



GARSCUBE HOUSE
FORMER RESIDENTS SURVEY
MAY 2012

Introduction

Garscube House is based in the Maryhill area of Glasgow and covers all geographical areas of Glasgow City.

The residential unit at Garscube Road provides a long-stay alcohol rehabilitation service for 10 people aged eighteen plus years who are homeless and have a history of alcohol dependence but wish to change their lifestyle. Individuals have complex physical, mental health and addiction issues with medium to high care needs.

The service is underpinned by an abstinence based model of addiction. In addition to this, the service endeavours to provide service users with secure accommodation, involving twenty four hour structured support in order that they will be in a better position to continue their recovery journey and maintain a lifestyle away from homelessness post discharge. The support provided helps residents to explore the underlying reasons for their dependency and encourage them to realise their potential to rebuild their lives.

In early 2012, the service identified that it would be beneficial to have a look at the recovery/homelessness outcomes of the individuals who had completed the programme at Garscube House and who had been living in the community for twelve months or more following their move on. It was decided to contact former residents to learn more about their experiences since leaving Garscube House and to identify how useful their time at Garscube had been in terms of their recovery.

As a result, a qualitative questionnaire was distributed by post to a group of former residents. Individuals were also asked if they wanted to be interviewed face to face. The response rate was as follows:

- 9 people responded from a total of 14 individuals
- 5 individuals were interviewed face to face and 4 completed questionnaires were returned
- 2 packs were returned as 'not known at this address' and there were 3 non respondents (2 of these 3 individuals made initial contact but did not engage in the process)

Individual interviews were carried out by the Service Manager (Elaine Forbes) and Service Coordinator (Susan Weir) in April 2012.

Service Description and Early Operation

Target group

As noted above, Garscube House aims to support homeless people in Glasgow who have a primary addiction to alcohol.

Specific Eligibility criteria include:

- Aged 18 years or older
- Being statutorily homeless
- Having a primary addiction to alcohol and/or poly substance use problem
- Having a desire to change their substance use situation
- Having a desire to break free from the cycle of homelessness

The service initially targeted people with a primary addiction to alcohol. However in response to requests from partner agencies and commissioners, criteria was expanded to include people with secondary drug issues i.e. methadone.

Referral and assessment process

Referrals for the service can be made from a number of agencies including the 8 Community Addiction Teams across the city. Referrals are sent directly to the Commissioning Team for the Homelessness Partnership for initial screening of suitability. Once this has been established and homelessness status has been confirmed, the assessment process by the management team at Garscube House commences.

Since opening in January 2009, a total of 95 referrals have been received by the service. A small number of these did not progress onto assessment stage for various reasons, e.g. entry gained to another rehab, withdrawn referrals or disengagement of the service user from services.

Potential residents undergo an assessment process to gauge their support needs (with a view to developing a person centred recovery plan) and their desire to undertake a period of residential rehabilitation according to the eligibility criteria. Only a few people assessed were not admitted to the project due again to the reasons mentioned above.



All those admitted to the service are detoxed in order to be abstinent from alcohol or other substances prior to admission. A limit is placed on the admission criterion level of prescribed medication, e.g. methadone at 20mls.

Since January 2009, 61 individuals have been admitted (10 of whom are currently in the service). To date, 19 individuals have completed the initial 9-12 month programme and have secured their own tenancy upon further completion of the programme. Fourteen of these individuals moved onto their own tenancy 12 months ago or more.

The survey aimed to contact the 14 individuals who completed the programme and who had left the service at least 12 months ago. We wanted to learn more about their experiences since leaving Garscube House and to identify how useful their time at Garscube House had been. Consequently, a letter was sent to their tenancy requesting that a questionnaire be completed and/or an individual meeting arranged with Garscube House's management team to gather feedback and opinions.

A total of 9 people responded. These responses were subsequently collated and analysed by Garscube House's Service Manager (Elaine Forbes), Service Coordinator (Susan Weir) and Turning Point Scotland's Information Manager (Victoria Murray).



Experiences of Former Residents

Life before Garscube House

There were 9 questionnaire responses from those still maintaining a tenancy:

2 female, 7 male.

The typical age range for females was 46-55 years and for males was 36-55 years. The average length of stay in the service was 375 days for those service users still in their tenancies.

With regard to presenting issues, all nine had a primary addiction to alcohol and were homeless. Four individuals identified having difficulty with mental health issues and five people were having severe difficulty with physical and medical complaints.

