

Executive Summary

The Ending Women's Homelessness Fund (EWHF) was established by Homeless Link to fund grantees to develop new initiatives or enhance their existing work to improve support for women experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantage. Homeless Link administered funds received from the Tampon Tax Fund totalling £1.85m to twenty-nine projects. The 29 grantees spanned the homelessness and women's sector and beyond including front-line services and some second-tier organisations. Some were women-only projects and others were mixed services that recognised the need to enhance provision for women. Grantees included a mix of mainstream and specialist services for Black and minoritised women, women involved in prostitution and LGBT women.

This research was commissioned by Homeless Link to explore insights and examples of impact across the Fund. In particular, this research explores four key themes which were identified in previous research as important for effective support for women experiencing multiple disadvantage:¹ gender and trauma informed working, cross-sector partnership working, co-production and staff wellbeing.

Beneficiaries supported through the Fund

2285 new beneficiaries² were recorded by the grantees over the funding period as well as 1767 training delegates.³ In addition to this, the EWHF also supported children, staff from external agencies, and staff from grantees and funded partners.⁴

Women received a combination of women focussed and trauma informed front-line practical and emotional support, housing, advice, advocacy, case coordination, and onward referrals to specialist services.

Children received support for basic needs, referrals to specialist services, safeguarding support and liaison with other voluntary and statutory services.

Training delegates received training which included gender and trauma informed practice as well as training relating to specific groups of women or circumstances that they may experience such as no recourse to public funds (NRPF), immigration, trafficking and exploitation, mental health and experiences of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Staff from external agencies received information, advice and signposting, improved referral pathways.

Staff from grantees and funded partners developed their knowledge and awareness and strengthened their approach to supporting women.

Reported outcomes achieved

Outcomes for women and children

A significant success of the programme is that women had increased and improved access to safe and appropriate housing options alongside

increased availability and quality of women-only support for a range of practical and emotional circumstances. Women reported improved feelings of safety, wellbeing and hope for the future as a result of engaging with the options available to them through the EWHF and some had been able to resume contact with children no longer in their care.

Outcomes for practitioners and services

Across the homelessness sector in particular, practitioners and staff teams benefited from increased knowledge and awareness of the specific needs and approaches needed to support women; increased staff capacity to respond effectively to women experiencing multiple disadvantage; and demonstrated more compassionate attitudes towards women. Improved practice was also evidenced through women's lead workers and women-only focussed time, space and interventions as well as enhanced partnership approaches to prevent women falling through the gaps in support. Services were also improved from co-producing services and interventions with women with lived experience.

Women-only services which already incorporated these elements were able to strengthen and deepen their existing provision, especially in relation to housing, and test and learn from new approaches to supporting women, stemming from existing organisational commitment and women focussed ethos.

1. Young, L. and Horvath, T. (2019). Promising practice from the front line: Supporting women who experience homelessness and multiple disadvantage. Homeless Link and Women's Resource Centre (WRC).
2. This figure is from the quarterly monitoring reports and is not thought to include any existing beneficiaries that the grantees were already working with. This figure does not include data from the final reports due to inconsistencies in the interpretation of the questions. In addition, some grantees were continuing to deliver activities beyond this research period. Therefore, this figure is indicative only. It is unknown whether this refers to

women beneficiaries only or if others are included. See methodology for limitations in the data collected.
3. It is unknown whether any double counting has occurred in the monitoring reports to reach this figure. As it is unlikely that training delegates would engage for more than one quarter, double counting seems less likely.
4. The exact figures are unknown due to inconsistencies in how the data was collected and double counting in the monitoring reports. See methodology for limitations in the data collected.

A unique delivery context

The start of the funded period coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. This had significant impacts on the grantees, creating a need to respond to the changing circumstances women were facing and changes in local delivery landscapes alongside a need to pause to review their EWHF project delivery plans and adapt. Adaptations made by grantees included: re-aligning mission to respond to the changes in women's circumstances; developing digital inclusion for women; re-designing support to remote delivery; adapting face-to-face delivery in-line with restrictions of the pandemic; and adapting training to online delivery. Some grantees played a significant role advocating for and supporting women into safe and appropriate accommodation during the 'Everyone In' campaign. The grantees' adaptability and ability to support women during the pandemic is a significant achievement.

