

No Second Night Out Salford and Gate Buddies

An evaluation for Riverside
ECHG

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About the Authors

The Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) is a dedicated multi-disciplinary research and consultancy unit providing a range of services relating to housing and urban management to public and private sector clients. SHUSU brings together researchers drawn from a range of disciplines including social policy, housing management, urban geography, environmental management, psychology, social care and social work.

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This report is based on research undertaken by the study team and the analysis and comment thereafter do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the research commissioners, or any participating stakeholders and agencies. The authors take responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions in the report.

Glossary

| Term | Explanation |
|----------------|---|
| AGMA | Association of Greater Manchester Authorities |
| DCLG | Department for Communities and Local Government |
| Gate Buddies | A Salford-based peer support service for those being discharged from prison |
| HTF | Homelessness Transition Fund. An independent fund that aims to protect essential services for homeless people, encourage innovation and support communities to adopt the 'No Second Night Out' standard. Administered by Homeless Link and supported by the DCLG |
| NSNO | No Second Night Out |
| Priority need | An individual who presents as homeless to the local council can only be provided with emergency accommodation if they are assessed as being legally homeless (that is, that they have no other form of accommodation in the UK or elsewhere, and have a priority need). Priority need categories include but are not exclusive to pregnant women, care leavers, people responsible for dependent children and other people considered to be vulnerable. |
| Riverside ECHG | Riverside English Churches Housing Group |
| Sash project | A hostel based in Salford that delivers the Salford arm of the NSNO GM service. |
| SHUSU | Sustainable Housing and Urban Studies Unit, University of Salford |

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Executive Summary

The Evaluation

No Second Night Out in Greater Manchester (NSNO GM) was established in 2012 as part of a nationwide response to the Coalition Government's Strategy to end rough sleeping (DCLG, 2011). NSNO GM works to prevent rough sleeping by targeting support at people who are new to rough sleeping as well as offering continued support for entrenched rough sleepers. The NSNO GM outreach team - based at Riverside English Churches and Housing Group (ECHG) - assesses the needs of new rough sleepers and links them to emergency accommodation. In Salford, No Second Night Out (NSNO) support is delivered to individuals from the Sash project - a local hostel - where ten beds are reserved for NSNO GM referrals. This service was set up in January 2014 and provides a range of support to homeless individuals across the city of Salford. This report provides an evaluation of this scheme.

In addition, this evaluation also considers an associated service: the Gate Buddies (GB) initiative. This was also set up by Riverside ECHG in January 2014 and delivers a peer support service for people being discharged from prison. The service matches trained volunteers with such clients prior to their discharge, with the volunteer meeting the client on release 'at the gate' and providing support.

In October 2014, Riverside ECHG commissioned the Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford to carry out a rapid evaluation of NSNO and GB. The evaluation was undertaken by reviewing the following data sources:

- Existing secondary data relating to NSNO GM, the SASH project and GB;
- Interviews with eight key stakeholders;
- Interviews with five NSNOS (No Second Night Out Salford) representatives;
- Interviews with four GB representatives; and
- Interviews with ten service users.

The fieldwork was completed between November 2014 and January 2015.

Key Findings

Service Providers

- Interviews with service providers indicated that service operations were seen to be efficient and responsive;

- The role of NSNOS service in providing emergency accommodation emerged from the interviews as an important one in terms of local provision. This was particularly the case in the challenging context of overall reductions in hostel type accommodation for homeless referrals, due in part to significant funding cuts nationally. The more time limited nature of the NSNO provision in comparison to previous longer term provision was seen a drawback but that the service strove to both provide emergency provision and move service users on in a timely manner. The approach and dedication of the staff at Sash was noted particularly by respondents;
- There was a recognition by those interviewed that the NSNOS project was dealing with an increasingly complex client group with a greater range of needs. The project was praised in this regard for its flexibility in adapting to individual and very complex needs. This was particularly the case as the Sash project continues to provide spaces for other homeless clients (namely prison discharge, entrenched sleepers, other emergency beds and temporary bed spaces for the cold weather initiative);
- Service providers and representatives from NSNOS emphasised the very flexible approach of their service, citing this as an aspect where they “stood out” from other services. One example emerged that is particular to this project: allowing dogs to be accommodated alongside service users where appropriate;
- The prevention role of the NSNOS project emerged in the interviews with providers. Examples were cited of successful outcomes for service users who had been homeless for the first time and had been successfully supported to attain accommodation in a short timescale;
- Working collaboratively with other agencies was seen as an essential element of the NSNOS service by the interviewees. Communication and joint working in the area was cited as a particular strength of the project. However, the lack of a robust multi-agency forum in the Salford area was raised as a negative, with some representatives feeling that a much more holistic service could be offered to the homeless community in the Salford area with the addition of a local forum; and
- The emphasis on capacity building at the NSNOS service emerged from the interviews as a key aspect of the service. The project has a strong emphasis on the use of volunteers and building capacity for the service through utilising former service users (one example of this being the GROW trainee scheme which will be discussed in detail later).

Service Users

- Service users who had accessed support at NSNOS varied in prior experiences of homelessness as well as circumstances which they identified as contributory to their current situation. For many of the respondents a key cause had been the breakdown of various relationships. A significant number of respondents also attributed ongoing issues with drug and alcohol dependency;

- Many service users established contact with the NSNO initiative via referral made to the centralised NSNO GM hub. Face-to-face contact was rapid following a referral, typically occurring within 24 hours;
- A number of service users discussed difficulties in accessing support. A key issue was individuals not fulfilling criteria for having a 'local connection' to the area, therefore not being eligible for homelessness assistance under local authority criteria. This highlights a critical flaw with the current process where due to relationship breakdowns many respondents did not perceive themselves as having a local connection to any one area in particular. NSNOS was praised in this respect where their individualised and meaningful assessments looked beyond the criteria of local connection;
- Service users also highlighted that in some cases a delay in accessing support was due to a misperception of homelessness support available. This particularly concerned the living conditions in temporary accommodation, with a key issue surrounding chaotic and unmanageable drug use;
- The NSNOS team were highly regarded by service users for their consistent and compassionate care. The service was considered to be well-managed and well-maintained. The living environment was praised for its standard of cleanliness as well as offering a calm and stable environment for individuals leaving chaotic lifestyles;
- With regards to the flexible approach adopted by the project, where unanticipated referrals had also been provided with the same level of support, service users held the same commendations as the stakeholders;
- Service users noted that the range of support provided exceeded their expectations. The respondents highlighted a number of examples where they had been supported beyond their housing need, including reconnection to health services, counselling, drug/alcohol support, cooking clubs, computer access and help with financial affairs, for example; and
- In terms of moving on, a number of service users remained concerned about wider issues with housing, such as long waiting lists for social housing and a refusal to give tenancies to those claiming housing benefit by private landlords. This represents a significant challenge faced not only by NSNOS but by homelessness provision nationally.

Gate Buddies

- As a completely new approach to service delivery, the Gate Buddies (GB) initiative was viewed as a positive and innovative development to current homelessness support and prevention. The service received considerable praise by service users and stakeholders who noted a number of key successes such as peer support, a preventative approach, working together with other agencies, supporting families and 'being there' at the crucial point of prison discharge. Capacity building was at the centre of the GB initiative, where GB volunteers gained vital skills, experience and self-esteem. Going forward, such opportunities will be offered to service users as well.

