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CASE STUDY

Using digital innovation to facilitate behaviour change and recovery:

Implementation of Breaking Free Online by Change Grow Live's Gloucestershire and Nottinghamshire services

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Breaking Free Online is an evidence-based digital behaviour change programme that has been shown by extensive peer-reviewed research to be effective at reducing people's substance use and dependence and improving their mental health and quality of life. Designed to be interactive, engaging and personalised to each individual, the programme supports people's recovery by giving them 24/7 access to a comprehensive toolkit of psycho-education, proven behaviour change techniques and recovery resources. To cater to all literacy levels, and different learning styles, full voiceover accompanies every screen.

The intervention targets over 70 different substances, including opiates, stimulants, alcohol, New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) and prescribed medications of abuse, and is endorsed by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Change Grow Live (CGL), which is the UK's largest non-statutory provider of substance misuse treatment and recovery services, makes Breaking Free Online available to all its service users. This case study considers the specific factors contributing to the successful implementation of the programme at two of its services: CGL Gloucestershire and CGL Nottinghamshire.

Historically, CGL Gloucestershire has reported some of the highest rates of service user engagement with Breaking Free Online. To date, a total of 1,201 service users have activated a Breaking Free Online account. Similarly, 846 service users have activated an account at CGL Nottinghamshire.

Facilitating engagement with Breaking Free Online

Key factors in driving engagement with Breaking Free Online have been identified at different stages of the recovery journey:

Awareness: Breaking Free Online is discussed with service users on entry to the services, during initial assessment, and again at review. At CGL Gloucestershire's 'welcome sessions', a Breaking Free Online access card is included within an information pack, alongside referral forms and details of mutual-aid support group meetings. CRiiS (the CGL case management system) also allows the automated creation of a Breaking Free Online account for service users during their initial assessment and induction;

> "For people coming into treatment in that period in between referral and assessment it can be really great to start bringing people into line and you know they're in that place. You're keeping them focused on what they're doing, and it's a reminder."
> *Abi, Team Leader,*
> *CGL Gloucestershire.*

Demonstration: During workshops with service users, staff can log into their own training account of Breaking Free Online and show service users how to use the programme, highlighting some of its key features. This also attests to the staff members' confidence in Breaking Free Online and the ability of the programme to support service users with their recovery;

> "It's encouraging people and pointing out where it would support them with what they're telling me, and why it would be a good idea to get their account sorted out. Again, I can put my account on and show them: 'look, you can do all this'."
> *Greg, Alcohol Recovery Co-ordinator,*
> *CGL Nottinghamshire*

Visibility: Breaking Free Online is visibly promoted within both services. Access cards are available on the front desk and within meeting rooms, and leaflets and posters publicising the programme are displayed prominently in the reception areas.

Accessibility: Staff find Breaking Free Online is particularly useful to recommend to service users when services are closed or limited, or when service users find it difficult to attend the service – for example, due to work commitments, or if they live in rural communities. This way, service users can still access support when they need it most;

> "It empowers people, it supports people when they're not in the service." *Chelsea, Recovery Navigator, CGL Gloucestershire*

> "It's not a replacement for a drug worker but it's the fact that it can be used at any time, because we're only open standard hours, not weekends, which especially for my cohort which are your non-dependent substance users, that's when they really need that bit of help … it's good that it's there and available 24/7 for them."
> *Kevin, Recovery Coordinator,*
> *CGL Nottinghamshire*

Outreach: Breaking Free Online is highly recommended for relapse prevention purposes, as a way to support and maintain recovery away from the service. At CGL Gloucestershire, the service also ensures that partner agencies are aware of the impact and effectiveness of Breaking Free Online when conducting outreach work.

Service User Profile and Outcomes at CGL Gloucestershire

The 1,201 service users who engaged with Breaking Free Online at CGL Gloucestershire were divided equally between males and females (see Fig 1).

