

THE FRIDAY FEATURE

BY KIERAN WESTBROOK

CENTRE OF HOPE

ON today's front page we revealed the pioneering NET (Neuro-Electric Therapy) being used to help drug addicts and alcoholics in Dumfries and Galloway.

But that is just the start of the programme.

Here is how else to Lochbank Trust helps them - and the stories of two addicts it is helping.

THE LOCHBANK Trust has been using NET for twelve months now - but when the electrical equipment is switched off, the real work begins.

Based in the quiet and serene surroundings of Borgue, the rehabilitation centre offers addicts a place free of temptation to regroup.

It is a place away from friends, family and distractions, giving patients the time and support they need to make a recovery.

The centre can home up to seven patients at a time, each with their own room.

However, there are not the facilities to cater for a mixed sex environment, so the Trust only accepts men at present.

FOR Dumfries man Stuart MacNeillie, Lochbank Trust and their treatment offers a new hope.

Stuart has been a drug user for ten years, and addicted to heroin for most of that time.

At the height of his addiction, he spent every penny he could on the demon drug, and robbed from his family to feed his habit, shattering bonds of trust.

His addiction ended a three-year electrician apprenticeship, and a 10-year long relationship with the mother of his two children.

His drug use first started when he was just 16 years old as experimentation in softer drugs at parties with friends.

But as he began trying and preferring harder drugs like Speed and Ecstasy, his friends were using the most addictive of them all - heroin.

And it was only a matter of time before Stuart followed suit.

Speaking to the Standard as he starts his NET treatment, Stuart said: "I didn't want to get onto the heroin, because I knew it was bad news.

"Some of my pals used it the morning after a big night, to help with the come down.

"My drug use was making me feel worse and worse the next day, and eventually I tried heroin, smoking it at first.

"It took the pain away and it felt good.

"And there was no withdrawal at first, which I liked about it. But once I started using it regularly, the pain of coming off it was terrible.

"I was addicted from then on. Whatever I had I would spend on heroin."

The drug turned Stuart into a different person - a man who didn't care about other people, and only thought about getting his next fix.

And he didn't see that everything that was going wrong in his life was because of his addiction.

He added: "Guys used to say 'watch that stuff, it'll leave you with nothing', but at the start I had a bit of money, and I thought I'd be fine, and I knew what I was doing.

"But look at me now."

Stuart has tried in the past to

There is a shared kitchen and living area, a small gym, cycle trails, and even table tennis.

So there is plenty to do to keep the patients occupied.

Patients enter a form of therapy that builds up confidence, and helps them make better decisions based on reasoning rather than impulse.

In this case, it is used to teach the reforming addicts to avoid situations where they may relapse, and recognise instances when they might be tempted.

They are entered into simple but important regimes such as cleaning and cooking, to build good habits.

Classes also focus on improved health and hygiene.

And towards the end of those classes, the centre looks for ways to reintroduce its

patients back into society.

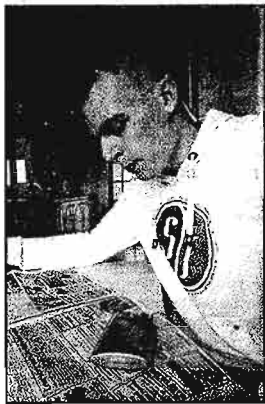
The Trust runs the Furniture To Go charity shop on the Vennel, and has an Outreach site at Teviot House in Dumfries.

When the Trust is confident the patient is strong enough, they can stay in Teviot House, which gives them more freedom in a more familiar surroundings.

Patients can also get involved in the Furniture To Go charity store.

The Trust sees it as important to offer assistance throughout a person's recovery, from the moment a patient goes into their care, to the when they are fully reformed.

Stuart MacNeillie and James McDougall are at the start and end of the rehab programme and have two very different stories to tell of how they got there.



STUART MACNEILLIE: pictured using NET.

get away from heroin, managing to stay clean for up to months at a time, but he has always returned to the craved drug.

But he is convinced that this treatment will be different, after he himself got in touch with the Lochbank Trust.

He explained: "I was on a Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO), and my support worker was on holiday.

"I felt like I had no support and was worried about turning back to the drug.

"So I contacted the Trust myself, and they took me on.

"I want to get back to being the father I should be.

"I've let this rule my life for too long.

"I've let a lot of people down, and I want to re-build bonds.

"They've stood by me through everything, and I owe them a lot.

"I couldn't imagine my daughter growing up and me thinking everything's fine and then finding out what my family have about me."

And for Stuart, this is a real chance to start again.

"I've been speaking to the other people here, and they think the place is great.

"It feels a bit strange having this thing strapped to my head, but so far it seems OK.

"It's a much better option than prescribing people with methadone and pushing them to one side - you just end up hooked on that too.

"This feels like a new start, and I feel like I deserve a second chance," he said.

JAMES McDougall has become a real success story for the Trust - and claims it has saved his life.

James was told by doctors that he would die if he didn't stop drinking, after being a chronic alcoholic for years.

The 34-year-old was sent to the rehabilitation centre in Borgue by his local church, who saw he had a drink problem.

He has been with the Trust for 15 weeks, coming off alcohol completely and working towards turning his life around.

He said: "This place has saved my life.

"When I came here I was a mess. Doctors told me if I didn't stop drinking I'd be in a wooden box."

James worked on the oil rigs, getting a healthy pay packet and having nothing to spend it on.

And the endless stream of money turned into an endless stream of booze which led to James losing his job, and becoming a complete down-and-out.

He said: "Alcohol ruled my life. I wouldn't go to sleep at night without having a bottle of cider next to my bed for the morning. I would drink a three litre bottle of that in the morning, then a bottle of vodka and fall asleep.

"When I woke up again I would carry on drinking.

"Alcohol took the shirt off my back - I had to knock on friends and acquaintances' doors for money or a drink."

The church James belongs to, took him to the Lochbank Trust for help.

And it was a traumatic experience for James.

He said: "My first day there was like the first day of school. I was nervous and didn't know what to expect.

"They take away your mobile phone, your wallet, and your keys, and you feel naked.

"But you soon realise you don't need these things really. Then the NET starts.

"The first three weeks were the hardest by far. Trying to go without drink after having so much for so long was really tough. But after that it got easier, and I started to feel good.

"After three months you start seeing things differently, because of the classes they put you in."

He spent nine days on the NET, and for him it was a con-



JAMES MCDUGALL: "This place has saved my life."

stant reminder of why he was in Borgue.

He said: "It makes you remember why you're here, and think 'I've got this on for a reason', and that helps you keep going.

"It also stops you thinking so much about the withdrawal. "It takes a bit of getting used to, but it really has helped me.

"It becomes a bit painful and irritating, and then you know it's time to take it off.

"Then the classes start."

James is nearing the end of his time with the Trust, and he sees how the treatment could help many people.

"I see people in the street just like I was, and I think how life doesn't need to be like that.

"But they need to want to change their life, or there's no point.

"When I was like that, couldn't see any way out. I was in a really bad way.

"But thanks to the church, and God, things are really on the mend now," he said.

As well as spending time in the Borgue rehabilitation centre, James stayed in the Teviot House re-settlement site in Dumfries for three weeks.

And that has shown James he can get through this hard time. He added: "I really surprised myself. I was off the leash for the time I was there, and I didn't relapse once.

"I came back here stronger and more confident."

James is now working with the Trust to gain qualifications to work towards going back to employment and is helping people who come into the centre for help.