1. Introduction

Background

In 2011, the Coalition Government put forward its commitment to end rough sleeping in its publication *Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide* (DCLG, 2011).¹ This document outlined a cross-departmental strategy which focused particularly on preventative work with single people who had recently been made homeless and who were unable to access other services because they were not in “priority need”.²

The Government's strategy is underpinned by the recognition that rough sleeping may be avoided if people are able to access support at an early stage, avoiding the potential downward spiral that more entrenched rough sleepers can often experience. The Government's vision was encapsulated in the following aims:

- To support people to move off the streets immediately and access a place of safety;
- To support rough sleepers in gaining access to emergency accommodation and the support services they need;
- To support rough sleepers from outside the area to reconnect to a place where they can get housing and support;
- To provide support which will enable service users to secure and maintain accommodation; and.
- To raise awareness of rough sleeping amongst the public and to encourage members of the public to refer people for help (DCLG, 2011).

Overview of No Second Night Out across Greater Manchester

In April 2012 the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) provided funding for Riverside to deliver a No Second Night Out (NSNO) pilot project which was operational across ten local authorities (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan). The service aimed to identify those new

¹ DCLG (2011) Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf

² The Housing Act (2006) states that a local authority must assess an individual as in priority need before they can be provided with emergency accommodation. Priority need categories include: pregnant women, care leavers, people responsible for dependent children and other people considered to be vulnerable. For more information, see: http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/help_from_the_council_when_homeless/priority_need

to rough sleeping offering immediate support and links to accommodation. Following the success of the pilot, further funding was secured from the Homeless Transition Fund (HTF) to continue the NSNO project across Greater Manchester until March 2015. Initially, the funding allowed for the service to be expanded by recruiting a larger outreach team and operating a seven day rota. In addition, a peer mentoring project - Street Buddies - was established to operate alongside the NSNO Greater Manchester (NSNO GM) service focusing support on entrenched rough sleepers, often with more complex needs and those who may not have been considered appropriate for NSNO support.

NSNO GM is based at Riverside ECHG in Manchester and operates as a hub through which homelessness referrals are received from service providers, members of the public and homeless people themselves. Members of the NSNO GM outreach team contact the individual at an agreed location and complete an initial assessment of need; individuals are then linked to the appropriate local service.

Within Salford, an additional NSNO funded project operates from Sash: a hostel based in Salford which offers ten beds for NSNO referrals made by the centralised hub in Manchester. Individuals based in Salford, many of whom have a local connection to the area, are referred to the team at the Sash project where the support offered may include access to emergency accommodation on site or assistance in linking service users to other appropriate housing options locally. Funding for NSNOs was received from round four of the HTF to deliver the service for 12 months from 1 January 2014.

The hostel currently has the capacity to provide temporary accommodation for 22 individuals at any one time. As outlined, ten bedrooms are allocated for NSNO referrals, three rooms are reserved for referrals from the prison service, two are retained for entrenched rough sleepers and four beds are recognised as emergency provision (two beds across two shared bedrooms). Access to three sit-up camp beds are also offered as additional emergency provision.

Once a NSNO GM referral has been connected to the Sash project in Salford, the team carry out face-to-face assessments in order to gain a better understanding of the individual's situation and identify the specific needs of each service user. Where available, service users are then provided with a room at the hostel. For some service users the sit-up beds provide immediate, short-term access to support while they wait for a room at the hostel to become available. In addition, this aspect of service delivery reduces the risk of losing contact with clients. This provision also allows the project to offer individuals with no recourse to public funds access to emergency accommodation while the NSNO team aim to connect the individual to appropriate assistance (however, take up of this provision has been limited).

Ongoing support from the Sash project is available to resident service users 24 hours a day, seven days a week, delivered by the team which comprises of a general manager, two support workers, two project assistants and two night concierge staff.

After the first six months in operation, a report summarised the details of referrals received by Sash during this period, outlining any key successes or challenges so far, as well as highlighting a single case study. Key findings from that report showed that:

- The project had received a greater number of referrals from individuals without a local connection to the area, those who had just been released from prison and entrenched rough sleepers;
- There had been less referrals than anticipated for those new to the streets – this was suggested to be linked to milder weather conditions during the winter months in early 2014 and the re-opening of a local private hostel;
- A total of 86 service users had been supported in the first six months; 68 males and 18 females;
- The project had to date supported 60 service users who were new to the streets; and
- The project developed and maintained a number of local networks with various agencies, including food banks, the local authorities' discretionary fund and private landlords, among others.

Gate Buddies (GB) and Giving Real Opportunities for Work (GROW) Trainees and Volunteers

In January 2014 Riverside ECHG introduced *Gate Buddies* (GB), a new project also funded by round four of the HTF, to support individuals in Salford who have spent time in prison. GB aims to establish contact with service users some time before they are released in order to build effective relationships with the project and identify appropriate support plans based on the needs of each individual. In addition, the GB project works with family members

to strengthen the support network for service users and their families after they have left prison. Once connected to the service, each service user is met at the 'gate' on the day they leave prison by a member of the team who has been linked up as their own support contact (that is, their 'Gate Buddy'). The role of each Gate Buddy is flexible to the needs of the service user and involves supporting individuals in a variety of ways such as attending meetings with them through to offering ongoing emotional support and advice.

Currently the project is delivered by a team of seven active volunteers who are ex-offenders themselves. This is considered a key characteristic of the project where it offers the opportunity for capacity building in those with past convictions. Moreover, it allows GB to link service users to support from individuals who can demonstrate a unique and critical understanding of their situation which is built upon personal past experiences of offending.

In addition, the project has recruited a GROW - *Giving Real Opportunities for Work* - trainee. This scheme is operated by NSNO GM and provides people who have previously been homeless with paid work experience.³ Trainees are employed for ten months and work across a number of different services delivered by Riverside.

The GB project, in working with prison leavers, is seen to target a key group who are at risk of homelessness and thus complements the broader work of NSNOS. Funding for the GB project has been secured for a further two years (until March 2017). Current plans are to expand and develop the team of volunteers and service user accessibility to the project beyond Salford.

³ Turley, H, Scullion, L. and Brown, P. (2014) *No Second Night Out Greater Manchester and Street Buddies: An Evaluation for Riverside* (2014). Available at: <http://www.riverside.org.uk/pdf/NSNOGMevaluationreportSalfordUniversity1.pdf>

This service was established in January 2014. A short report was provided by the service manager to summarise the details of referrals received during this period, outlining any key successes or challenges so far. Key findings to note include:

- A total of 17 referrals have been received to date from 10 different agencies. These referrals have mostly been from the prison services;
- There are currently seven active volunteers with four new applications pending. Of these, one is a service user. Additionally, two GROW trainee posts for the service have been advertised;
- In terms of current support, seven clients are currently engaged with GB, four whilst still in custody; and
- Support is also provided to families of prisoners through Family Gate Buddies.

Structure of Report

This report provides an overview of the rapid evaluation of NSNOS and GB. It focuses on the work of both teams, explores the experiences of service users who have recently received support from the services, as well as the perceptions of the services from stakeholder organisations. The report is structured in the following way:

- **Chapter 2** outlines the research methods used to conduct the rapid evaluation and describes the three phases of research;
- **Chapter 3** presents an analysis of the findings from interviews conducted with stakeholder organisations across Salford and Manchester, NSNOS and GB representatives and focuses on the project's operations and outcomes;
- **Chapter 4** presents an analysis of the findings from interviews conducted with service users and focuses on their experiences of receiving support from NSNOS and/or GB; and
- **Chapter 5** brings together the conclusions from this evaluation.

2. Evaluation Aims, Objectives and Methods

Aims

The aim of the evaluation of the No Second Night Out Salford (NSNOS) funded work was to assess the initiative and activities against the initial aims and objectives of the NSNO funding. More specifically the following questions guided this evaluation:

- Is the project achieving the objectives established at the outset?
- Has the project responded to any changes in the operating environment? In what ways?
- Is the project supporting the mainstream objectives in terms of supporting vulnerable customers?
- Is the project being managed effectively, and if not, what are the barriers?
- What is the early learning arising from the delivery of the Gate Buddies service?

