

## What is rough sleeping outreach?

In homelessness services, outreach refers to the assessment and support which takes place where people are sleeping rough. Rather than workers being confined to building-based services and rigid opening hours, outreach offers a flexible approach to support people who are rough sleeping, with the ability to target those most marginalised. Outreach is not just about helping people to find accommodation; it's about supporting people holistically for as long as is needed, recognising that everyone has unique needs and journeys away from rough sleeping.

## What does an outreach shift look like?

Outreach services tend to have two different shift times across a weekly rota. Early shifts tend to start around 5/6am, and late shifts start from around 10/11pm onwards but they will vary according to each service. Depending on the area you are covering (e.g., rural/urban), you may be on foot, or in a vehicle. You will be told the specific timings and meeting point of your shift in advance.

The outreach worker will always take the lead and will have a plan for the shift, which will be explained to you before you head out. The shift may include responding to referrals/reports of rough sleeping and locating these individuals and going to known 'hot spot' areas to connect and offer support to people sleeping rough.

## Your role as a volunteer

Volunteering with an outreach service is a brilliant way of making a practical contribution to helping people off the streets. You will always be paired with an experienced outreach worker, and you should follow their instructions. Don't worry, you won't be asked to take responsibility for decisions or casework: the lead outreach worker is in charge. If you are ever unsure of what you're going to do on your shift, don't be afraid to ask questions.

## Data protection

You will sign a confidentiality agreement when you start your volunteering position. This is because during your outreach shift, people may disclose personal information about themselves to you. You must not share this information with anyone, apart from the outreach worker on shift with you. If you know someone in a personal capacity, you must not share any information with the lead outreach worker that the individual does not share themselves.

## About our service

# Volunteering for a rough sleeping outreach service



## Health and safety checklist

### Do

- ✔ Wear comfortable clothing and suitable footwear for walking: consider weather conditions and environment
- ✔ Wear your ID badge (which will be given to you) at all times
- ✔ Be aware of your safety, and the safety of others, at all times during your shift
- ✔ Check your phone signal regularly: do not stay long in areas with no signal
- ✔ Agree a code word with the lead outreach worker(s) to let them know if you feel uncomfortable or at risk
- ✔ Have the contact details of an on-call manager for emergencies
- ✔ Be aware that you may come across illicit activity such as drug-taking or drug dealing, and that other people may not welcome your presence – remain calm and alert to risks
- ✔ Confirm with the lead outreach worker if you need support with transport to/from the shift.

### Don't

- ✘ Attend the outreach shift if you are feeling unwell or are displaying any symptoms of COVID-19
- ✘ Split up from the lead outreach worker whilst on shift
- ✘ Approach anyone who is displaying aggressive or violent behaviour
- ✘ Shine your torch in anyone's face or wake people using physical contact
- ✘ Go into derelict buildings/squats/building sites if no prior planning has taken place to get support from the police or other agency
- ✘ Go into any areas (dark alleys, underground car parks, parks etc.) where you do not feel safe
- ✘ Open any tents: always follow the lead of an experienced outreach worker
- ✘ Stand over or touch anyone as you wake them
- ✘ Use alcohol or an illegal substance prior to volunteering on shift
- ✘ Give anyone cash under any circumstances
- ✘ Give anyone personal information about yourself e.g., where you live, your phone number, social media account etc
- ✘ Return to sleep sites once your outreach shift is over
- ✘ Go home from the shift without speaking to the lead outreach worker.



## Trauma-informed support

Many people experiencing homelessness have also experienced trauma. Within organisations, being trauma-informed means improving awareness of trauma and its impact, and ensuring the service and the support provided does not re-traumatise those accessing or working in services. It takes time to build trusting relationships: not everyone will want to speak to you immediately – work at the client's pace.

### Things to consider whilst on outreach:

- » Where are interactions with clients taking place? Does the person feel safe to disclose information?
- » Can you have a conversation physically at the same level as the person?
- » Are questions kept to a minimum?

## Safeguarding

Outreach services often work with adults who have experienced or are at risk of abuse. Whilst on shift, if an individual discloses that they are at risk of harm or abuse (e.g., sexual, psychological, physical, financial, domestic, modern slavery, or self-neglect), alert the lead outreach worker immediately. The organisation will have policies and procedures about Safeguarding Adults at Risk and will be able to take the appropriate actions. Risk assessments/safety plans will be in place for individuals working with the outreach service.

Women, the LGBTQI+ community and anyone from minoritised backgrounds are especially vulnerable to abuse and many will have experiences of trauma. Be especially mindful of your gender, race and actions when approaching individuals from these groups.