

CHOOSE LIFE UNIVERSITIES EVALUATION PROJECT – PRELIMINARY REPORT

*A Qualitative Evaluation of the Personal, Academic and Professional
Impact of a Choose Life Project Event on Criminal Justice Students in
Universities in England*

Dr Karen Corteen and Dr Amy Hughes-Stanley



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**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY
OF CRIME, CRIMINALISATION
AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**



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We would like to thank:

Steve Duffy and the volunteers from
the Choose Life Project, the student
participants, University staff

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Dedication

At the heart of the Choose Life Project are the volunteers who are recovering from substance use and addiction and we dedicate this evaluation to them. We would especially like to dedicate this evaluation to Billy Dowdall and all the other people whose lives have been sadly lost as result of substance use and addiction. Finally, we would also like to dedicate this to the family and friends who have been or who are impacted on by substance use and addiction.

¹ Please note that volunteers have given express consent for their names to be shared.

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Part One

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About the Research and the Preliminary Report

The research entailed a qualitative, online, open-ended question survey with 31 students in five universities in England. The students were studying criminal justice and/or criminal justice-related programmes. It aimed to evaluate the personal, academic, and professional impact of an Choose Life Project event on students. The research also entailed an ethnographic element in which the researchers observed and interacted with the study's participants and volunteers at the Choose Life Project events. The findings of which are conveyed in this preliminary report. The research is part of an inter-related three-fold research project, details of which can be found later in the report.

This research began at the request of practitioner Steve Duffy, the Choose Life Project Founder and Manager. Steve asked for an evidence-based evaluation of the Choose Life Project in order to explore its impacts and the extent to which it makes a difference to the students who experience it. In a nutshell, the Choose Life Project is concerned with addiction education, although it is much more than this. The Choose Life Project provides substance use and addiction education for young people, students and professionals and it has done so in the community for over 15 years. Since 2008, the CLP has educated over 50,000 young people in schools, Youth Offending Teams, universities and pupil referral units. The project has educated over 5,000 police recruits in Merseyside, Lancashire, Cheshire, North Wales and Greater Manchester. They have also trained people from diverse fields including Criminal Justice, Job Centre Plus, Park Wardens, Probation, Psychology, Social Work together with national and regional charities.

The Choose Life Project is concerned with educating about drugs and alcohol however, it is far more than this and it is different to any other drugs and alcohol education. The Project educates about addiction, how addiction happens, the harms of addiction, recovery and the pains and tribulations of recovery, and desistance from harmful behaviour. In this respect it is unique.

Steve's request for an evaluation is timely as it coincided with Dame Carol Black's independent review which focuses on drugs, drug use, prevention, treatment and recovery (Black, 2021). Black's (2021) review highlights that there are evidence gaps, including what works to deter people taking drugs. It recommends more research into interventions regarding the prevention of and responses to drug use. In this report we refer to drug use as substance use and this includes alcohol use. We also prefer to discuss 'people who use substances' rather than 'substance users'¹. Importantly, the Black (2021) review also

¹ In the open-ended survey students were asked about 'substance misuse'. Substance misuse is a term that is commonly used to convey the harmful use of drugs, including alcohol, and it is a term that students participants would understand and be familiar with. When discussing student participants responses, the original terminology will be used. However, in the rest of this report we are taking a more nuanced, person-centred approach and in doing so, we are choosing to demonstrate this by using the term substance use and

highlights the role of education in preventative interventions, and it recommends that staff working with people with drug dependence be appropriately trained. In addition, it recommends bringing researchers and practitioners together. This research project, therefore, addresses some of the issues raised in the Black (2021) review including its recommendations. As such, the report is an evaluation of the impact of a community intervention concerned with addiction education, substance use prevention and recovery and desistance from substance use.

This preliminary report is made up of two parts. Part One provides an executive summary and the main headline findings and recommendations. Part Two is more detailed and provides the evidence on which Part One is based. It outlines a more detailed introduction to the Choose Life Project and it describes the content of the Choose Life Project events which student participants attended. The aims and methods of the research are presented together with a discussion and thematic analysis of the main headline findings. This includes giving a voice to the students who participated in the research.

This preliminary report will be followed by a final report. The final report will deliver a more in-depth thematic analysis of the data. It will also provide a literature review of the representation of people who use substances, universities and substance use, and the use of creative and critical methods and pedagogy in education on substance use, addiction and its impacts.

Executive Summary

This Choose Life Universities Evaluation Project (hereafter the evaluation) contains the preliminary findings from research into the personal, academic and professional impacts of a Choose Life Project event on students studying criminal justice and/or criminal justice-related programmes, conducted by researchers at Liverpool John Moores University. The Choose Life Project provides substance use and addiction education and awareness for young people, students and professionals and it has done so in the community for over 15 years. It also educates about the recovery journey and the desistance process. The research explores the impacts of a Choose Life Project event and the extent to which it makes a difference to students that experienced it.

This evaluation also coincides with Dame Carol Black's independent review and recommendations which focus on drugs, drug use, prevention, treatment and recovery (Black, 2021). Black's (2021) review highlights that there are evidence gaps, including what works to deter people taking drugs. It recommends more research into interventions regarding the prevention of and responses to drug use. This evaluation is an attempt to begin to address

by using the language of 'people who use substances'. This puts the person first and aims to be non-judgmental.

the evidence gaps in relation to the impact of substance use and addiction education together with education about recovery and desistance.

The evidence base for this evaluation comprises a thematic analysis of 31 qualitative, online open surveys completed by university students in five universities in England together with ethnographic observations at CLP events. The first CLP event and data collection began on Monday 14th February 2022. The final CLP event and data collection process took place on Friday 28th October 2022.

To summarise the findings of the preliminary report, the research demonstrates that creative pedagogical methods in substance use education, such as role play and the sharing of experiential narratives, have positive impacts on those who participate in Choose Life Project events. The research highlights that awareness of attitudes towards and responses to substance use, addiction and people dependent on substances can positively change personally, academically and professionally as a result of attending and Choose Life Project event. Choose Life Project events provide a powerful opportunity to increase understandings of substance use, addiction, recovery and desistance and therefore, these events should be rolled out locally and nationally for schools, universities, and professional bodies. Those who influence policy in this area and people who come into contact with people who use substances as part of their practice or profession should also attend a Choose Life Project event. The research also found that attendance at a Choose Life Project event can be validating for individuals trying to support someone dependent on or addicted to substances and it also offers them hope. In consideration of these findings, we recommend that in the local and national roll out of CLP events that sufficient time be dedicated to events, and that they are not a one-off event but the start of or part of education and training that focuses on substance use and addiction education, prevention, early help, harm reduction and recovery.

Main Headline Findings and Recommendations

The data collected through the course of the research has been thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The preliminary headline findings and recommendations are laid out below. These findings are discussed in more depth in Part Two.

[F1] Finding: Student participants thoughts about substance misuse before attending a CLP event were mixed and they were dependent on their existing level of awareness of substance use and their lived experiences.

[R1] Recommendation: The level of awareness of substance use amongst attendees to CLP events should not be assumed by the CLP and by the facilitators of a CLP event. The CLP event provides a powerful impactful opportunity to raise an awareness of substance use, addiction recovery and desistance. It also provides the opportunity to validate the lived experiences of members of the audience who have experienced or who are experiencing substance use and addiction either directly or indirectly.

[F2] Finding: CLP events gave student participants a better and more empathetic understanding of why people use substances and people's journeys to recovery.

[R2] Recommendation: Policy makers and influencers should attend a CLP event themselves to experience and witness its impact. The CLP events should be rolled out widely to individuals who come into contact with people who use substances in an educational, practical, non-professional and professional capacity. The CLP event should not be a one and only event and facilitators should think about where in their education, programme or training the CLP event fits, and what other follow up sessions with or in addition to the CLP are required.

[F3] Finding: The CLP event impacted on student participant's beliefs about substance use and people who use substances. In this way, the event opened student participant eyes to the realities of substance use and it positively changed and challenged their negative beliefs about people who use substances. In addition, the event impacted on student participants perspectives of their interpersonal relationships and substance use and their own substance use.

[R3] Recommendation: The CLP event does positively challenge and change negatives beliefs regarding substance use and people who use substances. In doing so, it raises awareness and increases an understanding of these issues. Therefore, the CLP event should be delivered locally and nationally to those who do come into contact with people who use substances and those who may do so in their future career. When doing so, consideration should be given to attendees who may be impacted on by substance use personally and/or interpersonally.

[F4] Finding: As a result of attending and CLP event, student participants gained new knowledge and perspectives on a range of drug, alcohol and addiction related issues, including the negative impact of substance use on people. This resulted in an overwhelmingly more humanistic response to people who use substances, why they use substances, the recovery and desistance journey and what should be done about it.

[R4] Recommendation: CLP events are needed locally and nationally in order to disseminate knowledge and understanding of the real-life experiences of substance use, the realities of recovery and desistance and to encourage a more humanistic and realistic way of responding to people who use substances. For professionals the more humanistic and realistic understanding gained from an event could be followed up with the opportunity to develop and practice skills.

[F5] Finding: Student participants made connections between the issues raised in the CLP event and their studies and it impacted on how they would approach this area in their studies and in their post-university life. This included finding alternatives to punishing and imprisoning people who use substances.

[R5] Recommendation: Due to the positive attitudes of student participants regarding their academic studies and post-university life as a result of attending a CLP event it is recommended that a CLP event or training be integrated into any education or training that

deals with addiction, drug and alcohol education, prevention, early help, harm reduction and recovery.

[F6] Finding: The volunteer experiential narratives, life stories and the role play were especially impactful on the student participants. The experience of a CLP event goes beyond educating about substance use, it extends to participant self-reflection and self-identification with the work of the CLP and its volunteers.

[R6] Recommendation: The creative pedagogical tools employed in the CLP event should be recognised as powerful and impactful on attendees and should be extended to local and national substance use and addiction education and training courses and programmes. Support for attendees should be considered.

