

## LAURA LOVES, LAURA LOATHES

*Laura Graham gives a personal perspective on the news, trends, people and events she encounters as she travels across the country. A close encounter places her in favour of the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners' trust. Out of favour: unexplained statistics – but she does offer a prize for suggestions.*

**LAURA LOVES...** the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust. I have been aware of the great work of the charity RAPt for years, having previously worked for the National Offender Management Service developing drug policy. During that time, I had the privilege to meet RAPt graduates in prison and post release. I had sat in meetings with RAPt top brass for years engaging in debate about how to improve the recovery landscape for people in prison with a drug problem.

Additionally, since leaving that role I have continued to remain in contact with RAPt through the volunteer support they provide at UKESAD, the annual UK/European Symposia on Addictive Disorders. I am lucky to now have friends who have completed the RAPt programme.

However impressed I had been about RAPt paled into significance when I attended the annual RAPt reunion in central London at the beginning of October. The event was amazing and brought into sharp relief exactly what RAPt does. Impressed is too light a word to use. With about 300 people present, the day was opened and facilitated by director of services Dave Mulvaney, who explained that this reunion was particularly special as it was the first of a year of celebrations to mark RAPt's 21st birthday.

A film of the Serenity Shack, a prefab at HMP Downview, provided a backdrop to RAPt's early days and triggered memories from the audience for people who had started their recovery journey there many years ago. This included Frank, the first-ever RAPt graduate, who found recovery through RAPt as a life-sentenced prisoner. He described that he had witnessed the drug dealers at HMP Downview move out landing by landing as prisoners found recovery through the RAPt programme there.

Inspirational speeches followed, including from RAPt chair Dr Michael Wilkes who was full of praise for the charity's staff and peer supporters, a sentiment that was reiterated during CEO Mike Trace's speech later in the day and from RAPt graduates throughout the day.

We heard from John a RAPt graduate of 13 years and now on the board of RAPt, about how it had changed his life.

Dominic Ruffy of the Concordat Graduates took to the stage and, to his biggest audience so far, raised awareness among RAPt graduates about the campaign to improve access to residential rehab for more people (see page??), inviting RAPt graduates to join the Concordat Graduate network.

We also heard from Helen a graduate of five years who explained that, through the RAPt programme, she "learned the concept of abstinence" and now has a "life that she loves full of dancing and holidays" totally different to her previous life.



The afternoon provided an opportunity for an open mike session. This also included a live link-up to the Mount prison in Hertfordshire and the men there currently working a RAPt programme, peer supporters and staff. The cheer that greeted them from the reunion building at the start of the link-up was loud enough to be heard in Hertfordshire!

During the open mike, we heard story after story of how people's lives had changed as the result of RAPt. Mark told us how he attended the reunion three years ago in handcuffs on day release from HMP Swaleside and was able to join us this year as free man with a family and job. Terry explained how he had spent 16 years in prison and that RAPt had changed him from being "anti-social to pro-social". Pani treated us to his 12-step rap and Nicky sang *Over the Rainbow*.

Adam was joined by his mum and aunt and expressed gratitude to his RAPt peer supporters who "taught him how to live" by acting as his role models in prison.

Ian had found RAPt at HMP Coldingly where, having spent his early years in care, he had become institutionalised. RAPt changed his view and, since his release from prison, he has travelled to Canada and is working three jobs to save enough money to travel the world.

Dwayne, on day release from prison, explained that before RAPt his behaviour had never been challenged. He had spent 16 of 34 years in prison but said that through RAPt he was "in prison but free".

The recovery energy in the room was tangible as share after share from the men and women highlighted how RAPt had changed people's lives.

The organisation is a bee-hive of activity behind the walls of prison and beyond with community link ups in Hull, London and Birmingham. Joe, currently at HMP Mount said that he hoped to be at the reunion next year – I have hope of meeting him!

For more information about RAPt, visit [www.rapt.org.uk](http://www.rapt.org.uk).

