

Coming in from the cold?

This summer's progress report from the RSU has caused uproar within this sector particularly from the housing and social press. The figures presented on those sleeping rough in England purport to illustrate a huge decrease in the numbers of those actually sleeping rough. In 1998 there were 1,850 rough sleepers counted. This year there were 700.

This is good news on the face of it, illustrating the success of the projects and organisations working extremely



hard to prevent rough sleeping. Some critics in the housing press have questioned this statistic arguing that it is not a true picture of street homelessness and that this statistic if accepted as true has serious implications for those involved in campaign work.

VHG approached the RSU and asked for their reaction to the criticisms that they have faced over their announcement and the method of counting rough sleepers. They said that they used the same method for this

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street count as for the last and whilst neither figure purports to be exact they should provide a true indication of the levels of rise and fall of street homelessness. Ben Cooper of the RSU said: "The

figures are a snapshot, an indication of whether services are effective locally." He added "They [these figures] are just one of the pieces of information that the RSU gather."

Focusing on this region we spoke to

Elizabeth Best of Norwich City Council about the Street Count for Norwich. They were advised by the RSU (along with other councils) that the street count didn't need to be carried out this year if it was felt that the figure would be 5 or less. After consultation with providers it was felt that the likely figure was 5. So a street count wasn't carried and therefore last year's figure of one was carried forward. Cambridge City Council did carry out a Street Count and entered a figure of sixteen.

Elizabeth Best, Norwich City Council commented:

"Norwich City Council believes the reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in the city reflects the hard work and determination of the various agencies and bodies that have worked closely over the last few years to find ways of reducing and preventing rough sleeping. Norwich City Council hopes these links can be maintained to ensure the positive results achieved to date are progressed and the number of socially excluded people in the city continues to be reduced"

I think that most observers would agree that there has indeed been a reduction in the numbers of rough sleepers however as one of our member organisations opined:

"One would question the validity of any report that does not have reliable statistical evidence to back it up."

Emma Daniel, VHG.

New developments in Lowestoft

St. John's Housing Trust are extending their direct access provision at Kirkley Cliff by extending their existing hostel into the premises next door. This hostel is aimed at accommodating the younger age group of single homeless aged 16-25. This conversion/restructuring has been funded by a successful bid to the Housing Corporation through their landlords, Orwell Housing.

The premises next door which are to be converted was a hostel for single mothers however these clients aren't to be left out in the cold. In the latter part of 1999 and during 2000, the demand for young, single mother accommodation suddenly increased to the point that the Trust was beginning to

generate a waiting list. This increase in demand reflected the findings of the Department of Public Health which indicated that two wards in Lowestoft were the second and third highest in Suffolk in the ranks of teenage pregnancy. The current project is situated in one of these wards. With the assistance of Orwell Housing and Waveney District Council another successful bid was submitted to the Housing Corporation under the first Safer Communities bidding round. This means that Orwell HA and the Trust are developing a new 12 bedded single mother project on the North side of Lowestoft Harbour.

John O'Sullivan, St. John's H.T.

Newsinbrief

Supporting People

The government abandoned its original plan to use THB to measure the funding required' and are going to use the interim council contracts with service providers to assess the true sum just before the programme's launch in 2003.

B&B Statistics

Shelter have released an analysis of figures of those living in B&B accommodation: They show that over 100,000 children in England are homeless and that 1 in 7 of those living in temporary accommodation are housed in B&Bs. The government figures on households living in B&B accommodation at June 2001 was 11,340 which is a frightening 25% increase on last years count.

VHG New Staff

We are delighted to welcome Kerry Giles, Geoffrey Bartlett and Joan Kinnings to the team at VHG. Joan Kinnings is our new Finance manager and has real expertise in charity law and regulations following her experience at The Charity Commission. Kerry and Geoffrey are administering the training programme for this Autumn and Winter and are working hard to develop courses that you have requested.

ADP Bids extension

The Housing Corporation has extended its deadline for bids to the Annual Development Programme until the 31st October 2001. There is a £1.4 billion pot. The reason for the extension is that RSLs used an out of date rent calculator. To obtain an up to date version go to The Housing Corporation's website.

VHG Relaunch

We are counting down to our Relaunch events:
27th November - Norfolk
29th November - Suffolk
Please put these dates in your diary. If you would like to have a display stand at either venue please contact Emma Daniel at VHG on 01603 617299.

Emma Daniel, VHG.

Newsinbrief

Too much weight on Section Eight

By Simon Floyd, Norcas

Two years ago shock waves were sent across the caring professions with the convictions of two senior staff of the Wintercomfort day centre in Cambridge. They were convicted under the now notorious section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act [1971] for 'knowingly' permitting the supply of a class 'A' substance on their premises. Both received hefty jail terms, one of 4 and one of 5 years. Though these sentences were reduced on appeal their convictions remain. The case of the 'Cambridge Two' continues to provoke a sense of ominous responsibility in all those who are concerned in the management of a premises.

