

Moving towards recovery

In 2010-11, 87% of female clients were supported to move into or remain in an active stage of recovery in relation to offending behaviour.

The corresponding percentage for mental wellbeing was 79% and 78% for substance use.

86% of female clients also became or remained active in addressing their needs around self care and living skills.

Source: *Outcomes Star data 2010-11*

Our Women's Strategy and plans for the future

St Mungo's Women's Strategy aims to ensure all services are meeting the personal, emotional and social needs of women, as well as housing health and work. We have secured funding for three years from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for a Women's Strategy Coordinator to implement changes such as staff and service development, improved partnership working, and increased opportunities for client involvement. The strategy sets out a clear aim to improve outcomes for women over the three year period.

Some key actions include:

- Taking forward our peer research recommendations in relation to gender ratios in projects and what is needed in terms of safety and the physical environment
- Developing strong partnerships with specialist women's services and relevant voluntary and statutory agencies, exploring possibilities for joint protocols or new services
- Strengthening policies and training for staff to effectively support vulnerable female clients who are experiencing issues related to areas such as domestic violence, sexual abuse/exploitation, pregnancy and contact with children/family
- Improving support around children, including legal support for women going through care proceedings, ensuring clients can safely facilitate access with children if wanted and providing emotional support to women who have lost their children
- Working with female clients to find out what activities, training, education and employment they would like and improving access to these
- Setting up a peer buddying and mentoring scheme for women, and other client involvement opportunities.

For more information contact our Women's Strategy Coordinator, Esther Sample:
esther.sample@mungos.org

St Mungo's opens doors for homeless people. Mainly based in London and the South, we provide over 100 accommodation and support projects day in, day out.

We run **emergency services** – including street outreach and emergency shelters. We support homeless people in their **recovery** – opening the door to health care, and supporting homeless people into lasting new homes and training and work. And we **prevent** homelessness – through our high support housing and support teams for people at real risk.

By opening our doors, and our support services, we enable thousands of homeless and vulnerable people to change their lives for good every year.

To receive future Recovery Results and Recovery Innovations briefings, or other St Mungo's information, visit www.mungos.org and sign up to our newsletter

*Dissemination of our good practice is funded by charitable voluntary income.
We are grateful to our donors whose support enables us to share this information briefing.*

St Mungo's, Griffin House,
161 Hammersmith Road, London W6 8BS
Tel: 020 8762 5500
Fax: 020 8762 5501
www.mungos.org
Charity exempt from registration
I&P Society No. 20598R Housing Association No. LH0279

St Mungo's 
Opening doors for homeless people

ST MUNGO'S WORK WITH HOMELESS WOMEN

Progress so far and plans for the future

September 2011

Introduction

When most homelessness charities were developed in Britain in the 60s and 70s, they were set up with homeless men in mind.

Even in the early 1990s St Mungo's used the phrase "successful solutions for homeless men" in its literature. Men have traditionally formed the vast majority of rough sleepers and hostel residents.

Today, however, women make up around a quarter of St Mungo's 1,700 residents.

Many issues faced by homeless people are the same regardless of gender. However, from listening to our female residents, we are aware that there can be different reasons why women become homeless, and they can therefore need different support to help them rebuild their lives. Issues related to domestic violence, difficult relationships with children and family, reproductive health and sexual abuse/exploitation are just some of the complex problems which homeless women can face.



St Mungo's Women's Strategy sets out a clear aim to work with women to ensure we are providing the personalised support they need. We want to ensure that our services for our women clients are the best they can be.

This briefing will explore:

- **What services do homeless women want and need?**
- **St Mungo's innovative services for women**
- **Our Women's Strategy and plans for the future**

St Mungo's 
Opening doors for homeless people

What services do homeless women want and need?

Through analysing our outcomes data in 2008, we found that overall, female clients were coming into services with a higher level of support need, and also progressing more slowly than the men in projects. Since then, we have been working to improve this, and conducting extensive peer research with female clients as to the specific issues they face.

