



Introduction

The current economic and social climate has had a devastating impact on vulnerable people including those who access homelessness services. The current housing crisis is brought sharply into focus by figures from the Combined Homeless and Information Network showing an increase of 2,533 rough sleepers on the streets of London from 2011 to 2014. Figures for the London Borough of Lewisham for the same period show an increase in rough sleeping of 52% (St Mungo's Broadway, 2014).

Whilst, arguably, austerity has precipitated the current housing and homelessness crisis, various explicit or consequential government policies – including cut-backs in benefits, sanctions and gatekeeping by local authorities - have resulted in a developing attitude of further exclusion of both homeless people and those who are vulnerable to homelessness. It is within this context that the 999 Club operates. The 999 Club offers a range of services including a Day Centre, Advice and Advocacy service, provision of various healthcare services and a Winter Night Shelter. The Winter Night Shelter operates between December and March each year and offers respite to those who would otherwise sleep on the streets.

At the request of Peter Wood (CEO of the 999 Club), Louisa Snow and Declan Flynn facilitated a series of focus groups with users of the 999 Club. The aims of these sessions were to:

1. Obtain users' views on the usefulness/effectiveness of the 'drop in' (Day Centre) facility;
2. Establish what users of the 999 Club's service feel works well;
3. Explore users' views on areas for improvement/development.

The Literature

Recent research into homelessness, vulnerability and the phenomenon of so-called 'housed attenders' (Crane, Fu, Foley & Warnes, 2005) highlights a range of issues facing the sector; hardening societal attitudes towards vulnerable people, the ethical dilemma of creating dependence, creating a culture of inclusivity and problems providing effective services in an increasingly difficult funding environment,



Johnsen, Cloke & May (2006) argue that cities have become increasingly intimidating environments for homeless people and that the traditional attitude of benign neglect by the authorities towards vulnerable people has changed to a persecutory, punitive approach in an attempt to control homelessness. To counteract this hostility, it is argued that there has been an increase in the “urge to care” manifest by the growth of day centres. While supporting the notion that day centres are sources of resources and refuge for homeless people, the authors suggest that they may also be viewed as places of fear and uncertainty. The rise in day centres is also highlighted in a recent report by the national charity Homeless Link (2015) showing that there are 208 homelessness day centres in England, an increase of 11% since 2010.

As well as providing services to homeless people, day centres provide vital support to vulnerable, isolated people who are housed or who use night shelters – the so-called ‘day homeless’. A University of Sheffield study (Crane et al, 2005) found that many housed people who use day centres are single men who have problems coping in their accommodation and had been previously homeless. They experience physical and mental health issues and had in many cases been heavy drinkers. The researchers argued that day centres have become more interventionist in recent times, providing advice and advocacy using a case management approach. Common issues faced by housed service-users include needing help completing forms, rent arrears, other financial problems and unsuccessful or sanctioned benefit claims. While most day centre staff believed that it is appropriate for housed clients to attend day centres, they also believed that those clients who are capable should be encouraged to move on, to help them gain independence and build community links. The study concludes that there is a strong case for day centres to refine their target clientele and to wean people off support when it is no longer needed. This requires staff skilled in needs assessment, a robust recording and monitoring system and a willingness to work with other agencies.

This is supported by Homeless Link (2014) research, which identifies the importance of partnership working. A strong association between day centres and other services for vulnerable people, such as primary care, community mental health services and community drug and alcohol services increases the likelihood that people will use the appropriate services they need to move permanently out of homelessness.



The ethical issues facing day centre staff around what services should be provided and for how long is explored by Bowspritt, Dwyer, Sundin and Weinstein (2013), who explore the tensions between the needs of those who use the services for sanctuary and safety and the needs of the centre to demonstrate outcomes – an age-old dilemma in the field of social work. This need to provide outcomes is undoubtedly driven by funding requirements. The Homeless Link Annual Review (2015) found that increasing numbers of day centres had experienced a reduction in funding in recent years - 36% in 2014 compared to 26% in 2013.

