

Accessing health and care while homeless or vulnerably housed

Project report supplementary content: Interview transcript

Introduction

During January to March 2024 we visited local health, community and homeless support services in Bournemouth to speak with their clients who are experiencing homelessness or vulnerably housed, and with the health professionals and workers who support them. We reported on the barriers they face when trying to access health and care services in BCP, and made recommendations for how primary, secondary, community and social care services are delivered. We shared our findings with the NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB) to help them develop better services in the community.

An interview with Jay, who is currently homeless

Please tell us a little bit about yourself

“My name is Jay, I’m from Brighton originally but moved to Bournemouth when I was released from prison. I’ve been in Bournemouth just over a year now and I love the area. I have friends here so that’s why decided to move here.”

What health and social care services are you currently using?

“The only services that I really use at the moment is the HealthBus. They’re a fantastic team who I get on with really well. Rachel is the best person for me because she understands my mental health and she’s absolutely fantastic.

“I’m also working with ‘We are With You’ and my support worker there is really good. That service is working well for me too.

“I’m in the process of trying to register with a GP and Rachel from the HealthBus is helping me with that. I know I need to be registered because I’ve recently been in and out of hospital a few times.”

Can you tell us about your recent hospital admissions?

“Basically, the hospital admissions were a result of me drinking too much and living on the streets. The support services that are available don’t seem to help me all that much. Since I came out of prison I’ve had nowhere to live and I’m in a catch 22 situation. When I

was in Bournemouth Hospital, I found it really hard to stay there because I'm an alcoholic and I go into withdrawal.

"There's no TV to watch or radio to listen to so you're just trapped with your own thoughts and there's no distraction. It's also really hard to sleep because they take your blood pressure every half an hour. I know they're looking after me, but the withdrawal and the lack of sleep gets to me. They gave me librium to help with the withdrawal symptoms but it's nowhere near enough."

Can you explain the reasons why you had to discharge yourself?

"The first time I went in I called the ambulance myself as I was in a lot of pain. I then discharged myself after the first night because my anxiety was through the roof, and I couldn't cope with the withdrawal. The second time I was admitted I stayed for two nights before I discharged myself and I was really proud of myself for staying longer. I struggle with being in confined spaces which I think comes from being in prison. I hate feeling like I'm trapped in a room, it makes me panic and it all gets too much. The third time they discharged me because they thought I had a blood clot on my lung, but the tests came back clear, thank goodness."

What would help to make your hospital stay easier for you?

"It would really help if they managed the withdrawal symptoms better and if there was a TV to watch. The TV daily rate is £9.99 and I can't afford that. I'm living on the streets! I don't think they should charge a person who is homeless £9.99."

Were you ever made to feel uncomfortable or judged when you were in hospital?

"Personally, for me, I never felt judged in there. I think they're very stretched and I feel sorry for all the nurses who work there as they have so many people to look after. I respect every single one of them from the bottom of my heart because of what they do, but I just feel more comfortable with the HealthBus as I come here, and I have a laugh with everyone. On a Wednesday night I set my alarm and I'm really looking forward to seeing the HealthBus team on a Thursday morning."

What are biggest barriers/challenges that you are currently facing in your life?

"There are lots of barriers and challenges when you are homeless, but the biggest one for me is fear. I'm not going to lie, I'm scared. I'm a big man but deep down I'm scared and that's why I couldn't manage to stay in hospital for more than two nights. I've been in hospital four times in the last two to three weeks and I have to mentally put myself out there when I go in as it feels like I'm trapped. I'm also laying there needing a drink and it's not easy. The night times are the worst because it's so noisy and my mind goes into overdrive."

What are your future goals?

“My main goal is to try and sort the housing issue out and get back to work. I used to do groundwork and I would love to get back into that again.”

For more information

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Accessing health and care while homeless or vulnerably housed:

www.healthwatchdorset.co.uk