



# RECOVERY FROM DRUG USE: Opportunities for your business

## Information for employers



DrugScope

Stereotypes about drug users are common, but relying on stereotypes could lead to missed opportunities for your business. We want to help you avoid this by looking at people with histories of drug or alcohol use differently. We want to show you how your business, your employees and your community can benefit from looking beyond the stereotypes.

We know from research that most employers don't have direct experience of knowingly employing people with a history of drug use. This means that opinions can often be formed based on what's in the media. But the media can be sensationalist and focus on exaggerated negative caricatures<sup>1</sup>.

## What's in it for you?

We know that when employers recruit people with a history of drug or alcohol dependency, the experience is often 'very positive, with low levels of absenteeism and staff turnover, and high levels of productivity'<sup>1</sup>.

There's a good reason for this. People with a history of drug or alcohol use have often been through difficult times. Recovering from drug dependency and making the decision to change their lives requires commitment and determination. That's not all, there's also evidence that people are more motivated, have stronger bonds with their employers and are more loyal, as they're thankful for the chance they've been given<sup>1</sup>.

Looking beyond the stereotypes may mean you become more aware of potential problems developing among your employees. It's worth remembering that with drug or alcohol use, to a certain extent, a large proportion of the population is on the same spectrum. It might be the case that some of your current employees may already be drinking more than is recommended.

*"Everybody else has got problems as well, some gamble, some smoke some drink, we've all got our vices."*<sup>7</sup>  
(Quote from an employer)

<sup>1</sup> Policy Forum: The other half of the equation: Employers' readiness to recruit problem drug users (2009), Singleton, Lynam, UK Drug Policy Commission



What's more, taking action that helps disadvantaged people is a great way to benefit your community, and enhance your organisation's public relations standing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy. The evidence shows a link between CSR and profitability – the 'reputational capital' built up by this sort of action helps resist external market shocks, improve workforce productivity and increase shareholder value<sup>2,3</sup>.

In difficult economic times, it's more important than ever not to miss out on good opportunities. You can benefit from hiring talented employees that you might otherwise have overlooked.

## What's just a stereotype, and what's really the case?

Some common stereotypes of people with histories of drug or alcohol dependency are that they lack self-discipline and willpower, that they won't get on with other colleagues, and they're untrustworthy and unreliable. Sometimes people think you can never really recover from drug dependency, and that people using substitute medication such as methadone are still 'on drugs'.

However, social attitudes move on, what's acceptable changes and it's important to stay up to date<sup>5</sup>. Research in 2010 found that the vast majority (83 per cent) of the public disagree with the statement "people who become dependent on drugs are basically just bad people"<sup>7</sup>.

2 Minor, Dylan, 'Corporate Social Responsibility as Reputation Insurance: Theory and Evidence,' (2010) Haas School of Business: UC Berkeley, mimeo. See also, Boccardelli L. De Santo S., 'Social responsibility and reaction to stock market shocks' (2004), mimeo

3 Becchetti, Leonardo; Di Giacomo, Stefania; and Pinnacchio, Damiano, 'Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Performance: Evidence from a Panel of US Listed Companies' (2005), *CEIS Working Paper* No. 784 Getting Serious about Stigma in Scotland: The problem with stigmatising drug users (2011), Singleton, UK Drug Policy Commission

5 The Stigma of Substance Use: A Review of the Literature (1990), Centre for addiction and mental health

Research shows that when employers were asked about employees who they later found out had a history of drug dependency, ‘most felt that they had got on with their colleagues as well or as badly as any other employee’<sup>6</sup>.

*“... I am employing the person to do the job and their history is not what particularly interests me, it is about how they are at the point of application for the job.”<sup>7</sup>*

(Quote from an employer)

Medical professionals are increasingly seeing drug and alcohol dependency as a health problem, including people using methadone or other substitute medications. Evidence shows that these medications can be effective at stabilising people who have used drugs<sup>1,2</sup>. Taking daily medication for an illness doesn’t stop a person from being a good employee.

Keep in mind that, just because views are commonly held, doesn’t mean they’re accurate.

## What you can do

There are several specific things you could do so that your business can make the most out of the opportunity that people recovering from a history of drug or alcohol dependency present:

- It can be helpful to think of every prospective employee as an individual with a range of characteristics and skills to offer<sup>1</sup>. Having a history of drug or alcohol problems will be only one element of who they are, and anybody can have problems in their past. They may well also be a loving parent, a hard-working businessperson, a talented musician, and a passionate Arsenal fan! As 82% of the public agree, “Virtually anyone can become dependent on drugs”<sup>7</sup>.
- Ensure that your employment contracts don’t include unnecessarily restrictive terms and conditions which may create barriers to people continuing to

6 Employing Drug Users: Individual and systemic barriers to rehabilitation (2002), Klee, McLean, Yakorsky, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

7 Getting Problem Drug Users (Back) into Employment (2008), Spencer, Deakin, Seddon, Ralphs, Boyle, UK Drug Policy Commission

access specialist support and treatment, including substitute medication.

- Most organisations already keep information about criminal convictions or previous drug use separate from main job application forms at least until the applicant is shortlisted. This way your view of potential employees won't be influenced by their drug or alcohol dependency history.<sup>6</sup>
- Draft a drug and alcohol policy. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommend that all organisations, large and small, can benefit from an agreed policy. This should apply to all staff, and set out how the organisation expects staff to behave, and what action staff can expect the organisation to take. This should leave less room for misunderstanding. See <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg91.pdf> for an HSE document that you may find useful, which outlines some suggested parts of a Drug and Alcohol Policy – pages 8-13

contain the relevant information.

- Get involved with the London Drug and Alcohol Network's employment project - for example, contact us if you would be interested in linking up with a local service. You can find out more about the project at <http://www.ldan.org.uk/employment.html> or email [employment-project@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:employment-project@drugscope.org.uk)



6 Employing Drug Users: Individual and systemic barriers to rehabilitation (2002), Klee, McLean, Yakorsky, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

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The London Drug and Alcohol Network (LDAN) is a London-wide membership network representing providers of drug and alcohol service in London. The network was merged into DrugScope in 2009, combining expertise and resources while retaining LDAN's distinct identity and position in London.

The LDAN 'Pathways to Employment' project is funded and supported by Trust for London. Trust for London is the largest independent charitable foundation funding work which tackles poverty and inequality in the capital.

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