From this brief overview of recent literature, it is clear that day centres are faced with ethical, operational and financial considerations when planning service delivery. If, as suggested by Johnsen, Cloke & May (2006), homeless and vulnerable people become the scapegoats for economic failure, the organisations that exist to serve them will inevitably feel pressure not just to “solve” homelessness and all its related ills, but to become more conditional and target-driven in their interventions – to become cost effective rather than person- centred.

Methodology

We have chosen thematic analysis to analyse the data collected. This form of analysis provides a systematic process of understanding and interpreting observations of situations, people, events and organisations accurately and sensitively (Boyatzis, 1998). It is widely used by researchers in psychology, sociology, art, history, social anthropology, political science and other fields to identify patterns and suitable codes (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). As a qualitative methodology, it provides intuitive and natural dexterity in gaining insight from the experiences described by the participants. The process allows the analyst/s to recognise and make sense of what could be perceived as unrelated material from which patterns and themes can be derived. The process involves familiarization with data, the generation of initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and the production of a final summary by identifying re-occurring patterns in the data transcriptions (Boyatzis, 1998).

Participants/Data Collection



Participants were recruited via the 999 Club's Day Centre. Service-users were invited to express their views on the effectiveness of the services provided by the 999 Club, by means of a poster. The Day Centre Manager recorded the names of those who volunteered and passed them to one of the facilitators. In addition, other members were approached directly (by the Day Centre staff) and asked if they were willing to participate. The focus groups took place over a three-day period on the premises of the 999 Club, with one group held on each of the three days. A total of 25 people were in attendance (five on Day 1, ten on Day 2 and ten on Day 3). In addition, one person declined to participate when he was informed that the session would be recorded. Two women participated in the first session, one in the second and the final session was comprised wholly of men.

Powell and Single define a focus group as 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research' (1996:499). This method of data collection was considered appropriate as focus groups are believed to mitigate the potential power differences between participants and professionals, when the ordinary use of language and culture of particular groups is pertinent to the investigation, and when the researcher requires to explore the degree of agreement on a given topic (Morgan & Kreuger 1993). Each focus group was electronically recorded and the recordings transcribed.

Analysis

The themes emerging from this analysis are now discussed.

Participants' Perceptions

Respondents were, on the whole, very positive about their views of staff and in their descriptions of their relationships with them. This applied both to staff in the Day Centre and those in the Advice and Advocacy service. We were given several examples of positive descriptions of staff's attitudes towards people who access the service. Comments included: "they are non-judgemental", "front line staff are caring", "they're compassionate" and "they have a good understanding of our needs.

Conversely, some expressed less than positive views. One (older) person felt that staff were patronising, whilst others felt that they were selective in the support/services they offered. For example, one participant reported that some people seem to "jump the queue" when waiting for



appointments with Advice and Advocacy staff and another felt that staff demonstrated favouritism towards particular people over others.

In terms of the *environment*, respondents were generally very positive about the Day Centre. They regarded the space as welcoming, warm and comfortable and saw it as an opportunity to socialise with other, like-minded people and where they could be given food and shelter. In this sense, the Day Centre seems to provide a social outlet for those who are lonely and/or living in poverty. One person talked of feeling a “sense of belonging”, while others talked of the importance of peer support, “keeping busy”. One person talked of the 999 Club acting as a substitute family, although this view was dismissed by others.

Staffing Issues

Boundaries It is evident that working relationships between service-users and staff do not always adhere to professional standards and/or boundaries. We were informed of so-called “out-reach” work taking place, whereby members of the Day Centre staff had had contact with a woman out of hours while she was sleeping rough locally. She was apparently taken for a meal and was ‘referred’ to the Winter Night Shelter, effectively bypassing the usual admission procedures. Another example was brought to our attention whereby a member of the Day Centre staff had taken somebody for a mental health assessment, alone in her own car. These examples are evidence of the need for greater adherence to the 999 Club’s Code of Conduct, as well as improvement in staff management and supervision.

