

Women's Focused Support: Recommendations

Report for YMCA Together

April 2024

**Steve Barkess, Partnership Manager: West Midlands
& North West**

Sophie Price, Consultancy Manager
sophie.price@homelesslink.org.uk



Homeless Link

Contents

Introduction	2
Recommendations	3
Appendix 1: Women’s Focused Support Presentation	6
Appendix 2: Resources and Further Information.....	7

Introduction

[System P](#) is a Cheshire & Merseyside ICS funded programme which commenced in September 2021. The programme uses Bridges to Health segmentation methodology, which has been endorsed by NHS England. Segmentation aims to categorise the population according to health status, health care needs, and priorities. This methodology identifies groups of people who share characteristics that influence the way they interact with health and care services. One of these segments is the complex lives segment.

To support this work funding has been made available to support a short programme of events to address specific areas within the complex needs segment which include:

- Homelessness health inequalities.
- Dual diagnosis.
- Co-production and system change.
- Women’s Focused Support.

This short briefing paper will outline recommendations developed from the final session focusing on women’s focused support.

To support wider discussion and to provide context on focusing on women’s support, guest speakers were invited to provide an overview of the challenges and successes of system change. This included:

- Hannah Boyle: Simon Community Scotland.
- Anna Millington: Campaigner and advocate for better harm reduction offers for mums who use drugs.
- Catherine Doyle: Lived experience perspective.
- Stella Kityo: Women’s Development Specialist from Your Place.

Recommendations

Understanding and better communicating women's support needs

1. To ensure that women experiencing a 'complex life' are effectively supported, we need to understand the full landscape. The completion of a 'women's complex needs census' would allow local decision makers, policy leads, and commissioners to develop services based on evidence. By exploring all aspects of how we define a 'complex lives', we also need to understand what the cause and effects of this such as addiction, criminal justice, mental health, domestic abuse, homelessness, and trauma, can be so that we can assess and evaluate if services are fit for purpose and how these may be improved.
2. Cross sector support should be provided to by local ICB to coordinate, facilitate, and provide infrastructure through funding of sector specialists to ensure that there is a true focus on women's support needs, which recognises how they differ from that of men and is embedded within service design delivery and implementation.
3. Allow women to share their experience honestly and without censorship. We need the reality of women lived and living experience to be understood in the context of daily life, and how systems may place barriers and challenges for women to access support at a time of need. By enabling this we may better understand how we can adapt services to become more preventative and reduce the need for crisis interventions.
4. Considering our language. The words we use and how we use them can directly influence the way people engage with services and how services engage with women. Often our terminology derives from a place of risk and assumptions. Our language needs to be asset based to provide a platform for solution focused approaches, discussion, and intervention. Jargon and acronyms are form and are embedded within the culture of our systems and this needs to change. Not only to diversify how we speak about the support needs of women, but to ensure that this does not prevent and dissuade people from joining the sector.

Improving quality of services focusing on women's support needs

1. Within mixed gender services it is important that the need for gender specific services and space are available. This includes but is not exclusive to specialist support workers and dedicated spaces for women to access support from professionals and peers without fear of judgement, and in a way that does not re-traumatise women further. This should be delivered based on what women need and want, and should be built on using a co-production model.

2. All services should be developed to create a psychologically informed environment simply based on accessibility and visual presentation but ensuring that language and asset-based models are adopted throughout to support assertive engagement both on and off site.
3. Workforce development should be reviewed cross sector, and all staff should be trained on gendered lens approaches. This should include specific elements such as supporting women who have had children removed and bereavement. Consideration needs to be made about who training should be targeted towards, in order to have the real change we need to ensure that this training is provided to men in the sector as well as women.
4. Review and evaluate referral pathways for women. To ensure that the right support is provided we need to explore how the pathways and journeys are experienced. Referral and pathway review may allow opportunities for new innovations and person-centred approaches. Evaluating referral processes will enable services to understand the impact that long waiting lists may have on engagement and enable effective action planning to reduce these and work in a preventative way instead of responding to crisis.

