



POWER IN PARTNERSHIP

Crossways Winter Accommodation Project 2021-22

It Takes a City (ITAC), a Cambridge homelessness partnership, secured government funding to provide safe, secure accommodation for those Cambridge rough sleepers at risk during last winter. The project demonstrated the positive, lasting changes that can be achieved when communities come together in mutual aid.

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Project

From 1st November 2021 – 31st March 2022 to run a 24/7 temporary home for locally connected verified rough sleepers. To keep them safe over the winter, help make a sustained transition from street to permanent home and avoid a return to the streets.

Premises

Unused student accommodation leased by Cambridge City Council from CATS Global Schools, comprising twenty single en-suite rooms in two accommodation buildings, a small courtyard area and laundry room. The property has a communal lounge and kitchen area in the front building (where security was located) In addition, there is an adjoining staff flat which was used as an office and storage area.

Residents

The majority of those referred to the project were single men and women, but, almost uniquely for a temporary or hostel accommodation project, we were also able to accommodate a small number of couples either in a double room or in adjoining single rooms. Residents with dogs were also welcome.

We aimed whenever possible to reserve a cluster of four rooms, close to the security desk on the ground floor of the front accommodation block, within the premises for our most vulnerable female residents.

All residents, unless ineligible, claimed housing benefit to cover the cost of their stay, and no additional charges were made. All meals and support were provided without charge.

Partners

Our approach, as with all ITAC work, is to work intensively in partnership, acting first and foremost to convene and coordinate, and always providing a way for other agencies to contribute and to work with those that we are helping. We are immensely grateful for the many agencies and organisations that helped us and our residents.

Cambridge City Council (CCC)

The project was developed in collaboration with Cambridge City Council. CCC, as the leaseholder, was the immediate landlord for the residents. The protocol for referrals to our project was developed in partnership with CCC, with other key partner agencies invited to contribute. Oversight and the consideration of any exemptions to this protocol were very much joint decisions. Important operational decisions were also made jointly.

The weekly visits to the project from a CCC homelessness prevention officer, an initiative that was introduced to facilitate residents submitting homeless applications to the authority, strengthened ITAC's understanding of housing legislation and the legal obligations of the authority, enabling us to broaden the accommodation options we could offer our residents.

With the advent of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 and the additional Protect & Vaccinate funding made available to CCC, our knowledge of the risks and support needs associated with many of those



seeking accommodation under this initiative was fully utilised and many hotel placements so funded eventually led onto accommodation within our project. The additional funding also helped cover the cost of accommodating at Crossways those without recourse to public funds.

St Andrew's Street Baptist Church (StASB)

The church's Centre Administrator, Eileen Hori, who is also the Administrator for the volunteer organisation Cambridge Street Pastors, acted as Volunteer Housekeeper & Food Co-ordinator. Considerable donations of food (and toiletries, clothes etc) came both through StASB from many local organisations, and we are thankful too for the regular and sizeable donations of food from Jimmy's. In addition, Eileen provided the cooks for the whole of November and for an average of 2 nights a week throughout the project. Eileen also recruited volunteers from Cambridge Street Pastors and the Cambridge Chinese Christian Fellowship to help with cleaning duties.

Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP)

CCHP provided cooks, kitchen assistants, hosts and food for the majority of evening meals from December 2021– March 2022. Rev. Sophie Young, the Bishop's Officer for Homelessness, who is sponsored by CCHP, visited the project regularly providing a chaplaincy service, pastoral care and support for those of all faiths and none. There were also regular, and much welcomed, visits by Herbert, the therapy dog.

Women's Homelessness Action Group (WHAG)

A number of member organisations of this group made special provision for our female residents.

Evolve Guarding

Evolve provided 1 guard for the daytime shift (7am-7pm) and 2 guards for the night shift (7pm-7am). Evolve did a significant level of additional tasks including manning reception, answering the gate buzzer, and holding room keys and petty cash.

Other partner agencies

Specialist partner agencies visited our site for meetings with residents. These included the local drug and alcohol recovery service, mental health focussed street outreach project, and a nurse from the local GP surgery provided vaccinations (on-site) and health services to those homeless or facing homelessness. The operation of these services on site enabled those residents who struggled to keep external appointments to receive the specialist support that they required.

