



Community Connections

Walking Alongside People Experiencing Homelessness

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The continuing pandemic has had a significant impact on the way faith and community groups that operate night shelters with many projects significantly adapting and changing the services they offer.

As projects plan how they can best support guests in this ever changing landscape we have put this document together so you can start thinking about the ways you do this.

What has always been unique about the network is the culture of hospitality and friendship it provides and there is a way of continuing this support regardless of what setting you are operating out of. Continuing to provide to support to guests even if you are not directly providing accommodation will mean that the valuable volunteer resource is not lost. We will refer to this support as 'Walking Alongside' but you could think of it as mentoring and befriending for easy terms of reference. We hope this document might give ideas for how you can make this support far more mutual, something you do with or alongside guests, rather than something you do for them or to them.



“Generally, people want a life, not just a service or multiples of; a community with unpaid reciprocal connections, with services there to supplement”

Cormac Russell

However you choose to support guests, going forward there are some practical elements to consider as you develop your model. We hope these pointers will give you a good foundation for your planning.

Considerations for Walking Alongside People Experiencing Homelessness

01

The Fundamentals

A. What is the need? This might sound obvious but you can't plan if you haven't identified the need. Eg Rough Sleepers in Ambridge will be staying in hotels over the winter period provided by the local authority, this and the possibility of further lockdowns will greatly decrease chances for human connection, support and encouragement for RS's at this significantly tough time.

B. What do you want to achieve? What will your project do? Think of your elevator pitch here, clearly and succinctly state your aims.

C. Who is your project for? Will it just be for guests who would have been rough sleepers? Do you want to extend your remit further and support those with new tenancies for example, this will also link with the identified needs. Often a greater need is when someone has been housed and other immediate support services step away and friendship circles decrease.

D. Funding – how will your project be funded? Can you repurpose some of your budget or will you need to fundraise. A projected budget would be a useful tool here. Costs to be considered – training, volunteer expenses, advertising, management, IT, small fund for guests?



Think about how your project will be funded

E. Design – who will you talk to about the plans and design for your service? As well as any managers and trustees will you talk to other community groups, organisations and services? Are you sure you are not duplicating what is already on offer? How will you involve volunteers and people experiencing homelessness in your planning?

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02

The Practicalities – the people you want to walk with

A. Referrals Where will you get your people from and how will you wrap some process round this? Will you just work with people who have recently been rough sleeping or will you work with people in temp accommodation, hostels, rough sleepers, families, people recently released from prison

B. Risk – will you support people whatever their needs even if they are complex? If you can only work with low needs then you will need to be clear about the higher needs you cannot work with. You will require a risk assessment for each person and where will this come from and who will have sight of it?

C. Format of support – face to face, phone, virtually or a combination? Will volunteers go in to people's homes?

D. How are you going to work alongside others?

- How will you ascertain what people want? Remember that some people might just want companionship rather than help with a practical need and that what you or I might

view as what they need and what they want may be very different. Needs assessments can feel very institutional in their approach. A conversational approach would be better.

- Will you offer regular support or will it be ad hoc?
- How will you set out the relationship, will it be structured or casual, open ended? Will it have an agreement or contract and will this be verbally or in writing?
- Will you offer one to one, or two to one, or small group support?
- How will you recognise when the relationship has run its course?
- How will you manage the ending?
- Will it be time limited?
- Terms of reference? What are you going to call the people you walk alongside and the support you offer?

For all of the points in section D once you have decided your boundaries as a project many of these questions can be answered at first meeting with the person you will be walking alongside – we would encourage you to remember that a one size approach doesn't fit all.

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03

Practicalities – the volunteers who walk alongside

A. Where are you going to get your volunteers from? Can you use your night shelter volunteers or do you need to recruit new ones? Think about gifts and skills they have – this could shape your service.

B. What training do your volunteers need? Who will do it? How will you fund it?

- Consider interviewing to assess suitability. Questions – time commitment, motivation, ability to be consistent and their own spiritual, emotional, physical histories.
- Don't base your assumptions on volunteers from their roles in the winter night shelter.



How will you support volunteers?

C. How will you fully support volunteers:

- How will they download and share any difficulties, triggers and challenges.
- What about their pastoral support?
- How will you gather their feedback?
- How will you incorporate Reflective Practice?
- Remember it's a two way process so walking alongside others will bring up issues for volunteers and have the potential to affect mental health and resilience – how can you support this?
- How will they share the stories of their experience both positive and negative?

D. Equipment – phones, laptops, tablets. Will you provide these or will volunteers use their own. You will need a policy around this and to consider GDPR.

E. Recording and logs – how will you want the volunteers to record their 'meetings' with people, what level of details will you need and how will you maintain confidentiality and GDPR?

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04

Policies

A. Where will you get your policies for this new project?

- Have you got existing ones that could be revised and adjusted, eg. Safeguarding, lone working, boundaries, drug and alcohol, GDPR and Confidentiality.

B. DBS – It is likely that DBS checks will be needed for all volunteers doing 1 to 1 work. We would advise getting some advice on what level of DBS is needed bear in mind that if you do need them before volunteers can start this can take some time.

C. Referral process – If accepting referrals from other agencies consider a SLA or partnership agreement in writing. This doesn't have to be onerous but we would advise having something that sets out your criteria for referral and what your project can and can't offer.



For help and support
contact Housing Justice at
info@housingjustice.org.uk