

Outreach Essentials Bitesize E-Learning

Being trauma-informed and working in partnership

There is no one-size fits all approach to outreach. Sometimes it can depend on the geography of an area. For example, is it predominantly urban or very [rural](#)? Is a [gendered](#) approach to outreach needed ensure that women who are rough sleeping in your area can be found and helped? Or do people from [culturally or racially minoritized](#) backgrounds have particular needs when it comes to outreach? Whatever the case, your approach to contacting people needs to be timely and the support you provide purposeful. In this short video we'll look at what that means.

Outreach workers are experts in finding those in need. They [cultivate networks](#) of engaged local organisations and individuals so that they can always be aware of who needs help and where they are sleeping rough. In urban areas, your networks could include local residents, the police, health service workers, local store managers or town centre management teams, train and bus station staff, park wardens, day centres, community groups, women's groups, faith groups, charities and other small businesses. In rural areas your network could also include for example farmers, factory workers, rural residents, land-owners, forest rangers and national park wardens, hotel and pub managers, and parish councils. These relationships can be built one-to-one or as part of your regular local homelessness action group or rough sleeping forum. Each member is an extra set of eyes and ears in the community. They can let you know about anyone sleeping rough that you might not otherwise have been aware of.

On a practical level, it's important that everyone involved in your network knows how to pass on information about someone sleeping rough. For example, can they call or email the outreach team directly, or should they use the [StreetLink](#) referral app? Is everyone aware of the [What3Words](#) app, which is especially useful for precisely mapping where people are sleeping rough in rural or other hard to describe locations?

Once you've been made aware of someone sleeping rough in your area, finding and helping that person in a timely way relies on carrying out regular outreach shifts. The routes and areas you are going to cover should be planned in advance based on the intelligence gathered from your local partners and referral mechanisms, and you should also cover known hotspots and sleeping sites.

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When you find someone sleeping rough it's essential you think about how to build a relationship with them at their speed, not yours! You may have suitable accommodation you can take this person to right away, but they might not feel comfortable accepting help from you until you have built up a rapport with them.

This could be over the course of a few visits or even a number of months. Being purposeful can also mean being patient.

In many areas there is a [verification](#) process. This usually means someone has to be seen by an outreach worker using their sleep site in order to be offered some services. The benefit of verification is that resources can be targeted at those most in need of them. However, it can also mean some people can get missed. For example, think about someone who, for their safety, is using a sleep site that is tucked away in a wooded location, a locked park or derelict building and difficult for an outreach team to get to, but regularly goes to a day centre to shower, get something to eat and speak to the support staff there. Could an evidence-based approach be taken and they be verified as a rough sleeper on the balance of probability? This can be especially helpful for women as strict verification requirements do not reflect that women are more likely to experience transitory patterns of homelessness and bed down in hidden locations during the day, but may use women's day centres or other gender-based services where they have been able to build a relationship of trust with a specialist support workers.

You could also think about carrying out [joint shifts](#) with other agencies, for example the police or park wardens to cover less accessible places, or a specialist nurse to help with the physical or mental health support needs of someone you're working with who feels unable to go to a building-based health service at that time. But be aware of how many people are in your group on such shifts and how you approach sleep sites so that you don't frighten anyone.

Supporting people means that once someone is located their needs are assessed and a support pathway established. To do this an outreach worker needs thorough knowledge of the accommodation and support services available in their area and how they are accessed. For example, does your team have a list or directory of accommodation and other services and the referral criteria for each one? It can be very frustrating and re-traumatising for the people you are working to support to have to explain time and again their circumstances and the things that have happened to them. So, it's crucial you only ask someone sleeping rough to complete referrals for the organisations that are appropriate to their needs.

Properly supporting people also means thinking about their immediate needs. It can take time for referrals to be processed and support plans put in place so it's important to think about any safeguarding concerns or other vulnerabilities that need to be addressed more quickly. This could be as simple as offering your client [Severe Weather Emergency Protocol](#) accommodation if it is available, or perhaps your client has physical or mental health support needs that mean they are 'in priority need' and should be offered temporary accommodation? An immediate need might also be language interpretation so that someone, for whom English is not their first language, can fully understand who you are and what you are offering to help them with, and so that you can understand their linguistic and cultural needs.

Use the following self-guided activities below to think about your network of referrers and local partners.

Self-guided activities

These activities can be done individually or with your colleagues, for example in a team meeting.

- First, think about your network of referrers and local partners. Who are they? How do you maintain your relationships with them? Who else could you invite to come into your network? What referral tools do you give them so that they can tell you about people they know or see sleeping rough?
- Second, do you have a directory or list of services and projects to refer or sign-post rough sleepers to? Are you clear on their criteria and how to refer someone into them? Whose job is it to keep your directory up to date?
- Finally, think about your processes and ways of working. Do you have specific guidance on finding and working with marginalized and minoritized people such as women and people for whom English is not their first language?

Suggested actions

Some suggested activities would be to:

- Nominate someone in your team to keep a list / map of local partners up to date.
- Set up activities to [grow your network](#) and involve the whole team in building those relationships. Think about how you will measure the success of this activity.
- As a team, talk about your [verification](#) process. Can it be altered to make it more inclusive?