

LIFEWORKS

How an innovative psychotherapy project is helping homeless people in their recovery

April 2011

Introduction

We have long recognised that one of the most significant barriers our clients face in moving on with their lives is past and sometimes recurring trauma. However, despite the high levels of complex trauma among homeless people, there is almost no NHS provision for psychotherapy for this group.

St Mungo's LifeWorks project was established in January 2008 with funding from the Cabinet Office's Adults facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) programme and is continuing through charitable funding including a generous grant from SLaM Charitable Trust.

This briefing highlights this project's outcomes and makes recommendations for the future.

LifeWorks has defied common conceptions about providing therapy to our client group. It has demonstrated that excellent outcomes can be achieved in improving people's wellbeing and motivating them towards recovery. We have shown that a small amount of clinical input makes a significant difference in health and social care outcomes.



A service homeless people want

St Mungo's works with rough sleepers, homeless people and vulnerable adults at risk of homelessness. More than two thirds (70%) of our clients have diagnosed or suspected mental health conditions, including high levels of personality disorder, psychosis and substance dependencies.

More than 500 St Mungo's clients expressed an interest in the LifeWorks programme.

Of those, around two thirds attended a first assessment to join the programme (328 people). Of these, more than six out of ten went on to attend at least four sessions, often many more.

Of the LifeWorks clients willing to share their history, 66% had histories of chronic trauma including sexual, emotional and/or physical abuse as children and high levels of early loss of primary caregiver. 24% had been in care and 43% had been in prison.

How the LifeWorks pilot worked

LifeWorks offered homeless people access to fully-qualified psychotherapists regardless of diagnosis or active substance use. It provided face-to-face psychotherapy to chronically excluded adults who were homeless or at risk of homelessness at ten different sites across London.

Clients were offered up to 25 weekly sessions, 50 minutes each, of individual psychodynamic psychotherapy. These were 'client led', with clients talking about emotional issues (such as relationship breakdown and bereavement), rather than 'needs led' (talking about substance use and non-engagement with services).

Motivating towards recovery

Data from the Outcomes Star¹ shows that all LifeWorks clients achieved greater recovery than non-LifeWorks clients.

This recovery included a change from being unhappy about aspects of their life, but not necessarily knowing what they wanted (being Inactive on the Cycle of Change**) to being clearer about what

they wanted and taking steps doing something about it (being Active).

Data from the Outcomes Star shows that 100% of LifeWorks clients achieved greater recovery than non LifeWorks clients starting from the same base and over the same period of time, i.e. six months. LifeWorks clients are three times more likely to move from Pre-contemplative to Active on the Cycle of Change².



The success of LifeWorks has shown that psychotherapists can successfully engage people with complex needs, including trigger change in those who are substance dependent.

¹ The Outcomes Star was developed by St Mungo's to measure recovery from homelessness.

² This is a model for understanding behaviour change originally developed by Prochaska and Diclemente in 1982.



Supporting positive progress

Evaluation of the LifeWorks project has found that:

- 75% of clients showed an improvement in mental wellbeing³
- Impact on a wide range of social outcomes: e.g. 42% of LifeWorks clients were in employment or training placements by the end of the therapy
- Impact on a wide range of health outcomes: e.g. increasing take-up of appropriate treatment and reducing use of emergency services⁴
- Higher take-up and completion rates and more recovery outcomes than the IAPT programme (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) despite working with chronically excluded adults with complex needs.

³ As measured by the South London and Maudsley's evidence based Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment.

⁴ 'Simple but Effective: Local solutions for adults facing multiple deprivation', Matrix Solutions, February 2011

LifeWorks' client Nick

"I didn't want to go initially, thought 'I don't need to see a shrink', I gave it a go and the first few sessions were very informal and unthreatening. I grew to trust her and told her things I haven't told anyone else and I won't talk about here. A lot of tears were shed, she didn't drag it out of me, she listened. I got shit out of my system that I'd been carrying around a long time. There was an underlying burden in my heart that she knew what to do with. Everything I said wasn't written down and I loved that. It was properly confidential. It was a hard one but a good one and if it wasn't for her I'd be floating down the Thames now."

After his LifeWorks sessions finished, Nick was motivated to go into detox. He is now substance free, resettled in his own flat and engaging in a community arts programme.

Conclusions

- Attendance and client feedback show that **access to psychotherapy is highly valued**, even by clients supposedly 'hard to engage'
- With a flexible delivery model such as LifeWorks, **psychotherapy delivers excellent outcomes for homeless people**
- **Health commissioners should ensure all homeless and vulnerable people have access to psychotherapy treatments** as part of an integrated and personalised recovery approach
- Our initial findings indicate that the costs of running the LifeWorks service are offset by clients improved engagement with mainstream health services. We would welcome the opportunity to evaluate the service's value and cost effectiveness further.

We will continue to seek funding to enable us to roll out LifeWorks at St Mungo's, and secure its renewed funding and **we recommend that the model is widely adopted throughout homeless and health services.**

For more information on St Mungo's LifeWorks service, please contact:

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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 getting more homeless people into lasting new homes and training and work than any other charity. 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 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.
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