Gender and trauma informed practice - key insights

Various examples were provided of grantees improving their approaches to working with women. Within mixed services, these included: cultivating buy-in with management teams and board members and developing organisational strategies and fundraising plans to ensure women's experiences and support requirements are included. Some introduced mandatory training for all staff; recruited champions and lead roles to focus on women, cascade and embed learning; and developed guidance and toolkits to accompany training. Evidence suggests that using a range of these methods in tandem, driven by senior managers, is most effective for implementing a gender informed approach.

Both mixed sex services and women-only services improved service design and delivery to women by creating and/or expanding their women-only provision; providing safe spaces where women are not required to repeat their traumatic experiences again and again; conducting assertive outreach to take the support to women; tailoring support to respond to circumstances and needs of particular groups of women; incorporating working with nature through 'talk and walk' sessions; and delivering asset-based and empathic approaches to support.

Some of the ways that grantees engaged with Black and minoritised women included providing services in community languages and/or access to interpreters; training staff to understand forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, ensuring services accommodate religious and cultural requirements, and establishing links with specialist services. For women with no recourse to public funds, crisis grants alongside specialist immigration advice were deemed essential.

Cross-sector partnership working - key insights

The types of partnership funded through the programme included both formal strategic partnerships between women's centres, domestic abuse services, homelessness services and mental health services to enhance the connections and support pathways, as well as capacity building to enhance informal partnership working approaches.

Benefits and outcomes from the partnership approaches include: breaking down barriers between services; pooling resources which increases organisational capacity; sharing responsibility to reduce the chances of women falling through gaps in services; effective risk management; and increased cross-sector skills and knowledge. The partnership approaches have provided women with increased and faster access to a range of support and increased flexibility in how support is provided.

At the end of the funding period, some projects have chosen to continue to work together due to the difference this has made to the delivery of support and positive outcomes for women.

Co-production - key insights

Co-production activities delivered include developing peer support groups; conducting research with women; holding regular feedback meetings; providing a range of options for women to input including creative arts projects; providing opportunities for women to co-design physical space and materials; and ensuring representation of women with lived experience in staff and decision-making roles. There is evidence from the EWHF that engaging in co-production has enhanced the quality and availability of support, improved commissioning processes, helped women develop their confidence and recognise the

value of their own voice, developed employability skills and helped women secure employment in helping others.

Staff wellbeing – key insights

The COVID-19 pandemic created a whole new landscape and increased pressures for staff and services including increased reports of VAWG, highly emotional and challenging work undertaken from home whilst being expected to deal with isolation, a lack of childcare, home schooling and heightened anxiety about the situation overall. In an attempt to mitigate some of these challenges, grantees introduced new measures to support staff wellbeing. These included: increasing access to clinical supervision; supporting staff to establish boundaries when working from home; providing flexibility in working patterns and hours; providing wellbeing activities and social spaces online to support team bonding; and offering counselling for family members. Some mixed sex homelessness services introduced reflective practice and clinical supervision across their organisation for the first time.

These strategies increased a sense of support available; helped teams to recognise and process emotional impacts of the role and de-personalise challenging situations; and increased empowerment of staff to take wellbeing seriously. In turn, these outcomes helped to increase staff capacity to support women effectively.

Challenges experienced by grantees

As noted in previous research,⁵ grantees reported that there remains a significant lack of understanding in statutory sector services and some voluntary sector services of the specific circumstances of women and the need for a specific focus on women's support requirements. Occasionally this is due to misconstrued attempts to achieve equality by delivering services from a gender-neutral perspective, when this does little to acknowledge the differences in the experiences between men and women or the effective support or approach required.

A number of ongoing systemic challenges in supporting women effectively were also reported, including lack of funding; funding structures which do not support gender informed working; lack of political will and coordinated approaches at both national and

local levels; plus a lack of representation in decision making roles. Government policy on immigration also continues to present multiple challenges and barriers for women who are seeking asylum in the UK and accommodation and support for women with NRPF is also scarce. Barriers to accessing services for Black and minoritised women and a need to embed culturally informed practice across services was advocated.