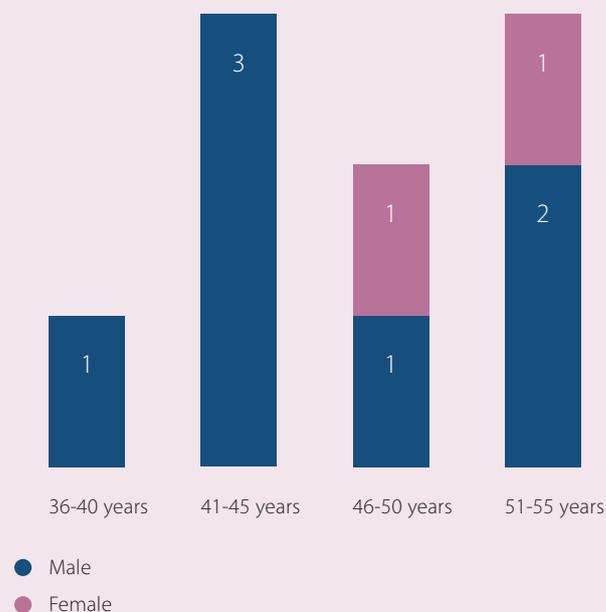
One of the main challenges to the service was engaging with people who had barriers to entering treatment; chaotic lifestyles and/or had been through the 'revolving door' of services in Glasgow without a clear pathway to break the cycle of homelessness and addiction.

Presenting issues at time of referral reflect the retrospective views of residents:

"I was in a living hell. After my dad died I lost his house and was out on the street. I was drinking 7 days a week, staying in Possil with other drinkers. I had an alcoholic's way of working to get booze 7 days a week. I was sharing benefits with other alcoholics to make sure we always had a drink."

"Life was going downhill with my constant drinking, getting into bother in my accommodation, with the police and worst of all not getting to see my child."

Age range of respondents



Age range of respondents



Health problems are a significant issue for residents accessing treatment. These range from peripheral neuropathy, blood borne viruses and liver impairment to dramatic weight loss:

"My health is much improved and I attend appointments now whereas in the past, when drinking would not go to appointments and not bother about my general health."

"I was less than 6 stone in weight; my doctor said I would be dead before I was 50 if I didn't stop drinking."

"I was in a wheelchair before but can now walk using a walking stick."

Respondents all reported an increase in general health throughout treatment however a small proportion have not been able to sustain this structure and attention to their health since discharge.

"My health improved in Garscube, but after I left and not long after I relapsed twice, my health was bad again, regarding my liver."

"I've not been able to attend the gym since I left, I can't afford it."

Life after Garscube House

The stabilising effects of family and community support have had a positive effect on respondents' recovery and tenancy sustainment. Garscube House acknowledges this and actively encourages family and community connections from the early stages of recovery.

"I like the fact that neighbours just see me as 'the wee woman with the dog' and not judging me on anything from a past life."

"Meeting new people, knowing I'm a better person, seeing my nephews wee girl a day after she was born and now babysitting, getting trust and respect back."



"I'm happy. I'm getting to know myself again, being with family, being around positive people, having my own home, security, being independent, being trusted, building relationships and achieving goals."

"Yes. I feel a lot better both physically and mentally. My asthma and eczema have improved. I feel good about myself and more than I ever have. I am looking good again. I feel more mature and happier with how I am now feeling and looking –I'm lucky to be in this shape."

"I'm eating well, my health is good, I'm still doing my exercises."

At a more local level we very much see our day to day involvement with residents as the most important partnership working we can develop.

In addition we have developed local arrangements with Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, SMART Recovery, SAMH, local Community Addiction Teams, Glasgow Council on Alcohol, GHN 'Keys to Learn' Woodside Health Centre, Maryhill Occupational Therapy Centre, North Woodside gym, FASS (Family Alcohol Support Service), Maryhill Community Central Halls and we have regular contact with a variety of other voluntary sector providers in this field.

"The employability groups were great - I even used them to help my daughter get a job. They gave me the confidence to go to someone and ask for a job."

"I have support from my peers at Addaction and Housing First and this gives me structure to my day."

"I've got a wee job a couple of days a week in the charity shop cancer research, and I love it."



Social functioning

Supporting women with child care issues has been particularly prevalent ranging from supporting individuals through the process of regaining access to their children to enabling relationship building/bonding with their children directly within the service.

