



Spotlight on Homeless Women – 20th June 2012 Event Report

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of the Spotlight Event

- i) To update delegates on recent research findings around women's homelessness and related issues.
- ii) To improve knowledge, skills and highlight good practice when supporting homeless women, many of whom have complex needs.
- iii) To recognise and improve partnership working between the homelessness and women's sectors.

1.2 Kate Green – MP and Shadow Spokesperson for Women and Equality

Kate Green (MP for Stretford and Urmston) and Shadow Spokesperson for Women and Equality opened the event, congratulating Homeless Link, St Mungo's and Women's Resource Centre for organising it and agencies for attending.

Kate reiterated the importance of agencies making sure that the Government sees the "whole picture" of policy reform; including women's homelessness – the problems, solutions, causes and drivers which lead to discrimination in our society. Kate stressed it is therefore crucial that the agencies present today opened up debate to ensure the correct provision of services for homeless women.

She acknowledged that the current climate of funding cuts and policy change is a very difficult time for women and agencies working with homeless women.

As part of St Mungo's Action Week 2012, Kate had visited a St Mungo's project and met women who have experienced sexual and domestic violence. She heard first hand about some of the issues these women are currently experiencing.

Kate invited agencies present at the event to let her know what needs to happen, so she and her colleagues can be "as noisy as possible" in Parliament around women's issues.

Kate stayed for most of the morning's plenary session.

2. Presentations

2.1 Alexia Murphy, St Mungo's Women's Homelessness Statistics, Research and Services

Alexia Murphy is St Mungo's Director of New Business and she is the organisational lead on women.

St Mungo's has been operating for 43 years and provides 1,700 units of accommodation in hostels and supported housing, including for people with complex needs.

240 women sleep out every night and account for 11% of rough sleepers recorded in local authority statistics. However St Mungo's believe that women are under-represented in street counts because in order to be counted they would have to put themselves in significant danger. They will sleep in hidden areas or during the day for safety reasons, so the number is likely to be far higher. The numbers of women known to be rough sleeping are only the "tip of the ice-berg" since many women live in squats and crack houses, sofa surf, remain in violent relationships or in insecure housing situations, rather than risk sleeping on the streets. The real problem of homelessness among women could be as extensive as men.

The Combined Homeless and Information Network (CHAIN) data base recorded a total of 658 individual women sleeping rough in the 2010-11 period. However, only 1% of clients said they became homeless as a result of domestic violence. This indicates a problem with reporting, and given the circumstances that outreach workers are often assessing women rough sleepers in – as one of a couple, in crisis and high levels of mental health issues, it is unsurprising that many assessments don't touch on domestic violence experiences. St Mungo's research report Battered, Broken, Bereft (2011), found that 35% of its women clients who had slept rough, did so after escaping domestic violence.

18,300 women live in supported accommodation (29% of the total). 30,200 women make up the total statutory homeless figures (76%). 46% of St Mungo's female clients have slept rough. Both research and statistics show that the numbers of homeless women are on the increase.

Causes of Women's Homelessness

Alexia suggested that there are complex and overlapping issues why women become homeless, including past trauma and abuse, loss of children, mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, involvement in the criminal justice system, immigration issues and a lack of relevant services. Services can fail to build up enough trust with women for them to disclose the experiences that they have had, and the support that they need.

Accommodation Provision for Homeless Women

According to Homeless Link data, in England there are:

- 27 women-only specialist accommodation projects
- 32 women-only emergency accommodation projects and
- 154 women-only second stage accommodation projects.

Of these projects only 2% of services are in London.

There has been a 40% reduction in women-only specific accommodation in the last year (Homeless Link 2012 Homeless Watch: Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP)).

Complex Needs

Many homeless women have complex needs and may present with a range of issues when accessing services. A recent profile of St Mungo's female clients showed that:

- 66% are white or Irish
- They tend to be younger i.e. aged 25-30
- 50% have significant health problems
- 29% had alcohol use issues
- 10% had used children's services
- 54% were involved in prostitution
- 33% reported domestic violence
- 53% had experienced domestic violence from a partner or a relative
- At any one time 10 women living in St Mungo's projects are pregnant.

