

work they had done was a tremendous boost to self-esteem. Not only would this benefit clients and the project, it would help the local community to recognise the value of investment in projects promoting recovery.

The first commission was to make replacement furniture for an old people's home. A wide variety of others have followed, including such highlights as constructing and installing a replica of a Victorian umbrella seat in Stourhead gardens – one of the National Trust's most visited sites – along with garden seats, work benches, picnic tables, bird boxes, coffee tables, bookshelves, children's outdoor play furniture and a signposted local nature trail. It is particularly heartening that a couple of other treatment providers have commissioned items from the Working Recovery workshop. Early on, Clouds House commissioned three garden cabins, which are used to this day.

While the woodwork programme continues, we have added an IT suite, basic skills training – including literacy and numeracy – work experience and a creative skills programme. Most recently the clients have played a significant part in producing the local community newsletter. A productive relationship has been built with local colleges in Bournemouth and Poole. Opportunities for volunteering are taken up and former service users encouraged to provide mentoring support.

Over the years Working Recovery has become a key component of integrated services offered by the charity in Bournemouth that now includes pre-treatment, structured day treatment and continuing care programmes. Working Recovery can, subject to assessment, now be accessed by people at different stages, under the SHARP (Self-Help Addiction Recovery Programme) banner.

Working Recovery clearly plays a key role in helping to build the personal and social capital that will support individuals in the ongoing process of self-managed recovery. This in turn helps the local community as it leads to productive citizens keen to give something back. It plays a role in reducing drug-related crime and increasing community safety. Given that much of the generous three year funding from the Big Lottery and charitable sources is coming to an end, the question is whether those charged with investing public money will also recognise this value and ensure that this project survives for another ten years.

The value of this model project was most vividly brought home during a visit to Working Recovery from the then drugs minister Caroline Flint. A man, who had made full use of what Working Recovery had to offer, had developed sufficient skills and confidence to launch his own joinery business. As a result, he no longer needed to be on benefits. He had become independent in every sense of the word – a fine example that a working recovery is a recovery working.

Nick Barton is chief executive of Action on Addiction



Sharyn Smiles – MA, drug worker, trainer, lecturer, PhD student, daughter, sister, friend, drug addict and alcoholic says off with labels and on with the reality of relapse

The sleeves on my jumpers get lower, along with the tracks on my arms. I'm sitting down because I'm in agony from the abscess on my leg. Baggy clothes hide the fact that I'm desperately underweight. Make-up hides my deteriorating complexion and sunglasses hide the pain in my eyes. This is the worst pain – the pain no one can see, feel or understand. The shame, the guilt, the hurt, the desperation, the sheer mental torture of my reality – where can I find a drug that could take away the plague in my head, polluting every cell in my body, a cloud with no silver lining?

I was a person lost in a sea of self-hatred, a representation of shattered dreams, anguish, pain, distress and self-ridicule – all shielded in a veil of secrecy. It preoccupied my days and haunted my sleep. I survived in complete despair – seven and a half years of abstinence. Little did I know my addiction was sitting waiting to detonate, finally exploding like an atom bomb, and I found myself back in the middle of chaos, deep in the heart of what I can only describe as a hellish nightmare.

The first problem for me was even considering treatment. How could I possibly tell people what had happened? Surely I should know better – I've been there and done all that before. I see the devastation caused by addiction every day, the damage and destruction to families, coupled with the sheer waste of human life.

I work in the drugs field, I can recite almost every theory of drug treatment known to man. I've seen the figures and done the maths – how did this happen? Where did it all go wrong? How will I ever live with the shame, humiliation, guilt and embarrassment? Perhaps more importantly, why can't I apply the mass of knowledge and theory to my own life?

Then there's the question of my colleagues who were already working under massive pressure. I didn't want to lumber and burden them with my problems. The secrecy and dishonesty I had used in an attempt to protect my addiction and maintain a professional image were about to be revealed. I was about to approach a service I worked for and helped to build.

Panic and anxiety overwhelmed me as I thought about the possibility of losing my job, house and the last threads of security I had – not to mention the

respect of my colleagues and the reputation of an entire company. I didn't know how to tell my colleagues, who had also become my friends, what I had done and what I felt I had become.

It could be argued that drug treatment is at its pinnacle. But when I couldn't trust myself, or those I hold dear, how could I trust a system? Did I have the faith that this system could salvage the debris of a broken life? Could I or would I trust it with my life?

Entering treatment this time was the most challenging and arduous thing I have ever had to do and I was doubtful it could really salvage the remains of my broken life. I arrived in a comfortable waiting room where I saw a drug-related magazine – it sported my name and an article I had written, and seemed to sneer at my hypocrisy, which I felt was a representation of my life.

A nurse took me to my room where I started a drug and alcohol detoxification. Forever the cynic, I waited for something to go wrong, for judgement, for mistakes, for miscommunications, for broken confidentiality, for poor treatment, for being treated like a number. It didn't happen – drug treatment has changed. The empathy, patience, kindness, compassion and professionalism were without parallel. What began was a new journey, a new beginning, a place of safety to explore and discover who I was.

What have I gained from this experience? Peace of mind and pleasure in the small things I had become blind to. Contentment and a harmony I'd long forgotten. Friends from across the globe who come to England for the sole purpose of drug treatment – now that's telling in itself!

The joy of genuine laughter, learning to care for me again and the beginnings of a reconciliation with myself. I gained a restored faith and belief in drug treatment and a new way of looking at things.

Ultimately it was my colleagues who believed in me, when I couldn't believe in myself. I consider myself privileged to work for an organisation that practises what it preaches. I feel no pride and I feel no shame in sharing my truth – if it helps one other person it's been worth it.

So would I trust drug treatment with my life? I just did.