People

Staff

ITAC staff led the setting up and management of the project, providing support on site, managing day to day issues, signposting residents to sources of help, coordinating all visiting agencies and volunteer organisations, and resettlement of residents to suitable second stage accommodation or to the city's all year round 24/7 assessment centre at Jimmy's.

Volunteers

Volunteers came mainly from CCHP, the Cambridge Street Pastors and a number of faith and student groups that ITAC and its partners connect with. Their work included: preparation and serving of a cooked evening meal; provisions for all other daily meals; cleaning of communal areas and vacated bedrooms; weekend daytime cover at the project, with ITAC Trustees also contributing.



Post Project Support

ITAC's Support Services Manager continues to support, predominantly in partnership with their current accommodation provider and other key agencies, several of the people accommodated over the winter. ITAC staff established good relationships with several deeply entrenched individuals over the last few months, and we are committed to ensuring that these relationships continue.

ITAC were able to agree with CCHP funding for three of the former residents to be accommodated in B and B accommodation for a two-month period whilst their settled status work was progressed. ITAC staff and volunteers continued to provide food to these individuals, including a hot meal several days of the week and monitored their welfare. With further funding from CCHP these three individuals moved onto next stage accommodation, initially for three months, where they have dedicated support workers.

Lessons learned

Strategy

The project was a pilot. It took its inspiration from the accommodation that ITAC provided in collaboration with Cambridge City Council under the "Everyone In" initiative, to house those sleeping rough at the onset of the pandemic. It incorporated both the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), operated by Jimmy's in previous years, on behalf of Cambridge City Council, and the CCHP winter night shelter, which entailed shared accommodation on church floors, and which had run for many years. We appreciate the support that we received from both Jimmy's and CCHP for this departure from the previous provision

As a result of the clear benefits for many accommodated under "Everyone In", Cambridge City Council decided that the shared accommodation models used in pre-COVID winters were no longer appropriate. When agreeing with ITAC that the Crossways Winter Provision could proceed the council agreed to also allocate its SWEP funds to the project.

ITAC was formed principally to encourage and coordinate partnership working to tackle homelessness in Cambridge and we want to ensure that we retain our commitment to this approach.

The Winter Provision saw us more heavily involved in the direct delivery of services than was first envisaged, but the success of this project, previous work around "Everyone In", and other mini projects such as the PRS20 tenancy sustainment service all help ITAC fulfil the aims it declared when first established.

Set up time

As the bulk of the funding for the project, via a central government fund managed by Homeless Link, was not secured until September 2021, planning with partners was not able to start with any certainty until that month. While some funding for the winter of 2022-2023 has still to be secured, planning with all key partners for the coming winter started shortly after the 2021-2022 closed.

Management of volunteers

Our service model relies on significant input from volunteers. The largest volunteer team was from CCHP who had in previous years run their own winter night shelter, with communal accommodation, The differences in the management, culture and oversight from what the volunteers were



accustomed to, presented a challenge for both parties initially. Ongoing dialogue between the two charities and weekly meetings during the project enabled successful partnership working.

We are now working on processes developed last year to ensure we have a common approach and understanding with CCHP for managing volunteers. This will include agreement on DBS requirements (if any), and processes for selection and training of all volunteers. CCHP previously ran their winter shelter December to March but will now join the project from the start date of 1st November.

Level of staffing needed

The complex needs of many of our residents and the high level of occupancy necessitated an increase in hours worked by the on-site support staff. The project began on the basis of using one security guard overnight, accompanied by trained volunteers. However, the start for this moved back steadily, due to delays in the recruitment process, and we had to continually adjust the budget to cover the very significant increase in security costs by having two overnight guards for the whole duration of the project.

Referral protocol

At the outset of the project a referral protocol was agreed with Cambridge City Council and partner agencies. This required Rough Sleepers to:

- i) be verified by the street outreach team as a locally connected rough sleeper,
- ii) to speak with the council's housing advice team to establish if they were owed a priority housing duty.

However, the wait for appointments with housing advice became a barrier to entering the project and delayed people being accommodated off the streets. In discussion with the Council the protocol was quickly revised to enable new residents up to 14 days after arrival to contact the housing advice team. To aid the new process a homelessness prevention officer from the council began visiting the project on a weekly basis.

