



* British Case Study Available For Interview

PRESS RELEASE 21.12.11

The Catering Industry Comes Under Fire As Chefs Turn To Addictive Substances To Cope

With 25% of British admissions coming from the catering industry, leading rehabilitation centre The Cabin, Chiang Mai, are keen to highlight the additional dangers that chefs and catering staff come under in the kitchen. With Christmas only days away, many in the food and beverage industry will be turning to illegal substances to get through the festive days.

The expression 'if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen' came into popular usage for good reason, as anyone who has worked in this area of the catering industry will be able to testify. Not only is it a physically warm environment to work in, it is also a high pressure environment in which bullying is common place and tempers are quick to flare. Under these circumstances it is no surprise that addiction is rampant among chefs who resort to addictive substances, most typically cocaine or alcohol, in order to help them cope with the pressure and stress of their everyday working life.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the food and beverage industry has addiction rates which are second only to professions which involve regularly engaging in dangerous or life threatening activity. The popular perception of a chef's life is influenced by glamorous TV programmes such as Hell's Kitchen and Masterchef but more often than not it consists of long hours and low pay.

Alistair Mordey is Head Counsellor at The Cabin in Chiang Mai, a treatment centre which caters to affluent addicts from all over the world. He says that a disproportionately high percentage of his clients come from the food and beverage industry, where a combination of stress, irregular work hours and a "work hard, play hard" lifestyle lead to many addiction problems. In fact, they are the number one industry by profession in treatment at The Cabin, Chiang Mai.

"Addiction is much more common in the industry than anyone actually realizes. There is very little research on the subject but virtually every week someone from this industry will arrive at The Cabin seeking treatment for addiction. Their stories tend to be quite similar, they work in fast paced environments and are under a lot of pressure and turn to drugs and alcohol to help them cope."

According to Mordey the vast majority of chefs who come to The Cabin are classified as 'functional addicts', people who are able to maintain an addiction without allowing their professional lives to fall into total chaos because of it. To become a successful chef requires talent, confidence and the ability to perform several challenging tasks simultaneously. These are also traits which are extremely prevalent amongst functioning alcoholics and addicts which might be one of the reasons that chefs are much more prone to addictive tendencies. Because of the high adrenalin work environment, alcohol is often used to come down after work and then drugs like cocaine are used come back up in order to perform at work the next day. Functional addicts can survive a long time like this but this cycle is inevitably unsustainable and destructive.

Mordey feels that addiction is a problem which is either being inadvertently overlooked or deliberately brushed under the carpet and something which the food and beverage industry should be doing more to address,

“Either people don’t realize it is happening or they don’t want to acknowledge it, maybe because chefs traditionally have quite a ‘macho’ image and don’t want to admit to any sort of weakness. I think the catering industry should definitely be doing more to raise awareness of the issue and to provide help and support to people who are struggling with addiction. Chefs, like all other addicts, need to realize that admitting that they have a problem and asking for help is not a sign of weakness.”

Editor’s Notes:

- Alastair Mordey (BA hons, RDAP, ADAP) is the Programme Director and Head Counsellor at The Cabin, an addiction treatment centre in Chiang Mai. He is a certified and accredited addiction counsellor with over 10 years’ experience working in treatment services. Website: www.thecabinchiangmai.com.
- We have a British case study available for interview, for more details please use contact details below.

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