

The Booth Centre

A Drop-in and Activity Centre for homeless people

National Alcohol Strategy Consultation

The Booth Centre is an activity centre for homeless people in central Manchester. The majority of people using the centre are heavy drinkers who have problems retaining housing as a result. Many also have additional problems relating to drug use and mental health. The Centre runs a “wet” garden where people are allowed to drink alcohol in a supervised and supportive environment where they are given help to maintain their tenancies and address their drinking problems. The centre also runs an activity programme, which includes education, training, work experience and sports which is accessible to street drinkers who wish to control their drinking. We have found that our approach is effective in engaging street drinkers and reducing the harm that their alcohol use causes to themselves and others.

Our response to the National Alcohol Strategy Consultation is made in the light of our experiences of working with street drinkers.

Alcohol dependency is a significant contributing factor to some people becoming homelessness. Efforts to reduce the levels of homelessness and street drinking would be more effective if there were better alcohol services. In particular;

- There needs to be quicker access to assessment and treatment, so that we can respond very quickly when people are motivated to do something about their drinking.
- People who have mental health or drug problems in addition to their alcohol problem should be able to access services to get help with any or all of these problems. Currently people often end up with no services because they do not neatly fit criteria.
- Funding for alcohol treatment and harm reduction services should be increased.
- Services should not just be targeted at people who are following an abstinence route. More services should be targeted at people who are still drinking but wish change their drinking pattern to reduce the harm they are causing to their health, housing situation, relationships etc.
- There should be research into the needs of street drinkers and the effect of street drinking bans, which includes involvement of the street drinkers themselves in identifying their needs. Our experience is that the Manchester street drinking ban has just displaced the problem into surrounding residential areas and further isolated and excluded street drinkers from services.

*The centre was opened in memory of
Michael Leddy and Peter Ryan and other friends
who lived on the streets and died prematurely.*

Charity Registration No. 1062674

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- There should be street based outreach workers to work with street drinkers.
- There should be specific tenancy sustainment teams to help people to maintain their tenancies, whether they stop drinking or not.
- There should be wet provision including day centres which provide a safe place to drink with support and help to minimise harm associated with drinking.
- There should be structured daytime activity programmes for people who are trying to control their drinking. Currently these are only available to people following an abstinence route.