Specialist housing provider of the year: finalist
Riverside ECHG: The Crossings
Riverside ECHG, HullHARP & Hull City Council

Please provide evidence of how your organisation is delivering high quality services and meeting the needs of your specific client group

Situated on Great Union Street in Hull, The Crossings opened in summer 2011 providing a state of the art homeless centre. It offers people living there the opportunity to gain new skills, enabling them to move forward with their lives. The Crossings provides temporary accommodation for up to forty-six people at any one time and is one of the country’s first pioneering training and enterprise centres. Reducing homelessness and addressing the needs of rough sleepers has long been a strategic priority for Hull, with partnership working underpinning our approach to reducing homelessness.

The Crossings was developed by Riverside Housing Association working in partnership with local charity, Hull Homeless and Rootless Project (HULLHARP) with the support of Hull City Council. We also worked with the Homes and Communities Agency, Hull Primary Care Trust and the Hull Hostel Forum’s Independent Living Skills to obtain additional funding and develop service provision.

Riverside Housing Association and HULLHARP both previously provided separate projects for homeless people in Hull. Working together, but retaining our own identities, has enabled us to replace our no longer fit for purpose buildings. Our partnership has benefitted homeless people by providing a three stage homeless service under one roof, and benefitted our staff through joint training and shared learning and working experiences.

The £5 million centre’s facilities include an IT suite, employment and education services, a multi-gym, treatment rooms and a social enterprise café. Many of these services are open to the local community too. The building incorporates a range of ecologically friendly design principles and its appearance, complementing other waterfront developments in the area, is not that of a typical hostel.

The accommodation grouped over three floors provides 19 emergency access rooms operated by HULLHARP, 11 HULLHARP first stage move on places and 16 individual rooms with communal facilities operated by Riverside. The Crossings can house couples as well as single people. A social enterprise café open to the public not only provides work opportunities for people living at the Crossings but discounted meals for residents. Pictures of the Crossings and more information can be found here and here.

The Crossings is aimed at a target group of service users who regularly face exclusions from existing local services for breaching drug and alcohol rules,
anti social behaviour and failure to participate in support planning and treatment activities.

Key to succeeding in the aim of assisting homeless people to move forward with their lives is providing security of tenure for a period of between 6 and 18 months, during which time specialist support staff at the scheme work with them to break the cycle of homelessness. This is done by assisting them in finding secure, long term accommodation, and addressing the underlying reasons why people find themselves homeless.

The scheme has had a significant impact on reducing anti-social behaviour through initiatives such as working with the local Police Community Support Officers in addressing and reducing street drinking in the city.

Please tell us about a specific project or achievement which sets your organisation apart from other good performing organisations

Our goal to help homeless people back into the mainstream community underpins the project. To help in this managers and staff have completed CIH Engage for Change and Leading Places for Change training. Local training providers delivering the on-site training programmes are also involved in this partnership, helping to address training and employability issues for the residents. We have already had a former homeless client complete a successful placement with the contractors who were building The Crossings. This led to an offer of employment.

HULLHARP operate a funded volunteer programme enabling people from the wider community to support core services. The HULLHARP volunteering programme has supported long term unemployed individuals back into employment, ex service users gain new skills and give something back to the service that supported them. HULLHARP are a UK Online Centre and this extended learning approach has been well utilised and accessed by many. Residents and ex residents have the opportunity to participate in Riverside English Churches Housing Group (RECHG)’s GROW programme (Giving Real Opportunities for Work). GROW offers a one year training post at a trainee rate with extensive training through establishing a mentoring programme. Each of our trainees is allocated a life coach or mentor who can give them support throughout the programme. The benefits of this include increased self esteem, confidence building, a chance to gain independence offering a second chance to many people through a paid job with all the opportunities this offers.

Why is your approach innovative/unique?

The Crossings focuses on harm reduction and health promotion. The service proactively works with those who are continuing to misuse substances. Support staff work in partnership with treatment agencies and specialist services include on-site needle exchange and workshops on harm minimization and lifestyle change. The living environment is unique and this lifts self esteem, and helps deliver real improvements with our clients who are
better able to achieve positive motivation from this. This impact is illustrated by the following case study.

