surgeries have also demonstrated resilience during the most recent economic crisis. This has been achieved by providing a high quality service and demonstrating the positive impact of the services; the legal programme has actually grown by 50% since 2008. Much of this has been achieved by being innovative and inventive to overcome funding challenges and expanding the various streams of potential income sources.

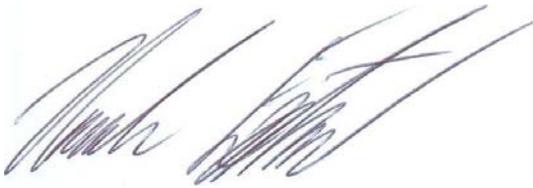
The legal outreach programme adopts a non-judgmental approach of intervention and assistance to aid some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society, securing and supporting their legal rights to housing, income, and health sources that are availed and acquired by the rest of society. By delivering legal surgeries at treatment centres service users are directly engaged in a secure, supported, and familiar environment that they are comfortable with.

“Professionals described PDUs in their areas as a marginalised group who experienced stigma and had complex needs, including mental and physical health, employment, housing and family problems.”

Department for Work and Pensions 2010

By addressing the legal needs of drug users and those in recovery the consequences can have a profound and positive effect not only for the individual but also for those who live, support and work with them. Reducing health and

income inequalities significantly improves a person’s life chances and integration back into their community.



Niamh Eastwood
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Before commencing with the legal outreach surgery evaluation a short synopsis of the organisation is outlined. This is in order to contextualise the service in light of the other relevant activities and services the organisation delivers. The other services will not be explored in detail unless they directly correlate or are a by-product of the legal outreach surgery programme.

The purpose of this evaluation report is to review the legal outreach surgery programme and its purpose, outputs (activities) and outcomes of the service.

This report will consider the quantitative and qualitative feedback received from the current service users, as well as those received from treatment centre staff. Other relevant stakeholders have also fed into this process to assist in determining the value and significance of the service.

Further to the aforementioned the report will review the legal outreach surgery service user experiences and how this shapes the policy and consultation work of our organisation on a local and national level.

Finally, a consultation process was undertaken with prospective host drug treatment centres and service users. Their views highlight the need for the service in other London boroughs and details the experiences they have had with external legal agencies.

The appendix to this report contains samples of the questionnaires used for service user and staff feedback, and other supporting documentation surrounding the legal outreach surgery provision.

THE ORGANISATION

Release was established in 1967 and became a registered charity (and company limited by guarantee) in 1985. The organisation is staffed by qualified lawyers, drugs experts, and policy experts providing a number of frontline services such as a national legal and drugs helpline, therapeutic counselling, expert witness (reports and testimony) and legal outreach surgeries. In addition we also produce publications for professionals and the public; several of these have been commissioned by the Home Office and the Department of health.

In addition to the services the organisation also proactively responds to governmental consultations and policy debates, especially in areas of social justice and welfare reform. Briefing papers are also provided to members of parliament and to non-governmental organisations developing policy which may impact on Release's core client group.

Since Release's inception, the organisation has continuously and proactively advocated for unrestricted access to justice for all individuals with a specific emphasis on substance misuse and dependency. By addressing the legal needs of drug users and those in recovery the consequences can have a profound and positive effect not only for the individual but also for those who live, support and work with them. Reducing health and income inequalities significantly improves a person's life chances and integration back into their community.

"At the South London Release surgery I attended as an observer, drug dependency had typically led to a wide range of other, often complex, problems in relation to housing; chronic debt; employment and benefit entitlement issues. These people had no-one else to turn to.

The solicitor's background of experience in the drugs field, coupled with professional legal knowledge and a non-judgmental attitude was clearly very much appreciated by the clients and, for some, was no doubt a real lifeline. "

Ronald Hooberman - Trustee (Chairman)

The organisation has memberships with AdviceUK, The Helplines Association (THA), Federation of Drug & Alcohol Professionals (FDAP), London Advice Services Alliance (LASA), Criminal Justice Alliance and FESAT. Individuals have memberships with the Bar Council, Solicitors Regulation Authority, London Toxicology Group, Expert Witness Institute, and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). We are also licensed to provide debt advice. There are currently 8 full time and 3 part time members of staff supported by over 25 dedicated volunteers.

LEGAL OUTREACH SURGERY

The National Treatment Agency and the Greater London Authority have both recognised that people experiencing substance misuse problems need to access services through collaborative initiatives to aid recovery¹. Given that the estimated number of problem drug users in London currently stands at 51,000, and of this number approximately 28,000 access treatment², the legal surgeries are an effective tool for engaging and retaining people in the treatment system.

“Wonderful service. You really go out your way to help people and I wish there were more people like you.”

Service User

The legal outreach surgery is a unique service that can only operate and be delivered through collaboration with treatment centres, service users, and other service providers. Integration into the service users’ treatment environment is essentially what distinguishes the service from other legal service providers, coupled together with the intricate specialist knowledge of each of our legal advisors. Our current surgeries are delivered in the following 9 London boroughs:

- *Brent
- Camden (2)
- *Hackney
- Hammersmith & Fulham
- *Haringey
- Kensington & Chelsea
- *Lambeth
- *Tower Hamlets
- Westminster



*Of the 33 London local authorities, 19 rank within the top 50 of the 326 local authorities in England on at least one of the summary measures of deprivation. Five of our legal surgeries are located within these local authorities and we are seeking to expand our presence to the other boroughs through this project proposal.

¹ GLA - The London Health Inequalities Strategy (April 2010)

² www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/prevalencestats2009-10fullreport.pdf

Service availability at the treatment centre addresses a number of issues.

- a) Delivering the service within an environment that the service user recognises establishes **trust**.
- b) Many of the service users are on welfare benefits, so **travelling** can cause issues with attendance at other venues.
- c) On-site delivery means the service user benefits from having services delivered in **collaboration** with each other.
- d) Service user **engagement** and **retention** with the treatment centre increases.

“I have personally referred clients onto Release and received client feedback on the service provided. Release has provided a crucial service, which benefits clients wellbeing and engagement with the service.”

Treatment Centre Staff

All of the aforementioned improve the long term prospects for the service user, which directly impacts upon their wellbeing and also that of their family and the wider community.

SERVICE DELIVERY & ACTIVITIES

The legal team consists of dedicated and motivated non-practising barristers, solicitors and paralegals (legal advisors) that deliver the legal surgeries and operate the helpline. They are supported and underpinned by a committed body of (student) undergraduate and postgraduate law volunteers.

The legal surgery is delivered at a fixed, published time each week when a legal advisor attends the drug treatment centre to deliver the surgery. Surgeries that fall upon a public holiday are rescheduled to be delivered upon a mutually agreed date with the treatment centre. The drug treatment centre provides the facilities (room, printing and telephone) and administers the appointment/drop-in system with up to 2 reserve appointments made available in case of emergency or cancellation. Sometimes there can be a delay in obtaining an appointment due to waiting lists, however the two reserve places can only be booked on the week the surgery is delivered, ensuring that emergency matters can be addressed immediately. Staff and clients of any service can contact the legal advisor responsible for their service outside of the surgery hours if

“They have helped many of my clients. Once problems of debts etc. are addressed they are more free to develop themselves and re-join society.”

Treatment Centre Staff

they need to determine if a matter is urgent - this acts as a kind of triage system. A maximum of six clients a week are seen at each surgery (authorisation letters are signed allowing the legal advisor to act on behalf of the clients) and all follow up work

is undertaken back at head office, ensuring that the service is running at its full potential and capacity.

For appointment-based services, the names of those booked-in will be provided in advance of the advisor attending. However, for new clients the advisor will be unaware of the specific issue to be discussed prior to attending the project. Each legal advisor is provided with a laptop computer, and these are configured to connect to our office via a secure virtual private network (VPN) which enables the advisor to access and create client files, as well as accessing support materials, and also use our virtual telephone system. Service users are notified in advance by the treatment centres to provide as much written correspondence as possible concerning their legal matters and to bring this with them when attending the legal surgery. This does not always happen because of the chaotic nature of many clients' lives, and service users frequently have to provide the correspondence at a later date.

