

## #BehindTheNumbers – Karen’s Story

### How would you describe your son Lee as a person?

**KM:** He’s a lovely boy. Talented, witty, funny. And he’s so so talented and the frustrating thing for a mum is that he just doesn’t use it because he’s so consumed by the drugs that that’s his focus.

### How have you supported Lee?

**KM:** He would ask me to go to his appointments with him, so I’d do that. I would go to the GP with him. Whatever he needed to be supported in like the chemist or maybe picking him up if he was having an off day ‘could you take me down to get my methadone’, I would go up and take him. Didn’t do it when he was being lazy. But I’d do it if he wasn’t having a very good day because Lee is the type of person who needs support.

Lots of other family members support him as well. He would phone me every day, he’d phone his gran, phone his papa, phone his sister, his brother, and that was his support network.

### What has been your experience of the different services involved with Lee?

**KM:** I went with him...he’s never been in the jail which is a rarity for a heroin addict of 20 years. He had community service and his community service was at quarter to 9 in the morning and the chemist doesn’t open till 9. So he’d asked addiction services if he could have his methadone on the Monday night to get to community service on the Tuesday morning. And they said ‘no, indeed you will not be getting no methadone on a Monday night as you haven’t seen a worker for x amount of months.’ And he said ‘well that isn’t my fault, my worker is off long term sick and you haven’t allocated me a worker.’

So again I thought, you are not supporting my son and the choices that he’s making, if he doesn’t get his methadone on the Monday night for the Tuesday morning if you’re not there within, I think it’s three times, you’re automatically jailed and as I said he’s never been in the jail. He’s not got the temperament for the jail. So I said effectively you’re hindering his recovery. So I did go with him, I made a complaint, and I did go, and it ended up he did get his methadone on the Monday night but again why does it take a family member to come along? Why are they not listened to in their own right? Why are they not supported in their choices of recovery?

We actually had a meeting...I’ve done so much complaining to services that I did get a meeting with the Head of Service and she admitted that they got it wrong. And I’ve also had a meeting with the Head Clinician who also said they had it wrong due to my experiences and my son’s experiences and the way he was treated.

At a previous meeting regarding the complaint, I asked if there was a care plan and I was told no, there was no care plans. So in any other service you have a care plan so why is there none in addiction services? A care plan...even a small goal, a small thing to work towards, but every time I went with my son it was a ‘how are you doing Lee, what’s happening’ that’s it, cheerio. There’s no respect or dignity. People with addiction issues don’t get treated the same as everyone else.

### Have there been times when these services have put Lee and/or yourself at risk or caused harm?

**KM:** Yes there’s been lots of times when they have caused him unnecessary harm, through no fault of his own. I went with him to his appointment to the doctor and the doctor had said...he wanted off

methadone all together. And the doctor said once you get to 50ml of methadone you can have a suboxone detox. So he reduced three times, he reduced from 110 to 80 to 50 to 40, and then he got a new worker and the new worker told him no, you have to go down to 30ml to get a suboxone detox to which again, there's the mental state away up in the air.

And he said no I'm not doing another detox, so there's no consistency with staff. And he got so fed up that he decided he was not going back to services because nobody was listening to him. So he just never appeared at the chemist on the Saturday, the police chapped the door on the Thursday to make sure he was alright and the cop said to him 'am I mighty glad that you're alright son', cause I'm generally taking that most people are no alright if they don't return to the chemist.

Staff are not all singing from the same hymn sheet. Some staff say you need three clean samples. It was three clean samples to go back to the three times weekly script till you get stable, and another worker told him it was two samples. So again...people with addiction issues are already chaotic, they don't need the chaos from the services.

### **Are there things that could have been done differently?**

**KM:** Many things could be done differently and the fact that the whole service needs to change because right now, it ain't working. And putting people off their scripts is penalising people. They need to think of different ways to combat that because that again is putting people at risk and if they're put off their script then they're obviously going to go out and use so I presume their tolerance levels will be lower and thinking they can take the same amount, so I'm sure that's contributing to a lot of the deaths.

But try treating people with dignity and respect, the same as any other service they would use because people with addiction issues seem to be discriminated against all the time. And there's that stigma that families are up against continual...I've had it myself, I did have it early doors but not now because they're a person the...they're a human being the same as anyone else and they deserve the same treatment, it doesn't matter what service they're in.

The form of stigma I got was oh I was classed as a mother from hell, which I used to laugh. It comes from people who don't have any experience or don't have a family member which is a rarity, you're very lucky if you're not effected by addiction in your family nowadays. But then I'm talking about 20 year ago, or 18 year ago maybe, 'that's terrible imagine putting your son out on the street and blah, blah, blah' and I just thought you just don't have a clue, you're ignorant to the fact towards addiction or anything and it's that whole thing about judgement until it comes to your door, you just don't know. And a lot of people are no interested either and think people with addiction issues are the scourge of society, but we all make wrong choices in life and we can correct those choices.

### **How are things for you and Lee now?**

**KM:** I've had a meeting with the lead clinician at services and he's admitted we got it wrong, things need to change, and they need to change big time. So Lee had actually phoned, well I told him, I said phone Woodland View and see what the criteria is to get in, which is in North Ayrshire. So he phoned, and I'm sure it was the secretary he never got speaking to a nurse, and she told him if you have drug issues, alcohol issues or mental health issues then you can come to Woodland View but you need a GP to refer you. So he did it himself, phoned and got an emergency appointment on the Wednesday afternoon and he said mum will you come with me, I'm going to see the doctor and blah, blah, blah, so I said okay. We go over, see the doctor, and I thought here we go again. The minute you mention that addiction, the barrier is up. And he says, 'I can't refer you, I can't refer you

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to Woodland View, I can only refer you to the psychiatrist and then the psychiatrist makes the decision.' And I said that's what we're here for. But we went in for a referral and we came out with a referral. No that anybody has contacted him. Nobody has contacted him from the crisis team and that's three weeks ago today. That's no good enough.

**What would be your message for other families in a similar situation?**

**KM:** My message for other families would be never give up, give in and start again, don't give up. Keep going. Don't be feart to voice your opinion. If you've got issues with services and your loved one, either go to their appointments with them. If you think they've been mistreated or not been treated properly or respected, speak to somebody within services, if you can't speak to somebody within services, then lodge a complaint. Contact yourselves at Scottish Families who are a great support for families. Join a group, if there's a local group, a family group that's experiencing the same stuff as yourself join in with them because we're all in the same boat. And families, if we all stick together and get our message out then hopefully, change will come.