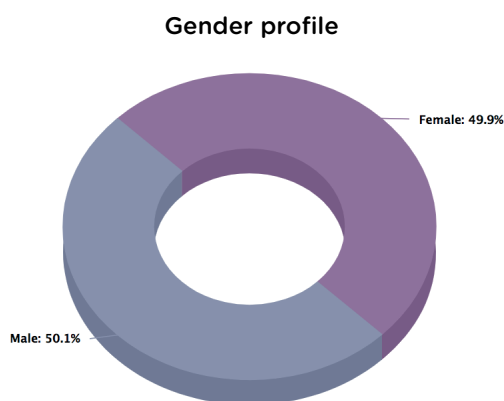### Gender profile

Female: 49.9%
Male: 50.1%

Fig 1: Gender of Breaking Free Online users at CGL Gloucestershire

Of the service users who accessed the programme, 60% were seeking support for difficulties with alcohol, 20% for drugs, and 20% for poly-use of both alcohol and drugs (see Fig 2).

Treatment pathways

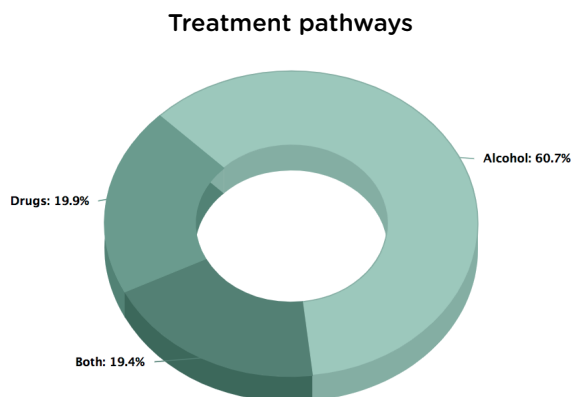Alcohol: 60.7%
Drugs: 19.9%
Both: 19.4%

Fig 2: Treatment pathways selected by service users at CGL Gloucestershire when activating their Breaking Free Online accounts

The specific drugs that were most problematic for the service users were cannabis/marijuana, heroin and cocaine (see Fig 3).

Drug profile: main problem substance

Co-codamol: 0.9%
Buprenorphine: 2.4%
Amphetamines: 5.2%
Amitriptyline: 0.5%
AH-7921: 0.5%
Zopiclon: 0.5%
Tramadol: 0.5%
Tobacco: 1.4%
Suboxone: 0.5%
Methadone: 2.8%
Mephedrone: 3.3%
Marijuana: 27.8%
Cocaine: 11.3%
Codeine: 2.4%
Crack: 6.1%
Diazepam: 3.3%
Dihydrocodeine: 0.9%
Ecstasy: 0.5%
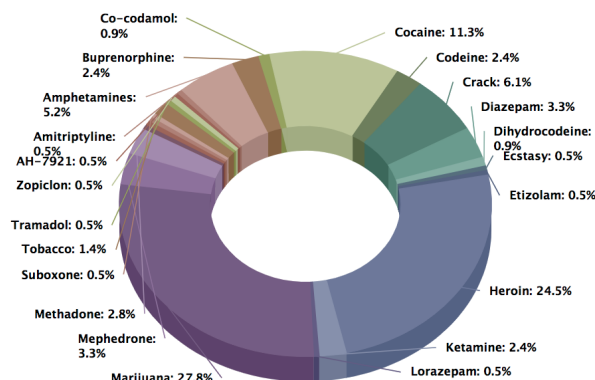Etizolam: 0.5%
Heroin: 24.5%
Ketamine: 2.4%
Lorazepam: 0.5%

Fig 3: Main problem substance identified by Breaking Free Online users at CGL Gloucestershire who were addressing drug dependence with the programme

In practice, Breaking Free Online is used by some service users to address their problematic alcohol and drug use, whilst others who are already abstinent use it to strengthen and support their ongoing recovery. In terms of reductions in substance use, the most marked improvements at CGL Gloucestershire were seen in relation to alcohol, amphetamines, club drugs and cocaine (see Fig 4). In addition, 96% of those service users who were already in recovery when they started on the programme managed to stay abstinent.

