

Report on the Homelessness Prevention Work of the Doorstep Project
April – October 2009

Access to the services

Access to the Doorstep Project has been a major focus for the first 6 months of the Homelessness Prevention contract and we have quickly established Doorstep bases and access points throughout the District. This includes substantive bases at Signpost MARC in Morecambe and Lancaster and District YMCA's base in Lancaster.

Work has been developed to increase access to the service by offering the Doorstep service at other venues, these have so far included:

- HMPYOI Lancaster Farms,
- HMP Lancaster Castle,
- Ridge Lea Hospital,
- West End Impact, Morecambe,
- Littledale Hall
- Slyne with Hest
- Yealand Redmayne
- Warton
- Hornby
- Lancaster Auction Mart
- Brock Auction Mart

The service is currently offered 5 days a week 10am – 5pm although we aim to expand this service as further resources are identified and secured.

The service is also available and frequently accessed via the internet through the websites of the Lancaster and District YMCA and Signposts MARC, and by telephone.

Internet access also includes a translation tool which enables the text on the website to be translated to a range of languages.

Lancaster and District YMCA has also utilised BSL interpreters in its work with service users accessing the Doorstep Project.

Sensitive to the Needs of Particular Groups

The Doorstep Project has worked to ensure that its work is sensitive to the needs of particular groups and has worked closely with appropriate agencies in ensuring that the specific needs of the service user is being met in a complementary service.

This has included, for example, close work with Lancaster and District Women's Aid where there has been a Domestic Abuse situation causing potential homelessness. We have also worked with the Lancaster NOMS Service in our work with offenders and ex-offenders and a range of other support services wherever homelessness prevention has become an issue for the service user.

In this period we have delivered homelessness prevention services with service users of the following agencies:

- Disc
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Lancaster and District Women's Aid
- Community Mental Health Service
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- Mental Health Crisis Team
- Tower Project
- The Arc
- Lancaster Homeless Action Service
- West End Impact
- Together
- Addaction
- Young Peoples Service
- HMP Lancaster Castle
- HMPYOI Lancaster Farms
- Age Concern
- Help Direct
- Lancashire Fire Service
- Children's Centres (Family Support)

The Doorstep Project

Doorstep is rooted in a Housing Options approach and focuses upon a strategy that is based upon early intervention and pre-crisis work. We have been successful in preventing service users becoming homeless through a range of inputs including:

Retaining existing accommodation

Landlord liaison – a close liaison with landlords has ensured that issues have been picked up early and solutions have been negotiated, preventing the eviction of the tenant and ensuring that the lines of communication between tenant and landlord have been kept open.

Understanding of legal issues – supporting tenants in knowing their rights as a tenant and ensuring that the relevant authorities, eg CAB, Lancaster City Council, Shelter, are involved in cases of illegal eviction etc.

Support with benefits – ensuring that the correct benefits are being claimed and that where applicable Discretionary Housing Benefits, direct payment instructions, Community Care Grants etc. are utilised. Doorstep staff work to ensure that paperwork is complete and that the relevant agencies have all of the required information to enable quick decisions and payments.

Referrals – Anti-social behaviour, anger management, addiction etc. can all have an impact upon the service user's tenancy, Doorstep staff are able to utilise a range of services both "in-house" and externally to ensure that the root causes of their housing difficulties are tackled, whilst working with them to secure appropriate accommodation. Tackling the root causes of the service users homelessness ensures that recurring homelessness is reduced and is a major focus of the Doorstep Project.

The Doorstep Project staff take a pro-active approach to referring to services such as Floating Support, through Disc, Together and Lancaster City Councils Services.

Securing Alternative Accommodation

Access to Accommodation – The Doorstep Project's Accommodation Officer has worked closely with landlords, lettings agencies, Housing Associations and other accommodation providers to ensure access to a wide range of accommodation. A close working relationship with Lancaster University Students Union has enabled service users of the Doorstep Project to access former "student only" accommodation and close work with local lettings agencies has enabled us to widen the impact of the Deposit Guarantee Scheme, with more landlords accepting the scheme.

The Accommodation Officer has worked with Lancaster City Council staff to develop a central register of accommodation available in the Private Sector, whilst maintaining and developing further, good links with Private Landlords.

During this 6 month period we have assisted 7 people in gaining Council Houses, and secured accommodation for 87 properties with Private Landlords (40 of these being through the Deposit Guarantee Scheme)

Engaging Hard to Reach

Work with Young People – Doorstep project staff work closely with Lancaster City Council's Strategic Housing Department, Social Services, Leaving Care Service, and the Young Peoples Service in their work with young people, this ensures that the needs of homeless young people are constantly monitored and appropriate accommodation sought. A direct access to Portland Street Emergency Accommodation Project with referral to 2a High Street, the Morecambe Foyer and Council Housing can be pursued through these channels. Doorstep has also commissioned the development of a schools programme, linking directly to the National Curriculum, for both Senior and Junior Schools. This will be delivered in local schools to ensure that accurate, up to date information is available to young people.

