

The London Housing Foundation's Impact Programme A short history

The Impact programme commenced in May 2001 and involves a series of commissioned interventions aimed at strengthening the organisational capacity of voluntary agencies tackling single homelessness in London. It has focussed on three key areas:

- Strategy and good practice
- Outcomes
- Leadership

Strategy and good practice

- Consultation conference May 2001 to identify needs and interests for capacity building (30+)
- "The Future of homelessness" – a briefing and strategic analysis of homelessness issues by nfpSynergy. September 2002.
- "Hostels for homeless people" – a briefing based on a review of recent research, highlighting issues for hostels and hostel providers (Geoffrey Randall). January 2003.
- "Homelessness and local authorities – a whole new ballgame" - Conference for 100+ people in March 2003 to explore the changed environment following the Housing Act 2002, which gave extra responsibilities to local authorities, along with the introduction of Supporting People funding.
- The above conference was followed by a briefing for trustees – "Our changing world" (nfpSynergy, June 2003) on the new powers and responsibilities of local authorities.
- A series of small-scale (up to 20 people) workshops during 2002/03 run by nfpSynergy on practical and strategic issues, such as key trends affecting the voluntary sector, branding, using the media and public perceptions of charities.
- "Five key trends and their impact on the voluntary sector" – a briefing by nfpSynergy. June 2003
- "Finding the key – a good practice guide to keyworking in hostels for people who drink heavily". Publication produced in June 2003, following action research funded by the Foundation and undertaken by Providence Row in 2001/02. The guide was produced following a forum of service providers from throughout England, to discuss the results of the action research and agree key issues for inclusion in the guide.
- A masterclass in strategic planning for voluntary sector organisations run by Action Planning for over 50 people in January 2004. This was followed by an evening seminar for trustees in June that presented a distilled version of the masterclass.
- A series of four "Employability Masterclasses" were run by Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) during 2003/04 to investigate in depth what works well within training and employment support for homeless people.

- Sponsorship of the 'One plus One' annual lecture at the Royal Institution at which Prof. John Laub (former President of the American Society of Criminology) reported on the findings of the world's longest running longitudinal study of repeat offenders. January 2004.
- Survey of homeless sector services provided to asylum seekers and refugees (November 2004). A report of the extent to which asylum seekers and refugees were accessing generic homelessness services and the capability of those services to respond to their needs. Involved discussions at a forum of agencies and a presentation to the Home Office.
- Evening seminar for trustees and senior staff on "Finance, Governance and Risk". This included a presentation by a senior partner of PKF on their risk management survey for voluntary organisations and a discussion on the reasons for the demise of three homelessness organisations (50 people from 28 agencies, September 2004).
- Research (February 2005) and forum (July 2005) to investigate the role and use of church-based winter shelters for homeless people. The research included nine of the ten shelters operating in London and the forum included 50 people from a mixture of mainstream homelessness agencies and church organisations.
- Developing guidelines for best practice in client surveys: support of Broadway to lead an initiative to establish agreed guidelines across the homelessness sector, with arrangements for benchmarking. April-December 2005.
- "Beyond a helpline – HR support for smaller agencies" (May 2005 on). Arising from a request from an action learning set, a programme to provide cost-effective high-quality HR support to small agencies. The terms for a two-year pilot programme were established following a seminar with ten agencies in May 2005 and, following a tendering process, the pilot will run for two years from April 2006. It will benefit 10 agencies directly, with a programme of dissemination to promote the model developed.
- With the Friends Provident Foundation, a review of financial inclusion interventions for homeless people (by the Centre for Housing Policy, York University) that also involved a user-consultation and forum for agencies and users involved. May – November 2005.
- Follow up research on why refugees use homelessness hostels and the pathways that lead them there (Dec '05 – March 2006)
- Learning from Utrecht – we will be supporting 4-5 people to attend an international conference in Utrecht that is built around their success in tackling a major community drugs problem. Involves identifying and sponsoring a presenter of the UK experience in tackling homelessness. March 2006.
- In development: in response to growing problems for homelessness agencies, particularly as a result of Supporting People, we are planning a series of 'Chatham House' discussions with agencies of different sizes to increase understanding of threats to viability for agencies and how these may be responded to. From April 2006.

