



IMPACT EVALUATION REPORT

EMMA JACKSON – REID ALLEN –
BRENDA HERBERT – JOSH AINLEY



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	03
FOREWORD	04
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	06
1. BACKGROUND	09
2. METHODOLOGY	14
3. FINDINGS	16
4. HOW DOES 999 CLUB FIT INTO THE LANDSCAPE OF LOCAL SERVICES?	23
5. THE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES FACING 999 CLUB	25
6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND EXPANSION	37
7. 'A MAJOR ANCHOR': PARTNER ORGANISATIONS PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEED FOR 999 CLUB	39
8. CONCLUSION	40
9. RECOMMENDATIONS	41
REFERENCES	42
APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE 2013–2021	44
APPENDIX 2: REFLECTIONS ON THE EVALUATION PROCESS	46

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this report was conducted between January – July 2023 by a team of researchers from the Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths College, University of London. The project was led, and the final report written, by Emma Jackson who also conducted the client interviews and discussion groups. Josh Ainley provided research support for the discussion groups. Reid Allen conducted the analysis of the annual reports and staff interviews, and contributed to the analysis of the staff perspectives. Brenda Herbert conducted the interviews with the partner organisation staff and did the preliminary analysis of these interviews. Thanks to Michael Eades at Goldsmiths and to Nick Rose at 999 Club, for their support of this project across its duration.

The research team wishes to thank everyone who contributed their time to this project. We fully appreciate the constraints on the time of those working in the homeless sector and the many pressures on the lives of 999 clients. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and your time with us.

For any queries or further information on this report, contact:

Dr Emma Jackson
Director
Centre for Urban and Community Research
Goldsmiths
London SE14 6N
e.jackson@gold.ac.uk

This report should be cited as follows: Jackson, E., Allen, R., Herbert, B., Ainley, J. (2023) 'Impact Evaluation Report: 999 Club' London, Goldsmiths.



FOREWORD

THOMAS NEUMARK, CEO



999 Club was founded by Iris French and Patricia Wyndham in 1992 after seeing people experiencing homelessness in their local churchyard, and we have been serving our local community in South-East London ever since.

So as we celebrated our 30th Anniversary, we look towards the future; a future where we will be able to support many more people to find a place they can call home. But we also wanted to use this time to reflect on our journey and the difference we have made to thousands of people over the years.

We were delighted to be able to work with the amazing team at Goldsmiths University London to produce this Impact Report, and we would like to also thank the National Lottery Community Fund who helped with its funding. Both organisations have been wonderful, long-term partners of 999 Club and we cannot thank them enough for their ongoing support.

In creating this report, which explores and details the impact of 999 Club over the years, the authors found that we were held in high esteem by the people we support and the partner organisations we work with, including our local authority, our local health services and fellow homeless organisations. As one representative argued 'Every borough should commission a service like 999 Club.' whilst another simply stated '...it's probably one of the best partner organisations I've worked with.'

We believe that 999 Club is a place where change happens. People come to us at a real time of crisis in their lives, whether they are homeless or are facing the risk of becoming homeless, and at 999 Club, we work in a unique, collaborative way to help meet their immediate and long-term needs.

Of course, the charity has changed over the years to not only to meet the often complex and challenging needs of those we are helping, but also to reflect the pressures of today's modern life. Having come through COVID and the lockdowns, which were truly an unprecedented time for everyone, 2023 now presents us with



Staff and volunteers listen to what you're going through and even if they're not able to help at that time, they will try and find ways around it, to make you feel comfortable and get the help that you need.



an extraordinary energy, housing and cost of living crisis, along with underfunded systems of housing, benefits and mental health support.

Therefore, our work to support people in south-east London who are at risk of sleeping on the streets is even more vital. But whilst it is important that we look towards the future, I also wanted to reflect on our past, and there are many wonderful points we have taken from this fantastic insight into the last 30 years of 999 Club.



The staff, they are excellent. They will never throw it in your face. You're always welcome.



If they weren't there to support me when I fell down and actually needed the help, where would I be today?



I do hope that you enjoy reading our Impact Report and that you will continue to support us on our journey. The report summarises our work, alongside some very powerful stories from those that matter to us the most; the people we were set up to help. I feel that it is only fitting that the last words of my introduction should be from them:



The 999 Club is a shining star.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report offers an evaluation of 999 Club in Deptford, London Borough of Lewisham, a centre for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Initially started by two women – Iris French and Patricia Wyndham – in response to local homelessness in 1992, 999 Club has evolved over time, expanding operations in the late 1990s into three day centres, a nursery and a night shelter before being gradually shaped into its present form of a fully professionalised, specialised but multi-faceted service under one roof on Deptford Broadway.

999 Club currently delivers four services: The Gateway (drop-in); Housing, Employment and Advice; The Bridge Café (a service for people with mental health needs); and The Women’s Sanctuary. Service provision has changed considerably in the past three years, in response to a new strategic vision, the impacts of the COVID pandemic and a high level of local demand.

This report by a team of researchers at the Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths, was commissioned by 999 Club to mark their 30th anniversary in 2022. The report set out to evaluate:

- **The impact of 999 Club on its clients**
- **The current and future challenges facing 999 Club and its clients**

The key findings of the report can be summarised as follows:



- 999 Club’s impact is wide. Apart from periods of lockdown closure, 999 Club Gateway has seen on average 50 people¹ a day since 2016. The estimated figure for the number of visits to The Gateway between 2013 and 2019 alone is 169,000².
- The evidence demonstrates that 999 Club has had a significant range of impacts on the lives of their clients. The kind of impact on clients’ lives ranges from providing the essentials of shower, food and clothing in a time of urgent need, to advocacy work that has speeded up access to housing, to providing a significant place of belonging.

¹ Based on annual reports 2016- present day.

² See Appendix 1 for average figures per year. The total is an estimate calculated on the basis of 260 working days in the average year.



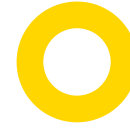
- These impacts are not always a result of one form of intervention/ advice/help but can result from multiple interventions over time. This impact across the life course is not readily captured by conventional outcome statistics. This is linked to the centre's longevity and its local embeddedness.
- The significance of the impact of 999 Club on clients' lives was starkly expressed. Several clients stated that they would not be alive if it were not for 999 Club. Staff and partner organisation interviewees also stated that if 999 Club were to close, this would result in the loss of lives.
- The centre's longevity and significance has made it an anchor institution in Deptford and south-east London.
- A combination of the outfall of the COVID-19 pandemic (2019–2021) and the cost-of-living crisis (2021–ongoing) has pushed people who fall beyond the usual 999 client profile into poverty, increasing the demand on The Gateway and Housing, Employment and Advice services at 999 Club.
- Staff describe advocating for clients within existing social and political systems that are under-funded and not functioning well for their clients. A combination of austerity and the outfall of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the retreat of other services and a move from face-to-face appointments to online. This is disastrous for people who are already experiencing digital exclusion, and 999 Club's staff's advocacy work has become even more essential.
- There has been a high volume of staff turnover at 999 Club in the last two years and a reshaping of the service along with changing strategic priorities. In this flux, institutional memory is held by the long-term clients and volunteers with lived experience.
- 999 Club has successfully realigned its services in line with the strategy set out by the trustees in 2015.
- The majority of clients express the view that the service has changed for the better over its 31 years. There is some ambivalence amongst clients about the recent reduction of open access sessions and a small minority of clients who express negative views about these changes.

- A tension between providing a place of belonging, where an inclusive community is built while also creating spaces for the most vulnerable and not creating dependency continues to underscore debates about what 999 Club should or should not be.
- Key to the realigning of the service has been a growing emphasis on co-production within the service. The evidence suggests that this has been a success and clients express a sense of ownership and participation in shaping the service.
- 999 Club is regarded as a vital service and an example of best practice within the sector by its partners.
- Our evaluation suggests five issues to consider going forward i) the need to continue to balance preserving open access elements of the service with delivering the more targeted model of service. ii) the need to continue to embed co-production and user-led methodologies at the heart of the service. iii) bringing in trained mental health workers. iv) a project to build a 999 Club archive. v) improving data collection and collation practices.



1

BACKGROUND



1.1

The changing landscape of homelessness in London (1993 and 2023)

The changing shape of 999 Club reflects policy changes and wider national and city-level patterns that have impacted on homelessness and homelessness services, as well as changes in funding and organisational strategy. An examination of reports on homelessness in the early 1990s reveals alarming parallels between the time of the founding of 999 Club and the homelessness crisis in contemporary London.

