

# Addressing health inequalities through developing peer based legal support for the homeless in London; considering the health impacts and future directions

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Out of homelessness



# Homeless Health Peer Advocacy



## The Intervention:

- One-to one support to make and attend health appointments
- Health Promotion Sessions

## The Result:

- Increased attendance at scheduled appointments; reduction in DNA rates to that of the general population
- A 42% reduction in unplanned care activity costs. Leading to a saving of £2.43 for every £1 spent.
- Volunteers move on!

# HHPA Development



## It's come from...

- One year pilot in Westminster in 2010; 100 appointments

## Where it's at:

- 8 London boroughs; 2,500 engagements last year; 450 Health Promotion Sessions
- Specialist projects: Hep C, Hospital Discharge, Mental Health and Women
- GSK Impact Award overall Winner 2016

## Where its going:

- HHPA National
- NIHR Evaluation
- Addressing legal need of peers and clients?

# Addressing legal need



- Peer advocates and clients – experiences of homelessness linked to, or exacerbated by, legal challenges
- Complicates efforts to secure long-term health
- In tandem with our Building Livelihoods programme – developing innovative model of legal support for peers and clients, with support from the Legal Education Foundation
- Context: limited evidence for interventions and policies to address legal needs of people who are homeless, and then impacts on health

# Participatory formative evaluation



- Formative evaluation – support ongoing development
- Action research – practitioners and researchers reflecting together
- Participatory – peers, staff, researchers working together
- Qualitative, exploratory – understand experiences, define the intervention, impacts and mechanisms for Groundswell peers and clients
  - 11 Semi-structured interviews with peer advocates
  - 5 Semi-structured interviews with people who are homeless (Clients)
  - 4 Semi-structured stakeholder interviews
  - 9 Academic-community partnership meetings (recorded reflective meetings)



# Findings

1 experiences of legal need and health

2 experiences of the Building Livelihoods intervention

# 1 Identifying legal needs



Immigration and welfare system challenges dominated

*“What’s worth commenting on is the experience of people within the general homeless population [...] more and more people are experiencing problems with their immigration and their status, documentation.” (stakeholder)*

# 1 Legal needs: complexity



Multiple, inter-linked legal challenges, bound up with experience of homelessness (both cause and consequence), and in turn with ill-health

*“So there was going to be an MDT [Multi-Disciplinary Meeting] type meeting [...] And that’s where we really began to understand actually how well known he was. Both to services and also how he had historically been excluded from services. Either because of his behaviour or because they hadn’t been able to manage his support needs. [...] which you could describe as complex.” (Groundswell staff)*



# 1 Overwhelmed by complexity

Respondents described challenges in 'motivation' and 'being bothered', but in context of overwhelming challenges they had little control over or capacity to confront

*"I hadn't got the motivation ...it's one of those things that... if I don't know about something, I won't... I just can't be arsed sometimes. It's finding the motivation. If I know I have got somebody who can do it for me, then let them... you know. I know that sounds er... but it's true, if I have got somebody who is going to do it for me then... and they are in a better place to do it, because they know ... more about the services, than I do." (groundswell Peer advocate)*



# 1 Limits to legal support



Sources of support are available, but insufficient and hard to access

*“it’s hard to access legal support. And here we are talking about immigration support, You have all the types of legal support that's also difficult to access. So I mean family law is not available for sorts of things for which there is no legal aid, very very limited legal aid. Criminal law – generally yes. But that’s problematic. But then having a good lawyer then that might be more problematic. And then employment law – no legal aid, so its people are being kind of abused.” (Stakeholder)*

# 1 Legal need and health



## Legal issues causing homelessness and health

*“I was made homeless because I didn’t have any papers, I couldn’t get benefits. I couldn’t get a job. Nobody give me a job because you are illegal immigrant.”*

## Legal issues impacting on mental well being

*“I was really down in the dumps at the time. But I took time, I went to see my doctor and he signed me off. He put it down to anxiety and depression. And I just didn’t want to get up in the morning.*

## Status preventing access to healthcare

*“Immigration status [...] is a big barrier in getting through to be assisted. No matter how vulnerable you are, I have come across some very vulnerable people with complex medical needs who have been on the street without diabetic medications. Like that, you know?”*

# 2 The Building Livelihoods intervention for peers



## Moral support and a safety net

*“I don’t know, it’s more like... all friends together. It’s not as though I have come to seek advice and they are giving it me. We sort of sit down and this is where we have known each other for years. Its... friends meeting for a coffee in a café. It’s like that. There is no sort of formula to it” (peer advocate)*

## Brokering and sign-posting

*“he listened to my needs, he listened to what I was saying. And I was about to get thrown out of my flat so ... so he wrote me a support letter, he talked me through the whole process of what would happen.” (peer advocate)*

# 2 The Building Livelihoods intervention for peers



## Organisational culture

Importance of long-term relationships and organisational culture that allows for trust

*“I mean one of the great things about Groundswell is that there is a welcoming atmosphere and environment. So people do immediately feel comfortable. And it affords enormous trust. And the thing that comes with the trust is disclosure. So people will tell you what is going wrong as much as they will tell you what is going right.” – (Groundswell staff)*

# 2 The Building Livelihoods intervention for clients



## Signposting by peers

Peers' own experience enables support to clients

*“In [day centre], I was just having lunch and one of the workers said to him he is [nationality] go and talk to him. He came and talked to me and he says... I have a problem. And he has the same problem as me. Exactly the same problem. And I had [London borough] Law Centre papers in my bag. So I said hey, here is the phone number, call them, its free of charge and they can help you. And god bless, he is working with the [London Borough] Law Centre. “ (Peer advocate)*

# 2 The Building Livelihoods intervention for clients



## Context of complexity and challenges of communication

If clients currently homeless and no long-term relationship with them can be difficult to identify and respond to need

*“His communication was ... er...you know the way he communicated his needs and the issues ..going back and thinking about it was very ... bitty. It wasn't. You know, it's not like you sit down with him and he goes these are the areas in which... You know. He was coming out as he thought about it, you know. He was just managing his life as it was. So it came up – things came up bit by bit over a period of time.”*  
(Groundswell staff)



# Core findings



- Legal support is complex; resources are critical
  - Core role for practical and moral support, as well as technical expertise
  - Expertise and ability to navigate care systems
- Provision of legal support in the context of homeless health peer advocacy to peers is feasible, with potential for significant impacts on mental health and the social determinants of health
- Provision of legal support to clients is less feasible; complexity may to be too great to prioritise amidst urgent health and social need and without long-term relationships





# Discussion

Groundswell legal support in context

# The 'hostile environment'

"The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants" (Theresa May)

'hostility' of other health and social support services (e.g. Universal Credit welfare reforms)



# Responding to a hostile environment

Hostile environment exacerbating the complexity of legal need, and limiting support available

In context of broad agreement on 'integration' as necessary to meet the needs of people who are homeless and excluded

Groundswell's legal support can support this integration function

But, ever increasing challenges of complexity and resources in doing this

# Thank You



People experiencing homelessness are not the problem – but are the solution to homelessness

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