

## BRIEFING NOTE

**TO: Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel**  
**DATE: 17 August 2006**

**RE: NEEDLE CLEAN UP - WALSALL DRUG ACTION TEAM**

We as the Walsall Drug Action Team have been aware for some time that there has always been an issue around discarded needles and drugs paraphernalia in and around Walsall and the surrounding borough. We are also aware that any press around this mine field of a subject has and is always negative and detrimental not only toward drug users but also any service which offers a needle exchange outlet. We as part of the Walsall Primary Care Trust will always advocate for the public health benefits of needle exchange as a valuable means of harm reduction not only toward a means of maintaining engagement with drug users who are not in formal treatment. But as evidence based means of reducing the spread of blood bourn viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis B/C not only within the drug using community but also the wider general public.

As a result of the continual negative publicity around this highly sensitive area it was decided that we should initiate a covert needle clean up campaign involving the local drug user group Hi's and Lows who provide the backbone of all clean up operations in and around Walsall, and are funded and supported by the Walsall Drug Action Team. We started out by identifying local hot spots where there was a high concentration of discarded needles. We then trained and equipped the volunteers in order to carry out these clean up operations. The clean up operations were carried out over a period of 6 months by the team of trained workers and each clean up lasted for around 3 hours between 10-1300pm. These clean ups have up until now been funded and directed by the DAAT, and the Police have been made aware that this operation has been ongoing and all the returns have been handed in and recorded by Addaction Walsall.

Over the last 6 months all the involved agencies have to date been responsible for the return of 44,000 discarded needles, of which approx 20% of these are unused needles, and a vast amount of discarded drugs paraphernalia such as tin foil, sterile cups, plastic water cups and vit c/b sachets. This has made a major impact on the drug using community as the number of returns that are now being recorded by needle exchange outlets has more than doubled not only because of the returns from the clean up campaign but also by injecting drug users who have been impacted by this message around the importance of returning used needles. 22 ltr clinical waste bins have been left out in all the locations which have been targeted in this initiative and they are being used by those individuals who are using the locations for injecting drugs. As a result of this move we are being contacted by users as to when those bins are full and need removing and replacing. Once a clean up has taken place Posters are then placed in location stressing the importance of not dumping your needles.

Another initiative which we have tried to employ over the borough is by placing secure metal works bins in hot spot locations in and around Walsall. The problem we have faced in doing this has been the strong objection by town traders as they then deem this as encouraging drug use on there premises. However the idea is to minimise the potential for harm caused by needles being disposed of dangerously in town centre areas which are being used for injecting regardless of establishment rules and regulations. We have however deployed these bins at the Bradford Street Centre with there support and have found that if deployed those individuals who are using these areas for injecting drugs are then taking responsibility of disposing the needles in these bins provided. We need to stress that these bins are extremely discrete and secure so that unless you are aware of what they are used for you would never know. Also Addaction have seen an increased engagement with injecting drug users accessing there service and this is around 40 people per day this is not including those individuals who are accessing the pharmacy outlets in the borough. Addaction is also involved in the current and ongoing development of new innovations in conjunction with Hi's and Lows to dispose of needles and syringes safely. Addaction has also supported Hi's and Lows in displaying a photographic display board of clean up sites and reinforcing the importance of returning needles and not dumping them.

We are however running towards the end of our recourses financially to sustain such an operation and feel that due to the fact that we are part of a partnership organisation, in order to continue this important piece of work we would welcome the baking and support of any interested parties such as local council etc.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO FURTHER REDUCE DISCARDED NEEDLES

1. The deployment of fixed used needle bins in town centre hot spot locations.

2. Seriously exploring DCR (Drug Consumption Rooms) see attached DEFRA report.
3. The ongoing sustained clean up campaign spear headed by Hi's and Lows.
4. Continued peer education of current injecting drug users via Hi's and Lows and through commissioned drug services engaging with drug injectors as part of the ongoing harm reduction strategy.
5. To continue Needle Exchange/Clean Ups as a public health issue.
6. Maintain the current needle exchange at Addaction who have successfully engaged Injecting. As a resulting more users accessing treatment and the relatively low prevalence of Blood Bourne Viruses directly accredited to injecting drug use in Walsall, which if current service provision were to be altered could potentially increase drastically through the sharing of needles and paraphernalia.

DATES FOR CLEAN UPS 2006/07

9 August 06- Willenhall

29 August 06

26 September 06

24 October 06

21 November 06

12 December 06

9 January 07

6 February 07

6 March 07

NB- These dates are confirmed however locations are to be confirmed prior to each clean up date as information on injecting sites needs to be gathered by Hi's and Lows engaging with current injectors as to where these sites are.

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**addaction**

Helping individuals and communities  
to manage the effects  
of drug and alcohol misuse

## REPORT ON ADDACTION'S NEEDLE EXCHANGE FOR WALSALL MBC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### BACKGROUND FOR INFORMATION

- ❑ Needle exchange services have operated in the UK since 1987, when they were established as a public health initiative to prevent the transmission of HIV via injecting drug use.
- ❑ Needle exchanges exist to provide injecting drug users with needles and injecting paraphernalia, as well as receiving back used equipment. They provide an opportunity for drug workers to begin to tackle drug dependency problems, while minimising the direct and indirect harm that injecting drug use generates.
- ❑ In Britain today, needle exchanges play an important role in preventing the spread of HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.
- ❑ They are included as an essential feature within the Government's strategy for drugs, *Tackling Drugs Changing Lives* and the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse's *Models of Care* framework.
- ❑ Addaction has operated needle exchange services in Walsall under contract to the Drug Action Team (latterly the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership) since August 2000.
- ❑ Addaction recognises that needle litter is a problem in parts of the Borough; as a result, we have been active in tackling the issue.
- ❑ Addaction believe that the majority of service users behave responsibly in returning injecting equipment safely for disposal.
- ❑ The Scrutiny Committee would be most welcome to visit the Needle Exchange facility at Addaction's office in Stafford Street to learn more about our safety processes.

