

A DTTO changed my life

How being put on a treatment order led one drug using offender out of crime and addiction



Teresa, 25



My first criminal charge was for intent to supply cocaine in 2000, but I ended up just being done for possession and got probation – a community rehabilitation order. The probation staff were brilliant with me. But I didn't straighten my life out. I started taking heroin as well as ecstasy and coke.

I didn't really need to get into crime. I'd done well at school and in jobs. I was quickly promoted to manageress in shops and pubs I worked in. But before long I got to work in a fraud ring using cloned credit cards. I got caught in ASDA buying a mobile phone and CD. The court gave me a one year suspended sentence. The judge said if I got caught again I'd be sent straight to prison. I soon got caught again in Marks and Spencer. By this time I looked like a real junkie – so it must have been obvious to the shop workers that I was trouble.

At that time I was on a waiting list for getting drug treatment with my local GP, so the judge gave me an option to be put on a DTTO. I accepted – and it really turned my life around. I had to attend probation three times a week and go to a drugs clinic for group work twice a week. The staff tested me for drugs twice a week and I was put on methadone.

I did lapse once when I was asked to be a driver for the card fraud gang. It went wrong again and the police arrested me, but decided not to charge me. I went to confess to my probation officer, who confronted me about my lies and attitude. In a way I'm glad this happened because I knew I had to put more effort into the DTTO and come clean.

The real turning point came when my probation officer helped me apply for the Princes Trust programme. I've done rock climbing, abseiling, orienteering and archery. I was surprised how good it was. I've made friends with people who are not on drugs. We did a team challenge where we visited homes for the elderly and organised bingo, manicure and pedicure sessions. The Princes Trust have asked me if I'd stay on and work as an assistant team leader because they thought I'd done really well.

...And why another offender decided to steer clear of DTTOs

Eileen, 31

I had been using heroin and crack for three years before I was arrested for shoplifting and given a probation order. I was put on a methadone script and visited a probation officer three times a week which I wasn't interested in doing. I breached the order twice after being caught shoplifting and was jailed for persistent offending. My first sentence was six months. I spent 14 days on the detox unit in jail, but had no support from the staff. I got drugs brought in on visits and there seemed more heroin in jail than outside. I got 28 days added on to my sentence after testing positive in a random test. I have been in jail several times since. After the last time they offered to put me on a DTTO. I refused because the maximum sentence for shoplifting is six months, but if I breach a DTTO I will get twelve months. And I'm already on treatment through getting the methadone. I think DTTOs are too strict. There's no point putting you in prison for every crime when no-one's addressing why you're doing it in the first place.



DTTO timeline

1989 First drug court set up in Miami, Florida. Drug courts, created by US judges who wanted an over-arching role in offering offenders the carrot of treatment or the stick of jail, expand across the USA. There are now around 400.

1998 DTTOs, designed as a response to growing evidence of links between problem drug use and persistent acquisitive offending, introduced as a new community sentence under the Crime and Disorder Act. DTTOs piloted in Croydon, Gloucestershire and Liverpool for 18 months.

October 2000 DTTOs rolled out across England and Wales.

January 2003 Home Office announces plans for a 50 per cent increase in the number of offenders to be put on DTTOs.

February 2003 The Probation Inspectorate reports that the operation of DTTOs is "extremely uneven" with "an unacceptably low level of achievement" which included "very disappointing" drug test results.

September 2003 Home Office study into the three pilot areas reveals over two-thirds of convicted drug users dropped out of the programme. Of those who completed the order, just over half were reconvicted within two years.

October 2003 DTTOs made available to every Sheriff in Scotland after a successful trial of drug court-style schemes in Glasgow and Fife.