

"A Brighter Future"

- Six months in the lives of a WYCCP service user and their volunteer link worker

David, now 26, has been known to the police and in and out of custody since childhood. He has never completed any formal type education, and, until now, has never completed a licence/probation period without reoffending.

David's offending record shows a consistent pattern of behaviour, with mostly all offences being violent. His reactionary and aggressive behaviour has tended to be brought on by instability in his mental health in periods where he has come off his medication for paranoid schizophrenia. Typically, David would stabilise himself on medication for brief periods, but once stable he would conclude that he no longer needed to take his medication and his bouts of mental illness would resurface, sparking his volatile behaviour.

He had been cited as being very hard to work with, becoming easily volatile and, due to constant changes to his mental health, hard to engage with and keep engaged in any type of services.

David was last arrested and remanded almost 2 years ago. Whilst in HMP Leeds David's paranoid schizophrenia was stabilized through medication. Upon release and with help from probation David was offered the 'Depo' injection. 'Depo' is a two-weekly injection of his mental health medication administered by a community mental health nurse. As David is no longer administering his medication himself, he has had consistent medication and a long period of stable mental health.

In March 2016 I was matched with David as my first service user as a volunteer link worker at WYCCP. David had been supported by WYCCP previously and his accommodation and benefits were stable and organised, and he had applied to start in college for September 2016. He explained to me that he wanted something to do in the meantime that would contribute to his future, keep him busy and give something to his community, especially those from similar criminal backgrounds.

David and I have met weekly at the WYCCP office to work together to achieve his aim of accessing volunteering and working towards starting his education course.

Through WYCCP he has completed a 3 day course with the Alternatives to Violence Project and has expressed interest in attending future courses with them. We have supported him to apply to St Giles Trust and he is currently in the process of completing their 11 week peer mentoring course. As part of this course, he has started a placement with the St. Giles Trust as a volunteer, helping to support their services users, and plans to continue in a volunteer peer mentor role when he has completed the course.

He suffered a set back with his application to college and when his place was declined due to his DBS and licence conditions. However, he took this in his stride and together he and I researched alternative learning opportunities and organised for him to attend an Adult Learner Course at Lifelong Learning Centre at Leeds University where he received advice and guidance on how best to enter education in his position. Since then he has also applied to do his English and Maths GCSEs at Swarthmore College starting September 2016. He then plans to do his PHE at Leeds University through the Lifelong Learning Centre and eventually hopes to attend university.

I believe that his intentions are strong and sincere and his investment in an education track that could potentially span the next 5 years shows that he is mentally preparing for a different future that does not include crime.

We constantly receive feedback from programme leaders of the courses that David attends saying what a great group member he is. Always contributing and getting involved with the work set and the discussions. I would definitely agree. He has been a pleasure to work with; his self-motivation has led our sessions as his goals have been clear from the start. He has a very positive attitude and I find him to be

engaged at all times. He attends weekly, is always prompt and keeps WYCCP up to date if anything changes as his growing diary gets ever the fuller.

In the six months I have known him, David has become a person who knows what he wants to do, is focused and easy to communicate with, and is compassionate and reflective on his own life experience.

He has stayed dedicated to his 'depo' injection and has been completely free from cannabis for the last 9 months. I feel confident that David has regained control over his life and is now working hard at taking the necessary steps towards a better future.

All service users are different but I find David to be a person who works with WYCCP instead of letting us do things for him. The description I had been given of David's past behaviour and attitude is one I can only imagine and the changes he has made in his behaviour are starting to pay off. For the first time in his life David is about to come off licence with the Probation Service, and we are seeing all his risk levels reducing. I would say that David is a prime example of someone who, with the right support, has steadily changed his attitude and behaviour, resulting in active positive changes and I have every faith in him having a much brighter future.

WYCCP Volunteer Link Worker
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