



The Bromley Homeless Shelter

Advice Service Update July 2020

Originally, The Bromley Homeless Shelter (TBHS) was created solely to be a Winter Night Shelter which would take people off the streets and help them survive the cold weather. It then evolved to include an Advice Service to help our guests. The Advice Service further evolved to become a year round operation with a professional worker, Kim Sutton, supported by several volunteers. This expanded service was not limited to our guests but to anyone concerned about their housing needs.

During the current coronavirus pandemic, many of our guests and other homeless people in Bromley have been housed by the government's "Everybody in" programme. However, this has left many of these people in isolation and in circumstances with which they are unfamiliar. Our Advice Service has continued to evolve by visiting with food and, more importantly, by giving moral support. Feeling valued has a positive effect on their outlook in life. As an example, despite the current high unemployment rate, one couple that the Advice Service were supporting have both taken the initiative and found full-time work.

The Advice Service is a critical part of TBHS and we believe this service will become increasingly important in the future and for this reason have asked Kim to give more details about its work.

Report by Kim Sutton

Meet the Team

Kim Sutton, Senior Adviser, Advocate and mediator
Sarah Whitelaw, Volunteer Adviser & Advocate
Pam Remon, Volunteer Adviser & Advocate
Steven Bishop, Volunteer Door Security
Tessa Westgate, Volunteer Welcome Reception

A Day in the life of the Advice Service...

10 am (First clients will come in) Depending on the time of year and if the Shelter is in operation, we will see between 5-10 clients every Tuesday and Thursday.

We will hand out between 4 & 10 Trussell Trust Food Vouchers every Tuesday & Thursday. The BHS Shelter Advice Service is the Trussell Trust's largest users of vouchers for the Bromley area.

Our clients vary from rough sleepers, sofa surfers, people with eviction notices, people who are isolated due to mental health issues etc. We have both walk-ins and appointments.

We will work until 1pm when I insist that my volunteers take a 45min break; it also gives me time to debrief with all them about their day and if they are concerned about anything.

We then work with clients until 4pm when the volunteers go home.

During the last Winter Night Shelter opening, a GP drop-in service was started for Thursday evenings. I and Tessa would stay until at least 7pm on those days.

Other Services – Pre Covid-19

In addition to our advice and case work we also provided these services for our clients:

TBHS Advice Food Bank

Open every Tue & Thurs. This was started in 2018 because the Trussell Trust have a 3-voucher limit for any crisis. This impacts on those that have addictions and those that are homeless. Many of the ex-guests have and still use this service. Our foods and essentials are now supplied by Sainsbury's Beckenham, which Stephen Bishop picks up once a month in his truck.

TBHS Food & Drink Service

Open every Tues & Thurs. This was started in 2018, because those coming in during the winter were cold and hungry. We offer hot tea, coffee and soup that is warmed up using our microwave. During lockdown, we gave our microwave to a client who had no means of heating food.

Tenancy Support and Mediation (Kim Sutton is a trained mediator)

This was started when we were not getting the Public Rental Sector landlords coming to us with properties. As a trained mediator Kim is able to offer this as part of the clients signing up with the PRS Landlord. This has now been offered out to social landlords and has been accepted by A2 dominion who we have worked with on several cases over the last year. It has also been accessed by statutory services such as Complex Care Team in Bromley where we stopped the eviction of a vulnerable person.

Immigration Solicitor

We have an immigration solicitor working with us now: Sandip Basu from SB Immigration.

Our Partnerships - Pre Covid-19

Bromley Borough Food Bank

2018-20 we have issued 391 vouchers

GP Outreach Service with The Cator Medical Practice every last Tuesday of the month.

This was started in 2019 as we could see the negative impact of health inequality for the homeless and difficulty gaining access to a GP. Clients can be seen by a GP & one of the practice nurses; usually Michelle will come along to do assessments. They will sign homeless clients up for their practice straight away. This means that clients that had previously been unable to gain access to a GP and other services now can. This has had a positive impact on a number of clients and in one case prevented a potential double amputation.

Department of Work and Pensions' Homeless Outreach Service with Gina Hutchinson-Nott.

This was started in 2017. We found that we were spending too much time in phone calls to the DWP and needed a direct contact. We now have that with Gina, who will return calls and emails within hours. She does a drop-in service with us once a month and will come into the United Reformed Church (URC) where we are based to see clients. She has access to all their benefit details and can get decisions or information while the client is with her.

London Borough of Bromley Outreach Housing Service with Faye Chuter.

This was started because we were spending too much time on the telephone or down at the Housing Options office at the Civic Centre. This has been vital in our expansion. It allows the homeless to access a housing officer without having to go to what some of them describe as an intimidating unit. This has also been excellent for those that have mental health or addiction issues as they feel supported as we are there with them if they need it. Faye came in every Thursday between 12-3 to see people who have homelessness or housing issues.

Community Counselling with BCCS (Bromley Community Counselling Services)

This is still in its infancy, but we have been approached by BCCS and have agreed a partnership with them to provide counselling services to our clients. We hope that this will commence with the lifting of lockdown restrictions and services getting back to face to face appointments. Meanwhile, BCCS will provide telephone counselling.

Our support now

As lockdown eases we are back working Tues & Thurs at the URC. This has had a positive impact on our clients as many are all coming back to service and we are booked up with appointments and new people that are emerging. We are able to continue with our Advice and Advocacy we are getting people coming from different boroughs for help. Our Food Bank is now being supported by Sainsburys West Wickham. This has been a much needed addition to our partnership teams. We have issued many food parcels since we started back up to two days a week. Our tea and coffee service is now being offered in take away cups but still needed and much needed social distanced chat over a cuppa. Our GP Service will be back as soon as it is possible for them to be here and safely. They have approached the service about a start back date and this is still in discussion. Our Counselling Partnership with BCCS has gone a stage further and funding has been applied for - we will know the outcome of that at a later date.

The future

No doubt you have been wondering what the future of The Bromley Homeless Shelter (TBHS) will be due to the impact of the Covid-19 virus. The simple answer is that we do not know; however, the trustees are looking at all future options and engaging with Housing Justice and other organisations to try and find the answer. TBHS's work will adapt to suit the future needs of the homeless. A look at the past shows how we constantly change our work to support in the best way possible the needs of the people we serve.