

## Keys group Specialist Substance Misuse Advisor

### Fran Gracie

The particular case below discusses how a systems approach can be beneficial and how this way of working helped a young person make positive changes.

The young person currently lives within one of the Keys Group South Wales homes. He first came to Fran's attention in March 2018 when he used a powdered stimulant substance, suspected to be MDMA.

Luckily no harm came to the young person, he vowed that he would never use the substance again due to it having a negative effect upon him.

Periodically, there were further occasions of substance use, mainly the young person drinking alcohol with friends. There were some concerns of potential drug dealing when the young person would occasionally go missing from care, however there was no evidence to support this.

For each incident, Fran would contact the home, offer support and advice, complete consultations with staff to equip them to carry out appropriate interventions. On occasions, Fran visited the home to complete psychosocial sessions with the young person and to deliver substance misuse training and further consultations with the staff team.

The care from the staff team, alongside direct help and support from Fran enabled the young person to make positive choices and he quickly settled back into the home and restarted education.

Nearly a year passed by where the young person was settled in the home, with no evidence of any substance use and no missing from care episodes.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the young person's presentation changed, he stopped engaging with staff, he lost weight, he cared very little about his personal appearance and cleanliness.

The young person refuted the COVID-19 restrictions; he was going missing from care on a regular basis and was involving himself in criminal activity that led to two court appearances. Some intelligence suggested that he was potentially involved in child criminal exploitation.

The young person was using cannabis and alcohol on a frequent basis, he declined all support from internal staff and even the statutory services that were involved with him at the time.

During this difficult period, although the young person was declining direct support, Fran was maintaining almost daily calls to the home, often reassuring the Manager and staff. Fran also helped the Manager establish patterns of behaviours and helped to implement some risk management plans.

Due to the young person's lack of engagement, Fran gave sound advice and strategies on how different approaches may help re-engage the young person. Fran also participated in numerous internal meetings, plus risk management and child protection strategy meetings.



This consistent approach had an impact on our young person, as he was eventually able to see that the staff cared about him, they kept him safe and wanted the best for him.



#### Manager's quote:

*"We could not keep the young person locked in the home; we could not stop him from leaving despite having concerns about what he was doing and also whom he was with. Fran supported the staff team, ensuring that we all covered everything that was within our control to support the young person."*

*Fran made us aware of intel of certain drugs within the area and what signs to look out for in terms of the young person's presentation.*

*Fran and I discussed possible options for immediate intervention. One of the suggestions was to give him a break away from the area, staff would take him on a trip away for a while to help break the cycle he was in.*

*This would enable staff to re-engage the young person away from the risks he was taking. In order for this to happen, Fran wanted to ensure the staff team were equipped and 'skilled up'. She delivered specialist training and guidance to the staff team and myself, alongside some robust risk management and risk assessments.*

*Fran was able to be a proactive support throughout, supporting staff with her knowledge of patterns of behaviours and possible drug use that our young person was involved with. Being able to identify what drugs were being consumed through the effects they were having on him both physically and mentally helped to shape the strategies of support and alleviate staff anxieties around his behaviours.*



*Fran supported the staff team with various evidence based approaches that he would respond to and what observations they were to be aware of with our young person.*

*With this, we saw a change in the staff confidence, having a robust plan to follow and firm consistent boundaries in place, all of which started to help our young person with his choices and engagement.*

*I believe this consistent approach had an impact on our young person, as he was eventually able to see that the staff cared about him, they kept him safe and wanted the best for him.*

### Outcomes

In September - The young person started college, he has made new friends and he has a new girlfriend who seems to be a positive influence on him. There are no missing from care episodes and there has been no drug use, but a couple of times he has used a small amount of alcohol with his college friends. The young person has fully re-engaged with staff.