"I've now got a permanent house and my child is back in my life, even though I still got a bit to do till she is back in my care for good."

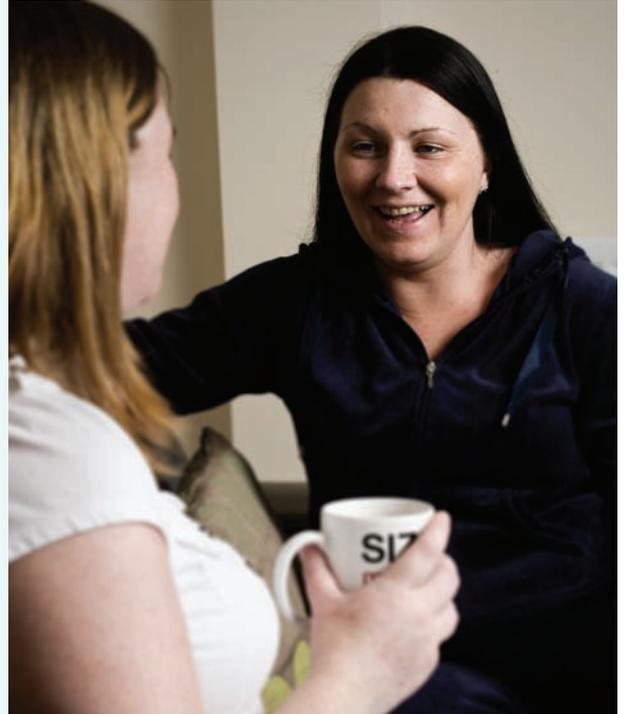
Social isolation is reported to be the biggest issue contributing to respondents' relapse. Several explained about the isolation:

"My life before Garscube was desperate; I was lonely, isolated, depressed and very little contact with my family. I felt worthless and found solace in the bottle. I felt my life was full of pressure."

"It's very difficult living alone because of the temptation always being there. It's all about your willpower I suppose."

"Having company at Garscube really helped especially at night - it was difficult to get used to not having people around all the time if you needed to talk to someone."

"It's just hard when the six weeks is over and you realise that's it - you are no longer part of the service and you have to get on with it."



Service approach to relapse

The dual purpose of Garscube House is to support people to tenancy sustainment and to deal with underlying addiction. Garscube House staff recognise that relapse is part of the cyclical nature of addiction and encourage residents to face this as part of the group work programme and one to one sessions. Our approach is to be as supportive as possible and encourage residents to see that relapse is not necessarily the end of someone's recovery.

88 % of those who responded had experienced post treatment relapse:

"I'm not going to lie, there have been days I have totally messed up with lapsing ... drink and drugs... and I'm not saying that I will never take anything again but for me, being back in the community twelve months now I think that within that time I am still stable and doing the right positive things. I'm so proud of myself and the life I've got now and I don't want to lose it."

I've had two relapses since leaving Garscube, I managed to get this under control very quickly but realised how easy it is to go down that road in one binge ... one bad night can change everything."

"My health improved in Garscube but after I left I relapsed twice, my health was bad again regarding my liver. I've just to try and get on with it now. I don't want to keep going backwards, I'm getting too old."

"I've had a few lapses and I've been to the stage where if I continued I would have been back to my old life, but having and being aware of what I have... home, family, health and knowing I'd lose it all if I continued drinking."



Tenancy sustainment

Of the nine survey respondents, all confirmed they had experienced no periods of homelessness since discharge from Garscube House.

With regard to the three individuals who did not respond to the survey we have since gained information from the care management system that one person has moved tenancy and two people have lost their tenancies and returned to homelessness.

The two individuals who lost their tenancies both had lengthy historic experience of homelessness and of the 'revolving door' access to services. It is our opinion and experience that this 'cycle' and its accompanying issues have impacted on those individuals' ability to maintain their recovery and sustain a tenancy.

