

# EFFECTIVE ACTION TO END HOMELESSNESS

## **NO SECOND NIGHT OUT** THE ROLE OF DAY CENTRES



# EFFECTIVE ACTION TO END HOMELESSNESS...

## **PRODUCED BY**

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# ADOPTING THE NO SECOND NIGHT OUT STANDARD

## DEVELOPING A SERVICE OFFER FOR THOSE NEW TO THE STREETS: GUIDANCE FOR DAY CENTRES

Day centres work with clients at all stages of housing need and, as a result, are well placed to play a crucial role in the implementation of the Government strategy *Vision for ending rough sleeping: No Second Night Out*. Homeless Link believes that the No Second Night Out (NSNO) vision can be achieved through four pledges:

1. No one new to the streets should spend a second night out
2. No one should make their home on the streets
3. No one should return to the streets once they have been helped off of them, and
4. Ultimately no one should arrive on the streets.

This resource is a supplement to Homeless Link's guidance on the first pledge, recognising the distinctive role that day centres play in the context of homelessness services and the fact that some day centres operate autonomously from the local authority. It is not intended to be a stand-alone resource.

Achieving NSNO will only happen if all agencies work together. Local authorities and other agencies working in homelessness need to understand the role of day centres and ensure these services are included in NSNO planning. Day centres are often remarkably resourceful and creative in their models of working and willingness to implement new projects, and their contribution should not be underestimated.

Day centres vary greatly between services and between locations, and the role of each day centre in NSNO service delivery will be different. Some day centres will have the skills and experience to be the NSNO service delivery lead for their area. Others will need to review their service delivery to ensure their clients benefit from the coordinated approach to support that NSNO represents. This guidance highlights issues for day centre managers to review in order to play a strong role in NSNO.

## DEVELOPING A SERVICE OFFER

Day centres will be the first point of contact for many people arriving on the streets, but are not always part of coordinated multi-agency approaches to ending homelessness in their local area. This may be because of non-statutory funding streams or a difference in ethos between day centre and local authority (e.g. open door rather than targeted). For day centres with low staffing levels simply attending a meeting off-site can be a challenge. Managers need to take a long-term view and balance the disruption to services of being off-site for half a day with the benefits to clients of setting up an NSNO service. To achieve the NSNO pledge day centres need to understand the strategic context in which they operate and where their service fits in, and local authorities need to engage with day centres, finding common ground to support clients even while differences in ethos remain. The day centre's role should at least be complementary and, at best, integral to the new model of service delivery.

### Issues to consider

- Do you attend local multi-agency meetings, e.g. homelessness forums?
- Can multi-agency meetings take place in your building so that you can attend easily?
- What is your day centre's strategic role?
- What role can your service play in the delivery of NSNO?

### EVIDENCING NEED

Day centres, along with other agencies, should be able to evidence the need for an NSNO service by recording details about their clients. Where possible, self-reported data should be supported by confirmation of rough sleeping numbers from outreach (some day centres carry out their own outreach shifts to do this). Not all services are comfortable with recording client data, in case this conflicts with the unconditional nature of an open access drop-in. However where services have introduced data collection that is relevant to meeting clients' needs, with a procedure for informed consent and information for clients on how this data contributes to service delivery, engagement with the service has not suffered as a result. In London the CHAIN<sup>1</sup> system allows information sharing across boroughs, helping to maintain a consistent message and avoid duplication of support. Day centres should make use of available tools to provide more streamlined support and avoid undermining the single service offer if it has been made elsewhere.

### Issues to consider

- Do you know what data to collect and why?
- Are staff able to explain the reasons for and benefits of data collection clearly to clients in order to get informed consent?
- Is there a local information sharing protocol to avoid duplication of client support and promote the single service offer?

