



# MENTAL HEALTH IN HOUSING

## Learning lessons

Our Mental Health in Housing campaign has helped increase the awareness of the mental health issues and the role housing can play through providing support. As the campaign ends, Mark Lawrence rounds up the key lessons from each of the main topics.

The increasing awareness around mental health has let society play a more positive role in ensuring people's lives are not destroyed by the impact of their condition.

But is housing keeping up?

With a house forming the foundation for positive health and wellbeing, housing has been arguably lacking in its mental health offer in the past.

*24housing's* Mental Health in Housing campaign was instantly taken to by the sector, which supported with pledge cards and stories of how organisations have been affected by such issues.

We are also incredibly lucky that mental health charity Mind jumped on board, adding its support and giving vital assistance during the planning stages.

We are delighted to see Aileen Evans has chosen Mind as her

CIH presidential charity.

We have already started our support for that year, raising over £2,000 for the charity at our annual awards.

We received many stories during the campaign. But one



stuck with us, being so devastating and inspiring in equal measure.

After a colleague took her own life, staff and the senior leadership team at Staffordshire Housing Group took it on themselves to put in place safeguards and initiatives to ensure it never could happen again.

Asking if people are okay, managing workloads to ease stress, and running wellbeing days were all part of the drive.

These next pages will provide much more in the way of key learning, as each topic is summarised and lessons highlighted.

Whether it is housing conditions, wellbeing or dealing with those who have experienced trauma before, there is learning in here for all in the sector.

Tackling mental health should be a key part of the sector's offer to its tenants, staff, and wider communities. Help make those people's lives better.

# Head space

Issue 127 – May 2019

Drawing on academic studies, the first pillar of our campaign investigated the impact of poor housing conditions on mental health.

Poor conditions, whether it be lack of light or space, or an increase in damp or mould, were a key indicator of people's ill mental health.

It is well known that poor-quality housing is costing the NHS severely – latest estimates put it at around £2.5bn – and this is despite a huge drive in standards due to the Decent Homes funding between 2011 and 2016.

How can housing deal with this and ensure residents' mental health is not hurt by poor housing?

The simple answer is to retrofit. It is not cheap, but it is an effective way of combating the problem, plus usually making homes cheaper

to heat and more futureproof.

With the Homes (fit for Human Habitation) Act now in place, there will hopefully be some movement.

But the feature argued there was now a need for government to get behind a drive for a Decent Homes 2 standard.

Geoff Robinson, director of business solutions at Fortem, said it was time for the sector to collectively "stand up and take responsibility" for identifying tenant-related health concerns – specifically the "significant benefits" home improvements can have on mental wellbeing.

"Although we're clearly not health professionals, there is strong support among leading providers for a new DHS (Decent Homes Standard) – not only to meet the demands of



modern-day living, but also meet the future needs of those wanting to live independently in their homes," he said.

There was talk in the feature from former National Federation of ALMOs chair, Hugh Broadbent on the need for housing to link the Decent Homes drive to regeneration if it is to secure the necessary funding.

"There is probably some of our stock that is past its sell-by date and shouldn't be putting any more money into the stock as it needs regenerating and rebuilding," he said.

"There might be some opportunity for that if government opens up some new channels for regeneration funding – most of those have long gone, but the same issues are still there." →

## 21%

of adults said a housing issue negatively impacted their mental health during the last five years





## → Showing the scars

Issue 128 – June 2019

Whether it be care leavers, domestic abuse survivors or prison leavers, individuals who have experienced trauma in their lives often need additional housing support.

The support packages and the appropriate housing offer was vital to ensuring those who were in a vulnerable state of mind were not left to fend for themselves, at a time when they most needed people around them.

The feature briefly welcomed the government proposal to end the “postcode lottery” of domestic-abuse victims finding safe accommodation after refuge, but it was noted that far more needs to be done in this area.

