



Support Solutions



The Manor Women's Project: Paul Rees describes a project which is turning around the lives of women with class A substance misuse needs many of whom engage in sex work to fund their addictions

The Manor Women's Project is situated in Walsall in the West Midlands. It is comprised of four terraced town houses that are linked to combine a unique urban environmental facility for homeless, vulnerable women with significant "class A" substance misuse needs. Many of these women worked as sex workers to feed their addictions.

It was founded in 1984 by Robert Gregory, who is known locally and now nationally as Greg.

Alison Cattell, who is now Director and Senior Support worker at the Manor Women's Project, became Greg's partner during the year 2000. They were disillusioned by the lack of facilities for local addicts and sex workers who used crime and vice to fund their habits.

Instead of just talking about it, they became proactive, outreaching in the community where the drug addicts frequented and sex workers plied their trade. They talked, asked questions and listened, and identified a real need for something innovative that offered more than the traditional medical models that existed and continue to exist.

The overwhelming replies were "we can't get help". The Manor Women's Project was beginning to realise the overwhelming task ahead of it as they kept hearing the same things from these women: i.e. "we need 24 hour support from people who care" ; "what do I do if I am craving for heroin and crack cocaine in the middle of the night, who do I turn to" ? "The system doesn't work for me"...The Manor Women's Project has always interacted with the other Drug Rehabilitation units and respect their contribution and indeed they have benefited from their support, but what the Project envisaged was a more holistic approach to providing twenty four hour, seven days



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per week support within the urban setting and not a converted rural mansion model that historically housed disenfranchised children in sterile care homes during the 1960's and 1970's. The advantage of the Manor Women's Project is that the client group are able to assimilate into their own community and face up to the rigours of possibly inadvertently meeting former drug pushers and pimps. They are provided with the strong support network and 'sisterhood' that prevails at the Manor Women's Project. They look out for each other and close ranks if threatened.

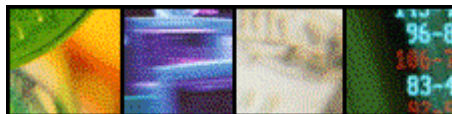
The Manor Women's Project provides a stimulating environment and their links with other drug counselling providers and key statutory institutions continues to facilitate an important part of the equation. The Manor Women's Project is so proud of their clients' achievements since supporting them through the estimated two year Manor Women's Project Programme.

Social education and academic studies, self learning and voluntary input from outside agencies and specialists has improved educational opportunities leading to certificated qualifications. The Manor Women's Project has a persuasive manner that encourages the clients to take advantage of the local facilities that are at their disposal.

The clients, most of whom have experienced physical and mental abuse are encouraged to express themselves in creative ways such as poetry and art and have benefited from an environment that allows them to express themselves without negative judgement.

There is considerable self satisfaction and belief amongst the client group that they can achieve their goals to come off drugs and cease criminal activity. Indeed, one of the residents has successfully completed a twelve month preparatory social work course and has been offered a place at a Birmingham University. Other residents have undertaken drug counselling courses and one of the residents has been working full time as a support worker for the Manor Women's Project. There are talented individuals who are showing promise in Information Technology and hairdressing and travel and tourism. These individuals have taken advantage of the close links the Manor Women's Project has with Walsall College of Further Education; the remaining clients and new recruits will continue studying at Learn Direct hopefully achieving grades in GCSE's in Maths, English and also a CLAIT computer course.

Walsall has the unenviable brand as Drug Capital of the United Kingdom and statistics showed that circa



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2001, two out of three people moving in to the Manor Women's Project were using Class A drugs it is now 100%.

The Manor Women's Project continued lobbying for financial support to set in motion their plans to engage and offer a comprehensive foundation for the most challenging and vulnerable client group.

In 2003 The Manor Women's Project's vision and perseverance overcame earlier disappointments, but with the help of the 'Supporting People' initiative their aspirations were fulfilled and since then they have specialised in one particular female client group that included 99.9% who had worked the streets as sex workers.

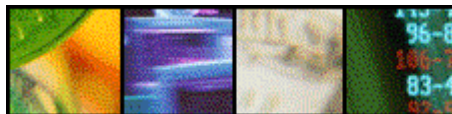
Through their endeavours The Manor Women's Project had substantially helped to reduce the numbers of women working in the Red Light District of Walsall. The Manor provided a sanctuary for recovery that has developed into a unique self help facility where the regime is built on 'tuff luv' and the rules and guidelines are created by the residents. Who better to understand the problems of their peers and how to avoid the cheating that is customary in drug testing? They self govern the testing that is overseen by a female support worker. There are no corners to hide

and nowhere to escape the rigorous drug testing regime. Hence, the success rate is easily understood. As you can't fool a former addict! "How cool is that"? The "girls", as they prefer to be known, make and agree the rules and the appropriate punishment for breach of those rules.

The significant thing for the Manor Women's Project is that they asked the pertinent questions, they did their market research, listened and acted upon the feedback.

Their teamwork approach resulted in the Manor Women's Project being nominated by their client group, friends and relatives of the recovering addicts, and achieving National and Local Awards in recognition of their pioneering work. The Manor Women's Project believe they could not have achieved these accolades without their support team and of course the residents who have helped maintain a 74% success rate, an unbelievable achievement that is considerably higher than the National average.

