- The Blue Light Approach:

Commissioning Services to high risk and entrenched dependent drinkers

March 2026

The starting point

At any one time the majority of dependent drinkers are not engaged in services, and of those who do engage approximately 50% will quickly drop out.

Alan

- Homeless 53-year-old who died in a fire in 2020.
- Cause: accident with a cigarette in a garage where he was sleeping
- Long history of alcohol and drug misuse, physical & mental health concerns, repeated impulsive suicidality
- Longstanding and repeated involvement public services including the police, adult social care and health services.
- Alan had been involved with the criminal justice system since age 19:
    - 585 arrests.
    - 301 convictions in relation to 516 offences.

Alan

In one 3 day period just before his death, Alan had the following service contacts:

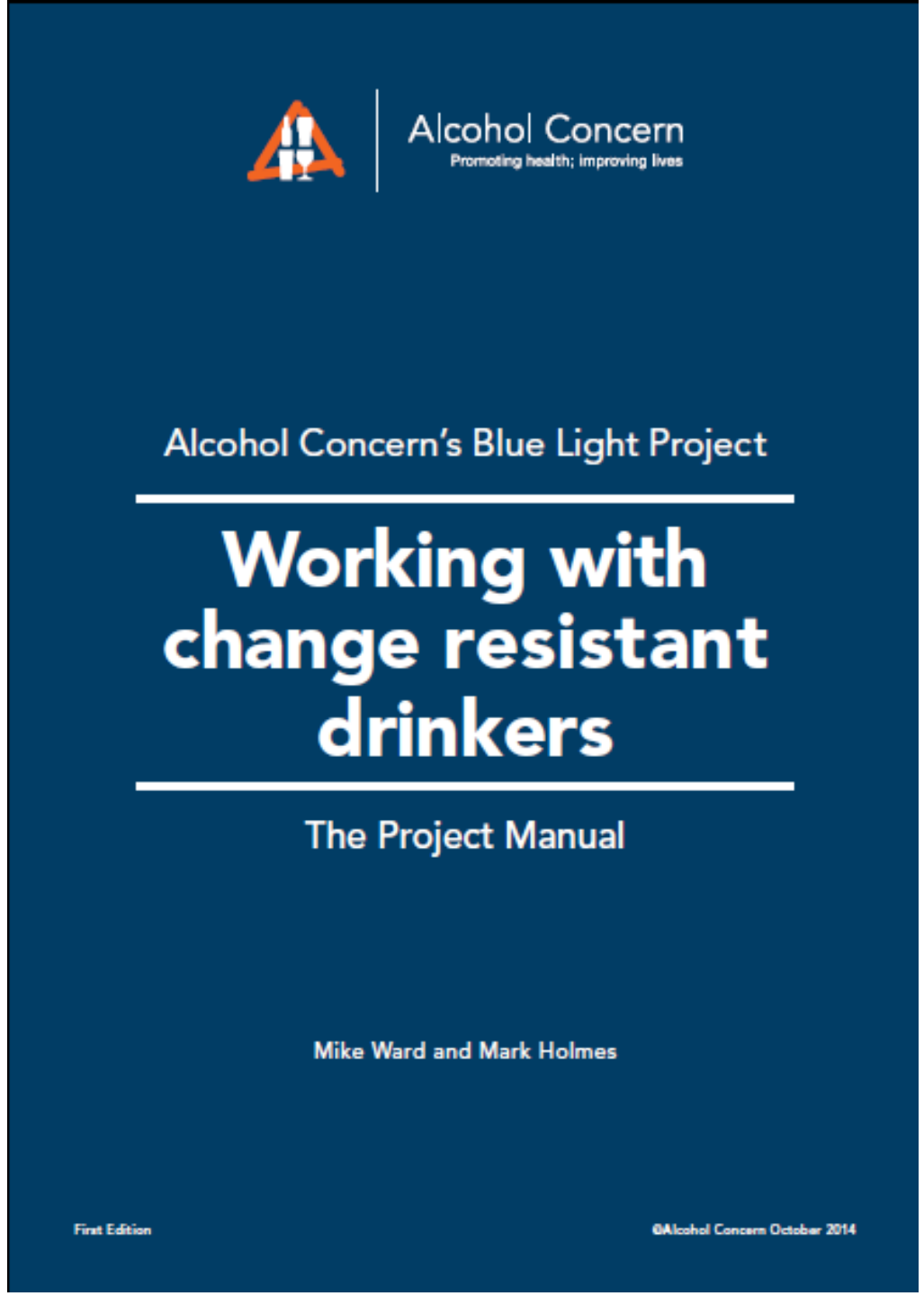
- Police called to incident in a fast food restaurant
- Ambulance called to same incident
- Alan taken to hospital due to head injury
- Alan admitted for observation but self-discharges
- Police bring him back to hospital but he is discharged
- Contact between Police and Probation about Alan's residence and potential exploitation

