

## BRIDGING THE GAP 2011 – EVALUATION REPORT

### Headline findings

- 98.7% of students enjoyed Bridging the Gap ‘a lot’
- 100% said it met their expectations
- 70.1% thought that 16 weeks was about the right length for the course
- 98.7% learnt ‘a lot’ on Bridging the Gap
- 96.0% developed new skills as a result of attending the course
- 75.3% found putting a study portfolio together ‘very useful’
- 92.2% had ‘a lot’ of support from the other students in their group
- 89.0% found it ‘very useful’ to have previous Bridging the Gap students as mentors on the course
- 81.1% found the additional weekly support sessions ‘very useful’
- 79.2% attended additional training while they were on Bridging the Gap
- 76.6% were doing, or planned to do a work placement now that the course had ended
- 70.4% planned to be a mentor for future Bridging the Gap students
- 91.7% planned to move onto other education and/or training
- 100% planned to go on to voluntary or paid work in the future
- 86.8% felt ready for work now
- 100% of the students felt more confident, 96.0% had more self-respect, and 100% felt more motivated as a result of attending Bridging the Gap
- 100% would recommend the course to others

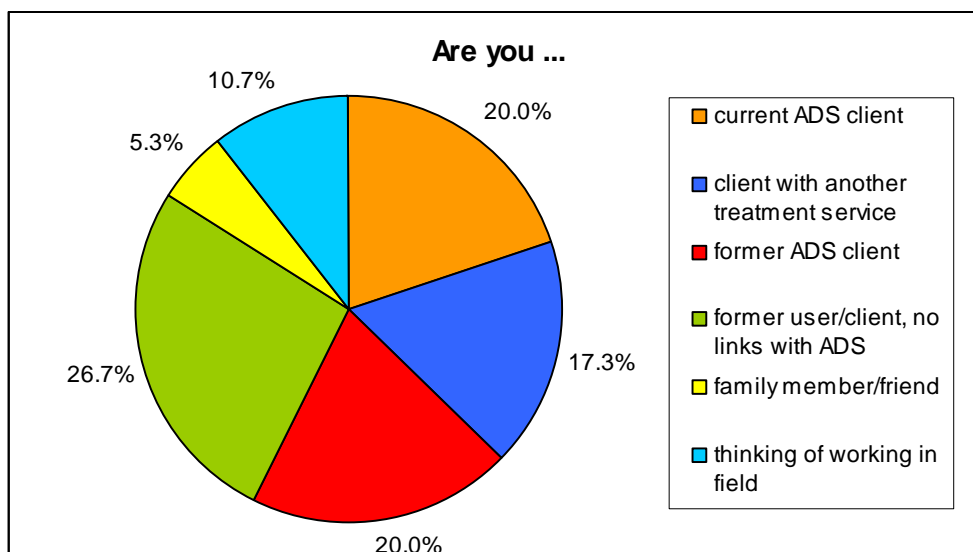
### 1. Introduction

In the spring of 2011 we asked graduating students from the five Bridging the Gap projects (Cumbria, Manchester, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan) to complete an end-of-course evaluation form which asked for their views about the course, what they had learned from it, and how they now planned to use their new knowledge and skills. This report presents the main findings.

### 2. The students

A total of 77 students completed an evaluation form. Just over half (53.2%) were male; 46.8% were female. Their average age was 41 years (mean=40.88); three quarters (77.6%) were over 35 years of age.

More than a third (37.3%) were current clients with either ADS or another local treatment service; a quarter (26.7%) were former drug or alcohol users with no previous links with ADS; and one in five (20.0%) were former ADS clients. The remainder were either a family member/friend of a substance user (5.3%), or had no personal experience of alcohol/drug use but were thinking about working in the field (10.7%).



### 3. What did people think about Bridging the Gap?

Almost everyone (98.7%) said they had enjoyed the course 'a lot'; one student (1.3%) had 'quite enjoyed it'.

