

# *Impact* **magazine**

It's time to understand the reality



**Birmingham**

Drug and Alcohol Service

ISSUE 1 | 2018

PEOPLE

**in Birmingham have changed their lives  
by overcoming drugs or alcohol.**

**This is how they did it...**

“

*I grew up in Sutton Coldfield with my mom, dad, two brothers and four sisters.*

**My dad was an alcoholic.**  
*After drinking, he would **beat up my mom.***

*For my own safety, **I was taken away** from them and **put into the care system.***

*At three years old someone in the care system, someone trusted to protect me, **abused and molested me.***

*These are my earliest memories, it was the **start of my life and of my story...***

**B**y 16, I'd managed to find a life working in the events business but lost my job when Birmingham's NEC first opened. I became jobless and broke. I had to find a way to make money and sex was all I'd known from my childhood to survive. I started to have sex with other men for money. It was either that or crime. It worked for me. I met a girl in a pub just about where Grand Central Station is now and I was married the same year as the Birmingham Miners' Strike, 1985. I was happy, but living on the streets was tough. I started stealing to make ends meet. In the end, the police caught me and I was given 15 months in prison. That's when I was first offered heroin.

*“ I had to find a way to make money and sex was all I'd known from my childhood to survive. I started to have sex with other men for money. It was either that or crime.”*

Heroin wasn't something I'd usually take, but the prison had just introduced a new drug testing system. It was easy to get caught using cannabis, it would stay in your system for a month or so, but heroin would only be detected up to two days after you'd taken it. We didn't want to get caught, so we all switched to heroin.

*“ The real problem was deeper inside of me, everything that had happened in my life since I was born; abandonment, insecurity, abuse, betrayal.”*

While I was in prison, my wife left me for someone else, someone close to me. It devastated me because I'd trusted her. I was alone, heroin became all that I had. I didn't have friends, just a lot of people who would hang around me because we used drugs together. Slowly I became dependent on heroin and crack.

I fell in love again after I was out of prison, I was happy. My partner had an amazing son and we had a baby girl on the way, when the biggest shock of my life came. My partner was arrested and sent to prison. To this day I don't understand it, I don't know what she was thinking. I was left responsible for her son and our baby, while heroin and crack still had a hold on me.

My dad's drinking almost destroyed my life. It was at this moment that I promised that drugs or alcohol wouldn't hurt the life of another child.

I had to find everything in myself to overcome heroin and crack. It sounds easy to “stop using”, but the reality

is that the drugs aren't the problem, they're just covering up what the real problem is. The real problem was deeper inside of me, everything that had happened in my life since I was born; abandonment, insecurity, abuse, betrayal. That's what I really had to beat. Only when you've understood and accepted all of that, that stuff that's deep in your gut, will you never need to use another drug or take another drink.

That's the kind of help that services like ours offer in Birmingham. I've been in and out of treatment centres and rehabs in Birmingham for decades. I wish that I could have come here the first time I used heroin. I wouldn't be a volunteer here if I didn't believe that every single one of the thousands of people that we help had the power within themselves to Change, Grow and Live.

*“ My proudest achievement has been giving my children a life I never had.”*

My proudest achievement has been giving my children a life I never had. They have always had the best that I can provide for them; the fridge has always been full and their school uniforms always spotless. I'm so determined to make sure my children have a childhood

that I didn't. Because without them I wouldn't be alive today.

Sometimes it's easy, and even tempting, to assume that people just choose to become dependent on drugs or alcohol. The reality is never that simple; there's almost always something else, something that's happened to lead people down a particular path in life.



**If you or anyone you know is struggling with drugs or alcohol, speak to us.**

(Details of this story have been changed to protect the amazing person who shared it).



# Hi, I'm Sian.

I work for a charity called Change Grow Live. We help people that are experiencing difficulties with drugs or alcohol in Birmingham. Thanks for picking up this magazine. By the time you've put it down I hope you will have taken something from the words on these pages. Maybe they'll inspire you and maybe they'll upset you. Most of all, I hope you remember them.

When I write this kind of thing, I always wonder if you (yes you reading this!), know who we are. I wonder if there is someone in your life that we've helped, maybe there is and you don't even know. Maybe we've helped you.

