

NORTH LONDON WOMEN'S HOSTEL

St Mungo's has been providing accommodation for homeless people for over 40 years. Our North London Women's Hostel draws on this experience to deliver a specific service for vulnerable homeless women. Staff at the 29-bed service work with local agencies to provide intensive, holistic support designed to help women make a sustainable recovery from homelessness and move towards independent living.

SUPPORTING WOMEN WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

The North London Women's Hostel is designed for women with high needs, who often face a number of issues that both cause, and have been caused by, homelessness. Of current clients:

- 66 per cent have a significant medical condition
- Over half have a mental health problem
- 55 per cent have misused illicit or prescribed drugs.

Staff are trained to help clients address issues related to involvement in prostitution and domestic abuse; almost half of the women at the project have been involved in prostitution and 62 per cent have experienced violence or abuse from a partner or family member. The project has an on-site complex needs worker, who helps clients to access and sustain treatment for substance use and mental health problems.

Staff at the project work to ensure that clients' support needs are met; staff also aim to help clients feel valued through maintaining a pleasant and welcoming environment, where they can feel safe and begin to look forward to a positive future.



A PROJECT FOCUSED ON RECOVERY

- Through providing emotional support and enabling contact in the project, St Mungo's has helped almost a third of the project's current residents to reconnect with members of their family.
- An on-site activities worker based at the project delivers a wide range of activities including holistic therapies, yoga, baking and music lessons, which most clients engage with. These activities boost self confidence, help staff to build constructive relationships with clients and can be a first step towards accessing formal skills and employment services.
- Staff at the service found that low literacy levels were forming a barrier to many of the clients' recovery, preventing them from engaging with a range of services. Each client now has a literacy test on entry and staff signpost them to local literacy services when necessary.

- Over three quarters of women who left the project between 2009 and 2012 made a planned move out of the project. Over this three-year period, staff at the project helped 50 clients to move into independent accommodation, including social housing, private rented accommodation and with family.

Nicola, has been homeless for over 15 years. She's been living in North London Women's Hostel for eight months.

'I had a stillbirth and after that I was really depressed. That was in the October and then in the November my mum died.....I was so vulnerable, so full of grief and my neighbour took advantage and 'preyed' on me, she introduced me to crack. I'm working on my addiction at the moment, getting help from the hostel for that and I'm seeing the doctor about depression.'

'I've been here for eight months. It's a well run place and I know everyone.... I've been on a drama course at [a local female drama company], acting is exciting..... At the hostel here they do yoga, bingo, karate etc and I've joined in with some of that... I've done some volunteer gardening here and I want to get back to college.'

Sabrina, has been homeless for five years since she lost her flat following a break-up with her partner. She has a diagnosis of schizophrenia and is working with staff at the hostel to stabilise her mental health condition.

'Eventually I'd like my own place but for now I'm feeling supported here, which is the most important thing for me.' She has plans for the future, enjoys working with computers and has been attending the gardening sessions at the hostel. *'I like computers but because of my mental health problems I find it hard to concentrate. I also like gardening, I find it therapeutic and creative and I do it here at the hostel every Wednesday. I'd quite like to do gardening as a job.'*

ST MUNGOS: WORKING TOWARDS A BETTER DEAL FOR WOMEN

In 2008, St Mungo's commissioned a piece of peer-led research which showed that female clients were progressing more slowly than male clients in our projects. The findings of this report led to the development of the St Mungo's women's strategy, which has helped to guide and improve the support that we give to our female clients, including those in our North London Women's Hostel.

To further improve services for homeless and vulnerable women, not only in St Mungo's but across the sector, in June 2012 we launched our ground-breaking campaign,

Rebuilding Shattered Lives, which is designed to raise awareness, showcase good practice and drive innovation on the issues faced by homeless and vulnerable women.

A central part of the campaign is an 18-month call for solutions, which will investigate nine significant issues for homeless and vulnerable women, and where a lack of access to appropriate services can have a significant impact their ability to recover. We want to draw on the knowledge and expertise of the broadest possible range of organisations and individuals, please visit www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org to get involved.

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