Outcomes

- Outcomes training programme – two-day training delivered to over 220 individuals from a range of some 50 homelessness agencies, with additional technical and personal support to implement learning. 2002/03.
- “Managing outcomes: a guide for homelessness organisations” – a good practice guide produced by Charities Evaluation Services, developed out of the training programme. November 2003.
- Conference on understanding and managing outcomes, drawing on the training programme, technical support provided to homelessness agencies through the grants programme and experience in other sectors. December 2003 (100+)
- Newsletters updating agencies on aspects and results of the outcomes programme, encouraging contact and sharing between agencies. (2003-05)
- A programme of consultancy and technical support (from 3 – 15 days) provided to 13 different agencies in 2004/05 to improve outcome management within each agency. Extended in 2005/06.
- Briefing paper “Putting outcomes into practice – sharing lessons from the homelessness sector” (produced by CES, 2004) drawing on experience of the outcomes programme to provide an overview of some of the main tools and systems in use in monitoring and managing outcomes.
- Briefing paper: “The need for IT-based outcome data management systems”. A market research study of 25 homelessness agencies to identify what IT systems they use to record outcomes and what needs they have in this respect. February 2005.
- “A guide to IT-based outcome data management” - building on the above, another briefing was produced to set out good practice guidelines for developing an IT-based outcome management system. May 2005.
- IMFO – Information Management for Outcomes – drawing on the above, a project with a number of smaller agencies to implement improved information management systems for outcome monitoring. 2005/06 and continuing.
- “Whose outcome is it anyway?” A conference for 150 people in September 2005 to disseminate experience and learning from the Foundation’s outcomes programme and wider. 25 different agencies were involved in making presentations in a series of 12 practical workshops and discussion groups, including user involvement and one user-led session. Included involvement of central, regional and local government, as well as independent funders.
- Supporting People (SP) and outcomes: a series of consultations with central and local government to identify progress and plans in relation to including outcome measures within the SP funding regime. Involves a detailed technical response to the ODPM consultation on SP (Feb ’06), participation with the ODPM in presentations to LAs and development work to implement this with two local authorities and the homelessness agencies working with them. April 2005 – continuing.
- Funding St Mungo’s to research predictors of success for hostel clients and how outcome monitoring can identify and improve this. March – December 2006.

Leadership

- Leadership retreat in November 2002 – 27 heads of homelessness agencies participated in a two-day residential to review strategic challenges.
- Bursary funded visits 2003/04 to: New York (two separate groups to look at different issues) and Holland. This was followed up by a seminar to promote learning, plus several presentations in other fora, including the All Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness & Housing and at the Office for Public Management. The visits involved 20 different people from 10 organisations and dissemination was to over 100 people.
- Action learning programme. During the first year (2004/05) a total of 40 people from 30 different agencies participated. Sets were themed and included sets for: heads of small agencies; HR managers; SMT members; trustees. The programme has been extended in 2005/06 and will continue into 2006/07. A feature of the 06/07 programme will be a set for members of the 'GROW' programme of Thames Reach Bondway. This is a programme under which service users of the organisation are given special training and support to become full time employees within the organisation. This programme itself grew out of the bursary funded visit to New York.
- Bursary awards 2005 – one award for 7 people from 4 agencies to visit Copenhagen to investigate an alternative approach to day centre services for homeless people and 5 people from 2 agencies to visit France to explore a model of social enterprise initiatives for homeless people.

Reference Group and evaluation

The London Housing Foundation's Impact programme benefits from a Reference Group of nine people, eight of whom lead an agency tackling single homelessness. They represent a mix of agencies of different sizes and interests. They have provided invaluable support in the development, implementation and monitoring of this programme. The ninth member is the Chair of the Foundation.

Each element of the programme is monitored or evaluated separately and the overall programme was independently evaluated after 18 months operation:

"The (IMPACT) programme has won almost universal praise from the people I have consulted and the reports that I have seen. It has succeeded in providing learning and networking opportunities that have been valued by both the individuals who have benefitted and by the organisations for which they work or volunteer."
[David Carrington September 2003]