St Mungo’s Housing Association: The Lodge

Summary

The Lodge is an innovative “hotel-style” accommodation project provided by St Mungo’s and the City of London Corporation for London’s long-term entrenched rough sleepers. It is a truly revolutionary service, designed specifically to address the needs of the older group of individuals who traditionally would not go into chaotic environments, preferring to stay on the streets. This group includes many of the so-called ‘205’ group – those 205 rough sleepers who have been on the streets in London for the longest, in one case for over 40 years – but he’s now a happy guest of the Lodge. 47 individuals aged over 50, and 36 members of the 205 group, have become guests of the Lodge since it opened.

It has succeeded because of its tailored approach, providing 3-star hotel-type accommodation that is maintained to an excellent standard. It also uses a deceptively light-touch customer liaison model of staffing which allows ‘guests’ to maintain their independence – a factor which helps overcome their resistance to traditional hostels. The Lodge’s refurbishment was inspired by the award-winning Gus Alexander architectural practice. Having such a high standard of accommodation has positively influenced rough sleepers’ recovery by making them feel valued and trusted.
**What did you set out to achieve?**

St Mungo’s has been providing accommodation and support for homeless people in London for over 40 years. We house over 1,600 people every night; however, we know that homelessness is more than a housing issue and we therefore offer a range of support services to help our guests address their health, mental health, substance use, education and employment needs. We offer a number of specialist projects that aim to meet the needs of groups and individuals that would not otherwise be met by mainstream services or even other homelessness charities.

The Lodge is one of these unique initiatives, specifically designed to meet the particular needs of older homeless men and women (normally over 50 years of age) with a long history of rough sleeping. Although referrals are accepted from any outreach team in London, the service is located close to the City and Westminster in order to reach the population of entrenched rough sleepers that live centrally, many of whom are part of the 205 group of identified long term rough sleepers.

Evidence for the need for this service arose from our experience attempting to engage with longer-term rough sleepers. Their resolute singularity and perception of hostels as intrusive, overwhelming and young people’s places made them resistant to leaving the City’s quiet streets. Furthermore, prior to opening the Lodge, the City of London Corporation conducted its own internal audit of the needs of City-based rough sleepers and other service users with complex needs. The contributors were Adult Social Services, City Drug Action Team, Homeless Persons Unit and the City Outreach team. The result clearly indicated that there was a need for the type of non-intrusive accommodation offered in this project.

**How were these aims and objectives met?**

There is no other homelessness service like the Lodge, and in achieving it we have eschewed many standard ways of doing things. The Lodge is provided at St Ursula’s, a former clergymen’s daughters’ hostel. We were successful in bidding to the Homes and Communities Agency for substantial capital funds (over £800k) to transform it into a hotel. One of the guests said: ‘My first impressions of the Lodge were really good. I knew the hotel was clean. You could still smell the newness of the carpets when you walked up the stairs and things like that. The cleanliness of the rooms and the decor with the pictures and the things they’ve done it with.’

We have also established a specialised recruitment process, with the Manager recruited from a private hotel background, and staff recruited to ‘Hotel Liaison Officer’ roles rather than as traditional keyworkers. Every process at the Lodge originates from hotel-based practices: for example, all guests are given their own key to the front door and daily newspapers and
fresh flowers adorn the reception area. Support is provided by visiting external Street Outreach Teams to prevent guests from feeling pressured into talking about issues while in the Lodge. The Lodge staff provide informal support only when approached by guests. This hotel-style, ‘hands-off’ approach has been successful with long-term rough sleepers because it enables them to retain their strong sense of independence, provides quiet and safe surroundings and is markedly different from the orthodox hostel environment. One guest said: ‘There is no such thing as “life skills courses” and things here: I dare say if you wanted them you could get them. But there is no structure like that which is great and you’re not instructed to attend or do things like that which you might get in a hostel’.

