

Outreach Essentials Bitesize E-Learning

Timely, purposeful and barrier-free contact and support

There is no one-size fits all approach to outreach. Sometimes it can depend on the geography of an area, for example is it predominantly urban, or very rural? Is a gendered approach to outreach needed to ensure that women who are rough sleeping in your area can be found and helped? Or do people from culturally or racially minoritised backgrounds have particular needs when it comes to outreach? Whatever the case, your approach to contacting people needs to be timely, and the support you provide purposeful. In this short video, we'll look at what that means.

Outreach workers are experts in finding those in need and to do so they cultivate networks of engaged local organisations or individuals so that they can always be aware of who needs help and where they are sleeping rough.

In urban areas your networks could include local residents, the police, health service workers, local store managers or town centre management teams, train and bus station staff, park wardens, day centre staff, community groups, women's groups, faith groups, charities and other small businesses.

In rural areas, your network could also include, for example, farm workers, factory workers, rural residents, landowners, forest rangers and national parks wardens, hotel and pub managers and parish councils.

All these relationships can be built on a one to one basis or as part of your regular homelessness action group or rough sleeping forum, where each member is an extra set of eyes and ears in the community and they can let you know about anyone sleeping rough, that you might not otherwise have been aware of.

On a practical level, it is important that everyone involved in your network knows how to pass on information about someone sleeping rough. For example, can they call or email the outreach team directly, or should they use the [Streetlink](#) referral app? And is everyone aware of the [What3words](#) app, which is especially useful for precisely mapping where people are sleeping rough in rural or other hard to describe locations.

Once you've been made aware of someone sleeping rough in your area, finding and helping that person in a timely way relies on carrying out regular outreach

shifts. The routes you're going to cover should be planned in advance and based on the intelligence you have gathered from your local partners and referral mechanisms. But you should also cover any known hotspots and other sleeping sites.

When you find someone sleeping rough, it's essential you build a relationship with them at their speed, not yours. You might have suitable accommodation you can take this person to right away, but they might not feel comfortable accepting help from you until you have built up a rapport with them. This could be over the course of a few visits or even a number of months. Being purposeful can also mean being patient.

In many areas there is a verification process. This usually means that someone has to be seen by an outreach worker using their sleep site in order for someone to be offered certain services. The benefit of verification is that resources can be targeted at those most in need of them. However, it can also mean that people can get missed. For example, think about someone who, for their safety, is using a sleep site that is tucked away in a wooded location, a locked park or a derelict building and difficult for an outreach team to get to, but regularly goes to a day centre to shower, get something to eat or speak to the support staff there. Could an evidence-based approach be taken, and they be verified as a rough sleeper on the balance of probability. This can be especially helpful for women as strict verification requirements do not reflect that women are more likely to experience transitory patterns of homelessness and bed down in hidden locations during the day but may use women's centres or other gender-based services where they have been able to build a relationship of trust with a specialist support worker.

You should also think about carrying out joint shifts with other agencies, for example the police or park wardens to cover less accessible places, or specialist nurses to help with the physical or mental health support needs of someone you're working with who feels unable to go to a building-based health service at that time. But do beware of how many people are in your group on such shifts and how you approach sleep sites so that you don't frighten anyone.

Supporting people means that once someone is located their needs are assessed and a support pathway is established. To do this, an outreach worker needs thorough knowledge of the accommodation and support services available in their area and how they are accessed. For example, does your team have a list or directory of services and the referral criteria for each one? It can be very frustrating and retraumatising for the people you are working with to have to

explain time and again their circumstances and the things that have happened to them, so it is crucial you only ask someone sleeping rough to complete referrals for the organisations that are appropriate to their needs. Properly supporting people also means thinking about their immediate needs. It can take time for referrals to be processed and a support plans to be put in place, so it is important to think about any safeguarding concerns or other vulnerabilities that need to be addressed more quickly. This could be as simple as offering your clients Severe Weather Emergency Provision accommodation if it is available, or your client has physical or mental health support needs which meant they are in priority need and should be offered temporary accommodation. An immediate need might also be language interpretation for somebody for whom English is not their first language. So that they can fully understand who you are and what you are offering to help them with, and so that you can understand their linguistic and cultural needs.

Self-guided activities

Use the following self-guided activities to think about your network or referrers and local partners. These activities can be done individually or with colleagues, for example in a team meeting.

First, think about your network of referrers and local partners. Who are they? How do you maintain your relationships with them? Who else could you invite to come into your network? What referral tools do you provide for them to tell you about they know who are sleeping rough?

Secondly, do you have a directory or a list of projects to refer or signpost rough sleepers to? Are you clear on their referral criteria and how to refer somebody into them? Whose job is it to keep your directory up to date?

And, lastly, think about your processes and ways of working. Do you have specific guidance of finding and working with marginalised and minoritised people, such as women and people for whom English is not their first language?

Suggested Actions

Once you've thought about these, some suggested actions would be to nominate someone in your team to keep a list of a map of local partners up to date. Set up activities to grow your network and involve the whole team in building those relationships. Think about how you will measure the success of this activity. And, finally, as a team, talk about your verification process. Can it be altered to make it more inclusive?