Reductions in substance use

Alcohol: 60.7%
Amphetamines: 100.0%
Cannabis/marijuana: 50.2%
Club drugs: 100.0%
Cocaine: 100.0%
Crack: 50.0%
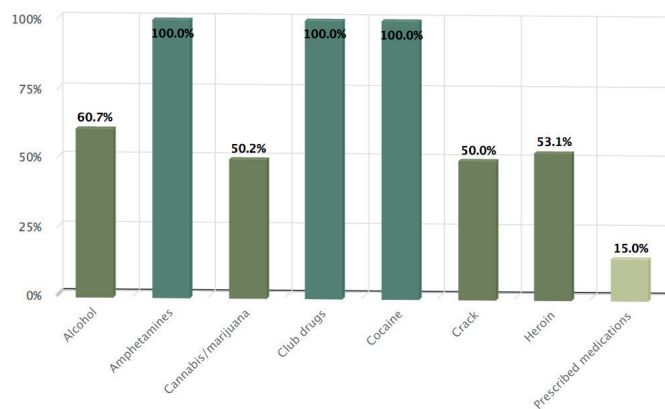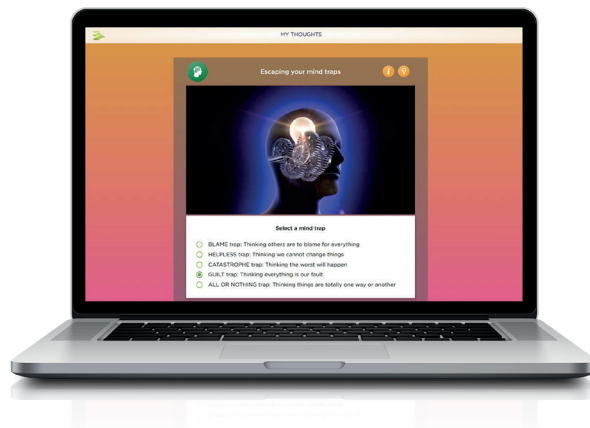Heroin: 53.1%
Prescribed medications: 15.0%

Fig 4: Average percentage reductions in consumption of their main problem substance by Breaking Free Online users as CGL Gloucestershire, shown by class of substance

A key advantage of digital interventions is their ability to provide support around the clock. Analysis of when service users accessed Breaking Free Online showed that half the time this was outside normal service operating hours, which are defined as 9am to 5pm from Monday to Friday (see Fig 5). Moreover, 21% of service user activity on the programme was at weekends.

Time of treatment access

Within service operating hours: 49.5%
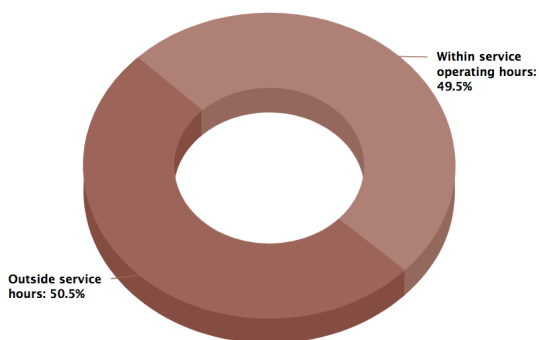
Outside service hours: 50.5%

Fig 5: Percentage of treatment episodes on Breaking Free Online within and outside normal service operating hours at CGL Gloucestershire

Service User Profile and Outcomes at CGL Nottinghamshire

As at GCL Gloucestershire, a large proportion of the 846 service users engaging with Breaking Free Online at CGL Nottinghamshire were female (see Fig 6).
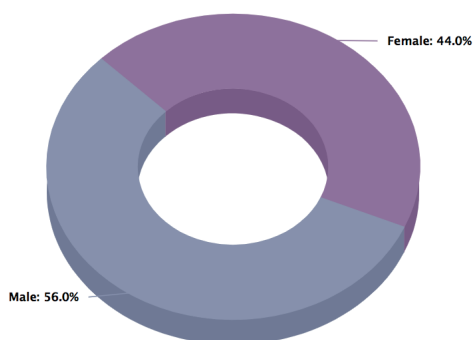
Gender profile

Female: 44.0%

Male: 56.0%

Fig 6: Gender of Breaking Free Online users at CGL Nottinghamshire

Of the service users who accessed the programme, 60% were using it to target their alcohol use, 22% to target their drug use, and 18% to address poly-use of both alcohol and drugs (see Fig 7).