"...when a client presents with a housing possession matter on the basis of rent arrears, it is likely that there are also Housing Benefit issues. This can then consequently reveal issues with the client's main benefit such as Employment & Support Allowance or Job Seeker's Allowance and an error or decision relating to this main claim has caused the Housing Benefit to be suspended and led to rent arrears."

Niki Durosaro – Release Solicitor

Examples of the work undertaken include assisting homeless clients with initial applications for housing to the local authority; advocating on behalf of a client who is suffering harassment at their property and who wishes to be transferred; ensuring benefits are reinstated if a client has been sanctioned by the Department for Work and Pensions ('DWP'); making backdated claims for housing benefit where a client faces eviction proceedings due to

rent arrears; appealing against a decision of the DWP where it has been determined that a client is not entitled to a specific benefit. Some of the issues facing clients are as a direct result of their drug use, such as a client who is unable to complete benefit forms and then faces eviction. The role of the legal advisor is to try to resolve, where possible, the matter before any further action is taken against a client or to limit the damage of an existing problem.

Where possible, issues presented by the service user are immediately addressed during the consultation, such as telephoning the Department for Work and Pensions (with the service user providing verbal authorisation) enquiring as to why the client's Employment and Support Allowance was stopped. This allows the legal advisor to garner as much information as possible and intervene at the earliest opportunity.

After the initial meeting the client is provided with a client care letter detailing what to expect from the service and the

"The service helped me feel less alone as I did not have representation for my trial. Release helped refer me to a criminal defence specialist and I now feel like I have somewhere to go for support."

Service User

complaints procedure so that they are informed of their rights at the start of the process. The client is able to contact the legal advisor at the Release office if they need to discuss their case further or to obtain an update on how matters are progressing.

Release also has a legal advisor who is an accredited Debt Relief Order Intermediary. This means they are able to assist those individuals with significant debt and who have a limited income by making an application for a Debt Relief Order, which essentially extinguishes the debt owed. Clients can freely access this service via any of our legal surgeries, and this service is conducted at our offices as 'real-time' filing is required. This service was only recently introduced in July 2011 but has already benefitted 12 clients to date.

Representation is provided by the Release legal team in relation to social security matters. In the last 12 months nearly 50 clients have benefitted from this element of the service.

"It helps to have such a competent representative who sets out the evidence in advance as this saves us from having to ask any questions of you."

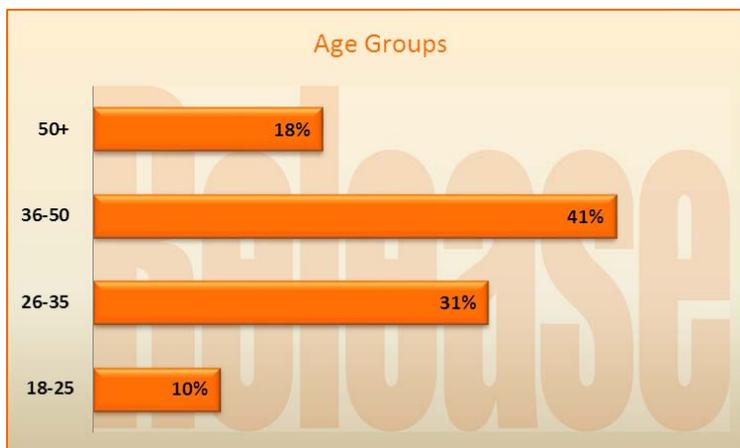
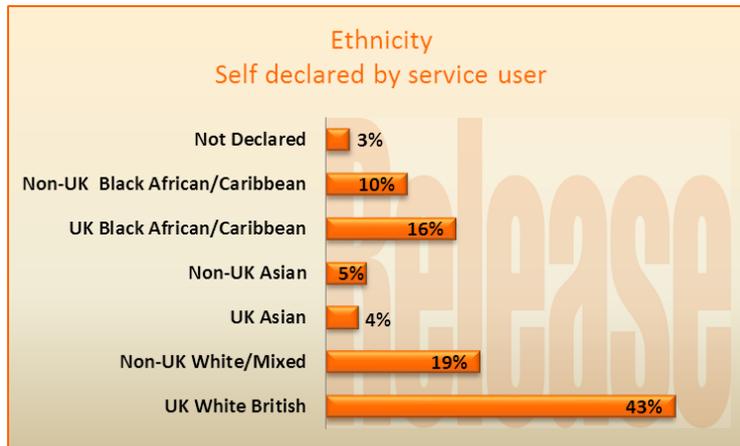
Tribunal Judge to client:

"These are the best submissions I have seen in months and are set out extremely clearly. I hope that Release continues to be funded for as long as possible."

Tribunal Judge to legal advisor:

If there are matters of law that Release cannot assist with we then refer the client to an appropriate provider. Release has developed strong links with legal practitioners in the London area which ensures the clients are referred to law firms that are able to support and represent a client with complex needs. Release continues to support the client through the legal process.

DEMOGRAPHICS - CURRENT SERVICE USER



MANAGEMENT OF THE LEGAL SURGERY PROGRAMME

This section considers the issues that arise in relation to the management of the legal surgery programme rather than the overall management of the organisation. Within the organisation the legal team is led by the Head of Legal Services, a qualified solicitor with 5 years post qualification experience. The legal team then consists of 1 full time solicitor, 2 full time non-practising barristers and 2 part time solicitors who are responsible for delivering the legal surgeries and who are supported by a part-time paralegal. The Head of Legal Services is responsible for staff supervision; staff training; liaising with the management of the drug treatment centres; ensuring that case files meet the requisite standard; and organising the project timetable including cover.

The senior management of the drug treatment centres and Head of Legal Services determine how the service will be delivered, that is, whether it will be appointment based or a drop in service. It is important that the system that results in maximum attendance is adopted in each project. Release is responsive to this issue and if it is found that one system does not work effectively the alternative will be adopted. The legal advisor delivering the surgery will be responsible for continually assessing the attendance levels at the surgery. The time slot when the legal surgery is delivered is also important to ensure high levels of engagement. Working with the drug project Release will ensure that the surgery operates during drop in sessions which are often the busiest time for a project.

Fundamental to the success of the project is strong working relationships with the management and staff of the drug treatment service. To this end staff are encouraged to contact the legal advisor responsible for the surgery at their projects if they have an issue that a client needs addressing urgently. This form of open communication leads to keyworkers supporting their clients to access the legal service. Furthermore, the members of the legal team will attend monthly or quarterly formal meetings with staff and service users to reflect on the delivery of the surgeries. This provides an opportunity to identify what works well and what needs to be addressed. Again, this level of responsiveness ensures that the surgery being delivered is specifically meeting the needs of the clients and staff at a project.

I truly believe all of the staff members from Release provide an excellent service to our clients. Client feedback has been very positive and the support they receive helps them to improve social, physical, mental wellbeing. Clients are able to access support via DIP and gives the client empowerment; increases their confidence and self-esteem."

Treatment Centre Staff

Quarterly reports are provided to the senior management at a drug treatment service so that they can clearly see the level of attendance;

issues that clients present with; the rate of success in the resolution of a case; and qualitative feedback from service users.

The Head of Legal Services also meets local commissioners responsible for funding drug treatment centres in their area to discuss continued funding of the legal surgeries. Due to the level of engagement and level of success in relation to the resolution of legal problems, funding is usually secured. If this is not possible through direct funding from the local pooled treatment budget then Release management, with local commissioners and management at the drug treatment centre, will work together to secure alternative sources of funding. This approach has resulted in a continued growth in the legal service within London.

“As a new trustee I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to observe one of Release’s solicitors conducting a ‘surgery’ in a drop-in community centre in Paddington. Without the assistance of the Release solicitor, there is little doubt they would fall down the cracks and quickly become a much bigger burden on the local or judicial authorities. Their evident gratitude for some kind advice, even when they were only securing their rights, was striking.”
Roger Golland - Release Trustee

STAFF SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Head of Legal services is also responsive to the needs of the clients in terms of the areas of law that need to be addressed. This is achieved through on-going training; an example of this is the increasing number of clients attending with debt issues where a Debt Relief Order (‘DRO’) would be appropriate. Currently all legal staff are undertaking training to deliver this service.

