

Case Study Glow Arson

Glow's Changing Futures Case Co-ordinator Kath has supported 57-year-old Claire* since she was first referred to Changing Futures earlier this year.

Claire has a history of sex work and was financially exploited by intimate partners due to the money that she made. She has also experienced mental health problems, domestic abuse, sexual assault, drug addiction and alcoholism.

Twenty years ago Claire started taking heroin and began rough sleeping and sofa surfing. This continued until she secured a flat in Stoke-on-Trent six years ago. For six years she maintained her tenancy, but had disagreements with her landlord who disconnected the lights in her flat. She lived in darkness for several years, using candles for light.

This year, a fire at her flat meant that she had to leave and was charged with arson. She's currently on bail and must present at the police station twice a week until her court date.

Case Co-ordinator Kath has faced different barriers since working with Claire, which she is working hard to overcome through the Changing Futures project.

The first was her limited engagement at the start of her time with Changing Futures. When Kath first started working with Claire, it was over a month before she was able to meet her in-person. Claire was difficult to reach and would change her mobile phone every few days because she thought someone was tampering with it and tracking her.

Kath worked hard to build trust with Claire. This meant that when she secured a phone from Tesco's charity, she gave it to her and convinced her that no one could tamper with it. The phone was pre-loaded with three months of calls, texts and data. Claire has kept the phone – without changing the number – for a number of weeks now.

Another barrier that Kath has faced when working with Claire is her housing situation. After leaving her flat, Claire was staying at the North Staffs Hotel. She didn't stay for long as she had an argument with another resident and was asked to leave.

From there, she began sofa surfing again and stayed with a man who charged her £40 a day to live with him. Claire paid the money because she didn't want to be on the streets again. During this period of sofa surfing and rough sleeping, Claire was assaulted in a tent by another rough sleeper. She got in touch with Kath and started to accept support.

Kath met with Claire and described her as being in a 'terrible state'. She faces physical health problems – including asthma – and had several marks on her body from previous assaults and rapes.

The following day, Kath was contacted by Swan Bank Church. Claire had been found outside the church, semi-naked and in a 'dazed state'. The church found her some clothes and Kath discovered that she wasn't fully dressed because of her incontinence. Claire only knows if she needs to urinate a few seconds before she does so.

To make sure she was safe, Kath secured her a room at the George Hotel, paid for by Changing Futures. It was thought that the council's housing team still had some duty towards supporting Claire, but they have since refused this altogether. This has become a barrier to finding her somewhere more long-term to stay.

Another barrier between Claire and housing is her arson charge. Local accommodation schemes – including Snowhill, Hope Street and the Lyme Trust – are unable to accept her as a resident due to the charge. Kath said that the barrier of arson is a systematic issue that she isn't able to change in her day-to-day role. There are discussions taking place between the police, housing teams and fire service around arson charges and housing.

Claire was only at the George Hotel for a short period of time. She fell asleep with hair dye on and caused damage to the pillow and towel in the room. Changing Futures covered the cost of damages so that she could stay for a few more days. Soon after, Claire experienced racism from another resident. She left and moved to the Crown Hotel in Longton, where she has been ever since.

Another barrier to Claire's progress has been her bail conditions of presenting twice a week at the police station. She had been presenting consistently until a couple of weeks ago. Kath said that Claire was unwell over the weekend and when it came to her presenting on the Monday, she slept in until 7pm and missed her appointment. Kath tried to encourage Claire to go to the station the next day and explain the situation, but she wouldn't. When she finally went to the police station on the following Friday, she was arrested.

While Claire was in the custody suite, Kath advocated for her with the duty sergeant. She said that Claire had never breached her bail conditions or failed to present until that week. Kath explained Claire's illness and said that rough sleeping had impacted her both physically and mentally. After this, the duty sergeant decided to drop the charges.

Another barrier that Kath faces with Claire is her not seeking medical attention. Kath only found out recently about Claire's asthma and discovered that she hadn't had her inhaler for several months. Kath encouraged Claire to see a doctor or go to the walk-in centre, but she said no. Kath even offered to wait with her, no matter how long that might take.

However, before her arrest on the Friday at the police station, Claire went to the Brighter Futures healthcare van at the Crown Hotel. She was checked over by the nurse who said there was no infection on her lung but advised her to make an appointment with a GP. Kath took Claire to a local surgery where she made an appointment for the following week.

Claire received her PIP payment the following Monday and was under the influence, so Kath couldn't get hold of her for the rest of that week. This meant that she missed her appointment. Despite this, Kath believes that going to the healthcare van was a huge step forward for Claire. Kath said that on paper it might appear that Claire's progress is always undermined by something negative immediately afterwards. A lot of it could be described as 'two steps forward, one step back,' but that's still one step forward from where Claire originally was.

At the moment, Claire feels safe in the Crown Hotel. Kath has noticed a difference in her as she feels like she has somewhere to go home to. She's currently waiting for her court date and Kath is working with other services to secure her somewhere to live. This has been challenging due to the council refusing housing duty and Claire's arson charge.

Kath said that Changing Futures is all about breaking down barriers and making real, lasting change. However, some of these changes aren't quick fixes. They are big, systematic changes that are out of Kath's control and take much longer to solve.

Without Changing Futures paying for Claire's stay in the Crown Hotel, Claire would be back on the streets and exposed to everything she faced before Changing Futures stepped in earlier this year. Kath will continue to work with Claire to support her through her court case and find her somewhere safe to stay.

*name changed