



Safe As Houses

Executive Summary

The Safe As Houses pilot was aimed at female council tenants in Edinburgh experiencing domestic abuse. The pilot ran in two stages and has since been adopted into every day working within the City of Edinburgh Council.

The project provides additional safety measures for those tenants at risk of domestic abuse and allows them to stay in their current accommodation. This is a valuable option for women who may have otherwise been made homeless due to domestic abuse.

During the project, 14 households had additional security measures installed in addition to receiving associated advice and support. A further 33 households were in contact with the project team, the majority of which were referred on elsewhere for support and advice. The pilots provided an immediate impact for the women and children involved and allowed them to feel safe, not only in their own home but also in the wider community.

Safe As Houses has demonstrated that it is possible to break the link between domestic abuse and homelessness.

Project Background and Aims

The Edinburgh Violence Reduction Programme (EVRP) 2008 - 2013 is a multi-agency programme which brings together partners from numerous organisations that have demonstrated a commitment to reducing violence. The programme asks for long-term commitment from all partners and communities to develop and implement policies that will lead to attitudinal changes towards violence. There are three work streams within the Programme:

- Violence Against Women
- Alcohol and Night Time Economy
- Other Street Violence

This Practice Note details work carried out by the Violence Against Women work stream.

The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) applied and was successful in gaining funding (£55,220) from the Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund (HPIF) which was announced as part of the Statement on the Abolition of Priority Need¹ to the Scottish Parliament in December 2005. The funding was allocated to eight projects within local authorities to stimulate innovation in homelessness prevention work.

The City of Edinburgh Council determined that in 2005-06, 237 people within tenures in Edinburgh sought temporary accommodation from the CEC Homelessness Service after citing a violent dispute with their partner as the reason for their homelessness. As such the Safe As Houses pilot was created to provide an additional choice during housing option interviews and to determine if women affected by domestic abuse would welcome the opportunity to remain in their own homes rather than move. The pilot was based upon a

¹ Scottish Executive, Homelessness Statement, Ministerial Statement on the Abolition of Priority Need by 2012, published December 2005 - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47121/0020892.pdf>

sanctuary scheme model which had been used successfully in a number of projects within England but had not been explored fully within Scotland.

Due to the nature of the pilot and the requirement of referrals the project relied on the operational input from a number of agencies, including:

- Police Safer Communities Team
- Police Domestic Abuse Liaison Officers
- Fire Service Community Team
- CEC Social Work
- Specialist Voluntary Sector Agencies

Safe As Houses was seen as an important complement to these other services as it is likely that women who are secure in their home environment will be in a better position to make use of other services available.

The Safe As Houses initial pilot ran from August 2007 – March 2008 with the primary focus being the installation of practical safety measures in to the home of women affected by domestic abuse living in council tenancies in Edinburgh. In addition to the practical measures, focus was also given to referrals to specialist agencies to ensure continued emotional support for women experiencing domestic abuse.

Due to the success of the initial pilot, the EVRP arranged for further funding to allow the project to run from 1 November 2009 until 31 March 2010, providing the project the time to integrate itself as part of the council's core business.

Activities

Throughout the course of the pilots, Safe As Houses received referrals from the following sources:

- CEC- Social Work: Children and Families
- CEC – North Edinburgh Neighbourhood Office
- Circle Scotland
- Edinburgh Women's Aid
- Sahelyia
- Domestic Abuse Initiative at Leith Community Council
- Shelter Families Project (and CEC Housing Options)
- Police

On receiving a referral, a risk assessment was undertaken to determine the risk to the woman/family and the suitability of the property for the installation of safety measures. In cases where the abuser was still within the home or where security measures were not deemed suitable, women were referred to specialist legal advice and support.

When a referral was found to be an appropriate recipient of additional safety measures, these were then installed. In all cases, Safe As Houses provided specialist practical advice and emotional support to the women/families, either themselves or through referrals or joint working with other agencies. The types of additional security measures included:

- Solid Doors
- Reinforced Windows
- Reinforced Door Frames
- Additional Locks and Bolts
- Reinforced Door Hinges
- Viewers
- Mobile Phones
- Personal Alarms
- Smoke Alarms
- Anti-Arson Letter Boxes
- Fire Safety Packs

The pilots ensured that the process was accessible and fast moving to allow the impacted women to begin to feel safer as soon as possible. The Safe As Houses project was staffed by a female worker which a number of women said made them feel more comfortable.

Impact

The measures provided by Safe As Houses enabled the link between domestic abuse and homelessness to be reduced. It has provided women with a valuable option in escaping domestic abuse without becoming homeless. The project was accessible, quick moving and it established a trusting relationship with women who valued not having to repeat their experience to multiple agencies. Additionally, the referrals of cases to alternative agencies have aided in the women receiving appropriate help.