Evaluation Methods

The rapid evaluation involved three separate but interrelated phases of data collection:

- Phase 1: Review of existing project data and other relevant literature;
- Phase 2: Consultation with key service providers; and
- Phase 3: Consultation with service users.

Phase 1 involved reviewing available information relating to the NSNOS project but also broader homelessness policy. It included an analysis of existing qualitative and quantitative data. External policy documents and reports such as *Vision to End Rough Sleeping: NSNO Nationwide* (DCLG, 2011), *NSNO: Across England* (HTF, 2014) and *Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness* (DCLG, 2012) were consulted in order to contextualise the project within broader homelessness policy.

Phase two involved carrying out semi-structured interviews with selected service providers. This was divided between two different groups. The first group of stakeholders consisted of NSNOS workers. The interviews with staff focused on: (1) understanding the aims and objectives of the project; (2) the key indicators of success; (3) perceived successes and challenges of the project; (4) strategic and operational issues; and (5) the policy context within which the project operates. One focus group and a single one-to-one interview were conducted with four NSNOS representatives in total.

The second group of stakeholders consisted of organisations working with NSNOS. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals representing various organisations across the area. The participants included representatives of local authority housing and homelessness teams, probation services, prison accommodation staff, substance misuse services and voluntary agencies in the area. These interviews focused on: (1) exploring their understanding of the NSNO outreach team; (2) perceived successes and challenges of the project; and (3) perceived gaps in service delivery.

In addition, four volunteers, one service user, one service representative and one service provider were interviewed from the Gate Buddies (GB) project. These interviews focused on: (1) exploring their understanding of the GB service; (2) perceived successes and challenges of the project; and (3) perceived gaps in service delivery.

A mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews were carried out. This provided greater flexibility for the individual respondents in terms of availability.

Phase three involved carrying out semi-structured interviews with service users who had been supported by NSNOS. In order to carry out this consultation, the NSNOS team identified a number of service users and contacted them to inform them that the evaluation was taking place and invited them to participate. Following this initial contact, and with permission from the service users, the research team provided further details about the evaluation so to establish whether or not they wanted to take part. A total of 10 people agreed to participate and were interviewed.

As with the stakeholder organisations, service user respondents were offered the option of a telephone interview in order to provide more flexibility. This proved preferable to a number of respondents and three interviews were completed by telephone. The remaining seven service user interviews were carried out face-to-face at the Sash project in Salford. The service users were interviewed about: (1) their situation at the time that they received support; (2) their overall experience of receiving support from NSNOS; (3) their reflections on the impact of the support; and (4) any perceived gaps in the support that was provided.

All of the interviews - service providers and service users - were audio recorded with the consent of the participant. The service users who participated received a £10 shopping voucher to compensate them for the time taken to contribute to the project.

All interviews were analysed thematically with reference to the key aims and objectives of the project.

3. Findings: Service Providers

This chapter presents an analysis of key findings from interviews carried out with a number of NSNOS representatives and key service providers. The interviews included seven telephone interviews with organisations that work with NSNOS, two face-to-face interviews with NSNOS staff and a focus group with a further three workers from the service. Analysis focuses on NSNOS service delivery and operations and explores key strengths as well as areas for further development. Please note that all identifiers have been removed from the quotes to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

Service Operations

All service providers interviewed commented on the key place that NSNOS has in providing a homelessness service in the area. Referrals to the NSNO spaces are passed on to the Sash project via the NSNO Greater Manchester (GM) referral system.

One stakeholder noted that in the early days of the central telephone hotline being set up for the GM area, the service was not as responsive, but his more recent experience was of a fast response and follow up from the Salford project. All service providers interviewed spoke positively of the team at the Sash project in terms of their contact with the service, both in relation to referrals and on-going contact. Against the backdrop of a reduction in other service provision, noted by several key service providers, NSNOS was seen as a core provision in the area:

***“In Salford at least hostel accommodation, supported accommodation is being run down all the time, so anywhere that stays open plays a bigger and bigger role”
(Service Provider 1)***

“We’re losing the direct access aspect of hostels, the one night or two stay until something is secured . . . [referring to NSNO] it’s got to be a positive I suppose to try and access any accommodation that’s out there ...” (Service Provider 3).

Functions: Providing Emergency Accommodation and Move-on Support

The role of NSNOS in terms of meeting the needs of homeless people in the area was raised by all the service providers interviewed. For the locality, the provision of emergency accommodation for street homeless and other homeless clients was seen to be important. Service Provider 3 noted that although extensive preventative work is carried out by their service, the availability of NSNO is signposted to those leaving prison as a key service should this be required. Service Provider 1 cited that, particularly for ex-offenders, the provision of emergency accommodation when required was a key service to prevent readmission to prison (this aspect of provision will be further discussed in Chapter Five where findings from the evaluation regarding the GB service have been included).

One of the key stakeholders raised the issue that the time-limited nature of the NSNOS provision in comparison to previous and more long-term provision was a drawback, but in terms of providing emergency shelter:

“Anything that takes people off the street particularly at this time of year [referring to winter] is going to be an advantage...”
(Service Provider 5).

The NSNOS representatives were also clear about the core role of the Sash project in providing emergency accommodation, particularly through NSNO:

“We provide an emergency housing service – for street homeless people...”
(NSNOS Representative 3).

Alongside this key function, the focus on moving service users on to more long term or permanent accommodation solutions and to other services was also highlighted. This was referred to by service providers as a key function of the project and also an aspect that the team were successful in achieving for service users: *“Move them on to get into housing is the biggest”* (NSNOS Representative 2).

One key stakeholder saw moving-on as a key part of the provision: building bridges with family and helping people get ‘back on their feet’:

“...somewhere to call home, it allows them to move their lives forward again, build bridges with family members where that's a possibility...” ***(Service Provider 1).***

As noted above, some service providers referred to the shorter timescales for moving service users on to more permanent solutions. Service representatives and providers were strongly committed to the idea of moving clients on but recognised that the targets of five weeks maximum for the NSNO beds and three nights for the ‘sit up’ spaces were often not realistic. Despite the best efforts of agencies, the more complex and long term issues faced by many clients proved a barrier to moving on. Particular examples of past histories of rent arrears or substance misuse were cited. It appears that the service does strive to achieve outcomes within the shortest timeframes, as evidenced in the data summarised in the introduction, but that this has not always been feasible due to the nature of the client group.

The Role of NSNOS in the Context of Local Services

In terms of provision in the Salford area for homeless service users, service providers were clear about the key place that NSNOS occupies in local provision more generally. Although not all of the service providers interviewed had referred specifically to the NSNO beds at Sash, there was an awareness of the role that the Sash project plays in delivering the NSNO GM initiative in the Salford area. This indicates a good level of awareness amongst agencies about the service that NSNOS offers.

Some service providers had contact with the Sash project in relation to provision accessible by service users other than NSNO referrals, for example those reserved for prison leavers, entrenched rough sleepers and other emergency provision.

Two service providers reported that although the Salford project was very flexible, the increased criteria for types of accommodation were a drawback when referring service users generally in the GM area. This was also raised as an issue by one service provider regarding NSNO generally, whereby referrals had to be about those currently rough sleeping, rather than a client who a service knew would be rough sleeping that night.

There was a recognition by those interviewed that the project was dealing with an increasingly complex client group with a greater range of needs. Service representatives referred to this in terms of the changes they had made to the Sash project to accommodate this more complex set of needs. There had been some issues of alcohol/substance misuse on the premises which had led to a revision of the rules. Also the communal lounge area had to be closed off at 11pm to allow the 'sit up' spaces to be made available.