Homelessness in Britain increased in the 1980s and early 1990s, with acceptances of those in priority need by local authorities doubling between 1984 and 1992 (Warrington, 1996). And rough sleeping was at crisis point. A study by The Salvation Army in 1989 estimated 2000 people were sleeping out regularly in London (Oakley cited in Warrington, 1996). In addition to increasing numbers, the diversity of those becoming homeless was increasing, with more young people, and those with mental health problems affected, alongside an increase in ethnic diversity among the homeless population (Warnes et al, 2004).

While the launch of the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) in 1990 attempted to contain the crisis of street homelessness, it did little to tackle the root causes (Cloke et al, 2010). When the RSI did not significantly reduce rough sleeping, the government's approach to rough sleepers grew more hostile, resulting in more coercive attempts to 'clear up' the streets and, in 1994, Prime Minister John Major referred to 'homeless beggars' as 'eyesores' (Porter, 1998, 372).

The founding of 999 Club in 1992 by Iris French and Patricia Wyndham in a shed in their local churchyard can be understood as not just an individual act of charity but as part of a wider societal moment when the voluntary sector stepped in to fill the gaps left by statutory services.

Moving to the present day, in 2022 London had by far the highest number of homeless people of any region of England with 1 in 58 people currently homeless, compared to a national average of 1 in 208 (Shelter, 2022).

London tops every one of the sub-categories within these homeless statistics, from those in temporary accommodation to those rough sleeping. The annual rough sleeping snapshot that counts people on one night a year, indicates that 858 people were sleeping rough in London (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 2022), an increase from 2021 of 218 people, or 34%.

Moving beyond the annual snapshot, the most recent CHAIN Bulletin (CHAIN a, 2023) finds that 10,053 people were seen sleeping rough in 2022/23 (see Fig. 1). This is an increase of 21% on the previous year, which contrasts with the downward trend of the years 2019–2022 when the positive effects of the ‘Everyone In’ policy of moving all rough sleepers into accommodation at the height of the pandemic were reflected in the figures. Worryingly, the CHAIN figures show 6,391 people (64% of the total) were seen sleeping rough for the first time in London in 2022/23.

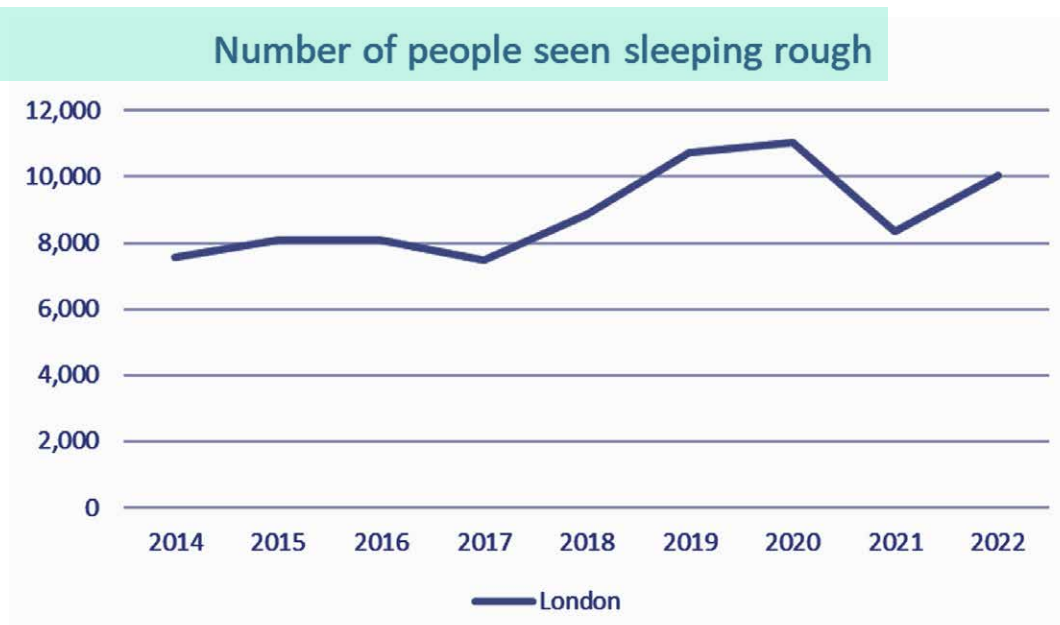


Fig 1. Number of people seen sleeping rough in London, 2014–2022 (Source: Atlas, 2023)

Beyond this city-level picture, Lewisham is the Local Authority with the 6th highest level of homelessness in England and with rising levels of rough sleeping, and with the neighbouring borough of Greenwich following a similar pattern (see Fig. 2). According to the CHAIN statistics on London’s outer boroughs³, Lewisham also has the second highest level of new rough sleepers in 2022/23, coming second only to Croydon (CHAIN b, 2023).



Number of people seen sleeping rough



Fig 2. Number of people seen sleeping rough in Lewisham and Greenwich, 2014–2022 (Source: Atlas, 2023)

Taking these statistics together, a picture builds of 999 Club as both emerging from and currently situated within high – and rising – levels of homelessness on a national, city and borough level.

1.2

The 999 Club: From 'Mary Poppins Carpet Bag' to a professionalised service

There is very little in the way of an archive of 999 Club from the years 1997–2013. The institutional memory of the place instead resides with the long-term clients and volunteers with lived experience who remember 999 Club in the 1990s. They describe a place of frenetic activity that was welcoming but could sometimes have a volatile atmosphere.

A lively⁴ snapshot of the service is given by the journalist Mary Wakefield, who was also a trustee, in 2008. She characterises the service as 'Mary Poppins Carpet Bag' where those working and volunteering manage to respond to a huge variety of local needs. The service at that time comprised three day centres in Deptford, New Cross and Downham, a nursery and a night shelter.

³ Lewisham is officially an inner London borough but is classified as an outer borough for the purposes of the CHAIN reports.

⁴ and not unproblematic in terms of the descriptions of clients 'There is no one too sick or too bonkers or too foreign to be helped.'

While the four services that currently make up the 999 Club still manage to respond to a wide range of issues from mental health crisis to housing to hunger, the shape of the service has changed significantly.

From 2013 onwards, 999 Club has operated solely from the Deptford centre. An ethnographic study (Allen et al, 2013) from 2013 by researchers from Roehampton University found that the club was not only an advice centre but was strongly involved in the creation of a safe, familiar social space where people could stay, relax and socialise. They argued that 'the 999 Club should be regarded as a community centre in its own right' (Allen et al, 2013, 9), pointing to the presence of people in the day centre without acute housing problems and with relatively secure financial situations. They found that the main pull factor of the club was its multi-functional character, catering both to the practical and immediate desires for food and cleanliness and the more subtle psychological needs, such as providing a sense of belonging. This report found that this sense of 999 Club as a 'normal' place was based on boundaries between the staff, advice workers, volunteers and clients that were porous, flexible and easily bridged.

However, the lack of boundaries between staff and clients was discussed as a concern in a later piece of research (Snow and Flynn, 2015) based on focus groups with clients. While respondents were generally very positive about the environment of the day centre, Snow and Flynn found that working relationships between service users and staff did not always adhere to professional standards or boundaries. They pointed to a need for improved communication between staff and between staff and people accessing services. They also pointed to a need for improved communication of expectations, as well as highlighting the desire for practical support in securing employment and for further services to improve psychological well-being.

Crucially, they found evidence of over-dependency – people using the service for many years and having difficulty accepting personal responsibility for their current situations.

This tension between providing a place of belonging, where community is built, while also not creating dependency continues to underscore debates about what 999 Club should or should not be.

In 2015 the trustees set out a new vision for the service, stating that 'The 999 Club has operated on a broadly unchanged basis for over 20 years, the trustees now wish to see the charity being more pro-active in supporting members to take greater control of their lives and move on.' This change in focus is reflected in the name change of the drop-in to 'The Gateway' ('we were no longer a 'drop in' but a 'gateway' giving access to these crucial services.' (999 Club and Lady Florence Trust, 2015)).



