

Update for the Beer-Harris Memorial Trust, July 2024

“Some places were filthy, blood-stained walls....Welcome pack stipulated ‘no weapons allowed’, ‘It’s...a nightmare. The house has cockroaches, mice...it is leaking, damp...we sleep on the ground.” “I have attempted suicide in the past. In temporary accommodation [TA], I used to have a noose next to my bed, like a comfort blanket, if things got really bad and I couldn’t cope.” “I barely sleep as my head does overtime”. “The nights were the worst as you would hear people walking past your room to get to the bathroom and quite often your door would be tried. When that was not happening, a resident with PTSD would be screaming and shouting in his nightmares”. [The shocking reality of living in TA]

In December 2023, the Beer-Harris Memorial Trust generously donated £2,500 to Justlife’s work in Brighton, focusing on the support we provide to TA residents who are experiencing mental health challenges. It was brilliant to have this donated through the Big Give campaign as it meant it was doubled! Thank you for your flexibility to do this. This donation has directly supported us to:

- **Continue our Health Engagement work in Brighton:**

This project continues to improve the mental and physical health of people experiencing temporary accommodation and reduces hospital admissions by supporting people to engage with health services. Since your donation, we have supported 108 people placed in TA, enabling them to live healthier, happier and safer lives. Of those supported, 86% reported experiencing mental ill-health.

- **Continue offering our Social Connection Project in Brighton,** which combats loneliness by matching TA residents with local people in befriending

relationships, organising community activities, and hosting a peer support group. Over the last year, the project has continued to go from strength to strength. We currently have 21 befriending relationships and 30 people attending the Peer Support Groups and wellbeing activities. We continue to see positive outcomes - from the people engaging in the project, 90% felt less lonely and isolated and 81% felt their mental health had improved due their involvement in the project.



The impact of this work on individuals with mental health issues can be seen in the following case studies:

Lucy arrived in Brighton after fleeing her hometown - her ex-partner there had tried to kill her, and she had been left with life-changing injuries. Lucy had a history of childhood abuse, and for most of her life, she had gone from one exploitative situation to another. She ended up rough sleeping with a new abusive partner; Lucy was referred to Justlife after she was hospitalised after a particularly violent assault. Following this, Lucy was placed directly into emergency accommodation and referred to Justlife. When we met her, Lucy was severely underweight, drinking heavily, using crack, had difficulty sleeping due to flashbacks and had a history of self-harm and suicide attempts. Lucy also struggled to stay inside for long because she felt trapped (one past abusive partner had kept her hostage). Justlife has supported Lucy over the last four years, during which time she was moved nine times between different TA placements. Lucy’s placements sometimes failed e.g. due to the complexity of her needs or because she moved to live with a new partner. Each time Lucy moved into TA, we advocated for accommodation that would meet Lucy’s needs (e.g. secure, self-contained and accessible due to her reduced mobility) and helped her move each time, ensured on-site staff knew how to work with Lucy in a trauma-informed way, and helped Lucy personalise her room and make it feel like her space. We also monitored Lucy’s whereabouts as best as we could when she moved out of accommodation or



A Brighton Up Brighton session, which is our gardening for wellbeing project led by people experiencing homelessness, focusing on neglected areas of Brighton and Hove

went missing, liaising with the police (who often found Lucy in unsafe situations) and responding to Lucy's out-of-hours calls (as she would call us as she did not have confidence in the police). On one occasion, Lucy was raped by two of her ex's associates, and her Justlife support worker went to the hospital with Lucy. To try and keep Lucy safe, we worked with her around personal safety and healthy relationships. We discussed early warning signs, controlling behaviour and safety planning. We also ensured Lucy carried a charged phone, with police on speed dial and a personal alarm. We referred Lucy to an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor at our partner Rise, for further advice. As a result, Lucy is now avoiding dangerous situations, and has secured a restraining order against her abusive ex-partner. Lucy now calls the police for herself if she needs to. We also referred Lucy to mental health services, where she was diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and Complex PTSD. We supported Lucy to build rapport with her Community Psychiatric Nurse, attend numerous health appointments and to keep taking her medication. We also discussed the reasons behind Lucy's eating disorder and identified that it was because an ex-partner had controlled what she ate. This realisation helped Lucy want to make changes. With our support, Lucy secured a referral to a dietitian, who provided support around Lucy's eating. Positive engagement with health services has built Lucy's confidence to engage with other services on her own e.g. sexual health and the dentist. Now, 4 years on, Lucy uses coping strategies to deal with flashbacks, is dissociating less often and is having far fewer mental health crises. Lucy has taken on the responsibility managing her medications. She has a much healthier weight, takes pride in cooking healthy meals and has stopped drinking. She is also engaging with substance misuse service to address her crack use. We helped Lucy to secure the benefits she was entitled to, including the full rate of Personal Independence Payment. Today, Lucy is living sustainably in supported accommodation, she loves doing art and redecorating her room. She is not in an abusive relationship, has found her voice, has local support (including many female friends) and is able to advocate herself for the support she needs. Lucy is very proud of how far she has come.