Everyone (100%) said that Bridging the Gap had met their expectations – despite the fact that nearly a quarter of students said they weren't sure what they expected to get from the course at the start but had *"gone into it with an open mind"*. The most common initial expectations were to gain a greater understanding/awareness of drugs and alcohol, to learn how to support others with substance use problems, to improve knowledge and/or skills generally, and to regain confidence. Some students had thought it would reflect their previous educational experiences:

*"I expected a load of homework and not much learning, but I was really surprised and enjoyed the whole course".*

Asked for their views on the length of the course, 7 out of 10 (70.1%) thought 16 weeks was about right; while 3 out of 10 (29.9%) thought it was too short. This was mainly because they had enjoyed both the content and the learning experience and didn't want it to end, although a few students would have liked to go into some topics in more depth. Those who thought the course was the right length talked about it being short enough to maintain interest, but long enough to cover a range of subjects and provide a foundation for the future:

*"You get to learn a lot but the course isn't rushed, it's nice and relaxed so you get to take everything in you have learnt."*

*"It just feels right to move on now with life and career after the process."*

Almost a quarter (23.4%) thought there were some areas of the course that could have been covered in more detail. These included assessments, alcohol use, domestic

violence, child protection, dual diagnosis, counselling skills, and offending behaviour.

Fewer than 1 in 10 (9.1%) thought there were some areas that could have been covered in less detail. These included child protection (interestingly, since a number of students had wanted more on this) and equality and diversity – one or two felt that as this theme had run throughout the course it didn't need a session on its own. Other comments related to specific guest speakers i.e. the CBT/mindfulness and dual diagnosis sessions in Wigan.

1 in 7 students (14.3%) felt that there was something missing from Bridging the Gap. This included information about local substance misuse services (and particularly detox programmes), anger management, coping strategies, working relations/expectations, and more on teambuilding and mental health. Occasional social events for students were also suggested.

#### **4. What had they learnt?**

Almost everyone (98.7%) said they had learnt 'a lot' on Bridging the Gap; the remaining student (1.3%) had learnt 'a bit', but this was *"a bit about everything – I really liked it"*.

The majority of students talked about how much knowledge they had gained around drugs and alcohol, even though these were subjects some had thought they already knew well. The impact of substance misuse on families was often mentioned in this context. Many felt they had learnt more about themselves in terms of both where their strengths and interests lie, and about their own substance use. First aid, teamwork, and increased confidence and social skills were also mentioned.

*"I have learned and gained so much about myself, grown in confidence and assertiveness, learning to work in groups and mixing with different people. I have learned so much from the course content. I learned to have belief in myself, to face fears and challenges"*.

Again almost everyone (96.0%) felt they had developed new skills as a result of attending the course. Listening, communication and presentation skills were most commonly mentioned, together with group work – often alongside better people and/or social skills. Many students said they had grown in confidence, self-belief and assertiveness; a number had developed or regained their ability to study and learn, and to enjoy doing so.

*"It's been brilliant, it's brought me out of my shell and has made me think I can do what I want to do"*.

#### **5. Additional support**

Three quarters of the students (75.3%) thought it had been 'very useful' to put together a portfolio of their work as Bridging the Gap progressed; the remainder (24.7%) had found this 'quite useful'. They felt it provided a good record of learning and achievement, and also that it would be a useful reference source in the future. A number commented on how it had helped them to improve their organisational skills, while others had used it as an aide memoire and/or to reflect on what they had learnt as the course progressed.

*"I now have a great resource file which I can look back on if I enter into this field of work."*

9 out of 10 (92.2%) said they received 'a lot' of support from other students on the course,

while 6.5% said they had 'a bit'; only one student (1.3%) felt they had not received any peer support at all. Having shared experiences had facilitated this, as had the openness and understanding of fellow learners. A number of students felt they had made friends on the course who would remain supportive long after its end.

*"A great bunch of people, I would not have been able to do some bits of the course without the experiences and knowledge of other members of the group."*

*"There were so many lovely people with the same goals and very understanding of issues and problems around addiction."*

Everyone agreed that it had been useful to have former Bridging the Gap students as mentors on the course; 89.0% felt this had been 'very useful', while 11.0% had found it 'quite useful'. Because they had been through the course already the mentors were felt to be in an ideal position to provide extra support, and were able to explain things further when needed; *"sometimes it's easier to ask a mentor instead of keep interrupting the facilitator"*. In general students had found the mentors helpful, informative and empathetic.