### EVIDENCE BASE IN SUPPORT OF NEEDLE EXCHANGE

- ❑ In 2002, the Department of Health's Strategy on Hepatitis C stated that, "the greatest impact on reducing Hepatitis C is likely to result from improving needle exchange services."
- ❑ In 2005, the Government's Health Protection Agency stated that, "the incidence of blood borne viruses in the UK is directly linked to the quality of harm reduction services provided (for example, at needle exchanges)."
- ❑ **In Walsall, the evidence to date suggests that the incidence of blood borne viruses linked to injecting drug use is lower than the national and regional average. We believe this is directly linked to the accessibility and quality of needle exchange services operated by Addaction.**

### WHAT ARE ADDACTION DOING TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF NEEDLES BEING ISSUED?

- ❑ Addaction is contracted by the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership to provide accessible harm reduction services for injecting drug users, which includes needle exchange at nine community pharmacies and at our main office in Stafford Street.
- ❑ This means that we distribute injecting equipment on demand to injecting drug users who require it.
- ❑ **However, if users of the exchange do not bring used equipment back, they are restricted to ten needles only. This recent change in policy has seen return rates increase dramatically.**

- ❑ Addaction's Service Manager attended the launch of DEFRA's *Tackling Drug Related Litter: Guidance and Good Practice* in London in October 2005. Many of the recommendations have already been implemented and we are exploring the feasibility of installing an out-of-hours secure sharps bin to be placed at the rear of our premises to collect returns when we are closed.

### **WHAT ARE ADDACTION DOING TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF RETURNS TO THE NEEDLE EXCHANGE?**

- ❑ As noted above, we have a policy of restricting needles distributed if no returns are brought in.
- ❑ At recently convened Client Workshops on Safer Injecting, held at Addaction, the message about returning used equipment was strongly reinforced.
- ❑ Every sharps bin has a sticker urging clients to return used equipment to the needle exchange.
- ❑ Posters are displayed in Addaction's Reception recording the previous month's return rate and urging people to try even harder.

### **DO ADDACTION DO 'STREET PICK UPS'? IF SO, WHAT IS THEIR POLICY AND WHAT AREA DO THEY COVER?**

- ❑ In order to maintain positive relationships with our immediate neighbours, Addaction has undertaken a daily 'needle sweep' for several years in the immediate vicinity of our Stafford Street premises.
- ❑ This often yields discarded, unused sharps bins, although used needles are only retrieved occasionally.
- ❑ We are not a clinical waste collector under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act (1990) and are therefore unable to provide a Walsall-wide needle pick-up service. Indeed, we are not required under our contract to perform such a role.
- ❑ When necessary, we redirect telephone calls about needle litter to external partners, such as Street Care and the Community Wardens.

### **WHAT ARE ADDACTION DOING TO TRAIN USERS?**

- ❑ User of the needle exchange is reminded of the importance of returning used equipment at each visit, as well as the necessity of avoiding careless disposal of unused needles, which can still cause a threat to the wider community.
- ❑ In the past, we have included messages in needle exchange packs, developed special two-needle mini-packs and even closed a needle exchange outlet at the NHS Walk-In Centre in Market Square that was failing to comply with our guidelines on equipment returns.
- ❑ We provide formal training for service users via Client Workshops on Injecting Behaviour (mentioned above), where the importance of safe disposal of injecting equipment is emphasised strongly.

### **WHAT PARTNERSHIP WORK IS ADDACTION CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF NX AND NEEDLE LITTER?**

- ❑ **Three years ago, Addaction established a partnership with the Community Wardens to deal with needle litter in the locale, such that Wardens were issued with special equipment to permit them to collect and return needle litter equipment to Addaction that had been found on their ‘patch’. This has been a very successful partnership.**
- ❑ **Addaction has also enjoyed the support of Walsall Service User Groups (*‘DIY’* and *‘Highs N’ Lows’*), who have regularly undertaken needle litter sweeps in areas of derelict private property, generating large amounts of returned clinical waste.**
- ❑ **Network Rail has been given material support by Addaction to clear used injecting equipment from line-side areas around Ryecroft Junction.**

#### **WHAT TRAINING DO ADDACTION UNDERTAKE WITH PHARMACISTS WHO OPERATE NX?**

- ❑ Addaction’s Pharmacy Needle Exchange Coordinator undertakes quarterly visits to all nine pharmacies in the scheme, allowing coaching and guidance to be offered.
- ❑ Weekly telephone contact is maintained when stock orders are placed, which enables us to deal with emergent issues and remind participants about return rates.
- ❑ A meeting is scheduled for 15 August 2006 with Walsall PCT’s Pharmaceutical Adviser to examine a range of issue in relation to pharmacy needle exchange, including return rates.
- ❑ In accordance with Government guidance, pharmacy exchanges in Walsall are designed to maximise service user accessibility, although many of the scheme’s participants get to know their ‘regular customers’, which permits dialogue about needle litter to occur.

Hugh Jobber

Service Manager (since March 2000)

Addaction Walsall

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