### IDENTIFYING NEW ROUGH SLEEPERS

Day centres often have a high volume of clients using their service on any given day. To achieve the no second night out pledge there must be a procedure in place to identify new rough sleepers at first contact. This may mean that some services need to review their approach to ensure that new rough sleepers aren't missed at this crucial early stage. For example, an open access day centre with no initial assessment could introduce an informal welcoming procedure. Day centres often wait until a client's second or third visit before asking about their support needs, but the offer of help at point of entry is not incompatible with a welcoming and non-judgemental environment. While some clients will need time to build trust before disclosing personal information, others will be grateful for the opportunity to explain their situation, and this chance to bring people off the streets must not be missed.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://broadway.jamkit.com/CHAIN/WhatisCHAIN>

### Issues to consider

- Does your service have a means of assessing a client's situation on arrival?
- Do you ask about clients' current/imminent housing situation, and do you record this?
- Do you have space for posters, leaflets and other resources to promote local services, including outreach and NSNO provision?
- Do staff and volunteers have the training and skills to ask direct questions and offer support while also making new clients feel welcome?

### INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

Day centres are good at raising their profile with the public and many have close links with churches, schools and businesses. These links can be used to promote service delivery around no second night out by encouraging the public to refer rough sleepers via the single point of contact. Day centres should advertise this referral route in newsletters, websites and at meetings.

In areas where relations between day centres and the local community are fraught, NSNO can demonstrate that the day centre is taking a positive, active role to end rough sleeping.

### Issues to consider

- How will your service promote NSNO referral route to the public?
- Is your service engaging regularly with the local community to promote its work ending rough sleeping?

### ASSESSING NEEDS QUICKLY AND SAFELY

In some areas, particularly those with few services, day centres will be the most appropriate place to assess clients and there may be scope for extending the service to become an out-of-hours referral hub. However, the presence of a wider client group including more entrenched rough sleepers can create social networks between new and existing rough sleepers which undermine the single service offer by normalising a street lifestyle. A pathway should be agreed so that day centre staff know where to refer new arrivals for rapid assessment.

### Issues to consider

- Is the day centre the best place to base an NSNO service?
- Can the service use different drop-in times or a separate area of the building for new arrivals?
- Are there joint working protocols and referral routes in place so that new arrivals are assessed rapidly?
- Will you need additional resources to get clients from the day centre to an assessment hub?

## ACCESSING EMERGENCY SERVICES

Clients who sleep rough are at risk in terms of their health, mental well-being and personal safety. Day centres that only meet basic needs, such as food and clothing, risk sustaining clients in an unsafe street lifestyle. NSNO services should have capacity to help clients as a matter of urgency, which will often mean meeting immediate housing and healthcare needs. Day centres can establish joint working agreements as part of NSNO services in order to offer emergency access to support, tackling the cause of hardship and not just its effects.

### Issues to consider

- Do staff understand the risks of rough sleeping and are they able to communicate risks and solutions to clients in a supportive and assertive way?
- Are there effective joint working protocols to meet urgent need?
- Does the day centre meet more than basic needs?

## RECONNECTING TO SUPPORT

Social networks are a key element in ending homelessness – clients are more likely to maintain accommodation in an area where they have a social network of friends and family. With few exceptions, local connection rules mean that it is not always possible to house people in the area in which they end up sleeping rough. Day centres play a role in creating social networks, which can be invaluable in keeping some clients in accommodation, but for new arrivals this can offer enough respite for people to choose to continue sleeping rough, perhaps in the hope that a better or different offer will be made in future. For the single service offer to be effective, staff in all homelessness services need to promote the offer consistently. Staff and clients should be made aware of the high risk to health and well-being that is posed by sleeping rough, and the urgency of finding a reasonable accommodation offer.

### Issues to consider

- What is the attitude of staff towards reconnection? If staff don't see its value, they may undermine the NSNO message in the way they describe the service to clients.
- Can your service offer a distinct form of support to new arrivals to avoid being drawn into street activity, such as a dedicated drop-in session or area?
- Does your service have any case studies of successful reconnection that can be used to challenge preconceptions about this approach?