In 2008, we completed a short peer-led study, *A Better Deal for Women*¹. The main findings were:

- A high percentage of women at St Mungo's have experienced domestic violence and/or childhood or adolescent abuse and need support for these issues
- Women want a choice of accommodation, some prefer women's only provision, and some prefer mixed. In mixed accommodation, situations where women form a very small minority were seen as less preferable
- Women value clean, private, safe and homely accommodation
- A wide variety of activities and training, and opportunities for women's client involvement were also seen as important
- Improving relationships with family and children was identified as a key recovery goal for many women.

Following on from this we conducted another research project with Revolving Doors Agency called 'Missing Families'², which found that many of the underlying issues affecting women's progress are related to family, whether it be childhood abuse, domestic violence, a history of exploitative relationships or issues around children. The research highlighted that the idea of the 'single homeless person' was in many ways an artificial construct. Our 2010 Clients Needs Survey found that 50% of women in St Mungo's are mothers. A total of 60% of their children were currently in care.

In addition, more than a quarter of women surveyed had experienced domestic violence which contributed to their homelessness.

Through St Mungo's Women's Strategy we will continue to explore these issues and increase our understanding of how best to support our female clients.

Case study - Sarah

When Sarah arrived at one of our hostels, she had recently had a baby and had been violently assaulted by the baby's father. The baby has since been adopted and the father is in prison.

During her childhood, Sarah's step-father was extremely violent and she went into care. Her alcohol use was so concerning that she went to detox and then rehab in her late teens. Although she stayed eight months, she didn't complete due to

feelings of loneliness.

Sarah has had unstable housing and periods of homelessness throughout her life. She has four children in total, none of whom have stayed in her care. She feels terrible guilt about these children, particularly her daughter as she was subsequently subjected to assault from a step-mother.

St Mungo's staff are working to help her feel settled and cared about.

¹ Bilton, H (2008) *A Better Deal for Women* London: St Mungo's

² <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/missing-families/>

St Mungo's innovative services for women

St Mungo's supports homeless women through a range of services that are open to both men and women. We also provide specialist services for women, such as hostels, semi-independent housing and women's groups, some of which are outlined below.

Outside In Women's Group

'We believe that all clients should have a say in all decisions that affect their lives and how St Mungo's is run. The Outside In Women's Group aims to give women a safe space to voice their views and promote peer support. Group meetings are informal, over a shared lunch. We need to hear the views of women in order to make positive changes to our services, support women to achieve their goals and aspirations and develop services which women want and need.'

Sarah-Jane Cox, Deputy Client Involvement Manager

Chrysalis: Psychologically Informed Environment

The Chrysalis Project, a partnership between the London Borough of Lambeth, St Mungo's and Commonweal Housing, provides housing and support for women who are homeless and have support needs related to substance use, trauma, abuse and sexual exploitation. The service offers 31 beds for women. All clients have access to formal psychotherapy and personalised support. Staff work with women to identify and achieve their long-term aspirations and make positive changes in their lives. St Mungo's runs the hostel and Commonweal Housing provides a mix of self-contained move-on flats. The hostel has become one of St Mungo's Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) pilot schemes. With the support of clinically trained psychotherapists, staff are given the opportunity to reflect and develop skills that are psychologically informed. For the clients, it fosters an emotionally safe environment, supports understanding of behaviour and relationships with others, and helps to encourage a sense of community.

North London Women's Project: enabling contact with children

St Mungo's North London Women's Project is a 29 bed hostel for vulnerable single homeless women with support needs such as physical or mental health problems, drug or alcohol issues, sex working and domestic violence. The project supports residents through assessment and planning to meet their individual needs, and to access other services such as GPs, substance use or education providers. The project encourages women to maximise relationships with their children by liaising with external services, as well as enabling contact in the project. Keyworkers provide emotional support to the women around their relationship with their children.

Meeting women's needs

- 88% of women leaving our services in 2010-11 with a support need around contact with external groups, friends or family had a positive outcome in this area
- 80% of women leaving our services with a support need around learning had their need met whilst staying with us
- Of the 50 female clients with a support need around self-harm who left our services in the same period, 80% had a positive outcome in this area
- 70% of women leaving our services in 2010-11 with a support need around contact with mental health services had a positive outcome in this area
- Of the 64 women leaving our projects who had a support need related to accessing paid work, 13% had a positive outcome.

Source: SP data 2010-11