

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus | Public Accounts Committee
Rhaglen Cefnogi Pobl Llywodraeth Cymru | The Welsh Government's Supporting
People Programme
PAC(5) SP 01
Ymateb gan Cornerstone Gwasanaethau Cymorth Cyfyngedig | Evidence from
Cornerstone Support Services Limited

Cornerstone is a small organisation that was formed when a group of friends who had all worked within the Housing Related Support field got together and decided that they would like to move away from the larger organisations and set up on their own.

In particular, this group had a passion for working with people who were street homeless. We approached the Caerphilly Supporting People Team and a decision was reached to try a small, short pilot to see if there was demand for a specific Rough Sleeper Project within our locality. It quickly proved to be the case.

This was three years ago, since then we have housed 320 people who had found themselves homeless and sleeping rough or 'sofa-surfing'. Despite many of these service users having complex needs and chaotic lifestyles we are also proud to report that of these new tenancies over 95% are being maintained to this day.

Critical to the success of the project which is now off pilot and, following an exhaustive tendering process is still being provided by Cornerstone, is the close working relationship we have with our Supporting People Team. Not only is the success of the project built upon the courageous decision they took to run such a pilot, but also on the ongoing support they provide to each of us on a daily basis.

Communication between both parties is fluid and regular. Advice is sought on a 2 way basis. Guidance is given to all staff to ensure that we work strictly within the parameters of the SP programme and that all that we do is towards the overarching aim of promoting independence.

The nature of the rough sleeper work means that we are providing support in all of the outcome areas laid out by Welsh Government. Our primary objective is to secure appropriate accommodation but in order to ensure that this can be maintained in the longer term we regularly address issues around addiction, legal matters, health issues, access to employment and mental well-being. We believe that by helping people off the streets and into a home we bring a significant cost reduction to the statutory services that would likely have been involved should this rooflessness have continued.

For some service users, sleeping out is a life choice that they have made and in these (thankfully rare) instances we provide whatever support is needed to help maintain life, particularly during inclement weather. This can be through the provision of sleeping bags and warm clothing, food that can easily be consumed and advice on how to sleep out safely.

Another vital tool in helping address rough sleeping in Caerphilly County Borough, is the Caerphilly Churches Night Shelter. Now in it's 6th year, the shelter opens for the 4 months of the year when the temperatures are at their lowest. Partly funded by the SP team, the church will accommodate up to 8 people per night providing a hot meal, a warm bed, a cooked breakfast and a packed lunch for the next day. It is a scheme that is without doubt life-saving and the partnership between the Cornerstone and the churches has been critical.

In order to achieve optimum effectiveness in the work we do, our partnerships have been key. To this end we work closely with; Neighbourhood Police Teams, National Probation Service, Specialist drug and alcohol teams and the local mental health unit amongst others. We regularly attend and host multi-disciplinary meetings in order to share intelligence as to where people may be sleeping out and information as to what is known about that person/s in order that we can best support them. We are also a registered partner of Street Link Wales and wherever a referral is generated, we aim to respond on the same day as the window of access can sometimes be limited.

As the service has developed we have identified the increasing need for support for people coming out of custody where there is no longer a duty for the Local Authority to provide emergency accommodation. As part of a partnership between our SP team and local National Probation Service Officers, a pathway has been drawn up to be followed in all such cases in order to help better meet the housing needs of this group. We were delighted that this was seen as something that fit our project given the chance of these prison leavers ending up on the street. We have helped implement this pilot pathway and it is working well. There had been an expectation amongst many that the change in the Housing Act could lead to a rise in re-offending rates but by securing appropriate housing in a timely manner we are pleased to report that this has not been borne out. We are now being approached by other boroughs within Gwent with a view to replicating this as best practice, and hope to take it even further.

It is our belief that the work we are commissioned to carry out by our Supporting People Team is a vital service, particularly when bearing in mind the recent reports highlighting the increase in rough sleeping and the publicity this has brought. As a direct result of the funding we receive 320 are no longer homeless and the Night Shelter is open now, saving lives, every day.

We constantly review our service and the support provision to ensure that we are delivering value for money and that we make our funding go as far as possible. Any reduction or loss of funding can only have a huge detrimental impact on some of the most vulnerable within our community.