What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

The Lodge is a genuine example of multi-partnership working, run by St Mungo’s in partnership with the City of London Corporation in the Borough of Camden. A key challenge was developing and maintaining a close working relationship between all stakeholders and acknowledging and committing to the priorities and concerns of all those involved. We have achieved this by:

- Offering referral access to outreach services from other parts of London
- Working closely with officials from the host borough Camden, with particular regard to community safety and reassurance mechanisms
- Enabling a Project Steering Group, led by the Corporation of London on which key stakeholders sit
- Enabling a broader Community Council structure, led by St Mungo’s, on which local Councillors, representatives and concerned individuals sit
- Linking very closely to the Parish of St. Alban the Martyr, Holborn, whose premises we are using, and whose ongoing operation adjoins
- Holding regular open days and celebratory events.

We have been substantially successful in overcoming anxieties about the service and the service enjoys firm stakeholder backing. Guests have helped by volunteering locally and by attending Community Council Meetings.

Another key challenge was encouraging the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach guests to enter the Lodge. We addressed this by using tailored approaches to support the Outreach Teams, such as our staff going to visit guests in the places where they sleep rough and donating gifts such as warm clothing. We have also offered the opportunity for some of these individuals to come to the Lodge for a hot shower and some food, and to see the standard of the accommodation, which in many cases has eventually led to these clients coming to live with us.
How was the success of the project measured?

The key outcome of the Lodge has been its success in helping individuals from the ‘205’ group of older long-term entrenched rough sleepers move off the streets; during 2010/11, 30 of our 65 beneficiaries were from this group. Since opening, 69% of our guests have been over 50 years old, 32% over 60 and 7% over 70. We also have one guest who is 81. Since opening, we have also accommodated 3 females, all aged over 50, including one 77-year-old woman who had been on the streets for over 30 years.

More than simply providing a roof over their heads, the Lodge helps guests to engage with other services and individuals. Rough sleeping can have very serious health implications and guests of the Lodge receive support to access appropriate treatment. Furthermore, the atmosphere of the Lodge has created a sense of community where guests can participate in positive group activities such as watching TV or cooking and sharing a meal, which has a very beneficial impact on our guests’ mental well-being.

Since the Lodge opened in March 2010, we have had 11 successful move-ons: eight have moved on to supported housing (ranging from sheltered housing to housing that is primarily independent living with floating support) and three have moved to independent accommodation. One of our guests, who is in his 70s, helps with the upkeep of the Lodge, including painting walls, collecting newspapers and sweeping the front porch, which demonstrates his pride in the place that he lives.

Other positive outcomes have included the following:

- None of the guests currently have arrears, indicating that they are able to manage their money well
- All bar one of the guests are fully engaging with their outreach worker regarding move on plans
- Around 10 guests have enrolled on various courses including a computer course, First Aid and a Caterplus course. Outside In, St Mungo’s guest involvement group, are also planning to deliver a computer training course at the Lodge very soon
- Around three quarters of the guests come together every Sunday for a social lunch, which demonstrates increased confidence and development of social skills
- The laundry and bathroom facilities are well used and the majority of guests have put on weight
- Our guests were some of the most visible rough sleepers in London; they’re not out there any more, and that’s motivating others to come in too.

What were the key positive outcomes?

We feel that this project could be replicated all over the country, provided that
organisations delivering it acknowledge the subtleties of the model. In order to assist other agencies to do so, St Mungo’s and the City of London have commissioned professional research to be carried out on the Lodge by King’s College London and the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, the aim of which is to learn exactly why the Lodge has been so successful. We will share the findings at a launch event later in the year.

A by-product of our ‘light-touch’ model is that staffing costs have remained relatively low in comparison with more traditional hostel settings, which makes the model viable even in the current economic climate. We hope to launch a separate move-on project for those moving out of the Lodge as a stepping stone to independent living, which we envisage to be a shared house with input from current Lodge staff. We believe that this would help to further build the confidence of our guests to enable them to move on to their own accommodation, and would also help to ensure that there is regular throughput of guests at the Lodge so that we are continually in a position to support other rough sleepers. This element of the project is also likely to be replicable by others in future.