Praising the NSNOS team for their efforts in dealing with complex cases, one service provider saw the team deal recently with *“one of the most chaotic individuals I’ve come across in this role”* (Service Provider 6). Another aspect of this greater complexity was the range of needs around health and finances that were addressed whilst users were at the project: *“I think that’s been the biggest thing to deal with was their health, and benefits.”* (NSNOS Representative 2).

Referring specifically to the development of NSNO at the Sash project, providers saw the vital and unique role of the service in the Salford area:

“It’s almost a halfway point from chaos to stability” (Service Provider 1)

“Our experience and feelings towards the NSNO project is extremely positive -pre this form of provision...it felt quite hopeless what you could do as an agency or organisation working with homeless people in terms of shelter & housing, it felt quite hopeless really. Whereas now the emotion is one that is much more optimistic and that’s from first-hand experience of seeing people from the street into temporary accommodation into clear move on strategies and thriving as a result and moving on from the stigmas associated with homelessness” (Service Provider 2).

Flexible Practices

Representatives from NSNOS emphasised the very flexible approach of their service, citing this as an aspect where they ‘stood out’ from other services. One feature of this that is particular to this project is allowing dogs to be accommodated where a service user is accompanied by a dog. The service provider was clear in the rationale for this where it might not be permitted at other projects:

“We can take up to three dogs and the reason for that is because if you go about the streets in Manchester or any sort of a town you’ll see people sleeping rough and they’ve all got dogs with them. If the place won’t take dogs, they won’t come in” (NSNOS Representative 4).

The project showed a great deal of flexibility in terms of creating space to accommodate short term places in the ‘sit up’ beds. This provision was also made available for those with no recourse to public funds. They appeared to work flexibly and creatively, utilising temporary beds in the lounge area for this, however the demand for this provision had been small. The project has also recently, at the request of the local authority, agreed to take some referrals as ‘Cold Weather Beds’, part of the Severe Weather Protocol for Salford:

“...sort of a stop gap for getting people off the streets in the severe winter to save them dying basically and it could just be a case of maybe one, two nights as respite. Having a shower, getting a change of clothes, getting some food in them and that. So, we’ve agreed to do that ...” (NSNOS Representative 4).

The service representatives all conveyed the message that the project would always try and accept any individual referred for support. Examples were given by two NSNOS representatives of referrals where there was a complex history of offending, including arson. Whilst this was taken into account, the representatives outlined a need for a detailed individualised risk assessment rather than a blanket rule. This also applied to those still currently using alcohol, although use on the premises was not permitted:

“...they know if they’ve got somebody at this end that other projects won’t take, they know that unless there’s a really big, bad issue with them that we will always take them if we’ve got a bed. I’ll put them on our waiting list. They’ve said that, they’ve said, ‘Oh, we know we can phone you” (NSNOS Representative 4)

“I think we’ve had quite an impact – we try and accommodate whoever comes through the door basically, there [are] very, very few we turn down” (NSNO Representative 2)

“...they’d always take a referral from us ...” (Service Provider 4).

Service providers cited examples of the flexible approach and how this had worked well in relation to the people they referred. Service Provider 1, for instance, retold the case where a room had been kept open for a short period whilst a client was in hospital. The representatives provided further examples of flexibility and really seemed to pride their service on this aspect of maintaining flexibility to meet the service users varied needs: “We take couples, we’ve had a family unit go through” (NSNOS Representative 2).

One area where NSNOS representatives would like to see the service improve was in terms of being able to fill 'void' spaces in the different categories where there was a need from another category of referral. For example, if there was one vacant NSNO bed, with a referral for an additional 'prison leaver' category bed, that the bed could be filled on that occasion, meeting the need of the homeless referral, rather than leaving the bed empty. Additionally, they would like to see some flexibility in allowing service users to stay out overnight and keep their bed space, particularly to promote and encourage reconnection with family members, thereby increasing the service users support network.

An Individually Tailored Service

What emerged as a key aspect of the service provided by NSNOS was the individually tailored approach that took into account the needs of each service user, which were often varied and complex as highlighted in the previous sections. This finding is very much linked to the flexible approach, with many service providers commenting on this as a real feature of the project and one that was very much related to positive outcomes for service users. The service representatives clearly prided themselves on this aspect of their service delivery:

***“I think one of the things I think they know is that we treat everybody individually”
(NSNOS Representative 4)***

***“Every single referral that comes through is looked at on an individual basis”
(NSNOS Representative 2).***

One aspect of the service that received positive comments by almost all of the service providers interviewed relates to the overall approach adopted by the NSNOS team. This, along with their flexibility, was a strong feature of the feedback given in the interviews:

“Staff are very approachable, they’re very nice, nice people, say in that they’ll work with people in a flexible way with understanding about homelessness and rough sleeping” (Service Provider 4)

“I do find the staff really supportive to service users and fairly protective I don’t think is too strong a word. They’ve got their best interests at heart and that comes through all the time” (Service Provider 1).

Prevention

The role of the NSNOS project in preventing homelessness - in line with the national aims of NSNO - was clear. One NSNOS representative cited a number of successful outcomes for service users who had been homeless for the first time and who had subsequently been successfully supported to attain accommodation in a short timescale. This had particularly been the case where clients were already in employment, with the project aiming to ensure outcomes in a very short timeframe. Viewing the NSNOS as playing a key role in preventing homelessness in the area, one service provider noted that she was “*encouraged and impressed with the speed of response*” (Service Provider 2).

Partnership Working

Working collaboratively with other agencies was seen as an essential element of the service by the NSNO representatives. This was referred to by one NSNOS representative as a “*joint effort*” to support service users. Examples of a proactive approach to engaging with other agencies was also cited by another representative who spoke about efforts to hold three way meetings, and in turn building good working relationships: “*I think because of the amount of networking we've got going, working with other agencies and its constant...*” (NSNOS Representative 2).

One area where this networking approach seemed to have a positive effect was in terms of generating a pool of private landlord contacts, which was seen by the service representatives as being particularly important in times when social housing is in short supply. This aspect was perceived as critical in achieving successful outcomes for many individual service users.

Although communication was cited as a strength of the project by service providers, and multi-agency working was clearly a priority for the staff, one NSNOS representative felt that the lack of a robust multi-agency forum in the Salford area was a negative aspect of the service provision in the local area overall. This was also raised by one of the service providers who put forward a concern over the lack of a holistic approach in the area from a multi-service perspective and that this could lead to duplication and/or lack of awareness of other services:

“...there could be a much more beneficial and clearly holistic service that could be offered to the homeless community, a more joined up working I suppose than perhaps there currently is” (Service Provider 2).

Capacity Building

A key example of the services commitment to capacity building is presented through the role of a GROW trainee: a position that offers a ten-month paid role with Riverside ECHG. The current GROW trainee has been actively involved in service delivery both at NSNOS and the Gate Buddies (GB) initiative. This trainee was a former service user at a Riverside ECHG facility having experienced both homelessness and time in prison. Significantly, the trainee has just been awarded a full-time, permanent position within NSNOS marking both a personal success for the trainee as well as a collective success for the project.

The emphasis on those with experiences of homelessness and associated issues being in a good position to support others on a peer basis came across as an important goal of the service, as this service representative noted that when experiencing difficult issues “*...it's great to speak to someone with experience*”.

The project demonstrates a strong emphasis on the use of volunteers, which allows for the flexible use of available resources and building capacity for the service.

