



The Brigstowe Project – Background Information

Aims

The Brigstowe Project is an independent charity and company, whose four main purposes are to:

Provide resettlement and housing related support, known as Floating Support

Offer free, confidential, impartial information and advice on housing, welfare benefits, community care or health to people living with HIV.

Provide directly managed housing to people living with HIV

Help other housing providers to better meet the needs of people living with HIV, by working with them and by providing training and good practice information.

Origins

Brigstowe grew out of the 'Bristol HIV & Housing Group', which comprised representatives from BCC Social Services HIV Team, the Housing Department; Avon Health, Bristol Churches HA, Bristol Drugs Project and the Aled Richards Trust. The group's aim was to identify and plan for the housing needs of people living with HIV in the area. In the early 1990's, following a research report commissioned by the group, BCHA obtained capital funding to build 8 new purpose-built houses on scattered sites.

A development worker was appointed in 1994, and after consultation with local HIV+ people (who expressed a strong preference for independent, HIV+ specific housing management) Brigstowe registered as a charitable company in 1995.

In 1996 – our first year of operation – we won the national Sir Roy Griffiths Award for excellence in housing & community care.

Housing Management and support

We provide directly managed housing to people living with HIV, in partnership with Places for People, a Registered Social Landlord. We currently have 14 units owned by Places for People in management. The housing we use is a mixture of purpose-built houses, and flats from general needs stock. The accommodation is scattered across Bristol, and all tenants have permanent assured tenancies.

In 2008 Places for People put the management of their supported housing out tender, and the Brigstowe Propjet were successful in retaining management of the properties at a greatly

reduced remuneration from April 2009, which will be carefully monitored by the committee during 2009/10.

Support needs and changing needs

Our tenants generally have low to medium support needs, although these vary enormously over time and between individuals, according to changing circumstances and physical / mental health.

When the Project started, people living with HIV in Bristol did not have access to the current drug treatments, and we were working on the assumption that we would have a high turnover of tenants due to their deaths.

Since the treatments have become available, most people living with HIV in the area have gained both quantity and quality of life. However, associated health problems have become an increasing issue alongside the side effects of drugs as people live longer with HIV, and the consequences of living with an unpredictable and still life-threatening illness.

Tenant profile

Our tenants include single people, single parents, gay and heterosexual couples and couples with younger and older children; currently 5 tenants are white British, 2 are white European, 4 are Black African, 2 are mixed heritage and 1 is Asian other.

Allocations policy

Tenancies are only given to HIV+ people. Although this has been a problem for some people who would like their HIV- partners to be joint tenants, the policy is designed to protect the security of the HIV+ person.

In allocating properties, we consider the person's long term support needs, availability of alternative appropriate housing or support, health, current housing / homelessness and suitability of available housing.

Information and advice

Brigstowe could not, and should not, aim to house everybody who lives with HIV in the area. Some people approach the Project wanting directly managed housing, but others, whilst not in need of long term support, request information, advice and advocacy because they are homeless, inadequately housed, unable to access essential services from where they live, or are under threat of eviction.

In response to these needs we developed an Information and Advice Service covering information and advice on homelessness and housing issues, welfare rights, community care and health.

Over the last three years we have experienced an increase in the number of clients using our service who have no access to public funds.

In December 2004 we were awarded the Community Legal Service Quality Mark for General Help with Casework in the Disability category.

In 2005 we were successful in securing funding from Lloyds TSB Foundation, The Elton John Aids Foundation and the Peter Moores Foundation, enabling us to appoint a dedicated part-time Information and Advice Worker in July 2005. Since then we have secured additional funding from Bristol City Council Adult Community Care of £15,600 (from the AIDS Support Grant (ASG), South Glos Council £5,250, and North Somerset Council £7,000) for 2008/09.

Floating Support

With the introduction of the government's Supporting People Programme In April 2003, we expanded our services within Bristol; we now provide floating support to people on a short term basis (up to two years) in all forms of tenure, who may be having problems managing or sustaining their accommodation or require help with resettlement. Including approximately fifty percent of our tenants, we work on average with between 24 and 30 clients at any time and have a waiting list.

Geographical area

Our constitution leaves this intentionally vague ('Bristol and the surrounding area'). All our directly managed housing is in Bristol, but we offer our Advice Service to people in South Glos, Bath and North East Somerset, and North Somerset. As we are the only HIV specialist housing agency in the South West, we aim in practice to provide a basic housing advice service for anyone living with HIV in the region.

Staff structure

Brigstowe currently employs a Project Manager, for 4 days a week, who is responsible for leadership and management of the project, 1 Senior Project Worker working 4 1/2 days a week, 2 Project Workers one working 3 days a week, the other working 4 days a week, a Senior Information and Advice worker, working full time, and an Administrator, working 4 days a week

Governance

Brigstowe is a registered company and charity, and is managed by a voluntary committee of Directors / Trustees and Committee Members to whom the Project Manager is accountable. We currently have 4 Trustees and 3 Committee members.

We are subject to audit/review by The Charity Commission, Companies House, and Places for People, the Supporting People Team at Bristol City Council, and the Adult Community Care Departments of Bristol City Council, South Glos Council and North Somerset Councils.

Finances

Our income in 2008/09 comes from:

1. 40% of rents collected which we retain to manage properties owned by Places for People
2. Supporting People Grant, approx. £120, 000, for providing support to all our clients.
3. Grants for Advice Service approx £36,000

Current issues and future needs

The early optimism of 2007 about HIV vaccines such as the Merck vaccine was shattered in September 2007 when it was withdrawn, having been found to be not effective. There has unfortunately been no good news with the new technologies to prevent the spread of HIV. The only thing to remember is that condoms work.

The news about treatments is better however, never have there been so many new drugs available and in the existing drug classes there are new drugs appearing that have different resistance profiles from the present drugs.

In Bristol we have seen an increase year on year in new cases of HIV, from 39 in 2001 to 119 in 2007/08, and 37 cases in January to March 2008 (latest figures). Southmead Hospital, part of Bristol NHS Trust, the main hospital in the Bristol region for HIV services, has seen an increase in the total number of patients to 954 by the end of March 2008, and an increasing number of cases are female. There has however been an increase in patients leaving the service.

There is evidence that whilst new treatments are more effective for physical problems, the longer length of time for which people are living with HIV is leading to increasing associated health problems. For us this has meant an increase in demand, and people returning for further help as needs change. The anticipated 'turnover' of tenants / clients due to deaths has not materialised, meaning we have fewer vacancies in our permanent housing and a greater need to help people find alternative suitable housing or ways of staying put.

Finally, we need to continue demonstrating need in a climate where it is largely perceived that people with HIV are now well, and where our government does not consider HIV to be a priority.

We face some difficult times ahead, along with other voluntary sector organisations, with reductions in funding. In 2009/10 there will be a reduction of £17,000 in our funding from Places for People. The level of the Supporting People grant is under pressure and may be reduced in 2010/11. In addition, we are entering a new era of competitive tendering. The committee is planning ahead to secure the sustainability of the organisation – we want to ensure that the Brigstowe Project is appropriately resourced to continue to respond to the changing needs of people living with HIV.

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