Treatment pathways

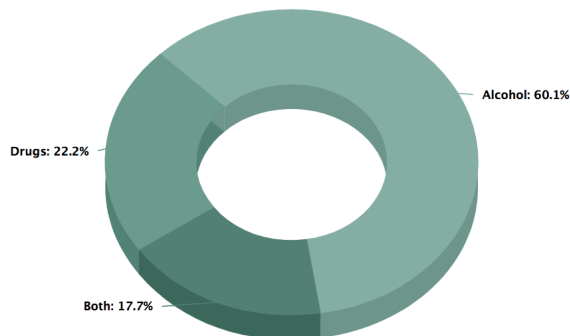Alcohol: 60.1%

Drugs: 22.2%

Both: 17.7%

Fig 7: Treatment pathways selected by service users at CGL Nottinghamshire when activating their Breaking Free Online accounts

Service users reported experiencing the most difficulty with heroin, cocaine and cannabis/marijuana (see Fig 8).

Drug profile: main problem substance

Co-codamol: 1.1%
Buprenorphine: 1.1%
Amphetamines: 4.8%
Amitriptyline: 0.5%
Zopiclon: 0.5%
Tramadol: 2.7%
Tobacco: 0.5%
Synthetic cannabis: 1.1%
Pregabalin: 1.1%
Modafinil: 0.5%
Methamphetamine: 0.5%
Marijuana: 19.8%
Cocaine: 20.9%
Codeine: 6.4%
Crack: 7.5%
Diazepam: 2.1%
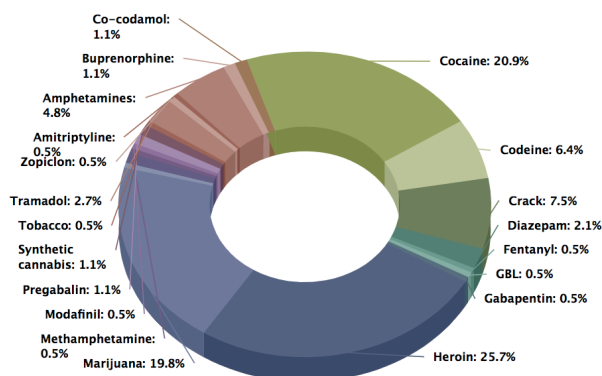Fentanyl: 0.5%
GBL: 0.5%
Gabapentin: 0.5%
Heroin: 25.7%

Fig 8: Main problem substance identified by Breaking Free Online users at CGL Nottinghamshire who were addressing drug dependence with the programme

The most significant reductions in the substance consumption of the Breaking Free Online users were seen in relation to amphetamines, crack and cannabis/marijuana (see Fig 9). Of those using the programme to support their ongoing recovery, 86% successfully maintained abstinence.
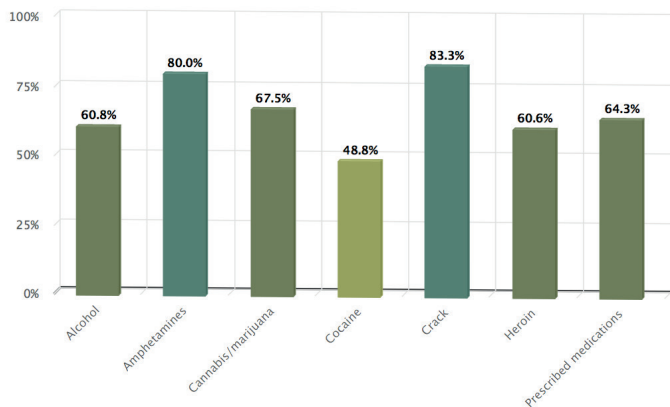
Reductions in substance use

Fig 9: Average percentage reductions in consumption of their main problem substance by Breaking Free Online users as CGL Nottinghamshire, shown by class of substance

