

Creating a WIN-ing idea: Hub for Homeless

May 2017



Background

Homelessness is a major issue in the United Kingdom and remains one of the most complex social issues to find a solution for. Most homelessness is hidden; the sofa surfer, the person sleeping in their car. Homelessness can affect any one of us at any time. Factors such as debt, relationship breakdowns, physical or mental health issues, or leaving institutions such as the armed forces can set off a chain of events, which can sometimes spiral out of control and lead to homelessness

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough collaborated with Wokingham In Need (WIN) to hear the views, concerns and experiences of their service users and how they access health and social care services. They contacted the Salvation Army to discuss the needs of those who are vulnerable. Wokingham Borough is an affluent town with good health outcomes, however there is a growing cohort of homeless and at risk people that need support.

Introduction

Wokingham In Need (WIN) is a local charity founded by residents with the aim of helping the homeless, vulnerable and those in need. There have been facilities for the homeless and vulnerable at the Salvation Army premises for about 7 years, but since the formation of WIN vast transformation has occurred and more of a hub or one stop shop has been created. The creation of a hub reduces the number of places people have to go, creating a more efficient space and use of time. Homeless and vulnerable people struggle with keeping appointments as their sense of time is skewed.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough commissioned WIN to gather stories about the experiences of our clients with local health services. WIN has collected some anecdotal information from those who visit us with housing and homelessness problems. Everyone domiciled in the UK is entitled to GP services - even the homeless - according to NHS regulations. But the feedback from some of our clients tends to paint a quite different picture.

Context

Defining homelessness

Defining homelessness is complex. Shelter define homelessness as anyone who lives in unsuitable housing, does not have rights to stay where they are, or they are sleeping rough (www.england.shelter.org.uk). Homeless Link suggest how homelessness can happen to anyone at any time and in their Annual Review 2015 (www.homeless.org.uk) highlights that one in ten people in England say they have personally experienced homelessness. With these figures the complexity surrounding cause and subsequent needs of those affected, highlights the need for support to be provided in many forms.

The picture

National

In December 2016 the housing charity Shelter estimated homelessness in England to amount to more than 250,000 people. Shelter calculated the figure using four sets of official sources:

- national government statistics on rough sleepers
- statistics on those in temporary accommodation
- the number of people housed in hostels
- the number of people waiting to be housed by social services departments (obtained through Freedom of Information requests)

The charity insists the overall figure, 254,514 is a "robust lower-end estimate".

Local

More and more Wokingham Borough residents are struggling to sustain their homes. Analysis within the Homelessness Review show the main reasons for homelessness in Wokingham Borough continue to be end of shorthold tenancy, relationship breakdown and parental eviction. Within the borough there has been a sharp increase in the number of complex cases where solutions are reliant on both expertise and good partnership working.

Policies and Strategies

Wokingham Borough Council has a Homelessness Strategy 2014-19
(www.wokingham.gov.uk/resources/assets/attachment/full/0/8546.pdf)

The Homelessness Review can be found at:
<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council/decisions/policies/?assetdet5200463=221212&categoryesctl5148227=3762>

Health and Social care implications

Being homeless can have a critical impact on a person's health. Healthwatch understands that conditions among people who are homeless are frequently co-occurring, with a complex mix of physical, psychiatric, substance use and social problems. High stress, unhealthy and dangerous environments, and an inability to control food intake means they are at greater risk of a wide range of health conditions and often result in more frequent visits to accident and emergency and longer stays in hospital than the average person.

What we heard

A number of people using the WIN facilities spoke about the difference having a space to go to made:

John* had been on the street for 4 years after losing everything in a relationship break up. John is an alcoholic and at 55 his health was seriously deteriorating. Through working with the council and his GP the Salvation Army were able to gain the evidence needed for him to be housed. We are continuing to support him in his tenancy and withdrawal from addiction. He says *'I didn't think I would ever have my own home again, and without the love and support from the SA I would have died on the street, I was very close. They believed in me and I wouldn't be here today without the service they provide.'*

Gail* is an alcoholic and was in an abusive relationship with another alcoholic both were homeless. Her life was in danger both from the drink and her partner. She suffered a burst stomach ulcer and was rushed to hospital and it was felt she would not pull through. A week later, sober and recovering, the Salvation Army (SA) arranged a safe house up north and drove her to safety before her partner could find her. She is now living a new life in her own flat. She said on the journey *'I have been overwhelmed by love from you (SA), couldn't see a way out and should be dead. I will not let you down, thank you'.*

Matthew* says 'I was being evicted from my council property, I had my court date. I asked the Salvation Army to help me with my paperwork which I didn't understand and to cut a long story short the decision was overturned. I am so grateful for their support and the time they spent helping me, nothing was too much trouble.'

