

#BehindTheNumbers – Sandra’s Story

How would you describe your daughter Elaine as a person?

SH: A very kind, caring person. She thinks of others. She’s very articulate. She’s very person-centered. She likes to be involved with people.

How have you supported Elaine?

SH: Through her addiction she has had some terrible experiences and I’ve supported her because I love her and I wanted to help save her life. I felt if I didn’t support her she had less chance of coming through the other end with her addiction.

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

SH: Horrendous. That’s probably quite mild to say the word horrendous, it was worse than horrendous. The services were probably hardly non-existent in Midlothian. There was a treatment centre but I think at one point it was two years for an appointment so my daughter was told just to continue using. And then they changed and they had a gateway clinic that you could turn up on a Tuesday and then maybe get an appointment 12 weeks, 16/18 weeks later to see if you could be appointed a CPN and then maybe get put on a prescription. So in all that time my daughter continued to use drugs, heroin was the main one. So she was dicing with death every day because she wasn’t getting any help from the services.

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

SH: Oh yeah, many very, for a, I’d say over the years, not just on occasions. Her life was at risk for a number of years once she started to engage with the services because appointments would be cancelled, the CPN was maybe off sick, they wanted a clean drug sample but she was waiting 9 weeks for an appointment, or she would turn up to an appointment to be told here’s your methadone prescription, your CPN is off sick today or she’s in a meeting. So there was never any consistency at all for years with the services.

Elaine’s life was at risk, she had been threatened that someone was going to kill her, they were going to come to her home and shoot her. So the police were informed, had got an anonymous call. So the police got in touch with me to tell me that my daughter’s life was at risk, they were looking for her. So they got in touch with the treatment service and told them her life was at risk and that we needed to protect her. So they then got in touch with her GP which she then phoned me to say to take my daughter away from the area we live in, I have a static caravan, a holiday home, to take her there for and, for her own protection out of the area. But the services wouldn’t give her her methadone prescription to take. They said she would have to still pick it up daily which meant a round trip of 120 miles every day for me to drive to pick up a methadone prescription and we had to do that for three months because the services were absolutely horrendous, they wouldn’t listen, they wouldn’t listen to the police that her life was at risk, they wouldn’t listen to my own GP that was willing to prescribe the methadone prescription, because the methadone prescription was being prescribed by the drugs service centre, they would not allow me to take the methadone prescription and put it to the chemist in Eyemouth. They said she still had to pick up the prescription daily. I have osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, I had broken ribs, and I didn’t have an automatic car at the time, so I was in absolute pain every day driving 120 miles every day to pick up a methadone prescription for 3

months. It's a disgrace that the services would not listen to me as a mother, or the police, or our own GP, that they knew better, that she would pick up that prescription daily.

Are there things that could have been done differently?

SH: Oh massively, I'll give you some examples. I would say as a mother, if you want your daughter, I wanted to support my daughter, so to help her I should have been able to go into appointments with her, and take her to appointments. But in our area, in Midlothian at the time, there was only six wee plastic chairs in the waiting room and there was a notice on the door to say you can't bring anyone with you because we don't have enough seats for anyone else to sit in them so I wasn't allowed to go to an appointment to help support her when she was feeling quite vulnerable.

Most of the time the services were just giving her a methadone prescription and no guiding her towards recovery. She could actually, she never knew that she could recover from addiction, she genuinely believed she was an addict and that was her life that was it, she didn't know that she could actually get help and get into recovery. She was in her 30s before she knew that.

How are things for you and Elaine now?

SH: Because of the horrific experience my daughter and I as a family, a mother and daughter, have suffered through her addiction we decided that it wasn't good enough and that the services needed to change. So with all the bad things that have happened over the years, things are so much better now. The services in Midlothian are fantastic. Nobody would go through what my daughter's been through because Tracey Clusker, the manager of the Glenesk Centre and me as Elaine's mother now work together.

I've set up a family support group in Midlothian for other families so that they don't experience what I've experienced as a mother and we have a fantastic group running now on a Monday night and it's well-attended, well-advertised in Midlothian, and the Glenesk Centre and Tracey Clusker work very closely with me and she's changed every service that ever happened in the Glenesk before is now the complete opposite. We have a lovely nice comfortable room with sofas, with radio and lamps, and treated with a bit of dignity and respect. So that's the most important thing that anybody should be treated with in these services is with a bit of dignity and respect. So our change that we've made in Midlothian is now phenomenal, it's a miracle what we've done. And families are really accepting that there is help available and every week there's people phoning the helpline looking for support and it's there on the day if you need it.

My daughter is in Leap as we speak and she's now clean and into recovery. So things are way better than they ever have been in the last 10 years because the services are now starting to listen to the families. And it's because our voices have been heard that the services in Midlothian have changed.

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

SH: Don't sit back and accept the services if you're not happy with it. Speak up, get in touch with a family support group, get in touch with Scottish Families' helpline and they'll guide you towards your area, what's available for you. Don't sit back and accept that there isn't any help or support for you out there because your family member is an addict.