Similarly to CGL Gloucestershire, half the treatment episodes on Breaking Free Online were undertaken by service users at CGL Nottinghamshire outside of normal operating hours (see Fig 10), with 20% of activity on the programme being at weekends.
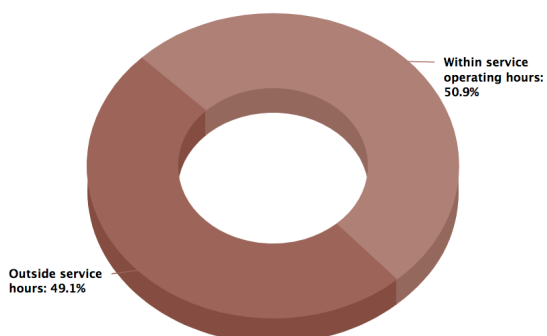
Time of treatment access

Within service operating hours: 50.9%

Outside service hours: 49.1%

Fig 10: Percentage of treatment episodes on Breaking Free Online within and outside normal service operating hours at CGL Nottinghamshire

Staff and Service User Experiences of Breaking Free Online

Enabling self-management: Staff and service users were enthusiastic about Breaking Free Online and commented that it was a useful tool for empowering individuals to take personal control of their recovery;

"It's giving them that control back, giving them that responsibility back. That's a good way of starting that process off, even with the smallest things. It just helps for them to regain power over their lives, rather than being directed by everyone else."
Abi, Team Leader,
CGL Gloucestershire

"The personalised diagram and the 'traffic light' system allow service users to get a clear understanding and insight into areas in which improvement is needed, to help them gain and build recovery capital."
Rob, Digital Engagement Worker,
CGL Gloucestershire

"If you've got a group of, say, eight or ten people, you can't stop every ten minutes to just keep going over things because you'd never get anything done. So in groups we can go over everything and then if you're unsure, Breaking Free just reinforces it and you can go at your own speed."
Peter*, Service User

Facilitating behaviour change: Specific techniques within the programme were cited as being particularly useful in terms of initiating behavioural change and supporting overall recovery;

> ❝
> "It's all evidence-based. It's all stuff that I would use in sessions, like mind traps. Also, things like the mapping functionality have been really good for discussing with people how to identify locational triggers, how to build positive behaviours. They're all great cognitive-behavioural techniques." *Kevin, Recovery Co-ordinator, CGL Nottinghamshire*

> "It's not just about the alcohol and the drugs, it's about all the other issues behind it as well, which a few people have found. They don't use it for the alcohol, they use it for the anxiety, they use it for the relaxation." *Greg, Alcohol Recovery Co-ordinator, CGL Nottinghamshire*

Supporting the entire recovery journey: Staff and service users highlighted the ability of Breaking Free Online to strengthen all stages of the recovery journey;

> ❝
> "I'm not quite there yet with my recovery, keep having lapses, but I use the programme on my phone, which means I can use it anytime, rather than relying on a tablet." *Debbie*, Service User*

> "Between that initial referral and the point of assessment you've got that bit of time where people are in that mode, and you need to just grab them and keep them there. So it's really helpful for that purpose, as you're keeping them focused on what they're doing, and it's a reminder." *Abi, Team Leader, CGL Gloucestershire*

> "When clients have been successfully discharged, it just gives them that boost, and something to take with them." *Leanne, Recovery Navigator, CGL Gloucestershire*
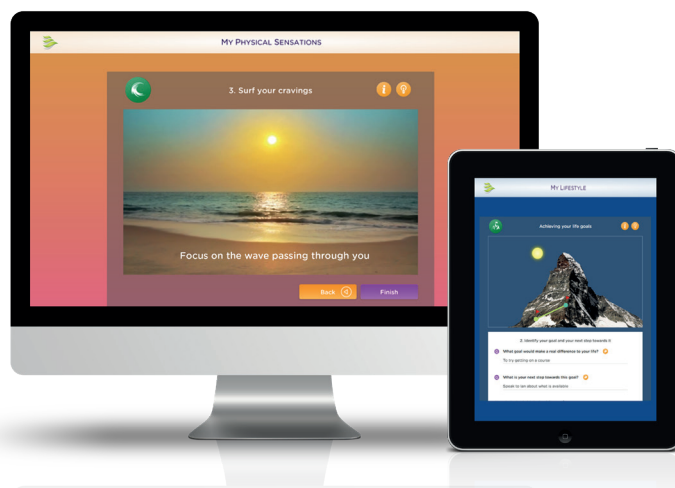
Strengthening continuing care approaches: When service users were not physically present in services or had been discharged, Breaking Free Online was identified as a way to provide continuity of care and ongoing support for their recovery;