Alan

- Attends Substance Misuse Service intoxicated
- Police called to Substance Misuse Service
- Mental Health Trust receive call from a church saying Alan is with them and suicidal
- Unplanned presentation at Substance Misuse Service
- Multi-agency meeting held at Probation about Alan

Alan

- He had at least one very serious TBI 15 years earlier due to jumping in front of a train.
- In the last 14 months of his life he had 15 head injuries.


Alcohol Concern
Promoting health; improving lives
Alcohol Concern's Blue Light Project
Working with change resistant drinkers
The Project Manual
Mike Ward and Mark Holmes
First Edition
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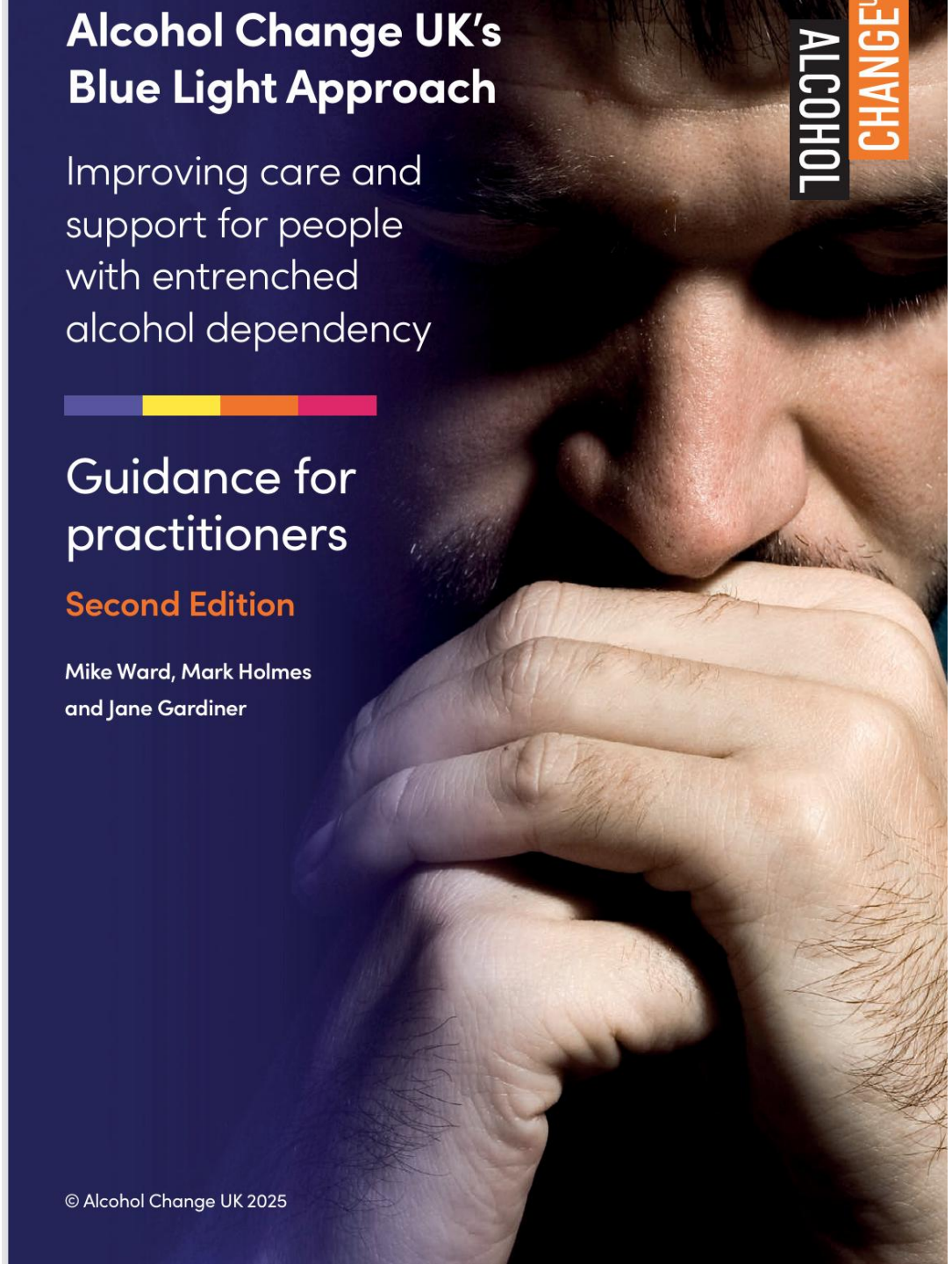
Alcohol Change UK's
Blue Light Approach
Improving care and support for people with entrenched alcohol dependency
Guidance for practitioners
Second Edition
Mike Ward, Mark Holmes and Jane Gardiner
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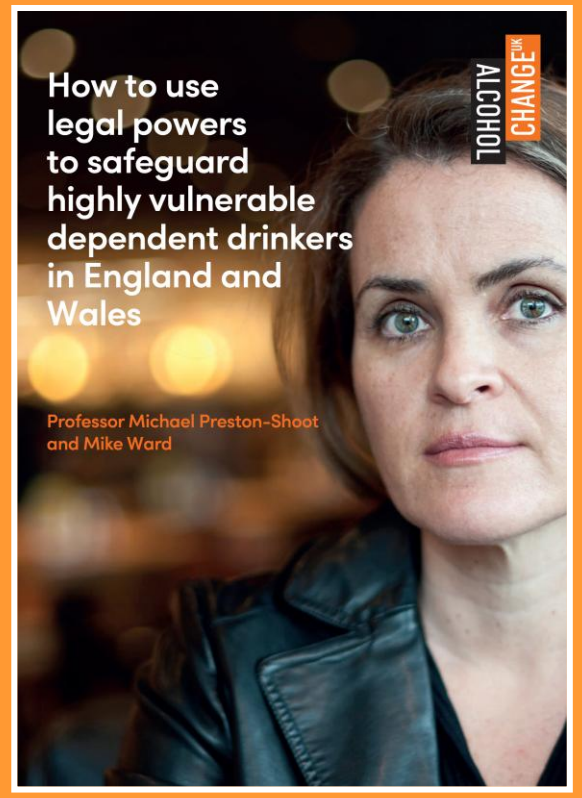
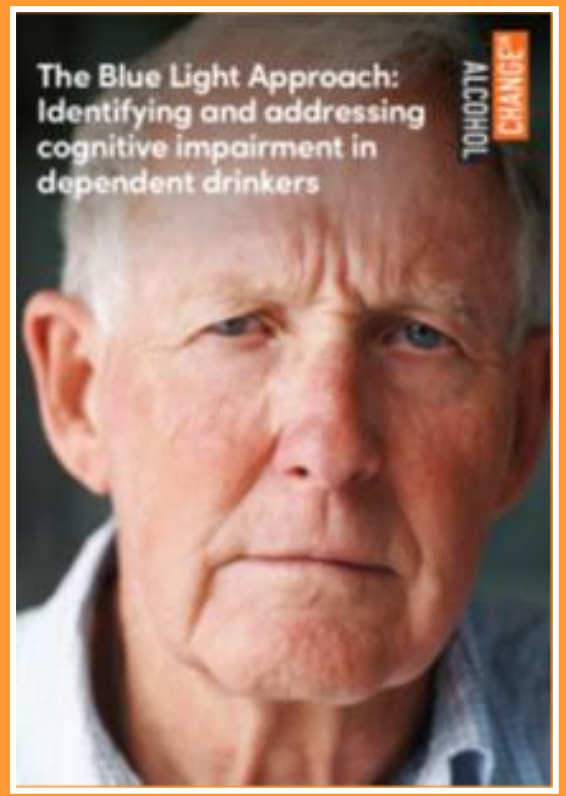
Basic message

