



Executive Summary

The voices of service users and carers on:

Recovery and Reintegration

This was a collaborative project working with **Healthwatch Hertfordshire, Herts Viewpoint** and **Carers in Hertfordshire** and was commissioned by Public Health at **Hertfordshire County Council**.

- We engaged with service users and carers between **August – October 2023** to find out their views and experiences of recovery and reintegration with drug and alcohol services in Hertfordshire.
 - **75** service users (11 focus groups and 2 interviews)
 - **22** carers (2 focus groups and 13 interviews)

Accessing Services

- Respondents felt reassured and at ease after being welcomed by staff and other service users.
- Most respondents were able to access support within days or weeks, and this was crucial in order to keep momentum.
- Initial awareness of services was low – important for all organisations to play an active role in raising awareness.
- Common barriers to access were: travel and transport, location, employment, stigma and shame, and privacy and safety.

Reintegration

- Respondents had a variety of perceptions of reintegration, from sobriety to building identity. These changed over the course of treatment.
- Support with volunteering, employment and education advice, in addition to support with life skills, finances and building social relationships were all highly valued.
- Respondents were keen to ensure that they would receive aftercare, and information about support options beyond the service.

Experiences of support

- Most respondents felt there was a high standard of care, and that staff were supportive and committed. Some service users described services as ‘life-changing’ and all were incredibly grateful for the support they received.
- 1:1 support and developing personal relationships with staff was valued, alongside peer support. Staff turnover sometimes made this continuity of care difficult.
- Respondents spoke highly of the activities and events on offer, wishing that more were available.
- The need for evening and weekend support was raised, due to being common times of relapse.

Carers’ experiences

- Carers sometimes felt isolated and stigmatised – more information about the recovery journey and carer involvement would help improve this.
- Respondents felt services should offer more support to carers and loved ones, including information about the treatment program.
- Carers who had accessed support groups found them to be very helpful.

Recommendations

Awareness: Increasing awareness of existing services for potential service users

Access: Providing practical support with accessing services (e.g. travel costs)

Support in services: Increasing the ability for services to offer more of the current support opportunities

Reintegration: Ensuring services are able to individuals with their goals for reintegration beyond the service

Integration between services: Improving collaboration and communication between drug and alcohol services and other services such as mental health, housing and social services.

Carer support: Ensuring carers have access to resources, practical information and support groups.