Programme learning

As well as the learning gleaned from the operational delivery of the EWHF, it is also important to acknowledge the programme level learning. The key aspects include:

- By firstly undertaking research into this topic to use as an evidence base, then recruiting an all-female grants panel to guide the programme and assess applications, the decisions were grounded in an understanding of what works for women and the realities of service provision.
- The programme provided one-to-one support to grantees, facilitated learning events, training and webinars which contributed to building their capacity, confidence and empowerment as well as strengthening networks amongst grantees to work towards a shared vision.
- The programme galvanised support amongst a network of practitioners, services and women with lived experiences to speak up for women and influence decision makers to make progress towards ending women's homelessness.
- While the monitoring data framework developed and administered by Homeless Link generated learning across the programme regarding the progress and challenges experienced by grantees, there were some challenges and gaps in the approach to quantitative data collection which impacted on the usability and robustness of the numbers and types of beneficiaries reached and details of their circumstances.

5. Young, L. and Horvath, T. (2019). Promising practice from the front line: Supporting women who experience homelessness and multiple disadvantage. Homeless Link and Women's Resource Centre (WRC).

Conclusion

The EWHF was an ambitious programme that in the midst of a global pandemic has succeeded in supporting women to improve their housing circumstances and personal situations, share knowledge and skills across sectors, develop partnership approaches to supporting women, enhance the quality and availability of support for women and encourage more people to advocate for women on a local and national scale. Overall, the effort and resilience shown by the grantees and the women they support throughout the life of the EWHF cannot be underestimated. The Fund helped to establish a network and community of people and organisations to work towards ending women's homelessness that hopefully can be expanded and strengthened in the future to meet this shared goal.



Recommendations

The following key recommendations are based on findings from the research. For a full list of recommendations please see the full report.

Policy makers

- Government should develop an evidence-led national strategy that ensures the specific needs of all women experiencing homelessness are met across wider strategies to ending rough sleeping and homelessness.
- Government must incorporate a gendered focus into rough sleeping strategies to ensure that the extent of women's homelessness is effectively counted and recognised.
- Encourage and provide funding for gender and trauma informed training for all statutory staff working in housing and homelessness services that come into contact with women experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- Ensure local authorities develop coordinated strategies to support women experiencing multiple disadvantage, embed gender and trauma informed working across all services, develop coordinated approaches to support, guided by the evidence base, practitioner expertise and experts by experience.
- Enable all migrant women who do not yet have leave to remain to access public funds to access safe and secure housing and prevent human rights violations including destitution, experiences of extreme hardship and risks of abuse and exploitation.

Funders and commissioners

- Fund approaches to ending women's homelessness that are

delivered by women's sector specialist services which are underpinned by an ethos and understanding of women's lived experiences of inequality.

- Ring fence funding in the Rough Sleeper Initiative and other grants programmes for gender specific, women-only emergency accommodation and specialist services for women.
- Fund strategic cross-sector partnership approaches to supporting women as these have the benefit of shared aims and objectives, pooled resources and shared responsibility which ultimately facilitates well-coordinated, accessible support for women.
- Develop decision making processes based on robust research and input from women with lived experience and service delivery practitioners experienced in supporting women experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- Embed good quality data collection frameworks and processes into fund design, working with experienced researchers, to help programmes capture relevant data and measure what matters to evidence the outcomes, impact and effectiveness of their initiatives.

Services supporting women

- Embed co-production throughout delivery to create a learning cycle based on women's lived experiences, providing a wide range of options for women to contribute on an on-going basis. Ensure women with lived experience are in decision making roles.
- Where possible form strategic partnerships between women's sector services, homelessness services and other specialist agencies to develop a coordinated approach to support based on shared aims and objectives and pooled resources.
- Organisations to take the lead responsibility for staff wellbeing; create a culture and ethos where staff wellbeing can be discussed

and supported; and dedicate budget to this area.

- Develop culture informed practice to overcome barriers to accessing services for Black and minoritised women. This includes: providing language support; considering women's cultural and religious requirements and how to appropriately meet these; increasing staff knowledge and capacity to support women who have experienced forced marriage; honour-based violence and FGM - and make links with specialist services to provide women options of support.

Specific recommendations for mainstream mixed sex services

- Ensure that there is a commitment to working from an understanding of women's lived experiences at the strategic level, through management and Board understanding and buy-in to this approach, and the development of strategic plans to support women effectively.
- Incorporate elements of women-only provision in service design to help women feel safer and engage with support.
- Embed roles that are women-specific and held by staff with skills and experience in gender informed working to continue to drive a gender informed approach in the organisation.
- Deliver mandatory training to all staff on gender and trauma informed working alongside training on specialist areas of support need.
- Collaborate with women's specialist services to enhance support and provide options for women.