*"They understand totally, they're needed to help with a large group of people, they advised, assisted and made people feel a lot more at ease"*.

In addition to the formal training day each week, the co-ordinators run half-day informal support sessions for smaller groups of students to review recent learning and go over any areas of difficulty. 3 out of 5 students (61.8%) had attended all of these weekly support sessions, while a third (34.2%) had been to some; only three students (3.9%) had not been to any of the sessions at all, and in one case this was because work commitments made it difficult for them to take any more time out of the week for Bridging the Gap.

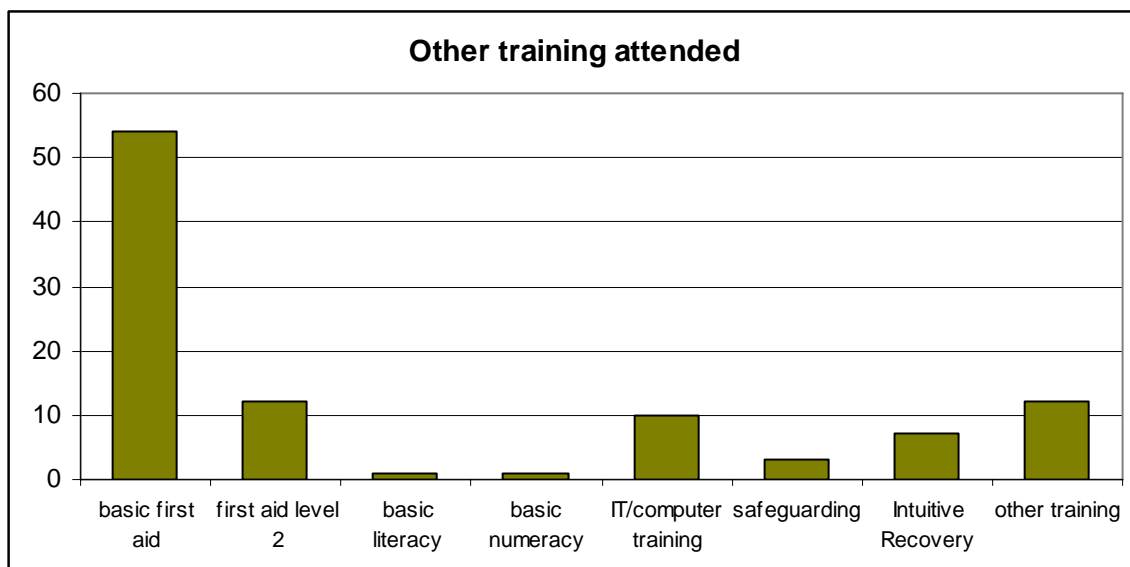
Of those who had been to the support sessions, 4 in 5 (81.1%) found them 'very useful', and 1 in 5 (18.9%) felt they were 'quite useful'. As well as consolidating learning from that week's formal training, these sessions were valued because they gave students the opportunity to get to know each other better, to have more of a say (some felt more comfortable speaking out in a smaller group), to ask questions having had a chance to reflect on the information from the training, and to get additional support from the co-ordinator when this was needed. Many commented on the more relaxed atmosphere in the support sessions.

*"These give you time to ask about things you are unsure about, added little bits of extra information to the stuff we already had, gave us time to bond and learn from each other as well as the tutor."*

## **6. What other training had the students attended?**

4 in 5 of the students (79.2%) had attended other training while they were on Bridging the Gap, with more than half of these (42.9% of all students) having been on at least two additional courses.

The most popular of these was basic first aid training, which was attended by 7 out of 10 (70.1%) of the students. 'Other' training included assertiveness and decision-making (6 students), mentoring (3 students), and peer support, cookery, Straight Ahead, Smart Recovery, mindfulness, Ramp, Phoenix Futures and volunteer induction training (1 student each); some of these students attended more than one of these 'other' courses.



