



The *Blue Light* project: The story so far...

A report on progress to March 2016

The Blue Light project is an innovative and cost effective approach to tackling one of the most challenging groups in the community:

Change resistant drinkers

Part 1 - The *Blue Light* Project

The *Blue Light* project is Alcohol Concern's national initiative to develop alternative approaches and care pathways for change resistant drinkers who place a huge burden on public services.

The traditional approach to this client group has been the pessimistic belief that nothing can be done for people who do not want to change.

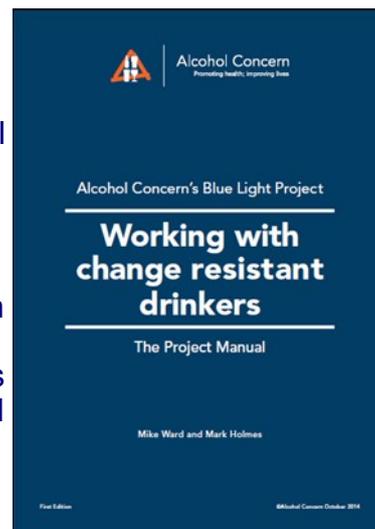
This is simply untrue. The *Blue Light* project has challenged this negative approach by showing that there are positive strategies that can be used with this client group. These will enable a range of agencies to offer a coherent and planned approach to these, often socially excluded, adults with complex needs.

The project was funded in a unique way with 23 local authorities across the country each contributing a small sum to develop the response. Local staff in each area contributed expertise to the development process.

The *Blue Light* manual

At the heart of the development has been the *Blue Light* manual which contains:

- ◆ Tools for understanding why clients may not engage
- ◆ Risk assessment tools which are appropriate for drinkers
- ◆ Harm reduction techniques workers can use
- ◆ Advice on crucial nutritional approaches which can reduce alcohol related harm
- ◆ Questions to help non-clinicians identify potential serious health problems and deliver enhanced personalised education
- ◆ Management frameworks
- ◆ Guidance on legal frameworks



Above all it offers a fundamental positive message that intervention is possible. We may not always be able to “treat” someone and make them change completely, but we can help them reduce the harm and manage the risk they pose to themselves and others.

Public Health England funded a national dissemination and consultation for the manual. This has received very positive feedback:

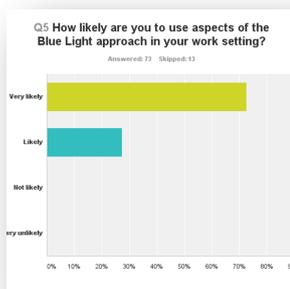
- ◆ *Three cheers for the Blue Light Project manual – what a fantastic document! It speaks directly of a population we see quite a bit of, but effecting change is slow and sometimes difficult to achieve.*
- ◆ *The information is fantastic.*
- ◆ *Very helpful and we will try and incorporate some of these ideas/techniques.*
- ◆ *It's very good and easy to read.*

The manual is available at:

<http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Alcohol-Concern-Blue-Light-Project-Manual.pdf>

Evaluating the manual

We used an online survey to evaluate the impact of the approaches set out in the manual. This demonstrated a would use the techniques.



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Evaluating the *Blue Light* approach

In 2015 we undertook a review of the Nottinghamshire Alcohol-related Long-term Conditions Team that works with chaotic drinkers – *blue light* clients. This team has been using the techniques highlighted in the manual. The evaluation demonstrated the effectiveness of the approaches and that in just one year this small team has saved £360,000 in healthcare costs alone. This far exceeds the cost of providing the service. The detailed evaluation is available from Alcohol Concern.

This effectiveness data is mirrored in research by both Alcohol Concern and others. Data from Wigan's Active Case Management Team, which works to engage frequent attenders in the hospital system, shows a 52% reduction in hospital admissions by people who receive outreach. A separate trial in Salford found that assertive engagement with a small cohort of change resistant patients resulted in better engagement with specialist alcohol treatment services at 12 months follow up.

Part 2 - Local pilots

At the heart of the ongoing dissemination of the project is a series of local pilots. We have received funding from the following areas to roll out the *Blue Light* project:

- ◆ Sandwell
- ◆ Lincolnshire
- ◆ Medway
- ◆ Nottingham and Notts
- ◆ Merton (with support from Safe Sensible London Partnership)
- ◆ Devon
- ◆ Staffordshire

We also know that a significant number of areas are pursuing this approach separately from us e.g. S Tyneside, Swindon, and Surrey.

The key elements of these pilots have been:

- ◆ Embedding the approach in strategic / commissioning thinking;
- ◆ Training of specialist and non-alcohol specialist staff ;
- ◆ Train the trainer programmes to ensure a local legacy;
- ◆ Developing multi-agency operational groups to manage high risk, change resistant drinkers;
- ◆ Building a business case for other interventions such as outreach.

The Blue Light project aims to develop responses that require minimal investment by:

- ◆ ***using existing resources more effectively; &***
- ◆ ***achieving the greatest impact by bringing organisations together and refocusing what they do.***

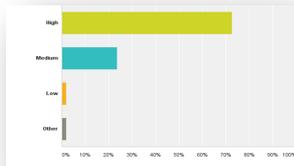
Evaluating the local pilots

Throughout the project we have attempted to evaluate impact; however, it is important to note that the *Blue Light* project is still at an early stage of development and with initiatives such as the multi-agency groups it will take a longer time to demonstrate effectiveness. Nonetheless, we can already show real impact.