Staff as Peers At least one person used the term ‘peer’ to refer to member/s of Day Centre staff. She clearly valued the shared experiences she and they had had and this appeared to engender a sense of trust and confidence on her part. However, the potential value of the shared experiences between staff and those accessing the services (in terms of credibility) was, we felt, potentially negated by staff’s lack of adherence to professional boundaries and policies/procedures.

Volunteering Although contrary to the 999 Club’s procedures, there was evidence of a woman working in a voluntary capacity in the Day Centre. The individual concerned talked extremely favourably about her perception of the positive effects of this experience:



A member of staff] has got me into volunteering. I work behind the counter as you know, and now I'm starting to help people now [were] in my situation. I love coming here. I love volunteering.....I want to give back what they give to me.

However, that this took place without formal procedures or processes being adhered to is a cause for concern. If the skills and experiences of those accessing services are to be utilised, formal policies and procedures must be established and consistently adhered to. We support the use of people acting as volunteers but in a structured and managed way.

Management One person talked at length about what she suggested was a rift between the 'front line' staff and management of the 999 Club. She frequently referred to a "them and us" situation, indicated that management lacked understanding of homeless people's needs and experiences and that only "front line" staff fully understood them and, further, were non-judgemental in their attitudes. This was the expressed view of one participant whom, we felt, was somewhat over-familiar with Day Centre staff and vice versa. It is possible that staff disclosed to her their views on the management of the organisation and that she was used the opportunity of the focus group to express these views.

Communication

Another issue arising from the focus groups is the need for improved communication, both between staff (including Day Centre, Advice and Advocacy and management staff) and between staff and people accessing services. There were many examples of situations where communication could be improved. For example, a number of participants referred to confusion with regards to accessing Advice and Advocacy staff. Some, but not all, were aware of the 'list' system, whilst others felt that it was adhered to inconsistently.

Communication of expectations is also important. One woman who had been engaged with the 999 Club for three months had seemingly only recently learnt that she wasn't deemed to be in priority need. This is something she should have been aware of from the outset; this issue is further discussed below.



Further, as alluded to earlier, one participant who also has experience of volunteering, highlighted a communication problem between management and staff. She referred to management as being “upstairs” and being unaware of what happened at the “front line”.

Others expressed anxieties over the impending closure of the Winter Night Shelter and there is, perhaps, an opportunity to more fully prepare people who are unlikely to be housed. Some people seemed unaware of what would happen to them when the night shelter closed and, as it is unrealistic to expect that everyone could be rehoused, there is a need to better prepare people for potential street homelessness.

It was also evident that more work could be done in terms of communication of potential opportunities arising from contact with the 999 Club. One person told us how he had been using the Day Centre (as well as the Advice and Advocacy service) for several years and had only just learned about the existence of the Pret a Manger Apprenticeship scheme. This was something he felt he would be suitable for, and would benefit from. Better communication of opportunities, as well as the services on offer, could have prevented this situation.

Advice & Advocacy and other support

Aside from the reported positive relationships with staff and the existence of a safe, warm environment, some of those we spoke to talked of positive *consequences* of their time spent at the 999 Club. One woman in particular felt that her self-confidence and self-esteem had increased since her engagement with staff and that this had been matched by a reduction in her consumption of alcohol.

You need the help, understanding and compassion to stand alone again. Now when I wake up in the morning I smile. I've got everything around me. I've got a roof over my head. I feel happy throughout the day. I love coming here.

Another service-user talked positively about what he perceived as a reduction in gambling since accessing the 999 Club. He described how he'd used the Advice and Advocacy service to help secure a job and housing.



I thank God for the people here and the 999 Club. I have been coming over six years now. They people here are very, very helpful. They provide facilities that keep me away from these [gambling] people. I have changed from a gambling person to somebody responsible.

Others talked of the advantages of having both the opportunity to socialise coupled with the availability of practical support. “I have found them [staff] to be very helpful. Now I’m a retired person, I find it very helpful to sit and have a chat. My eyesight’s not that brilliant and if I have a problem with letters or anything, they assist me”. Similarly, “I come here when I have nothing to do. Sometimes I use the computers for work and that sort of stuff”.