Release lawyers are required through their professional code of practice to undertake a minimum number of hours per year continued professional development. Failure to maintain this would result in the individual lawyer not obtaining a practising certificate. The staff attend regular training sessions with the following organisations: Child Poverty Action Group; Crime Line, Legal Action Group, London Advice Services Alliance, as well as attending seminars at law firms and barristers’ chambers.

One of the difficulties that arises in relation to the delivery of the services is ensuring that staff are competent to deliver advice and assistance in relation to areas of law that clients present with. As stated, training and development is one way to address this issue however there will be areas of law where the team is simply not able to provide advice, such as immigration matters (a lawyer providing advice in this area needs to be certified to do so). In such cases we work with solicitors who specialise in these areas and continue to support the client in terms of document gathering etc. Another consideration is in terms of future recruitment; in

our next recruiting round Release is likely to seek applications from solicitors who are certified in delivering immigration advice as well as having knowledge of social welfare issues.

SPECIALIST STAFF KNOWLEDGE

One of the unique aspects of the service is the requirement that all the legal staff are involved in public consultations and parliamentary briefings on proposed legislation that impacts on people who use drugs. This means that the legal team are always up to date in relation to new laws and policies that impact on the client group. One example of this is the 'Sentencing Council's Drug Offences Definitive Guideline' which was published in February 2012 and detailed the new sentencing regime for those convicted of drug offences. The legal team were heavily involved in the drafting of a response to the proposed guidelines which had been released in mid-2011 and had attended several meetings with Council staff and Crown Prosecution Service staff. When the final guidelines came into force the lawyers at Release were already well versed in the content and principles of the new regime. Other examples include: legislation introduced in relation to antisocial behaviour under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, the Crime and Immigration Act 2008 and the Police and Crime Act 2009; welfare reform legislation and changes in relation to housing benefit and proposals contained in both the Welfare Acts of 2008 and 2012. Contributing to these consultations means that Release is able to provide a voice to the experiences of the clients and be properly informed of changes in policies and legislation that impact on our clients. It also provides an opportunity to meet with ministers and civil servants from the Home Office, Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions to discuss the issues faced by our clients.

Many of the clients are aware of this element of Release's work and this strengthens their confidence in the legal advisors as they know that the organisation advocates on their behalf. Added to this, the team also present at conferences around the country. In the last 12 months presentations have been made at the following conferences: AdFam; the Royal College of GPs Substance Misuse in General Practice; the Alliance and Drink & Drug News service user conference; and 1 Pump Court's Children and the Law conference. Staff are also regularly asked to comment in the media about stories that impact on the clients.

Most importantly, the legal staff receive in-house training from Release's expert drugs team on the effects of drugs; drug related health issues such as Blood Borne Virus and damage from injecting; and information on how the treatment system works. This means that the legal advisor is well informed on issues that may impact on a client and can properly take instructions in relation to legal matters where an issue may be relevant.

CLIENT CONTACT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The legal team run a client contact management system which is essentially a database that records clients' details, the number of appointments they have attended including the date of the first engagement, the issues they present with and at what stage of resolution we are at in relation to those issues. This allows us to monitor activity effectively and supports the production of the quarterly and annual reports for each project.

CASE STUDIES OF THE LEGAL OUTREACH SURGERY

Below are three case studies which illustrate how the legal outreach surgery achieves its aim of benefiting individuals, families and communities summarising the activities (outputs) of the advisor, and the outcomes achieved. Further, case studies are contained in Appendix 1.

A CASE STUDY of MULTIPLE DEBTS

Male Client, mid 40's

Legal issue presented

The client sought the assistance of Release as he was facing considerable debts.

Case Background

The client was working through his substance misuse programme but was becoming increasingly anxious regarding money he owed which was jeopardising his chances of recovery. A key worker at his treatment centre booked an appointment for him to see a Release lawyer at the centre.

The client owed £13,970.59 to 24 creditors including priority debts such as rent arrears, council tax arrears and bailiff recovery was pending. The majority of the debts were consumer debts including personal loans and credit cards. The client was surviving on means-tested benefits based on his incapacity to work and his £7.00 per month disposable income would not have covered even nominal payments to each creditor.

Advisor Activity

The advisor applied for a Debt Relief Order for 20 of the 24 Creditors for a sum of £11,800.59 worth of the total debt. The advisor then negotiated with the remaining 4 creditors (who could not be included in the Order) a reasonable and affordable payment plans for the client.

Outcome Achieved

The Insolvency Service accepted the Debt Relief Order application and the remaining creditors all agreed to enter into payment plans with the client. The client has since successfully completed his recovery programme and is now mentoring young men in his local community around drug use.

A CASE STUDY of MULTIPLE LEGAL ISSUES

Female Client, early 30s

Legal issue presented

Benefits, rent arrears and debts.

Case Background

Client was a single mother who had started working as a sex worker 12 months previously to try and pay the household bills. She had not used illicit drugs previously but 6 months into sex working she started to use crack cocaine. This led to non-payment of rent and mounting bills. She attended the legal surgery at a drug treatment centre stating that she wanted to stop sex working and seek help for her drug use.

Advisor Activity

The lawyer advised the client to make an immediate claim for income support and housing benefit and assisted her in completing the paperwork. Contact was made with her housing officer and a payment plan was put in place. The Housing Association was going to start possession proceedings but was halted as a result of the legal intervention. A number of the debts were extinguished due to the client's vulnerability and repayment plans were established for the remaining debts (mainly council tax arrears).

Outcome Achieved

The client's legal issues were resolved and she entered a 12 week abstinence programme. She has not used any illicit substances and is training to be a youth worker. She and her daughter continue to reside in their local community.

A CASE STUDY OF RIGHT TO RESIDE and BENEFITS

Male Client, late 30s

Legal issue presented

Possession proceedings were commenced by the client's Landlord for significant rent arrears. It transpired that the client had accumulated rent arrears due to his housing benefit being suspended as a direct result of the right to reside test for his substantive benefit claim. A notice of eviction was issued and the client was faced with street homelessness within one week.

Case Background

The client originally attended because he had received a notice for possession for his property and was being harassed by his landlord's bailiffs. Upon further investigation it was discovered that the client had accumulated rent arrears due to his housing benefit being suspended as a result of a pending right to reside decision by the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to his substantive benefit claim. The client is particularly vulnerable and suffers from mental health conditions and is recovering from long-term heroin use, so the threats of eviction and harassment by bailiffs were having an adverse effect on his wellbeing. His situation became particularly challenging because he did not have access to alternative accommodation without his housing benefit being processed. He had previously lived on the street and was having suicidal thoughts at the prospect of being forced into street homelessness again.

Advisor Activity

Release intervened to make representations on his behalf to his landlord, successfully negotiating to have further bailiff action suspended pending determination by a court as to his eviction from the property. Further written representations were made on his behalf to the county court, requesting a postponement of his eviction on the basis that it would leave him destitute and homeless, and raising serious concerns that this would have on his welfare. The court granted a temporary postponement of the eviction.

Release then submitted a request for a review of the right to reside decision, arguing that the client had acquired a permanent right of residence under the EEA Regulations. Release is continuing to assist with reinstating and backdating his full housing benefit and has made a homeless application on his behalf.

Outcome Achieved

The Department for Work and Pensions revised their decision and concluded that the client had a right to reside as he had acquired permanent residence in the UK. His benefit entitlement was backdated for the entire period in question.

The client now qualifies for full housing benefit and is being assisted with sourcing alternative accommodation. He is no longer having suicidal thoughts and his mental health has improved because he is not at risk of street homelessness.