Strategy

In most areas we have gathered evidence on the priority that should be given to tackling this client group. In Sandwell, an online survey highlighted that 72% of respondents felt that change resistant drinkers should be a high priority for service development. This is consistent with surveys in other areas such as Merton.

What priority should be given to tackling the needs of change resistant drinkers in Sandwell? (2015)



Training

In Lincolnshire we have run a long programme of Blue Light training and train the trainer courses and completed the programme with training co-run by a local facilitator. The feedback and interest in these courses has been excellent.

Feedback	% scoring 8-10 out of 10 (10 = high)
The subject and content of this session was appropriate to your work setting	95%
The pace and timing of the session was appropriate	93%
The trainer communicated clearly throughout	100%
There was sufficient opportunity for you to ask questions and explore areas that you had not	98%
The session made you better equipped to assist your client group	98%

I just wanted to say a big thank you for the Blue Light Train the Trainer course. The training was really well received and people seemed really enthused to take this forward.

Multi-agency groups

In most of the pilot areas we have set up a multi-agency *Blue Light* group which aims to drive joint planning around individual high risk drinkers. As an alternative, in one area we are looking to develop training for existing multi-agency groups to improve their response to this client group.

These groups are still at an early stage of development. In Medway and Sandwell the groups have been running since summer of 2015, in Merton since early 2016. It is, therefore, too soon to make reliable, statistical statements about impact. However, the first groups have been subject to internal review and been positively evaluated with decisions taken to continue.

The Medway group first met in July 2015. In its first six months it took referrals for 12 clients. All of these fitted the *Blue Light* criteria of significant substance misuse problems, frequent engagement with the criminal justice system, contact with multiple agencies, housing problems and, in some cases, significant vulnerability.

Of the 12 engaged:

- ◆ 3 showed marked improvement: improved housing status, engagement with substance misuse services and fewer problems to the criminal justice system.
- ◆ 6 have seen improved multi-agency working including one safeguarding referral .
- ◆ 3 have not progressed or have been considered inappropriate for the process.

Individual cases have quickly highlighted the potential benefit from the groups.

- ◆ The first case in one of the areas highlighted that a man viewed as a troublesome, anti-social drunk was actually suffering from a significant head injury.
- ◆ In another area the group has challenged failures to follow up drinkers who have disengaged from alcohol treatment.
- ◆ Safeguarding agencies have been challenged to take on individuals who were highly vulnerable but not engaged with adult social care.

We will evaluate these groups through a review of changes in offending levels and other markers of harm.

The early indicators are that the Blue Light multi-agency client management groups are proving effective.

The 12 questions tool

The 12 questions tool (part of the *Blue Light* manual) sets out a series of questions that non-medical staff can ask a drinker to identify whether there is an emerging physical health problem. **This tool offers a real opportunity to impact on significant health problems such as liver disease.** We are seeking an academic review; however, in the interim we have undertaken a small trial of this tool in Merton. The results are still to be collated but the responses from the workers indicate that it is increasing the identification of physical health problems.

I have managed to ask 9 people so far. 5 people were identified with symptoms and I advised them to go to their GP or A&E which they have all done.

Part 3 - National initiatives

Alongside the local pilots we have been involved in four major projects to develop elements of the *Blue Light* agenda. These documents will be published at various points throughout 2016.

- ◆ **Commissioning guidance:** we have worked with Public Health England to develop national guidance on commissioning services for change resistant drinkers.
- ◆ **Domestic violence:** we have worked with AVA Stella to develop national guidance on *working with blue light clients in the context of domestic violence*. This was another multi-partner project supported by 24 local authorities across England.
- ◆ **Street drinking:** Eight Police and Crime Commissioners have joined with us to fund the development of good practice guidance on tackling street drinking.
- ◆ **The family and carer response to change resistant drinkers:** we are working with Adfam to develop guidance on supporting the family members of drinkers and helping them to be a resource in tackling change resistant drinkers.

Part 4 - Moving forward

Over the next year we are aiming to continue with the local pilots but also to target three specific developments at the national level:

- ◆ A model specification for alcohol services that addresses this client group. We are keen to move commissioners away from simply specifying alcohol treatment to the specification of an **alcohol impact management service**.
- ◆ Guidance and training on how to manage problem drinkers in multiagency groups.
- ◆ Guidance and training on how to undertake outreach to this client group i.e. what works.

We are looking to develop these, as previously, through national partnerships with local authorities, CCGs, Public Health England and other stakeholders.

If you want to work with Alcohol Concern on rolling out elements of the Blue Light Project including training and developing a multi-agency group in your area please contact:

mward@alcoholconcern.org.uk

Thanks are due to the following areas and agencies who have also contributed to the Blue Light Project: *Aquarius, Herefordshire, Northumberland, Swanswell, Bath & NE Somerset, EACH, Shropshire, Thurrock, Telford & Wrekin, Blackburn & Darwen, Harrow, Blackpool, Liverpool, Southend, Warwickshire, Manchester, City of London, South Tyneside, Wigan, Dudley, Newcastle, Suffolk, Wiltshire Hampshire, North Lincs, Surrey, Birmingham, East Cheshire, Norfolk, Tower Hamlets, Bury, Haringey, North Tyneside, Camden, Havant, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Westminster, Coventry, Hounslow, Oldham, Kingston, Durham, Darlington, Kent, East Suffolk, Stockport and Stoke-on-Trent*