St Mungo's has found that women are often linked in to multiple services, however as no single service is tasked with achieving the overall outcome with the women there isn't a joined up response – services don't meet their needs and women get batted between lots of different services like a “human pin ball machine” or fall through the cracks due to gaps in service provision.

Women need integrated services that are specifically designed to meet their needs.

Research on Women's Homelessness

The [Outcomes Star](#) records progress across 10 different areas including physical health, drug and alcohol use, managing money and offending. St Mungo's noticed in 2008 that women were not travelling as far as men on the Outcomes Star, despite St Mungo's client centred approach. Women scored higher in levels of self care and managing money, and generally had more qualifications than men, but in all other areas were coming into services with higher levels of support need than their male peers.

It was only when St Mungo's mapped the outcomes star to the [Cycle of Change Model](#) that they noticed the importance of the starting point, what offers staff were making and when they were doing this. Points 1-3 on the Outcomes Star equates to the “pre-contemplative” stage on the Cycle of Change Model and a score of between

3-6 equates to a “contemplative stage”. Women were coming into services at a more pre-contemplative stage than men and this meant that the initial offer needed to be a place of safety and someone to listen to, rather than pushing interventions such as rehab or training courses.

St Mungo’s peer-led research “A Better Deal for Women” identified that the main support issues for women are more emotional and relational. Children and families are a key recovery goal for women. It is therefore important for those working with women to resolve these issues, along with childhood abuse and neglect. Staff need to give clients space so they can tell their stories and they need to be skilled to talk about sexual abuse.

Revolving Doors and St Mungo’s carried out some research called “Missing Families” which looked at the importance of children and family to women in homelessness services. It found that re-establishing contact with children was the key recovery goal for many women. Others needed more support to grieve children they had lost.

The research also identified that a more psychologically informed approach, with better support for staff was required. The research noted that homelessness agency staff need to develop good relationships with local authority Children’s Social Services departments.

St Mungo’s are currently in the process of developing a series of legal briefings which staff can use with clients, so they are clear of their legal rights when they have children in children’s services or care proceedings, when they have experienced Domestic Abuse or when in court regarding fines and sanctions for prostitution..

St Mungo’s Lifeworks Project, a psycho-therapy project has been very successful when working with homeless women. When using the service women can carry on drinking, sex working and using drugs etc. This alternative approach has helped many women move from a pre-contemplative to a contemplative stage in their recovery.

St Mungo’s Rebuilding Shattered Lives Campaign 2012

St Mungo’s Rebuilding Shattered Lives Campaign is a call for solutions to women’s homelessness and is designed to shout about all the good practice and work that is going on with homeless women. The campaign will run for 18 months (to approx. December 2013) and focuses on nine themes. Every two months the campaign will focus on a specific theme, the first one is housing and homelessness (ends 31st August 2012). The second theme is domestic violence and will start in September 2012. Alexia urged all those present to sign up to the campaign and post examples of good practice and case studies. This will then be disseminated to central and local government and a range of support sectors to influence both policy and practice. To sign up, click on “join our campaign” at the top of the www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org web page.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Are you aware of any research relating to early solution focussed interventions designed to help women?

A: Alexia wasn't aware of any and commented that most sector research is focussed on problem evidence, but lacked research on solutions.

Q: Are you aware of any progress in developing No Second Night Out (NSNO) women's hub?

A: As a sector we need further research on women rough sleepers, so we can develop the correct services.

2.2 John Bentham, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Accommodation Trends

Accommodation plays an important part in the solution to homelessness and domestic violence.

Two women are killed every week by their partner.

There have been huge financial cuts at a local level; however this approach may be very short term.

Homelessness statistics are increasing after a long period of them decreasing. For example in 1999, 6% of people were deemed in priority need; however in 2010 this had fallen to 3%.

Unfortunately domestic violence data can't be broken down by age, ethnicity etc., but homelessness acceptances data can be.

In London there are some areas with high number of domestic violence priority need acceptances, however this tends to be lower than for the rest of England and the reason for this isn't clear. John said he would speak to the DCLG specialist advisors to highlight these statistics.