Awareness Raising – In addition to the schools work of the Doorstep Project we have delivered work at Lancaster and Morecambe College Freshers Fair and have continued with the Don't Duck the Issue campaign. Both of these opportunities have enabled Doorstep staff to engage with a wide range of service users, particularly those "hard to reach" groups. A presentation of the Doorstep Project was given to the Homelessness Forum in April 2009 and was effective in ensuring that local agencies had a good understanding of the issues. There has also been a presentation at the Young Peoples Housing Forum and the Mental Health Housing Forum.

The project is currently delivering a Housing Roadshow (expanded from Tenants Information Campaign to encompass wider issues) across various venues in the District. The Roadshow consists of a display board along with information about housing issues; debt; home safety; housing benefit; council services and contact details for where people can get help. The Roadshow is taken to each venue and left for 1 or 2 weeks:

- Morecambe Town Hall
- Lancaster Town Hall
- Signposts Information and Advice
- Morecambe Library
- Carnforth Library
- Heysham Library

Other venues are currently being considered including Lancaster Library (currently undergoing refurbishment); Morecambe Health Centre; Lonsdale District Carers.

Alcohol/ Drugs / Substance misuse – Through close work with the YzUp Project, Community Alcohol Team, Community Drugs Team, Addaction, Inward House and Littledale Hall, the Doorstep Project has been able to ensure that addicts and recovering addicts have been able to access the Project. Doorstep does this in negotiation with the relevant support for the service user to begin to tackle the abuse in order to impact upon the sustainability of the tenancy.

Offenders/ Ex-offenders – The Doorstep Project works closely with the YzUp Project for Offenders and Ex-Offenders, Youth Offending Team, NOMS and the two Lancaster Prisons to ensure that the service is accessible and utilised by Offenders and Ex-offenders. Through work with the YzUp Project we are able to begin work on homelessness prevention at an early stage, ensuring that appropriate accommodation options are identified and actioned at the earliest opportunity. This work has resulted in securing funding to appoint a specific Homelessness Prevention Officer for ex-offenders. The vacancy is currently being advertised.

Mental Health – Work with CAMHS, CMHT, NOMS, the Mental Health Homelessness Forum and Ridge Lea has begun and we have a number of positive results with people suffering from mental health issues. Links with the Truce Project, based at the Lancaster and District YMCA has also ensured that we have the opportunity to access counselling and mediation wherever appropriate.

Domestic Violence – the Doorstep Project works closely with LDWA and Lancaster City Council to ensure that those experiencing Domestic Violence have speedy access to services.

Rough Sleepers – Doorstep staff have strong links with Lancaster Homeless Action Service, Morecambe Homeless Action Service, West End Impact, Faith In Support of Homeless and The Arc. Through our work we ensure that those who are Rough Sleepers and those who have been long term homeless have access to the Doorstep Service, enabling them to access sustainable tenancies.

BME communities including Gypsies and travellers – The Doorstep Project is able to work with members of BME communities by building on existing links that have supported the accessibility of services. Through this members of these communities feel able to access the project and have been supported to address specific needs around homeless prevention and housing poverty. In particular we have worked with gypsy and travellers from Morecambe and Slyne and Polish Community in Morecambe. The project has also supported a number of people from Asian backgrounds. Through our networks with other partners we have been able to access interpreters and specialist support to ensure that the Doorstep Project is accessible to all including those for whom English is not their first language.

Case Studies

B is 21 year old man who had previously asked to leave the Foyer because of unacceptable behaviour. He was accepted into Portland Street Emergency Accommodation Project and we worked with him regarding the issues that lead to his exclusion from Morecambe Foyer. Whilst in Portland Street we explored all the housing options available to him and looked to place him with the most appropriate. B moved on from Portland Street into his own privately rented accommodation, the tenancy was set up and all benefit matters put in place. We referred B to Disc

Floating Support Service, they have been in contact with him and after 3 months the tenancy is proving to be a huge success.

C is a Nigerian woman in her 30's who has 3 children. She was referred into our service by LDWA as she was suffering from domestic violence. Following our partnership with LUSU housing we were able to take this woman and her family away from harm and place her in a new family home that met her and her family's needs. They are now safe and settled and she has been able to continue her nursing studies.

D is a gentleman who has a history of substance abuse and offending (spending various sentences in prison). D got in contact with us whilst he was completing a treatment programme with Inward House, we supported him and he began volunteering at one of our projects. We worked with D whilst in the project and looked at his long term housing. We secured him private rented accommodation with his partner, this however became inappropriate as D and his partners relationship ended. We supported both parties with this liaising with the landlord enabling the partner to remain in the property and take over the tenancy and secured D alternative rented accommodation. Through D's volunteer work he has now secured full time employment as a youth worker.

E is a 21 year old woman who has led a chaotic lifestyle since the age of 16. She was placed in Local Authority care for a period during her teens and has spent 2 sentences in Prison. Prior to her release this year we began to work with her around her behaviours and looking at resettlement options for her. We worked very closely with her family and the client. We mediated between the two and were successful in E being able to return home to live with her family after a number of years apart. The Lancaster and District YMCA have continued to support E upon her release and have assisted her into further education where she is due to begin University next September. We are currently in the process of signing her into her first tenancy where she can continue with her personal development readying her for her experience at University next year.

