

Wellington Homeless Women's Trust

Accommodation and Support Service

Highlights from the first three months (July – Sept 2013)

Read these highlights alongside the model (diagram) attached.



Did we have the people, money and resources that we expected and needed? (Inputs)

- Staff report sufficient funding is available to allocate to activities.
- Staff feel the operations are well supported by the board.
- The house is meeting the needs – it is warm and secure.
- We are engaged with 9 supporting/referral agencies and have received enquiries from others
- The Service has had 13 referrals: 9 were accepted, 2 were not accepted (high needs), 2 lost contact/unknown. Approximately 3 of the 5 rooms are occupied at any one time.
- So far tenants tend to fit the description of 'invisible homeless' – women with moderate needs who may otherwise be in Boarding House, backpackers, or couch surfing. Tenants have tended to come from situations in which they have experienced violence, and many experience moderate mental health needs.

What have we done / achieved so far? (Activities/Outputs)

- All tenants have Support Plans in place. The few reports from tenants indicate they are positive about the support provided by staff.
- Five women have been supported from homelessness into accommodation. We have three current tenants. One tenant was asked to leave and is receiving mental health intensive care.
- The referral process is going well overall. There was some feedback from agencies that may indicate the referral process could be have challenges for more complex/ transient cases that require emergency response or where information is not readily available.
- Staff have worked well to connect women to social agencies. Some tenants have had on-going support from referring agencies. The positive, working relationships built between staff, referral and housing agencies is a real strength of the Service.

"We've appreciated and found it really useful that they are giving women a chance – they're not being too stringent and are open to discussing options for women, even when their needs are complex. We do appreciate the approach that has been taken so far." Referral agency

What difference have we made so far? (Outcomes)

- It is very early days to understand the difference that has been made for clients. Early emerging information indicates that the accommodation and support has contributed to tenants becoming more resilient, and positive changes were described by tenants and staff. Future follow-up with tenants will be required to confirm the role of the Service in supporting them into permanent accommodation.
"It's been life changing; I arrived quite suicidal, depressed and anxious coming from a violent situation [from outside Wellington]. I really believe this place changed my life. I definitely feel like my needs have been met." Tenant
- Among the nine referral agencies, the Service is recognised as being part of the continuum of support in Wellington for women with moderate needs experiencing homelessness, providing an alternative (or for some, the only) option for agencies who want to ensure their clients have on-going support as they move to permanent housing (distinct from Boarding House options).

Was it what we expected?

- There was an assumption that volunteers may be needed. This has not happened yet, but may if the need exists in future.
- The tenants are not necessarily how the staff or public perceive “homeless women” to be.
- While it is early days, the three month period appears to be sufficient; it helps place women on priority housing and underlines temporary nature of accommodation. Tenants have stayed approximately 5-6 weeks.
- Housing for the tenants has been found quicker than staff and others initially expected.
- Staff have found the roles to be within their capacity and not as challenging as first envisaged
- In a few cases, staff have maintained contact with ex-tenants and in one case at least they have provided practical support as they settle them into permanent housing.

Next steps: Actions and issues to consider

- Consider that the scope of referral agencies is expanded from the current nine agencies
- The house manager will re-visit a few partner agencies to reconfirm the referral process and level of moderate needs that can be accommodated.
- The staff will continue to link with and build a broader understanding with other agencies who may come across women with moderate needs experiencing homelessness.
- What has the board got in mind for promoting the Service? (i.e. a communication strategy or plan for building support for future funding?) Is this the role of the Board, staff or both?
- As the Service settles and the demand becomes more known, the Board may need to continue to revisit and confirm the type of women that the Service is accommodating (i.e. the extent to which the Service may cater for higher and complex needs, or maintain current moderate-need focus).

Special focus: Is the Service meeting a clear need?

The Board was keen to understand whether the Service is meeting a clear ‘need’ (as identified in original evaluation questions). Although it is early days, interviews with 8 of the 9 referring/partner agencies indicated:

- Some agencies verbally reported they encounter approximately 1-3 women per month experiencing homelessness who may fit the Service criteria. For others this is more rare and not all agencies have referred to the Service because they have not recently encountered women who fit the criteria or their clients were not in a place to want supported accommodation. However, all agencies say they would refer for the 'right' client.
- At this early stage, the Accommodation appears to be filling a particular gap for women coming from violent situations who do not qualify for a Refuge safe house.
- A few agencies who work with women with complex/high needs are less convinced there is a demand for the Accommodation, or hold frustration that it's not an option for their clients.

“It’s certainly it is meeting a need for us – they [WHWT] would be our number one choice, rather than a boarding house. Way more committed to issues of homelessness rather than simply renting a room – better meets the needs of women we come across” Referral agency

“We don’t think there was a large need for accommodation for moderate needs. We’re unsure whether there was a real need. But they’ve been great to work with.” Referral agency

- Agencies reported they continue to find it difficult to find support or emergency accommodation for:
 - women with very high and complex needs
 - mothers with children or whom are pregnant
 - transgender population
 - young people
 - those needing permanent affordable accommodation with intensive support (rather than another temporary option)
 - shelter-type accommodation (though this was viewed by some as an insufficient model for addressing homelessness and supporting women).

How did we do? – The first three months