DCLG's Research and Recent Actions

In 2003 the DCLG published 3 reports:

Single Women – recognised that housing related support is vital to help people get help. The local authority response is very important. If a person gets a poor service, they are likely not to return to get help. This could be dangerous for the woman as she may return to a violent relationship.

Provision of Services – Ideally there should be 1 refuge space per 10,000 of the population. Some areas across England have good refuge provision e.g. London and

the South East, but other areas such as the North East, Yorkshire and Humber provision is less dense.

Sanctuary Schemes - areas such as the North East, Yorkshire and Humber is less dense. Where schemes operate it is important that the whole house is secure, not just one room.

The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness

The Inter-ministerial Working Group on Homelessness brings all the Government departments together. There has been a real impetus to end homelessness and has seen the introduction of initiatives such as NSNO, projects that encourage earlier intervention to avoid entrenchment. There is also the acknowledgement that services need to be more integrated and there needs to be better communication between some local authority departments and homelessness agencies. More work needs to be done in this area.

With changes to Supporting People, the welfare benefits system and the introduction of localism, John acknowledged that homelessness services face challenges over the coming years. Some people have expressed a concern that some smaller groups with specialist knowledge will be lost.

Agencies do have a voice and need to talk to local authorities now, since more power is being devolved to them. This is important so that local authorities understand the problems in the local area, how much these are costing them and how services for women can be improved. It is very important that the voluntary and community sector and local authorities work together more in the future.

Question and Answer Session

Q: What can the DCLG do around poor practice such as gate keeping?

A: Local organisations need to talk to the DCLG specialist advisors who will talk to the local authority concerned to help discuss strategy, understand the legislation and provide a better service.

Q: Wandsworth was named as a borough with poor practice. For example refusing to rehouse women despite them having children and experiencing domestic violence. What can be done in instances like this?

A: It is important for workers to understand the legislation and client rights (section 184). It is good practice for clients to take an advocate when they go to the local authority to get housing advice. It is possible to take legal action to bring the social landlord to account.

Q: Isn't it important for the Government to recognise the need to invest to save?

A: The DCLG has made the case for invest to save several times, however the Government are still going ahead with short/medium term plans. The voluntary sector needs to make the case, especially with the Comprehensive Spending Review coming up and with Supporting People money being moved into the Formula Grant.

2.3 Mary Mason, Solace Women's Aid Funding Cuts and Policy Change – Effect on Domestic Violence Services

Domestic violence cannot be seen as a lone issue. There are frequently other issues at play including mental health, substance misuse, no recourse to public funds and learning difficulties. Clients frequently have multiple needs and many only leave home as a last resort.

Solace is now dealing with more risky clients since there has been a decrease in the numbers of women leaving their social tenancy.

Currently there are insufficient refuge places to provide accommodation to those fleeing domestic violence. The situation is being made worse by some refuges closing due to the cuts. A recent Women's Aid survey showed that 230 women are turned away from refuges every day because there aren't sufficient refuge places available and there has been an increase in need.

The cuts have led to increased risks for women fleeing violent relationships.

Services are currently not delivering value for money since the emphasis is focused on crisis intervention, rather than prevention and support into independence.

Commissioning

In the current economic climate there is increased competition between services when competing for tenders. It is now more common for non-specialist services to win contracts when they do not have the expertise to support women with multiple needs, which is of concern. There seems to be a culture of reduced price and quality of services at a time when the numbers of homeless people are increasing. Some agencies may be tempted to "cherry-pick" clients who are easier to work with. This includes not accepting women who do not speak English.

It is vital that commissioners understand these women's needs and commission services accordingly. A national outcomes and commissioning framework for domestic and sexual violence services is needed so that generic commissioning tools are not used.

Outcomes of the Localism Act: Housing Allocations

Local authorities are able to decide on additional criteria for allocating social housing. We need to be aware that these criteria can be prejudicial to women and particularly those fleeing domestic and/or sexual violence.