[F7] Finding: For the majority of student participants there was nothing about the CLP event that they did not like. Some students commented positively on what they liked about the event and three important issues were raised: the role play, family and friends, and triggering.

[R7] Recommendation: The CLP event is impactful and should continue and be expanded locally and nationally. Greater attention needs to be paid to the debriefing of the 'drug dealer' role play, to the inclusion of the impact of substance use and addiction on families and friends, and to the potential of triggering. The facilitator and the CLP should make known the immediate and ongoing wrap around support and services following an event.

[F8] Finding: Approximately half of the student participants did not comment on how a CLP event could be improved. Some student participants offered useful suggestions on how to improve an event. These are grouped as: more information, comments on volunteers and the role play and the impact on families. The CLP would benefit from each event having more time dedicated to it.

[R8] Recommendation: In the closing of a CLP event the audience should be informed of what the aim of the event was and what it tried to achieve. Where possible, the CLP Manager should continue to include volunteers with different characteristics and different experiences of substance use and time in recovery. The duration of a CLP event should be extended to increase the participant experience.

[F9] Finding: The student participant experience of the CLP event is overwhelmingly positive, and students demonstrated a great appreciation of the event and of the volunteers experiential narratives and life stories.

[R9] Recommendation: The CLP event should evolve and expand and should be rolled out locally and nationally. Sufficient time should be provided for CLP events and they should be followed up with one or more sessions focusing on substance use, addiction, people who use substances, and sources of immediate and ongoing support.

The student participants were asked to provide three to five key words that describe their thoughts about substance misuse BEFORE and AFTER the CLP event. The impact of the event can be seen in the words provided by the students:

BEFORE



AFTER



Part Two

1. An introduction to the Choose Life Project

The Choose Life Project (CLP) has its roots as a project in HMP Liverpool and in 2008 the CLP was established in the community as a charity. Steve Duffy is the Founder and Manager of the CLP and he is a former prison officer. Since 2008, the CLP provides substance use and addiction education and awareness for young people, students and professionals. It did, however, begin inside a prison in the mid-1990s. Whilst working in prison Steve noticed that a vast majority of people in prison had problems with substance use and addiction and he also realised that nothing was being done to address this issue. There was no education in the prison about substance use and addiction, “there wasn’t even a poster on the wall or any form of support for the inmates” (Choose Life, 2020a). Subsequently Steve introduced the novel idea of using drama and experiential knowledge to try and address the growing issue of substance dependence and addiction amongst people in prison.

When the CLP was founded over 25 years ago, not only was education on substance use and addiction non-existent in HMP Liverpool, generally substance use and addiction education and training was very poor. To some extent little has changed in this respect (Black, 2021). In addition, professionals were (and arguably many still are) not equipped to deal with these issues. This includes professionals such as the police and prison officers who regularly have to work with individuals with people who use substances including those with dependence and addiction problems. The CLP believes that “There is no-one better to educate and inform about the danger of drug and alcohol abuse than someone who has been there and experienced it all for themselves” (Choose Life, 2020a). In addition, “Hearing about their often harrowing and emotional pasts, and the sequence of events that led to their growing addiction, instils a raw and forceful warning [to the audience] that simply cannot be acquired from another means” (Choose Life, 2020a).

Many people believe that individuals simply choose to engage in substance use, and this lack of understanding can result in a lack of empathy for people who are in the grips of drugs and alcohol use. The CLP aims to dispel the myths surrounding substance use, dependence on substances and addiction, and the individuals who have suffered from and are in recovery from problematic and harmful substance use. They do this through collaboration and employing a range of creative techniques (see Section 2 below). The CLP uses “the first-hand knowledge and experiences” of recovered alcohol and drug users to educate pupils, students, and professionals about substance use and addiction (Choose Life, 2020a). It goes into schools with volunteers who are in recovery from substance use in order to “teach the pupils about the pitfalls of substance abuse, with the addict’s own experiences offering a powerful and cautionary voice about the risks that lie on the road to addiction” (Choose Life, 2020).

1.1 The Choose Life Project and Desistance

The theory, policy and practice regarding the concept and process of desistance is a relatively new area inside and outside of academia. For the purpose of this report desistance is the process of stopping unwanted patterns of behaviour such as substance use and/or crime. The relationship between substance use and crime and the need to simultaneously study desistance from both types of behaviour has been recognised (Nixon, 2023). It has also been acknowledged that desistance is not an identifiable one-off event, it is process (Burke and Gosling, 2023; Kewley and Burke, 2023). The process of desistance “is also not linear, people ‘zig and zag’ in and out of [unwanted patterns of behaviour] for periods of time, often long before permanent cessation occurs” (Kewley and Burke, 2023), if it occurs at all. Audiences at CLP events gain important insights into desistance – in terms of what this entails and how difficult the desistance journey is. Importantly, being a volunteer in the CLP is a crucial part of their desistance journey. For some volunteers this is not only part of their recovery, rehabilitation and desistance from substance use it is also about their departure and desistance from the commission of crime. For many of the volunteers, their cycle of substance use resulted in a life of crime, for some it resulted in imprisonment. Some female volunteers have worked in the sex industry and many male and female volunteers went through the care system. When the volunteers share their powerful personal testimonies not only are they doing so to aid the audiences understanding of and empathy towards the complexity of substance use and desistance, they are also giving something back to the community. Wanting to give something back is an important aspect of the desistance journey (Maruna, 2001) whether it is desistance from substance use and/or crime. The following comments from volunteers on the Choose Life (2020b) website captures both the importance of this project for the volunteers and the audience:

Being involved with the Choose Life Project has been a great experience. Telling my life story to large groups of people, including students and new police recruits, has really boosted my confidence. As volunteers, we always get positive feedback from the audience, which lets us know we’re doing something worthwhile.

I have volunteered for Choose Life on many occasions. Why I do it is so that young people can hear first-hand what the horror on life addicted to Class A drugs is like and hopefully will educate them not to go down that route. I also get so much from this Project.

The CLP has more than 600 volunteers, many of whom have been part of the project for over ten years. The volunteers are “at the heart of the project” and “their shared stories are the essence of Choose Life” (Choose Life, 2020b). Each volunteer is in recovery and they have “a unique and powerful story to tell Their experiences inspire and empower others to walk a path that leads away from substance misuse” (Choose Life, 2020b).

The CLP is based in Merseyside, going forward Steve Duffy would like the CLP to be expanded nationally with volunteers and attendees across Britain being able to be involved in and benefit from local events. In order to do this an evaluation of its impact is required.

2. An Overview the Choose Life Project Event

The section provides an overview of the Choose Life Project (CLP) event experienced by the researchers and participants of this research. More detail can be found on the Choose Life website: <https://www.chooselifeproject.org/addiction-education-for-professionals> At this point the researchers observation and experience during and after the event is noted. Some specific findings and recommendations are provided further on in the evaluation.

2.1 Introduction to the CLP event

A CLP event typically begins with a talk by Steve Duffy about his experience of substance use and addiction in prisons. This was followed by an overview of how the CLP came about and how it went from being delivered in prison to being delivered in the community. The researchers observed the immediate engagement of the students at the outset of the talk.

2.2 Role Play: The Life Testimony of a Drug Dealer

After the introduction, Steve introduced two or three volunteers. One of whom plays the role of a drug dealer. In order for the 'drug dealer' to tell their story Steve asks the 'drug dealer' some really hard questions about why they deal drugs, who they deal them too, how they recruit young vulnerable people to deal their drugs, the measures they go to make sure that they will never get caught, and how they tampered with drugs to make more profit. The researchers experienced the evocation of quite strong emotions of dislike towards the 'drug dealer' on the part of the students. Tension in the room was also observed.

2.3 Student question and answer time and revelation of the role play

The students were invited to ask questions and the researchers observed that the student's also asked many hard questions to the 'drug dealer'. Steve then explained that the volunteer is not a drug dealer but a person in recovery from substance use. Steve explained that most of the drug dealers in prison are low level players and that hardly any drug dealers who are at the top making the most profit rarely go to prison. He also told the students that the answers that the volunteer gave in their role as a drug dealer are based on conversations that Steve has had with drug dealers in prison. The researchers witnessed and experienced a mixture of emotions and reactions to the revelation of the role play, they varied from surprised, relieved, amused and feeling a little deceived.

2.4 PowerPoint presentation: From Afghanistan to Anfield – Drug Dealing in Our Communities

Steve then went through a PowerPoint presentation that demonstrates the drug dealing hierarchy, how drug trafficking works, and how drugs get into communities. In so doing, issues such as the devastating consequences for communities, the manipulation of young and vulnerable people and county lines are covered. The students listened to this attentively and many made notes.

2.5 Volunteer Life Testimony

The life testimony of a volunteer in recovery is described on the Choose Life website as “one of the most powerful sessions we offer” (Choose Life, 2020c). This is when the audience, in this case students, have the privilege of hearing the volunteer’s life story. This offers the students “a memorable insight into a world very few people know about” and even though Steve has heard over 600 life stories during his time with the CLP “he is still routinely shocked by some of the ones he hears” (Choose Life, 2020c).

Each volunteer life testimony is highly personal and unique. However, from the researcher’s observations there are some shared themes. Each volunteer is in recovery from substance use, dependence on substances and addiction in the form of drugs and/or alcohol. Some volunteers had a happy and safe childhood, but many did not and many had a variety of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs included being in care, being bullied, and being abused (psychologically, emotionally, physically, sexually). Some volunteers also had shared experiences as adults such as being exploited, engaging in sex work, being homeless, having no familial ties or having family ties severed, having their children taken into care, and being prevented from seeing their children and grandchildren. Finally, many volunteers also entered into a cycle of crime as a result of their substance use and addiction, some of whom ended up in and out of prison.