A lot of this comes down to the

basics: There is a need for more social housing that people can access when they need it most, becoming the safety net that many yearn for.

For care leavers, the big issues were low self-esteem, anger management issues, learning difficulties, issues with the development of relationships, authority issues – but the list is actually “endless”.

Scottish Borders Housing Association has developed specialist flats, with furniture and support. This allows care leavers to hold onto their Leaving Care grant and sets them up with a stable place to live. After going through the care system, that is the stability needed

to foster positive mental wellbeing.

And this approach has worked. The project has so far supported over 300 care leavers since it began in 2010, 100 of whom have gone on to secure tenancies. 83% of those have managed to sustain those tenancies.

The tenants of the scheme benefit hugely from the communal areas, being able to communicate with others about their problems or just simply be with others while they watch a film.

The idea is to encourage confidence in living alone, with cooking lessons, budgeting advice, and flat hunting all crucial parts of the offer.

But time again, these schemes are being run by small organisations desperate for funding to carry on the incredible job they do.

For Langley Housing Trust, it had to halt a programme with ex-offenders due to lack of funding.

Women’s Aid has struggled with the levels of women and children fleeing domestic abuse.

The same stories are being echoed around the country.

One solution is for housing to work closely with these local partners such as women’s refuges to help them on-to a steady footing. At least be able to work on a housing journey that gets those fleeing abuse into stable accommodation.



# 45%

of young care leavers aged between 16-25 suffer from mental health problems

6%

of housing workers took the max. time allowed for long-term sickness due to ill mental health



## View from a bridge

Issue 129 – July/August 2019

Housing professionals deal with every aspect of their tenants' lives. Tenants mental health is a huge part of that mix, but they are not able to help if their own mental health is not also considered.

There are various initiatives housing associations have unveiled to help with this.

For example, Bourneville Village Trust has created Mental Health First Aiders to remedy the increasing numbers of staff taking time off work due to ill mental health.

The training is a lot like a physical first-aid course, with its emphasis on listen, reassure, and respond in that it will teach colleagues to do just that.

“We don't expect colleagues to become therapists, but instead develop practical skills to spot triggers and signs of mental health issues,” said Neeta Chauhan, head of HR.

“They will also learn the skills needed to step in and support a person in distress, guiding them confidently to the appropriate support.”

Other associations have introduced wellbeing days and mindfulness events, and have been proactive in marking Stress Awareness Week.

Happier staff means they can provide tenants with the support they need.

Stockport Homes Group offers free counselling for tenants. In most cases, counselling is provided by students on placement at Relate, although experienced counsellors are available when needed.

During the first eight months of the contract, 97 referrals have been received, with 339 individual counselling sessions delivered from a variety of community locations throughout Stockport.

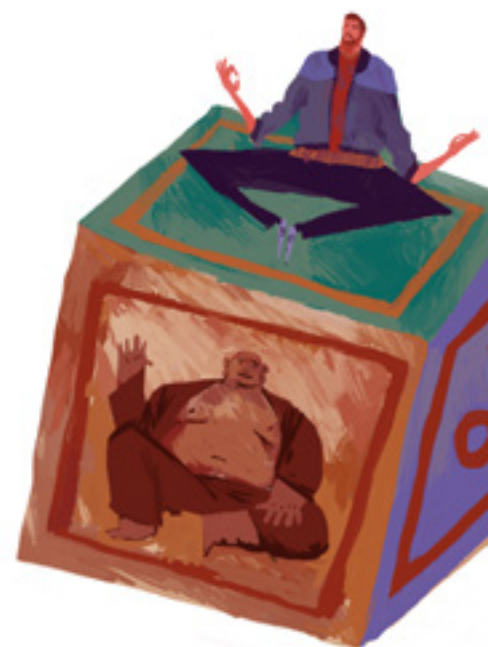
Tenants can access six sessions, with scope for more if needed.

This is just one example of how housing associations can help general-needs tenants with their mental health.

