Assertive Homeless Outreach Theory of Change

This document outlines a draft theory of change for an Assertive Outreach Project in Leeds run by Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI) aiming to prevent rough sleeping in the city.

This theory of change was created in partnership between NPC/Clinks and CRI. A workshop was held with the assertive outreach team in October 2013 to explore the different aspects of the service. The theory of change was then developed by NPC/Clinks with input at key stages from the CRI team.

Context

The service focusses on people in crisis situations who can be a challenge to engage. They often have multiple needs that are too challenging for other services to deal with effectively.

Among the main challenges for people targeted by the service are:

- Low education/life skills. Intergenerational disadvantage and lack of support from families.
- Experience of relationship breakdown, domestic violence, debt/hardship and exploitation.
- Mental health problems.
- Experience of offending and substance misuse.

Problems can be exacerbated by societal changes such as limited access to suitable housing, the necessity for shared housing, and welfare reforms such as the Spare Room Subsidy. Moreover, statutory services are not generally equipped to work with people who have the most severe and urgent problems.

In response the assertive outreach service aims to:

- Identify vulnerable individuals.
- Engage with them on their own terms.
- Work relatively quickly to promote changes in people and institutions that help them resolve immediate problems, access housing and other services, and then to make sustained changes.

Aim of the theory of change

Constructing a theory of change has a number of benefits, the most important of which are summarised below:

- It helps groups of people involved in the same project to come together and work towards a shared understanding of intended outcomes and how they plan to achieve them.
- It is a way to quickly communicate about the work to external stakeholders/funders.
- It helps determine what evidence should be collected to test the service.
- It highlights the most important activities and aims, to help assess strengths and weaknesses.
• Ultimately - with evidence against each link in the chain - it will be possible to construct an evidence-based “story” about whether the service has made a difference - and what lessons have been learned.

The key change mechanisms are:

Key change mechanisms are the active causal ingredients of services which are headlined here by way of a summary:

• Risk of rough sleeping can be identified by assertively engaging those identified as vulnerable.
• Similarly for those already sleeping rough, help is most effective if people are identified and engaged quickly and assertively.
• Staff need to establish a trusting relationship with vulnerable people in order to properly assess and respond to their needs.
• Trusting relationships can be established by listening, being open and flexible, and helping address immediate needs without constraint or restriction.
• Once trust is established, vulnerable people will be willing to engage in joint-work to address practical and attitudinal barriers to change.
• Some of these practical barriers relate to the housing and benefits system. Outreach workers are uniquely positioned to resolve these barriers because of their simultaneous understanding of both systems and of individuals’ needs.

In addition, through its relationship with other services and by exemplifying how to work with vulnerable people, the outreach service works to change the approach of mainstream services - so they are better able to deal with vulnerable people in future.

The intended outcomes of the service are:

• Vulnerable people better understand their entitlements and have the capability to access and engage with mainstream services.
• They accept there’s something wrong about their situation and take responsibility to change.
• Improved emotional coping skills: such as self worth, self-esteem.
• They are more hopeful & motivated: can think beyond their current situation and plan their future.
• Ultimately they will agree on a plan to change their situation, which will include entering accommodation and changing their lifestyle.
• Vulnerable people may also be referred to mainstream services - which will be better equipped as a result of the wider work of the outreach service.
• As a result of this work we expect to see a minimisation of rough sleeping and associated activities (begging, street crime).
Theory of change

A summary of the theory of change is shown below, with a more detailed logic model on the following page. It has two columns reflecting the work the service does with; a) individuals; and b) other services. We have also summarised how these two streams of activity are linked.

### ASSERTIVE OUTREACH – HIGHER LEVEL TOC

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trained, knowledgeable staff</th>
<th>Partnerships with statutory services</th>
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<td>Identify and proactively engage rough sleepers</td>
<td>Statutory services share information</td>
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<td>Build trust with clients</td>
<td>Services work together more effectively</td>
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<td>Identify needs</td>
<td>Cultural change and improved practice in statutory services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop tailored package of support</td>
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<td>Rough sleepers better understand their situation and their options</td>
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<td>Attitudinal changes, with a plan to change their situation</td>
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<td>Reduce problem behaviours</td>
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<td>Take up of suitable accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced rough sleeping and crime in the city</td>
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**WORK WITH INDIVIDUALS**

- **Trained, knowledgeable staff**
  - Funding sources combined so service can respond quickly to demand
  - Staff recruited to reflect demographics/needs of clients
  - Induction training and staff shadowing
  - Ongoing appraisal and analysis of learning needs
  - Staff engage in shared learning and reflective practice
  - Develop cumulative knowledge of persistent cases

- **Consistent group of experienced outreach workers, specialising in needs of vulnerable people, working flexibly to maintain high quality.**

- **Identify and engage through assertive outreach**
  - Receive timely information about individuals at risk
  - Regular visits to rough sleeping sites, hospital cells, current accommodation, night shelters
  - Persistent approach: work with all individuals until they engage