The majority of volunteers talked about how their desistance journey included relapses along the way. Listening to volunteers talk about their lives, including their shame, embarrassment and guilt, provided an understanding that may not be acquired any other way. From discussions with students after the CLP event a powerful aspect of bearing witness to such personal testimonies and experiential narratives and knowledge, is hearing about, and seeing how, the volunteers have survived and how they found the resilience to desist, recover and build a safe and happier life. The researchers, Steve and the volunteers experienced through discussions with students following the event how students had been or were currently impacted on by substance use in their lives. This was as a result of their own engagement with substances or their loss of a parent, relative or friend due to substance use or because of substance use on the part of their living family members or friends. Students commented on how the CLP event enabled them to have hope and imagine the possibility of better futures

for themselves or their family and friends who were struggling with substance use. We also observed and heard that for students who had lost someone to substance use or addiction that the CLP event was at the same time, moving, upsetting, validating and life affirming.

2.6 Video: Rat Park

After the first volunteer testimony the students were shown a short video called *Rat Park*. The video format is that of a cartoon. The video describes an experiment undertaken by Bruce Alexander, a psychologist in the 1970s. The crux of the video conveys that addiction to drugs is not about being addicted to the drugs themselves but about the environment in which an individual takes drugs. It shows that rats raised in an isolated and desolate environment are more likely to habitually drink drug laced water than those raised in an enriched and stimulating environment. Although the video is concerned with the behaviour of rats, a key message is that chemical addiction is not the only factor in substance use, dependence on substances and addiction. The experiment provides evidence that in order to understand substance use and addiction, there needs to be an understanding of the environment and circumstances in which a substance or substances are consumed. Therefore, the emphasis in drugs law and responses to substance use should not be to blame the individual who is using substances but to recognise, account for and address other factors such as social problems.² After the event, when mixing with students, the researchers heard how this was thought provoking and how it provided a different perspective on substance use and addiction.

2.7 Video: Morph

Next the students are shown another short video, this one is based on real individuals – previous volunteers. It shows volunteers morphing from their substance use identities into their desistance identities. The students seemed to be moved and happy to see individuals showing a positive change in the individuals' appearance as they morphed from looking very unkempt, unwell and unhappy, to looking extremely healthy, well kempt and happy.

2.8 Video: Julie's Poem

The students were shown a final short reality video which features Julie, a former sex worker, reading a poem out about her life. The poem depicts a problematic and abusive childhood and it describes how Julie entered a cycle of substance use and how she sold sex on the streets in order to pay for this. In each of the CLP events that the researchers observed and experienced the students were attentive during the poem and they appeared very moved by it.

² For more information on the rat park experiment, follow-up studies, replication attempts and contemporary studies and an evaluation of the Rat Park programme of research, see Gage and Sumnall (2018).

2.9 Volunteer Life Testimony

The students then heard one or two more life testimonies from the volunteers (see section 2.5 above).

2.10 Volunteer-led question and answer session

The volunteer-led question and answer section is the final part of the CLP event and from what the researchers have observed it is a very interactive session. We witnessed this happening in two ways depending on the size of the audience and also depending on the venue. If the audience was small e.g. less than 10 students, students were invited to put their hand up and ask questions to any member of the CLP. If the audience was large and the venue did not lend itself into students getting into smaller groups, then the questions are opened out to the students in the same way that they would be to a small group of students. If the audience is large e.g. more than 10 students and the venue enabled students to go into smaller groups, then this is what happened. Using a carousel learning strategy students moved from one volunteer to another, spending 5-10 minutes with each of them. They asked questions, got answers and discussed and reflected together on the responses. We observed this activity as especially interactive with students asking lots of different questions.

2.11 One to one and group support

The researchers observed that it is the norm for students to approach the volunteers and/or Steve for a one-to-one discussion, or for a discussion in a small friendship group. The researchers witnessed this at the events they attended and students also came up to the Principal Investigator (PI) one at a time or in small groups of two to four. They usually thanked the PI for the event, commented on the research or asked a question about the research or they told the PI a little bit about their own life story and how the CLP event had resonated with them in some way. Steve and the volunteers are trained in offering support and directing attendees to relevant services if necessary. They always stayed behind at the end of the event to for one-to-one or small friendship group questions, discussions, and support. The students and university staff appreciated this.

3. Background to the Evidence-Based Qualitative Evaluation of the Choose Life Project

3.1 Introduction

The research is part of a comprehensive inter-related three-fold project. This comprises, one, an evaluation of the impact of a CLP event on university student's personal, academic and professional understanding of substance use. It is conducted by the authors of this evaluation, Dr Karen Corteen and Dr Amy Hughes-Stanley who members of the Criminal Justice Department, at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). Two, an evaluation of the impact

of a CLP event on pupils in secondary schools. This evaluation is being conducted by Dr Cassie Ogden also based at LJMU in the Department of Sociology. Three, an evaluation of the impact of being part of the CLP on volunteers. This evaluation is being carried out by Dr Sarah Nixon and Dr Michelle Jolly who are both based in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Winchester. The researchers have collaborated to independently evaluate the impacts of the CLP on university students, school pupils and CLP volunteers. This is with the intention of using this evidence-based research to build on existent good practice within CLP and to identify where improvements can be made. It is also hoped that evidence-based positive policy and practice change will be made beyond the CLP's operations.

This research project was concerned with exploring the impact of a Choose Life Project (CLP) event on students in five universities in England. The evaluation is made up of two elements. One, it is a process evaluation in that how students engaged with the CLP event has been ethnographically observed. Two, it is an outcome evaluation in that it specifically examines the personal, academic and professional impact on student participants after they have experienced a CLP event. In terms of the personal impact, the researchers wanted to assess the extent, if any, student participants personal beliefs and thoughts about substance misuse and people who used substances had changed as a result of experiencing a CLP event. The researchers also wanted to find out how, if at all, the CLP event impacted on student participants academically, for example how they thought about their academic studies or what they would like to study in the future. Finally, the researchers wanted to explore if the CLP event had impacted on them professionally. For example, had the event made the student participants consider or think differently about what they wanted to do professionally when they leave university.

3.2 The impact of desistance narratives

Desistance is a relatively new but important field of inquiry in criminology and in criminal justice theory, policy and practice. Defining desistance "is not without debate" (Kewley and Burke, 2023, P 55) and "it has been much contested" (Barr, 2019, p. 2). One definition provided by Nixon (2020, p. 1) is that "Desistance is the study of pathways out of offending and desistance narratives are expressions of 'going straight'". Given that the work of the CLP and this evaluation of it reach beyond addressing just desistance from crime and offending behaviour, for the purpose of this report we define desistance as the process of stopping unwanted patterns of behaviour such as substance use and/or crime.

The researchers are aware that in the desistance literature and in desistance studies "women's experiences were largely side-lined, marginalised and incorporated within the male-focused exploration of desistance" (Barr, 2019, p.1). However, despite this gap in relation to women, understandings of desistance are beginning to influence evidence based

practice, especially in probation (McNeil and Weaver, 2010; Maruna and Mann, 2019)³. For Kewley and Burke (2023) understanding the desistance process is vital, as effective desistance impacts on everyone involved in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, “Not only does it help break the offending cycle” and reduce recidivism, desistance from crime and from substance use can “prevent future harm, ... (re)build relationships, provide reparation, and help desisters develop the strengths and resources needed to live a life free from crime” (Kewley and Burke, 2023, p. 55), and a life free from substance use. It is therefore crucial that students, who may become professionals and practitioners in the field of criminal justice and/or substance use understand the process of desistance, its complexities and challenges.

At present there is very little research which examines the impact of desistance narratives on students in Higher Education. Drawing on research concerned with bringing academic knowledge to life through experiential learning (Payne et. al., 2003; Ancrum, 2015; Marsh and Maruna, 2017; Belisle et. al., 2019; Nixon, 2020), it is the intention of this research to explore the impact of desistance narratives and experiential knowledge on students personal, academic and professional development. Literature based on qualitative research with undergraduate criminology students demonstrates that real-life desistance narratives have a positive impact on the student’s understanding of desistance theory and its application, and of themselves as potential future criminal justice practitioners (Nixon, 2020). This included having a positive impact on 68% of students with regard to their perception of people who have offended, including humanising people who have offended and people in prison (Nixon, 2020). It also inspired some students to want to work with people who have committed offences (Nixon, 2020). For Roth (2016, in Nixon, 2020, p. 4) bringing in guest speakers and using real life case studies in lecture delivery “can open student’s eyes to offender’s capacity for change”. The use of real-life desistance narratives based on volunteers’ experiential knowledge can be used to challenge “the spate of prison documentaries in the UK” which disseminate “very negative and damaging portrayal of prisoners” (Nixon, 2020, p. 1). Also, Knight (2014) argues that in order to be able to work with people who have offended, criminal justice practitioners need emotional literacy, and guest speakers with offending backgrounds can impact on the development of the emotional intelligence required to work effectively with diverse groups of people who have offended (Belisle et. al., 2019).

It is hoped that the desistance narratives of the CLP volunteers will contribute to the critical pedagogical approach utilised in criminal justice and criminal justice-related programmes⁴. Within this critical pedagogical approach, it is important to explore the role of experiential learning and the creative and innovative experiential knowledge, desistance narratives and drama on students personal, academic and professional understanding and academic

³ See Burke and Gosling (2023) and Kewley and Burke (2023) for more detail on desistance and theories of desistance.

⁴ For more information on a critical pedagogical approach see Barton, et. al., 2010; Kershaw, 2012; Lin, 2014 and Gosling, Burke and MacLennan, (2020).

application of substance use, addiction and the desistance process. This is central to this research project via the experiential knowledge and desistance narratives of the volunteers and of a former prison officer and CLP Founder and Manager. Together they are disseminated at a CLP event in a creative and interactive manner (see Section 2 above). Ex-criminal justice practitioners have a unique insider perspective and experiential knowledge of the criminal justice system (Earle, 2014; Nixon, 2020). During CLP events Steve Duffy used his experiential knowledge of being a long-term prison officer and CLP Founder and Manager to bring to life the realities of substance use and addiction and the desistance and recovery process. So too did the volunteer's life stories. Nixon (2020, p. 14) found that "student perceptions can be positively influenced or consolidated through (ex) practitioner delivery, and the authenticity of first-hand desistance narratives". This study aims to explore and capture the impact of a CLP event which entails both these methods of delivery on students personally, academically and professionally using qualitative and exploratory research. It also aims to use the findings to bring about positive policy change locally and nationally with regard to education aimed at raising an awareness and understanding of drugs, alcohol, addiction, and recovery and desistance.

