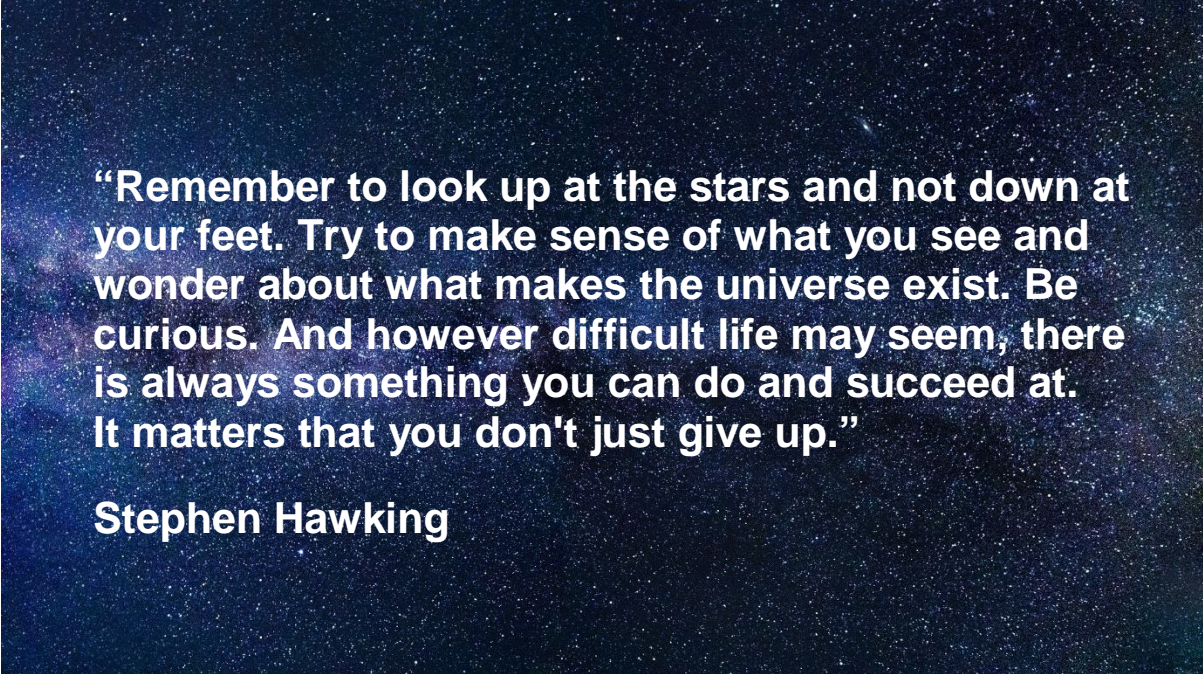


**Winter Emergency Provision
Final Report
January – March 2018**



“Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up.”

Stephen Hawking

Winter Emergency Provision

Final report

January – March 2018

“I finally felt safe and secure, I also felt I was moving forward for the first time in years!” (Client quote from WEP 2018)

Introduction

This was the eighth year that Aylesbury Homeless Action Group (AHAG) provided emergency shelter during the winter months. The project started on Wednesday 3rd January and finished on Monday 26th March.

This was the first year that we had the opportunity to use two local hotels to provide emergency accommodation.

Background

Since 2009, AHAG has used a number of different venues to run the WEP. Initially, this was run through local churches where clients slept in a different location each night. One of the main disadvantages of this was that clients could only access the churches between 19.30 and 07.30. They would also have had to carry their belongings round with them during the day.

In January 2014, we were fortunate to be offered the use of a single venue through the generosity of Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC). This enabled clients to leave their belongings at the venue, however they were still only able to access the project overnight. The advantages of having our own building, meant that we were able to provide housing and employment support whilst clients were accessing the project. We were able to use this venue for two winters and it enabled us to support a greater number of people into secure, affordable accommodation.

In 2016 and 2017, we developed the project through the use of a local guest house. This gave the client a greater sense of dignity and respect. The advantages of this was that the clients did not have to wait until the evening to access the accommodation. Clients were offered daily support at our offices within the town centre.