Their recommendations were:

- to focus work on a smaller number of people – those with greatest need – providing personalised and in-depth support
- to provide each individual with a range of support including advice and advocacy to resolve some of their problems and a variety of activities to improve life skills and employability, in the process reducing isolation
- to develop core specialisms within advice and advocacy in housing and benefits, migrants and employment, and women
- to create an inclusive culture for members in which they have a voice to tell us what works best for them
- to expand the range of services to include family mediation to help members reconnect with support networks and healthcare support to help them obtain better health outcomes from the NHS
- to deepen partnerships with other organisation in Lewisham



Our research suggests that 999 Club has successfully implemented these changes, with the exception of family mediation.

Further changes were forced by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown of 2019, which saw the permanent closure of the night shelter. As the centre reopened in 2020, a raft of changes, including new staff in key leadership positions, changes to working practices, and a new focus on co-production were brought in. The first co-produced project was the Women's Sanctuary opening in 2022, a year which also saw the opening of The Bridge Café, a service for those with mental health problems. Further changes to the service came in March 2023 as part of the 'Theory of Change'⁵ process. This resulted in the restricting of open access to the drop-in from 5 days to 2 days a week for those who are not rough sleepers and who do not have appointments.

This report therefore provides an evaluation of the impact of a service that has changed significantly over 31 years and is settling into its most recent form.

⁵ an approach popularised by Carol Weiss (1995) that is aimed at helping organisations to work backwards from their intended impacts to identify a route to achieving these goals.

2.

METHODOLOGY

This research took place between January and June 2023. In order to meet our research aims, and in keeping with the ethos of 999 Club, we conducted a qualitative study based on a combination of interviews and group discussions with staff members, volunteers, clients and staff members from partner organisations. The research design was produced in dialogue with 999 Club.

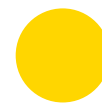
We also analysed the available annual reports from 2013 to the present day to track changes in the charity's vision and strategy.

The primary research consisted of the following data set:

- 5 interviews with staff members
- 5 interviews with staff from partner organisations
- 3 discussion groups with clients and volunteers with lived experience (15 people in total)
- Informal interviews in The Gateway with 10 additional clients

We approached the managers within the centre to nominate a member of their team for interview and four were suggested. Due to the recent high turnover of staff post-COVID, we then recruited an additional member of staff who had worked at the centre for five years.

We also interviewed professionals who work in partnership with 999 Club. Ten were approached and four responded to our request for interviews. One participant recommended contacting another professional for an interview. A total of five professionals were interviewed – three in-person and two via Microsoft Teams. The length participants had worked with 999 Club varied – from starting in Oct 2022, 2018 (5 years), August 2022, March 2023, 4 years. The partner organisations represented span drug and alcohol support services, healthcare, Lewisham Council and the homelessness sector.



Staff from 999 Club set up three discussion groups with clients with a wide range of experiences, from new clients to long-term ones and encompassing those currently experiencing street homelessness to those who had successfully moved through employment and training programmes. Setting up discussion groups was quite challenging – at least two other organisations were conducting research in the centre during this period, which brings the possibility of research fatigue – and so the discussion groups were complemented with informal interviews in The Gateway.

The discussion groups all lasted between 1 hour and 90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. The Gateway interviews were informal, and lasted between 5 minutes and 25 minutes. These were documented through a combination of recorded interviews and note-taking, depending on what seemed appropriate for the client in this busy environment. At the request of one of the managers, we carried out the client discussion groups and interviews a month after the access to The Gateway was changed, rather than while those changes were taking place.

A limitation of writing up interview-based research is that through reducing these conversations to interview transcripts, some of the emotion – predominantly overwhelming gratitude to staff – that came through in these accounts is lost. For many people, encountering 999 Club was a life-changing moment that happened in the worst time of their life. We have tried to capture these feelings in this report.

This research project was approved through the ethical review process at Goldsmiths. The research was explained in an accessible way at the outset of discussion groups and interviews and information sheets were distributed to participants. While the study was oriented towards experiences of 999 Club rather than asking for narratives of homelessness, recalling the impact of 999 club did for some involve recounting difficult and painful memories.

The presence of two other teams of researchers in the service during the research period also served as a reminder of how often homeless people are asked to provide their stories for those conducting social research. No incentive was offered for taking part in this research and often people stated their motivation for taking part as giving back to 999 Club or wanting to share their appreciation for the place. However, this contrasted with other research teams who were offering paid incentives and resulted in one participant commenting ‘we’re not getting paid today’ (see Appendix 2 for reflections on the evaluation process).

We also examined the organisation’s annual reports and other archival materials to construct a timeline of changes within the centre and to trace shifts in strategy and operations (See Appendix 1). One limitation of this study is that we found near to no archive of the years 1997–2013. The best source of information about the changing service over the years is the living archive of long-term clients and volunteers with lived experience.

3. FINDINGS

The findings sections of this report are structured into two over-arching sections to correspond to the two sets of research questions that drive this evaluation. The Impacts of 999 Club presents an overview of how the 999 meets the needs of those who use it, based on the accounts of clients. We consider how it fits into the landscape of changing local services and how local stakeholders see the role of 999 Club. The current and future challenges facing 999 Club considers how the local/national landscape of homelessness and housing precarity have changed in recent years. We examine the key challenges that the organisation faces and how 999 Club is evolving to meet these needs. We set out ideas from clients, staff and partner organisations about how 999 Club could and should develop in the future.

3.1

The impacts of 999 Club on clients

We found that 999 Club has made a positive and profound difference in the lives of many of the clients that we spoke to. This was further evidenced by interviews conducted with staff and the partner organisations. From providing the basics of food and clothing to providing a route to training and employment, clients were effusive in their praise for how it had made a difference in their lives:

'I got there, the reception I got, it blew your head away. Instantly, I felt that I was at home.' — Male Client (DG3)

'It ain't the bricks and mortar. It's the people. This service is the best ... so it's got to be the staff and the volunteers. The atmosphere that they create.' — Male Client (G1) **'The 999 is a shining star'** — Male Client (DG3)

'If they weren't there to support me when I fell down and actually needed the help, where would I be today?' — Male Volunteer with lived experience (DG1)

'I love the community in Deptford and this is such a big, big part of it.' — Female Volunteer with lived experience (DG1)



999 Club staff and those working in partnership organisations were also positive about the impact that 999 Club made in the lives of their clients and the high level of service provision:

I'm very passionate about making sure that we are delivering a good service for the clients. Even if we cannot resolve their situation, it's about clients being able to come in and their journey here. — Staff Member

'[We] have the right support in place to help combat some of these ongoing cycles of inequality within the community around vulnerable people and homelessness.'
— Staff Member

In the rest of this section, we look at the kinds of impacts that 999 Club has made in the lives of those who use it and consider how it fits into the landscape of changing local services.

I haven't worked in a service that matches the 999 Club. — Partner organisation interview

3.1.1

Client perspectives on the impacts of 999 Club

The client participants for this project were at different stages in terms of their interactions with 999 Club – one woman had only been coming for five days, whereas another had started as a volunteer, then used the service and then volunteered again. This move between volunteering at 999 Club and in other homeless services, and then returning as a client was not unusual and serves as a useful reminder that the trajectories in and out of homelessness can be complex and cyclical.

The range of uses by clients mirrored these different stages. Current rough sleepers were positive about 999 Club's provision of food and a place to shower. One client apologised for his lack of English but showed us a wallet full of appointment cards to show how 999 Club was working with him on many different issues. Longer-term clients spoke of the multiple ways that the service had helped them over a sustained period of time. One woman who had been coming to the centre for 18 months described:

'When I got my flat, I thought that was the end of it. But I was trying to look for a course to do, to get myself back into work. Someone said to me, "Have you spoken to [staff name]?" There's a coach here that just guides you to do things. I came in, I booked an appointment with him, and he helped me do my CV. After that, we applied for a couple of jobs, but I didn't get them... But what he did, instead of him leaving me just like that, he tried to look around to see what training is out there, that can fit me ... I went on one and I remember my first day, because I did training with another lady, and instead of just giving us the [map] to find a way... There was a staff [member] that came with us on the first day, just to show us the place where we were going to be, have a word with the tutor and explain everything to us. That was really, really helpful.' — Female Client, DG1

This long-term and multifaceted set of interactions had been transformative for this client who also enjoyed the activities offered by 999 Club, especially yoga. Her story captures the holistic nature of the support offered. A more long-term client of eight years, described how 999 Club had supported him to access housing over the years:

'As soon as I came here to the front door, they gave me a bed. The same day, they took me in. I had food and drink, breakfast, lunch and dinner. I had to leave in the morning at 8 o'clock and then come back at 8 o'clock in the evening, but they looked after me. They found me my first room with a fridge and a shared house with six more different chappies ... I would spend five years in there, but I finally – together with [staff name] and [staff name] – got a flat now and she's beautiful ... I'm still flying. I don't think I'll ever touch the ground again.' — Male Client DG3

He also described enjoying taking part in the music sessions facilitated by 999 Club and had been on a wide range of trips over the years. This is an example of how the interaction with 999 Club that created impact was often not a one-off event but a series of moments over a person's life course and he also described enjoying taking part in the music sessions facilitated by 999 Club and had been on a wide range of trips over the years. This is an example of how the interaction with 999 Club that created impact was often not a one-off event but a series of moments over a person's life course and across different parts of the service.