IMPACT ON POLICY

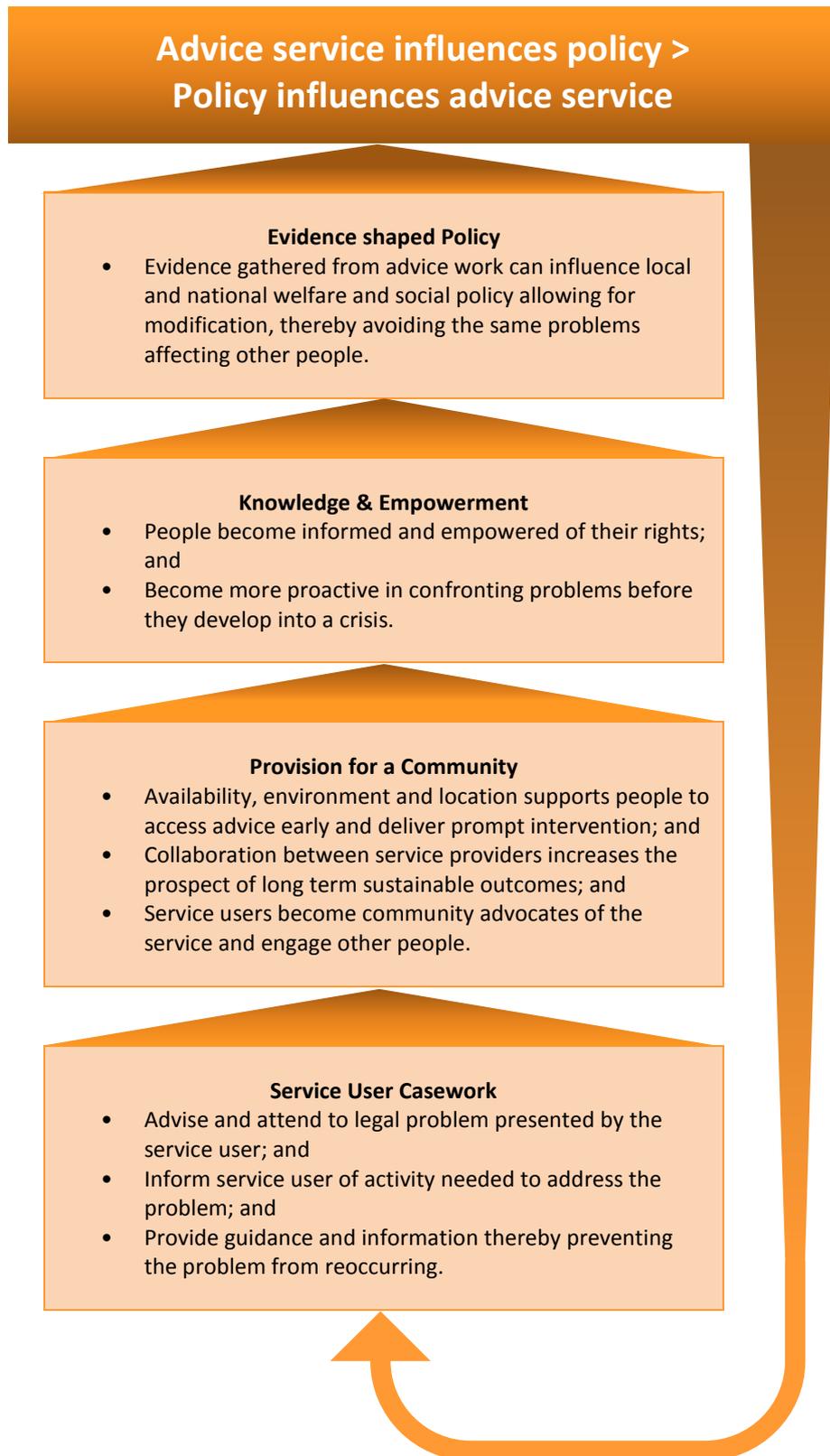
The advocacy strategy at Release is very much based on lobbying on those issues that impact, or have the potential to impact, on our clients. It is their experiences which determine what the organisation does in terms of public policy. This is why Release has become a pivotal voice in the welfare reform debate especially in relation to proposals that are specific to drug users. Most recently Release led a coalition of organisations providing evidence to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on how the current medical assessments (ATOS assessments) are carried out in relation to those with substance misuse problems. The clients were interviewed for their views and experiences and this information was submitted to the DWP.

Often when meeting with parliamentarians a service user will attend to share their views on how a proposed policy or legislation will impact on them.

As stated, Release regularly contributes to public consultations and provides parliamentary briefings. Case studies and client feedback will often form part of these written submissions.

The flowchart below illustrates the central role service user casework is to shaping community benefit, local and national policy.

The following diagram shows how the experience of clients can help to shape national and local policy.



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Release delivers a specific legal service in drug and alcohol treatment centres, which work within partnerships, or treatment communities. Our service evaluation was explicitly clear that we were solely evaluating our own service and not that of other service providers within the treatment environment, or community.

For approximately 10 weeks between mid-July and September 2012 we gathered feedback of our legal outreach surgeries that we deliver in 10 drug treatment centres across London. This consisted of not only asking for feedback from service users but also from staff at the treatment centres, so that the feedback itself involved all stakeholders.

The evaluation methodology deployed was the development of a uniform questionnaire for service users and a distinct one for treatment centre staff, thereby allowing for quantitative and qualitative consistency across both groups. Both questionnaires are contained in the appendix to the report.

Prior to commencing the evaluation we concluded that in order for service users and staff at the treatment centres to provide feedback they would need to have the privacy and time to consider the questions posed. This would allow them to make an informed and considered response based upon their individual experience of the service (service users). Centre staff were asked about their observational assessment of service and how the availability of the legal surgery impacted on their interaction with the service user.

The service user questionnaire consisted of 11 closed questions and 1 evaluative question using a scale of 1 (poor) to 6 (good) plus a comment section. The treatment centre staff questionnaire consisted of 9 closed questions, and 1 evaluative question using a scale of 1 (poor) to 6 (good) plus a comment section.

The closed and evaluative questions on both questionnaires were designed to extrapolate quantitative data. The comment section of both questionnaires encouraged individuals to include complaints, criticisms, or compliments thereby allowing for qualitative analysis.

We distributed 50 service user and 10 staff questionnaires to each treatment centre (total of 10 centres) – the questionnaires were coded for each centre and clearly watermarked with staff and client respectively. We set out a clear statement on each questionnaire which read:

“Release is conducting a satisfaction review of the legal outreach surgery delivered in your centre, and it would be extremely helpful if you could take a couple of minutes in answering the following questions. A questionnaire for staff and a questionnaire for clients have been produced and the responses provided will be covered by confidentiality and Data Protection.”

Of the 500 questionnaires distributed to service users we received back 246 (49.2%), and of the 100 questionnaires distributed to staff we received back 37 (37%).

When questionnaires were completed they were handed to our legal advisors by centre staff and service users and returned to the operations manager at Release for collation and analysis. It should be stressed that no member of the legal team assisted in collating or analysing the questionnaires at any point during the process of evaluation.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3