4. University Evaluation Aims and Methods

4.1 Summary of the research

The 31 participants in this study were students studying criminal justice and/or criminal justice-related programmes in five universities in England. The research entailed distributing a Participation Information Sheet and a link to a Qualtrics anonymous open-ended survey to students before they had attended a CLP event. After the event students were asked to complete the questionnaire via the Qualtrics link that they had been provided with. At each university very few students completed the questionnaire at the end of the event and most students completed the survey away from the event in their own time. The questionnaire contained questions that asked about their experience of the event and the ways it impacted on them personally, academically and professionally. The research also entailed an ethnographic element in that the researchers attended and observed the events and students' reactions to the event and their participation in them (see Section 2). It also comprised informal one-to-one and small friendship group discussions with the student participants at the end of CLP events.

The start date for arranging the implementation of the research was the 1st November 2021. The first CLP event and data collection began on Monday 14th February 2022. The final CLP event and data collection process took place on Friday 28th October 2022.

Name of the Student Participants Programme	Number of Student Participants
Criminal Justice	4
Criminology	3
Criminology and Counselling Skills	1
Criminology and Criminal Justice	2
Forensic Investigation	2
Forensic Psychology and Criminal Justice	5
Law and Criminal Justice	6
Policing and Criminal Investigations	6
Professional Policing	2
Total Student Participants	31

Table 1

4.2 Ethics and ethical approval

The Liverpool John Moores (LJMU) Research Ethics Application Form was completed and submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in July 2021. The research project gained LJMU Research Governance Approval on Thursday 5th August 2021. The UREC Reference is: 21/LAW/006.

4.3 Key aims of the research

The research entailed five key aims:

- To evaluate the personal impact of a Choose Life Project event on student attendees.
- To evaluate the academic impact of a Choose Life Project event on student attendees and to capture how students may apply what they have experienced to their academic studies.
- To evaluate how a Choose Life Project event may impact on student attendees' future professional aspirations.
- To build on good practice within the Choose Life Project and to identify areas of improvement.
- To provide key findings and future recommendations in relation to education aimed at raising an awareness and understanding of drugs, alcohol, addiction, and recovery and desistance.
- To disseminate the findings and recommendations and to track and record impact.

5. Discussion and Thematic Analysis of Headline Findings

The below section provides the research questions, main headline findings, key recommendations and a detailed discussion of the findings as a result of a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) of open-ended surveys completed by 31 student participants. The findings are rooted in and supported by the student participants voices.

Research question: *What were your thoughts about substance misuse BEFORE you attended the event? Write as much or as little as you like.*

Finding: Student participants thoughts about substance misuse before attending a CLP event were mixed and they were dependent on their existing level of awareness of substance use and their lived experiences.

Recommendation: The level of awareness of substance use amongst attendees to CLP events should not be assumed by the CLP and by the facilitators of a CLP event. The CLP event provides a powerful impactful opportunity to raise an awareness of substance use, addiction recovery and desistance. It also provides the opportunity to validate the lived experiences of members of the audience who have experienced or who are experiencing substance use and addiction either directly or indirectly.

Discussion: Students were asked about their thoughts in relation to substance misuse prior to their attendance of the Choose Life Project event. Overall, students showed a mixed response regarding their thoughts of substance misuse prior to the event. Many of the responses focussed on how aware the student was of issues relating to substance misuse. Student's thoughts on substance misuse therefore could be split into three categories of awareness: a lack of awareness (sometimes coupled with very negative views), academic and research informed awareness (which correlates broadly with academic literature on substance use), and experiential awareness (through friends and family members who used drugs and/or alcohol).

Lack of awareness

A number of students stated that they did not have many thoughts, or mixed views, on substance misuse prior to the Choose Life event. For example, participants stated that they knew that substance misuse was an addiction, but *'didn't fully understand why and how it happened'* (Participant 12), and that they *'knew it was an issue but didn't know that much about it'* (Participant 14). Whilst some students thought that substance misuse was *'a major problem'* (Participant 9) and *'very dangerous and unhealthy not just to your physical health but your mental health as well'* (Participant 22), a number of participants believed, prior to the event, that substance misuse was a choice (Participant 3; 17; 21; 24; 25). Moreover, some participants felt very negatively towards substance misuse (Participant 19), and held judgemental views towards people who used substances, for example, Participant 6 stated *'I*

was very judgemental and subconsciously turn my nose up at people that used drugs' and Participant 29 stated that they thought that *'often people were weak who became addicted to drugs'*. Overall, a large proportion of the participants displayed a lack of awareness of the complexities of substance misuse and the people who use substances.

Academic and research informed awareness

Some participants also demonstrated some nuanced thoughts and awareness of substance misuse prior to the Choose Life Project event. For example, a few of the participant's statements suggested ostensibly that their views may have been influenced by research and academic works, perhaps during their criminal justice related degree programme. Students demonstrated an awareness of the complexities of why a person may become addicted to drugs, for example, Participant 31 asserted *'that it is a complex issue which involves multiple factors such as mental health, socio-economic factors, access to resources and gender inequality'*. Similarly, Participant 5 stated:

From my own research, I consider substance misuse more a medical issue than an individual/moral issue and that the criminalisation of drugs has exacerbated the problem. Community and structure would help prevent relapse, harm reduction centres could allow people a safer place to use and allow individuals to have a central place to access support. Addiction is individual and so is their recovery.

Taken together, the comment provided by Participant 31 and 5 reveal an awareness of the intersecting factors that can influence drug use, which largely corresponds with academic literature relating to addiction (RachBiesel, Scott and Dixon, 1999; Patrick et al, 2012; Gage and Sumnall, 2019). Similarly, the idea of drug addiction as a disease in need of treatment (Participant 20), and the links between substance use and trauma (Participant 30) were identified by participants, which demonstrates that some students, prior to the Choose Life event, were aware of the complexities of drug and alcohol use.

Experiential awareness

Whilst some participants demonstrated little awareness of substance misuse, other students reported that their thoughts on substance misuse prior to the Choose Life Project event had been shaped by familial relationships or friendships in which substance use was present. For some participants, they felt that they had a good awareness of substance misuse on account of their prior relationships, for example, Participant 16 stated *'I've seen a few friends and family friends go through substance addiction so I've always felt as though I have somewhat of an awareness of how bad it can get'*. For many of the participants whose family and friends use substances, this left them with a negative opinion of substance use, for example, Participant 17 stated:

I've been exposed from a young age to people who were substance abusers, including my mother, I knew it was a disease but didn't have any sympathy for those who abused alcohol and drugs, as I believe it is their choice.

Similarly, Participant 19 expressed the difficulty that they experienced when their friends began using drugs around them:

I have always thought negatively about this. Being in a student accommodation where everybody around me uses drugs, I have found this difficult to be around, witnessing the first-time people try cocaine, for example. I knew the affects this can have on people and their lives, and I have seen people say, 'I'm dying for some coke', it is hard to witness knowing that they are craving this drug.

This testimony from participants demonstrates that whilst some students who attend Choose Life events may have little to no awareness of substance misuse, on the other hand, several students may have first-hand, experiential knowledge of substance misuse due to friendship or familial relationships.

Research question: *What were your thoughts about substance misuse AFTER you attended the event? Write as much or as little as you like.*

Finding: CLP events gave student participants a better and more empathetic understanding of why people use substances and people's journeys to recovery.

Recommendation: Policy makers and influencers should attend a CLP event themselves to experience and witness its impact. The CLP events should be rolled out widely to individuals who come into contact with people who use substances in an educational, practical, non-professional and professional capacity. The CLP event should not be a one and only event and facilitators should think about where in their education, programme or training the CLP event fits, and what other follow up sessions with or in addition to the CLP are required.

Discussion: Students were asked to give their thoughts on substance misuse after their attendance to a CLP event. The findings clearly demonstrate that the experience of a CLP event impacted on all participants in a positive way. It gave participants an increased understanding of why people use substances, this led to the advocacy of a 'person centred' approach to people who use substances and to people addicted to substances. Such an approach was also underpinned by participants feeling greater empathy to people's substance use. Finally, it gave participants hope and understanding that addiction can be overcome.

An increased understanding of why people use substances

Overwhelmingly, the participants stated that the CLP event gave them an increased understanding of why people use substances. For example, Participant 21 stated that the CLP event *'completely changed the way that I thought about substance misuse, and substance misuse within the prison system'*. Similarly, Participant 23 stated *'I have a much more clearer understanding of how addictions occur, how much life and family have an effect on substance misuse'*. As such, the participants grew an understanding from the CLP event that substance use and addiction is a multi-faceted issue, with a wide range of causal and correlative factors, such as social factors and person experiences (Participant 4) and traumatic experiences:

The cards you are dealt with in life can affect how you react to taking drugs, for example those surrounded with love, good friendships, partners etc. are less likely to than those with no support, bad relationships or even those who suffer traumatic events in their lives. You could be a happy person than one day age 40 a tragic event happens, and grief and pain can cause you to need a helping hand i.e. drink, drugs etc. (Participant 3).

A 'person centred' approach

As noted above, participants emphasised in their testimonies that they had an increased awareness and understanding of why people use substances because of the CLP event. Furthermore, participants also emphasised that they had a new understanding of who could become a substance user. As such, participants stated that after the CLP event, they thought that that substance misuse *'could happen to anyone over anything'* (Participant 9). Participant 7 similarly commented that they now thought that substance misuse *'can happen to anyone with a similar upbringing as other drug misusers'*. This understanding led some participants to stress that after attending the event that they thought that a person-centred approach must be taken to understand drug use, for example, Participant 22 said *'we need to be looking more at the person themselves and their background and upbringing to help understand why they have an addiction, and this will allow us to provide more tailored help'*. In keeping with this person-centred approach, students further emphasised that *'it's all about the person and not the drug itself'* (Participant 26) and that they realised *'it's not down to the drug it's down to the individual'* (Participant 27).