But are we over-reacting? More often than not the urgency to stay the right side of the law is compromising staff and management's ability to provide care and support to the drug using population. Invariably we are seeing the threat of exclusion and homelessness hanging over the heads of those in hostel type accommodation. Although accommodation providers cannot be blamed for introducing punitive policies (managers are unwilling to live with the threat of legal action and possible prison sentences because of the drug using habits of their residents) it is time to step back from all the furore and consider what the situation is.

Drug use, particularly in the younger population, is the norm. The Office of National Statistics tells us that 57% of 16 year olds have tried illicit drugs and a staggering 98% of 17 year olds have found themselves in drug offer situations.

This is a situation that is not going to go away. Young people will continue to use drugs even when the roof over their head is threatened, they will just find more cunning ways of concealing their use. Howard Parker, a leading researcher into the habits of young drug users puts the situation in more sobering terms:

"Millions of people in Britain have tried cannabis.. Other illicit drugs, once with only sub-cultural or minority appeal are being used by a much higher proportion of the young. Their motives appear to be less concerned with peer group status and more with rational consumption as part of young peoples approach to their leisure time."

Increasing drug use inevitably means more drug problems, not for all but for some, and especially for those who have already had a turbulent background and may find themselves with housing needs. The challenge is for service providers to develop strategies that do not inhibit and exclude but that assimilate the reality into the care that is provided.

Key points to consider:

- Know what the law actually says
- Review your existing policy
- Allow for flexibility of interpretation: 'Write flexibly and implement rigidly' – in many cases this is the other way around.
- Ensure that both staff and residents can 'own' the policy
- Ensure a working relationship with the local police: Satisfy them that you have a responsible attitude to the management of drug related incidents; liaison with the police will largely remove the threat of prosecution and enhance the possibility of their intervention should it be

required.

■ Include all substances: There are many substances that can cause harm and present risks to the user and the people around them, not least alcohol, aerosols and prescribed medications

■ Consider staff training

The conflict with the law which section 8 can bring service managers into must be fully recognised and understood. However, it is time for the rocket that Wintercomfort put under us all to come back down to

The challenge is for service providers to develop strategies that do not inhibit and exclude but that assimilate the reality into the care that is provided.

earth. Our responses must be more considered. Only in this way will we stop overreacting, start to adapt our practice to the culture of our times and truly begin the process of social inclusion.

NORCAS can provide comprehensive policy development and staff training programmes on issues raised in this article. For details contact Simon Floyd at NORCAS Training and Consultancy on 01603 621116.



Groundswell of support for Nottingham exchange



In June two workers (one from the Ripley Project and one from Smartmove, Norwich) along with two service users were invited by Groundswell to visit Nottingham for a three day exchange trip.

Groundswell are part of the National Homeless Alliance and work with projects, groups and individuals offering training, advice and networking. Groundswell's aim is to promote and develop self-help initiatives with people who are homeless or socially excluded. Their

belief is that homelessness can only be tackled by involving homeless people and by assisting people in taking control of their lives.

Whilst in Nottingham, the group met with other accommodation providers from across the country. Over the three days visits were made to different types of day centres and projects for homeless people, including direct access, a foyer and a "Wet House". It was a unique opportunity for clients and workers to exchange and share ideas away from their own projects.

We found the trip to be enormously

interesting and informative, especially hearing the views and opinions of the Service Users, and comparing the opportunities and facilities available in Nottingham to those in our own areas.

We brought back fresh ideas for our own projects and Service Users and were able to make a presentation to the other workers and Service Users.

We were all grateful for this opportunity and now plan to attend the annual "Speakout" event in London which is also organised by Groundswell.

Angela Carley, The Ripley Project.

Comment...

■ In the light of recent events many people around the world feel a sense of shock and insecurity, wondering what the future holds and whether life will ever be the same again.

These feelings are not unfamiliar to many of our clients, tenants or residents who often come to our services when they feel most vulnerable and fearful of a society that should give them a sense of protection and security but appears hostile.

It is to be hoped that the perhaps somewhat over-optimistic and self congratulatory style of the Progress Report on 'Coming in from the Cold' does not make any of us relax our efforts. Or that it causes the public to lose its empathy with our work.

The Homeless Bill should be welcomed as an opportunity for us all to tackle the wider aspects of homelessness, to identify the hidden costs and traumas of being without a safe and secure permanent home. It is essential that the voluntary sector service providers who support people in finding, establishing or sustaining a suitable home are fully involved in the development of an assessment of need and a strategy to meet that need. VHG is committed to ensuring we are all effectively involved and can make an even greater difference to more people's lives in the future.