This is testament to how 999 Club operates as an anchor institution for people who inhabit south-east London precariously. The durational nature of the service and its rootedness in place is important here.

The confidence that 999 Club was a place that could offer support on a wide range of issues also came through in the multiple accounts of clients who said that frequently they recommend 999 Club to people they know:

'I just tell them straight if they've got any financial paperwork, difficulties with council tax, or electric bills, or anything, come to the 999. If you're homeless, if you're hungry, if you need the hospital or any advice, I always recommend this establishment straight away ...Yes, there's nowhere else to send anyone.' — Male Client DG3

Central to these accounts of the service from clients was praise for the staff and volunteers. Several people in the discussion groups and in The Gateway interviews remarked upon how polite the staff were and how this was unusual in their experience. When conducting interviews in The Gateway, two clients pointed to the busy staff in action around them to indicate how hard they work ('look at them, they deserve medals' Male Client G1).

Clients were effusive in their praise for staff:

'They listen to what you're going through and even if they're not able to help at that time, they will try and find ways around it, to make you feel comfortable and get the help that you needed.' — Female Client (DG1)

This appreciation came across strongly in an exchange in DG3 between three male clients:

The staff, they are excellent. They will never throw it in your face. You are always welcome.

Always.

Always welcome. They receive you with open arms.

Like a family.

Moments of crisis where 999 staff had made a difference figured heavily in the descriptions of 999 Club in client discussion groups and interviews. Clients described the significant impact of contact with 999 Club during these moments. This came out strongly in Discussion Group 3, where there was a consensus that if it wasn't for the 999, many people would have taken their own lives, including people in the group:

'If there was no 999, I wouldn't be here at this time. I would commit suicide because of shame.' — Male Client DG3

'It was actually when me and my missus separated and I had nowhere to live, so I found myself in a hostel just around the corner here... so 999 really helped me to come here to do my washing. We ate here every morning and, in those days, they gave you take-away as well. I just came here almost every day and the support they gave me was really good, because I was really, really down. All of a sudden, we were separated with three kids ... I felt like even committing suicide. I ended up in a hostel. It was really difficult. If I didn't have 999, I think my life would be a bit rough.' — Male Client (DG3)



But moving beyond these moments of acute need, longer-term clients and volunteers with lived experience also described a sense of belonging to 999 Club:

'I keep coming back because of the welcoming atmosphere. It's not just because I was homeless and they helped me get somewhere to stay. Then even after that, I thought that would be the end of it. But I still come back and now they're helping me. They've put me in training for different jobs. They've got different activities that they do as well. Yes, so, I keep coming back every day.' — Female Client, DG1

'A lot of the clients, I knew before I started coming in here, from the street and previous places I've eaten and that. So, a lot of the clients I did know, so, yes, I've got friends here, but I've made a lot more friends here because I've been coming here regularly.' — Male Client, DG1

'It's like another family' — Male Client, G1

We have found that 999 Club meets a range of needs from clients from providing for the immediate needs of food and clothing, to training and employment, to activities such as music making and film club. It also continues to provide a place of belonging over time, echoing the earlier findings by Allen et al (2013). The service is effective in meeting the immediate needs of new clients, but the accounts of longer-term clients reveal the impact of multiple members of staff and parts of service that have been accessed over a sustained period.



3.1.2

Partner organisation perspectives: Empathy, Care and Professionalism



The high regard in which clients hold staff was matched in the partner organisation interviews. A recurring theme throughout the partner organisation interviews was praise for the professionalism and care of the staff members at 999 Club. Many of the participants praised the care and empathy the staff showed through their work and manner, and gave glowing accounts of the good practice of the 999 Club staff:

'The team there are absolutely incredible ... They're so professional, they care... The empathy, it's all there. They're all incredible, they're very professional. It's probably one of the best partner organisations I've worked with.' — Partner organisation interview

'I think there's loads of examples that we could give, but I think it's important that the 999 Club's recruitment process is fantastic. I think they're very particular about who they hire. The levels of empathy that the workers have and dedication. Because I can't think of one worker that I wasn't impressed with.' — Partner organisation interview

Communication was also key, and several participants commented that they felt that the communication with the 999 Club was good, and they were always kept 'in the loop' with clients. Participants felt that the 999 Club was run well, in the terms of one interviewee, like a 'well-oiled ship'.

Another participant said 'I can't praise them enough. I sincerely mean that. They're very, very genuine people and very caring, very caring. Every client, if you just mention a person, "Oh, I remember that person." It's not a case of, "Who?" They remember everyone they work with and they give them their full attention, they really do ... we do get feedback. It's like, "Oh, thank God you sent me there. I wouldn't know where else to go. They're so helpful."

Taken together the accounts of partner organisations and clients give an in the round picture of the high levels of professionalism and care shown by staff at 999 Club.

4.

HOW DOES 999 CLUB FIT INTO THE LANDSCAPE OF LOCAL SERVICES?

The expectations and demands on 999 Club are also impacted by the changing dynamics of other similar local services. At the time of the research there were two other key homeless services in Deptford, Deptford Reach and Bench. Bench is a different kind of organisation, with a Christian ethos. It does not run a drop-in service but does provide housing and benefits advice, and runs an outreach evening in conjunction with a local church. As one volunteer summarised: 'It's more outreach ... It's not a centre that you can go in.'

Like 999 Club, Deptford Reach was a day centre and community advice service supporting people who have been affected by homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness. Previously an independent charity, it became part of the London-wide homelessness charity Thames Reach in 2018. Both staff and clients describe how previously clients would use both services, but that Deptford Reach had recently changed the scope of its activities, joining forces with 999 Club to relocate some of their social activities such as art workshops to 999 Club. Clients had also experienced the reduction in activities at Deptford Reach and considered 999 Club more of a hub for activities:

'I'd say there are more activities go on here than any of the others that I know of. They do have a gardening club round Deptford Reach, but I think they're winding down round there. So, less and less goes on round there now. Because I know the building is meant to be coming down at some point and loads of flats are going there.' — Male Client (DG1)

Deptford Reach was also fast approaching closure during the research period (the day centre closed on 16 August). In the run-up to its closure, clients were concerned and some had moved over to 999 Club as Deptford Reach had already restricted its opening hours to three mornings a week and was preserving that space for rough sleepers:

'They used to leave it for people to go there, stay there, do things. But now, strictly ... Unless you have an appointment. That's the difference. But they provide food, they provide assistance on everything. But the only thing is, they don't allow people to go there and then sit down and relax.' — Male Client DG3

The closure of this service will also impact on the neighbouring space of 999 club, as one staff member suggested, clients will no longer 'bounce between the two'. Partner organisations also expressed concern about the impact of the closure of Deptford Reach, considering that it will make 999 Club even more of an important service but that it would also increase demand.

The removal of Deptford Reach to make way for a housing development was also remarked upon by clients and can be seen as representative of an increasingly difficult local environment where rents are increasing and spaces for those experiencing homelessness are shrinking.

5

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES FACING 999 CLUB

In the second half of the findings section, we move on to consider the wider context within which the 999 Club operates. We consider how the service has adapted to these current challenges and evolved, focussing on the changing focus of the service. We discuss the co-production approach and the emphasis on partnership working.

5.1

Advocating in the outfall of austerity and the pandemic

The demand for 999 services increased exponentially after the pandemic and as the Government wound down the emergency measures they had put in place for homeless people. Monthly attendance at the centre grew from 129 in April 2021 to 753 in August 2021.

