



Reflections
from the Streets
of Preston

The Work of Soup Kitchens and Drop in Centres
in the city of Preston

Greg Smith
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Action Research : What we did.

Visits to all the drop in centres and soup kitchens

Focus groups and feedback sessions with volunteers

Ongoing involvement with service users and colleagues in Homeless Forum

Questions and Issues (1)

Who is being served (and missed)?

- Maybe 50-70 people regularly use one or more of the centres plus many more occasional or one off visitors
- Not all are homeless, still less are rough sleepers, but all have needs
- Some homeless or vulnerable people avoid soup kitchens.

Level of complex needs: It's not just housing.

Mixture of poverty, addictions, health, Mental health, low basic skills, family and relationship problems

Questions and Issues (2)

Duplication of services:

Something on already every day/night, some nights two; Are all these needed?

Information Circulation:

- are volunteers aware of other services and their role?
- are we passing on sound advice and information to homeless people?
- are we using the forum Website?
- are we able to share concerns about high risk situations?

Questions and Issues (3)

What is the aim...?

Do you have a clear vision and strategy to achieve it?

What counts as success?

- 1 person housed?
- 1 person saved?
- everybody you see helped in some way

Do soup kitchens perpetuate homelessness. and social exclusion.?

Are we just helping folk to get by, rather than helping them change / move a step forward

Practical Issues

Health and safety issues

- food
- fire and other emergencies
- safe operating environment

Risk management

- managing aggression
- children and other vulnerable people
- risk from staff / volunteers (CRB checks etc.)

Recommendations to discuss (1)

all should become aware of and make known a simple message that service users who want to get their problems sorted out need to go as soon as possible to one of the advice points...

either Foxtan Community café

or for people aged 25 or under to Barnardos Moving On project @Urban Exchange

Recommendations to discuss (2)

We would recommend that those running soup kitchens etc. make themselves more familiar with the overall homelessness and rough sleeping strategies and reflect on their place within this.

Also it is important that their work is seen as broader than the specific issue of homelessness and rough sleeping and is seen as a wider contribution to other social agendas, for example strategies for wellbeing, alcohol harm reduction and mental health and community safety.

Recommendations to discuss (3)

Groups could also be encouraged and supported if someone on behalf of the homeless forum could regularly keep in touch, affirm their efforts and advise the organisers of soup kitchens about current issues and good practice. This has begun to happen through our project but needs someone to be designated as responsible if it is to be sustained.

On the other hand independence needs to be maintained for example on issues of religious ethos, how to ration handouts and charging policy.

Recommendations to discuss (4)

Sharing Resources and Expertise:

We need a way to recruit and channel suitable volunteers and resources to particular centres and sessions.

The Preston Homeless forum network is well positioned to find funding and expertise to offer some basic training for volunteers and should be encouraged to do so.

Recommendations to discuss (5)

consultation processes with homeless people continue to be developed, and that the network explores some pilot schemes around greater participation of service users in the work of the soup kitchens

explorations about ideas for additional services or activities at or alongside soup kitchens

Links should be made with other potential partners such as drugs and alcohol services and arts and sports groups and funding streams to support such activities could be money well spent.