How does your project support older people to maintain their independence?

The Lodge has successfully re-housed a large number of some of the most vulnerable older entrenched rough sleepers in our capital city, who have previously shunned traditional hostel accommodation in favour of sleeping on the streets. Not only have we successfully housed these guests in our project; we have also enabled them to make the mental and physical leap to independent accommodation, despite some of them sleeping on the streets for a number of years – and in one case 40 years.

St Mungo’s and the City of London Corporation have ambitious plans for changing the lives of the guests, even those who have been sleeping out for most of their adult lifetimes, and under our gentle encouragement many are now getting socially involved in meaningfully useful ways. St Mungo’s offers a wide range of skills, employment and informal activities programmes, which all guests have access to. Crucially, however, we maintain guests’ independence by allowing them to move forward at their own pace, and do not compel them to take part in anything that is against their wishes.

There is very encouraging evidence that being resident at the Lodge is proving the vital catalyst to many guests to achieve their broader goals. Settlement at the Lodge is proving a potent catalyst for many dormant dreams and long-packed away hopes; e.g. one guest who is an accomplished musician now helps out in a local church every weekend; another has revisited his place of origin for the first time in over 30 years, because he feels he wouldn’t, now, be embarrassed if he met someone who had known him before.
How are you involving older people in the development and delivery of your services?

At St Mungo’s we believe our guests have the right to contribute to decision making at every level. We have a guest representative on our Board as well as a guest involvement group, Outside In, which meets regularly with the Senior Management as a voice for guests. Guests are also encouraged to participate positively in the community; for example, we have nominated guest representatives who attend our Community Council meetings to meet with local elected members and guests and contribute to the broad-based neighbourhood plan for the area.

Guests also help out on an informal basis e.g. by collecting the daily papers for the Lodge and assisting with small painting/decorating jobs when necessary. One guest also looks after a dog belonging to one of the Lodge’s neighbours when they are on holiday.

We are about to launch an exciting ‘time bank’ initiative to enable guests to build up ‘credits’ for work they undertake in the Lodge and exchange them e.g. theatre tickets. We are currently undertaking an evaluation of the scheme using participatory methodology and, in part, peer evaluators. The Lodge is of deep interest to policy makers including the Mayor and his team, and guests of the Lodge have been able to speak directly to them and leaders of the homelessness and local authority sectors about what works best for them.

How does your project help address either a current challenge, faced by many providers, or meet a current priority in your part of the UK?

The Lodge is a direct response to the London Delivery Board’s pledge to end rough sleeping by 2012 and to provide a service that suited the long term rough sleepers of whom many are elderly and included in the group are those known as the 205. While there have been a number of successful projects catering for this guest group, the Lodge has seen the greatest number of elderly and 205 guests come through its doors and move on to live independently, thereby breaking the cycle of homelessness.

London is often the forerunner on homelessness relate practice, which goes on to influence practice regionally, nationally and internationally. The Lodge’s fame has spread and it has recently, for example, been visited by a delegation of Danish policy makers.

Is your project influencing the way other providers work, will it help deliver improvements beyond those immediately involved?

The Lodge will transform the face of London, contributing, more so than any other single initiative, to making it unnecessary for people to sleep out in our Capital. It will also help transform other services, compelling them to re-examine time-held orthodoxies. It will be formally evaluated by Dr Maureen
Crane, of King's College London, a leading academic in our field, and as such it will contribute valuably to the body of evidence about homelessness, in particular how and why some people come to stay out for longer and what, in the end, makes the difference for them. As such, it will have international impact and significance. We will hold a launch event to disseminate the findings later this year. Additionally, we will share this information with Homeless Link, with whom we work continuously in order to share our work and findings on a day-to-day basis with other Homeless Link members (please see http://www.homeless.org.uk/alternative-models-thelodge).