



Launchpad highlights stark statistics on homeless women to mark International Women's Day

Reading charity Launchpad is highlighting the stark statistics on women who are homeless to mark International Women's Day, Friday 8 March 2019.

Female staff, volunteers and supporters of the charity gathered to raise awareness of the very significant needs of homeless women, by holding up boards displaying sobering figures:

- It is estimated that there are 68,000 women in the UK who are sleeping on the streets, or in temporary accommodation and emergency shelters.ⁱ
- 1 in 10 women fleeing domestic violence are forced to sleep rough; almost half of these women have to sofa surf, many with children.ⁱⁱ
- 1 in 4 women have been sexually assaulted while sleeping rough.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The average age of death for homeless women is 43.^{iv}

Su Hamblyn, Deputy Chief Executive at Launchpad said: "These disturbing figures are the reality for women who are homeless. We want to raise awareness of the impact homelessness has on women and remove the stigma so often attached to female homelessness. These women need our help.

"At Launchpad we offer services to help both men and women alike. Women come to us for all sorts of reasons. We see many who are struggling after a relationship breakdown or trauma after losing access to their children, and single mums who have financial issues managing the family budget. Some are victims of domestic violence or exploitation and are fleeing another area to try to rebuild their lives.

"Others have lost their jobs and need support gaining employment. Homelessness is not just a young person's issue. We see older women who have lost their partners, are isolated and are trying to manage their finances which they have never done before. Some have mental

health issues and learning difficulties. The issues are complex but very specific and unique to each individual, and can happen to anyone. These statistics are not just numbers, they represent real women, women like Angela.”

Angela, an employed single mum, had her benefits cut when she moved to Universal Credit. With her children in further education, she was no longer entitled to Child Benefit, reducing her income by a third.

The bailiffs were at her door, her health was suffering and she was about to lose her home due to rent arrears that were mounting monthly. To complicate matters, she had an amphetamine addiction that had been hidden for over 40 years. Her life was falling apart.

Angela came to Launchpad’s drop in centre with a carrier bag full of bills. Staff listened to her story and contacted her landlord and the bailiffs to hold off on any action while they found support to address her debts. They helped Angela to complete an income and expenditure form in order to arrange repayment of her debts in affordable amounts. They also worked with her GP to get her support from Iris, a local drug and alcohol service, to address her drug use and plan her recovery.

“Launchpad saved my life and that is the only way I can express how I feel” said Angela. “The day I walked into Launchpad, I was in a really bad way and I didn’t think anyone could help me. The staff there spent four hours sorting out all my paperwork out. I felt so much better when I came out.

“Since that day Wendy has been my key worker at Launchpad and has helped me with lots of things that I couldn’t have done without her. I want to thank everyone at Launchpad for making me feel so welcome when I walked in their door. A special thank you to Wendy for everything, I would recommend Launchpad to the world.”

Launchpad’s Floating Support service helps people who are at risk of losing their home and includes the drop in service that Angela used. In the past year, the service has helped 311 clients; 151 were women (48 per cent).

The charity also offers a Supported Housing service which provides temporary accommodation for those that need it, along with a tailored support plan to help them get their life back on track. In the past year, 190 clients accessed the service; 39 were women (20 per cent).

Su continues: “The positive news is that our stats show that women are approaching us and that we are able to help them. What we are finding is that women tell other women about Launchpad who then come to our drop in service for support. This service is for anyone in Reading who needs homelessness related advice and enables us to offer early intervention before their circumstances deteriorate.

“This was crucial for Angela, as our intervention meant she kept her home and we were able to support her through very difficult times. She has managed to sustain her work and parenting duties, as well as supporting her older children with her grandchildren’s needs. She is doing remarkably well.”

Launchpad offers support in a variety of different ways, helping clients to access support services that they aren't always aware of, or taking part in its Education, Training and Employment (ETE) service which helps them to find jobs and courses, and with CV writing and interview techniques. The charity also offers a huge array of classes and activities including French, literacy and numeracy, IT skills, photography, arts and crafts, gardening, climbing and cookery.

Su continues: "The aim is to help our clients regain their confidence, teach them new skills, help them into employment and enable them to meet other people, build friendships and reduce isolation. Our ultimate goal is to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place and to ensure everyone has a place that they can call home.

"On International Women's Day, please join us in raising awareness of the struggles homeless women face and help us to improve these shocking statistics."

ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2017/feb/14/homelessness-women-disadvantaged-channel-4-councils>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/women-and-children-fleeing-domestic-abuse-sleep-rough-failed-by-local-authorities/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/rough-sleeping/rough-sleepers-and-complex-needs/>

^{iv} <https://www.nhs.uk/news/lifestyle-and-exercise/homeless-die-30-years-younger-than-average/>