Finances

CCC allocated its normal SWEP funding to the project and allocated some of the Protect & Vaccinate and Homelessness Prevention Grant funding provided by DLUHC. ITAC received a Homelessness Prevention Fund grant from CCC, a Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund grant from DLUHC via Homeless Link and other grants, donations and payments. CCC covered the building rental costs and received the housing benefit payments. The parties shared the costs of Evolve Guarding for the security staff. ITAC covered staffing and all other costs.

The project budget increased significantly during the project, in part for extra support staff hours but mainly due to the requirement for two professional overnight security guards, replacing volunteers. Both were in part due to the low barrier to referrals, the complexity of residents' support needs and the additional support required to ensure successful move-ons and, in a number of cases, the time and effort required to establish settled status to enable residents to become eligible for housing benefit and housing.



Statistics

No of individuals that interacted with Crossways Winter project	58
No of individuals that were BAME	10
No of individuals that were LGBTQ+	2
No of individuals that had a declared disability (actual number likely to be higher)	3
No of individuals that have received a COVID-19 vaccine	21
No of individuals that are experiencing challenges with their immigration status (3 moved into temporary accommodation at end of project)	5
No of individuals that have been supported into new temporary accommodation	20
No of individuals that have been supported into employment,	1
No of individuals that were supported who were experiencing mental health problems - number appears high but is based on data from the local authority's shared information system and includes clinical diagnosis, professional observation or self-diagnosis (sometimes with prescribed medication to confirm diagnosis).	42
No of individuals that have been positively supported by substance misuse work	13
No of individuals that have been supported into new settled accommodation	24

Case Studies

Mike and Jenny

'Mike' and 'Jenny' are a couple who had been rough sleeping for many years and were suspicious of any help previously offered. Both had addiction issues and Jenny suffered greatly from trauma caused by historic domestic abuse.

Mike and Jenny were offered a room at Crossways, a chance to get warm and reset. The team were pleasantly surprised when they accepted. Jenny arrived full of anger. However, over time she began to relax, spending more time in the lounge, even telling Emma that their room felt like home.

Mike and Jenny abided by the rules of the project and their street presence reduced. Both agreed to script as they were supported in making a housing application for a City Council rough sleeper property.

A package of support has been offered as Mike and Jenny take the next steps on their housing journey.

Jane

'Jane' suffered long term domestic abuse, forced into street begging by her coercive partner who would pocket the proceeds. He decided the location and kept watch to ensure compliance. Deeply traumatized, Jane was mistrusting of anybody trying to help.

The Street Outreach Team made contact and Sophie Young began visiting Jane every day, trying to build trust. Although initially resistant, Jane eventually agreed to visit Crossways, no pressure. After briefly returning to the streets, she accepted the offer of a room.

With multi-agency support, Jane was able to break the cycle of coercion, take control of her finances and begin engaging with mental health services. Crossways gave Jane a safe space to rest and gain strength. She was supported in making a priority housing application.



Pavel

'Pavel' is a man in his fifties, originally from Poland. He had worked continuously since his arrival, until he developed long COVID. Unable to cover his bills, Pavel was evicted by his landlord with nowhere to go.

With limited English and no experience of street life, Pavel was found by the Street Outreach Team frightened and disoriented. Crossways provided him with safety and privacy. With emotional support from the team, he found renewed pride in his appearance and began to imagine a better future.

Pavel was placed in Jimmy's move on accommodation, where staff described him as a 'brilliant guest'. Whilst there, Pavel befriended another Polish man and they have been supporting each other on their journey.

Pavel is now looking for employment and his own front door again.

Femi

'Femi' is a man, originally from West Africa, who was struggling with severe mental health issues. He was sleeping rough outside Addenbrookes when the Street Outreach Team made contact. As is often the case with people who have been on the streets for long periods, Femi was suspicious and reluctant to accept help.

Eventually Femi came into Crossways, only leaving of his room to get something to eat. Slowly, as he began trusting the team, Femi engaged more and shared some of his story.

Intensive support from multiple agencies helped Femi build the confidence to begin the process of securing the necessary papers and passport from his home embassy in London in order to establish his right to remain in the UK. The City Council's housing team can then assist Femi to apply for benefits and make an application for suitable accommodation. CCHP has agreed to provide Femi with temporary accommodation in the interim.

Reflecting on all the support the amazing network of agencies and volunteers had given Femi, Emma said, 'The environment and atmosphere created at Crossways has helped him begin his journey'.