

ROLLING SHELTERS

A highly effective short-term solution

'Rolling Shelters' are a new approach to short-term accommodation, replacing the old Cold Weather Shelters that housed rough sleepers during the winter months.

The rolling shelters are free at the point of entry and specifically targeted at getting people off the streets. They provide a path for rough sleepers to move on to more permanent accommodation or access treatment to tackle problems of alcohol, substance abuse, mental health or physical illness.

St Mungo's manages the Rolling Shelter Programme for the Homelessness Directorate (formally the Rough Sleepers Unit). The programme sets up and manages short-term shelters in central London, free at the point of access and targeted at Contact and Assessment Team (CAT) clients. The rolling shelters run throughout the year and make use of empty buildings, providing a basic, decent standard of accommodation and encouraging rough sleepers into appropriate 'next stage' accommodation.

- Since beginning in April 2000 the rolling shelters have had a big impact in reducing the numbers of rough sleepers across London's streets, achieving resettlement rates of over 30 people a month
- The rolling shelters reduce the number of people sleeping rough in the area they are located
- They have proven highly successful as a springboard into treatment for chaotic drug users
- Proactive neighborhood management by rolling shelter staff reduced antisocial behavior in the area

As managers of the programme – and as service providers – St Mungo's are committed to helping individuals change. The shelters don't exist to facilitate people's 'street' lifestyles.

We welcome the continuation of the Rolling Shelter programme. It needs to remain flexible and able to respond to the changing profile of needs on the streets.

Further, we believe that:

- Specific provision for older rough sleepers should be included in the future. Because of the chaotic nature of most shelter residents, older, more vulnerable clients have stayed away.
- The Rolling Shelter Programme could also be extended to a preventative or diversionary role.

St Mungo's

Leading London's services for people who are homeless and vulnerable

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The Rolling Shelter Programme

The programme began in April 2000 and seven different providers have run 12 different shelters. Nine of these shelters have been large projects catering for all ages, while the other three have been specialist small projects – two targeted at young rough sleepers and one for older men.

The shelters are short-term and ‘roll’ between different locations as they become available.

St Mungo's agreed on several targets with the Rough Sleepers Unit (the funders). The key targets were occupancy levels of 60% and positive outcomes – resettlement, detox etc – for 70% of those who stayed in a shelter for over seven days. Occupancy levels have in fact exceeded expectations, and move-on targets have been substantially achieved.

Who did the rolling shelters help?

Because all referrals to the rolling shelters came from CAT teams, only the most vulnerable, entrenched and genuine rough sleepers were housed. This contrasts with the Cold Weather Shelters (CWS) where anyone was able to stay rent-free for four months.

Rolling shelters are also highly effective at breaking damaging lifestyle cycles – with a three week limit on each client's stay, every three weeks a space was available for another rough sleeper to come and access services.

What did the programme cost?

The Rolling Shelter Programme has proven highly cost effective.

The average length of each project is 24 weeks, with the cost per bed averaging at £289 per week. This represents substantial savings against the benchmark costs agreed with the RSU.

What were some of the outcomes?

Clients

- The shelters were successful in providing a springboard into treatment for chaotic drug users
- Very few residents returned to the streets when projects closed. The closure of projects contributed to a successful focus on resettlement for both residents and workers
- Minimal serious incidents occurred in the shelters
- The shelters maintained a focus on entrenched rough sleepers, and worked with people with high levels of support needs

Resettlement

- Positive resettlement outcomes were achieved for more than 50% of rough sleepers who stayed at a rolling shelter – rising to over 65% for those staying for more than seven days.
- Because the shelters work to a maximum stay of 21 days, this encouraged motivation and momentum to resettle people

Services

- There is effective joint-working with Primary Health Care services
- Programmes of ‘meaningful occupation’ are now offered in shelters as they open
- There has been excellent support from the Benefits Agency outreach team, with residents accessing benefits more effectively and improved resolving of claims problems
- Shelters are increasingly linked to local service commissioners

Management

- The programme has cost less than budgeted, with significant savings on the capital side
- There has been tight gate-keeping, with referrals almost exclusively from CATs and a small number from prison referral schemes or directly from the RSU
- There has been proactive and effective management of neighbourhood relations, and due to effective support, impact on local communities has been minimal

The future

Rough sleepers

A key feature of rolling shelters is their ability to respond to the need on the streets. This flexibility should remain key in the future, adapting to the changing needs of residents and any variations in client profiles.

The success of the shelters in holding and working with challenging client groups could be expanded, for example to develop a respite service for clients in hostels and flats whose accommodation is at risk because of their behavior.

By focusing on the entrenched, more chaotic client group, it is probable that some vulnerable older clients have felt excluded. St Mungo's proposes that specific provision for older clients be added to the programme.

CAT views

The CATs are looking for a relatively slim – 80 to 120 bed – programme, managed by St Mungo's and achieving a good throughput of clients. Outer London CATs would welcome more local free provision.

Locations

The programme has remained ‘building led’, and we haven't been able to fully test the theory that buildings located near rough sleeping hotspots will have the most impact. But the opposing view – that shelters are a magnet for rough sleepers – has certainly been disproven with a significant drop in rough sleeping in south Camden where the majority of shelters are located.

In fact, proactive neighborhood management by rolling shelter staff can have a very positive impact on reducing antisocial behavior in the area.

Charges

A unique feature of the Rolling Shelter is that they are free at point of entry. This has been a crucial factor in assisting some very entrenched and isolated clients off the streets.

Conclusion

The rolling shelters have had a positive impact in reducing the numbers of rough sleepers on London's streets. They have assisted in resolving seemingly intractable barriers and successfully moving clients on.

St Mungo's believes the rolling shelter regime needs to continue in its current format and scale. Over time the model of a **time limited**, rent-free stay and **assertive assessment** should be tested for a broader clientele.