Knowsley Housing Trust (KHT) has teamed up with Wellbeing Enterprises – the first health and wellbeing community interest company in the UK – to support the trust's customers.

Social 'prescriptions' include stress management, lifeskills courses, interest groups, emotional awareness, creative crafts, volunteering, sleep and relaxation, singing and comedy, and mindful movement.

Now, the company is keen to offer KHT's customers a series of stress-busting, confidence, and motivational courses and is currently work shadowing KHT's Neighbourhood team to identify and understand the mental health training needs of its customers. ➔



## → That age-old question

Issue 130 – September 2019

Age UK cites that over half of the UK's over-55s have experienced depression, with around the same number for anxiety.

The death of a loved one, financial worries, and personal ill health are the most common triggers, according to national statistics.

Yet, more than a third don't know where to go for help and support.

And this is where housing can play a huge role.

Older people are more likely to be stuck in their homes and socially isolated. This compounds mental health problems and other conditions such as dementia, effecting huge costs for health and care services.

Many older people are falling into relative poverty, sometimes forced to choose between heating and food.

One solution is the idea of Retirement Communities. Not a new idea but one that is rapidly growing as the need to find alternative arrangements becomes ever pressing.



# 50%

of the UK's over-55s have experienced depression, with near the same number for anxiety

Communities where older people can not only live happily, but thrive, with features and initiatives designed specifically for them, are attracting hundreds – with many schemes being way over subscribed.

Dealing with loneliness is also a huge part of the way housing can improve the mental health of older people.

ExtraCare Charitable Trust's people-centric approach allows every resident moving in under the scheme to take a comprehensive welfare assessment to highlight their medical history and identify how they monitor any existing conditions.

These baseline assessments are what make the Trust different, with technical-sounding 'loneliness scales' and 'fragility calculators' offering a simple formula to produce a well-rounded solution.

South Yorkshire Housing Association's (SYHA) LiveWell at

Home initiative provides over-50s with a package of care. The 70-point home check sets to identify the main principles of what is a 'decent home', matching the needs of the resident with each point to ensure where they live isn't a detriment to physical and mental wellbeing.

The scheme aims to tackle issues such as hoarding and maintaining adaptations to ensure people can live in their own homes for as long as possible. It also seeks to support customers with a mental health condition and guide them on the road to recovery. SYHA believes it has saved local health partners around £50,000 a year.

Another initiative associations such as Ongo and Housing21 have taken forward is a partnership with the Alzheimer's Society on a programme called Dementia Friends. The service offers a package of support to those working alongside people living with dementia and promotes awareness of what behavioural changes to look out for in the early stages, prior to diagnosis.

Housing21 says the service has helped increase tolerance among residents, who work with staff to develop an action plan to embed good practice within the organisation.



## Somewhere to turn

Issue 131 – October 2019

A culture of gangs has placed many young people in a position of poor mental health. The feeling of not belonging has enabled some criminals to abuse vulnerable young people and manipulate them to commit crimes on their behalf.

Mosscafe St Vincents has two Foyers to aid those aged between 16 and 25, a group in which vulnerability and exposure to mental health problems is at its highest.

Not letting a bad start determine the rest of their lives, young people get a decent roof over their head, regular check-ins with support workers, and levels of education and training opportunities they struggled to access beforehand. They are also able to take lessons in cooking, budgeting, and employment skills.

This foyer is run in partnership with Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust – showing once again the importance of partnership working for better mental health outcomes.

Part of the drive from some housing associations has also

been through apprenticeships.

Home Group's scheme emphasises an open culture, with an 'it's okay not to be okay' approach.

"Our apprentices are fully supported and often great at sharing their own stories about overcoming mental health issues, or learning to live with them, which inspires colleagues to talk about their own mental health and wellbeing, too," says employability manager Stuart Campbell.

"We often see cases of frustration among the apprentices, which have before led to long-term unemployment and anti-social behaviour. That's why we nurture them back into work and more importantly give them time to rebuild and prove their worth."

