



Out of Area Health Engagement Worker Evaluation

“Just the fact of
having her
made my
anxiety less”

Introduction

The Out of Area Health Engagement Worker (OOA HEW) role was established in agreement between Justlife and Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness being placed by BHCC outside the city of Brighton and Hove in neighbouring East Sussex.

The purpose and overview of this role from the contract was stated to be:

“An Out of Area Health Engagement Worker to work with people with health needs and a history of rough sleeping who have been placed out of Brighton & Hove in emergency accommodation. The postholder will work in partnership with the Southdown In-reach Workers, Brighton & Hove City Council Welfare Officers and the Brighton & Hove City Council Emergency Placement Team to identify people who may need support with health engagement. The postholder will work to ensure people are engaged with health services and where necessary support them to return to Brighton & Hove by following the Out of Area Placement policy.”

One worker was employed by Justlife in July 2021, Izzy Carpenter, full time on a one-year contract. During this year, Izzy has worked with a total of 19 clients, supporting them in many different ways. Regardless of the location of the accommodation, the clients have a variety of needs, depending on their health and mental health status, disability, substance misuse, trauma and their prior experience with services.

The idea behind establishing this role was that people experiencing homelessness, who are placed out of Brighton, have the same needs as those placed within the city but lose much needed support through physical distance. Through the OOA HEW, at least some of that support would continue.

For this report, we interviewed eight of Izzy’s clients to hear from them what their experiences were of being placed out of area, and what difference having Izzy made to them.

03

The practice of sending people ‘Out of Area’

04

The clients

05

What the interviewees said about being placed OOA

10

What Izzy was able to do

11

Conclusion

The pictures used in this report do not represent the people who were interviewed as part of this research.



The practice of sending people 'Out of Area'

Like other Local Authorities, Brighton & Hove places some of the individuals experiencing homelessness, to whom they have a duty of care, out of Brighton. This practice, known as out of area placements (OOA), has come about as the demands on temporary accommodation (TA) is increasing beyond capacity within the city.

Seven out of eight clients interviewed for this report were placed in Peacehaven, Newhaven and Eastbourne respectively, between 10 and 31 km from Brighton. One remained in Brighton. Of the seven individuals interviewed who were placed OOA, five have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder); the remaining two have Asperger's and suspected autism. One attempted suicide and one was sexually assaulted. Most of the clients interviewed for this report told us they were given very little notice and no choice.

It is not clear how the decision is made as to who should be placed OOA, but it is the official line that disruption caused to employment, education or caring arrangements, access to medical facilities and proximity to other amenities should be taken into consideration, as should other factors raised by the client. *

*Allocation of Temporary Accommodation Policy.pdf (brighton-hove.gov.uk)

The clients

Izzy worked with 19 clients over the year. Of the 19 clients, 13 were male (69%) and 6 were female (31%). This is in line with the general gender representation among Justlife's clients in Brighton. Most of the clients were white British (12). The remaining six clients identified as white Irish (2), white other (1), Asian Bangladeshi (1), North African (1), black Caribbean (1) and black Fijian (1).

17 of Izzy's clients had been placed out of area:

- Ten were placed in Eastbourne, 31 km from Brighton. By bus, the journey takes between one and a half hour and one hour 45 minutes, depending on the time of day. The train journey is 41 minutes.
- Four clients were placed in Newhaven, 14 km east of Brighton along the seafront. By bus, the journey takes between 28 and 42 minutes to get into central Brighton.
- Three were placed in Peacehaven, 10km east of Brighton, a 20-minute bus ride away from the centre of town.

Eight of these clients were supported to move back into Brighton by Izzy. The average time spent OOA from the time Izzy started working with them, to the time the move was facilitated, was 54 days.

Eight of Izzy's clients remain OOA. Two of the clients Izzy worked with were never placed out of Brighton, and one made it back to Brighton before Izzy was able to start working with him. We spoke to eight of the clients to get a sense of the stories behind these numbers.





What the interviewees said about being placed OOA

“The place was really bad for my asthma. To be honest, all of the temporary accommodation, they’re not suitable for me”

Seven out of eight interviewees struggled with life in temporary accommodation, regardless of the location, mentioning the chaotic environment, intimidation from other residents, easy exposure to drugs, violent and sexual assaults. One interviewee, who remained in Brighton, found TA unsuitable for his disability, but otherwise had no complaints.

In addition to the general strain of life in TA, four of the seven individuals placed out of Brighton found that being placed away from their hometown and known environment made life harder still.