Summary

The role of NSNOS service in providing emergency accommodation as a key part of local provision was clear, with an efficient and responsive service at Sash. The project was dealing with an increasingly complex client group with a greater range of needs; in the context of wider service reductions and a broad remit overall for different types of homeless referrals. Within this, the project showed a great deal of flexibility in adapting to individual and very complex needs. The approach and dedication of the staff at Sash was evident. Key to the findings was the preventative role of the NSNOS project, with examples of successful outcomes in terms of accommodation for service users who had been homeless for the first time.

Capacity building as a feature of the project was shown in the emphasis on volunteer roles and the GROW trainee initiative. Whilst working collaboratively with other agencies was an integral part of the service, the addition of a local forum in the Salford area was raised as a suggested initiative that could enhance services to the homeless community in the Salford area.

4. Findings: Service Users

The following chapter presents the key findings from the analysis of interviews carried out with nine service users who had received support from NSNOS based at the Sash project. Those interviewed outlined their experiences of support from NSNOS, as well as other local services, the impact of the support provided, and also shared details of their situations prior to contact with the project and their circumstances at present. The analysis explores the strengths of the service, as well as the challenges faced in terms of service delivery and outcomes from the perspective of those supported. Please note that all identifiers have been removed from the quotes to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

Characteristics of Service Users

As outlined in the introduction, NSNOS is part of a wider initiative to end rough sleeping that demonstrates a key focus on developing homelessness assistance targeted at those new to the streets. In operation, while NSNOS has maintained accessibility to support for those new to the streets, it has successfully demonstrated flexibility in response to the diverse demographic of referrals received. As highlighted earlier, during the first six months in operation there had been fewer

referrals made to the project for those new to the streets than expected, however the number of referrals for other individuals - such as prison leavers or entrenched rough sleepers - was greater than anticipated. The service users interviewed were representative of this where six out of the nine respondents had one or more experiences of homelessness prior to contact with NSNO.

The length of time service users had been homeless, both before contact with NSNO and during past experiences, varied from a few days to more than a year. Service users with past experiences stated that they had been homeless in Salford as well as other parts of the UK. Overall, the interviews revealed that homelessness experience was not the same for any two individuals. The broad range of experiences provided rich narratives for the evaluation, some of which will be drawn upon throughout this chapter. Almost all service users had been rough sleeping at the point of contact with NSNO, while others reported periods of 'sofa-surfing' - moving between friends or relatives - as well as time spent on the streets.

The circumstances identified by service users which had led to their situation prior to contact with support were diverse however common themes did present across the interviews. Most of the service users attributed a breakdown in family or personal relationships. For others, a lack or absence of contact with family members or friends was viewed as a barrier to accessing support sooner. Some service users commented on bad experiences with landlords and privately rented properties which had resulted in eviction or abandonment of the property. Many of the service users interviewed also discussed drug and alcohol misuse as a catalyst for homelessness (both as a result of recreational use and long-term addiction).

Since the introduction of NSNOS, support at the Sash project was extended to accommodate both men and women (previous to this the hostel provided temporary accommodation for males only). Representatives from NSNOS highlighted that the number of female referrals had been considerably lower than for males, a factor that was anticipated prior to the introduction of the project. Consequently, all nine service users who agreed to be interviewed for the evaluation were male.

Of the nine NSNOS service users interviewed, seven were current residents at the Sash project, of whom one had returned, and two respondents had moved on. Two service users interviewed had temporarily accessed the emergency sit-up beds at the Sash project before being allocated a room. Service users reported varied lengths of time spent as residents at the Sash project but *all* were supported for a minimum of one month. As highlighted earlier, in operation the service has had to be extremely flexible to support the needs of each individual on a case by case basis.

Accessing Support

For those interviewed, contact with NSNOS had been established in a number of ways. For some, contact began with a referral to NSNO GM made initially via the centralised hub, which accepts details of individuals who are rough sleeping 24/7 either by phone or through the online referral form (referral details are then passed on to the team at the Sash project). For others, NSNOS had been contacted directly by other services across Greater Manchester, such as the local authority, day centres or other hostels. For some service users, a link up to NSNOS formed part of support provided by the GB project where contact had been established before release from prison. One service user was made aware of the project by another rough sleeper and another individual had been signposted to NSNOS by a local job centre.

A significant barrier to accessing support for a number of respondents was an inability to satisfy certain criteria required to be considered as having a local connection to the area. In particular, this was voiced by service users who had tried to access support through local authority homelessness provision. As one service user outlined:

“When I’ve spoken to councils all they ask is ‘do you have a local connection?’ – I am my local connection, just because I don’t have family in the area, I’m local to the area” (Service User 3).

In its flexible approach, NSNOS has managed available resources to accommodate unanticipated referrals, such as individuals identified as not having a local connection. As previously outlined, many of the respondents identify broken relationships with their family or ex-partners as a key contributor to becoming homeless. For most this meant that they

no longer felt any connection to the area that would be identified as 'local' under current assessment criteria. In addition, one service user highlighted how despite not having a local connection to the area he needed temporary accommodation in Salford in order to be able to access medical treatment. This service user anticipated a return to his local area once treatment had ended but viewed the projects flexibility in this regard as invaluable during a time of need.

Service users voiced frustration with failed attempts to access support in the past, especially the length of time taken by some services to respond to applications for support. This was viewed by the respondents as a key success of NSNOS where a solution, if only access to a temporary sit-up bed, was offered on the same day. As Service User 3 highlights:

"You just get fobbed off, whereas I came here and explained my situation, went through the assessment and moved in the same day, whereas with other places I have gone and spoken to them and I'm still waiting about five/six months down the line for them to contact me – how does that work out?" (Service user 3).

Some service users expressed a personal responsibility for delays in accessing support. An initial period of disbelief when becoming homeless for the first time presented difficult emotional and psychological challenges. This highlights the need for continued efforts to raise awareness of homelessness, including the NSNO initiative and other local support provision:

"I ended up wondering about around the streets - one of those things, I think like denial or something - you just don't think that it's happening to you" (Service User 2).

Service Delivery

All of the service users interviewed highly regarded the approaches adopted by the NSNOS team in terms of service delivery. Operationally, the project was presented as efficient and well-managed, while the individuals voiced particular compliments to the environment maintained by the team. The NSNOS representatives also received praise for their approachability and overall service users expressed complete confidence in the service's ability to support them. The following service users summarise their experiences:

"It sounds mad but it's like a family. They are that friendly and they are always saying as soon as you walk in the door 'are you alright?', 'do you need owt?', and all that - that's why it was mad coming back because it was like coming, not home, but like, I can't explain it. They are really nice people and they try and do everything they can for you" (Service User 7)

"...incredibly compassionate and considerate people. My experience was fantastic." (Service User 2).

For many of the service users, face-to-face contact with NSNO began by meeting members of the NSNO GM outreach team. Respondents reported that once they had established contact with the NSNO GM outreach team, the link up to the project base within Salford was rapid typically occurring within 24 hours.

Once service users arrived at the Sash project each individual would complete a needs assessment with a member of the NSNOS team. Service users noted the immediate relief that came when contact with the service had been established:

"Straight away it's like a weight off your mind. When you've been homeless and then you've got somewhere to live. It's a weight off your mind. I felt stable. That's the only emotion I felt really. I remember feeling...I was buzzing for the rest of that day." (Service User 8).

In particular, service users remarked on how the level of support offered by the NSNOS team was delivered consistently. A number of service users outlined that daily contact with the residents was maintained by the team, if only to offer to sit down and talk. For many, this was an important advantage of the project:

"...the good about it is there is someone there to talk to, if you need to talk there is always somebody there to talk to and it is a confidential thing" (Service User 4).