Empathy

When asked what participants thoughts were about substance misuse after the CLP event, several students emphasised feelings of empathy towards substance users in their testimonies. For example, Participant 10 stated it *'was really nice to hear the story from the other side and made me realise that I can be quite judgemental at times'*. Similarly, after hearing a CLP volunteer's story, Participant 18 said *'it made me feel sad for him'*. Akin to this, participants stated:

I still believe that a person cannot be completely be free of blame just because they get addicted to a drug they choose to try in the first place but the event helped me broaden my mind to understand how it actually affects a person's way of thinking and how their rationalisation switches when misusing substances (Participant 17).

My eyes have been opened more to understand why an individual continues to use drugs or drink alcohol even though they are losing their children, it is heart-breaking to see these individuals crying due to what their addiction is doing to them and what impacts it has (Participant 19).

Empathising with those who use substances was therefore a significant factor when exploring student's thoughts about substance misuse after the CLP event.

Addiction can be overcome

As well as the above issues, students also commented on their perspectives on addiction recovery. Participant 15, for example, highlighted that those who use substances '*can recover and improve their lives*'. Similarly, Participant 12 said that substance misuse is '*definitely something people can overcome*', however, '*that the determination and the right help is definitely needed*'. This notion is consistent with another participant who also emphasised that addiction can be overcome, despite the challenges along the way:

Recovery is a long road, more support is needed, perhaps earlier on instead of when people have hit the depths of despair. People will not give up until they're ready, you can't force people to snap out of addiction, they don't enjoy being addicted themselves it's difficult and lots of healing is involved in order to keep going forward (Participant 30).

The criminalisation of drug users as a barrier to their recovery was also noted by Participant 25, who stated that substance use '*needs to be resolved as a community not just outlawing the addict*'.

In sum, it is clear that participants, after the CLP, have an increased awareness of the complexities of substance misuse and why people use substances. Moreover, findings suggest that the CLP event increases the empathy that participants feel towards substance users and those addicted to substances and the event broadens participants understandings of the lives and recovery journeys of those impacted by substance use and addiction.

Research question: *How did the event impact on you as a person and on your personal beliefs. Write as much or as little as you like.*

Finding: The CLP event impacted on student participant's beliefs about substance use and people who use substances. In this way, the event opened student participant eyes to the

realities of substance use and it positively changed and challenged their negative beliefs about people who use substances. In addition, the event impacted on student participants perspectives of their interpersonal relationships and substance use and their own substance use.

Recommendation: The CLP event does positively challenge and change negatives believes regarding substance use and people who use substances. In doing so, it raises awareness and increases an understanding of these issues. Therefore, the CLP event should be delivered locally and nationally to those who do come into contact with people who use substances and those who may do so in their future career. When doing so, consideration should be given to attendees who may be impacted on by substance use personally and/or interpersonally.

Discussion: Student participants were asked to reflect on the impact that the CLP event had on them as a person, and on their personal beliefs. The majority of student participants who attended the CLP event commented that the event impacted their beliefs regarding substance use and their understanding of people who use substances. Although substance use is a common topic on Criminal Justice related Higher Education programmes, Participant 21 commented that the event *'made me feel like I had no clue about what addiction or substance abuse was actually like'*. Similarly, another participant stated that the event was *'educational as to the real life and unfiltered side of substance abuse'* (Participant 4). Student testimonies regarding how their beliefs around substance use and those who use substances changed, is encompassed in two themes namely, an eye-opening experience, and challenging and changing negatives beliefs regarding people who use substances. The final two key findings are discussed under the headings of: impact on interpersonal relationships, and reflection on personal life, addiction and use of substances.

An 'eye-opening' experience

Akin to the comments made by Participants 21 and 4 above and as noted in previous themes, the CLP event broadened student's view of substance use and people who use substances, with several participants describing the event as "eye opening":

It impacted on me as it has helped open my eyes to the lives of people who misuse substances. It easy to see people who are drug addicts as criminals but hearing from one of the volunteers and their story it has helped me to realise that they are just people too who have unfortunately gone down a path of abusing substances usually because of a traumatic upbringing (Participant 22).

It was very moving to hear the stories from the volunteers and opened my eyes to the personal struggles of addiction and helped me to understand more (Participant 14).

In keeping with this 'eye opening' experience, participants noted that the event changed their beliefs about people who use substances, for example, Participant 26 said that the event '*changed the way I look at people that I see on a daily basis*', and Participant 8 noted that it '*allowed me to have more of an insight to people with addictions and it allowed me to see them in a different way*' (Participant 8) and for Participant 24 it "changed my view as to the range of circumstances at which a person becomes addicted".

Challenging and changing negative beliefs regarding people who use substances

As noted above, this 'eye opening' experience also coincided with a shift in decidedly negative beliefs towards substance users from other participants. The idea that participants unduly judged those who use substances before the event was apparent in participants statements, for example, Participant 3 commented '*I think we are quick to judge people with substance abuse, but we need to look at the bigger picture look at them as an individual and why they took that substance in the first place*'. However, after attending the event, Participant 10 stated that the experience '*made me think before making assumptions*'. The sentiment that the CLP event shifted student participants negative attitudes towards substance users was also highlighted by Participant 18:

I believe that it impacted me emotionally more as I have always had a negative view of drug users as could never understand myself as to why you would take drugs, but after hearing the stories of how people get there it does really make you think and almost understand as to why it happens.

Ultimately, it can be concluded then that the event has the capacity to challenge and change participants negative beliefs regarding substance users through its activities, with Participant 12 stating, '*It definitely changed it I think more of the people than I did before*'.

Impact on interpersonal relationships

Whilst the CLP event has the capacity to change general negative views towards people who use substances, the results of the open ended survey also demonstrates that the events have the capacity to shift participants attitudes towards friends and family members who use substances. For example, Participant 1 stated that because of the CLP event they '*better understand of how as family I can support recovery*'. Similarly, Participant 15 reflected on their own family relationships, and stated that '*I have addiction in my family so it helped me understand it better and allowed me to empathise with my family member even more*'. For Participant 19, the CLP event has also changed the way that they view substance use amongst peers, they said:

I always understood the fact that addiction is a disease and so hard to stop. The speakers sharing their powerful stories emphasised to me how harmful these substances are and I find it difficult to see everybody acting so casually about drugs,

however, it has shown me the major impact alcohol has had and made me more wary to ensure my friends are drinking it safely, and not becoming reliant.

Participant 19 therefore suggests that the CLP event has not only shifted the way that they understand substance use including alcohol but also emphasised the importance of actively promoting harm reduction principles amongst friends who use substances.

Participant 17 also reflected on their own relationships with family and added that the drug dealer role play showed them a new perspective, they said:

I enjoyed the event, the drug dealer role play really struck a chord with me, I had never looked at it from that perspective that a lot of people are preyed upon because they are vulnerable. I thought it was great to hear from those who are recovering as it allows us to actually hear it from someone who has been through it and not just someone from the side lines (Participant 17).

Participant 17 also highlighted that the way that relationships were portrayed by the CLP were difficult due to their lived experience, and gave suggestions as to how the CLP could improve this aspect of the educational event for the future:

It was quite eye-opening and difficult to hear the volunteers talk about how they were self-aware and are self-aware of how their actions have affected their family/close friends, drugs ruined my family and still do, so it was a kick in the teeth for the project director to speak about how 'connections' are key to substance abusers' recovery but this point is very polarising and in my opinion not always the case and the point could have been put across better, i.e. not suggesting that lonely, depressed people are the only people who take and misuse drugs/alcohol.

These findings suggest that the CLP event can impact on participants perceptions of their interpersonal relationships, raise participants awareness of family and friends who use substances, and aid in participants reflection of these relationships, often creating increased empathy for those who use substances. The CLP event as a mode of actively promoting harm reduction principles is also apparent. Further care must be taken to ensure that the CLP organisers are aware that audiences may be personally impacted by substance use and may already have complex relationships with people who use substances. It is critical for the CLP to therefore ensure that their approach allows space for a range of experiences with substance use and substance users, and be aware that participants lives may already be impacted by substance use.

Reflection on personal life, addiction and use of substances

As well as awareness of addiction and substance use in interpersonal relationships, the CLP event also aided participants reflection on their relationships to addiction and substance use. To this, Participant 25 stated that the CLP event has '*impacted my current struggles and those around me to get help and support others*'. Like Participant 25, Participant 30 also reflected on the way that the CLP event made them think about their own use of substances:

I felt empathy, and a great deal of understanding having recovered from addiction myself to alcohol. I understand why people form addictions my first one was to cleaning ... it's soothed me from the horrid feelings inside. Reinforced my belief that addiction is an illness and it's something that a lot of people battle with each day.

It is important to therefore recognise the role of the CLP event in allowing audiences to reflect on their own addictions and substance use, identify the shared experiences between them and others with addictions, and to recognise and identify the support available to them. The CLP events therefore not only have the capacity to change participants perceptions of their interpersonal relationships with those who use substances, but also participants perceptions of themselves and their own substance use and addictions.

Research question: *What did you learn from the event? Write as little or as much as you want.*

Finding: As a result of attending and CLP event, student participants gained new knowledge and perspectives on a range of drug, alcohol and addiction related issues, including the negative impact of substance misuse on people. This resulted in an overwhelmingly more humanistic response to people who use substances, why they use substances, the recovery and desistance journey and what should be done about it.

Recommendation: CLP events are needed locally and nationally in order to disseminate knowledge and understanding of the real-life experiences of substance use, the realities of recovery and desistance and to encourage a more humanistic and realistic way of responding to people who use substances. For professionals the more humanistic and realistic understanding gained from an event could be followed up with the opportunity to develop and practice skills.

