

PREVENTION

SAVES

MONEY AND

MISERY

CYRENIANS HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION SERVICE
IMPACT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

i. INTRODUCTION

Edinburgh Cyrenians has pioneered Scotland's first service aimed at stopping people in imminent risk of homelessness from losing their home, and helping them over a 3 month period to become more resilient to future crises. This report presents the findings from research undertaken by Cyrenians to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of the Homelessness Prevention Service, now in its third year and providing 400 interventions per annum in Edinburgh.

ii. PRIORITISING HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

Homelessness prevention was already identified by the Scottish Government as a priority in advance of the publication of the Christie Commission's Report on the Future Delivery of Public Services in June 2011. It is acknowledged as a vital element in local authorities' work towards meeting the commitment of the Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003 that after 2012 all unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to permanent accommodation.

iii. CYRENIANS HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION SERVICE

The Cyrenians Homelessness Prevention Service was set up in response to a City of Edinburgh Council competitive tendering exercise in autumn 2008. It was designed specifically to prevent people from presenting as homeless by either keeping their current house or moving on to an alternative home in a planned way.

Taking account of the factors known to be associated with increased risk of homelessness, Cyrenians employs personal advisers offering tailored one-to-one support to people who are dealing with relationship breakdown, financial problems and concerns about housing security due to unemployment. Mediation is available in relation to debt and relationship problems; and volunteer befrienders will assist people to become more active and engaged in leisure, social and community activities.

iv. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The research compiled quantitative and qualitative data from a number of sources:

- Quarterly performance information provided by Cyrenians to the City of Edinburgh Council.
- Cyrenians' own internal recording systems which indicate distance travelled by those using the service, based on six outcomes in areas that are linked to homelessness. (The six outcome areas cover employment, community links, money, housing security, health and relationships.)
- A tracking questionnaire with a sample of 50 customers of the Homelessness Prevention Service.
- A comparison questionnaire with 15 people with experience of presenting as homeless.

v. FINDINGS

Improvements can be seen across all outcome areas in the situation of people who have engaged with Cyrenians Homelessness Prevention Service. Analysis of the data for the sample group of 50 customers indicates demonstrable impact, for example in employment, where 11 moved into employment; and money, where rent arrears dropped from a total of £25,339 to £5,935 and the number of people in rent arrears dropped from 29 to 11. Only 3 out of the 376 people who Cyrenians Homelessness Prevention Service worked with in 2010/11 became homeless.

The research seeks to highlight potential costs saved by the City of Edinburgh Council through investment in a prevention service, for example by avoiding the costs of temporary accommodation. Hard data is available and included in the report on repayment of rent arrears by customers of Cyrenians Homelessness Prevention Service. The Council's performance data demonstrates that the service is meeting and exceeding its targets on diverting customers from homelessness presentations and sustaining this for a further 12 months in 99% of cases. The report provides strong evidence for the cost effectiveness of the service.

However, the limitations of the exercise preclude a robust quantification of potential costs associated with becoming homeless in a comparable group of non-recipients of such a service, which would provide a measure against the cost of delivery of the Homelessness Prevention Service. Cyrenians would welcome involvement in a research study to undertake a cost:benefit analysis of this prevention work.

vi. CONCLUSIONS

Cyrenians' report seeks to highlight a number of important issues:

- Firstly, Cyrenians' research has demonstrated that customers of the Homelessness Prevention Service are living in circumstances similar to those who experience homelessness in the wider population. This suggests that had Cyrenians customers not sought intervention, there is a reasonable chance that they would have become homeless; certainly, two thirds of the sample group said that this definitely would have been so for them. The case studies in the report help to demonstrate how similar circumstances have led to different outcomes for individuals who have/have not had access to the service.
- Secondly, Cyrenians has tried to demonstrate the impact the Homelessness Prevention Service has on people's lives outside of their housing situation. Our research shows that when an individual's housing situation becomes more secure there are concomitant improvements in other areas of their life, in particular their financial situation, their perception of their mental health, and their employment circumstances.
- Furthermore, the changes made by customers engaging with Cyrenians Homelessness Prevention Service have been sustained over a year after finishing with the service.
- Finally the research has illustrated potential savings to the local authority and shown that a preventative approach is effective in enabling people to avoid homelessness. It presents strong evidence that the new preventative approach developed by Cyrenians in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council is highly effective (more than 95%) and is cost effective for the Council through reducing homelessness presentations, recovering rent arrears and avoiding the costs of temporary accommodation.

In view of the high risk of rising homelessness and new obligations on Councils to help, **Cyrenians proposes to policy makers that homelessness should be a key focus for preventative spend in Scotland.**