> ❝
> "It is very user friendly, and it is something that you could have with you all the time. It's something that is there for continual support, in any situation, no matter what you are struggling with." *Abi, Team Leader, CGL Gloucestershire*

"On your way home, if you live there, you're in town, but the drug dealer lives there and there might be a pub there, it lets you put a flag for them. That really helped me because I'd never thought like that, like I'm just walking home, but you're getting those triggers all the time, and I'd not really discussed that with my worker because I'd never thought of it."
Peter*, Service User

"I've really enjoyed using this as it's been reminding me to keep away from bars and places where I could trigger." *Karen*, Service User*
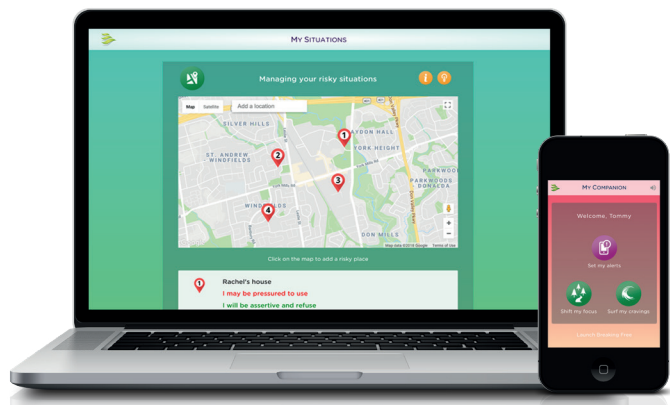
Digital Engagement Workers

The introduction of dedicated Digital Engagement Workers within CGL services is greatly helping to improve digital access for service users.

CGL Gloucestershire is now implementing digital engagement clinics, giving service users opportunities to attend drop-in computer sessions in which they learn how to navigate and take advantage of online support such as housing programmes and job opportunities. As part of these sessions, service users are encouraged to complete the initial assessment on Breaking Free Online. Similarly, CGL Nottinghamshire is introducing peer support-led Breaking Free Online groups within the service.

These sessions benefit service users in many ways, such as improving their IT confidence, digital literacy and skills development within a supportive environment; increasing their access to and knowledge of available digital support; and, crucially, continuing to build their recovery capital through engaging with recovery communities and peers.

This highlights the value of having a focused Digital Engagement Worker within the staff team to support service users with computer-based learning and activities.

KEY LEARNINGS from CGL's services in Gloucestershire and Nottinghamshire to increase engagement with Breaking Free Online:

Integrate it into care pathways from referral through to exit:
Discuss Breaking Free Online with service users from the point of referral and through all stages of their recovery. Doing this helps to get service users motivated and 'treatment ready' from the outset and provides them with initial focus. The programme then complements and enhances existing interventions, particularly at times when service users cannot come into services. And for some, the programme provides ongoing relapse prevention as an aftercare support tool when they are transitioning out of structured treatment.

Use assertive engagement to introduce it to service users:
Ensure activation cards and leaflets are available on reception for service users; and include information on Breaking Free Online within referral/discharge packs. However...

"Don't do what we started doing, which was 'here's a card, go and have a look at it', 'here's a leaflet'. Rather, 'here's a card, this is really useful. This is what it does, this is how you can get it set up'."
Greg, Alcohol Recovery Co-ordinator, CGL Nottinghamshire

Use it to strengthen the role of peer mentors and volunteers:
"Be open minded. Give it a chance. It can seem a little overwhelming for staff, who are already busy, to have to think about another thing to work out how to use. Something that would be really useful is getting it in with the peer mentor and volunteer training programme, so we've got our peer mentors and volunteers trained up in how to do that. Give it a chance because it will make your lives a lot easier when it's used properly." *Abi, Team Leader, CGL Gloucestershire*

Thank you to all the service users and staff who provided comments for this case study.

The names of service users have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

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For more information:

www.changegrowlive.org

www.breakingfreegroup.com