In the last three years, four thousand people in Birmingham have overcome their issues with drugs and alcohol. That's four thousand people whose lives have changed for the better; they are brothers, sisters, friends, colleagues, parents and children. They are you, me and the people around us. I can tell you, categorically, that drugs and alcohol can destroy lives. But I don't know if a sentence exists to describe the difference that four thousand healthy and happy souls can make to a city. But I do know it's huge.

In the next few pages you'll read some stories that I hope you think are as amazing as I do. But before you move on, do me a favour. We don't run adverts, you haven't seen us on TV and we're never going to turn up at your door with a clipboard. Our charity is built on the power of individuals to connect and become stronger together. So we want to connect with you (Yes, again! You reading this!).

Follow us on Facebook or Twitter (details below), leave us a message, let us know what you think of this magazine. Is there a particular story that inspired you? Reach out to us, maybe we can work together. Or just share a post and like our page, you never know whose life you could change with a few taps of a phone. We'd be thrilled to have you visit our services and learn more about us.

Most importantly, if you or anyone you know is struggling with drugs or alcohol, speak to us.

**Our incredible team and our unrivalled volunteers are busy working away, every day, to help change lives in Birmingham. Let's change them together.**

**@ChangeGrowLive**

**Facebook.com/ChangeGrowLive**

# HELPING THE HOMELESS

Hi, my name's Simon. I help homeless people in Birmingham. I've had the privilege of developing relationships with some of the incredibly inspiring homeless people on Birmingham's streets; I know their stories, their situations and the circumstances that led to them becoming homeless. It's my job to do everything in my power to help some of these incredible people make positive changes in their lives.

The average passer-by doesn't seem to see much of a change in the rough sleeping situation, they see faces and bedding on the same streets in the city centre; for me it's completely different. Daily, I see people changing, growing and taking another step closer to making a positive change in their lives. It's simply the nature of the current situation; homelessness is increasing across the country. As soon we help someone move from street-sleeping and into accommodation, someone else, often a victim of similar circumstances, quickly takes their place.

We're part of Birmingham's Street Intervention Team, we are specialists in substance misuse. Our job is to motivate and help homeless people understand and change their relationship with drugs or alcohol. This is often the first step in them finding accommodation, finding employment or being reunited with their families. We also help those who might have an issue that could cause them to become homeless, such as a relationship breakdown or discharge from hospital.

*We've helped around 100 people make the changes needed to regain their hopes, dreams and lives. But we're always working with people who are just struggling to find their feet.*

Each person we work with is unique, so our approach has to change each time. We can do this because of the Street Intervention Team's incredible partners, which include; Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police; Midland Heart Housing; St Basil's service - for under-25s; the Homeless Health Exchange (HEX) and the Birmingham BID Enforcement Team; Shelter – Changing Futures; The Salvation Army and other hostels in the City.

We've helped around 100 people make the changes needed to regain their hopes, dreams and lives. But we're

always working with people who are just struggling to find their feet. Our work doesn't end when we've found someone accommodation; it's just not that easy. Ongoing support is what makes people achieve a true long term change in their lives, So we go to hospital visits, hostel visits, get people new clothes, dental care and housing support. I've even helped one client get a new wheelchair.

Homelessness is often discussed by professionals and politicians. You probably read about it in the news and hear about it on the radio. The reality is often a bit more complicated, so why don't

you come and take a look what's really happening? Be warned, we start early (6am!) but you're more than welcome to come out with the team and see our work first hand.

I'm proud and privileged to work with our rough sleepers and I'd welcome the opportunity to share this with you.



*This story was written by Simon*

Simon is an outreach worker for Change Grow Live Birmingham, operating as part of Birmingham's Street Intervention team. Simon can be found at 6am most mornings out in the city centre, providing help and support to Birmingham's rough sleepers.

# BIRMINGHAM LEADING THE WAY IN ERADICATING ~~HEP C~~

**H**epatitis C can also be called the ‘silent killer’; it’s often unnoticed at first, with only mild or no symptoms at all, but the virus can go on to result in liver cancer and death. Roughly 90% of chronic Hepatitis C infections in the UK are among people who inject or have previously injected drugs. But there’s been a breakthrough, Hep C can now be cured with almost no side effects. All it takes is a few tablets each day for 8 to 12 weeks.

## **So we’re trying to lead the way in eradicating Hep C in Birmingham.**

A drug and alcohol service is often the first and only point of care for people affected by both substance misuse and a blood borne virus like Hep C. Between June and August 2018 we tested over 200 individuals for Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B and HIV as well as other blood borne viruses.