From the Editor

■ Have you responded to VHG in any way over the last few months? If not I urge you to do so. We want to know how you feel and what you think about VHG. We are prepared to listen to all views, even if they are negative. We will respond. Our response will be one that we hope you feel is appropriate, realistic and acceptable. We want the development of VHG to be of maximum benefit to member organisations and their clients. The task ahead is large. Member organisations are diverse in so many respects. However you have more in common than separates you. You are all engaged with people who feel or have felt more or less vulnerable and excluded from society. You all aim to make a difference to individuals because you care about the society in which we live and strive to make a difference.

If you do nothing else for VHG then please tell us if you like 'Raising the Roof'. Tell us if you would like to have several copies. Show it to staff and clients and let us know what they think. Send Emma Daniel article ideas for future editions. We intend to promote your work in a variety of ways - but this magazine is to be a vital part of that process. Let us help you by contributing your news and views.

Ann Beattie, VHG.

Training Dates

THB WORKSHOP
October 17
Jayne Knight
Norwich

THB WORKSHOP
October 22
Jayne Knight
Norwich

BASIC DRUG AWARENESS
October 31
Simon Floyd
Norwich

HEALTH & SAFETY
November 5
Melanie Hines
Essex

MANAGING AGGRESSION
November 7
Bob Banham
Norwich

THB
November 13
Jayne Knight
Venue: TBA

FIRST AID FOR
FRONTLINE WORKERS
November 20
St John's Ambulance
Essex

MANAGING AGGRESSION
November 23
Bob Banham
Suffolk

HEALTH & SAFETY
November 28
Melanie Hines
Norwich

PRESENTATION SKILLS
November 30
Diane Woodhouse
Essex

DRUGS, ALCOHOL
AND YOUNG PEOPLE
December 6
Simon Floyd
Venue: TBA

HEALTH & SAFETY
December 13
Melanie Hines
Suffolk

"Assertive Outreach" Valued by Service Users *by Anne McCrudden*

The Julian Housing Active Outreach team has been in operation for the past seven years. It was one of the first teams in the country to work to an 'Assertive Outreach' model of care. What this means is that the team seek to positively engage with people who, because of their severe mental health problems, find it difficult to access services that could be helpful to them. The team currently supports 53 clients offering a range of interventions, focusing on what the client feels will be helpful in sustaining themselves in the community.

Another first for the team is a recent evaluation of the service by researchers from the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health. The team has been the first in the country to be evaluated by an Independent User Researcher. Over two thirds of clients agreed to be interviewed, and the results are shortly to be published by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health.

The evaluation has been positive about the work of the team indicating that it is a style of working that clients and carers really value and appreciate. The process was a positive experience for clients also, who were encouraged and supported to participate in the evaluation.

■ For more details of the team or a copy of the draft evaluation, please contact Anne McCrudden at Julian Housing on 01603 767718.



Active Outreach can involve some unusual tasks including helping to organise a rock band!

A day in the life of...

Major Barry Wilson has worked alongside his wife, Cindy, as a Salvation Army Officer for over 30 years. They have six grown up children. Barry & Cindy were appointed to lead the Norwich Citadel Corps of The Salvation Army in June, 1995. Their work includes the pastoral care of the Church in St. Giles Street and the ultimate responsibility for two Charity shops, Catherines Coffee Lounge, the William Booth Day Care Centre and the Pottergate ARC (Advice & Refreshment Centre).

I look at the time as the postman passes my window. It's just after 7 am., time to leave computer, put the kettle on and open the day's mail. The next hour is given over to personal stuff before leaving for the first meeting of the day. For the last few months the Pottergate ARC has attracted the support of the Primary Care Group, and this morning we are meeting with the Joint Commissioners to monitor recent events. Pottergate ARC attracts around 100 clients each day, and the PCG have funded professional in-reach services to assist substance mis-users and those with alcohol dependency.

The meeting concludes mid-morning, and it's time to touch base with members of staff at some of the projects before returning to the

office and dealing with a range of administrative tasks. Tomorrow morning I am presenting "Pause for thought" on Radio Norfolk, so I prepare this before I visit a local business who has undertaken to sponsor a special event. My next appointment is 3.30, where I meet with a supermarket manager to explore a possible partnership. An hour later I am back in the study responding to all the messages on the answerphone.

I order some stationary, and make an appointment for the installation of CCTV surveillance equipment at one of our projects. I clear all the outstanding emails and say Hi to

Major Barry Wilson *Salvation Army Officer*

my son as he arrives home from his part time job.

We have just launched our Annual Appeal, and each evening for the next two weeks I am doing my stint on the knocker. The money is used to help fund the range of social care provided by The Salvation Army in the UK.

We arrive home before it rains, grab a quick meal, and then I have a short article to prepare to meet the deadline for a magazine. I sit at the blank computer screen and start to write...A day in the life of Barry Wilson.