

Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

CASE STUDY: Out of Area Accommodation

Background

Sarah* is known to have been involved with sex work from a young age and has a history of substance and alcohol use. Sarah has been to prison a number of times for committing petty crime to fund her addictions resulting in a Community Behavior Order being put in place which prevents her visiting the majority of shops in the city. Sarah was placed in the care system where she went on to have a number of unhealthy relationships with men who continued to exploit her.

Sarah has lived in lots of supported accommodation in the city from which she has been evicted, in several cases leading to a lifetime ban, usually for the use of 'monkey dust'. As a result Sarah needs help to find somewhere to live.

At the point of referral to Changing Futures Sarah was street homeless and in the mindset that going back to prison would be preferable to the situation she was experiencing.

Sarah states all she ever wanted is to have a proper relationship with her daughter who is currently in foster care, or put simply to be a normal mum.

Summary of barriers to be addressed

- Suitable housing is needed
- Sarah has a lifetime ban from housing providers in the city
- Support needed to address substance use
- Support / Therapy needed around childhood trauma
- Support to reconnect with family
- Support needed with welfare benefits

What we did

Post referral Sarah's coordinator supported her into a women's only service, however this did not last very long due to use of 'monkey dust' and Sarah was issued a notice to quit her tenancy at the beginning of the year, with the expectation to leave immediately. Sarah's service coordinator and Sarah wrote a letter of appeal to ask for a seven day extension to allow time to find alternative accommodation, and subsequently requested to meet with the operational manager of the service who agreed that this was reasonable.

Sarah's service coordinator discussed with Sarah what her options were and made multiple referrals to supported accommodation locally, however these were refused. These decisions were challenged but the outcome remained the same due to her monkey dust use and chaotic behavior. The local authority was contacted to ask for help however temporary accommodation in a hotel wasn't an option as Sarah was already barred from all the hotels they use.

At Sarah's request her service coordinator then asked for a referral to a female only accommodation provider out of area. All our risk information and wellbeing assessments were forwarded and a provider in another city agreed to house Sarah the same day with the understanding that the correct support is put in place to meet Sarah's needs.

Obviously Sarah was anxious and tentative about this but after reassurance from her service coordinator she decided it was the only option, and was preferable to rough sleep. The local authority provided transport for Sarah to travel to her new accommodation and her service coordinator went with her to help settle her in, returning to Stoke on the train afterwards.

Despite moving to another city Changing Futures Stoke continued to have contact and provide support to Sarah. We worked closely with her local job center who have a family support officer that has taken on Sarah's case. We also attended a number of complex needs case conferences to explore how Sarah can best be supported in her new home, leading to measures being put in place to prevent sanctions being taken from her benefits.

We spoke with the closest Changing Futures programme to where Sarah now lives however this was some distance away from Sarah's new home and were unable to help. The Integrated Offender Management have been supporting Sarah remotely until she can be picked up by the relevant team locally to her, however there was skepticism about doing this until she was settled there for a period of time as there were concerns Sarah may return to Stoke.

Outcome

Sarah is now housed in semi supported accommodation in another city, although she was initially reluctant to explore this avenue due to it being a significant distance away from her family, friends and acquaintances. So far this has been the longest tenancy Sarah has sustained outside of being in prison.

Sarah has stopped sex working and using monkey dust, however is using a small amount of heroin which she is receiving support for from a drug service. Sarah engages with her drugs councilor and regularly attends talking therapies to address childhood traumas.

Sarah is now volunteering with her housing provider helping to maintain their other properties for other tenants.

Since relocating Sarah has been back to the Stoke to visit her family and has not been tempted to use monkey dust.

Sarah has started that she is very grateful for the support received from the Changing Futures programme and is grateful that Changing Futures believed in her when others may not have.

Without the intervention of Changing Futures Sarah would likely have continued in the same cycle of being street homeless, committing crime and breaching her Community Behavior Order, which would lead to her being recalled to prison and released again to no fixed abode. This is a cycle that could have repeated over and over.

Learning

- In some instances relocating to another city can result in a positive outcome for our customers.
- Communication with customers and services can continue, using technology if necessary, even after customers have moved away, providing continuity and improving the likelihood of a positive transition.
- By providing continuity of support it is possible to prevent customers falling into repeating cycles of negative behavior.
- By breaking the cycle of being recalled to prison for petty crime and being released to No Fixed Abode this has likely led to a significant cost saving to blue light services.

*Name has been changed to provide anonymity