



Rebuilding **Shattered Lives**

"Women's homelessness is so often invisible. I have no contact with my family – I had a very traumatic childhood and don't want to see them. I did a lot of sofa surfing after I left my violent partner. But then I ran out of friends and became homeless."

Marguerite, St Mungo's Client

Rebuilding Shattered Lives

St Mungo's campaign to raise awareness, showcase good practice and drive innovation on the issues faced by homeless and vulnerable women.



"We have known for a long time that men and women respond differently to the threat of homelessness, and differently too when it becomes a reality. It has struck us as questionable, therefore, that we seem to treat them the same when it comes to offering them support and helping them on the path to recovery. Whether it be from the perspective of health, work or family, homeless women have specific needs which we as a sector do not seem particularly good at meeting.

We want to see this change. Within St Mungo's we have been doing some work to improve our responsiveness and relevance, but we know we do not have all the answers.

That is why we want to harness the insights and experience of others, from a range of sectors, in order to build up a body of good practice about what really works for women who become, or are at risk of becoming, homeless. It is important that we are all willing to learn from each other – and crucially, from women who have direct experience of homelessness. Our new 18-month campaign, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives*, will, we hope, distil these lessons and energise policy and practice.

We need your help to make this campaign a success. Please do lend us your support so that together we can make lasting progress in this vital area."

Charles Fraser CBE
Chief Executive, St Mungo's



Why are we focussing on women?

- Over 1 in 10 rough sleepers in London are women¹
- Over half of those living in temporary accommodation are women²
- Women make up a quarter of St Mungo's clients, and a third of those supported by homelessness services in England³
- In addition, many homeless women are 'hidden' – trapped in abusive relationships, living in crack-houses, squatting or sofa-surfing with friends and family.

We know that women can become homeless for a number of different reasons, such as relationship breakdown and bereavement. Unbelievably, **over a third of our female clients who have slept rough tell us that their experience of domestic violence directly led to their homelessness.**

We also know that our female clients arrive at our services with a wide range of significant and complex needs, nearly all of which are more severe than for our male clients⁴:

- 66 per cent have a mental health problem
- 55 per cent have a substance use issue (alcohol and/or drugs)
- Half have a significant physical medical condition
- More than 1 in 10 have a history of being in care.

In addition they also face a range of issues which predominantly affect women and that often require specialist support⁵:

- Over half have experienced violence or abuse from a partner or family member
- 41 per cent of those who have slept rough have been involved in prostitution
- Almost one in ten of our female clients are pregnant, have given birth or have had an abortion in the last year
- 45 per cent of our female clients are mothers.

Despite these needs, **women are not always well served by existing homelessness provision** as much of this has traditionally been designed for, and focussed on supporting, men.

Women often need a different approach. Some fall through the gaps between specific services, others find it difficult to get the joined-up support required to meet the range of complex needs they have.

Why are we acting now?

Homelessness, including female homelessness, is on the rise⁶. Government figures released in Spring 2012 show a **23 per cent increase in rough sleepers⁷** and a **14 per cent increase in households accepted as homeless⁸**.

Despite this, there has also been a reduction in the national supply of all types of supported accommodation⁹. Although many women successfully recover from homelessness in services that engage with both men and women, in many cases women-specific services may be more appropriate. Yet between 2011 and 2012 there was a 40 per cent drop in the proportion of homelessness services specifically targeted at women¹⁰.

As the number of homeless women increases and services are cut, it is vital that we raise awareness of the issues, share existing good practice and drive innovation.



St Mungo's: meeting women's needs

In 2008, St Mungo's commissioned a piece of peer-led research which showed that female clients were progressing more slowly than male clients through our projects. The findings of this report led to the development of the St Mungo's Women's Strategy, which has helped to guide and improve the support that we give to our female clients. This would not have been possible without the generous support of

the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, which funds the St Mungo's Women's Strategy Coordinator post.

We support homeless women through a range of specialist services, including women-only hostels, semi-independent housing projects and women's groups.

We continue to focus our efforts on meeting women's needs; in 2011/12, of over 200 women who left our services, 81 per cent with a previously identified learning support need had this met whilst staying with us¹¹.

Showcasing success – St Mungo's North London Women's Hostel

St Mungo's North London Women's Hostel is a 29 bed project for vulnerable single homeless women with medium to high support needs including substance use issues, mental health problems and an offending history. Staff at the project are also trained to meet support needs related to prostitution and domestic violence.

The project has an on-site complex needs worker who, through working in partnership with local agencies, helps clients to access joined up treatment for substance use and mental health problems. There is also an on-site activities worker who offers clients a wide range of activities such as holistic therapies, yoga, baking and music lessons. Participating in

activities builds clients' self confidence and can be a first step towards engagement with skills and employment services.