- **We should not write off people who do not want to change their drinking.**
- **There are things you can do to make a difference.**

Our other multi-partner projects





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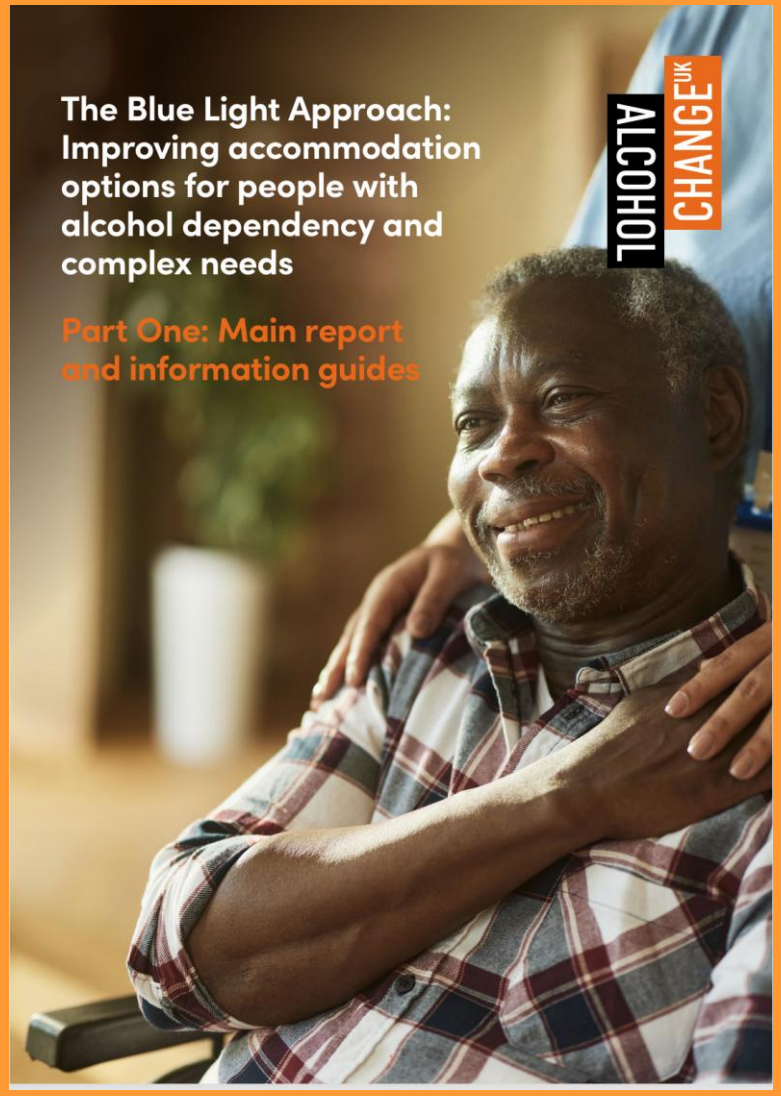
Our most recent multi-partner guidance



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NB: Neurodiversity

- We are now working on a multi-partner project on neurodiversity and entrenched dependent drinkers

The key question

- What works?