The impact of the installation of security measures and the provision of additional support made an immediate impact on the lives of the women affected. The work carried out by Safe As Houses has allowed the women to feel empowered and safe once again in their own home. One of the recipients stated "Why should I let someone chase me out of my home. Safe As Houses gave strength to stand on own two feet". The impact of the additional safety measures went beyond the security of the home as women felt safer in the wider neighbourhood and there was a reduction in significant stress factors associated with moving home and community. Making homes safer has also had a positive impact on children living in the homes, not only are the children protected from the abuser, they are also not required to change schools or friendship circles, which can be very disruptive to a child.

It is felt that an additional impact of sanctuary schemes is that it gives a powerful message to perpetrators of domestic abuse as they realise that the additional safety measures have been installed due to their actions.

The financial impact of the programme is also evident. The average costs associated of a stay in temporary accommodation is £3,000-£4,000; this is based upon an average length of stay at 53 days. The average cost of the additional security measures installed in each household was £1,200. Therefore, in addition to the women being able to remain in their own home, there was a potential saving to the CEC of approximately £2,000 - £3,000 per household. These figures are based upon a single, rather than repeated use of temporary accommodation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

As a condition of the HIPF agreement, an evaluation of the initial pilot was conducted by Research for Real, an external evaluator under contract with the Scottish Government. The evaluation was published in May 2008 and utilised a theory of change approach. The evaluation was based on an analysis of project monitoring data, telephone interviews with women who had security measures installed and the views of agencies involved in the work of project. In addition, the Scottish Government published an evaluation² of all eight Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund projects in 2008.

During the eight month duration of the project, 47 referrals were received, of which 14 homes received the installation of safety measures. Of the remaining 33 referrals, seven of the cases, the referral was eligible, however they could not be carried forwards for a number of reasons including difficulty contacting the women, difficulty accessing properties, clients changing their mind and refusing to go ahead due to police involvement. The rest were deemed to be ineligible for the project, either due to tenure reasons (ie non council leased properties) or referrals which did not relate to domestic abuse. All received alternative support and advice.

² Scottish Government, Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund projects, Published 2008 - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/244719/0068588.pdf>

The additional funding provided by the EVRP was enough to fund a further 12 households to receive extra security measure to allow them to remain in their own homes. The extension of the project also enabled the project to attract funding from various sources and be mainstreamed as part of the council's core business.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

The pilots found that there were a high number of ineligible referrals received from agencies and as such it was recognised that there was a need to improve the understanding of the project to the partners involved. The greatest scope for improving the understanding was in relation of the tenure eligibility criteria and the source of violence. It was thought that wider training on the purpose of the project to all partners involved would reduce the number of inappropriate referrals received.

The evaluation identified a number of key lessons experienced in the pilot which were highlighted for future schemes, these are summarised below.

Extend the scope to other tenures

Monitoring data gathered by the City of Edinburgh Council shows that the private rented sector has the majority of female homelessness relating from domestic abuse, with under 5% arising from housing association tenancies. As such, it is advisable that the scope of a programme should not just focus on council tenants. Potential approaches to this include the involvement of housing associated or extensions to clauses on new leases at private sector properties, used as temporary accommodation.

Retain focus on domestic abuse

Due to the large demand for home security services from other instances ie ASB, harassment, etc. It is recommended that the focus remains on domestic abuse unless resources are expanded.

Provide appropriate training

Training should be provided in a number of areas including risk assessments, safety planning and wider awareness of domestic violence and abuse. The challenge is to enhance the skills of the staff within the multiple agencies to ensure appropriate cases are recognised and referred.

Retain a coordination role

The Safe As Houses project provided a key coordination role which was highly valued by stakeholders, users, agencies and contractors. It is recommended that this approach is continued to ensure a robust service is maintained.

Maintain the link with strategic partnership working

The coordination role established key relationships and shared knowledge at a strategic level which would be difficult for the individual agencies to manage on their own.

Make it part of core business

The evaluation noted that there was strong support for the scheme to become more widely available and it was seen that it could become an important part of the response to wider strategies relating to domestic abuse and community safety. Due to the enthusiasm and commitment from the key partners, the EVRPs additional funding allowed for the project to be extended until the scheme became part of core business in the City of Edinburgh Council, which was achieved in April 2010.

Resources

Funding	The project received £55,220 from the Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund (HPIF). Additional £16575 funding from EVRP.
Partners	City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Government, Lothian and Borders Police, Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service.

Outcomes

National	8: We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk. 9: We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger. 15: Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.
Local	8.1 Children in need of protection receive the help they need straight away. 9.1 People in Edinburgh are safe from crime, disorder and danger. 15.1 Our services are continually improving and efficient. 15.2 People's perceptions of the quality and responsiveness of public services in Edinburgh are improved.

Practice Note Information

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