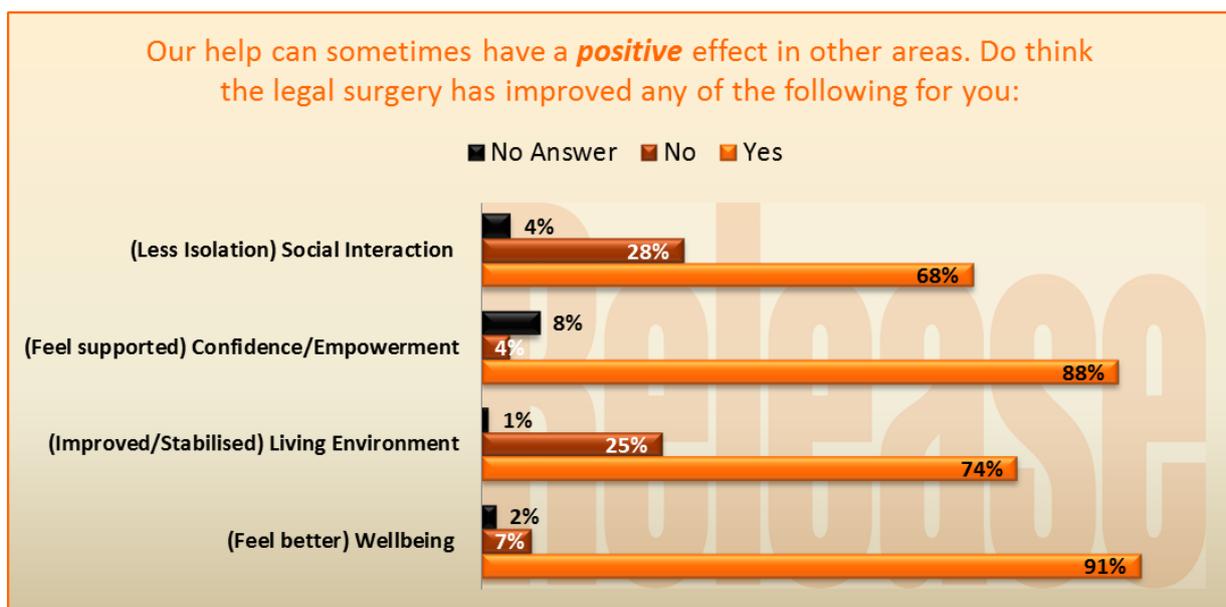


Fig 4

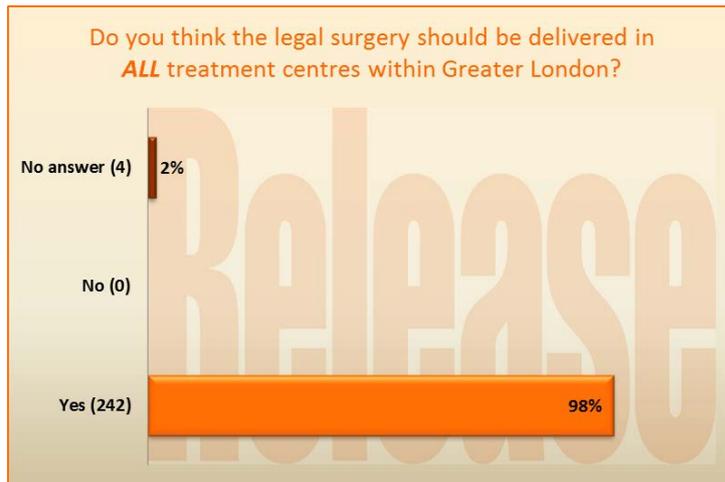


Fig 5



SERVICE USER EVALUATION

As previously mentioned in order for service users to provide feedback they would need to have the privacy and time to consider the questions posed. This allowed them to make an informed and considered response based upon their individual experience of the service. The results of the evaluation with current service users clearly demonstrate the positive impact the service can have on an individual. In particular the 'soft outcomes' measured in relation to the 'positive effect' of the surgery (Fig. 3) illustrates that a significant majority of the service users have experienced feeling more supported and empowered (88%) and their overall sense of feeling better about their wellbeing (91%) is an indirect consequence of having their legal issues addressed. Whilst social interaction (68%) and improved living environment (74%) are marginally lower than the two abovementioned categories nevertheless demonstrates that a sizeable proportion improvements in these areas.

For those service users that indicated there was no improvement in their social interaction (28%) and improved living environment (25%) may be the result of not having had their issues resolved during the 10 week period the feedback was conducted.

The following graph (Fig 6) is a snapshot illustration of the issues presented by individual service users during a six month period from April to September 2012. The issues have been categorised but it should be borne in mind that debts includes rent, mortgage, and commercial lending, and have been recorded against the individual not per issue. On average each individual presented 1.8 debt issues.



Fig 6

The following graph (Fig 7) shows the number issues resolved against the number on-going through the six month period. The debt category demonstrates the protracted nature of addressing debt issues, as

resolution can often take several months depending upon the creditors' procedures and negotiation position.

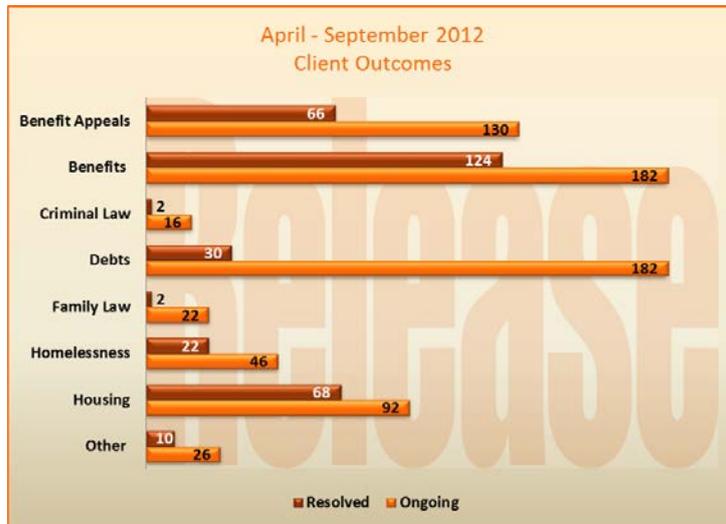


Fig 7

The feedback received by service users is extremely positive as seen by their responses in Fig. 1, 4 & 5. These responses distinctly indicate the value and confidence levels service users place on the provision of the legal outreach surgery.

“it’s a shame not more appointments available; it’s a great service and should be in all treatment centres.”
Service User

The main criticism by the service users (3 comments) and treatment centre staff (2 comments) of the service was the availability of appointments, which represents an overall **0.018%** of all feedback back from 283

respondents'. The average waiting time for an appointment is 1 to 2 weeks and emergency cases are dealt with almost immediately. Interestingly the criticism levied is acknowledged by the statement makers recognising the service is oversubscribed due to its popularity.

“I would like more slots to be available in order to see the lawyer. All the help provided has been fantastic.”
Service User

TREATMENT STAFF EVALUATION

As mentioned earlier we additionally sought feedback from treatment centre staff to see if they held any opinions regarding the legal outreach surgery. In addition to the 5 closed questions we also asked them to grade the service (Likert system) based upon their observational experiences of the service and their interaction with the service users.

Fig 8

The adjacent graph highlights the 37 responses received to the 5 closed questions and in the main the respondents were extremely positive about the service.



The last open question is based upon a system of measurement where respondents were encouraged to grade the service. Over three quarters of respondents graded the service as very good with a further fifth grading it as good. We only received one response grading the service as adequate. Considering the overall responses received the legal outreach surgery is warmly viewed by treatment centre staff.

Fig 9



“Release has been providing an essential legal pathway to our clients which has been greatly benefited them. Without Release many of our clients would be unsupported in such a vital area. In my professional opinion the service provided by Release should be rolled out across all treatment providers in all London boroughs.”

Tower Hamlets - Senior Staff

CONSULTATION WITH PROSPECTIVE SERVICE USERS

The current legal outreach surgeries are consistently meeting a growing demand and feedback from current service users and treatment centre staff overwhelmingly indicates the service should be delivered in as many treatment centres as possible without over extending the organisation's resources.

In order to determine whether expansion of the legal outreach surgery programme was viable two key questions were addressed through the consultation process:

1. Is there a local need?
2. Would the service make a difference?

In order to answer these two questions, the Head of Legal Services consulted with 6 treatment centres in the London boroughs of:

Barking and Dagenham
Ealing
Islington
Lewisham
Newham
Wandsworth

Part of the consultation process was to discuss with service users, through focus groups, whether the delivery of a legal surgery would be of benefit. They were also provided with two questionnaires. (Appendix 1)

The importance of the focus groups and the questionnaires was essential in determining local need and if the service would make any difference to service users.

Each consultation was organised by a senior manager of the treatment centre and lasted approximately 3 hours. A total of four separate focus groups took place involving a total of 89 service users. The consultation consisted of the Head of Legal Services explaining Release's legal surgery provision and gaining their views on the possibility of the service being established within their project.

The results from the consultation are presented on the following pages.

THE CONSULTATION RESULTS

A description of the areas of law Release deals with prompted lots of nods of recognition as the 75% of respondents had experienced some form of legal issue during the previous 12 months, for which they sought advice for.



The choice of advice provider was varied with just under half the respondents choosing a solicitor, and just under a third chose the Citizens Advice Bureau. The remaining respondents approached either a law

centre or someone that had been recommended to assist but was neither working in the aforementioned categories.

When it came to choosing the service provider 40% made the decision independently whereas half the respondents did seek advice over which service provider to select. The 40% that self-determined the provider all chose to see a solicitor which is reflected in the answers to question 1 above.