Again one student said they had found it difficult to fit in additional courses because they were working while doing Bridging the Gap.

## 7. Future plans

Almost 3 in 5 students (58.4%) said they were doing a work placement arranged through Bridging the Gap now that the course had finished. A further 1 in 7 (14.3%) were waiting for an offer or for confirmation of their placement to come through, while 3 students (3.9%) were still awaiting their CRB checks.

Not all of those who said they were not doing a work placement explained why, although the main reason was that they planned to mentor on Bridging the Gap or at another agency instead. Other reasons included already being in work, being unsure what they wanted to do next, and having health problems that they needed to sort out first. One student said they had not been asked to do a placement.

In total 7 out of 10 students (70.4%) said they were planning, or hoped to be a mentor on future Bridging the Gap courses.

The majority of students (91.7%) planned to move on to do other education and/or training now. More than a quarter (26.8%) were interested in doing a health and social care NVQ level 2 or 3, while 1 in 8 (12.7%) was considering a counselling course. Most commonly mentioned after this was training with either ADS or another substance misuse service such as Lifeline, Ramp and Wigan SMS (9.9%), a substance misuse management and/or drug awareness course (8.5%), and IT/computer courses (7.0%). Mentoring, mental health awareness training, maths and English, pre-employment courses, an access course and Smart Recovery training were also planned. While 1 in 9 students (11.3%) were undecided as to what education/training they wanted to do next, they were certain that they wanted to continue their learning.

They all felt that Bridging the Gap had helped to prepare them for this education/training. Asked why, the most common responses related to the knowledge base and skills it had given them, the positive learning experience encouraging them to do more – *“It has helped me get back into the learning process”* – and the fact that they were more motivated and confident now. They also had a better understanding of what to expect from further

education and/or training, and felt that the course had shown them what they wanted to do in the future.

*"It's given me the opportunity to get my foot in the door and I now want to boot that door wide open."*

2 in 5 students (42.2%) said they would not have considered this education and/or training prior to attending the Bridging the Gap course. This was mainly because of their previous lack of confidence and self-belief, not knowing what they wanted to do, and being unaware of the opportunities that were available to them.

All of the students (100.0%) said they planned to move onto voluntary or paid work in the future, and the majority (94.7%) felt that Bridging the Gap had helped to prepare them for this, in terms of both the knowledge and skills it had provided, and the opportunities it had made them aware of. One student thought that the course hadn't prepared them for work, although it had made them *"think of what the next move is"*, and three more were unsure, with one commenting that they *"would be OK in this field of work, but not for other jobs e.g. retail"*.

Most students wanted to work in the substance misuse field, although a number had ambitions in other areas of health and social care e.g. with cancer patients, mental health clients, sex workers and the homeless. A few wanted to help run existing mutual aid groups such as Smart Recovery, or to set up their own support groups. Most saw volunteering as a positive first step that would give them experience and open up possibilities for paid work in the future.

*"I want to encourage others that moving on is possible – tell them there is a new life out there!"*

The majority (86.8%) said that they felt ready to work right now, although 3 (3.9%) didn't, and 7 students (9.2%) were unsure. Of those that weren't ready, two had ongoing health problems which they needed to sort out first and one was worried about over-stretching themselves, while one thought they could manage part-time work and another was *"almost there"* (the remainder didn't say).

Of those who did feel ready to work straight away, most put this down to the knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation they now had. Two of the students were already in paid work, and six were volunteering. From their comments the majority appeared to be excited about the future and the possibilities it held.

*"I want to move on, I'm feeling focused, motivated and ready to help others along with continuing to grow myself."*

*"I feel that now is the time to 'get back in the saddle' and I'm just waiting for an opportunity."*

## **8. How did people feel about themselves now?**

Three quarters (77.3%) of the students agreed strongly that they felt more confident as a result of attending Bridging the Gap; almost two thirds (64.0%) agreed strongly that they had more self-respect; and 4 in 5 (80.0%) agreed strongly that they felt more motivated by the end of the course.