The most exciting part is the Hepatitis C clinic that we run in Birmingham with the Hepatitis C Trust and Queen Elizabeth Hospital. We have a clinic based in our drug and alcohol service. This means people that are coming into our buildings to get help for their drug or alcohol misuse. Can also get Hep C treatment. No need for onward referrals and travel to specialist clinics or departments elsewhere in the city.

Hep C doesn’t discriminate and neither do we, equality and diversity are so important. In the last 12 months we’ve tested people of 18 different nationalities. Nearly 250 of the people we tested had a physical or mental disability. We try to focus our efforts on injecting drug users; sex workers and men who have sex with other men; we know they are more likely to contract Hep C.

To date, 90 people in Birmingham have successfully completed their Hep C treatment. That’s potentially 90 lives saved!

Check out what the incredibly passionate Dr Ahmen Elsharkawy, who’s a Consultant Transplant Hepatologist at Birmingham’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital, has to say:

*“As we move towards the stated ambition of NHS England to eliminate HCV by the year 2025, it is absolutely critical to focus our attention on the services accessed by those individuals who inject drugs. It is no longer acceptable to expect such vulnerable people to attend appointments in secondary care NHS trusts and every effort should be made to co-locate HCV services in places where such individuals are seen for their other needs, be it social, probationary or health related. The Change Grow Live clinic follows this ethos and has seen us treat approaching 100 people who inject drugs, individuals who we were never able to treat successfully in the past.”*



**Dr Ahmen Elsharkawy**

Consultant Transplant Hepatologist at Birmingham’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital



# The road to recovery for Women & Families

For anyone that is dependent on drugs or alcohol, the road to recovery is daunting and littered with temptations and hurdles. For women, it's more complicated, there are greater risks. It could be a fear of having children removed or the coercive control of a partner. These risks mean women are more likely to die from an overdose than men.

**S**ome of the women we work with are pregnant and some are already mothers. The majority are in an abusive or controlling relationship. Put bluntly, a lot of the women we are helping have turned to drugs or alcohol because it helps them escape a world where they're physically and emotionally abused or forced into situations they don't want to be in by others. It's hard to imagine the circumstances unless you've seen them first hand.

So, it's essential that we help women dependent on drugs or alcohol to make positive and long term changes in their lives.

Right now we're helping 70 vulnerable women. From the thousands of people we help across Birmingham, these 70 women are the few that we know will need the most support. Between them, the staff in our team have 100 years of experience in working with vulnerable women, and we bring all this expertise to bear each day to help women understand and challenge their behaviours, changing their lives for the better.

Between February and October, 13 women have walked out of our centre completely free from dependency on drugs or alcohol.



*This story was written by Marcia*

Marcia is the Team Manager for the Change Grow Live Birmingham Women and Families team. Marcia is driven by her passion to relieve the multiple disadvantages that women can face in their lives.

# ZERO TOLERANCE



to domestic abuse  
in Birmingham

**I remember exactly how I felt at the launch of Birmingham's Domestic Abuse Strategy, as the Leader of the Council stood up and "called time" on Domestic Abuse in Birmingham. It's a moment I'll never forget.**

*Every day I see women who have turned to alcohol or drugs as a way to escape domestic abuse. I work with women that have been forced to use drugs or alcohol by their abusers.*

I remember exactly how I felt at the launch of Birmingham's Domestic Abuse Strategy, as the Leader of the Council stood up and "called time" on Domestic Abuse in Birmingham. It's a moment I'll never forget.

I'm proud to support the launch of Birmingham's Domestic Abuse strategy this year. As safeguarding lead for drug

and alcohol services in Birmingham, I'll be sitting on the Violence against Women and Children Steering Group.

Every day I see women who have turned to alcohol or drugs as a way to escape domestic abuse. I work with women that have been forced to use drugs or alcohol by their abusers.

We know that women experiencing domestic abuse are more than twice as likely to have an alcohol problem and eight times more likely to be drug dependent than others. For much of my life I have fought to put an end to the suffering and pain that domestic abuse has wreaked in Birmingham.

Side by side with Birmingham City Council and our other incredible partners across the City, we're calling time on Domestic Abuse in Birmingham too.