Another man who, at the time, was staying in the Winter Night Shelter spoke of the support he’d received and (indirectly) of the usefulness of sign posting.

I find them very helpful They help you and give you all the assistance that you need. They encourage you to do better in your life. One of the things I find with the homelessness, they can only do so much, because their hands are tied. They are not involved with the institutions as such, but they try their best. It is quite pleasing to know there is a place like this you can come and talk to someone and someone can point you in the right direction and eventually you can be sorted.

Another man talked of the 999 Club as acting as a community ‘safety net’ during times of vulnerability:

I’ve been coming here on and off for many years. I have recently finished a very long prison sentence and it’s only being away and coming back that you realise how important this place is. I can’t imagine what this area, or the people that use it, would be like without it. I think it is an amazing place and very, very important. It’s a bit of a safety net. It is amazingly important.

Another, in describing how he had been helped after his benefits were stopped, praised the support he’d received from staff and, again, highlighted the community-wide benefits that the 999 Club provide: “it’s good for a cup of tea and a chat, but it keeps people together. What if this place goes? Begging on the streets. In this place you get looked after. You can have a shower, get advice....”.

Conversely, others talked about the difficulties they faced in accessing Advice and Advocacy staff and what they perceived to be the unfairness in gaining staff time and support.



Inter-Agency Working

We found several examples of positive inter-agency working. One woman, in describing her homelessness journey, told us that she'd been referred to a women's refuge following domestic violence. There she met somebody from CRI who, in turn, 'signposted' her to the 999 Club. Another person told us how he'd learnt about the 999 Club's existence during a drop-in at a local church where homeless and other vulnerable people are offered food and signposted to appropriate services. We were also given an example of the effectiveness of the Street Link referral system. Somebody's relative had become homeless, had had involvement with another local organisation (Bench Outreach), had been referred to Street Link and was subsequently housed locally.

On the other hand, we found several examples where service-users did not appear to have been well-served. For example, some people were still homeless despite having been in the Winter Night Shelter for numerous weeks and in the face of its impending closure.

Whilst we would not necessarily expect every guest to be found accommodation, the number facing a return to street homelessness was disappointing. Others were not informed of opportunities to engage in education, training or employment and were not assisted when they expressed a wish to better their situations. Several participants expressed a desire to attend training courses at Lewisham College, although they voiced reservations about taking the first steps towards achieving this. No help was available in this regard.

Winter Night Shelter and Day Homelessness

All the Winter Night Shelter guests who participated in the focus groups were extremely positive about the service. They appreciated having somewhere to sleep during the coldest months of the year, as well as the food that was provided. Most expressed a wish for the night shelter to be open all year round. "It's very, very good. What the people do there is amazing. It would be nice if it was all read round. The 999 Club is a saviour".

However, the participants who were homeless (including those staying in the Winter Night Shelter) expressed their exasperation at having nowhere to store their belongings and requested the



installation of lockers. Although this would be impractical, that it was raised does serve to highlight the many practical difficulties faced by homeless people on a daily basis.

Others highlighted difficulties in accessing showers in the Day Centre after sleeping in the night shelter. While they welcomed the introduction of showering facilities, it was pointed out that since everyone is allocated a 15-minute slot, this only gives time for four people to shower between waking at 0700am and leaving the premises at 0800am. The introduction of a more effective system could resolve this issue.

A major consideration is how people fill their time during the day, highlighting the difficulties associated with so-called 'day homelessness'. Without exception, those who were using the night shelter expressed a wish for it to remain open later in the morning and to open earlier in the evening. They felt that the time they had to spend out of the night shelter (8am to 8pm) was too long, particularly when it is cold/wet and at weekends, when little else is open in the surrounding area. They also expressed a wish for the Day Centre to remain open at weekends.