Case Study: XXXX Council

XXXX's allocation policy bands people in categories from A-D. To get into band A and B the person needs to have lived in the borough for two years. However, refugees usually require women to move-on in nine to twelve months making it impossible for the women to get housed locally.

Also to get into bands A and B you need to be working or volunteering. It is very hard for women, especially those with young children who are living in a temporary refuge accommodation to work or to volunteer.

Some London boroughs have decided not to change their allocations policy.

Welfare Benefit Reform

Universal Credit will limit the amount of money women with larger families will have to spend on rent. It is highly likely that many families on benefits will be forced out of central London boroughs, or even out of London all together which disrupts social networks and children's education.

It is becoming more difficult to access the Social Fund and there is a move away from money to hand outs. In the future it is likely that women will have to pick up food parcels up from warehouses to support themselves.

Impact

Safety and security of women is at the heart of Solace's work, but they are currently faced with:

- A decrease in the number of refuge spaces and increased demand. This is resulting in a silting up of refuge spaces
- Women are relocating to London boroughs/out of London and have to make the choice of staying in violent relationships or moving out of area.

Action points

To secure women's safety and ensure their access to support, local and national government should:

- Make domestic violence an exception in borough allocations policies;
- Widen the reciprocal agreement which was piloted in the East London sub-region, is available in West London and has just been set up in North London;
- Ensure perpetrators are evicted from the home;
- Ensure that private rented sector accommodation properties are fit for purpose i.e. geographical, away from individuals/groups.

Voluntary sector organisations should respond to the DWP consultation on Welfare Benefit Reform.

Solace Women's Aid is carrying out research with Big Lottery funding into the long term impact of domestic violence. Two main issues have been identified: housing and isolation. Both issues need to be considered in the context of service development and vulnerability to re-victimisation.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Women frequently experience isolation when they move out of refuges. Is this an opportunity for Women's Aid to develop a wider reciprocal agreement?

A: There is frequently a lack of services, especially now with the cuts. There is also a trend of women moving out of London, which is putting pressure on services in these areas. There should be more training for floating support services staff. The suitability of the accommodation is key.

A pan-London reciprocal is currently being piloted (around gangs/crime), however this hasn't been widely advertised.

Q: When people are in danger, do we (the voluntary sector) need to be more militant?

A: What is more effective is to make a legal challenge around some of the cuts/reforms. For example, around changes to housing allocations and how this disadvantages women who are fleeing domestic violence. We need to look for cases and seek legal advice. Between us we should be able to get access to some pro bono legal advice. We need to exhaust legal methods in this country before approaching the European Courts. We all need to rise beyond what are reasonable issues at a local level and also talk to colleagues, family and friends to get these issues raised locally.

Q: Is there not a risk that by evicting perpetrators you perpetuate the problem, as this does not address the causes of their behaviour and they may prey on other women?

A: If perpetrators are living in family accommodation, in order to reduce the burden on women and children then perpetrators need to be evicted.

Q: It can be difficult for clients to be assessed since it is difficult to access local authority housing options gateways. Can you comment more on this?

A: It is good practice to accompany clients to Housing Options. Staff need to know and insist on client rights. A bank of standard letters and legal advice would be useful. Solace surgeries in housing options has been very successful. We need flagship cases for legal action so local authorities shift their practice, for example the Yemshaw v LB Hounslow case.

Q: Moving families out of their local area seems very unfair and detrimental. What are your thoughts?

A: We have already seen certain groups of people being stigmatised, for example asylum seekers being sent around the country and being given reduced amounts of benefits. Policies are being replicated to other vulnerable/at risk groups. The homelessness and domestic violence sectors need to work together more closely to share expertise – there is a whole wealth of experience both sectors as well as a wide range of cross cutting issues. The two sectors needs to be clear on what good communication looks like, what we should be communicating and why.

Q: Who are the experts at a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)?

A: MARAC is part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse and there is one MARAC in each borough. Domestic violence providers go along as experts.