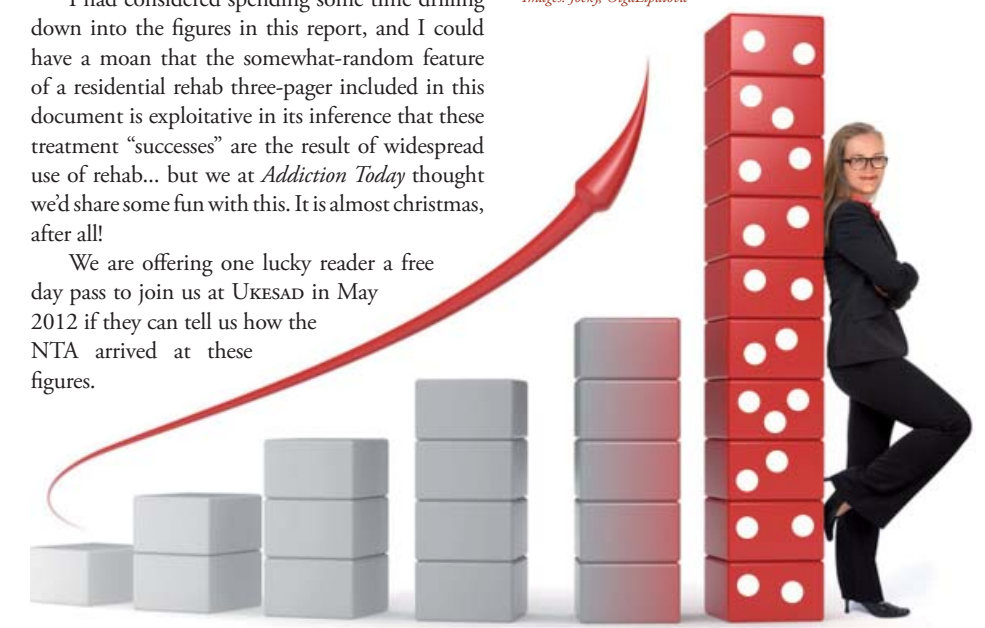
**LAURA LOATHES...** Lies.

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics" is a phrase popularised by Mark Twain describing the way in which numbers can be presented to support weak arguments or claims. I learned this phrase at "research school" many years ago and it resurfaced to the front of my memory when I read the National Treatment Agency's most recent PR exercise, *Drug Treatment and Recovery in 2010-11*. Even the title misdirects, given that the NTA's definition of recovery is yet to be announced.

The headline statement of the report claims that "The NDTMS figures for 2010-11 reveal that 27,969 adults left the drug treatment system free from dependency in 2010-11 – an increase of 18% compared to 2009-10 (23,680) and 150% compared to 2005-06 (11,208)". Please note that these figures refer to people who "successfully" completed treatment – that is, they are no longer in contact with services and have not seen again, so might have in fact died! These figures are not the result of any post-treatment follow up study.

I had considered spending some time drilling down into the figures in this report, and I could have a moan that the somewhat-random feature of a residential rehab three-pager included in this document is exploitative in its inference that these treatment "successes" are the result of widespread use of rehab... but we at *Addiction Today* thought we'd share some fun with this. It is almost christmas, after all!

We are offering one lucky reader a free day pass to join us at UKESAD in May 2012 if they can tell us how the NTA arrived at these figures.



Images: Jocky, OlgaLipatova

By the way, Mr Hayes, I am delighted that you read my column, to the point that you not only created a response letter and press release to a rhetorical question in my last article, but also gave it top billing on the NTA web homepage. But on this occasion there is no need to respond: I have checked with *Addiction Today* board of trustees and you are more than welcome to join us at UKESAD anytime, at our expense, for the full three days! We would love you to enjoy the company of 600 or more professionals in full recovery.

Answers to [info@addictiontoday.org](mailto:info@addictiontoday.org); please mark the subject box "Mark Twain Statistics" by 31 December 2011.



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