We found evidence of people utilising the different services in the area in order to overcome some of the difficulties associated with 'day homelessness': "there is nowhere to go. You have to go to the library. In the cold. In the winter. In the rain. You go to Deptford Reach first, then to the 999. People are enslaved in the timing. When it shuts, what do you do?" Others also used more than one local service: "I have been coming here four and a half years. Here and Deptford Reach. They do a lot for the homeless, a lot of advice. They are good at what they do".

Similarly, those using the Winter Night Shelter expressed a desire for it to operate over a longer period of time or, preferably, all year round. "You are only open for a certain time and, after that time some people go back on the street and remain vulnerable". Another participant, who talked about going to extreme lengths to end his situation, echoed this view: "the night shelter should run on a bit longer. The worst part of it is the shelter closing and having to go back out on the street. To be chucked back on the street is depressing and puts all sorts of ideas in your head. You go out and do things you normally wouldn't do..... It makes me want to commit a crime so I will get into prison and I will not be homeless. It makes me desperate".



Participants spoke unequivocally about the difficulties facing single homeless people and their lack of confidence in the local housing assessment and referral service (SHIP): “I heard when you go to SHIP you need to be really down and out [otherwise] they won’t accommodate you. You’ve got to be on drugs”. Another participant said: “if people want a place, they need to start drinking and sticking needles in their arms”. Similarly, “if you want accommodation, you need support needs”.

Another, relaying his experience of SHIP said: “the lady said to me “you are not on drugs, you haven’t got an alcohol problem and you are definitely not pregnant, so we cannot help you”. But at the same time, I am homeless”.

Following this was a lengthy discussion about government policy and privatisation as well as the role of the 999 Club in challenging authority at a strategic level. “The 999 club needs to be in a position to oppose things like that [the closure of a local hostel]”.

Activities

When asked what other services or activities the 999 Club could usefully offer, participants made suggestions along *practical*, *psychological/well-being* and *social/expressive* lines.

The majority expressed a desire for *practical* support with regards to securing employment which most saw as the way out of their current situation. Examples included assistance with preparing CVs, help with job applications and practise interviews. Several participants expressed the desire/need for literacy and numeracy classes whilst another talked very favourably about the recently-held cookery classes and expressed a wish for further involvement.

Participants were very clear that the single most effective way out of homelessness was employment. For example:

I am fortunate. I have my own flat. A lot of people have got to a time in their lives where they are stalled and need a little kick-start. Jobs – [people need to get] back to work to have some sort of goal. We should be setting those for ourselves. People come here because things are not going great for them..... We need goals in our lives. Getting back to employment. It answers a lot in your life, to be back at work. It feels great when you’re working.



Another (currently homeless) person saw the importance of work but highlighted the point that homelessness itself is a barrier to progress in this area: “It’s a Catch 22 situation. Who will employ you if you haven’t an address?”

A recurring theme was people’s dissatisfaction and frustration over their inability to use the IT facilities because of a lack of supervision/staffing. Several people highlighted the need for IT access, for job applications, property viewings, etc., but were unable to use the facilities available to them, simply because there were not enough staff in place to oversee the facility. They acknowledged that supervision of the area was necessary but felt that this should be made a priority.

Participants expressed a desire for help in improving their psychological well being, and suggested that counselling and other psychological support would be beneficial; indeed, many described the focus group itself as being therapeutic. Some talked favourably of the previously-held yoga classes which they felt had led to an improvement in well-being, although this was coupled with frustration that the classes had been halted.

Others clearly valued the opportunity for social interaction afforded by the Day Centre. They saw it as a social space where they could spend time with others facing similar issues and problems. They did, however, feel that more could be made of the space and more activities on offer. Suggestions included the introduction of a pool table and the provision of bingo.

Case management

Although users valued both the support they received in the Day Centre, as well as that provided by the Advice and Advocacy staff, arising from the focus groups was the need for more effective case management and a dedicated advocacy service.