Discussion: Students were asked about what they learnt from the CLP event, and this prompted a variety of responses from participants. These responses can be grouped into three categories, one, gaining new knowledge and perspectives, two, an understanding that addiction and substance misuse can happen to anyone, three, the humanisation of people who use substances, why they do so, the desistance journey, and a call for more humanistic responses.

New knowledge and perspectives

Some participants made reference to specific aspects of the session for example, in relation to the PowerPoint presentation titled *From Afghanistan to Anfield*, Participant 4 stated that they '*learnt the structure of the drug process from the 'manager' to local dealers*'. In a similar vein, Participant 13 stated, '*I learnt the ladder of selling drugs and how managers work*'. In response to the video *Rat Park*, one participant found that '*the video of the rats [to be] a great way to explain addiction*' (Participant 15). The following quotes from participants encapsulates new knowledge and perspectives as a result of attending and CLP event:

I think it helped me understand and learn more about how addiction starts once they [people who use substances] start taking the drugs (Participant 20).

New perspectives on how people get into drugs and how their reasoning changes once addicted (Participant 17).

I learnt about the process of drug rehabilitation and the different programmes and people involved in this area of criminal justice (Participant 14).

Wanting to go into the police, this event definitely gave me a better perspective on misuse (Participant 11).

Addiction and substance use can happen to anyone

Students gained a greater awareness and understanding of how substance use and addiction can happen to anyone and that therefore, more positive responses are needed. Participant 7 for example, averred, '*drug abuse can affect anyone*'. Similarly, for Participant 6, '*addiction can take hold of anyone and it doesn't matter how you were brought up it can all affect you*'. This comment rhymes with that of Participant 25 when they state, '*there is more to life than drugs and alcohol and a bad upbringing isn't the only factor*'. Another participant stated that they have learnt '*how easy it is to fall victim to addiction*'. It is clear in these participants comments that people who use substances are not being judged or blamed. This theme was common in participants responses to the question of what they had learnt *AFTER* the CLP event (see above) and it continues in participants responses when asked what they had learnt from the CLP event as can be seen below.

Humanisation of people who use substances, why they do so, the desistance journey and a call for humanistic responses

There was a more humanistic understanding of substance users, for example, Participant 4 asserted, '*I learnt it is much more about the person and the decisions they make than it is about the drug*' and '*I learned to think of the struggles of the people before judging them*' (Participant 12). There was also a more empathetic and humanistic understanding of why people resort to substance use and why people become addicted, they are captured here:

A lot of people get addicted to things from pain (Participant 8).

I learnt that it is not the substances always, it is often the people, what people are going through and the lengths they are going to go just to feel a little better (Participant 19).

[I learnt] that we should not stereotype people with an addiction. There will always be a reason behind their problems and it is important to try and understand this (Participant 22).

I learnt that you need to be more open minded and sympathetic to those suffering addiction (Participant 23).

With regard to desistance there was an understanding that *'addiction is not so simply cured'* (Participant 24), and they learned that *'recovery takes a very long time, relapses are to be expected'* (Participant 15) and *'how easy it is to access drugs and how difficult it can be to come off them'* (Participant 18). Another participant asserted, *'Those with addictions shouldn't be shunned but helped and looked after'* (Participant 25). This humanistic understanding of people who use and are addicted to substances and the reason why this may be, led to a call for a more humanistic response. Participant 9, noted, *'that more help should be given'* and Participant 5 asserted:

I've not necessarily learned that society is letting individuals with addictions down but that it's solidified my understanding that we need more support in general for prison leavers and substance abusers, in a way that is constructive and gradually decreases from the intense environment of rehab/detox.

It is worth ending this discussion with a quote from Participant 31, *'[I learnt] that more projects such as Choose Life should be available to society'*.

Research question: *How do you think what you learnt from the event fits with your academic studies? Write as little or as much as you like?*

Finding: Student participants made connections between the issues raised in the CLP event and their studies and it impacted on how they would approach this area in their studies and in their post-university life. This included finding alternatives to punishing and imprisoning people who use substances.

Recommendation: Due to the positive attitudes of student participants regarding their academic studies and post-university life as a result of attending a CLP event it is recommended that a CLP event or training be integrated into any education or training that

deals with addiction, drug and alcohol education, prevention, early help, harm reduction and recovery.

Discussion: Some students could clearly see how the CLP event fitted into their academic studies as evidenced in their explicit connection between the event and their studies. For other students it impacted on the approach they would take to towards this area in their studies and in the future careers that their studies were preparing them for. Other student participants made the connection between punishment, prison and substance use and addiction.

Applicable to the participants academic studies

Participant 11 commented that what they had learnt '*definitely fits into policing and knowing what to expect a bit better*'. The following quotes from the participants also capture the connections between the content of the CLP event and their studies:

Substance misuse is very applicable to criminal justice studies and has encouraged me to explore this area more in academic research on addiction (Participant 14).

It relates to the substance misuse and mental health module we are learning (Participant 29).

I think it fits great, I think it would fit in any and every course as education around substance abuse and rehabilitation is vital to fight the problem (Participant 17).

I feel that this fits perfectly with our studies as most modules we've studied has an involvement or mention of substance abuse so I feel like it is very relevant and as discussed in the talk sadly a lot of offenders do have issues with substance misuse and addiction (Participant 18).

It definitely will help me understand more about addiction (Participant 20).

I think it is a good educational tool to understand the cycle of substance abuse to allow for awareness to be spread in an attempt to break the cycle in future generations (Participant 4).

Approach to studies and in future career

A number of students did not make an explicit link to the content of their academic studies, but the CLP event did influence the way they would approach subject matter related to substance misuse and addiction. One participant commented on how it enabled them to '*see things from a different perspective*' (Participant 9) and another participant stated that '*I think it's helped me be more understanding and think in a more open minded manner*' (Participant 3). It also impacted on how students think about the issues beyond their studies for example,

'I'm not sure it directly fits with my studies however it influences the way I look certain situations, with more compassion and understanding' (Participant 5). For Participant 6 the CLP event enabled them to *'take a different approach when starting my career in the police'*. Another student stated that it made them realise that as part of their career they would have to *'deal with drug addicts on the street and try to help others recover from drug abuse'* (Participant 7). For Participant 1 the CLP event gave them an insight into *'How to work towards a better more supportive system'*. In a similar response to the other questions, attendance of the CLP event resulted in Participant 5 and other participants being less judgmental and more empathic. Participant 22 asserted that the CLP event gave *'me more of an understanding of those within the criminal justice system who have been effected by substance misuse and who are stuck in the cycle of addiction.'* For another student, *'it's taught me that not all drug users are bad people'* (Participant 12). Participant 23 felt that they would be *'more understanding of the crimes committed by addicts'*. Participant 15 averred that, *'substance misuse and addiction can be related to different forms of criminality, it is important to acknowledge that there is a human being behind the crime'* (Participant 15). Finally, Participant 26 stated that they learnt *'To look at circumstances rather than judge and to think of way to help people from a young age'*.

Punishment, prison and substance use

The CLP event prompted one participant to suggest what else may be needed alongside punishment, they commented that the event *'allowed me to understand that offenders may actually need substance misuse treatment as well as their punishment'* (Participant 13). One participant went further and suggested *'it [the CLP event] made it obvious that prison was not the answer for substance misuse'* (Participant 28). In a similar vein Participant 31 stated that the event helped them *'to understand why prison doesn't reform it rather hinders and a lot of people end up in prison when really they should be helped not punished'*. For another participant it helped them to understand how individuals who use substances can *'carousel through the custodial setting'* creating *'a vicious cycle'* and that *'an alternative needs to be made to make a positive impact on those in need'* (Participant 27).

Research question: *Is there any aspect of the event that impacted on you the most? If so please explain – write as much or as little as you like.*

Finding: The volunteer experiential narratives, life stories and the role play were especially impactful on the student participants. The experience of a CLP event goes beyond educating about substance use, it extends to participant self-reflection and self-identification with the work of the CLP and its volunteers.

Recommendation: The creative pedagogical tools employed in the CLP event should be recognised as powerful and impactful on attendees and should be extended to local and

national substance use and addiction education and training courses and programmes. Support for attendees should be considered.

Discussion: Student participants were asked to reflect on any aspect of the CLP event that impacted them the most. The findings are categorised as: personal stories, relating to volunteers, and role play.

Personal stories

In total, 17 participants mentioned CLP volunteers' personal stories when referring to the aspect of the event that impacted them the most. As such, hearing the lived experiences of volunteers was particularly powerful to participants, for example, participants stated:

Hearing the life stories of the two volunteers. It was really interesting and impactful to hear from people first-hand about their experiences with substance abuse (Participant 22).

Having people who have been through this as a personal life experience is good to hear from (Participant 4).

Personal stories were helpful in seeing how anyone can be affected, people can get better (Participant 1).

The talks from the volunteers were really moving and eye-opening (Participant 14).

The use of personal narratives therefore emerged as a key element of the impact that a CLP event has on its audiences. Volunteer stories not only provide participants with an understanding of the lived experience of someone in recovery from substance use, but act as a crucial point of impact for the CLP event as a whole. This highlights the importance of the CLP continuing to provide a platform for those with lived experience of substance use and addiction in their educative events.

Relating to volunteers

As highlighted above, a significant number of participants cited personal stories shared by volunteers as the most impactful element of the event. Further to this, participants also highlighted that their ability to relate to volunteers' stories impacted on them the most. For example, Participant 24 stated, 'The real-life stories give an emotional impact making the issues more relatable'. Participant testimony suggests that as volunteers shared their lived experiences, this allowed space for participants to reflect on their own lived experience. This can be seen in the comment made by Participant 10 when they said that the element of the event that impacted on them the most was '*the emotional abuse story as can relate to it*'. Similarly, hearing testimony from volunteers that participants can identify with was also of

importance for Participant 5. When asked if any aspect of the event impacted them the most, they stated, 'Having speakers I can identify with - having a care leaver as a speaker who has been through the system and so let down by the system, really impacted me as a care leaver'. The ability for participants to identify personally with the experiences of volunteers suggests that CLP events are inclusive to a range of lived experiences. The impact of volunteers sharing their lived experience (as discussed in the above theme 'Personal Stories') is not only instrumental in developing participants understanding of substance use and those who use substances, but the ability for participants to see themselves in the CLP volunteers illustrates that the work of the CLP goes beyond merely educating about substance use and extends to participant self-reflection and self-identification with the work of the CLP.