Staff at the hostel identified that low literacy levels could form a barrier to clients' recovery. Each client now has a literacy test on entry and staff signpost them to local literacy services when necessary.

The project encourages women to work on relationships with their children through providing emotional support, working with other agencies and enabling contact in the project.

St Mungo's has helped almost a third of the project's current residents to reconnect with members of their family.

Showcasing success – Lucy

"It was...huge financial pressures which led to the breakdown of my marriage. I became very unwell and my husband couldn't cope. Our home was repossessed as I was too ill to make the payments."

After a stay in emergency housing, Lucy moved into a St Mungo's accommodation project in Camden. The garden there had become overgrown and Lucy started to tend to the weeds and plant flowers. *"I realised that I had skills to share and it would be a shame not to share them with the other six residents. It was a bit of a leap of faith for me but something to get committed to – a support structure out of the project."*

"The hardest thing to deal with is the mental health problems which caused you to be homeless in the first place....You have to focus not just on

whether you have a roof over your head but who you are under that roof, who you want to be."

While a resident at St Mungo's Lucy has completed a degree. She has also set up a Green Leaves Acupuncture group with the help of a grant from St Mungo's client representative body, Outside In, and wants this to develop into a social enterprise.

"I've always wanted to run acupuncture groups in hostels working with homeless addicts... I know that all it takes is a bit of support, a bit of value placed on you.... Each week, the group meets to discuss their wellbeing, health issues and emotional management. The main focus has been helping clients recover from addictions using acupuncture as adjunct, along with other external support services."

About the campaign

We have identified nine key areas which are often significant issues for homeless women and where a lack of access to appropriate services can have a significant impact on their ability to recover from homelessness:

- Housing and homelessness – services for women with complex needs
- Domestic abuse
- Families and children, including relationships
- Childhood trauma, including being in care or childhood abuse
- Employment and skills
- Being involved in prostitution
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Substance use
- Women involved in the criminal justice system.

These issues form the nine inquiry themes for the **Rebuilding Shattered Lives** campaign. Each theme will be investigated over a two month period during which time individuals, statutory and voluntary organisations from across the UK will be asked to submit their examples of effective services and promising new ideas via www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org.

At the end of the campaign this will result in the most comprehensive Showcase of innovative and successful practice and policy to meet the needs of women who become, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.

We have convened a group of Experts, each with exceptional levels of knowledge and experience, to support the campaign across each of these different themes. They are:

- **Martin Barnes**, Chief Executive, DrugScope
- **Jacqui Dillon**, Independent Trauma Specialist
- **Catherine Hennessy**, Director of Development and Partnerships, Revolving Doors
- **Davina James-Hanman**, Director, AVA
- **Jacqui McCluskey**, Director of Policy and Communications, Homeless Link
- **Penny Newman**, Chief Executive, Platform 51
- **Baroness Stedman-Scott**, Chief Executive, Tomorrow's People
- **Dame Clare Tickell**, Chief Executive, Action for Children.

We will also be consulting directly with women about their experiences of accessing services to ensure that we give a voice to those who are directly affected by these issues. Their views, opinions and experiences will be embedded throughout, and will form a central part of, the campaign.

Get involved

Over the next 18 months, we want to showcase the very best in services and innovation from across the UK. Submissions to the Showcase are invited via www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org.

Here you can also join the campaign, sign up for campaign newsletters, read what others have submitted, and contribute to the discussions.





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- 1 CHAIN data (2010-2011)
- 2 DCLG (2012) Live tables on Homelessness
- 3 Homeless Link (2011) Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP)
- 4 St Mungo's (2012) Client Needs Survey, supported by data provided to St Mungo's from Fitzpatrick, S., Johnsen, S. and White, M. (2011) "Multiple Exclusion Homelessness in the UK: Key Patterns and Intersections". Social Policy & Society 10:4, 501-512
- 5 St Mungo's (2012) Client Needs Survey
- 6 Fitzpatrick, S. et al (2011) The Homelessness Monitor: Tracking the impacts of policy and economic change in England 2011-2013. Crisis
- 7 DLGG (2012) Rough Sleeping Statistics England - Autumn 2011. DCLG: London, 2012
- 8 DCLG (2012) Live tables on Homelessness
- 9 Homeless Link (2012) HomelessWatch: Survey of Needs and Provision 2012
- 10 From 20 per cent of all homelessness services in 2011 to 12 per cent in 2012. Homeless Link (2012) HomelessWatch: Survey of Needs and Provision 2012
- 11 Supporting People Data 2011/12

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Charity exempt from registration
I&P Society No. 20598R Housing Association No. LH0279

St Mungo's 
Opening doors for homeless people