Clients expressed a high level of awareness of the wider constraining structural forces on the service. One male client said that the staff were very helpful and had helped him with housing, however he contrasted this with his experiences of dealing with Lewisham Council ('people in housing don't respond, the council don't respond'. GI). He pointed out that what the 999 staff can do is limited by the council – they could try and contact the council but ultimately all they can do is 'ask the council for options'. This unfavourable depiction of the council's housing service in contrast with advocacy provided by 999 cut through the interviews and discussion groups with clients.

Some of these frustrations with Lewisham had been exacerbated by the move to online services and the decline of face-to-face contact:

'You can't even come to my office now and just make a simple enquiry. You have to go online and frigging— Sorry, my... I'm just getting so passionate here. You have to go online. In those days, you want information, go to the library, put on your coat, your jacket, your shoes... Not anymore.' — Male Client DG3

Staff also described how the move from face-to-face appointments to online, post-pandemic had had an adverse effect on their clients:



'When you look at like the state of Citizens Advice Bureau, it's like paperwork A&E ... That was always the fob off, you know? Whatever it was, 'just call the Citizens Advice Bureau' and that's just not available anymore. The Home Office, you know, 5 million unprocessed cases ... The fact the JobCentres and Lewisham council have much less client facing on the ground service as a knock on from COVID ... but there's a lot of people who that means they literally can't access any of that stuff ... For services. I think that's definitely been like the cherry on the top of austerity. The ones that you know can support you, you can't access it. And I think there's not enough real-world portals to that stuff for people.' — Staff Member

'So many people just shut down. And I think a lot of people use COVID as an excuse to shut down for good, especially the council. Now it's just purely online. Over the phone, etc. Yeah, because I think people just got used to it.' — Staff Member

However, staff members also were well aware of the impact of austerity on local councils and other services, describing a situation of chronic under-funding.

'I'd say getting through to the Housing Department for both us and the people is a major challenge. And not only in Lewisham, in our surrounding boroughs. It's Southwark, Greenwich, them all. And on the other hand, I know that every council is scrabbling about for money, has had its funding cut, is trying to deliver services when they're faced with the same pressures that we are. So, you can say, "Well the council don't do this," but I don't know that they've got the capacity or the funding to do it either.' — Staff Member

'It's easy to say ... you can point fingers and be like "Housing could do better", "this person could do better" but ultimately it lies within government. I think a lot of the issues and why there's so much reliance on charities is because there's limited funding. So even if Housing make poor decisions for clients, it's because they can't house everybody. And sometimes it can be easy to just blame them, but you know ultimately it's not them, it's a wider society issue.' — Staff Member

The picture that emerges from staff accounts is of trying to advocate in highly pressurised and underfunded systems ('it's always a lot of following up and chasing.' Staff interview).

Interestingly, those from the partner organisations that we interviewed described being 'pushed' by 999 Club on clients' cases in a positive light. One participant explained it as the 999 Club staff member in question being 'like a dog with a bone' but appreciating this dedication. Another participant reflected that the 999 Club pushed him in the direction of helping people more, which he appreciated. He commented:

'I think everyone who works here, who I've met and who I've built a relationship with, has been positive, caring, easy to approach, and all pushed me in the direction that I want pushing, which is supporting people who are vulnerable, who need help' — Partner organisation interview

Staff could see the changes that clients were being supported to make through their advocacy work but all expressed frustration at the systemic failures in housing and mental health provision:

'Everybody here can say they've made dramatic changes in people's lives. But covering that over is, the whole system is broken ... Housing is broken in this country ... The whole system, the breakdown of not supplying social housing, the benefits system, that is mean to assist people into housing. And I think what we see here is a lot of exploitation of very vulnerable people by offering the type of housing that kind of traps them within the system. So the local housing allowances say they can only afford so much rent. Just everything comes back to the sheer lack of housing.' — Staff Member

'There's not sufficient mental health support services, there's not sufficient social services, all the services around just aren't fit for purpose. And I guess it can feel at times like you're just banging your head against the wall, or you're just kind of like, it's a big revolving door.' — Staff Member

'We are really advocating a lot of the time... But at the end of the day, we don't have keys to flats or passports to give them, you know, we can't sort out people's PIP you know?' — Staff Member

Staff are keenly aware of how this wider situation of crisis impacts on their work and on clients' lives. Further pressure has come from the cost-of-living crisis that has seen people who do not fit the usual profile:

'Before it would be someone that's got substance misuse history, who's been multiply excluded from different accommodations, but now with the cost of living, it affects everyday people. We have people coming in who have got children, people that are working not earning enough wages and they can't pay their bills.' — Staff Member

The brutal national context and its impact on who was experiencing homelessness was also discussed by participants from partner organisations. One participant described:

'The rise in the cost of living is bound to have a huge impact, I think we're already beginning to see that impact in the amount of approaches that we're getting for low to medium support clients, seeing an increase of that someone that was working and was quite functioning ... Loss of job means they've resorted to rough sleeping.' — Staff from partner organisation

As we explore below, in the face of these mounting pressures and in light of changing strategic objectives (see pages 11–13), 999 Club has changed.

5.2.1

Changing services: Then and Now

Clients' accounts of change within 999 Club were largely positive, although, as we set out below, a minority were dissatisfied by the curtailing of open access to The Gateway. Clients pointed to a more well-organised service with more clearly defined roles, The Gateway feeling safer and the important provision of the space of the Women's Sanctuary:

'It used to be one staff member would tell you this, another would tell you that but now they've got it all sorted out.' — Male Client (GI)

'It was so manic before. Anyone could come in. They can now, obviously, but we hadn't got a reception, so people were in and out. There was a lot of fighting. A lot of these people had known each other for years. Some people slept on the street and they'd come into the club. We only had one poor guy who used to do all the bouncing ... We did have a nice sign outside, saying, 'No guns and no knives.' I don't know if anyone took any notice of that, but... It was quite frightening.' — Female volunteer with lived experience (DG1)

'They are well-organised now. That's why things are very simple now. Well-organised. Group by group. "Who is responsible for this group?" Before, it was just all over the place, but now, "Who is responsible?" The IT class in this section, this one in this section, this one in this, so you know where to go.' — Male Client DG3

However, there were some long-term clients who had found the recent turnover of staff destabilising and that the more defined roles had made it feel 'more office like' (Male Client DG3). While appreciating the staff effort, this client expressed the

opinion that: 'I think for me in this establishment, one would prefer how I found it.'

He explained:

'The workers before, when I first got to meet them, they were working here for 10, 15 or 30 years. At the present moment, the young people who we're meeting at the moment, they might've only been here a year or a year and a half. The time when we're talking, the people who used to be here and work here, they were here for 20 years, 15 years. So, they were well rooted, with anything that came through the door, they appeared. Coming in now, you just join in. Like, in the old days, you'd been here 10 years.' — Male Client DG3

This sense of rupture is understandable given the huge and dramatic changes brought about by the pandemic, the temporary closure of the centre and the permanent closure of the night shelter.

Despite these changes, the long duration of 999 Club in Deptford was important, and a feeling emerged from the client accounts that what was important about the place was there from the beginning and still remained. These qualities are hard to quantify and involve the particular atmosphere and lived values of this place and the meanings it has accrued over the years for multiple people that use it.



In a discussion of how chaotic 999 Club was in the 1990s, a volunteer said:

'In defence, I have to say, when this was first opened, it was for the homeless, but it was for vulnerable. Really for anyone in Deptford that wanted. It's somewhere for a cup of tea. Do you know what I mean? So, it was all manic and we weren't professional. It was mainly women that lived in Deptford and we worked there and did our best. So, over time, it has evolved to where we are now. Obviously, it has improved, but the heart was good at the beginning.' — Female Volunteer with lived experience (DG1)

The staff that we interviewed did not have the same institutional memory, having all joined in the last five years. However, in this short time, they had also seen and enacted many changes within the service.