*Names changed to protect anonymity

Themes

Access to information: Difficulties accessing services and information about treatment.

Registering with a GP The street homeless who do not have an address may find it very difficult to register with a GP. Usually they will not have identification bearing an address, or photographic ID which may be too expensive to arrange. The street homeless can of course go to A&E when they are ill but while they may receive initial treatment there may not be any follow up.

Diagnosis or screening: Difficulties in getting a diagnosis or poor follow ups from initial consultations with GP.

Providing evidence to register with other agencies such as Housing

Dealing with paperwork, appointments and correspondence

The facilities at the WIN hub (based at Salvation Army Site)

Even when people can protect themselves from hypothermia, wet belongings can breed mould leading to sickness and hospital visits. WIN has been able to put in place a secure storage cabin. This has enabled the Salvation Army to set out a store room from which the Salvation Army can continue to offer clothing, bedding, and starter packs for those being rehoused.

The Salvation Army continue to supply food in partnership with the food bank in Wokingham and WIN are there to provide further funding for this if requested.

There are also facilities on site that include a wet room cooker and breakfast bar (supplied by WIN), and washing machine, tumble dryer. The Church building continues to be used for much valued support and guidance, food, drinks and toilets.

The Drop In Centre is a peaceful space for people to relax in, for one to one work, computer work and small group work. It is overseen by Zara Sanders who is the Salvation Army (SA) Community Manager and is employed for 20 hours a week. The SA are in negotiation with employment plus, who are the SA's job search team. They work with the job centre and will provide them with the laptops, templates and courses that can run from the Drop In Centre. They are also in talks with the job centre for the

SA to become an out post from Bracknell so that people in Wokingham can 'sign on' in Wokingham rather than having to go to Bracknell which is so difficult for many.

The Drop In site has full disabled access and facilities in main building. All services are available to all abilities. No disabled access to porta cabin as yet but that does not prohibit any service.

Volunteers have various roles including, one to one form filling and assistance with computers, food prep and service, cleaning, sorting clothing for the store, to name some. All have to work within the SA's policies, procedures, safe guarding and Christian ethos.

Plans going forward

The plan for 2017 is hoped to have a nurse who will do a clinic once a month to cover health issues and to signpost on when needed. The SA have someone in mind but they have been delayed in starting due to personal reasons.

WIN hopes to source a podiatrist, as most of our service users have problems with their feet. WIN will fund this service if need be.

Transform Housing and the police have also offered to run workshops/drop ins for service users.

Jan Howlin, Lieutenant, advised that as a Church leader she also wished to develop a recovery church, for example Alpha type course. A week day church for those wishing to explore their spiritual life. Whilst we would never expect those accessing our services to attend Church, we recognise that many of our service users are searching for answers in all areas of their lives and it's important we have that available.

The SA and WIN are also looking into social enterprise ideas and so will be developing those over the next few years. Enabling skills to be used and developed to give a pathway back to work. Again Wokingham In Need will be with these developments all the way and are happy to discuss anything that will enhance the lives and services to those who are Homeless and Vulnerable in and around Wokingham. Founded in September 2015 we want to make a difference.

Contact details

Sue Jackson, Founder Wokingham In Need

Email: wokinghaminneed@gmail.com

Website: wokinghaminneed.com

Jan Howlin, Lieutenant, Salvation Army –Sturges Road, Wokingham,

Email: info@salvationarmy.org.uk

Website: <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/wokingham>

Healthwatch Wokingham

Email: Enquiries@healthwatchwokingham.co.uk

Website: www.healthwatchwokingham.co.uk