

Summary Report

Domestic Abuse Project - Places of Safety for those fleeing Domestic abuse

1 Background

Domestic Abuse provision as funded by Supporting People historically existed as accommodation based refuges with a helpline and limited floating support. In 2012 the previous principal refuge provider decided not to continue to provide refuge accommodation following the loss of the domestic abuse contract commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council (Glos CC) in 2012. This resulted in the closure of refuges in Gloucester, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham. Stroud Refuge was able to continue on charitable donations and assistance from Stroud District Council and offers 8 refuge rooms with 21 bedspaces to women fleeing domestic abuse.

In April 2012 Gloucestershire County Council Supporting People commissioned a Domestic Abuse support service through GDASS (Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse and Support Service). GDASS has demonstrated the success of the community based floating support model where a seamless, integrated support approach is provided throughout the individuals and families pathway recognising the strengths and assets they have to lead independent, happy and healthy lives free from fear. GDASS work with partner agencies across the county providing support to over 400 victims at any one time and worked with 2,400 during 2014, which was an increase of 2,000 per annum compared to previous accommodation based provision. The service provides early intervention and prevention, to deal with emergency and crisis and offers support for lower risk cases. All high-risk cases that have been dealt with by the police are referred into multi-agency arrangements, where agencies work together to gain information and plan a package of support for that individual. Qualified IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) from GDASS work with high risk cases to increase their safety.

In most cases IDVAs support victims and their families to stay in their own home where possible or to stay in a place of safety; with family, friends, short term accommodation or in some cases B+B for a short period while other measures are put in place. These may be non-molestation order, prohibitive steps or occupation orders. These can take as little as 24 hours. In some cases DVPN/Os' are issued to the alleged perpetrator. In this way, GDASS are an integral part of the multi-agency arrangements.

2 Profiling of ongoing emergency accommodation need

Whilst the numbers of households receiving assistance had increased, it became evident that there continued to be a need for suitable emergency accommodation. Ongoing monitoring was undertaken by the local authorities in Gloucestershire regarding the number and composition of households requiring emergency accommodation as a result of homelessness through domestic abuse.

Data gathered between January and the end of September 2014 from the District Councils and GDASS identified 95 families requested temporary accommodation due to domestic abuse. Based on the Council of Europe recommendations, Gloucestershire should have provision for 60 refuge spaces.

Out of the 95 victims identified 9 were male victims, 34 single females and 51 have children. 45% would have been suitable for refuge but only 7% were accepted. The reasons for the others not being suitable were: 14% had 3 or more children, some victims had complex issues that would pose safety risks within the refuge i.e. drug and alcohol abuse and/ or complex mental health issues, families with older children and teenage males and 11% being male. Many victims presented as homeless because they have no rights to be in the property i.e. living with the perpetrators family or the property is the perpetrators and they have no right to be there.

3 Places of Safety

In November 2014 the district local authorities met with Gloucestershire County Council and GDASS to establish how best to meet this need. Concerns were raised regarding the suitability of accommodation provided to those fleeing violence and it was agreed that placements meet agreed would be into 'Places of Safety'. Basic principles were established at this meeting with a view to finding an emergency accommodation solution to meet the needs of households fleeing domestic abuse

Places of Safety – Principles:

Bed and Breakfast accommodation should be avoided wherever possible
Accommodation should be available at point of need if possible
Accommodation should be fully furnished
Bespoke support should be available at point of need
Any accommodation procured must be safe
Agreed cooperation on move on to more permanent accommodation – inter-district, joint working between agencies
Low security of tenure to allow maximum use of resource

It was estimated that another 12 self-contained properties providing a minimum of 36 bedspaces would allow better provision for victims, avoid the necessity of applying as homeless and the use of B+B or transfers out of the county

4 DCLG Refuge Funding

In January 2015 the DCLG invited local authorities to bid for Refuge Funding. The local authorities in Gloucestershire agreed to make a joint bid to the DCLG for funding to support the Places of Safety concept for meeting the emergency accommodation needs of those fleeing violence within Gloucestershire with a complementary bid from Stroud District Council to support the remaining refuge in Stroud District. The Forest of Dean District Council wrote and submitted the Places of Safety bid.

In March 2015 the DCLG announced that both funding bids had been successful and a press release was made in April 2015 and published on the local authority websites. The Places of Safety Project was awarded £500,000.

5 Progress on Places of Safety

- All districts within the County have agreed two properties within each district will be used as places of safety.
- All districts have held joint meetings with their principal housing providers and GDASS to secure agreement from the providers. In Cheltenham, CBC has agreed

with Cheltenham Borough Homes to make available two properties to support the places of safety arrangement.

- The Forest of Dean – as the lead authority – has worked with One Legal to draw up two agreements:
 - The Inter Authority Agreement for the Domestic Abuse Services Project – to be signed by all 6 local authorities
 - The Agreement for the provision of Domestic Abuse Services – to be signed by the Forest of Dean District Council (as lead authority) and Westlea Housing (also trading as Greensquare and GDASS)
- The Forest of Dean have put in place arrangements for the administration of funding to GDASS/Greensquare for the delivery of the project
- GDASS have advertised and appointed a Supported Housing Officer to undertake lettings, offer wrap around support for domestic abuse, and manage licences.
- The tenure, processes and monitoring procedures have been agreed.
- It is anticipated that once agreements have been signed, that the Places of Safety project will provide accommodation in early 2016.

Martin Stacy
Lead Commissioner – Housing Services
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