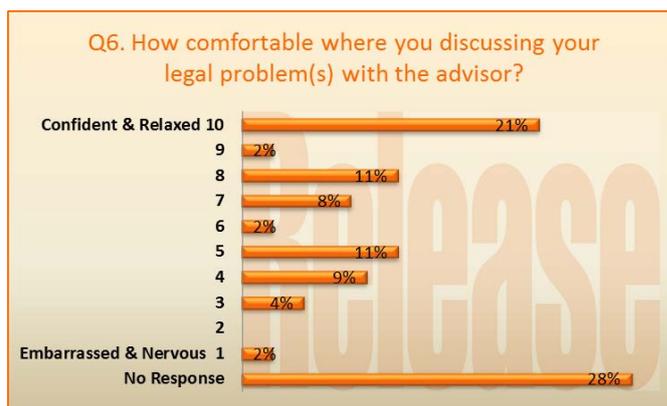
The 35% of respondents to the adjacent question all accessed solicitors. The remaining 40% mainly tried to access law centres, and the citizen advice bureau. Just under half of this group had to wait more than 4 weeks for an appointment.



The majority of respondents elected to attend their, appointments independently with just under a fifth electing to attend with some form of support. The 25% that did not respond were all in the 40% that had to wait more than 4 weeks to obtain

and appointment in question 4 above.

The individuals that elected to see solicitors generally expressed the greatest confidence as displayed in the adjacent graph. Those that elected for someone to accompany them to their appointments recorded the lowest levels of confidence.



The striking feature of the graph below is a third of respondents had had a negative experience when seeking legal advice in the past, frequently relating to judgement and stigma around their drug use.



One client stated that he felt he had been “treated like just another junkie with a criminal record” when he needed representation. See result to question 7.

The interesting finding with the last question received the most positive response overall and included many of the respondents that previously offered no response to the questions above.



Each meeting lasted much longer than anticipated as service users took the opportunity to ask for advice on their individual legal problems, with one person even passing her contact details on to another service user because she was unable to attend but desperately needed assistance. The most recent session concluded with the comments that “This is long overdue” and “You will be very busy!”, and others stated at previous sessions that there were easily enough clients in need of legal advice to fill a whole day each week rather than just an afternoon. The general feeling and consensus was that this is a much needed service that would be warmly welcomed if and when implemented.

While the responses provided above are extremely encouraging in as much they clearly demonstrate a need for the service the larger question is would the service make a material difference to the service user. In order to answer this question we need to turn to the results of the second questionnaire which are contained below where we ask “Have you ever experienced problems in any of the areas listed below and needed advice and assistance?”.

The results from questionnaire 2 below are grouped according to income, debt, housing, and other, and offer some interesting findings.

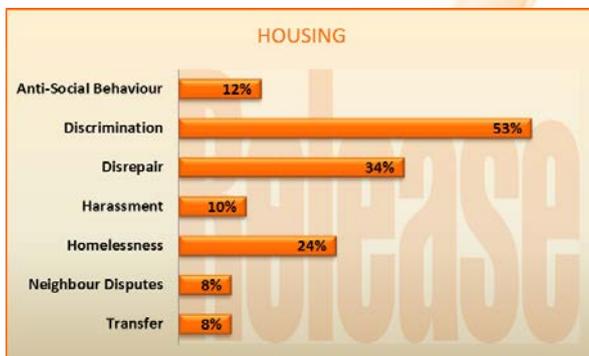
It’s worth remembering the service users were asked “Have you ever experienced problems in **any** of the areas listed below and needed advice and assistance? “.



The adjacent graph demonstrates at least 76% of service users experienced at least one problem with their income. What the graph does not show is that all 89 focus group members were reliant upon welfare benefits. When we analysed further we noted

that 39% had experienced problems in receiving Employment Support Allowance; 18% with Job Seekers Allowance; 18% with Disability Living Allowance. A further 33% experienced problems with housing benefit payments, and 20% with council tax benefit. There is a direct correlation between the benefit problems and housing debt whereby clients lose passport benefits such housing benefit and council tax benefit leading to arrears in these areas. This is demonstrated through the graph below.

We found that 57% of respondents had at least one debt issue and of this number 31% had 3 or more debts. The largest single debt issue (27%) was related to rent debt, and 18% with council tax. We further analysed the responses and the majority of those individuals experiencing income problems also had benefit problems. Commercial debt accounted for a significant proportion with 24% stating that credit cards were of concern, and a further 19% had issues with bank loans.



This graph demonstrates at least 24% of respondents have faced homelessness and a staggering 53% have reported issues of discrimination. Disrepair also seems to be a common issue amongst service users.



We were also interested in the findings in the last category as 26% identified crime as an issue, a further 13% with complaints against the police. Family issues were also of relative concern.

CONCLUSION

The process for evaluating the legal outreach surgeries was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved our current service users and the treatment centre staff which between them provided over 280 feedback forms with over 20% providing qualitative statements. The service users' statements provided valuable and insightful comments about the service to the effect they believed had upon their wider lives.

The continued demand for the legal surgeries is demonstrated with the number issues (1,030) presented between April and September across a wide variety of areas. Income and benefits was the main concern for many and amounted 49.5% of all issues presented. Debts were the next main problem measured at 22.5% followed by housing with 15.5%. Homelessness was recorded at 6.6% and translated into affecting 68 individuals which is a 25% increase year on year.

“Support from the legal advisors boosted my confidence.” Service User

The 'soft' outcome responses demonstrated beyond doubt that whilst the service was there to address material legal issues, many of the service users indicated they had experienced an improvement with their living environment; empowerment and confidence; less isolation, and a general feeling of a better wellbeing. These experiences were independently corroborated by treatment centre staff.

“I have been delighted with the service. I have felt much less isolated and it has given me the support I have needed to feel more secure.” Service User

The second stage of the evaluation drew upon potential service users and the issues they have experienced over a 12 month period. Whilst the first questionnaire was designed to establish use of legal advice and interaction the second questionnaire delved deeper into the issues experienced. Again income was of major concern with 76% of service users experiencing problems. Debts again featured high at 57% with housing problems affecting 65% and homelessness affecting 30% of respondents.

“Excellent service and I will be definitely spread the word. I was in a very bad state financially and am now much better. I felt suicidal before I received help from Release. I was scared and often felt there was no way out of the problem. Release is a much needed service.”

Service User

The Release legal outreach surgeries has brought about material changes too many individuals, in not only addressing their legal issues but has as a by-product provided them with the support, and much deserved opportunities to live more fulfilled and settled lives.

With over 50,000 problematic drug users in London our surgeries help and aid individuals, families and local communities that would otherwise be potentially left without assistance.

“The role is not straightforward delivery of legal advice but due to the issues the clients present with, their histories and substance misuse problems, it requires advisers to be extremely astute and responsive. We are required to anticipate and explore problems that the client might be facing in order to provide a holistic legal advice service.”

Niki Durosaro – Release Solicitor

The responses received to our questionnaires from our current service users and treatment staff clearly demonstrates they view the

service as one of the most important factors in aiding their ability to receive and deliver treatment. Substance misuse can befall anyone and the case studies illustrate how empathic legal interventions can change an individual’s life and that of their families’ and community.

With the breadth and depth of knowledge gained from delivering the legal surgeries we will continue to affect local and national policy, whether it is through consultation documents or ministerial briefings. This ensures the service has a wider effect on society ensuring everyone has a voice.

The Release legal outreach surgery is unique – achieving and affecting so much for so many people. It is in this vane that the organisation continues to seek funding to expand the legal outreach programme.

RECOMMENDATION

The legal outreach surgery programme is a unique service, where demand has remained constantly high. Whilst other legal providers are available data garnered from service user feedback demonstrates there is a definite need for the service which is accessible, supportive and collaborates with other service providers in a treatment environment.

The aim of the service is clear, along with the outputs and outcomes, which are evidentially achieved. With these in mind there is ample verification to support the future growth and expansion of the legal outreach surgery programme in London.

Expansion of the legal outreach surgery programme to be achieved through the following plan:

- Continuous feedback from current service users and the results anonymised and published quarterly through the legal service section on the Release website demonstrating usage and outcomes;
- Collect random sampling feedback thereby avoiding over saturation from current treatment centre staff; anonymise and publish six monthly through the legal service section on the Release website;
- Develop strategic plan including resources to deliver pilot surgeries;
- Head of Legal Services to plan and consult with prospective service user treatment centre groups and staff through focus groups and feedback questionnaires;
- Develop funding strategy to deliver pilot legal surgeries and direct potential funders to published results on the Release website.

APPENDIX 1 – CASE STUDIES

A CASE STUDY of ANTI- SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CLOSURE AND POSSESSION PROCEEDINGS

Male Client, late 50s

Legal issue presented

Closure Order under Part One of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 and possession proceedings.