For Sanctuary Housing, this means ensuring support is tailored to the needs of the individual, making sure their health and wellbeing doesn't become a detriment to their quality of life.

Through Sanctuary Housing's Foyers, which target those aged 16 to 25 who are homeless or at risk

of homelessness, young people are encouraged to lead on a range of community projects to rebuild the confidence they may have lost.

From rock-climbing and boxing sessions to completing a careers and work qualification, those involved walk away with the skillset needed to begin to pave their own path into employment and live independently.

The team at Sanctuary says this is vital in achieving good mental health and supporting those who may be experiencing a decline in wellbeing.

For housing providers to have an impact on the mental health of the young people, they need to ensure there are spaces available to them that encourage positive decision making and growing confidence.

With cuts to youth services being so dramatic over the past 10 years, local partnerships and initiatives are key to protecting the next generation. →



## → Circle of desperation

Issue 132 – November 2019

Our final piece highlighted the impact of mental health during a change in tenure. And with homelessness rising and Universal Credit pushing more tenants into arrears and poverty, there is a real need to act.

A couple of simple recommendations: build more housing that people can genuinely afford and fix the Universal Credit system.

A statement from Charlotte, a campaigner against Universal Credit, Bedroom Tax, and other welfare policies sums up the fallout: “It doesn’t do your mental health any good when you’re told, ‘oh, sorry, but you’re not going to be able to buy food for

the next God knows how long.”

And with the standard of temporary accommodation falling rapidly as local authorities scramble to assist the growing numbers, another piece of learning from the feature was that Housing First was a model that would produce results.

Housing First provides those who have been homeless, or who were at risk of becoming homeless, a chance to rebuild their lives. While the Housing First model has been called for numerous times over the past few years, framing the argument with a mental health slant makes it even more potent.



The scheme is more than a simple bricks-and mortar-solution – white goods and other furniture are kitted out in homes and dedicated support packages provided.

One partnership in the West Midlands – comprising Accord, whg, and Longhurst Group – aims to provide Housing First for 600 people over the next three years.

The scale is what is needed now. Those partnerships between housing associations are already breeding results, with whg upping the number of homes they were offering to the partnership from six to 36.

People are then able to move through the system with confidence and independence and the knowledge of how to deal with problems if they are to strike again.

Simply allowing people to stay in a circle of desperation is the wrong thing to do.



# 48%

rise in foodbanks in areas where Universal Credit has been running for at least two years



## Conclusions

While mental health solutions differ from person to person and from issue to issue, there are some things that housing can do that remains constant.

Firstly, when providing housing for those with poor mental health, there is a clear package of support measures that goes hand in hand.

There is a need for housing to partner organisations with expertise to get these schemes, programmes, and initiatives over the line.

Housing cannot and should not be expected to do all this by itself. But providers are in a unique place to form the foundation of a person's life.

These features have seen partnerships from Alzheimer's Society and between other housing

organisations. What all have in common is that they share the burden of cost and risk while meaning more people can access the services they so desperately need.

Another strand is the continued lobbying for more homes that people can afford.

Socially rented homes must make a comeback if these issues are to be resolved.

A woman and a child who have just fled domestic abuse with nothing but the clothes on their backs can't afford any form of private housing or even intermediate rent.

The government, if it is serious about combating these issues, must provide funding. There is

some talk that housing could play a huge role in the Social Care Green Paper, where schemes such as the ones mentioned would be key.

The key to the success of all of these is compassion. Hearing the real stories from those who have been impacted by negative mental health, and how important the role of housing was in pulling them out of the dark, shows why compassion is so important.

Stories of colleagues losing colleagues to depression, stress, and feelings of not being able to cope... that shouldn't happen in any sector, let alone one that prides itself on its social purpose and nice nature.

There is lots that housing can be doing. Now is the time to start. ■