'When I first came it was a whole different day centre ... when I look back I just don't know how we were able to have all the flow of clients coming in, work with them, it was just crazy.' — Staff Member

'Before it was just like, there was a kitchen and then a bloke with a laptop. That was, kind of, the 999 club.' — Staff Member

'I came in at a time when everything was shifting, everything was moving. So there's been this massive momentum towards the good. I mean, even a year and a half ago, when I came here... there were no systems, it was so chaotic. It was such

a mess. I think [name] The Gateway manager's done an amazing job like putting in all these kinds of procedures and standards. It's been amazing. Like, I wish I could take you back to see how it was a year and a half ago because I don't know how they functioned here. But I think it's just being part of that constant change and improvement and putting stuff in place and having a place for everything, like sometimes people come in and they're just like, "Oh, my God, this place has changed so much" because it has." — Staff Member

One participant from a partner organisation who had known the 999 Club for a long period, pointed out that one of its strengths has been that it has been able to adapt to the changing needs and environment over the years. This participant identified the new management structure as a positive change and welcomed the involvement from the new CEO, who he felt had increased the level of engagement with the local wider homeless forums and the Local Authority. He felt that the club was working well and was a single point of entry for clients to many services in the area. He explained:

'Making itself the central hub for people to access stuff has been a really big change, but the changed physical environment has really improved. The front door going in, it feels nice, it feels welcoming, it feels more efficient, it feels cleaner. It looks nice and I know that that's been in consultation with service users. So yes, I think it has changed over the last 3–4 years.'

In the rest of this section, we explore the aspects of 999 Club that have changed in more detail. We consider three key changes; the restricting of open access sessions, co-production and increased partnership working.

5.2.2

Balancing open access and delivery of a targeted service

In order to respond to increasing demand and to deliver the strategic objectives of the trustees, 999 Club has changed their open access policy. Instead of five days a week, there are now open access sessions on Wednesdays and Fridays only. The open access policy is key to the appeal of 999 Club for clients, but running an open to all service has become too much of a stretch for the service with increasing demand. This is a key change brought about through the Theory of Change process (see page 13). However, there is a tension in staff and volunteer accounts about the value of preserving a face-to-face and open service but also the need to restrict access.

Frustrations with the open access policy stemmed from a sense that clients were being sent to 999 Club by other organisations that had a statutory responsibility to them:

‘There seems to be quite a huge reliance on us, so sometimes we’re seen as a dumping ground. For example, places that should have a statutory duty to help people like the police, the local ambulance service, other professionals sometimes would be like, “Just go to the 999 Club.”’ — Staff Member

Staff were agreed on the issue of the need to prioritise the clients in the most need, rather than in one staff member’s words ‘trying to solve all social inequalities at the same time. All the time.’ However, this staff member also expressed having ‘mixed feelings’ about the changes to open access:

‘The thing for me that will be really special was that if you or I turned up at the door with X problem, you aren’t then just sitting in a room with people who have X problem, you’ve got people who are sitting there out of choice.... And I think there’s a degree of community support, and not everyone being there just because they need something immediately.... I think there is a lot of value in that, that could go under in the Theory of Change. It’s a balance. I think there’s a sense of belonging, through a shared experience, whether that’s a form of hardship. I just think that there is unplaceable undesignated value in that.’

However, another staff member, while critical of Theory of Change as an approach, welcomed these changes and saw this moving away from being a ‘soup kitchen’:

‘We’re changing the open access to The Gateway, which I think is a good thing, because we’ve become a bit of a soup kitchen, to be honest, that old school thing. We even promoted it on our website – you’d have pictures of volunteers giving the poor homeless person a sandwich ... Yes, it was helping some individuals to have a social space where they can sit and socialise, but we had to come to the realisation that’s not what we are. We’re not a social club, and we don’t want to be that.’ — Staff Member

This reflects different ideas about what the centre should be. However, where staff were agreed was that demand was high and something had to be done to make sure those that needed it were seen. One staff member also pointed out that this also has a gendered dimension:

‘In our day centre it’s got a lot of male presence in there. I don’t know, it’s quite funny, because there are a lot of female people that are street homeless, but we tend to get a lot of males coming into our day centre so, those that are usually in need sometimes get hidden amongst all of them. So, we want to be able to have a more focused approach on those particular clients.’

One way the 999 Club has responded to the increasing demand for help with bills is by starting 'One for Wednesdays' whereby everyone with these enquiries can bring these in on a Wednesday. A team of volunteers and staff have time designated for Wednesday afternoons to work through these issues. A staff member explains:

'It was trying to free up our project workers, our advice workers, who get stuck with: "I haven't been able to get onto the repairs department," "My gas," "I don't understand why Thames Water has sent me that." So we've got a whole team of really good volunteers and some of our staff who do that 'One for Wednesdays', where people can just come in and resolve those types of problems.'

This is an example of how 999 Club are preserving space for these more general issues that are bound up with the cost of living and energy crises, while also continuing to prioritise those in most acute need.

The majority of clients and volunteers with lived experience agreed that these changes were fair: 'Wednesdays and Fridays are open but the rest of the time it's only for the homeless. Considering the people that have more needs than those that haven't – and that's how it should be' (Male Client GI).

The activities are still open to everyone and one volunteer described how people were adapting to the new schedule:

'People look forward ... They know they've got Tuesday afternoons ... Because Tuesday is a closed day here, the only open access is the film club and people actually know that it's film club. You get a few people turn up. The numbers have started getting bigger, the same as with games day. More people are coming to play games and have fun, because they're getting used to being there on a Wednesday now. "I've got a cup of tea, maybe some biscuits. I've got somewhere warm to sit and whatever, and I've got a bit of social interaction as well." So, yes, it's what it's about.' — Male Volunteer with lived experience DG1



However, unsurprisingly, the change to open access was an issue a minority of clients felt very strongly about. One long term client described how:

'Before, everyone could come in, Monday to Friday. And now they've changed it all. I've been fighting to get it open at weekends, so rough sleepers have got somewhere to go on the weekends.' — Female Client DG2

One group of three men that we spoke to in The Gateway also thought this change was negative. One participant argued that rough sleepers were not the only people with acute needs, pointing to the needs of those with mental health issues: 'It's a joke. There used to be a sign outside that said pop in for a cup of tea and a chat. That's not there anymore'. (Male client GI). One of the other men in this discussion had started coming to 999 Club due to not being able to access Deptford Reach any more and so there was a sense in this discussion that available day centre spaces in the local area were constricting.

In 2013, based on ethnographic research at 999 Club, Allen et al argued: 'it is crucial that the club continues in its role as a community centre for everyone, regardless of their particular circumstances. The open door policy is much more than just a management rule: it has a symbolic meaning for its users, giving them a sense of equal treatment, fairness and ownership of this social space.' (23). Curtailing open access then, could be seen as compromising this characteristic of the service. However, for the most part the organisation has been successful in taking the clients with them regarding this change. Running a full programme of activities, introducing 'One for Wednesdays', and preserving some open access sessions have been key to this.

5.2.3

Co-production

Part of the restructuring of the service has been to bring co-production to the heart of the service – co-production in this context refers to ensuring that clients are a part of, and have a say at, every level of the organisation – through the creation of a co-production manager role. Co-production of the service with clients has become central to 999 Club's ethos ('whatever strategy our board is currently deciding upon the client committee have to sign off as well.' Staff Member).

This has also involved setting up a client committee to represent the views of clients and is working well. Clients described feeling listened to within the service. One client said: 'Annually, the committee invite us to give them feedback. Most of the time, they are inviting us here... I gave a speech congratulating them on what they have been doing for us, because without them, it's finished.' Male Client DG3

The first co-produced project was the Women's Sanctuary opening in 2022. The female clients that we spoke to who had accessed that space spoke of it very positively:

'When I came through that door, I was so nervous at first. They took me into the Women's Sanctuary and introduced me to one of the volunteers. She just told me what she has been through in her life and I will get there, "If you will be patient and be strong, it'll be okay. I know now it's hard, but it all happens." I didn't think at that time there was a light at the end of the tunnel for me. But because of what she said... I was sleeping on the street at that time, but it made me so confident that night. I think I told her I slept well that night.' — Female Client (DG1)

'It was the women that selected the colours and furnished it. The activities that we provide, and they do it themselves. Very good, I might say, as well! Yes, but it is a lovely safe space. If they need anything confidential, we've got another little room at the side and we have people obviously from different professions, like domestic violence, come in. So, we have everything on-hand for different people as well.' — Female Volunteer with lived experience (DG1)

There seemed a significant embracing of co-production across the organisation. Members of the client committee were effusive about the co-production and its impacts:

'I would say we're encouraged more to say how we feel. We do have the right, but we're encouraged to voice an opinion. Because if we don't voice an opinion, things are not going to get resolved, are they?' — Male Volunteer with lived experience (DG1)

Staff were also unilaterally positive about this change.