Strategies to create safe and supportive environments

1. A localised strategy should be developed to enable a better understanding of the socioeconomic factors and inequalities that affect women accessing services. By understanding local demographic factors, local provision can be developed to ensure this is not preventing women from accessing services at point of need. This will allow preventative strategic planning which is actionable and relevant.
2. Review how we collate, access, and analyse data about what support women need. We consider a 'complex life' as someone who has experience of a combination of two or more of the following:
 - Homelessness
 - Mental ill health
 - Criminal justice system
 - Addiction
 - Domestic abuse/violence

Many of the services that support the above have often been designed to meet the needs of most service users, often this is men. We must now consider service design through a gendered lens.

3. Action steering groups to be implemented that will have representation at all levels of operational and strategic development. This should include specialist women's support leads from health, probation and criminal justice, street support and sexual health, adult social care and social services, homelessness, and addiction services. This would also be a space where good practice, oversight, and scrutiny of strategic and operational planning can take place. This would also ensure sector representation in sector specific strategic planning.

Appendix 1: Women's Focused Support Presentation

Appendix 2: Resources and Further Information

Homeless Link (2024) Advocating for Women. Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/advocating-for-women/>

Homeless Link (2024) Autism and Homelessness. Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/autism-and-homelessness/>

Homeless Link (2024) Exploring Women's Homelessness - what we know. Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/exploring-womens-homelessness-what-we-know/>

Homeless Link (2024) Gendered Lens Framework - Bitesize Learning. Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/gendered-lens-framework-bitesize-learning/>

Homeless Link (2024) Influencing for change (Women's Homelessness). Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/influencing-for-change-womens-homelessness/>

Homeless Link (2024) Promoting inclusion within homelessness services. Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/promoting-inclusion-within-homelessness-services/>

Homeless Link (2024) Supporting Migrant Women. Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-migrant-women/>

Homeless Link (2024) The Gendered Lens Framework for Homelessness Services.

Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/the-gendered-lens-framework-for-homelessness-services/>

Homeless Link (2023) Supporting LGBTQI+ Women Experiencing Homelessness.

Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-lgbtqi-women-experiencing-homelessness/>

Homeless Link (2022) How can services improve their support for women? Available at:

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/how-can-services-improve-their-support-for-women/>

Homeless Link (2022) Insights and Impact from the Ending Women's Homelessness

Fund. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/insights-and-impact-from-the-ending-womens-homelessness-fund/>

Homeless Link (2022) Myth Busting Women's Homelessness. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/myth-busting-womens-homelessness/>

Homeless Link (2022) Promising practice from the frontline. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/promising-practice-from-the-frontline/>

Homeless Link (2022) Supporting Women Involved In Sex Work And Survival Sex. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/webinar-supporting-women-involved-in-sex-work-and-survival-sex/>

Homeless Link (2022) Supporting young women: learning from the sector. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-young-women-learning-from-the-sector/>

Homeless Link (2022) Supporting older women experiencing domestic abuse and at risk of homelessness. Available at: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-older-women-experiencing-domestic-abuse-and-at-risk-of-homelessness/>

Solace Women's Aid (2023) London Women's Rough Sleeping Census. Available at: <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/london-womens-rough-sleeping-census-2023/>

About Homeless Link

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in England. We aim to develop, inspire, support, and sustain a movement of organisations working together to achieve positive futures for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed.

Representing over 900 organisations across England, we are in a unique position to see both the scale and nature of the tragedy of homelessness. We see the data gaps; the national policy barriers; the constraints of both funding and expertise; the system blocks and attitudinal obstacles. But crucially, we also see – and are instrumental in developing – the positive practice and ‘what works’ solutions.

As an organisation we believe that things can and should be better: not because we are naïve or cut off from reality, but because we have seen and experienced radical positive change in the way systems and services are delivered – and that gives us hope for a different future.

We support our members through research, guidance, and learning, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Homeless Link

Minorities House

2-5 Minorities

London

EC3N 1BJ

www.homeless.org.uk

@HomelessLink

Let's End Homelessness Together