Case Background

Client was a heroin and crack cocaine user. He attended the drug service initially so that he could access the legal surgery. The client had received a notice for his property to be closed under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (often referred to as a crack house closure). It was explained to the client that it was difficult to defend such orders and that it was likely that his property would be closed for at least 3 months. Legal representation at a specialist criminal law firm was organised. The client was advised that in many cases the landlord, in this case the local council, would start legal proceedings for possession of the property on the grounds of the closure order. The client explained that his property had been taken over by drug dealers and he had been exploited (this is a common experience for vulnerable drug users and is known as 'cuckooing'). The closure order was granted for 3 months and the local authority initiated possession proceedings.

Advisor Activity

The legal advisor organised for the client to be placed in emergency accommodation whilst the property was closed. Housing benefit would only be paid on one property so the legal advisor advised the client to make regular payments to the rent arrears, as this would demonstrate to the Court in any possession proceedings that the client was making an effort to address the problem. The possession proceedings were adjourned on the grounds that the client met a number of conditions including engaging in treatment.

Outcome Achieved

The client continued to meet the conditions of the Court Order and was able to return to the property. There is a repayment plan in place in relation to the outstanding arrears and the client continues to engage with the drug project.

A CASE STUDY of COUNCIL TAX DEBT

Male Client, 41 years old

Legal issue presented

Council Tax Debt.

Case Background

Client had accrued Council Tax arrears for three financial years. These arrears had accrued because the client was on Incapacity Benefit. Claimants of Incapacity Benefit are not entitled to full Council Tax benefit as it not considered to be 'means-tested' and therefore does not provide an automatic 'passport' to full council tax benefit (a distinction from Incapacity Credits paid through Income Support.) The client had presumed that he was entitled to full Council Tax benefit (this is not uncommon).

Due to a sustained period of chaotic lifestyle and crack-cocaine addiction, during which the client found it exceedingly difficult to manage his personal affairs, he had also not been aware of the accruing arrears.

Upon taking the impressive step of voluntarily accessing support services and embarking on a 13 week abstinence based day programme, the client began to start dealing with his backlog of postal correspondence and discovered that he was threatened with bailiff recovery for Council Tax debt of over £500.00. The client was in receipt of appeal rate Employment and Support Allowance only and therefore was unable to pay off the debt.

Advisor Activity

Release made representations to the Council Tax department directly requesting they exercise their discretion to withdraw any warrants from the bailiffs, and write off the arrears, or in the alternative, agree to a nominal and affordable repayment plan.

Outcome Achieved

In light of the submissions detailing the client's previous drug dependency, vulnerabilities, and successful rehabilitation, the council agreed to write off the arrears in full, leaving the client able to focus on his recovery without the stress of threatened bailiff recovery. The client continues to reside in the community enjoying the local support of family and friends.

CASE STUDY on EVICTION PROCEEDINGS and HOUSING BENEFIT

Female client, early 30s

Legal Issue Presented

Eviction proceedings on the grounds of non-payment of rent. Hearing scheduled within 24 hours of attending legal surgery.

Case Background

Client, a single mother in her early thirties, made a real effort to control her heroin problem and was starting to engage in the treatment process. The client accessed one of Release's legal surgeries in crisis and very distressed - with a court hearing due at 10.00am the following day and her eviction set for 10.30am.

Advisor Activity

The legal advisor quickly established that the client wasn't receiving the amount of Housing Benefit she was entitled to - probably due to a combination of her chaotic behaviour and complicated administrative red tape. Release was able to secure legally aided representation for the client at the very last minute and attended Court with her. The housing association agreed to an adjournment moments before the hearing, thereby avoiding the eviction, on the grounds that she was now receiving legal assistance in obtaining backdated housing benefit.

The legal advisor submitted written representations detailing the legal grounds as to why the client was entitled to backdated housing benefit. The majority of the rental arrears were cleared and an agreed repayment plan for the remainder was set up.

Outcome Achieved

The client and her son have remained in their home, the rent arrears have been resolved and the threat of eviction has been overcome. The client is now fully engaged with drug treatment services.

A CASE STUDY on DISABILITY ALLOWANCE APPEAL

Female client, early 40s

Legal Issue Presented

Client had been awarded lower rate for mobility and care components of Disability Living Allowance ('DLA'). She wanted to appeal against the decision to award lower rate care component of DLA.

Case Background

The client engaged with the legal surgery on a Monday afternoon with an appeal hearing already listed for 7 days later. The client informed the legal advisor that she had been getting assistance from the local council support unit but they had not been in contact for a number of weeks and she was concerned. The client suffered from Personality Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, both of these conditions were confirmed by the Department of Work and Pensions. The client also had a history of self-harming and demonstrating suicidal tendencies.

Advisor Activity

The advisor contacted the local council to ascertain where they were at in relation to the appeal hearing. The person responsible was not contactable so her manager was contacted. The council did not respond to Release's enquiries (several were made) until the following Thursday and at this point they advised they were withdrawing from the case and in their view the client had instructed Release. This was not the case and at all times in our communication with the council it was made clear the client simply wanted clarification on the case.

As a result of withdrawal Release submitted 2 separate requests for an adjournment both were rejected. The client advised that she would not be attending the appeal hearing as she was suffering panic attacks. She stated she would rather withdraw the appeal than attend. However, the legal advisor advised her that she had strong grounds for an uprating in the DLA care component and offered her an appointment at the Release offices with a view to at least submitting written submissions. Again, the client was not able to attend due to her mental health problems. The legal advisor took instructions over the phone and submitted the paperwork, including supporting medical evidence (obtained by the advisor) to the Tribunal.

Outcome Achieved

The client's appeal was successful and she was awarded higher rate of the care component. This has enabled her to live a more independent life and she has stated that the outcome has had positive impact on her wellbeing.

*****It is important to note that this is an example of how Release staff will respond to urgent cases.***

APPENDIX 2 - ANONYMISED STATEMENTS

SERVICE USERS

1. Service User

"I would love to see more of them because people need help and the waiting list is long sometimes to get an appointment. Thank you very much for your help – God bless."

2. Service User

"Helping me with my housing needs – it's still on-going. Hoping for the best with help that I need."

3. Service User

"Even though the help I was given was useful I already knew most of the advice given to me. I was looking to see if there was any help directed for people in the same position as me i.e. hostel accommodation which is dry etc. Unfortunately it seems there not much to offer."

4. Service User

"I feel release is essential to help people in addition. They struggle to deal with a variety of issues surrounding their ability to cope with housing, benefits and various situations that can arise with these areas. Therefore they rely heavily on these professionals."

5. Service User

"I found the service very supportive & useful 3 years ago. I was supported with a case where they assisted me in my tribunal, and I won the case – so thank you Release. Now I am being assisted with an issue around my benefits which is on-going and it is nice that I have help around a subject that I don't know much about."

6. Service User

"...because they were very good at assisting me with my problems and made me feel more positive about the outcome of things."

7. Service User

"[Legal advisor name] really helped me. She has given me confidence, without her help I would have given up."

8. Service User

"[Service] it help you sort out your life. [My] drugs life has stopped."

9. Service User

"...because they help people who can't cope. Release is needed so much what will do without them."

10. Service User

"As I have a health condition that is affected by stressful situations i.e. viral load +CD4. Release is the most useful of charities + helps me on catastrophic situations."

11. Service User

"Release has helped me so much, in feeling I am not alone and is always there for my issues. I feel so much relaxed in my mind. There was a time all the bills & debts brought me so down, and being able to have one there for you, makes life so much better."

12. Service User

"I still feel supported even when there is nothing that be done to help me legally. Release helps me feel less isolated."

13. Service User

"The release representative has been great in helping me mange my debt. I would recommend it to friends & family. [staff name] was fantastic."

14. Service User

"I become un-important; no one with a right [or a] voice. I don't feel as an "ignorant" trying to move into the "clever's" but am equal with your support."

15. Service User

"This service is invaluable to clients with self-esteem issues. Health and other similar issues and helps to assist with debts and housing issues all of which are serious and difficult to cope with on one's own."

16. Service User

"Feel like I've got some help. Really appreciate it and it's a great service."