Being far from the support of family, friends and services

“I haven’t got any links in Eastbourne”

Being far from the support of friends, family and trusted support services came up as the biggest concern, leaving people lonely, isolated and struggling with mental health in an unfamiliar environment. The journey to see family was prohibitively expensive for some, while others found it difficult for health reasons.

“It’s a 16-mile ride by bus for me to get to see my son. Until I got my bus pass it was costing me an absolute fortune.”

“They sent me out of that place, over here into a house that has random strangers, absolutely broken with no friends, and I’ve just been struggling every day just to keep going.”

“all my friends, all my support network is down here, so when they put me out of area, I didn’t have anything, or anyone.”

“I’ve lost contact with a lot of people, physically. I still send messages on Instagram and stuff. I kinda got really isolated during this whole thing”

“I’m far away from everything I know. My son is over this way” [Interview conducted in Brighton]

Of the three that didn’t have a problem with the OOA placement, two said it brought them closer to family (they were placed in Peacehaven). One had a sister up the road, and the other had children in Woodingdean in the east of Brighton, not far from where Peacehave begins.

In addition to family and friends, people were struggling to access much needed support services such as GPs and other health appointments, as well as therapeutic activities to help their mental health.

“My GP is Arch Healthcare and they’re in Brighton, and it’s tricky for me to come over to Brighton. My body hasn’t been able to heal and so every time I go out and do anything it’s quite challenging. Getting on a bus to come over to Brighton is a big deal”

“I used to do music therapy before they put me out in Newhaven. I would have had to take a train or a bus, but I just didn’t have the funds for it”

“I’m supposed to go over to Hove to have an x-ray to check my ribs coz it’s taking so long to heal, but I can’t even get over there. (...) And I have to keep putting holes in my belt because I’m getting skinnier and skinnier, coz I can’t even lift up a kettle that’s got water in it”

“Recently I’ve been really, really depressed. I’ve been having suicidal thoughts. But I’m trying, I’m really trying”

Not being given a choice on location

“I’m not even allowed to take my children where I live because there’s paedophiles. Council told me you’re not allowed kids in there. They fully knew that I had children and they put me there.”

The interviewees had been given very little notice and no choice about whether to stay in Brighton, although some said they were asked:

“They [the Council] asked me questions like, do I wanna stay in Brighton, I said yeah, would you go to Newhaven, ‘no I’ve already done that’, and they said Eastbourne, I said no again, and then it came to my kick-out date, and they said ‘oh we’ve got a place for you in Eastbourne’”

According to Martin Coll, Justlife’s Operations Manager for Brighton, the allocation can seem random:

“On Monday you could get Brighton but, on a Tuesday, you get OOA as that’s all they have.”

However, for some clients, it isn’t random at all. Martin Coll:

“Some clients are “banned” for an indeterminate time from Brighton. For example, there could have been an incident at a particular property a year or so ago, and it still stands against them, so they are not allowed to stay in any of that landlord’s properties. This really limits their options to find accommodation in Brighton.”





Not knowing how long they were going to be there, feeling forgotten about

“Kendall Court is where they place people from Brighton to forget about them”

Another main concern was not knowing how long they were going to be there. The sense/hope that the placement away from their hometown was transitory meant that many didn't want to establish new networks or roots and so felt in a state of limbo.

“I'm in this tiny little room, trying so hard just to keep going and be a good person. And it's just all getting too much.”

“The Council pretty much wiped their hands off me when I was in Eastbourne”

“I just feel so insecure. I just want somewhere where I'm settled”

Harry, one of Izzy's clients, was so worried he would never make it out of Eastbourne that he wouldn't answer Izzy's calls.

“I didn't want to meet her coz I thought she worked in Eastbourne, and I thought the Council would use that as an excuse not to let me move back to Brighton (...) So I sort of ignored her, and she kept trying, she was quite persistent”

Harry was able to make it back to Brighton without Izzy's help, but everyone else only got back with Izzy's support.



Positive OOA experiences

Three of the interviewees told us they did not mind being placed OOA. As mentioned above, two people were brought closer to family in their new locations, and one quite liked the town he was placed in as he found it less hectic (Eastbourne). All three mentioned the relief of being in a quieter place compared to Brighton & Hove. However, all three still had substantial support needs.



What Izzy was able to do

“Just the fact of having her made my anxiety less”

Izzy helped the clients with a broad range of needs, from filling out forms for PIP or Universal Credit applications, accompanying them to health and other appointments back in Brighton, sorting out essentials such as bedding and shopping, picking up medicine, encouraging positive interests such as creative writing, and just keeping them company. She also supported eight of her clients to move back to Brighton.