The Manor Women's Project, was voted, "Best Drug Workers of the Year" and were awarded their certificates by no less than the Drugs Minister the Right Hon. Vernon Coaker MP, and endorsed by the (then) Home Secretary Right Hon. Dr. John Reid. The



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Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Blair was also quoted as saying what wonderful work The Manor Hotel Project is carrying out.



The Manor Women's Project has shown that it has a proven track record with excellent success rates, well in excess of the national averages; let us not underestimate the extent of the psychological baggage that this extremely vulnerable client group brings with them to the Manor Women's Project. All of the residents previously subjected themselves to self harm and to date, no client has self harmed or even threatened to do so whilst undergoing the support program at the Project.

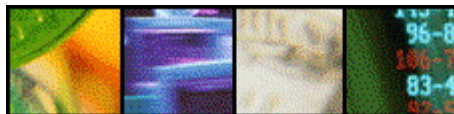
This is indeed an accolade and they continue to work in harmony with their client group in an environment

whereby they help navigate and weave a degree of magic in an area where the drug subculture is a massive problem. The Manor Women's Project was recently featured on BBC Radio WM and ITV and indeed the local press and because so much interest was generated the Independent Television Authority decided to film a fly on the wall documentary that showed the Manor Women's Project's support staff engaging with the residents in a positive, caring, poignant and sensitive way. The two residents who featured in the documentary film called 'Tales of the Unaccepted' who agreed that with emotional support they found the experience a positive one.

The strength of the project and its vision and aspirations is always going to be a learning curve, yet the unique project model offers a real chance of recovery for many of the addicts that are referred to them.

The Project is brave and committed in its bid to tackle the insidious and evil social phenomenon that has wide reaching and deleterious implications for each and every community.

If you wish to invest in a worthwhile cause or are able to sponsor the Manor Women's Project Team, please

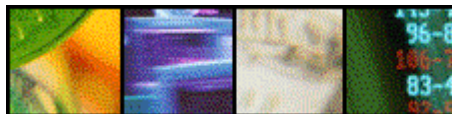


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contact Alison or Greg on 01922 648401, you could help SAVE A LIFE!

Manor Women's Project achievements April 2003 to April 2007

- Manor Women's Project started in 2003 a 16 bed unit of women giving up drug addiction
- funded by Supporting People £152,000 a year
- currently delivering over a 74% success rate
- nearly 80 newspaper reports in the last two years all positive on our success
- three 30 minute programmes on Sky TV regarding our success
- several appearances on local news TV channels
- at least 15 local and national appearances on radio
- a documentary on the Manor Women's Project shown by ITV in May 07
- Manor Women's Project staff winning Home Office award drug team of the year in the West Midlands
- "Tackling drugs Changing lives" award presented to staff by Vernon Coaker (Drugs Minister)
- Award endorsed by John Reid (Home Secretary)
- local solicitor Stephen Scully wins legal aid lawyer of the year through work at the Manor Women's Project
- Cherie Blair Prime Minister's wife presents prize to Stephen Scully and comments in press about work at Manor
- Manor Women's Project staff and clients invited to police ACPO conference in September 2006 to give a presentation and a questions and answers session on why the Manor Women's Project is so successful
- Manor Women's Project staff and clients praised by Dr Timothy Brain Chief Constable of Gloucestershire
- Manor Women's Project visited by Wolverhampton Crown Court Judge who gave his full approval on what he saw and heard
- the Manor Women's Project has taken clients from the courts as an alternative to drug testing and treatment orders and to date has a 100% success rate



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- the Manor Women's Project is supported by local MP Bruce George (Walsall South) and local councillors
- in total our 16 clients spent £6,700 on drugs per day (£2,445,500 a year) gained from multiple crime in and around the Walsall area (report compiled for Bruce George MP)
- the Manor Women's Project is supported by many organisations including Walsall police, Wolverhampton police, Gloucestershire police, Dr Timothy Brain Chief Constable of Gloucestershire, a Crown Court judge, Walsall magistrates, Walsall MP's, Walsall councillors, Wolverhampton PCT, many doctor's surgeries, many drug agencies, several groups who support sex workers, the Prince's Trust to name but a few
- in the last 28 months we have had only two clients lapse we have never had a relapse
- we have never had a client make a formal complaint against any staff member
- we have never had a client self harm or even threaten to self harm
- currently we have one client who has been accepted by Wolverhampton and Birmingham University for a degree course in social work, two clients training to be councillors, two clients training to be drug support workers, two clients training to be hairdressers, one client training to be an IT teacher and the rest of the clients all attend our local Learn-direct centre to achieve their GCSEs in maths and English and also a CLAIT computer course before moving on to college
- everything our clients do at the Manor Women's Project is voluntary and we empower them by allowing them to make all the rules and the punishments if these rules are broken at the Manor Women's Project and it works we are revolutionising the way female drug users are becoming drug and crime free
- The Manor Women's Project has always extended a welcome to visitors to the Manor Women's' Project, why not contact us (greg271@aol.com) to arrange a visit and chat to our support staff and residents.



This article was written by Paul Rees, Retired Probation Officer, former Social Worker, ASW Mental Health Act and Guardian ad Litem.