3. Workshops

The afternoon session comprised of eight workshops:

1.15-2.15 Workshops

1. St Mungo's Women's Strategy and Work with Homeless Women Living in Hostels (St Mungo's)
2. Supporting women with experience of gender violence and complex needs (Nia Ending Violence)
3. Equality Impact Assessments, The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (WRC)
4. The 2012 London Olympics and Anti Slavery's Work Around Trafficked Women (Anti Slavery)

2.20-3.20 Group work

1. Homeless Link's Women's Sports Project (Homeless Link)
2. Working with Homeless Women with Mental Health Issues (St Mungo's)
3. Working with Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Trans Service Users (Stonewall Housing)
4. Effective Partnership Working Between DV and Substance Misuse Agencies (AVA Project)

Workshop notes and resources can be found on [Homeless Link's website](#).

4. Closing Remarks

With homelessness on the rise, more cuts and the Comprehensive Spending Review coming, it is vital that the homelessness and women's sectors work together to support vulnerable women to ensure they don't miss out.

We must resist divide and rule tactics, even when it seems that currently we are more in competition with each other rather than collaboration. We must work in partnership together.

All the presentations and workshop resources from the event can be found on [Homeless Link's website](#).

5. Key Policy Areas to take Forwards

At a meeting on the 24th July 2012, Homeless Link, St Mungo's and Women's Resource Centre staff discussed five key policy areas to take forward.

St Mungo's will be shortly circulating a legal briefing once finalised and Homeless Link will run a session on sexual abuse in the Autumn of 2012.

Homeless Link, St Mungo's and Women's Resource Centre will keep all those who attended the Homeless Women's event up to date with women's news, events and resources. Please do not hesitate to contact:

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Following on from the Spotlight event, below is a list of actions that can be taken by individuals and organisations:

1. Sign up to the campaign to improve services for homeless women at www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org Click 'join our campaign' at the top and then get a profile and can submit ideas, case studies and examples of good practice.
2. Tell Homeless Link about how the cuts and welfare benefit changes are affecting homeless women – email homelesswatch@homelesslink.org.uk.
3. Tell Kate Green MP about homeless women's issues.
kate.green.mp@parliament.uk.
4. To carry on the campaign to get the counting and monitoring of rough sleeping altered to incorporate women's experience of rough sleeping.
5. On CHAIN we need to work towards a breakdown of support needs by gender not just the figure for gender, in the key reports, for example service use, hostel abandonment etc.

6. Opportunities for Joint Working for the Future

1. Working with local authorities to ensure domestic violence is an exception in allocations policies
2. Looking for cases which can be used as a legal challenge against some of the reforms.
3. Running a national domestic violence campaign (agencies, not 2nd tier led).
4. Building closer working relationships between homelessness agencies and Children's Social Services departments.
5. Campaigning/lobbying for an interim/emergency arrangement under Universal Credit
6. Looking to widen the reciprocal arrangement across London. For example to keep the pan-London Reciprocal Agreement on the agenda at meetings such as London Council's Housing Needs and Homelessness meeting and to ask London boroughs to promote it more. Also to liaise with the London sub-

regional coordinators to promote the reciprocal arrangement and other women's homelessness prevention initiatives across London.

6. Attending each other's events and sharing consultation responses.
7. Look to re-establish a quarterly London women's housing and homelessness group.

7. References and Resources

[DCLG Domestic Violence - Assistance for Adults Without Dependent Children](#)

[DCLG Effectiveness of Scheme to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in Their Own Homes](#) and [Good Practice Guidance](#)

[DCLG's Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2012 Consultation](#)

[DCLG Meeting the Needs of Households at Risk of Domestic Violence in England: The Role of Accommodation and Housing-Related Support Services](#)

[St Mungo's - Broken, Battered, Bereft Report \(2011\)](#)

St Mungo's – A Better Deal for Women – Copies available on request. Email [**Esther.Sample@mungos.org**](mailto:Esther.Sample@mungos.org)

[St Mungo's and Revolving Doors Agency - Missing Families Report](#)

8. Useful Websites

[AVA Project](#)

[Homeless Link's Women's page](#)

[Homeless Link's Domestic Violence page](#)

[St Mungo's website](#)

[Solace Women's Aid website](#)

[Rebuilding Shattered Lives website](#)

[Women's Resource Centre website](#)

[Women's Aid website](#)