*This statement was written by Kerry*

Kerry, safeguarding lead for Change Grow Live Birmingham, can be found next to a black coffee at 7.30am each morning. Planning training, assessing risks and speaking with our safeguarding partners across the city. Kerry is relentlessly determined to keep adults and children safe from harm, in Birmingham.



**D**rug or alcohol misuse can impact on anyone. Our veterans, especially those that suffer with PTSD, need and deserve a special level of support for drug or alcohol misuse. We work in partnership with the Armed Forces Covenant and make sure we're doing everything we can to serve those who have served us.

The first thing that's offered to any of our veterans is a pin badge. It might not sound like much, but this symbol represents pride and a feeling of belonging once again to the armed forces. The pin badge lets people know they are not alone and gives them special access to other veteran services for the future. The badge is a symbol. When a veteran has their badge and they see a member of our team wearing theirs, there's a special connection there, an understanding between us. Sometimes that's all it takes to give people the confidence they need to make the first small steps towards recovery.

# What even is Service

# User Involvement?

**We talk about 'Service User Involvement' like you know exactly what it means. Well it's pretty simple. We call the people that use our services "service users" (obviously).**

Other than being amazing people, what's really unique is these guys know exactly what it's like to use our service; I don't know first hand what it's like and neither do most of my colleagues. Our service users experience of using our service is one of the most important resources we have. So we invite some of our service users back to become service user representatives.

Imagine being the CEO of an organisation that helped 4,000 customers a day, would you know exactly how it feels to be one of those customers? Our Service User Representatives help us find parts of our service that need to be improved or changed for the benefit of others. Birmingham is a big city, so we need Service User Involvement to play an important role, making sure we're always doing the right thing by the people that we're here to help. Here's a great example of how we do this:

I spotted something strange about some prescribed drugs called Pregabalin and Gabapentin. I'd heard they were causing our service users problems and saw people coming to us in desperate need of support. I started to ask around, spoke to staff and after doing some research, I didn't think we were doing enough for people in Birmingham that were using Pregabalin or Gabapentin.

I checked it out online and explored our internal policies and procedures. I found out that the medications were originally developed to treat epilepsy and are commonly being used to treat pain and anxiety. I found that it was possible to become physically dependent on Pregabalin and Gabapentin. They also carry an overdose risk and deaths are going up each year.

I was concerned. It was obvious that these medications posed a serious risk to our

service users. I was even more concerned when I found no evidence of a Change Grow Live policy regarding Pregabalin and Gabapentin use!

So I shared all of this with my colleagues. We decided to conduct a survey on Pregabalin and Gabapentin use to try and figure out how widespread it was. Within a few days, we'd found 42 people using Pregabalin or Gabapentin.

Now I knew I needed to act, so I created a report on my findings and made some recommendations to Change Grow Live. These included training, a fresh policy and a communication to GPs across the city. I shared my report with other Service User representative teams in Walsall, Dudley and Nottinghamshire. Collectively, we agreed that this issue had to be addressed.



#### **This story was written by James**

James Robbins is a former service user representative who is now employed as a Recovery Motivator for Change Grow Live Birmingham. James is passionate about working with our service users, understanding their experiences and collecting evidence to shape the future of Birmingham's drug and alcohol services.



*"Thanks to the expertise and passion of James and his colleagues in Birmingham, we know we need to do more to help people using Pregabalin and Gabapentin. We've created a working group, led by our service user representatives, to turn James's report and recommendations into a reality. In addition, we'll be conducting a study exploring possible clinical responses and interventions to address Pregabalin and Gabapentin problematic use and dependence. The work that James and his fellow Service User Representatives have done in Birmingham is incredible; this could go on to help thousands of people that use our services across the UK each day."*

**Dr Prun Bijral**  
Medical Director and Responsible Officer

# The numbers that matter

**We currently work with 6,000 adults in Birmingham, providing help ranging from substance misuse, housing, employment to general health and wellbeing. Since March 2015, we have helped over 4,000 people overcome their issues with drugs or alcohol. This is the point that we tell you about our “impact”.**

By telling you that we’ve helped 4,000 people in Birmingham get well from drugs or alcohol, we don’t want you to forget that each and every single one of those people had a unique story, and accomplished something incredible themselves. So don’t think too much just about the numbers, but think about the people, friends and families they represent.