5.2.4

Increased Partnership Working

Another major change at the 999 Club has been an intensification of partnership working through bringing external services into 999 Club. On Wednesdays, the busiest day of the week, a drugs and alcohol service, the health service, Citizens Advice Bureau, Lewisham Council all have a presence.

This is effective because it increases accessibility to services for clients and enables joined-up working between organisations working with the same clients.

One staff member explained how this had been a concerted move post-pandemic:

‘Everybody knows who we are. We’ve managed to build quite a lot of relationships within the community. So, after the pandemic a lot of work that we were doing was to re-emerge ourselves into the community, get people to know what we’re doing, that we’re up and running again face to face, doors are opened. There was a lot of emphasis on going back to all the different partners and saying, “We are here.”’ — Staff Member

‘One of the things I really like about 999 Club is that they want community-based organisations to come and work out of our spaces. So sometimes it’s really busy. If you come here on a Wednesday, you’re gonna see all sorts of different partners, and you’re gonna see workshops taking place, and not necessarily being run by the team here – but they’ve been run with people coming in and giving, like music therapy, etc. So there’s lots of cohesive work going on with external organisations. And that’s allowing us to be able to feed into those services as well.’ — Staff Member

Bringing external services under the same roof had been beneficial, as one staff member described it, by removing a barrier for clients. Another staff member described how there was also a benefit for relations between clients and partner organisations by bringing them into face-to-face contact:

‘I think once the council workers started coming in-house, I think even from their perspective they’re used to doing everything telephone based. Now they seem to be more empathetic when they’ve actually met with the client and they’ve told their story.’

The sense that this partnership working has been a great success was shared by participants from partner organisations. They noted that through 999 Club working collaboratively with a number of organisations, they had created a hub for multiple organisations to work with people who are homeless. Participants from partner organisations valued the clear communication with 999 Club’s staff members, nurturing a sense of an extended team around clients.

This good partnership working had a direct effect on the work with clients. One participant from a partner organisation explained how they liaised with the 999 Club about any client that they are concerned about – so clients did not go unnoticed, both checking in if either had not seen a regular client recently.

One participant explained ‘Our communication levels with the 999 Club is second to none. It’s almost like we feel like we were almost like an extended member of their team and vice versa.’

Staff from partner organisations valued the accessibility and ease of communication between the 999 Club and their own organisations, often saying how they have each other's telephone number. This led to good collaboration between 999 Club and other organisations, with one participant saying: 'And it just works. I'm, kind of, part of the furniture there a bit now. So, I feel like I'm one of them.'

The generosity of 999 Club in welcoming both clients and professionals was praised by partner organisations, as well as their ability to bring ideas to discussions about how best to serve people in the local community who are experiencing homelessness.

Staff considered that this good partnership work was attracting more organisations into the centre:

'It's almost like we have this gravitational force that all externals come into. One, because we were open, and two, because everyone's here all the time. So, it just makes sense for everyone to come here. And that's great for us as well, it is great for our clients, because they can see so many different professionals or so many services in the same place.'

'It's great for our partners, because they know those individuals will be here, so try and catch up with somebody especially like, say, the drugs and alcohol team trying to track down a client and get them to come to a meeting. The difficulty is to just sit and wait in your office but if you're going to be here, 'hey, come like and chat to me now.' That's really important. And it's great for us as well, because we become that harbour.' — Staff Member

For staff members this also helped them work effectively, pooling knowledge and sharing resources:


'There is kind of a reliance on each other. If somebody phones Crisis and they're around here, they would direct them here, which is fair enough. A lot of our clients use Crisis at Christmas, so when they're open during Christmas, we would redirect and we'd book people in, to have that break at Christmas.' — Staff Member

This partnership working, then, is of huge benefit to staff, clients and partner organisations alike.

6.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND EXPANSION

Across clients, staff and partner organisation accounts, one issue stands out as a place where 999 Club could expand its provision, and that is through the provision of mental health workers.



'One of the things that we don't currently have is somebody that can support clients around their mental health. Very difficult for us because not all of us have mental health training and sometimes you're dealing with people that you don't know that come through our doors, so you have to be quite sensitive. You don't know what people's triggers are, so if we had a specialist mental health worker in here that could help a lot.' — Staff Member

'The biggest gap will probably be mental health support, which we're very aware of. I would say 99% of people that come in our doors need some kind of mental health support. But we haven't figured that out yet. And we definitely don't offer support for that. I would say which is a missing piece.' — Staff Member

'I think the mental health professional presence would be amazing. I don't know how realistic it is now. Given everybody who is working in hospitals is pretty bumper-to-bumper.' — Staff Member

'I would probably say the mental health side... For me personally, it would be good if we had one of the Bridge Café's staff during the day, rather than just keeping it at a set time.' — Male Volunteer with lived experience (DG1)

'We cannot meet the demands. What we'd love to see, and it's not completely in our control, is more mental health services feeding into the organisation. But my understanding is, where they used to do that, they don't have the staff or the income to do it.' Staff Member

The provision of support with mental health was also a challenge that staff members from partner organisations participants identified as an issue. One participant suggested that there needed to be a mental health service at 999 Club. Another participant emphasised that mental health was a big issue for the community and that there was a lack of services.

There was also concern voiced over the way the Metropolitan Police will no longer help with people who are having a mental health crisis, and will only assist if a crime has been committed (Home Office, 2023). Therefore, this is one area where pressure within the organisation is likely to build further.

Other suggestions about improving the service from staff included doing more work to the building – perhaps using it to open short term accommodation, and having more staff in The Gateway.

Another key area that came up for improvement and investment was communications. This would see 999 Club having more of a public voice in terms of getting what they do and their impact communicated. Having more of a public voice on the issues that were impacting on clients was seen as an area that 999 Club could work on:

The 999 club is in a really good position to be more active in a sort of political sense. I think it is very much on the pulse. A development in that side of things would only strengthen that.... It could have a much stronger voice. Because, literally, every day, we are seeing the results or fallouts of political issues.'
— Staff Member

Clients also had ideas for improvements that they wanted to see. More and better showers, more hot food, more differentiation in the levels of ESOL classes, gym classes, and, for those who were unhappy about the curtailing of access to The Gateway, extended opening hours.



7.

A MAJOR ANCHOR': PARTNER ORGANISATIONS PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEED FOR 999 CLUB

To the question 'what would happen if the 999 Club were to disappear?' participants from partner organisations were unanimous in how detrimental this would be for the community and services. One participant said: 'Some people would probably lose their lives.'

Other staff from partner organisations were also dismayed at the thought:

'It would be disastrous, absolutely disastrous, if something like [999 Club] had to close because of no funding or whatever. Disastrous.'

'I think for the clients that I work with, who I'm dealing with on a day-to-day basis, it wouldn't hamper their ability to get accommodated. But it would obviously hamper their ability to have other support services involved with them, who they could go and meet with in a formal setting, which can change people's lives Having a welcoming place for people is really, really important. I think every borough should commission a service like this because it makes a huge difference. It would be very negative if they didn't exist.'

'If the 999 Club were to go ... you would lose at least in the short term, a major anchor... If you're vulnerable and you need somewhere to go to ... you lose a resource for the Council and the wider systems to be able to go in and reach those people..., it would make it much more difficult for anyone to do their job working with homeless people. It would be bad.'

'Oh, God. I just don't know where anybody would go for help. Because they cater for so much. Nothing is ever a problem. Every time you phone, you get through to someone straight away ... They never turn anyone away, and that's so important.'

These perspectives demonstrate that the service is seen as indispensable by partner organisations, as it is by clients.



8.

CONCLUSION

This report finds that 999 Club is an anchor institution in Deptford and south-east London that has had wide, significant and lasting impacts over its 31 years.

Anchor institution refers to both its lasting significance as a place of support and belonging for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and its new role as a hub for services working with this client group in the local area.

It is an important part of Deptford's civic history and its contemporary civic infrastructure.

Against a backdrop of austerity, the aftermath of COVID-19 and the move away from face-to-face delivery of many services, 999 Club continues to provide an open door to those in need. It provides crucial advocacy within broken and underfunded systems of housing, benefits and mental health. The accounts from clients and partner organisations about their positive experiences of 999 Club and the professionalism and level of care of their staff needs to be situated in this wider, highly challenging context.

