

## *Peer-led, Recovery focused*<sup>™</sup>

Dear Albert is a Leicester based, peer-led Social Enterprise creating opportunities for people to desist from crime and problematic substance use to achieve a better life by utilising a professionally supported 'Lived Experience' approach.

Dear Albert's approach to peer mentoring\*, peer relationships and Lived Experience is unique in that the organisation is 100% peer led. All staff and volunteers within the organisation have Lived Experience of problematic alcohol and other drug use and extensive personal and professional experience of how this issue can be resolved.

Those struggling with substance use are often more willing to work with those who've already gone through similar experiences who have found a solution (peers) and this can be a first step to creating positive relationships that can start putting things back together again.

By being 100% peer led Dear Albert is able to harness and build on the existing skills and assets of individuals and in doing so build a (sustainable\*\*) wider recovery community for the mutual benefit of all members. This ties in with pursuing a genuine, asset based community development (ABCD) approach. Dear Albert uses this ABCD approach to create recovery focused, psychologically informed environments (PIE's) that entrust and facilitate individuals to develop their own recovery capital and grow personal reasonability, hope and ambition.

This 'Recovery Community' in turn becomes an easily accessible resource for others. All interventions delivered by Dear Albert are also designed and delivered by individuals with lived experience of problematic substance misuse and recovery. This unique organisational makeup produces programmes of treatment and support which not only value every individual's lived experience but also incorporate and build on the evidence base for what works. Dear Albert is hence able to identify gaps in existing provision and deliver a peer led approach to resolving shortfalls/respond to new needs.

In addition to the structured groups offered Dear Albert is able to utilise a genuine ABCD approach from its members to individuals in every stage of recovery to access a holistic peer led range of soft and skill based group activities such as art, drama, music, sporting and leisure opportunities alongside recovery focused work. This combined approach plays an important role in building individual and personal recovery capital, establishing positive social networks, providing purposeful activities, improving physical and mental wellbeing, social connectedness along with work ready opportunities. This approach is combined with a strong partnership ethos with local and national stakeholders in our sector.

By being peer led Dear Albert is able to encompass opportunities for those who use the service as they grow in their recovery journey to undertake ongoing training. This offers a route into learning, skills, volunteering and ultimately employment that may not be open to them in any other sector due to lack of formal training, criminal histories or other difficulties. The offer of these opportunities within the recovery organisation then provides individuals with the skills, knowledge and confidence to fully engage within not only the recovery community but the wider community as well. Thereby raising the aspirations and achievements of those wanting to move away from problematic substance use.

This creative Lived Experience approach has resulted in the establishment of a local recovery community that now runs and manages a Community Rehab and a Recovery Café, helping hundreds of local people address their substance use and find recovery. Dear Albert runs The Stairway Project, Leicester's first community based rehab for substance use issues. From The Stairway Project the organisation offers a full menu of structured groups all groups are facilitated by professionally trained peers. <http://thestairwayproject.co.uk/>

By being peer led Peer led Dear Albert is also highly adaptable. For example when the Covid 19 pandemic struck the organisation was able to mobilise the recovery community and peer support to ensure that everyone who needed support had that support. Initially this was done with daily phone calls to vulnerable service users. However by harnessing skills that already existed within the peer led organisation Dear Albert was rapidly able to set up 'The Virtual Stairway Project', moving the entire menu of structured groups and 1 to 1 support to video calls and conferencing. This has now been added to by means of a permanent broadcast suite which enables service users to tune in to live sessions, interactive content and support through the newly formed DATV (Dear Albert TV).

*\* Peer mentoring is described as a form of mentorship that takes place between a person who has lived through a specific experience (peer mentor) and a person who is new to or is currently living with that experience (the peer mentee). Peer mentoring has a strong evidence base and has been shown to be particularly effective in the drug and alcohol treatment field. A number of long standing models of effective treatment for problematic alcohol and drug use are based around peer support and mentoring. Although peer mentoring has become popular in recent years it is not by anyway a new model of support, for example Alcoholics Anonymous which most people will be familiar with is based on this model was started in 1935.*

*Peer mentors are now much more widely used across health and social care delivery services both here in UK and globally. In most organisations however peers mentors are used only as an adjunct to professional service delivery, not as a comprehensive, integrated, independent Service User led model in its own right as in Dear Albert.*

*\*\* Sustainability of our services is supported by enabling Recovery Community members to contribute to existing Treatment Service delivery, working in Partnerships to identify gaps in current provision that can be filled with a peer-led, recovery focused approach. Dear Albert encourages the growth of existing and emerging Mutual Aid. This is achieved through their popular and effective 'You Do The MAFS' (MAFS: Mutual Aid Facilitation Service). The MAFS programme they have developed is an important tool supporting Dear Albert's mission to build sustainable recovery communities because it strengthens Mutual Aid, the 'community pillars and social architecture' that support Recovery Communities.*

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**DearAlbert**

**DATV**



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