

Chris Murphy, Chairman, Balloon Dog

I have worked in the advertising industry in Norfolk for over 30 years and have been an employer for more than 20 of those.

Over that time there have been two occasions where a member of staff has been seriously affected by addictive behaviour. Although both people concerned had been experiencing difficulties for some time, we didn't discover the problem until they were either late in their employment or had already left the company. Naively or not, we didn't expect it and were quite shocked when we found out. Although myself and the senior management team tried to offer the very best support we could in the circumstances, none of us had received professional training on how to handle such a situation and without expert guidance it is difficult to know if you are providing the appropriate help and advice.

I now believe that it is really important for employers to prepare and formulate an approach in case they are required to support someone struggling with addictive behaviour in the workplace. I think it's vital not to over-react, or invade people's privacy, but to know some of the tell-tale signs to look out for and where to go for help; somewhere like NORCAS.

My advice to other business owners is not to ignore any unusual patterns of behaviour. The signs are not always, or even often, the classic stereotypical behaviours of those with alcohol or drug problems that are often portrayed in films or on television. In the cases that affected us, the symptoms were quite subtle; lack of concentration, needing to repeat conversations, erratic timekeeping and moodiness. Above all I would urge employers to intervene in some way, rather than hope the problem will go away and to let your employees know they can come to you if they have an issue. The earlier that people get help, the greater chance they have of overcoming their problems and changing their lives for the better.