



Recovering drug addicts at the Beijing Drug Rehabilitation Center work in a vegetable garden as part of a vocational program. Provided to China Daily

Focus on psychotherapy is intended to combat the high relapse rate

One of Beijing's government-run drug rehabilitation centers is introducing new programs and building new facilities to try and boost such centers' so-far-dismal rate of success.

At least 95 percent of supposedly recovered drug addicts who leave drug detoxification centers in the capital relapse into addiction within a few years, said Yang Baohang, the vice-director of the Beijing Drug Rehabilitation Center.

There are two government-run rehabilitation centers in the capital - the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau supervises the Beijing Drug Rehabilitation Center and the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice manages the Beijing Tiantanghe Detoxification and Rehabilitation Center. The former has recently adopted psychotherapy techniques, including arts-based therapy and exercise therapy and is constructing a facility filled with equipment for team-building initiatives in a effort to keep more recovered addicts from relapsing once they leave the center.

More than 570 drug addicts are currently undergoing compulsory narcotic detoxification programs at the Beijing Drug Rehabilitation Center, about 110 women and 460 men, who are 18 years old to 62 years old.

Most drug addicts arrested by Beijing police are forced to spend a minimum of two years in rehabilitation programs.

"It's easy for their bodies to become less dependent on the drug, but much more difficult for them to get off the drugs psychologically," said Yang.

According to Yang, most addicts go through an intensive 21 days detoxification at the start of their two years of programs.

"In the first week they take Methadone to alleviate withdrawal symptom and the dose is gradually decreased," said Yang.

Most withdrawal symptoms go away during this intensive 21-day detoxification, but there is still much work to do, he added.

"The key is to eliminate their psychology dependency on drugs," said Yang.

In March the center will spend 430,000 yuan (\$62,957) building a 600-sq-m facility, which will include equipment for team-building initiatives such as traversing rope and chain bridges. "These physical initiatives will foster their team spirit, increase their sense of honor and help them recover their cognitive ability, all of which is conducive to their psychological rehabilitation," he said.

Besides giving addicts lectures on psychology twice a week, the center has started using tailored one-on-one psychological therapies, including music therapy and sand-play therapy.

In one new form of cathartic therapy, addicts at the center practice boxing to unleash their anger and anxiety.

There are 20 qualified psychologists working at the center alongside 30 policemen.

Most of the new psychological exercises are meant to cultivate the addicts' interest in life and give them a way other than drugs to relieve pressure, said Li Lixin, a psychologist at the center.

Some people become so addicted to drugs, both biologically and psychologically, that they are unable to derive pleasure from anything in life, said Li.

Such addicts tend to become introverted or depressed and start withdrawing from their social circles and family, which often only further fuels their dependency on drugs, added Li.

Helping recovering addicts regain the ability to feel good without drugs and helping them rebuild social and communications skills is crucial, said Li.

The Beijing's Drug Rehabilitation Center is much different than the Chinese rehabilitation centers and detention houses described in the New York Times on Jan 7, said Yang. The story, which did not name the centers, described the life of drug addicts as "an unremitting gantlet of physical abuse and forced labor without any drug treatment." The story also said addicts did not get basic medical care, even when sick.

Addicts who fall ill in the Beijing Drug Rehabilitation Center during the detoxification period are immediately treated in the hospital, free of charge, according to Yang.

Police arrested Chen Qingshuang, a 45-year-old male drug addict from Heilongjiang province, in July 2008 due after he took methamphetamine hydrochloride in Beijing.

On Dec 13, 2009, while at the Beijing Drug Rehabilitation Center he had a heart attack and the police on duty immediately sent him to the center's emergency room, said Yang.

After taking medicine his condition improved and six policemen then sent him to a coronary care specialist at Fuwai Hospital for heart surgery, according to Yang.

The center paid the 70,000-yuan operation fee, said Yang.

The center provides six sets of uniforms, underwear and socks, worth a total of 2,300 yuan, and gives a 300-yuan food allowance to each addict, said Yang.

Four drug addicts share each bedroom, which has a television set and air conditioning. They also have access



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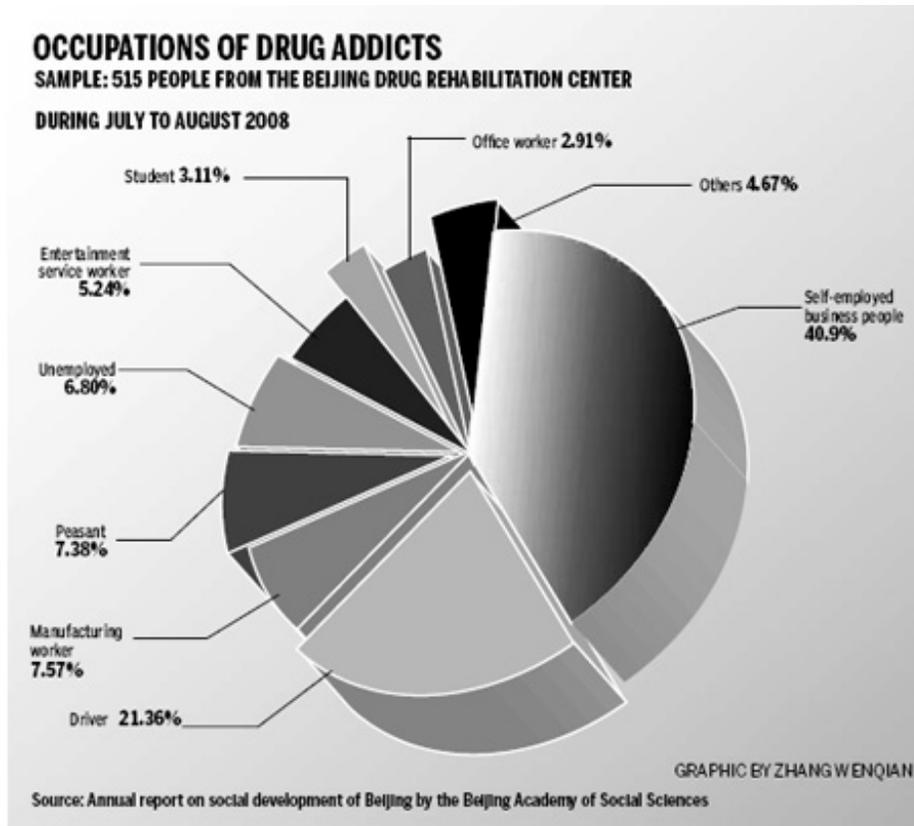


to ping-pong tables and pool tables for recreation.

Addicts also have the option to grow eggplants, cabbage, cucumbers, pears and cherries in a 50-sq-m garden.

The Center will spend 300,000 yuan in 2010 to expand its vocational training programs for addicts, said Yang.

The vocational programs will help recovered addicts reintegrate into society once they are discharged, he said.



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