F and G are sisters, 18 and 23 respectively. F initially came to us seeking assistance with her housing as she was 29 weeks pregnant and her parents were concerned about her staying with them once the child was born. At this initial contact after speaking with both F and her sister it became clear that G also had issues with her housing that needed addressing rather urgently. We looked at all the options with F, we made enquiries both in the private sector and made an application to council housing followed up with letters of support from ourselves.

F was offered a private tenancy with which we supported her in completing Housing Benefit forms, Community Care Grant application and made a referral to Disc Floating Support Service. 4 Days before the tenancy was due to be taken up F was offered a Council tenancy which she has maintained and has been extremely successful, largely due to the successful appeal by ourselves for her Community Care Grant application, which enabled her to purchase essential items such as white goods and furniture. This was key in making sure this tenancy was a success. Lancaster and District YMCA are providing ongoing support as F has joined the YMCA's Young Mums group (in partnership with NHS and Be Well) which works around issues such as diet, well being, economic well being, managing stress and issues surrounding the raising of a child.

The issues around G's housing situation were that she was in the process of 'giving up' a private tenancy. We strongly advised against this and explained to her all the implications of leaving a tenancy. G went ahead and did this against our advice. G

moved in with her friend who was living in a council house. The friend then left the tenancy handing the keys over to G, the council were informed of this and sought possession of the property, which we explained to G they were well within their rights to do and although she hadn't acted with any mal intent or broken any rules it was purely a case of lack of knowledge of the Housing system. Bearing this in mind and the homeless implications of losing this accommodation we applied to the council to transfer the property into G's name. We liaised with officers from Strategic Housing who supported this and between the two agencies work we managed to get the tenancy transferred and signed into G's name. She is now settled in this tenancy and all Housing Benefits forms are dealt with, a Community Care Grant application has been successful and essential items have been purchased. These were needed as Council Housing disposed of much her belongings when they sought possession of the property.

H, a woman who has been homeless for several years through alcohol addiction and mental health needs, secured a tenancy but was experiencing difficulties with finances; domestic abuse and alcohol addiction which resulted in H being in danger of losing the tenancy. We supported H by organising direct payments to her landlord for housing allowance; working with the Job Centre to re-instate benefits with back payment and arranging a payment schedule to pay off a debt. H is no longer in danger of losing her tenancy and can now be supported to address issues related to confidence and self esteem.

J, a woman from the Traveller Community accessed our service due to experiencing deteriorating health and wishing to find more suitable accommodation. J currently lives in a caravan and felt that she would benefit from moving to a house. We have supported J to make applications to Council and Housing Associations and worked through the process of this, including appointments with housing officers and gathering medical information. J uses our service to make contact with agencies, meet with housing staff and to understand the waiting list and points systems. The case is on-going and J will continue to access the project until her new accommodation is achieved.

K, an older man, has been a regular user of the service for nearly 2 years. K has an alcohol addiction and was temporarily living with his sister. We were able to support K to access new accommodation and were able to continue our support to enable him to maintain the tenancy. Despite K's chaotic lifestyle which is related to alcohol misuse he continues to visit the project each week to access the support of our team who support him to ensure he makes regular payments for his utilities. The routine that has been established over the past year has enabled K to maintain his tenancy and easily access any information and advice he needs.

Referrals to Other Agencies:

Strategic Housing	43
CAB	5
Disc	12
Disc (offenders)	4
LDWA	6
Shelter	85
Housing Ass	9
SVP/ Salvation Army	3
Total	167

BVPI 213 - Families who considered themselves as homeless (or potentially so) and for whom "Doorstep" housing advice casework resolved their situation

Number presenting as Homeless prior to decision

43

Number requesting advice who were threatened with homelessness and where homelessness was prevented for at least 6 months

378

Total number of cases resolved

421

Added Value

Practical support
One off request for advice
Total

372
522
894

Cases opened in period

Mortgage Arrears	2
Rent Arrears	3
Unsuitable/ dis-repair	74
Debt	14
Relationship Breakdown	47
NTQ	0
Possession Proceedings	8
Harrassment/ Eviction	30
Security of Tenure	40
HB	34
Council Tax	0
Seeking Accommodation	290
Homefinder	0
Fleeing Violence	16
Health	39
Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS)	179
Joint Protocol Panel (16-25)	36
Offenders/ Ex-Offenders	25
Family Mediation	19
TOTAL	856

Cases closed in period

No further contact	57
Rehoused using PSL	2
Rehoused via HR	0
Rehoused via Homefinder	0
Rehoused in private sector using DGS	49
Mediation Successful	13
Tenancy Support Successful	29
Accepted onto DGS	57
in T/A made available via LA	2
Notice withdrawn	0
Landlord issued new valid notice	0
Returned to parents	9
Accessed Portland Street	12
Re-housed in private sector	44
Referred to Specialist	147
Total	421