HULLHARP changed its service delivery model back in 2011 with the introduction of a Restorative Practice framework across all its services. This brought with it a vast amount of change, an inclusive culture, and developed social capital. Restorative Practice has affected delivery in many areas, resulting in fewer exclusions, fewer appeals, reduced complaints, greater client involvement, improved relationships and an improved sense of community and understanding. The organisation has used this ethos to improve collaborative partnerships with other citywide services. We are the only known hostel nationally delivering services in this way, and HULLHARP are very proud to be contributing to the city wide vision of becoming a Restorative City.

**Please provide evidence to demonstrate the positive impact of your project or achievement for your specific client group**

Since the Crossings opened in summer 2011, 166 people have used the services provided. The Crossings fully embraces the Places of Change ethos and in the last quarter, we achieved an amazing 100% planned move on from our service. Increased economic well being is being supported by helping residents maximise their income and reduce overall debt. This is through budget planning, advice on welfare benefits and debt counselling as well as opportunities created through partnership working with agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Choices - a local agency providing advocacy regarding debt, welfare and legal advice along with a surgery on site each week.

Provision of on-site health and treatment services, working in partnership with the Mental Health Community team, a local drug treatment agency ‘Compass’, visiting dental hygiene teams and the local PCT all help improve health outcomes for residents. Workshops are provided around harm reduction and risk minimisation, advice and support on general health and well being, stress and relaxation and dietary and healthy eating. This helps people to better manage their general physical health, their substance misuse and obtain regular access to treatment for issues related to mental health. Facilities include a fitness room with a qualified gym instructor.

Regular key-working sessions providing coaching around basic living skills such as cooking and budgeting help break the cycle of homelessness created by chaotic substance misuse. Service users are encouraged to develop the skills needed to take control over their own lives and explore their individual aspirations for the future and pathways to achieving their desired long term goals. Helping individuals achieve their potential is supported by the stability the Crossings provides. Residents who have previously been excluded from education, training and employment are now able to access them. 28 people have attended a two day pre employability course and 40 people achieving UKonline. 7 % of service users have obtained employment and are still in employment.
The Community Café operates as a social enterprise with a dedicated chef with accredited training in NVQ food preparation and basic food hygiene. It provides a training platform for residents to train in all aspects of the catering industry and to achieve a recognized qualification in catering in line with the local college with a view to gaining employment. This opportunity is also open to other supported housing services in Hull, enabling the scheme to reach as many people as possible as a resource for the community and excluded people. It has had nine volunteers in the six months since it opened and currently has six volunteers and 1 work placement volunteer.

Two Multi Functional Training Rooms with interactive IT facilities are available for training, meeting and leisure activities. These are also available to other organisations in Hull which, coupled with the catering service provided by the café, are helping to spread the Crossings’ ethos and embed the Crossings in the wider community.

Please tell us briefly why your organisation should win this award

The Crossings demonstrates homeless services at the highest standard. Not only from a facility perspective but also service delivery standards, the number of positive move-ons from the scheme validates this. The Crossings demonstrates excellent partnership working and how collectively citywide agencies and statutory services have come together to support homeless men and women in the city.

The centre not only supports those within, but also focuses on community development. Emphasis is placed on building stronger, safer, inclusive communities by integrating those socially excluded back into local communities, with the right skills and connections to go on and lead independent lives. The Crossings aims to provide appropriate supported housing to enable individuals to live safely, supporting their long term needs.

Life changes take time to provide evidence but we are convinced that one of the main contributory factors to changing lives is providing hope. This facility provides that hope, not just to the residents but to the wider client group. Along with hope, it is important to generate self respect and the living environment is key to creating this.

The Crossings is providing this opportunity and breaking the cycle of homelessness by providing a foundation on which to build a holistic, rounded person who is able to support themselves and eventually contribute to their community, and achieving outcomes for individuals in the hostel and across Hull.