For a number of service users the network of support at the project also extended to the other residents:

"When I moved in it was really good, there were residents there that I spent a lot of time with. A couple of the residents we put a lot of time and effort into each other. We help each other out. There's also other people there to talk to if you need them – it's not just the staff that you can talk to" (Service User 4).

One service user outlined that at times the individual support received could have been greater. However this respondent was quick to defend the project highlighting the difficult task he viewed the team as having in the delivery of a service that was required to cater to a large group of individuals with various complex needs:

"...they were really busy with other people. I don't think that's because they have to change for them, it's just that somebody like me going through it is so rare that I think the way they are set up is for the best" (Service User 2).

Interestingly, this perception was presented by one of the two service users who had no prior experience of rough sleeping, and therefore an individual who is representative of the client group outlined within the wider NSNO initiative. This highlights a key challenge faced by the project where the service delivered must continue to demonstrate flexibility in order to provide support to a complex client group, where individuals present with varying levels of homelessness experience from those who have spent a night or two sleeping on the streets to entrenched rough sleepers.

An aspect of service delivery that was particularly well-received by service users was the ability of the team to establish and maintain a stable and desirable living environment for service users. Respondents offered exceptional praise for the living conditions at the Sash project, commenting on a high standard of cleanliness, as well as the provision of a calm and quiet environment:

"It's just the atmosphere for me - you know enough for me to get my head together to move on. I don't think I could do it...if I was in another hostel because the atmosphere and everything else. It's just hard to explain and just totally different. It's more placid in here - you can hear it now it's nice and quiet – it's like that most days. You don't really get that anywhere else" (Service User 7).

Stability was frequently expressed as something of critical importance to the service users, where periods of homelessness were commonly described as chaotic. The environment offered by NSNOS was defined as stable and calm by the respondents, who identified this as a key success of the service, also offering explanations as to why this aspect was valuable to them as service users. As the following respondent highlighted:

"I think it's important – the atmosphere and the area in order to get yourself better. If you go into a place and its 24/7 just constant mithering people, in and out, and they've got no respect for anyone else – I've got no control. You can't move on, can you? You're sort of get stuck in that circle sort of thing. I know people who have gone in, like myself, no drugs whatsoever, and then smoking crack and whatever just because of the pressure that they have been put under, in there and the atmosphere" (Service User 7).

In addition, the relationship between service users and the team allowed for effective management of conflict when it did arise. Respondents outlined that, if needed, the team would mediate on behalf of residents who were in dispute, contributing to any discussions and helping to find quick resolutions. This further highlights the effort afforded by the team to deliver an efficient and well-managed service, as described by the following service user:

"If you need to speak to someone in private...and you want someone to be there to know what's going on, the staff will help you out with that. They'll see it from both sides and come up with a couple of options for us to get along" (Service User 4).

The main criticism of the project presented by a number of service users concerned access to a communal area. Respondents outlined that after 11pm the lounge and kitchen area were inaccessible. Those interviewed demonstrated an understanding of why this restriction was in place, highlighting that the benefits of a well-managed hostel outweighed the frustration of limited access. One service user highlighted the possible benefits of unlimited access to a communal living area on psychological wellbeing, as follows:

"I understand that if there's new residents coming in with that need, NSNO, and they've got to stay in the lounge or in the sit-up then obviously everybody respects that as they need their sleep - you know they've been sleeping rough - they need their sleep. If there's nobody there? It's not just myself, various other residents found it unfair that the lounge was shut at 11pm and you weren't allowed in there. For myself I have trouble sleeping...that's the trouble some people have - they can't sleep - and it's not as if you can sit in your bedroom because it drives you absolutely crazy" (Service user 4).

Overall, the interviews revealed a sense of collaborative involvement from both the NSNOS team and service users in delivery of the service as a whole. Respondents referred to it as a two-way process where both residents and staff assume a level of responsibility for the effectiveness of the service delivered. As one service user outlined:

"When you've got people that say 'well if you come this far, we'll come this far and we'll meet you' – what more could you ask for? It's not just them putting everything on a plate for you, you've actually got to do your bit as well" (Service user 3).

Beyond Housing Need

Many of the service users interviewed spoke positively regarding the wider support received from the project, offering a number of examples of how the team at NSNOS had supported them beyond housing need. This demonstrates how the approach adopted by NSNOS strives to provide all-encompassing support tailored to each individual's needs whilst retaining a wider commitment to ensuring long-term solutions are identified and ultimately that no individual returns to the streets.

At the point of contact with NSNOS, none of the service users interviewed were in employment. One example of this wider support highlighted by the respondents involved helping service users to secure regular income through benefit claims. One service user described his experience as extremely positive, outlining how a member of the team had assisted him in making a benefit claim online during his first day at the project. Adopting this approach initially in an environment where he felt comfortable with trusted support was instrumental in increasing confidence in his ability to manage a benefit claim independently, and in turn his search for employment. For a number of service users, gaining access to a computer with guided support, if only in certain circumstances, highlighted the importance of continued efforts to reduce digital exclusion, particularly among benefit claimants where claims are largely managed online. Since contact with the project, two respondents have returned to employment, one still resident at Sash and the other shortly after moving on.

Particular praise was given by service users regarding a regular cooking group organised by the NSNOS team and held at the Sash project. Respondents outlined that although the activity primarily developed their cooking skills it also promoted a better awareness of budgeting. As the following service user explains:

"They have a cooking thing on every Wednesday...it's like budgeting. It shows you, basically, how to buy food at a small price and make a nice meal out of it. I've done it a couple of times - its good because they get the stuff, they teach you how to do it and then you're left with...you know...last time we made a quiche, and then you're left with a big quiche like this...to do it yourself...I mean, I couldn't make a quiche me, but I know how to make one now because of that. It does sort of make me think well instead of going to Tesco's and buying a fish, £3 odd a box for more – it's learnt me how to save a bit of money" (Service User 7).

Another service user noted that the benefits of this activity also served to foster good relationships between the residents and the staff by providing the opportunity to prepare and eat a meal together. This further demonstrates the commitment of the NSNOS team to ensure the project offers a stable, home-like environment which is inclusive for all service users.

Respondents also commented positively on the project's efforts to reconnect service users to health services such as GPs and dentists. For some of the service users, ongoing health issues were dominated by drug and alcohol misuse. As complimented by an earlier service user, the NSNOS team created a well-maintained and well-managed environment desirable to service users who were focusing their efforts on managing certain addictions at various stages of treatment or recovery.

Where service users reported that particular issues could not be dealt with by the NSNOS team, they noted a commitment from the project to identify the most appropriate form of support. Examples offered by the respondents covered a broad scope including access to courses or training, as well as drug services or counselling.

This also represents a key success of the NSNO initiative across Greater Manchester, in that NSNOS and GB, along with other local services, have adopted a clear strategic commitment to link up support services across the area in order to maximise the effectiveness of support provision. A number of service users also offered praise for other local organisations that, on occasions, had delivered support to service users collaboratively. One service user offered exceptional praise for a local initiative called *Street Soccer* where vulnerable adults can attend regular sessions to play football while accessing support from the organisers, such as housing advice or emergency food provision. As this service user outlines:

"I think it's really smart what they have done because football is a big pulling power for young lads, even older lads. When you get a chance to play football, because that's what you think – 'yeh, man'. Because I'm a footballer, I've always been a footballer, yeh I get to play football, but when you find out the support they offer you as well. Without them I would have been in jail a long time ago" (Service User 3).

This project presents a new approach to service delivery where a popular activity among certain service users can be combined with access to support. Identifying approaches in service delivery that may overcome delayed access to support could be critical for future project successes.