999 Club is innovating in the sector in terms of co-production with clients and its partnership working with other organisations and stakeholders. It is held in high esteem by clients and partner organisations, including the Local Authority, Health Services and other homeless services. As one representative from a partner organisation argued 'every borough should commission a service like this'.

999 Club is considered to be indispensable by those who use it and those who work in partnership with it. This comes through starkly in the answers to a question we asked all participants about what would happen if 999 Club ceased to exist. Across all three groups of participants, the opinion that lives would be lost if 999 Club were to close was repeated.

The critical situation of homelessness in London will not improve without systemic change. Watts et al argue in their latest report for Crisis 'The number of core homeless households are projected to grow further in England, particularly in London, unless policy steps are taken to correct this negative direction of travel.' (2022, npg) Within this context, 999 Club is an essential service providing a lifeline to those at the sharpest end of the combined impacts of a housing crisis, austerity, the aftermath of COVID and the cost-of-living crisis.

9.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that there are huge pressures on 999 Club. However, we recommend that 999 Club continue to preserve open access elements of the service within the new model of delivering a more targeted service to fewer people. The current model seems to strike the difficult balance of providing a place that people feel a sense of belonging and can be returned to, while allowing space for more sustained focus on the most vulnerable.

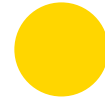
This report finds that the co-production approach is working well. Clients express that they feel listened to. We recommend that 999 Club continue to embed co-production and user-led methodologies at the heart of the service.

While ideas on how the centre could expand or improve were numerous, our research finds that the key element that staff, partner organisations and volunteers with lived experience consider is the 'missing piece' is having a trained mental health worker on site. This would reduce pressure on existing staff as well as meeting clients' needs.

While there is a lack of an archive or sense of official institutional memory among current staff, there is a living archive among the long-term clients and volunteers. There is potential here for an oral history, film or creative project that gathers accounts of 999 Club over the years and preserves this history for the future. This could be a potential future avenue to explore in collaboration with Goldsmiths.

We also recommend that 999 Club look at the way they collect and collate statistics. At present it is difficult to make comparisons across the years, as what is measured changes and is usually given as daily averages. This is partly due to changes in the service over time, but if the centre is settled in its current form, collecting consistent statistics on how many clients per year use various parts of the service, for example, would be useful for future evaluation projects.

REFERENCES



999 Club and Lady Florence Trust (2015) Trustees Report and Financial Statements for year ending August 2015 [last accessed 26th July 2023 <https://999club.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The-999-Club-and-Lady-Florence-Trust-31-August-2015.pdf>]

Allen, A, Clark, N., Dempster S.J, Garapich M.P, Jemmott A.S, Lowe W., Motino M-Y, Nicholas GA, O'Connor R, O'Gorman T, Twumasi M, Sandhu S, Willwerth, I (2013) London's Outcasts: Research Report from a study on 999 Club Day Centre. London, University of Roehampton

Atlas: Mapping Homelessness in London [last accessed 17th August 2023] <https://www.lhfatlas.org.uk/maps/time-series>

CHAIN a (2023) CHAIN Annual Bulletin: Greater London 2022/23, GLA, London. [last accessed 26th July 2023 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>]

CHAIN b (2023) CHAIN Annual Report: Outer Boroughs 2022-23, GLA, London [last accessed 26th July <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>]

Cloke, P, May, J., Johnsen, S. (2010) Swept Up Lives: Re-envisioning the Homeless City Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2023) Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2022 [last accessed 26th July 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2022/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2022>]

Porter, R. (1998) London; A Social History Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

Shelter (2022) Homelessness in England 2022: the numbers behind the story Shelter, London. [last accessed 26th July 2023 https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/research_homelessness_in_england_2022]

Snow, L and Flynn, (2015) 999 Club Focus Groups 999 Club, London

Wakefield, M (2008) 'Mary Poppins' Carpet bag in Deptford' The Spectator [last accessed 26/6/23 <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/mary-poppins-s-carpet-bag-in-deptford/>]

Warrington, M. (1996) 'Running to Stand Still: Housing the Homeless in the 1990s' Area 28 (4) pp. 471-481.

Warnes, T., Crane, M. and Foley, P. (2004) London's Hostels for Homeless People in the Twenty-First Century, London, PLPG.

Watts, B. Bramley, G. Pawson, H. Young, G. Fitzpatrick, S. & McMordie, L (2022) The homelessness monitor: England 2022 Crisis, London. [last accessed 26th July 2023 <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022/>]

Weiss, C. H. (1995) 'Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families' in J. Connell, A. Kubisch, L. Schorr & C. Weiss (Eds.), New approaches to evaluating comprehensive community initiatives The Aspen Roundtable Institute, New York.



APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE 2013-2022

2013

- Operations: Two drop-in centres, nursery & night shelter
- 150-175 adults seen each day across both centres
- Night shelter accommodated 88 guests over 104 nights
- Rebuilt nursery to increase safety
- Peter Wood appointed as CEO

2014

- Operations: Two-drop in centres, nursery and night shelter
- Paul Hughes appointed as Operations Manager
- New IT and VOIP telephone systems introduced
- Prepared and begun to implement new Business Plan agreed by board

2015

- Closed the second centre in Downham and the Nursery
- Closed and re-structured the day centre – The 'Gateway' Centre opened 7th September 2015
- Night shelter took in 77 guests
- Installed HomeLess Link's InForm database to improve data collection
- Appointed Dr Louisa Snow as Homeless Support Team Manager
- Started a pilot Learning & Activities programme

2016

- Operations: Gateway centre and night shelter
- Shorter sessions: one for rough sleepers only and other for broader homeless/at-risk population
- Saw 25 people p/d in each session
- Night shelter saw 66 guests and 35 positively moved on
- Launched Learning & Activities programme + an Employability service
- Achieved AQS level 1
- Set out framework extension for period Jan 2017 - Jan 2020

2017

- Operations: Gateway centre and night shelter
- Saw 25 people p/d in each session
- Achieved PSASSO Level 1

2018

- Operations: Gateway centre and night shelter
- Saw 30 people p/d in rough sleeper session and 20 people p/d in open access session
- Working toward the Housing Justice Quality Mark for the night shelter

2019

- Operations: Gateway centre and night shelter
- Saw 35 people p/d in rough sleeper session and 15 people p/d in open access session
- Night shelter operated YEAR ROUND (from Sep 2018) seeing 184 people
- Positive move-on achieved with 99 people directly
- 2015-18 Business plan has been tweaked to become 'Organisational objectives'

2020

- No Trustee Report 2019-20 or Annual Review - Likely due to COVID-19
- Proud to be the chosen charity of the Mayor of Lewisham, Damian Egan, for 2019/20

2021

- Operations: Gateway Centre ONLY
- The Gateway centre reopened, closed and reopened again in line with Gov. guidance
- Night shelter closed - employed floating support workers instead
- A year of adaption and re-focusing to deal with ongoing impact of Covid-19 pandemic
- Supported 490 different people
- Saw dramatic increase between April and August 2021 – from 129 to 753 monthly attendance

2022

- 999 Club is fully operational after the pandemic lockdowns
- The Women's Sanctuary fully opens
- The Bridge Café, our new mental health service, launches
- On average 50 people per day accessed the Gateway to meet immediate needs
- We helped 86 people find accommodation and prevented 11 people from being evicted
- At the end of December, we had 79 volunteers supporting our work

APPENDIX 2: REFLECTIONS ON THE EVALUATION PROCESS

There are challenges with conducting research in a changing and busy organisation. This research took place during a period when changes to the service based on the Theory of Change were being implemented.

Some anxiety was expressed by staff members that the changes in the service taking place during the research period would mean we gained an overall negative impression of clients' experience of the service. As the report shows, this has been far from the case. There were also other groups of researchers working in the centre during the same period. Based on the

experience of the evaluation process we raise three further points on process, aimed at informing any future evaluations:

- We recommend that management staff and the client committee are consulted on the evaluation before a research team is brought in.
- That evaluation is factored into the process of making changes within the service, rather than having two processes of evaluation running in parallel on different timelines.
- Co-ordinating any internal evaluation research with other research taking place – even perhaps considering limiting external research during periods of internal research – so that clients aren't research fatigued and staff aren't having to deal with accommodating multiple groups of researchers.
- That there is an agreement on what internal data will be made available to researchers from the beginning.