- **Focus on building trust**
  - Out-of-hours service enables contact at key points of vulnerability
  - Work to engage people by listening, being flexible and open, providing food
  - Past, responsive emergency support (accommodation, food & other needs)
  - Build relationship quickly. Clients get to know staff & begin to approach service themselves
  - No restrictions. Support maintained until no longer required

- **Tailored package support to individuals**
  - Assessment of people’s strengths and needs
  - Determine benefit entitlements and support that might be available
  - Facilitate access to accommodation (private rented/hostels/temporary accommodation) or engage with landlords/housing associations to prevent evictions
  - Provide practical assistance such as transport, accompanying clients to appointments
  - Counselling to address attitudinal issues
  - Discuss plans for the future
  - Being clear about the offer to people and what can be achieved

- **Improved understanding amongst service users**
  - Better understanding of welfare/housing entitlements and what mainstream services offer
  - Increased capability to access and engage with mainstream services
  - Accept there’s something wrong with their situation and take responsibility to change

- **Changes to attitudes of service users**
  - They feel support is available; provides a basis for thinking about change
  - Better emotional coping skills, self-worth and self-esteem
  - More hopeful: think beyond their current situation & make plans for the future
  - Motivated to change
  - Agree a plan to change their situation

- **Changes to behaviour of service users**
  - Enter suitable accommodation
  - Change lifestyles and daily routines
  - Attend to any substance misuse problems actively
  - Reduce criminal behaviour

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**SYSTEM CHANGE**

- **Partnerships with statutory services**
  - Build knowledge and relationships with other services
  - Other providers understand the aims and role of the outreach service
  - Establish referral arrangements with police and housing providers

- **Support and challenge mainstream services**
  - Challenge services on specific issues that impact on vulnerable people
  - Update on legislation/policy changes and trends in vulnerable people
  - Exemptify approach to working with vulnerable people

- **Lead multi-agency response**
  - All services work together more effectively
  - Build knowledge/intelligence about individual cases to support the work of other services
  - Promote better dialogue between services.
  - Co-ordinate roles and responsibilities
  - Promote information sharing and operational communication between services

- **Better understanding between services**
  - Better knowledge/practices for working with people with complex needs – their entitlements and how to adapt services to them
  - More accepting of people and willing to engage with them

- **Mainstream services more accessible**
  - Less restricted access to services. Take more responsibility for complex cases
  - Services are more flexible and adaptable with individuals
  - Services work more effectively with one another (across institutional/geographical boundaries)

- **Appropriate and effective referrals to mainstream services**
  - Mainstream services have better policies/practices (e.g. client discharge)
  - Approach of mainstream services is consistent, predictable and more effective

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**Final outcomes**

- Reduction in rough sleeping and associated activities (begging, street crime)
- Reduction in costs to the city associated with rough sleeping and criminality
Evidence needs

The table below outlines the evidence needs to follow from the theory of change above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the model</th>
<th>Evidence needs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ways of working</td>
<td>- Description of funding sources, staff recruitment and training processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Consistent group of experienced outreach workers, specialising in needs of vulnerable people, working flexibly to maintain high quality | - Description of the team and particular strengths  
- Analysis of how time is divided (including amount of referral and contact time) |
| Develop partnerships:                                                             | - Description of relationships established with other agencies and log of actions that have resulted                                        |
| Support and challenge other services, improved knowledge in organisations, culture change in organisations, services work together more effectively: | - Specific examples of support/challenge provided and actions that have resulted  
- Survey of staff in partner organisations to assess impact achieved  
- Stakeholder consultation (ie. qualitative feedback) |
| Identify and engage through assertive outreach:                                    | - Description of outreach activities, locations visited and time spent  
- Estimates of the number of rough sleepers/potential rough sleepers engaged with. |
| Ability to build trust                                                            | - Case studies of steps taken to build trust with service users  
- Feedback from service users (system for recording engagement on case-by-case basis)  
- Perceptions of stakeholders and partner organisations on effectiveness of outreach work service in engaging service users |
| Tailored package support to individuals:                                          | - Case studies of support packages provided to individuals  
- Feedback from service users (ideally this would be a simple questionnaire, but it would also be possible to collect feedback informally and have outreach workers code/assess it) |
| Improved practice in organisations                                                | - Statistics on evictions from housing providers  
- Statistics on the proportion of cases who remain with mainstream services  
- Statistics on number of effective referrals from outreach |
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<tr>
<td>improved understanding amongst service users</td>
<td>- ‘Outcomes Star’, or equivalent, to measure feelings of support, coping skills, self-worth, motivation amongst service users</td>
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<tr>
<td>changes to attitudes of service users</td>
<td>- Case studies of plans made by individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>changes in behaviour of service users</td>
<td>- Statistics on proportion of service users entering and remaining in accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Statistics on substance/alcohol misuse amongst service users</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Perceptions of stakeholders and partners on level of success achieved by outreach workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final outcomes:</td>
<td>Homelessness and crime statistics for the city</td>
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