One person who, at the time, was staying in the Winter Night Shelter appeared not to be fully aware of the range of services offered by the Advice and Advocacy staff. She talked of being allowed “only one ‘phone call” and reported missing a viewing because she couldn’t access a computer to view the property (the issue of access to IT is discussed more fully below). She described her



experience at Crisis and was apparently told that somebody (from there) would visit her at the 999 Club. She had lost her phone and said she couldn't approach them (Crisis) as she lacked the money required for the journey. As mentioned above, she also seemed unaware that, as a single adult with no dependents, she would not be classified as being in priority need and would not, therefore, be easily accommodated. Effective case working/management should have meant a more positive outcome for this person after three months' engagement.

Mentoring

Although only one participant was currently involved in Housing Justice's Mentoring and Befriending scheme, he spoke extremely positively about his experiences and the perceived beneficial effects.

I recently lost my mum and my life came crashing down. I had one beef after another. I didn't do to see my Parole Officer. I should have been recalled. It all got too much. From our first meeting [with his befriender], I mentioned a few things to her that were bothering me and it was really powerful being able to get things off my chest I have [now had] four meetings and in each meeting, I have offloaded a little bit more. My life is slowly taking on a completely different shape. For the better..... Having a key worker or having somebody to sit down and have a chat with is powerful..... People feel they are on the outside of the community. Feeling on the outside is not good and leads to drug taking, alcohol and crime.....

This person's experience highlights both the positive impact of the Befriending and Monitoring Scheme but also the necessity of a key-working or case-working approach.

Ongoing/long term support

Participants also talked about the importance of on-going support after a period of homelessness: "when I move on from here [the night shelter] I hope I can still come here and talk about paying bills and stuff". Similarly, "if you get a red letter bill you can come to the 999 Club and give it to one of the assistants here and they can communicate and they see you are not avoiding and they will negotiate, if you are on benefits. It takes the pressure off. Have you ever tried to go in a phone box and talk to these people?". Another participant said "if you get an electric bill and I don't understand it, I take it to [Advice and Advocacy workers] and they help me out". Similarly, another man who had previously been homeless said "I am learning things I should have learned in my teenage



years. Paying bills..... I sympathise with people who are homeless, but when you do find somewhere to live, all the little things cause stress”.

Over dependency

We found evidence of people using the service for many years and having difficulty accepting personal responsibility for their current situations. In response to our questions about improvements to service-provision, participants overwhelmingly expressed a wish for increased support through longer opening hours, with some expressing a desire for 24-hour telephone support.

Another participant seemingly refused to accept personal responsibility for his current situation: “I keep getting evicted out of places for not paying rent or service charges. I keep on getting suspended. The landlord didn’t care and I didn’t have the money to pay for it. That is the reason I lost my first place. The second one was loud music. I didn’t get on with the people – and all those silly little things got me evicted again”.

Discussion

There was no evidence that any participants found the day centre to be a place of fear or uncertainty as suggested by Johnsen, Cloke & May (2006). Most participants were effusive in their praise of the staff and appreciative of the space, which was described as warm and welcoming; however this may be because people who find the centre intimidating are unlikely to participate in a focus group on the premises.

A contrary opinion was expressed by one service-user who reported that he felt patronised by Day Centre staff. Another participant (a woman), while hoping to demonstrate the compassion and care offered by staff, highlighted some worrying boundary issues. The lack of containment of this relationship had implications for the health and safety of all concerned, as well as opening the organisation to accusations of potential abuse and negligence. This staffing issue may be indicative of a lack of line management and/or supervision, as one participant referred to a “them and us” situation between Day Centre staff and those who work “upstairs”. It is not unusual for organisations to adopt similar defences to the people they are created to serve – in this case, splitting (Weegmann



& Cohen, 2002). This opinion is supported by participants' perceptions of a lack of communication between staff and management.

The ethical issues around boundaries were further evidenced by a perception some people had of difficulties accessing services. While there was general agreement that the Advice and Advocacy staff were supportive and effective, there was concern that there was unfairness in the way staff time and support were allocated with a belief that staff showed favouritism to some people.