Changing Perspectives

A number of service users highlighted how expectations of the environments in which homelessness support is provided had created barriers to accessing support earlier. Such judgements were also extended to the client group that may be encountered if temporarily housed in emergency accommodation. For many respondents this surrounded a major concern of drug and alcohol misuse, however they positioned NSNOS as not representative of such places. As the following service user highlights:

"Even though I'm living in a hostel and even though I've not got my own place and it's not ideal, it's still somewhere I can sort of settle. I know I've got somewhere I can sort of come back to and I know I can come back here and not get any trouble. I can come back here and there won't be loads of drugs floating about everywhere because it does happen in some places" (Service User 7).

Since contact with NSNOS such views had been challenged, as the following service user points out:

"I'm surprised how nice a lot of the lads are in here as well, being like most of, they are like heroin addicts, drinkers. I didn't think I'd be alright in somewhere like this that's why it probably took me so long to go and look for somewhere like this" (Service user 9).

In particular, one respondent conveyed that since accessing support for his own circumstances his perception of the causes and experiences of homelessness had drastically changed. This realisation was not unique to this service user alone and similar comments were offered by both service users who had been new to the streets and those with previous experiences of homelessness:

“The experience was quite odd. It opened my eyes to how easy it was to fall into that situation and not to judge. I think I was maybe one of those people that you walk by a homeless person in the street and you’re sort of like ‘well it must be their fault’ but I think going through that experience makes you realise that you are not far away from it. It just takes somebody to bump you over, or you know you lose your job and you can fall right into there. Everybody seems to be judging people on benefits...so I think for me it has been a real eye-opener” (Service User 2).

In addition, some of those interviewed also described changes in their ability to manage undesirable behaviours since they accessed support. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the project’s approach to provide support and encouragement to individuals who want to make significant behavioural changes intended to have positive and long-lasting impacts on their wellbeing. One service user highlighted how combined support from NSNOS and another local organisation had helped him to overcome past problems with managing aggressive behaviour:

“I’ve gone from that to saying ‘you know what, I can actually walk away from that in this situation and just sack it’. All they want me to do is the best with my life. They’ve shown me that I can actually contribute to the people around me” (Service User 3).

While many of the service users highlighted that their current situations were not ideal, a number of them pointed out that on reflection they were able to take something positive from the experience:

“[I] would have rather that the situation never happened, but in some weird way I’m glad that it did because I think that it’s changed my perceptions” (Service User 2).

Moving On

While service users remarked on the positive, stable and home-like environment provided by the project, it was only regarded as a temporary situation. Respondents discussed their enthusiasm to move on, but for a number of those interviewed it was a well-received aspect of the service that they did not feel rushed into doing so. For one service user, accepting accommodation too early and in what he perceived as the wrong location had resulted in returning to NSNOS for further support. The team were commended for their ongoing support in this respect where he felt comfortable making contact with the project for a second time, with hope of working towards a more long-term solution. As he highlighted:

"It was pretty quick how they sorted me out with the housing. They sorted me out with the doctors straight away and the dentist. They done everything for me pretty quick and it was a quick turnaround to get me into a property...but I came back here and there was no judgement, no questions, no nothing, it was just what do you need? Not why are you back here?"
(Service User 7).

Another service user who had recently left the project further highlighted the ongoing support that the team at NSNOS offered to service users once they had moved on:

"I'm struggling a bit at the minute, recently moved out. It is going to be hard on me at first because you know I haven't got somebody downstairs that I can just go and talk to if I can't sleep or anything like that – however the staff have advised that if I needed help with someone to talk to, or with letters, or anything, they have informed that I can return there and speak to a member of staff, rather than dealing with it on my own. That's a great thing – it's not just me they've done that for – there's been ex-residents that have turned up and said 'I'm struggling, can you help me out?' and they've helped them out..."
(Service User 4).

Respondents highlighted the difficulty in accessing suitable properties to move on to, particularly with regards to social housing where in the local area the waiting list presents significant problems not only for homeless individuals but also for homelessness support trying to assist service users back into housing. As the following service user describes:

"It is hard - I can go in the council every day and mither them and mither them but you just get nowhere. They basically tell you the same thing - there are 300 people on the waiting list. But, with these doing things for you and taking hold of the reigns and going down there and you seem to get things done quicker. I know people who've been on the housing lists and they've been on it 2/3 years and they're still waiting"
(Service User 7).

This issue was further complicated for service users looking to move on where even access to privately rented accommodation was limited, and on many occasions inaccessible to individuals receiving housing benefit. As outlined:

"...looking in papers, looking in shop windows because you never know it could be someone like DSS accepted. That's what you need to look for, you need to look for people that are willing to accept housing benefit because obviously I haven't got a job at the minute so I wouldn't be able to pay the deposit or anything like that"
(Service User 3).

The interviews revealed substantial concerns from the service users about the process of returning to housing and management of their situations independently after leaving the project. It was voiced by one service user, in particular, that in some respects it was easier to be homeless than to cope with the financial strain of living in a house:

"Hard in one respect, but a bit easier in the other because there's no stresses or worries of bills and things like that"
(Service User 9).

This was further supported by other service users who described poor experiences with landlords and privately rented properties in the past, for some of whom had caused them to become homeless.

Long waiting lists for social housing and a lack of confidence in private renting represent key issues within the housing sector overall, both of which clearly have a critical impact on homelessness across the UK and consequently the service delivered by NSNOS.

This chapter aimed to highlight the experiences of homelessness for a number of service users who have received support from NSNOS. The interviews explored their views on service delivery, highlighting successes and challenges faced by the project. Overall, service users felt that NSNOS exceeded their expectations in a number of ways, offering excellent support and focusing efforts on trying to achieve long-lasting changes for those who come into contact with the service. This was done effectively and with compassion. As Service User 4 summarised:

“I’ve never really had people that want to help me or cared about me. So, when you get a lot of people that actually do care about your wellbeing and where you’re going in life it’s just humbling, isn’t it? It humbles me” (Service User 4).

5. Gate Buddies Findings - *The Way Forward?*

This section presents an analysis of key findings from interviews carried out with a number of service providers in relation to the Gate Buddies (GB) initiative. This was set up by Riverside ECHG in 2014 and is a peer support service for those leaving prison. The service matches trained volunteers with clients prior to their discharge, with the volunteer meeting the client on release 'at the gate' and providing on-going support along with other agencies. Family members of the clients are also supported during the process through Family GB.

Four GB representatives were interviewed, three of whom were volunteers for the project, as well as one service user and a key stakeholder. Additional comments have also been drawn from the other interviews carried out during this project where providers had experience of dealing with the GB service. Note that all identifiers have been removed from the quotes to protect the anonymity of the respondents, with the above being referred to generically as GB service representatives.

Peer Element

A key aspect that emerged in relation to the scheme was the ability of the volunteers to engage with those who were referred. This was rooted in the model itself which recruited volunteers who had themselves been in prison, utilising the expertise of their own experience:

"It's absolutely fantastic and I think it's received so well by the people involved because they know they're dealing with people who actually understand where they're coming from. It's not textbook, it's not somebody sitting down in front of you saying, 'I know because of this in the book. This says this and this says this'. It's because it's somebody who has shared those life experiences, who gets exactly where you're coming from and is impartial and non-judgemental and wants to do the best for you and by you. It's received so well I think because of that" (GB Representative 1)

"So, they're caring people, they understand people. They're on your wavelength because they've been through similar things that you've been through" (GB Representative 2).

One GB Representative felt that effective engagement with the service was greater than that with other services due to the nature of this peer approach. The ability of those who have experienced complex issues when leaving prison, including homelessness, appeared to be well placed as mentors and 'role models'. As the following NSNOS representative noted:

"...it's the volunteers...the clients there are much more likely to talk and open up to them..." (NSNOS Representative 6).

