

Two years have passed since Bracknell Forest's substance misuse centre New Hope, opened its doors and without it many of the clients now leading happy and healthy lives readily admit without it they'd still be reaching for the bottle or looking for their next fix.

New Hope is the borough's only drug and alcohol drop-in centre and has been providing support, advice and medical help to residents wanting to kick their drug or alcohol addiction since July 2005.

It expanded in July 2006 to include a meeting room and offer a seamless treatment package to more addicts. It is also just about to expand into the wider community with an outreach service available in xx xx and xx from xx 2007. This will make sure people living in areas not so close to the town centre can still access services.

Many of the centre's clients say they owe their lives to New Hope and add that despite begrudgingly attending group sessions and one-to-one meetings in the first place they would never have cleaned up their act if it wasn't for the treatment centre.

"I can quite honestly say I owe my life to New Hope. I was just existing before and now I'm actually living," says Damien a 32-year-old father who has been free from drink and drugs for 18-months after referring himself to the centre as a last resort.

"I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for the help and support of this place. I'd tried lots of different things before. I don't know if it was the timing or because this was right here on my doorstep but whatever it was it worked," he adds.

For Damien New Hope has given him a new lease of life and after attending regular appointments and going to group sessions he's finally winding down his treatment.

"I spend about five hours a week here now, before if I could have spent every day here all day that wouldn't have been enough but it's really worked for me. It's not like other places I've tried before where you have someone judging you or telling you what you can and can't do. If you slip up or make a mistake the staff just listen and support you. You don't feel like you're being told off or you're at school – which makes such a difference," he says.

Lee, who has dabbled with a whole list of drugs and admits his drinking makes him "a complete nightmare", is optimistic that New Hope will give him a brighter future.

"The staff here are great. They are very professional and genuinely care. They feel like family really but keep enough distance to remain professional. I would encourage anyone in the same position as me to come down and just try it.

New Hope has a range of services and offers a seamless treatment package to drug and alcohol abusers as well as providing individual treatment sessions, group sessions with up to 12 people, holding social events, and giving prisoners help and advice to prisoners due to return to the borough upon parole.

Female service users can also get advice from Berkshire Women's Aid if they are suffering domestic violence as representatives from the organisation are on hand at the centre on a fortnightly basis.

A mother of four who voluntarily gave up her children after her drug taking spiralled has been using New Hope since November 2006 to beat her heroin, crack cocaine and alcohol addictions, said: "I still have bad days; I'm not going to say it's all perfect because it's not. But the thing is now I can function like a normal person and I can see my children.

"I now get up and do things like other people do and I'm not always thinking about drugs and it's this place that has really helped start to turn my life around. What this has done is really build up my self-esteem as well.

"The thing is Bracknell needs a centre just like this as without it you have to travel to Slough or Ascot or Reading. I'm so pleased that New Hope's here, without it I don't think I'd be where I am today, I'm now looking to the future and what I can achieve."

There's a clear element of support, almost camaraderie, between the service users who talk about how they have started to reclaim their lives and how New Hope, especially the staff, have been a big part of that transformation.

It's not been without struggles and as Lee says every day is a test to resist temptation for each and everyone of them, a test he has failed several times but with the advice and support of staff and other service users the determination to live a drug-free and happy life is a goal he's firmly got his mind set on.

Other people struggling to overcome their addictions who live in places like Crowthorne, Binfield, Winkfield and Sandhurst will soon be able to have the opportunities Lee speaks so highly of as a peripatetic service will be xx xxx at xxx

Jillian Hunt, Drug and Alcohol Action Team Co-ordinator at the Council, said: "New Hope has really given many people a chance to turn around their lives in the past two years and the service will continue to offer even more people that opportunity once the peripatetic service is rolled out.

"We are committed to tackling the harm that drugs do to the community not just to the individual, which is why this expansion of the service into the more rural communities is so essential."

Cllr Dale Birch, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health Commissioning and Housing, said: "We don't have a big drug problem in Bracknell Forest but we do have a great service within the borough for anyone who does have an alcohol or drug addiction which is key to helping addicts on the road to recovery.

"The service has gone from strength-to-strength and continues to be a successful centre for recovering addicts who want to turn their lives around."

Ends.

Please see attached fact box with contact details
Pics are also attached.