



THE CHRYSALIS PROJECT



SUPPORTING VULNERABLE WOMEN TO RECOVER FROM HOMELESSNESS

The Chrysalis Project is a joint enterprise between Commonweal Housing, St Mungo's and Lambeth Council. It provides high-quality accommodation and support for homeless women involved in street prostitution in South London.

In April 2009, the three agencies involved came together to launch what is a unique project designed to help this particular group of women to make an enduring recovery from homelessness. The women that the project supports are often particularly vulnerable, all have substance use issues and many have histories involving physical, mental or sexual abuse.

There are three phases of accommodation in the project; each phase offers support tailored to clients at different stages of recovery and together they offer a clear progression route towards independence.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKS: A MULTI AGENCY APPROACH

Phase One – security, stability and intensive support: The first phase is a 17 bed St Mungo's hostel that provides secure supported accommodation, designed to enable women to address enduring problems such as substance use issues. Specially trained psychotherapists provide therapy sessions and work with project staff to support clients to deal with traumatic experiences, such as having children taken into care, being assaulted or experiencing childhood neglect.

The hostel is one of St Mungo's Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) pilots. As well as providing therapeutic sessions for clients, psychiatrists help staff to build resilience in coping with the emotional impact of their work and encourage a reflective way of working. As a PIE, the project is also an emotionally safe environment, where a sense of community is fostered and clients are supported to build positive relationships.

Phase Two - moving towards independence: Clients move into phase two, a St Mungo's semi-independent project, to further develop skills that will help them to sustain independent living. Support remains available from key workers for these clients, who are assisted to build links with local services and develop social networks in the wider community.

“Expecting people to fly straight after they have been supported in a hostel is condemning some of them to fail. So I think [it's worth] finding something where you can maybe have learned to walk in the hostel, can maybe run in a flat with a bit of support, before being expected to fly out on your own.”

Fiona Mactaggart - Commonweal Chair

Phase Three - living in the community: The Commonweal Housing element of the Chrysalis Project forms the third phase; the women are given a tenancy in one of seven transitional move-on properties with floating support from a key worker.



The accommodation provided consists of one bedroom flats in South London. This housing is intended to prepare women for totally independent lifestyles. The key aim of the third phase is to ensure that women leave the service into sustainable accommodation, ensuring that there is 'flow' through the service and that more women can enter and progress through the Chrysalis Project.

SUCCESS AT THE CHRYSALIS PROJECT

- Women report that having their own space, where they can control who is allowed access, means that they feel safe and gives them a sense of control;

“The most important thing was I had a roof over my head, it was my sanctuary. I could close my door, that’s my time behind there, somewhere where I was safe. No one could come and invade me. No one could come and violate me.”

- Since the Chrysalis Project started, the proportion of planned move-ons from the Phase One project has increased by 16 per cent: more women have been supported to progress into other accommodation, including the semi-independent project, independent local authority housing or residential detox.

“I didn’t know anything about this place or I would have come in sooner, being on the road is horrible, it’s nice to feel safe.”

- Ten women have been accommodated in the flats since the outset of the project. Some of these women had a prior history of abandoning or being asked to leave St Mungo’s accommodation. The fact that all have remained in their flats and are doing well can be attributed the preparatory work and continued support that they receive from St Mungo’s staff.



ST MUNGOS: REBUILDING SHATTERED LIVES

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 in the Chrysalis Project.

To further improve services for homeless and vulnerable women, both in St Mungo’s and across the sector, we launched our ground-breaking campaign, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives*, in June 2012. The campaign is designed to raise awareness, showcase good practice and drive innovation on the issues faced by homeless women.

A central part of the campaign is an 18 month inquiry, which will investigate nine areas where a lack of access to appropriate services can have a significant impact on women’s recovery from homelessness. 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.

June 2012

Commonweal is a housing charity that uses its resources to find new and role model housing based solutions to different forms of social injustice; testing and evaluating these solutions and promoting successes to achieve wider replication.

This briefing draws on an evaluation of the Chrysalis Project undertaken by Professor Roger Mathews at the University of Kent and Helen Easton at London South Bank University, to be published summer 2012.