"I have high-functioning autism, depression, anxiety and binge-eating disorder. I've recently been matched by the Social Connections Project with the amazing Clem and already feel very lucky to have her in my life. To me having Clem as my befriender means having an empathetic, listening ear, who can use her own experiences to make suggestions on how to improve my situation. We have meaningful conversations that I would be too anxious to have in a group situation, which helps me to offload some of my troubles, better understand the neurotypical world, improve my social skills and realise when I need to be kinder to myself.



Meeting Clem each week gets me out of my challenging accommodation situation and pushes me to get outside when depression doesn't want me to. Also, for one hour a week I don't obsess about food. I've asked Clem to find me opportunities to move more and try activities and go places that I'd be reluctant to do and go to by myself. The fact that Clem is not paid means she genuinely wants to be there, but her actions show me this anyway and already feel like I can trust her, which is rare for me."

Imani grew up care and was sexually abused as a child. She has no living family. Imani had recently got married, but it turned out her husband had married her for a visa, and they started divorcing just 2 months after getting married. Through this process, Imani had lost all her money and become suicidal. As a result, she spent time in hospital due to depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. She also lost her job as a carer due to her mental health issues. On discharge from hospital, Imani was moved into emergency accommodation in Brighton. However, her Housing Officer had decided that she was not owed a housing duty, and Imani was faced with being street homeless, which was worsening her mental health and meant she was struggling to sleep. A council Welfare Officer referred Imani to Justlife, and we also put Imani in contact with another local organisation, Lawstop. Lawstop focused on ensuring Imani wasn't made street homeless, by challenging the local councils' decision, filling in paperwork and attending meetings. This resulted in the council's decision being overturned, and Brighton accepted they owed Imani full housing duty. Alongside this, Justlife supported Imani to help bid for local accommodation, and once Imani was allocated a flat, assisted Imani with the paperwork, moving in, getting settled (including registering with a new GP), and (in partnership with Southdown Resettlement Service) applying for funding for carpets, fridge, cooker and furniture for her new home. We also supported Imani to access the

benefits she was entitled to and access her Leaving Care Fund. Imani was also in debt, so we referred her to Money Advice Line, worked with her to enable her to manage her finances and set up her Council tax. To help her pay off her debts, we referred Imani to a local food bank and supported her to do food shopping on a budget. Once Imani was settled in her new home, we referred Imani to our Social Connection Project where Imani was matched with a local befriender and attended social groups and workshops. Imani didn't have a wide social network in Brighton, so this gave her the opportunity to meet new people and make friends. As her mental health improved, Imani started considering her future. She had dreams of becoming a personal trainer, so we supported her to successfully apply for a course at Brighton University to become a personal trainer and helped Imani with her travel costs. Imani is feeling much more positive about the future and is grateful for Justlife's support "fighting her corner", meaning she did not feel so alone.

Alongside this and drawing on knowledge/experience from our frontline work in Brighton, our **Research and Policy team** works to improve experiences of TA nationally, identifying and advocating for much needed long-term solutions to hidden homelessness. This has included continuing to act as co-secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Households in Temporary Accommodation (APPGTA) to enable us to secure government support for changes to national policy and practice. We have had a major success in the last few months - thanks to our campaign alongside the APPGTA to ensure temporary accommodation is safer for households with babies, the Minister of Housing and Homelessness changed the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities to state that cots should be provided to every child under two in temporary accommodation, ensuring safer sleep arrangements are in place. This is an important and lifesaving change – earlier this year, new child mortality data showed that temporary accommodation has contributed to the deaths of 55 children in England since 2019.



The APPGTA exhibition on families in TA held recently in the House of Commons

We hope this update gives you a good overview of how the Beer-Harris Memorial Trust's kind support has enabled us to continue to provide high-quality community-based support for people experiencing homelessness and mental health issues in Brighton. However, if you have any questions, or would like any further information, please let us know. Finally, thank you again for your support, it is really much appreciated.