Role play

An aspect of the CLP event that also impacted on participants the most was the role play. For example, Participant 14 asserted, '*I especially liked the role playing that they did as it prompted some really interesting questions*'. The role play aspect of the event illustrates the ability for the CLP event to challenge participants perceptions of drug use, as evidenced in the statement made by Participant 15, '*The role play was shocking, I could not believe the attitude towards drugs and people with addictions coming from the pretend ex-dealer*'. It is clear then that the drug dealer role play element of the event is integral to making an impact on participants. For example, Participant 17 stated:

The drug dealer role play was phenomenal, I was nearly ready to leave in the middle of it as it was very emotive and a brilliant eye-opener to those who have never experienced anything about substance misuse, to see how easy it is for a person to take advantage of someone's vulnerabilities and how unconscionable they can be.

As highlighted by Participant 17's comment about the role play that they were 'nearly ready to leave in the middle of it', it is critical that the CLP event strikes a balance between ensuring that the role play has impact without alienating or confusing participants. From participants testimonies students perspectives were challenged and this was an educative experience, thus the balance is achieved and in future events the CLP should continue to do so.

Research question: *Is there any aspect of the event that you did not like? If so please explain – write as little or as much as you like.*

Finding: For the majority of student participants there was nothing about the CLP event that they did not like. Some students commented positively on what they liked about the event and three important issues were raised: the role play, family and friends, and triggering.

Recommendation: The CLP event is impactful and should continue and be expanded locally and nationally. Greater attention needs to be paid to the debriefing of the 'drug dealer' role play, to the inclusion of the impact of substance use and addiction on families and friends, and to the potential of triggering. The facilitator and the CLP should make known the immediate and ongoing wrap around support and services following an event.

Discussion: In response to the question of whether there was any aspect of the event that the participants did not like, four students thought the question was not applicable (Participants 15, 21, 24 and 25). Eight students did not provide an answer (Participants 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 16, 20, 26) and three students stated 'No' in answer to the question (Participants, 11, 12, 22). Participant 18 commented that there was '*Nothing that I can think of*' and Participant 7 stated, '*No dislikes*'. Therefore, 17 students did not make a comment about anything that they did not like about the event, this is over half of the participants. Participant 5 felt that the interruption of the Choose Life speaker by a university tutor wanting to monitor attendance meant that there was '*a lot of faffing about*' which felt '*quite dismissive and rude to the speaker*'. No other participants commented on this interruption. One participant did not like, '*not having a break*' (Participant, 28) and one participant would have liked the volunteers to have microphones so they could hear them more clearly (Participant 30). The other responses can be categorised as either positive answers or important considerations going forward. There are three important considerations going forward; they are discussed under the headings: role play, families and friends, and triggers.

Positive answers

The first positive answer that appeared in the analysis was that of Participant 3 who in answer to the question of what they did not like about the event asserted, '*That it was not long enough I could have listened for hours*'. Participant 6 stated, '*Nothing, I thought it was amazing*' and for Participant 31 there wasn't anything that they did not like as '*all was very informative thank you and I think it is amazing what you're doing*'. The final two statements in relation to this category are: '*No, it was difficult to hear the sad events but I think it was really powerful*' (Participant 19) and '*Nothing I did not like – I thought it gave a realistic insight*' (Participant 27).

Important considerations going forward: Role play

In common with answers to the previous question, participants discussed the role play in particular. These are the comments from the four participants that raised the issue of the role play:

I understand why the role play was part of the event; however, I do not think it would have been fully required, the man doing the role play would have explained it in his own words and I think it would have been just as effective, if not more (Participant 4).

I did not like the role play with the male speaker, I didn't think it was true anyway and it made the room feel hostile and not a safe space to have a discussion about something as important as drug and alcohol use (Participant 13).

The role-playing scenarios the volunteers did were really interesting but it did make me a bit anxious as it created some tension in the room (Participant 14).

They didn't make it clear that some bits were role play so it was sometimes confusing (Participant 29).

It is clear that the role play is an impactful part of the CLP event and a significant part of its impact is due to the audience being unaware that it is a role play, until the role play is finished. We would not recommend any changes to this aspect of the CLP event; however, it is clear that greater attention needs to be paid to the debrief of the role play. A longer and clearer explanation of the role play and why it is a role play is needed. Also, the volunteer who plays the 'drug dealer' should be provided with an opportunity to explain what it was like playing the 'drug dealer' and why they are really at a CLP event e.g. what their lived experience is. Either at this point or at some point in the CLP event the role-playing 'drug dealer' should be able to share their experiential narrative and life story. Importantly, the tension, anxiety and hostility in the room in response to the 'drug dealer' should also be explicitly acknowledged by the Project Manager and the audience should be given an opportunity to share any thoughts or feelings that they have in respect of this.

Important considerations going forward: Families and friends

Although this discussion is in response to one participant, the point raised by Participant 17 is a significant one which needs to be addressed in future CLP events. Participant 17 stated, '*I thought that everything was good*' however, they also thought that there was a '*lack of information about how this [substance use and addiction] affects families and close friends*'. They continued to state that the event '*felt very one-sided*' and that while the event was '*trying to build sympathy for addicts and recovering addicts*' it did not give the '*whole story*' as '*not all substance misusers are as regretful and apologetic as the two volunteers*'. Also, they thought that the event '*gave the picture that all addicts want to recover and are willing to recover, which in my experience sometimes you can give and help until you are blue in the face and sometimes they [a person who uses substances] are never coming off of that ledge*'. There are a number of important issues and considerations to acknowledge and address going forward. Being willing to stop using substances on the part of the person using them or being addicted to them is an important part of the discussion and experiential narratives in a CLP event. This needs to be stronger as does a discussion of the impact of substance use and addiction on families and friends. Ideally, a CLP event should include a family member or friend who has been impacted on by someone they love who is or has been a person who uses substances. This would give the CLP more balance and it would validate those members of the audience who have this lived experience. We appreciate that it may not always be

possible to include a person who has been impacted in this way, yet it is important that the experiences of family and friends be included in a CLP event in some way. This could take the form of a video recording of a family or friend who have been impacted on by a relative or friend who is a substance user or addict. Alternatively, it could include reading testimonies from families or friends or telling one life story of a family or friend who have tried to support a loved one who has or is using substances or was or is addicted to substances.

Important considerations going forward: Triggers

Again, this finding and subsequent recommendation arises out of the response of one participant however, it is an important observation and one which needs highlighting and addressing. When asked was there any aspect of the event that the student did not like Participant 23 provided this response, *'It's not so much something that I didn't like, but I was not sure about the video that showed a cartoon of injecting drugs as thought this could be triggering'*. Prior to the event the facilitator should make clear to the intended audience that there may be aspects of the CLP event that could be triggering for individuals in recovery or individuals who use substances, and if they think this may be an issue for them then they should consider whether to attend the event or not. At the CLP event at the outset the potential of triggering should be explained and individuals in the audience should be given the opportunity to leave at any time during the event. Prior to the event and after the event the relevant wrap around support services should be make known.

Research question: *Is there any aspect of the event that you think could be improved or that you would like to hear more about? If so please explain – write as much or as little as you like.*

Finding: Approximately half of the student participants did not comment on how a CLP event could be improved. Some student participants offered useful suggestions on how to improve an event. These are grouped as: more information, comments on volunteers and the role play and the impact on families. The CLP would benefit from each event having more time dedicated to it.

Recommendation: In the closing of a CLP event the audience should be informed of what the aim of the event was and what it tried to achieve. Where possible, the CLP Manager should continue to include volunteers with different characteristics and different experiences of substance use and time in recovery. The duration of a CLP event should be extended to increase the participant experience.

Discussion: In response to the question about what could be improved or what participants would like to hear more about, three students thought the question was not applicable (Participant 15, 21, 23), eight students provided no answer at all (Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 20) and three students stated, *'No'* (Participant 19, 22, 23). This means that just under half

of all participants did not suggest a way that the event could be improved or expanded upon. Participant 11 commented that, *'I thought it was good the way it is'*. Participant 30 once again raised the issue of the volunteers having microphones and Participant 31 mentioned that the event could *'Perhaps' be improved upon by including a 'break in between'*. The rest of the responses can be organised under the headings: more information, volunteers and role play, and the impact on the family.

More information

For one participant a greater focus on *'the aim of the event'* could be an improvement (Participant 4). They continued stating that while there is *'no simple solution'* they would have liked to know *'what they'* [the CLP] was *'hoping to achieve'* and the event could have explained *'if this is an issue for society to change'* and *'if the government need to do more to help vulnerable children and people recovering etc.'* (Participant 4). Part of this participant's response is reiterated by Participant 25 when they too ask for *'More about the project and what it does'* as this is as *'important'* as hearing from *'those it helps'*. The aim of the CLP event is to enable and encourage the audience to think for themselves about the complexities and challenges of substance use, addiction and the process of recovery and desistance and to begin to draw their own conclusions with regard to solutions. However, the desire for more information regarding the aim of the event and what the event hopes to achieve maybe a good way to close an event. Participant 24 felt the event could be improved by including a *'wider range of addiction such as robbery for a thrill'*. There are other forms of addictive behaviours such as the commission of crime for a thrill and gambling, however, this is not the remit of a CLP event. Facilitators of an event may, however, wish to build on the event by incorporating a wider focus on addictive behaviours beyond substance use. Finally, one Participant 26 asked if the CLP could *'Tell us how we can help and if the organisation has any roles that we can help fill'* (Participant 26). The positive impact of the event is clearly demonstrated in this response.