- ACUK's Blue Light project manual will be the best guide to the types of practical intervention to be used. These will include harm reduction, dietary approaches and motivational interventions that work with these clients.

But also

- The DH Clinical Guidelines for Alcohol Treatment
- Clinical guidelines for alcohol treatment - Guidance - GOV.UK

Outreach works

Outreach is the best evidenced intervention

- Surrey evidence
- Wigan, Notts, Salford, Lincs

- ACTAD - £1 spent on assertive outreach can save £3.42

Multi-agency groups

- Multi-agency groups
- e.g. Medway, Northumberland, Surrey & Sandwell

- *Team around the person*

- Build as much of an outreach approach into your intervention as possible.
- The best approach is multi-agency management plus outreach

Beyond AO…

- The Blue Light manual highlights a whole range of engagement, harm reduction and motivational techniques

The accommodation project: key message

Without appropriate accommodation, dependent drinkers will find it hard to achieve any kind of reduction in harm or long-term recovery.

Moving Forward:
Accommodation is a journey not a place.

Every local area needs a strategy to

support dependent drinkers to move

through a system of residential options

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The five themes of the guidance

- Building the case for investment and change (section 2 of the guidance)
- The need for a system approach (section 3)
- Accommodation - options and models (section 4)
- Managing alcohol in existing care homes (section 5)
- Developing an Improvement Plan – commissioning a system of accommodation for complex dependent drinkers (section 6)

The partnership self-audit tool

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Audit questions - Managing alcohol in existing care homes	Yes	No
Have the training needs of general housing/residential care staff been assessed in terms of alcoho		
the physical effects of alcoh		
Is relevant alcohol-related tr		

Audit questions - Building the case for investment and change	Yes	No
Has the case been built locally for investing in meeting the accommodation needs of complex dependent drinkers? (2.1)		
Has there been an assessmen accommodation? (2.2)		
Has there been a costing of the im		
Has evidence on the housing ne people with lived experience, alc reviews. (2.4 & 2.1.4)		
Has there been work on reducing elected decision-makers, to unc accommodation? (2.5)		

Audit questions - A system of support	Yes	No
Do local Housing and Homelessness Strategies		
Is there a housing strategy for dependent drinke		
Has consideration been given to the geography		
Is there a mapping of local pathways into, thro drinkers? (3.4)		
Are there services that support people into, thro		
Are there interventions that stop people becor abandonment)? (3.5)		
Are there outreach-type services that support pe		
Are there pathways from prisons and hospitals i		
Have the training needs of staff working with c housing related themes e.g. housing law? (3.8)		
Are there performance indicators for this area of		

Audit questions - Accommodation options and models (Section 4)	Yes locally	Yes but not locally	No
Are dependent drinkers able to access the following types of accommodation:			
Accommodation that requires abstinence ("dry houses") (4.2)			
Complex needs facilities, night shelters and general accommodation that takes people with alcohol use disorders (4.3)			
Temporary housing (4.4)			
Accommodation that specifically allows ongoing drinking by people with alcohol use disorders ("Wet Houses") (4.5)			
Managed Alcohol Programmes (4.6)			
Facilities for people with co-occurring disorders (dual diagnosis) (4.7)			
Residential care for people with cognitive impairment both short-term and long-term (4.8)			
Women-only facilities (4.9)			
Domestic violence refuges which accept people with alcohol use disorders (4.10)			
Housing first - Single person accommodation with support (4.11)			
Facilities that can accept people on a DOLS (4.12)			
Facilities that can accept people on an Alcohol Treatment Requirement (or Positive Requirement) (4.13)			
Services that can take people with specific needs (4.14)			

	Yes	No
Are these services offering Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)? (4.15)		
Are there performance indicators for this area of work?		

- Any questions?
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