

## 'Sarah's' Story

Sarah\* was accepted onto our Dual Diagnosis project in August 2010. She required support to manage and sustain her tenancy as she was living a chaotic lifestyle as a result of her alcohol dependency which she developed as a

way of trying to cope with her mental health problems i.e. anxiety and panic attacks. She had severe memory issues due to her alcohol use and she also has a number of physical health problems. Sarah was constantly under the influence of alcohol or feeling unwell because of withdrawing from alcohol. She would regularly call ambulances and was frequently admitted to A&E, sometimes as often as 4 times a week. This was a result of her alcohol use and the impact it was having on her mental and physical health problems. Her chaotic lifestyle and memory issues meant she was unable to effectively manage her tenancy, her finances, or address her health problems. Living in a state of self neglect, she was at risk of becoming homeless or seriously ill.

With our support Sarah began to develop independent living skills, including budgeting skills and paying bills. We helped her register with her local GP surgery and attend hospital appointments that they arranged to investigate her physical and mental health issues. In addition, we assisted her to report household repairs including urgent problems such as a previously unreported gas leak, as she was unable to effectively communicate with her landlord at this time because of her alcohol misuse.

Sarah's support needs became more severe over time; therefore we made a referral to Social Services as she was putting herself at risk. She was affecting the mental health of one of her friends by regularly turning up at the supported housing scheme where he lived, often at night and heavily under the influence of alcohol, which was causing him severe mental distress and putting his tenancy at risk, along with causing a disturbance to other residents. The staff at the scheme sometimes had to contact the police to forcibly remove her from the premises. Following our referral to Social Services, a Social Worker was allocated and their assessment found that the risk to Sarah's welfare meant it was necessary for them to put in place 6 hours of support each week to assist her with practical issues such as going food shopping and personal care.

Since undergoing detox in hospital in August 2011, Sarah has abstained from using alcohol. Her chaotic lifestyle is a thing of the past. She has made positive steps to improve her life including cutting down on her smoking by attending Fag Ends, painting and decorating her flat and making contact with a number of services in order to find meaningful activities, meet new people and address her mental health issues. With our support, along with the assistance arranged by Social Services, Sarah is now managing her finances and tenancy well; her physical and mental health have drastically improved. She has not called an ambulance or been admitted to hospital since she stopped using alcohol and all anti-social behaviour has stopped. Empowered by feeling that she is back in control of her life, in better health and with the support she needs in place, Sarah will soon exit the project. Her lifestyle and wellbeing is greatly improved and she is able to live independently.

\*Real names have been changed for protection of privacy.