“I am very, very, very happy to have Izzy on my side, because half of the times, what I say to these people and get through to these people, they don't listen. They don't care. It's people like Izzy that they listen to”

The geographical distance made accessing appointments in person extra challenging and having a trusted person to talk to was essential for those who found themselves without support in unfamiliar environments. It was clear from the responses that Izzy was instrumental in being a trusted familiar face.

“I tell her, when you go, I will miss you every day. You are like a mother or sister for me”

“I would text her. She would always call me, and she would listen to me, offer me advice”

“One time we took a train to another hospital. She was helping me”

Harry, who told us he didn't engage with Izzy because he thought if he started working with her, he would never get to leave Eastbourne, contacted Izzy once he had found his own way back to Brighton. He speaks very highly of the support she was able to give once they made contact.

“She has really tried to help me out. I think she's a credit to your organisation”

Concluding remarks

Like most individuals in TA, Izzy's clients had a range of support needs, including managing admin and finances, attending health appointments, getting access to basics such as bedding and laundry, managing their mental health and just having someone to talk to. Izzy's clients all had substantial support needs.

Being placed OOA created additional support needs for most of the interviewees, and further added the risk that these individuals stop engaging with much needed services and fall through the cracks.

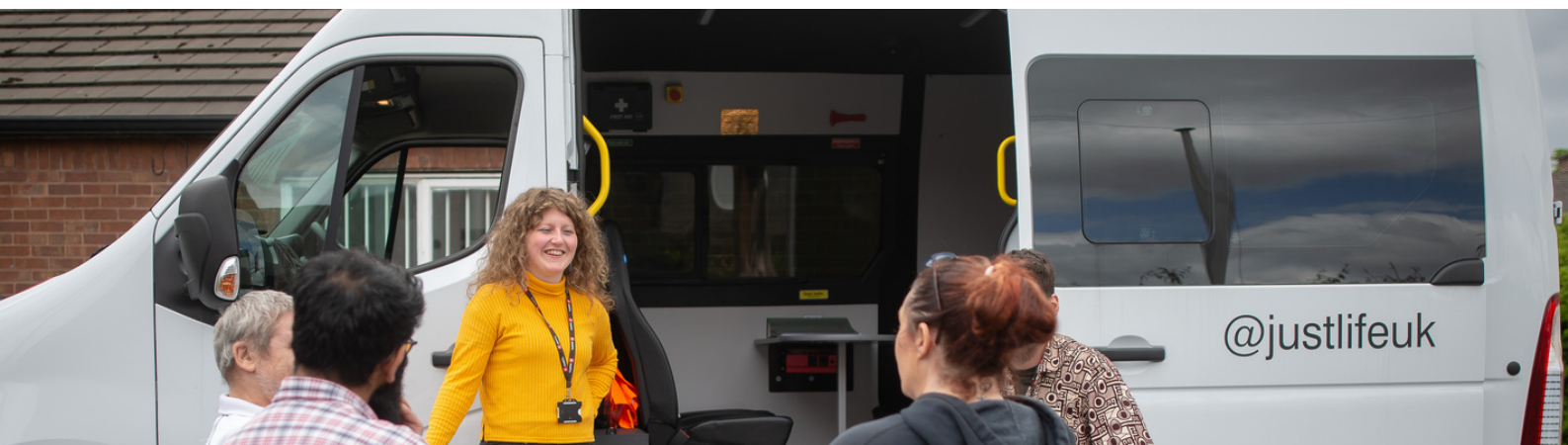
It is not always bad to be placed OOA. The individuals who told us they didn't have a problem with the OOA placement, cited being closer to family in their new accommodation and getting away from disruptive environments in Brighton. It is important to note that these individuals had a host of other support needs.

However, the majority told us it was a daily struggle just to keep going, being in an unfamiliar environment without the support of established networks of family, friends and services. One individual developed an addiction to crack while in Eastbourne as a coping mechanism, another had suicidal thoughts.

Attending health appointments was hampered by the distance, and has led to missed appointments and health needs not being attended to. This is problematic both in the short and long term, as the consequences may be felt long after the OOA has been settled.

Companionship became even more essential for those placed far from known networks. For some, the distance also created added strains on relationships, with one individual giving up his child, as taking him to school on the bus an hour each way became too much of a burden physically as well as financially. The loss of support from friends and family, and more broadly, the sense of belonging in a community, added to the mental health strains of the majority of the interviewees, most of whom suffered with PTSD.

Most of the individuals interviewed for this report had substantial support needs, and yet they were placed out of area, far from any support they may have had. It is obvious from the interviews that the support Izzy provided, in each of the areas of concern brought up in this report, was crucial in giving people hope and keeping them from disengaging with much needed services.



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