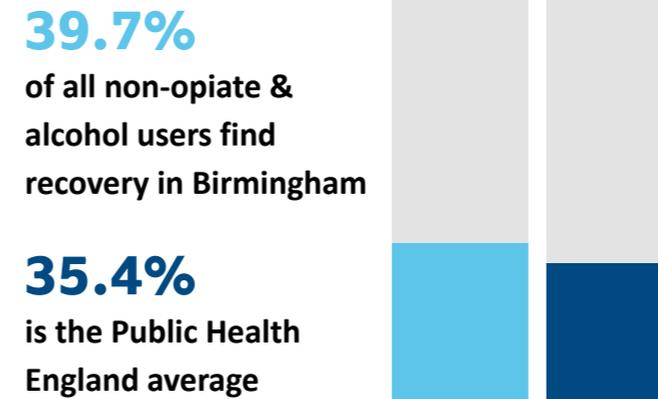
## Alcohol



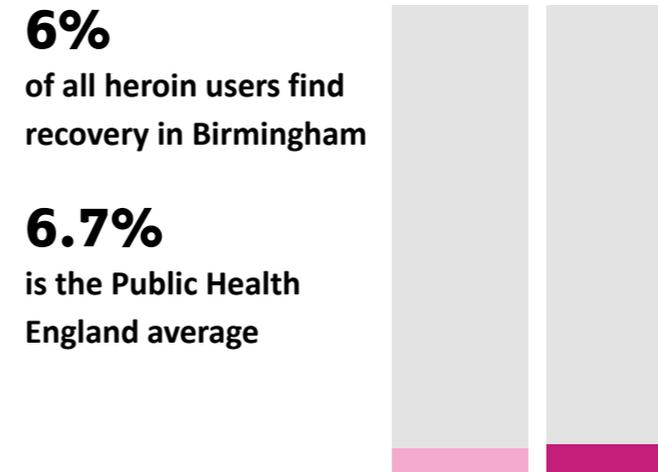
## Non-opiates (ie cocaine)



## Non-opiate & alcohol



## Opiates (ie heroin)



## But drugs and alcohol also impact other areas of someone’s life.

We have supported **1,233 people** to **find or maintain employment**, helping them on their way back into society.

**3,958 people** that have left our service substance free also had no housing issue or had their housing issue resolved while working with us.

Since March 2015, **2,934 clients** have received training to deliver naloxone. **2,747 naloxone kits** have been presented to service users, preventing drug-related death and overdose.

In one year, naloxone training was given to **1,007 people** and **943 naloxone kits** were issued.

During the same period we’ve recorded 30 instances where naloxone has been used to reverse an overdose situation, 12 of these instances were self-administered. **That’s potentially 30 lives saved!**

In this financial year, naloxone training has been given to 627 people and 575 kits have been issued.

A staggering **53% of our service users** had their **friends/families supported throughout their recovery journey**, bringing parents, children and families back together and assisting the clients to sustain their recovery.

An average of **86% people** referred through court orders successfully overcame their substance misuse difficulties with us for 2018 YTD, reducing both substance misuse related harm and reducing crime in our communities.

# The *future* and what we *need to do better*

I told you those stories were amazing! It's important to recognise that we do very serious work. We've accomplished a lot, but we can always improve and can always do better. A great service isn't one that provides a perfect experience all of the time, that's just not the reality. A great service is one that learns from its mistakes, harnessing the brilliance of its staff and service users to improve a little each day.



There are four areas that we'll focus on for the future. These are:

## 1 - Demand

We've received over 6,500 referrals from January 2018 to September 2018. In some months, such as July, we received 800 referrals. This volume is consistent with the previous year. In a nutshell, our services are in massive demand.



From January 2018 to September 2018 the service processed over 50,000 phone calls (average 1,280 per week). The average footfall at our City Centre base (Scala House) reaches around 100 people per day seeking help and support with their addiction and associated lifestyle issues.



## 2 - New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

NPS use is becoming ever visible, harming to people's health in communities across the country. You only have to step off the train at New Street Station at the start of your working day to see the devastating effects they can have.

This is an issue we have to tackle with many partners and organisations. We need to reduce supply, demand and use. We have developed a treatment programme specifically for NPS, based on the best international



evidence of what works in promoting recovery, including inpatient detoxification options. We are also looking at learning from other areas in the country where similar issues are being faced to gather evidence of 'what works' for this typically hard to engage client group.