Volunteers and role play

Four participants wanted to hear more volunteers stories (Participant, 5, 6, 7, 12). Participant 5 stated, *'I would like to hear more stories as that was the best part, I love to hear why they did drugs it made me really understand the illness'*. One participant wanted *'more people and more stories'* and also *'more stories on multiple drugs'* (Participant 12). One participant stated, *'I feel like one speaker was more impactful than the other'* (Participant 18). Only one participant remarked on this however, this is inevitable as each volunteer will have their own characteristics (e.g. gender, age, parental status) and their own unique stories (e.g. how they started using substances, why they decided to stop, and their length of time in recovery). In relation to this Participant 5 suggested that a way to improve the event was to *'Have more speakers that have been in recovery longer'*, they recognised that although *'logistically its more difficult'*, they thought it would be worth it as *'I think it would be an interesting dynamic that could be explored'*. In a not dissimilar vein Participant 28 asserted that, *'It would be good*

to have a woman's perspective of the impact of substance misuse' and Participant 29 commented, 'I would have like to have focused more on the men's personal life stories'. When organising a CLP event the Manager of the CLP does do his best to ensure that there is a male and female volunteer, that volunteers are at different stages of their recovery and desistance journey and that different substances including alcohol are included. This is good practice and it should continue as it enhances the experience of the event. However, it is acknowledged that due to the reliance on volunteers who are in recovery this is not always possible. One participant who thought '*the role-playing was really interesting*' suggested that a way that the CLP event could be improved was to '*perhaps in future it could be a bit more interactive with the audience*' (Participant 14). There is a question and answer session at the end of the role-play, thought could be given to including a question and answer or comments session mid-way through the role play in order to facilitate greater audience participation.

The impact on the family

Participant 17 raised the issue of the impact on the family and friends in the above question, and they raise the important question of the family here too. Again, although this is only one observation it is important to highlight and address it. The participant rightly observes that this is an intervention that happens in the community – '*community rehabilitation*' and therefore, someone who has first-hand familiar experience of '*those who are recovering*' would improve the event (Participant 17). They state that including a family perspective in an event would add a '*great dynamic as drugs and substance abuse doesn't just affect the person who is addicted*'. They comment that it would be good to show '*how difficult it is to help people who are addicted*'. They also, suggest that relationships should be covered in more depth for example, how relationships '*can be hurt or event completely severed*'. For Participant 17 the inclusion of families and relationships would present '*a better whole round picture*' as '*addicts aren't bad people but a lot of them do bad things and sometimes these things are unforgiveable*'. We reiterate that the inclusion of families impacted on by substance abuse and addiction would further improve CLP events and ways in which this can be accomplished have been outlined in the discussion of family and friends above.

Research question: *Is there anything else that you would like to add? Please write as much or as little as you like.*

Finding: The student participant experience of the CLP event is overwhelmingly positive, and students demonstrated a great appreciation of the event and of the volunteers experiential narratives and life stories.

Recommendation: The CLP event should evolve and expand and should be rolled out locally and nationally. Sufficient time should be provided for CLP events and they should be followed up with one or more sessions focusing on substance use, addiction, people who use substances, and sources of immediate and ongoing support.

Discussion: In response to the question whether participants would like to add anything else, 16 participants provided a comment which are discussed below. The other 14 participants either thought that the question was not applicable (Participant 15, 21, 27) stated 'No' (Participant 7, 19, 22) or did not provide an answer (Participant 9, 10, 11, 16, 17,23, 26, 29, 31). The responses are presented under the headings: thank you, volunteer experiential narratives, expanding and rolling out CLP events and additional positive comments.

Thank you

Eight participants said thank you (Participant 1, 2, 3, 14, 20, 25, 28, 30). Below are some of the comments from participants:

Thank you for sharing the stories (Participant 1).

Thank you very much (Participant 2).

Just that everyone was so brave and thank you for sharing your stories (Participant 3).

It was a very interesting experience and I'm glad to have attended, thank you to the volunteers and the team who made it all happen! (Participant 14).

Thank you so much for coming and putting this into perspective for us all. I wish the guest speakers all the best and I hope they all have a more fulfilling future (Participant 25).

Thank you for a truly insightful and wonderful event – it was an honour getting to meet such great individuals (Participant 30).

Volunteer experiential narratives

The volunteer experiential narratives were particularly powerful as can be demonstrated in the response from Participant 6, *'The honesty of the volunteers made the project, it made me open my eyes and understand the person, the fact it was face to face made me feel a connection and understand the struggles and pain'*. Similarly, Participant 20 stated, *'I would like to say thank to the people that shared their stories and how open, honest and real they were. It helped me learn and understand so much more about substance misuse'*.

Expanding and rolling out CLP events

Four participants would like to see the CLP expand or be implemented wider. Participant 5 asserted, *'The event was informative but not preachy which is very important when talking about topics like this. I'm really excited to see how the project evolves and expands'*. One participant added, *'Really good event. I think it needs to be implemented in schools to raise awareness to children who are around the ages of vulnerability to being involved in this area of crime'* and Participant 12 also thought that the CLP needs to be rolled out further, *'It was amazing and should be implemented in more places, it's definitely amazing'*.

Additional positive comments

'AMAZING!' was the response from Participant 8, for Participant 13, 'It was eye-opening' and Participant 24 added the 'The event was well presented and highlighted the core issues in society'. The statement from Participant 18 is a good quote to end this discussion on, 'I really enjoyed the project and I would love the opportunity to learn more and get more involved'.

6. Conclusion

This preliminary report has provided an executive summary and the main headline findings and recommendations in Part One. Part Two of the report outlined the work of the Choose Life Project and the content of the CLP event which student participants attended. It also provided the aims and method of the research and a detailed discussion of the thematic data analysis of the findings. This included giving a voice to the students who participated in the research. This preliminary report will be followed by a final report which will provide a more in-depth thematic analysis of the data. It will also provide a literature review of the issues, namely, the representation of people who use substances, universities and substance use, and the use of creative methods and critical pedagogy in the education of individuals about substance use, addiction and its impacts.

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APPENDICES

QUALTRICS SURVEY

A Qualitative Evaluation of the Personal, Academic and Professional Impact of a Choose Life Project Event on Criminal Justice and Criminology Students in Three Universities in England - Open Ended Survey

The following open ended survey is designed to explore the impact of a Choose Life Project event on your personal, academic and professional development. You will be anonymous and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You can stop completing the survey at any time. Thank you for participating.

Please tick to confirm.

YES I CONSENT

NO I DO NOT CONSENT

What is the name of the University where you attended the Choose Life Event?

What programme/course are you studying?

What were your thoughts about substance misuse **BEFORE** you attended the event? Write as much or as little as you like.

Please provide three to five key words that describe your thoughts about substance misuse **BEFORE** the event.

What were your thoughts about substance misuse **AFTER** you attended the event? Write as much or as little as you like.

Please provide three to five key words that describe your thoughts about substance misuse **AFTER** the event.

How did the event impact on you as a person and on your personal beliefs? Write as much or as little as you like.

What did you learn from the event? Write as much or as little as you want.

How do you think what you learnt from the event fits in with your academic studies? Write as much or as little as you like.

Do you think the event made you think about what you might like to do in your future professional career? If so, please explain - write as much or as little as you like.

Is there any aspect of the event that that impacted on you the most? If so, please explain - write as much or as little as you like.

Is there any aspect of the event that you did not like? If so, please explain – write as much or as little as you like.

Is there any aspect of the event that you think can be improved or that you would like to hear more about? If so, please explain – write as much or as little as you like.

Is there anything else that you would like to add? Please write as much or as little as you like.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A Qualitative Evaluation of the Personal, Academic and Professional Impact of a Choose Life Project Event on Criminal Justice and Criminology Students in Universities in England

Dr Karen Corteen, School of Justice Studies

LJMU's School of Justice Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: 21/LAW/006

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Dr Karen Corteen, Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice. School of Justice Studies.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to explore the impact of a Choose Life Project event on students personal, academic and professional development. It aims to look at students understanding of substance abuse and desistance (refraining and recovering from substance abuse) before and after the Choose Life Project event to see what impact attending the event has.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you will have attended a Choose Life Project event in your University.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, please read this information carefully.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, please click on the link that has been provided for you in the announcement in your virtual learning space. The link will take you straight to an on-line survey. This will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete and participation will remain anonymous. The survey will explore the impact that attending a Choose Life Project event had on you.

Are there any possible disadvantages and risks from taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study, it is hoped that the findings may be used to justify a much larger study with the hope of extending the Choose Life Project beyond Merseyside. Also, you may find reflecting on your experience of the event and relating it to your studies and your personal, academic and professional development insightful.

What will happen to the data provided and how will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

The information you provide as part of the study is the **research study data**. Any research study data from which you can be identified (e.g., from identifiers such as your name, date of birth, audio recording etc.), is known as **personal data**. This can include more sensitive categories of personal data (**sensitive data**) such as your race, ethnic origin, politics, etc. Due to the nature of this project no personal data will be collected from you.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Karen will produce a report for Steve Duffy the Choose Life Project Manager. The report will be shared with the steering group and it may be used to secure funding for a much larger study with a view to supporting the expansion of the Choose Life Project beyond Merseyside.

Who is organising the study?

This study is organised by Liverpool John Moores University.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Liverpool John Moores University School of Justice Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: 21/LAW/006).

What if something goes wrong?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact me and I will do my best to answer your query. I will acknowledge your concern with within 10 working days and give you an indication of how I intend to deal with it. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact the chair of the Liverpool John Moores University School of Justice Research Ethics Committee (SJS-ethics@ljmu.ac.uk) and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.

Data Protection Notice

Liverpool John Moores University is the sponsor for this study based in the United Kingdom. We will be using information from you in order to undertake this study and will act as the data controller for this study. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. Liverpool John Moores University will process your personal data for the purpose of research. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest. Liverpool John Moores University will keep identifiable information about you for 5 years after the study has finished. Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact LJMU in the first instance at secretariat@ljmu.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Contact for further information

Dr Karen Corteen, Senior Lecturer, Criminal Justice, School of Justice Studies

K.M.Corteen@ljmu.ac.uk

0151 231 3062 (office number)

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this study.