

GDAS Recruitment Agency

Case Study

FEASIBILITY STUDY



About Gloucestershire Drug and Alcohol Service

Gloucestershire Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS) is a Gloucestershire-based charity offering advice, information and support for individuals, families and communities who are concerned about drug and alcohol use.

For more information,
please contact:

GDAS
98-100 Eastgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1QN

Tel: 01452 381166
www.gdas.co.uk

Case study published by:

Co-operative Futures,
City Works, Alfred Street,
Gloucester, GL1 4DF

Tel: 01452 543030
Email info@co-operative-futures.coop

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A proposed new social enterprise in Gloucestershire could help people recovering from drug or alcohol problems to return to work

How the idea came about

The idea is to set up a recruitment agency staffed and run by people recovering from drug and alcohol problems. It would work like an ordinary commercial agency, but provide a bridge between addiction treatment services and the world of work.

“One of the biggest problems people who have had a drug or alcohol problem experience is that they can’t get back to work,” said Peter Steel, chief executive of Gloucestershire Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS).

“There’s a huge amount of discrimination, but people who have drug or alcohol problems are no different from you and me. And they come with a wide repertoire of experiences, skills and knowledge.”

The scheme emerged from a feasibility study funded by ACE, the Alliance of Communities and Enterprise programme, although the original idea behind the research was to examine the business case for providing a training venue for GDAS.



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The story so far

Researchers undertook consultation interviews with 26 recovering people, and 30 managers and workers in addiction treatment and reintegration services.

The study found that a proposed training venue would not be financially viable. But from his research, a GDAS volunteer and former service user came up with the idea of a recruitment agency run as a social enterprise.

Those people ‘in recovery’ were found to have a range of diverse skills, yet they spoke of their difficulties in trying to find employment.

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Almost all those interviewed had some work experience – their practical skills included plumbing, hairdressing, carpentry and working as a steeplejack and a machinist, as well as a range of other experiences.

Most of the group suggested that the obstacles to achieving their ambitions concerned their own lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem.

Every one of those interviewed said they would be interested in working for a social enterprise. Responses to the idea of a recruitment agency included comments such as “it’s a brilliant idea” and “It’s a really positive thing – lots of potential and needs to be encouraged.”

Interviews with workers and managers in treatment and reintegration services also found great support for the idea.

While people in recovery focused on their own deficiencies, those working with them cited obstacles such as prejudice from employers. Some cited the benefits system as an obstacle.

The agency would aim to support people in recovery to match their skills with employers’ needs. It would aim to become an autonomous social enterprise run by and for recovering drug and/or alcohol users.

And it would work in co-operation with

employers from all sectors to raise awareness of issues related to drug and alcohol dependency.

One of the benefits for service users is that the agency would be staffed entirely by people who understand addiction issues. It would offer support leading up to and during employment, and improve access to education and training.

The feasibility study estimates the agency would cost £115,000-a-year, but that it could become self-funding as long as it was initially subsidised to get it up and running.

Peter Steel of GDAS is very enthusiastic about the scheme. “I think it’s an absolute corker – and it would be the first of its type in the country.

“What it will mean is that not only will people work in that agency and get their CVs together, they would have that extra passion and insight to help people recovering from drug and alcohol problems to get jobs.

What next?

“What employers see first is drug or alcohol use – they don’t see the ability that person has. So the new agency, along with organisations like ours, has a marketing job to do to say drug users are fine.” ■

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Community Enterprise Gloucestershire, Co-operative Futures, City Works, Alfred Street, Gloucester GL1 4DF
Telephone 01452 543030 Email info@co-operativefutures.coop

