



## **National drug & alcohol rehab welcomes first dog into treatment**

**Wednesday 17 September**

National drug and alcohol charity Phoenix Futures has welcomed its first four-legged resident into rehab after opening a block of kennels at its Wirral Residential Service.

The drug and alcohol service provider opened the block of new kennels earlier this year to help pet owners access treatment without having to give up their animals. The 18-month-old American Bulldog Buster, who arrived at the Upton Road residential service with his owner on Wednesday 9 September, has taken the first spot in the three kennels available for furry companions.

Phoenix believes this is the first residential rehab in the country which enables people to live with their dogs while receiving help for their drug and alcohol problems. The national charity's Hampshire Residential Service will soon be opening its own set of kennels, after the positive response from dog owners wanting to access treatment.

Buster's owner explained why the kennels were key to his recovery, he said: "I wouldn't have come into residential rehabilitation without my dog Buster. He is my best mate and I would be lost without him.

"I had tried to detox 12 months ago when Buster was about 6 months old, he was being cared for by a neighbour while I was supposed to be in detox for two weeks. I only lasted a week as I needed to get out to Buster."

"Since I arrived with Buster, both Buster and I have settled in well...the freedom he has been given has been fantastic and other residents are actually asking if they can walk him, so there is no lack of volunteers and helpers. Having Buster with me is so important and I couldn't do this without him!"

The Wirral Residential Service – which offers three-month treatment for people with substance misuse problems – opened its block of three kennels in July. Phoenix are now accepting referrals from local authorities and people who wish to book themselves into treatment. The dogs will be cared for in a safe and appropriate environment by their owners, trained professionals and other people in treatment at the service.

Karen Biggs, Phoenix Futures' Chief Executive, who officially opened the kennels, said: "We are so happy to welcome the first Phoenix dog into our services and we believe this is a big step in the right direction towards adapting treatment to fit the people who need it. At Phoenix we pride ourselves on ensuring our residential services respond to the needs of our service users. Many people in active addiction build strong ties with their dogs. Their dogs keep them warm and safe during periods of homelessness, give them unconditional love through the worst points in their lives and a reason to keep going when all other relationships appear irrevocably damaged.

"We know that no matter how entrenched someone's addiction is recovery is always possible. When people told us that they didn't want to choose between seeking the appropriate help for their addiction and their important relationships with their dogs, we decided to do something about it and now they don't have to choose."

Buster's owner added: "Buster is a lovable companion, very gentle and the amazing bond between us is unbreakable. I wouldn't be able to get through any of this without him, when I feel anxious, nervous or angry, just being with him makes me feel more relaxed and able to cope. I love him, he loves me and we love our time together."

If you would like to refer someone with a pet to the Wirral Residential Service email [wirral.residential@phoenix-futures.org.uk](mailto:wirral.residential@phoenix-futures.org.uk) or call 0151 652 2667 or visit our website [www.phoenix-futures.org.uk](http://www.phoenix-futures.org.uk)

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Notes to Editors

- Phoenix Futures is a leading provider of services for people with drug and alcohol problems.
- We offer services within community, prison and residential settings in England and Scotland.
- Established in 1967, Phoenix has 45 years' experience in helping people through recovery.

- Over 20,000 people every year begin their treatment with Phoenix Futures.