Conclusion

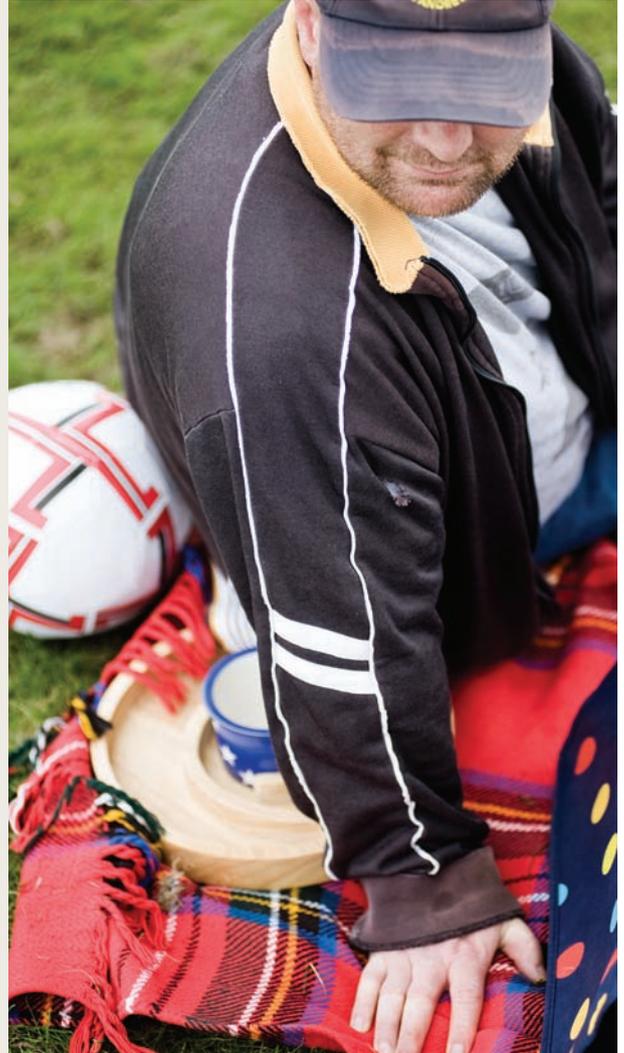
The respondents' experience of Garscube House was very positive overall and all stated they had developed very good relationships with staff whilst resident there. Some individuals still keep in contact with the staff member who was their designated key worker. They particularly appreciated the way staff encouraged them to take responsibility for themselves. Those who experienced a 'lapse' in their journey towards recovery whilst in the programme felt they were not judged and were supported to stay and continue in a positive and constructive way. Most stated the group work programme was instrumental in changing their ways of thinking which resulted in changes in their attitudes and behaviours towards life in general.

Most former residents found the adjustment to independent living difficult to begin with following their discharge from a 'communal' living setting. However, they felt well equipped to manage their tenancies in relation to general housekeeping as a direct result of having spent time in the individual 'flats' within the service where they had the opportunity to practice and develop these skills in conjunction with the resettlement group work. All stated they were happy having "their own home" and couldn't imagine returning to homelessness.

Most reported feelings of loneliness and isolation as being the biggest contributing factor to them relapsing in the initial weeks/months following discharge. Although 88% of the respondents relapsed post discharge, all but one have managed to regain control of their drinking. Some have returned to abstinence and a couple continue to drink although far less than they did before accessing treatment and they continue to function in the community.

The six week outreach support period offered to individuals following their move on from Garscube House was greatly appreciated by all respondents. This is one of the 'added value' aspects of the service and is not directly funded. With regard to aftercare options for residents, survey participants stated that the duration of the outreach support provided was very important to their long term recovery and tenancy sustainment. Former residents spoke of the high risk of relapse in the initial post discharge period.

Although most leave with external support plans/packages in place, all felt that the 'cut off' from the service after six weeks was quite harrowing given the length of time spent in the service.



Recommendations

In terms of future service development, former residents have stated their desire to see the existing model of recovery support extended, i.e. have a longer period of post treatment monitoring and support with more assertive outreach in place.

Feedback from former residents validates the current treatment system in place at Garscube House, with its focus on addiction and homelessness based support, alongside assertively linking individuals to community engagement. It is evident that remaining in treatment for sufficient time is essential to optimise effective outcomes for individuals who exit the service. Treatment at Garscube House played a critical role in recovery initiation for all respondents.

As a result of the above findings, consideration will be given to some of the development suggestions made by the respondents:

- Providing a drop in type facility for former residents to access support/advice/guidance on a two weekly or monthly basis
- Extend the six week outreach support to individuals who are struggling to maintain their recovery post discharge
- Garscube House is participating in the pilot scheme for 'Circles of Care' approach to recovery 'in order to develop and maximise the use of individual resources, beyond those of solely professional networks, to include those of the wider family, community and society.' It is hoped that involvement in this scheme will help address some of the issues individuals experience around isolation and loneliness once they move on from Garscube House.

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