

Rebuilding Shattered Lives

Rebuilding Shattered Lives Theme Round Up: Housing and Homelessness

Lead by Expert Group member Jacqui McCluskey,
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What a great start to the campaign! Already almost 90 people have joined the campaign and we have received almost 30 submissions of best practice, ideas and information from across the UK, as well as from America, Australia and Ireland. I was particularly pleased to see so many views from women on what support has worked for them and what could be improved to prevent others going through the same experiences.

Their experiences have really emphasised the interlocking nature of the issues faced by women experiencing homelessness, and the need for support services to recognise this. Many of the issues raised will be explored in themes later in this campaign.

Below is a summary of the submissions received on the theme of Housing and Homelessness, grouped by the four areas we identified as critical within this theme.

Thank you to all of those who have joined in the campaign so far and contributed to the Showcase. Please do continue to share your good practice and ideas as the campaign moves forward and please do encourage others to also get involved!

Summary of submissions

1. Services that meet the complexity of needs of homeless and vulnerable women

“You need to be somewhere where the staff remind you of your life before abuse and homelessness and how it could get back to that. You need that motivation to get up each day and move forward.” Resident from St Mungo’s South London Women’s Hostel

The Rebuilding Shattered Lives Showcase received submissions from accommodation projects and day centres/specialist schemes for women, all of which have different approaches to providing support. For example;

- **Coventry Cyrenians women’s residential service** offers accommodation for 16 women in five shared houses and provides support in areas such as drugs, mental health and domestic violence
- **The Marylebone project in Westminster** combines accommodation and education/training in their approach which has supported around 7,000 homeless women back into independent living over the past 10 years.

We heard from **Brighter Futures** and the **New Horizon Youth Centre’s Women’s Open Space Programme** about specialist support schemes for homeless women, for example for those involved in prostitution, younger women, and offenders. These examples are also very relevant to other campaign themes.

We are particularly pleased to have received submissions from overseas supporters. From the United States we heard from **Calvary Women’s Services**, and **N Street Village** in Washington DC.



These services provide accommodation plus a range of support services which offer significant learning for us in the UK. Impressively, they suggest that 48% of the women accessing the project were employed, compared to 20% of all homeless people in DC. At N Street Village they offer six shelter and housing programs including ‘Miriam’s House’ which supports homeless women who are living with HIV and AIDS.

In Ireland, **Sonas Housing Association Ltd** provides housing, refuge and support to women and children who are homeless because of domestic violence, and **Macarthur Youth Connections** in Sydney Australia provide specialist accommodation to young women with a range of needs aged 14-21 years.

2. Women’s homelessness prevention services

“I think Councils are not as helpful as they should be to women who do not have dependent children. There was no way for me to find out about all the accommodation or housing schemes that I was eligible for. I think there are less single homelessness services out there for women because society perceives women as mothers and homemakers”
Resident from St Mungo’s North London Women’s Hostel

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Family Intervention Project works with families in danger of being evicted from their homes, having their children taken into care or falling into crisis. They offer families who are at risk a keyworker who becomes the link between the family and the services they need, helping families to regain control of their lives. **Wish** showcased their Community Link project that provides long-term holistic support to women with mental health needs when they leave prison, and also with women leaving secure hospitals – these are both critical points in women's lives which all too often can lead to homelessness without the right support.



A common issue raised was the lack of information available to women, with one woman suggesting that police stations, libraries and GP surgery's should all have information about housing and homelessness services that are available to women.

Many of the women who contributed directly to this theme highlighted the role of domestic abuse as a leading cause of homelessness, telling us that if they had received support to escape the situation they were experiencing, they would not have become homeless:

“Women need more support in their homes so the perpetrator can be arrested and they don't have to run away.”

Resident from St Mungo's North London Women's Hostel

“We need an emergency fund for women so they could independently sort out short term accommodation rather than waiting to get into a service. In abusive relationships often the perpetrator controls the finances.”

Volunteer on St Mungo's client representative body, Outside In.

3. Access to move-on support and housing for women

Many of the projects on the Showcase run move-on advice or rent deposit schemes to help women move into accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), for example **St Mungo's Women's Move on Course** and the **Tower Hamlets Family Intervention Project**.

Submissions on this topic showed some concerns and mixed experiences on moving into the PRS. For example, **Tower Hamlets Family Intervention Project** told us about a woman they supported who had fled an abusive relationship and was initially placed in temporary housing before moving into the PRS. They outlined how she had struggled because she hadn't received the support she needed;

“In her new [PRS] accommodation her housing benefits were paid to her directly, having never been responsible for managing the family's finances before. ...she quickly lost control of the situation and was unable to pay her rent on time. ...she found herself very isolated, suffering with depression, low self-esteem and alcohol problems brought on by the stress of repeated abuse and persistent emotional and psychological trauma.”

However, move on isn't just about housing;

“When I first got my flat I had time to think and started to feel lots of anger for the experiences I had been through. I know this is common and some even destroy their flat when they first get it. It needs to be recognised that some people need emotional support such as counselling to move on in their mind as well as in their housing situation.”

Volunteer on St Mungo's client representative body, Outside In.

Crisis showcased their **Women's Progression Coordinator** and **Skylight London Women's Zone**. These allow them to provide tailored support and women-only training and activities to homeless or vulnerably housed women, including education and preparation for employment. These are important issues that will be explored later in the campaign.

The value of education and employment in a successful move on for clients was echoed by a resident of St Mungo's North London Women's Project;

"I am going to St Mungo's Skills for Employment Training on Tuesdays including an IT class. I think this is a great way to help women move on from homelessness, and gets them away from the feelings of isolation, and the routine of being in a project."

4. Examples of good cross-boundary working or innovative funding for services

The Showcase received two excellent examples of cross boundary working. The **East London Housing Partnership** is establishing a project which will assist women with multiple needs such as substance misuse, physical and mental health problems, experience of abuse or involvement in prostitution. The Partnership also operates a rent deposit scheme for single women (and men) who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. These projects both allow women to move away from their local authority area if needed. For some women, this is incredibly important, as a resident from St Mungo's North London Women's Project explains:

"In the refuge I felt safe but another woman's partner found her and that had a bad impact on all the women there. Women need the option to move far away and change schools for their children."

In Lincolnshire the seven local housing authorities have a strong track record of working collectively, together with other agencies and service users, through the **Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy Group** (LHSG). Recently, they collectively commissioned a partner agency, Framework Housing Authority, to deliver a rough-sleeper project that has now supported 41 women across the region.

Research submitted to the Showcase

We were particularly pleased to have three pieces of research submitted to the Showcase which help to inform our thinking around this vital issue:

- **Crisis's 'The Hidden Truth About Homelessness'** report. This found that 28% of homeless women have entered an unwanted sexual partnership to gain a bed for the night, and 19% have engaged in sex work. Over half have experienced violence or abuse from a partner and rates of mental health issues were higher for women than men
- A review of the **Women's Night Service** by **Bristol University**. The service was a six-month pilot project providing emergency accommodation to vulnerable homeless women
- **Brighter Futures papers** on the **relationship between street homelessness and street sex work**. The papers highlight their methodology around complex needs.

Thank you again to all who submitted

If you would like to view all the submissions in full for this theme, please visit www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org and click on the 'Housing and Homelessness' theme.

The second theme of the Rebuilding Shattered Lives Campaign – **Supporting women who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence** – is now open for your submissions of good practice and innovations. We'd also welcome your thoughts on what needs to change to improve the lives of women who have experienced domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Find out more about the theme and get involved at www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org

Jacqui McCluskey, Director of Policy and Communications at Homeless Link.