Inter-agency working is another area that highlights inconsistency of approach. While the Winter Night Shelter referral system seems to have worked well for most people, there is evidence of some people not being offered any service when the shelter closed. Also, opportunities to create links with local education and training providers such as Lewisham College have not been maximised. Working with other agencies emerged as an issue when discussing the Winter Night Shelter. Participants were warm in their appreciation of the shelter and of the agencies that referred people there – Deptford Reach and bench Outreach - but showed no faith in the ability of statutory services such as SHIP (Lewisham's Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention Service) to assist them out of homelessness.

A further inconsistency that emerged was around the IT suite and being unable to use them because there was no supervision of the facility. This situation mirrors the frustration felt by one participant in being homeless because he was unemployed and being unemployable because he had no address. Consistency in approach is further evidenced by a lack of effective case management which by its nature would also address some communication issues. It would also lead to a highlighted issue of lack of support when resettled from homelessness.

We spoke above about the tensions between providing a place of sanctuary and the necessity of providing a positive, dynamic outcome for the users of the service. We found evidence of people not accepting responsibility for their own actions and this may or may not be because of having an unconditional place of sanctuary such as the Winter Night Shelter or the Day Centre. It was notable that many participants wanted to see longer opening hours for the Day Centre and to see the Winter Night Shelter open all year.



Recommendations

We recommend that addressing the causes and the devastating effects of homelessness and poverty on the individual should remain the primary aim of the 999 Club. While some said they would like to see the organisation expand to provide a wide range of services, the consensus was that homelessness and poverty are the two main (and inextricably linked) issues facing the people who access the service. With this in mind, we recommend the continuation of homelessness services, especially the Winter Night Shelter, and the consolidation of the Advice and Advocacy service to help people access benefit and housing entitlements. Whilst we would recommend a review of the Day Centre's opening hours, we would caution against simply increasing access (as most participants requested), for fear of creating a culture of over-dependency.

Unquestioningly, there are staff shortcomings as evidenced by the ethical breaches highlighted in the data. Whilst service-users see the staff as being caring and having an understanding of their needs, they do not see them as being professional. We recommend the introduction of an ethical framework within which the staff can more effectively operate, particularly with regards to justice, fidelity and recognising and nurturing people's potential. However, this should not detract from the good work that is done. Overall staff performance would improve with the introduction of formalised staff management and supervision.

We recommend closer working alliances with other local organisations to reduce duplication of work and to more effectively target resources at the identified people's needs – homelessness and poverty.

Service-users expressed the view that 999 Club staff could and should be lobbying government (both local and national) about changes in housing legislation, benefits and sanctions on their behalf. They were aware of the bigger picture and wanted the opportunity to express their voice, or for someone to express it on their behalf. In order to achieve this end, we recommend that the 999 Club should have a management presence at local fora.

Finally, we recommend further research into the absence of a representative population of women service-users accessing help at the day centre. In the single homeless population, women are in the minority. Crisis (Fitzpatrick, Pawson, Bramley & Wilcox, 2014) report that women comprise 26% of clients of homelessness services. There are extremely high levels of vulnerability within the



women's homeless population - mental ill-health, drug and alcohol dependencies, experiences of Local Authority, of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and other traumatic life experiences are all very common-place. Indeed, Crisis report that homeless women experience higher levels of mental illness than homeless men, by virtue of the physical and sexual abuse they have experienced.

It is evident that majority of homeless women have had negative experiences when approaching local authorities for help, with many being 'turned away at the door' or deterred by front-line staff from making homelessness applications. Recent research conducted by Crisis found that, of the women who did make homelessness applications, less than one third were awarded priority need status. It is not surprising, therefore, that few women are willing to seek support and that over a third of homeless women do not approach their local authority for help or cannot remember doing so.

The 999 Club and its partner agencies (namely Deptford Reach and Bench Outreach) are in a good position to actively and positively engage with the women who access their services. It is vital that they foster positive working relationships with the women with whom they work in order to end the cycle of abuse, deprivation and homelessness. That only three participants in the focus groups were women (12%) suggests that fewer women than would be expected are accessing the services offered locally. We recommend further research to establish why this is the case and to consider what more can be done to engage this extremely vulnerable group.



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