Support and Prevention

The emphasis in the scheme on support for those referred was clear from all the interviewees. It was noted by one GB representative that an important aspect of the service user experience was that support was there at the point of being released. The service provider also commented on the need for this support due to the "shock of being released" - in part due to services that had been around them closely in prison coming to an end. In this respect, they viewed the GB service as "...kind of the way forward..." (Service provider 3).

The very supportive and nurturing approach was an aspect the GB representatives took pride in and was also referred to by Service Provider 7, who felt that this contributed in a positive manner to the client's emotional wellbeing on release. One GB Representative also suggested that he would like to see the support for families expanded as this was seen as an important element of service delivery.

This support appears to be carried out in a strategic approach, with volunteers commencing input approximately six weeks prior to their release dates. This was supported by one GB representative who spoke of the support commencing a long time prior to release. This preventative aspect to the support was noted by Service Provider 4, who saw the

volunteer nature of the role being able to provide extra time waiting for what can be variable release times and going "the extra mile". In further support, GB representative 6 noted that:

"...the success has been fantastic because they've got someone supporting them prior to release and post release, and pick them up and meet them at the gate, and all of their appointments and things they need to attend are set up..." (GB Representative 6).

Service Provider 5 also noted the crucial timing of the support the GB service offers:

"If people don't get plugged into the right services within three of four days of leaving prison, everything else that follows can be set in motion and usually what follows is not good . . ." (Service Provider 5).

Working in Partnership

An advantage of the volunteer support provided by the GB service is that there is clear multi-agency working. Service Provider 7 stated that the GB service seemed to work seamlessly with other services, providing a total package of support: "I have to compliment the interagency working ..." (Service Provider 7).

GB Representative 1 noted that a key success of the project was "... just the amount of networking that's been done". This demonstrates the function of this volunteer scheme role in the wider package of support that is set up for prisoners on release. The Buddies were seen as an important link in ensuring appointments were set up and had additional time to spend with clients to ensure these took place, almost reinforcing and facilitating this process.

Capacity Building and Benefits for Volunteers

Capacity building appeared to be a central element of the GB service, where those who have received support from the project are offered the opportunity to become volunteers themselves. Service Provider 7 commented positively on this approach, highlighting the importance of reinvestment of service users back into the project. Each of the GB representatives who were volunteers had their own story to tell and spoke enthusiastically about the transformative nature of becoming a volunteer:

“I felt like I did have a place in society again” (GB Representative 1)

“...it's definitely changed my life” (GB Representative 2).

Service providers referred to the comprehensive training and support that was being provided to the volunteers by the project, highlighting a number of benefits. One example outlined the advantage of having a reference from a leading local charity for the volunteers, enabling them to increase their employability. Critically, this was seen as incredibly important for those in a position of having few employment prospects due to their offending history:

“...the GB where the volunteers are concerned is a fantastic means to get a reference from quite a large charity.....a fantastic opportunity to move into paid employment or another higher level volunteering opportunity” (GB Representative 5).

That the service was a great addition in this area was commented on by all interviewees, with one GB Representative noting that the great work of the service to date should be more widely publicised. Some talked about how the outcomes of the scheme - keeping service users well supported on release so they do not reoffend - may contribute to saving the prison service money in the long term. GB representatives spoke of the potential for expanding this relatively new service, given its initial successes, to a wider geographical area. In addition, it was noted by a number of GB Representatives, and mentioned by one of the service providers, that the potential to expand current provision to also support female service users was a development currently underway.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the rapid evaluation was to provide Riverside ECHG with a greater understanding of the impact of the NSNOS and also the recently established GB initiative, exploring areas of success and particular challenges faced by the projects since they were introduced at the beginning of 2014.

The evaluation highlighted that the NSNOS service appeared to be a well-managed service, providing an efficient response to referrals. It had been well-received by service users and other local organisations. NSNOS was commended for the broad support adopted in the service delivery, supporting each service user based on their individual needs, which often extended beyond that of their housing need. In particular, the team were praised for their approachability and consistency - an aspect that was extremely valuable to service users who defined accessing support as representing a transition from a chaotic lifestyle to one of stability and control.

The NSNOS service did not position itself as a 'quick fix' and strategically adopted an approach that was directed at achieving long lasting positive impacts on all service users. Those interviewed appeared to value this approach where it was conveyed that for most individuals moving on was a multifaceted problem presenting a number of challenges, ranging from issues related to drug and alcohol misuse, lack of family or friends to provide support and a lack of availability or trust in appropriate accommodation provision.

The NSNOS appears to have achieved its objectives in terms of providing emergency accommodation to the target group. However, since its introduction, service providers reported that the NSNOS service has had to be flexible in its approach, whereby it has had to accept a higher number of unanticipated referrals for a more dynamic client group. The project was commended by other service providers and service users for its commitment to supporting any individual in need, providing an inclusive service to all vulnerable homeless people. In operation, less referrals have been made to the service for those new to rough sleeping than expected. In turn, NSNOS has utilised this opportunity to expand their provision focusing additional support towards other client groups (such as entrenched rough sleepers, prison leavers, those without a local connection and the cold weather initiative).

In particular, accessibility to the service by those without a local connection was seen as invaluable to service users who had become homeless as a result of a relationship breakdown. As highlighted, these individuals no longer felt they had a connection to the area where family members may live, an aspect of the local connection criteria which was rejected. This highlights that assessments needed to go beyond identifying the location of family members and look at the details of each individual situation.

This was seen as a positive from the service provider's perspective and demonstrates that the NSNOS service is clearly able to respond to such changes in the operational environment. Overall, in the current context where support provision - such as emergency accommodation - continues to decrease as a result of funding cuts, an approach of this kind is critical.

The Gate Buddies (GB) service is a relatively new initiative for Riverside therefore the findings represent early reflections on service delivery. The project has been welcomed by service providers and service users alike; many of whom highlighted that the innovative approach was a key success. The service received praise across the board as a project which provided timely support to prison leavers, also extending support to their families in a collaborative approach. In particular, efforts to deliver a service that promotes capacity building through an in-depth volunteer development programme - which is also offered to service users - was held in high regard.

The evaluation revealed that for many service users stability in the support network and the environment in which support is delivered is of critical importance. A number of respondents identified the absence of this at the point of contact with the projects due to relationship breakdowns, repeatedly offering praise to the services for meeting this support need.

In terms of suggested improvements, one issue raised was the benefits of providing a more interagency focused service. To a large extent, NSNO GM are already achieving this outcome but service providers suggested there was room to improve across Salford in particular. One suggestion outlined the potential of an interagency forum. Operationally, the GB service boasts a strong element of partnership working already, in part facilitated by its base in a multi-agency setting at the ARC (Abstinence & Recovery Centre) premises.

In terms of future development, it has been noted that while NSNOS has expanded to include female service users, to date need for this provision has been limited. Continued efforts to promote the service as accessible by both men and women may be needed, however it is unclear from the evaluation alone if females fail to access the support, or are less likely to need it. In a similar respect, the GB initiative also aspires to expand the service to support female prisoners in the near future.

Continued efforts to raise awareness of both initiatives across Salford may contribute to service delivery having a wider impact on those who are new to the streets across the city. In addition, a commitment to sharing the positive experiences of service users may serve to break down existing concerns regarding the type of support given, or the environments in which support is provided, among those who continue to be homeless. As highlighted in the findings, a significant barrier to accessing support at present is situated within potential service users' perceptions of homelessness provision.

Within the evaluation it was reported that NSNOS will continue to deliver the service for the foreseeable future. For the GB project, funding has been secured for a further twelve months and development plans for the service are currently being outlined.

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