We have an important and reliable pathway in place with Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital toxicology department, due to the risks involved and complexity of the detoxification from NPS ie Renal damage, seizures, cardiac arrest, delirium and hallucinations.

### 3 - Homelessness

There is a perception of the City experiencing growing levels of people who are homeless, sleeping rough and begging on the streets of Birmingham. Whether a perception or reality, as providers we have a responsibility to respond, engage and support people to regain control over their lives.

We have established a specialist homeless team, which works alongside other agencies to provide a multi-disciplinary response to the issues this client group are facing.

This team's sole aim is to take services to our service users in one appointment, at their time of need. The team is able to address a multitude of issues in one single assessment, completing onward referrals and treatment.

The most exciting development is that we now have a fully mobile clinical team. The team breaks down the barriers that the homeless people face when entering treatment, by taking the treatment to the person on the street, doorway or hostel. Working in partnership with other agencies we have a mobile dedicated prescriber working alongside the team to take the most critical element of treatment by way of opiate substitute medication and pharmacological interventions in a unique and exciting way.

As you read earlier in this report, the team have successfully housed 108 clients this year to date and are actively working with over 250 homeless people across the city.



### 4 – Reducing budgets versus Reducing barriers

All services are facing a period of financial challenge and we are no exception. Our role as lead provider is to therefore look at opportunities where we can work more creatively and continue to make every penny count for the people we help.

An example being the collaborative work currently underway with the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust and SIFA Fireside. We are exploring opportunities where we could co-locate staff members where there is a shared interest in the client. This will break down barriers and support people at the same place at the same time as other services. Co-location will also reduce costs and strengthen the help we can provide for everyone.



*“We're delighted to be strengthening our partnership working with CGL to enhance our ability deliver a premium service to some of the most vulnerable people in Birmingham. Working more closely together will enable us to provide immediate access to a range of essential services for clients that improve their to capacity long term recovery. Our collaborative approach will reduce the risk of clients falling through the gaps as they try to navigate through services and enable them to receive a more personal and holistic package of support.”*

**Carly Jones**  
Chief Executive, SIFA Fireside

We currently have a co-located Hepatitis C and HIV clinic. The service is open to any Birmingham resident who requires treatment, not only those engaged with services. You can come in, get support, get tested and get treated! Colleagues from the Queen Elizabeth and Heartlands hospital work from our building weekly, tackling these potentially life-threatening conditions.

To remain effective it's imperative we listen to our service users' voice. Clients and staff alike tell me they need for 'a place to connect and call home'. We will be enhancing the help we already deliver at the local level through four new service hubs.



**Sian Warmer**

This section was written by Sian Warmer, Head of Services for Change Grow Live in Birmingham. As soon as she's finished the school run, Sian strides into the office each morning committed to providing the very best service for our staff and the people who use our services in Birmingham.



# Birmingham

## More about our service

**Substance misuse services in Birmingham are the largest in Europe. Before 2015, there were lots of different organisations and charities providing drug and alcohol services. But the people that used them thought that was too complicated and inconsistent.**

So Birmingham City Council commissioned a city-wide drug and alcohol treatment service for all adults in Birmingham, led by one charity, that's us: Change Grow Live.

As you'd expect, for the biggest substance misuse service in Europe, there's a lot going on. Our services include:

- Help for adults with drug or alcohol issues in Birmingham
- A team dedicated to helping people who are homeless
- Help tailored for BME communities
- Peer support
- Help for the families of those impacted by substance misuse
- Employment support for those coming from the criminal justice system.
- Help and advice in finding employment
- A team that helps vulnerable women and families
- Experts working within Birmingham's hospitals, providing on the spot help for patients.
- And much, much more!

**Of the thousands of people we help, there is no one 'standard' journey through our services; each of our service users is unique and our service has to provide unique help.**

This service is part of the charity:



Change Grow Live (CGL) Registered Office: 3rd Floor, Tower Point, 44 North Road, Brighton BN1 1YR. Registered Charity Number in England and Wales (1079327) and in Scotland (SCO39861). Company Registration Number 3861209 (England and Wales).

## Speak to us

Want to know more about anything you've read? Get in touch, we'd love to hear from you.

**[Birmingham.info@cgl.org.uk](mailto:Birmingham.info@cgl.org.uk)**

**0121 227 5890**

**You are welcome to visit our Birmingham drug and alcohol services to see first hand how they help people Change, Grow and Live.**