17. Service User

"Release have saved me from debt and the severe consequences and being able to manage the debt. Helped my daughter to get housing; helped overturn a benefits decision and go to a tribunal and successfully appeal and overturn a decision. Release and the fab work they provide to ordinary folk who under jeopardy."

18. Service User

"Really helpful service. My issue was resolved within a matter of days when I thought it would take months."

19. Service User

"I have been delighted with the service. I have felt much less isolated and it has given me the support I have needed to feel more secure."

20. Service User

"Everyone has been really helpful and goes out of their way to provide assistance. They are selfless and have huge hearts. Thank you."

21. Service User

"The service helped me feel less alone as I did not have representation for my trial. Release helped refer me to a criminal defence specialist and I now feel like I have somewhere to go for support."

22. Service User

"Very happy to use the service. There are so many people out there who need these services. I hope you are able to expand and reach more people."

23. Service User

"Wonderful service. You really go out your way to help people and I wish there were more people like you."

24. Service User

"Great service. I have felt really supported by the two Release workers I have met, and can only say good things about the service."

25. Service User

"Great service – has helped, and is as important as the treatment [centre] itself – this is because I can now feel supported towards the end of my treatment."

26. Service User

"The legal help I have had at [DTC] has been invaluable as the [other advice service] were of little help and a great waste time. With the [other advice service] were very stressful and as I suffer with anxiety and depression it put a lot of stress on me."

27. Service User

"I am very happy and grateful that you have been able to assist me. You always keep me updated on the progress of my case and have been successful in helping me with my benefits."

28. Service User

"The service has really helped me. My only suggestion would be that it should be communicated to more people in case they are unaware of the service."

29. Service User

"Very helpful service."

30. Service User

"I have found Release to be very helpful. They have helped me feel more at ease and the service helped me feel more relaxed."

31. Service User

"Very supportive – was feeling uncomfortable and was having anxiety attacks – {legal advisor} calmed me down. She is a very good solicitor. I am grateful and happy with the result."

32. Service User

"Very good – had already recommended the service to 2 other people."

33. Service User

"Felt really comfortable and at ease talking about my problems and made me feel so much better."

34. Service User

"Think that the legal surgery is a really, really good thing."

35. Service User

"Been excellent. Without Release I wouldn't have known what I would have done. I have recommended people to Release. Release is a great service and been a great help to me over the years."

36. Service User

"Release have been doing a really good job at the [DTC] helping a lot of people and making everyone a lot more happy."

37. Service User

"Would be lost without you guys. You have never made me feel inadequate and you make me feel worth something. You helped me and my son when other [advice] services didn't care – I feel Release cares."

38. Service User

"it's a shame not more appointments available; it's a great service and should be in all treatment centres."

39. Service User

"Excellent service and I will be definitely spread the word. I was in a very bad state financially and am now much better. I felt suicidal before I received help from Release. I was scared and often felt there was no way out of the problem. Release is a much needed service."

40. Service User

"Great that the service was available & grateful for the support."

41. Service User

"Have recommended the service to other clients. Appointments should be more quickly. There is current 1-2 week waiting time."

42. Service User

"Support from the legal advisors boosted my confidence."

43. Service User

"Actually, my brother would very much benefit from this service – as debt and legal issues are crippling him. Brilliant, very – helpful and hopeful advice – very glad I came."

44. Service User

"More sessions should be offered to clients. For example sessions could be offered for 2-3 days per week. Due to the demand for the service I had to wait several weeks to get an appointment."

45. Service User

"I would like more slots to be available in order to see the lawyer. All the help provided has been fantastic."

46. Service User

"Assistance with the paperwork was really useful. Couldn't get this sort of legal advice and help elsewhere."

47. Service User

"Not just helpful but understanding of the situation people are in. It made life a lot easier as we'd have gone downhill and may have relapsed."

48. Service User

"Shame legal surgery can only help those with drug issues otherwise I would be able to recommend it to more friends."

CENTRE STAFF

1. Treatment Centre Staff

"The feedback that I am getting from clients regarding Release services is very positive & they find the service very helpful."

2. Treatment Centre Staff

"Easy & quick to access. Much needed support for clients who find it difficult to manage the many different facets of their lives."

3. Treatment Centre Staff

"I think the legal surgery has been very helpful for our clients & the staff are very supportive."

4. Treatment Centre Staff

"I think the service that Release offers makes a big difference in the lives of clients and helps them to sort out the mess that might stop them from staying clean & sober. I have seen the difference to our clients with Releases support."

5. Treatment Centre Staff

"I have found the service provided for clients by Release to be of considerable benefit – to the extent, in fact, that my only real criticism relates to the brevity of the sessions here. I am sure that more work could be done if the time available could be expanded though I do appreciate that this consideration is influenced by budgetary and other factors."

6. Treatment Centre Staff

"I think the service you provide us vital and essential to our service. Our clients are very happy and are able to feel better and they know where they can get help from."

7. Treatment Centre Staff

"I have personally referred clients onto release and received client feedback on the service provided. Release has provided a crucial service, which benefits clients wellbeing and engagement with the service."

8. Treatment Centre Staff

"They have helped many of my clients. Once problems of debts etc. are addressed they are more free to develop themselves and re-join society."

9. Treatment Centre Staff

"Clients have benefited from using this service as it a unique and specialised subject area that clients need to access."

10. Treatment Centre Staff

"An extremely important & valuable service that helps our clients address legal, housing & debt issues that when left undealt with have a major impact on their health standard of living & their drug use. Release are always polite, helpful & extremely knowledgeable. I would support the expanse of this service in any way it wanted to expand."

11. Treatment Centre Staff

"Release has been providing an essential legal pathway to our clients which has been greatly benefited them. Without release many of our clients would be unsupported in such a vital area. In my professional opinion the service provided by Release should be rolled out across all treatment providers in all London boroughs."

12. Treatment Centre Staff

"We/I consider the service provided by the Release legal team to be invaluable to our service users. The service provided is exemplary."

13. Treatment Centre Staff

"It's a great service and because Release is well known, you tend to find that legal, debt, hospital agencies take them more seriously than when we try to liaise with them, which helps the client get in a better space and are more able to look at their substance misuse issues."

14. Treatment Centre Staff

"The advisors from Release have and still do support our clients with the various issues they have presented. In turn the clients have been able to concentrate on their recovery thus changing their behaviour & way of thinking."

15. Treatment Centre Staff

"Overall the legal surgery has been a boon to the service. As benefit changes deeply affect our client group the additional help provided has been of great help to our client group. Also being supported with a myriad of legal problems has been a huge relief."

16. Treatment Centre Staff

"I am a social worker who attends the drop-in every other Friday. I work in partnership with the [London borough] with those service users who wish to access structured residential or day programmes in the community. I have found the service very helpful with clients who have debts or other legal matters outstanding which could be disruptive to pathway into treatment."

17. Treatment Centre Staff

"There is often problems with other services such as social security and criminal justice, housing, debts etc. which Release is very useful."

18. Treatment Centre Staff

"I believe this service is a motivation tool for clients to engage with the other services that we provide at DIP. The staff from the legal team have had a very positive impact on our client group."

19. Treatment Centre Staff

The clients would benefit further if the service included immigration advice."

20. Treatment Centre Staff

I truly believe all of the staff members from Release provide an excellent service to our clients. Client feedback has been very positive and the support they receive helps them to improve social, physical, mental wellbeing. Clients are able to access support via DIP and gives the client empowerment; increases their confidence and self-esteem."

21. Treatment Centre Staff

"Staff are always polite and objective to client needs. Very helpful."

22. Treatment Centre Staff

"The feedback from clients is very positive. The support clients receive from Release contributes towards a client's recovery in many ways as highlighted above (Wellbeing, Living/Environment, Confidence & Empowerment, and Social Interaction. Whilst engaging with Release it gives treatment staff the opportunity to encourage clients to engage with other services."

23. Treatment Centre Staff

"extremely useful service that helps us concentrate on addressing substance misuses, rather than practical concerns we are not qualified around."

24. Treatment Centre Staff

"Very professional service – no complaints from service users and staff are excellent on every performance level."

25. Treatment Centre Staff

"No complaints only praise."

26. Treatment Centre Staff

"They provide a service that compliments clients recovery and are advocates for the vulnerable."

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