Winter Emergency Provision (WEP)

This year, AHAG pre-booked bed spaces in 2 local hotels. They were booked in September to take full advantage of the ‘savers rates’. We also booked a number of beds using the ‘flexi rate’ which enabled us to cancel the room up to 13.00 if it was not being occupied.

The advantages of having this flexible option, enabled us to utilise as many bed spaces as possible and to manage our finances more efficiently.

The use of hotel rooms ensured that all clients were offered a safe and secure place to stay.

When asked what difference staying in a local hotel made to you, one client wrote **“the impact of being given the luxury of staying in a hotel had a huge impact. It was a place where I momentarily could call home. A place I could go to where it was warm, safe and clean. I could get showered and sleep. But it gave me that little inspiration and comfort knowing I had a place of safety.”**
(WEP client)

As in previous years, each client was offered a 28 day licence with AHAG. This meant that we committed to giving each client up to 28 nights' accommodation. This gave the client a period of stability, enabling them to concentrate on engaging with support.

One client stated that the local hotel had, **“given me a bit of stability for a month in a nice warm place where all my belongings are safe.”**

As a condition of the licence agreement, clients were expected to engage with a case worker on a daily basis. For those clients who were working, case workers provided support via emails and telephone calls in the evening.

When asked what worked well for you, one employed client stated **“It was great I could pick up the phone and someone was always there.”**

Each client had a designated case worker, who supported the client to put a support plan in place. The support was offered at our office in Rickfords Hill, where clients had access to computers, telephones and laundry facilities.

Referral Process

This year was the first year that Youth Concern was funded by AVDC to provide emergency accommodation for those clients who were under 25 years. This enabled AHAG to concentrate on those people over 25 years and prevented duplication of support. Where this may have had an impact on statistical comparison with previous years it has been marked with an asterisk.

AHAG has always run WEP in conjunction with AVDC. All clients who wished to be referred into WEP completed a referral form with the Housing Pathways team at AVDC. A police check was then undertaken to check suitability, with the same criteria as previous years. Those excluded from WEP included any person with a conviction for possession with intent to supply prohibited substances, arson, sexual offences or violence within the past 3 years.

Additionally, if a client's support needs presented as too high, this would also preclude them from accessing the project. In general this would be unmanaged mental health, unmanaged addiction or a person on bail for a serious offence.

It is important to note that whilst these conditions preclude them from accessing WEP, they would still be offered advice and support through our other services.

Referrals

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>
Total number of referrals*	24	42	35	33
Total number of referrals refused	3	14	8	2
Total number of female referrals	12	8	6	6

Of the 21 referrals accepted onto WEP, 16 took advantage of the emergency provision. The remaining 5 were supported with finding alternative accommodation before the emergency provision was needed.

This year saw the highest number of females accessing the project.

Waiting List

Two clients had to wait for one night until a room became available.

WEP use

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>
Total number of bed spaces provided	391	522	503	492
Total number of bed spaces used	321	389	429	386

In the previous year, AHAG block booked a total of 522 bed spaces which was the equivalent of 6 bed spaces throughout the project. The disadvantage of this was that at times, particularly in March, we had paid for bed spaces that were not being used.

Client demographics

The average age of clients in WEP overall this year was 41 years. It was 38 in the previous year.

Male client ages

	<u>18-25</u>	<u>26-35</u>	<u>36-45</u>	<u>46-60</u>	<u>60 plus</u>
2018*	0	2	2	4	0
2017	2	3	1	2	2
2016	2	4	4	4	0
2015	5	5	9	2	1

Female client ages

	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	60 plus
2018	1	2	3	2	0
2017	3	1	0	1	0
2016	0	1	1	0	0
2015	1	0	2	1	0

Ethnicity

	White UK	White other	Asian	Traveller	Bk mixed	Bk other
2018	13	1	0	0	1	1
2017	14	1	0	0	0	0
2016	13	1	2	0	0	0
2015	23	2	1	0	0	0

Religion (where given)

	Catholic	C of E	Muslim	Other Christian	None	Other
2018	1	3	1	0	5	5
2017	1	5	0	2	7	0
2016	2	3	1	1	8	1
2015	0	2	2	2	18	2

Sexuality (where given)

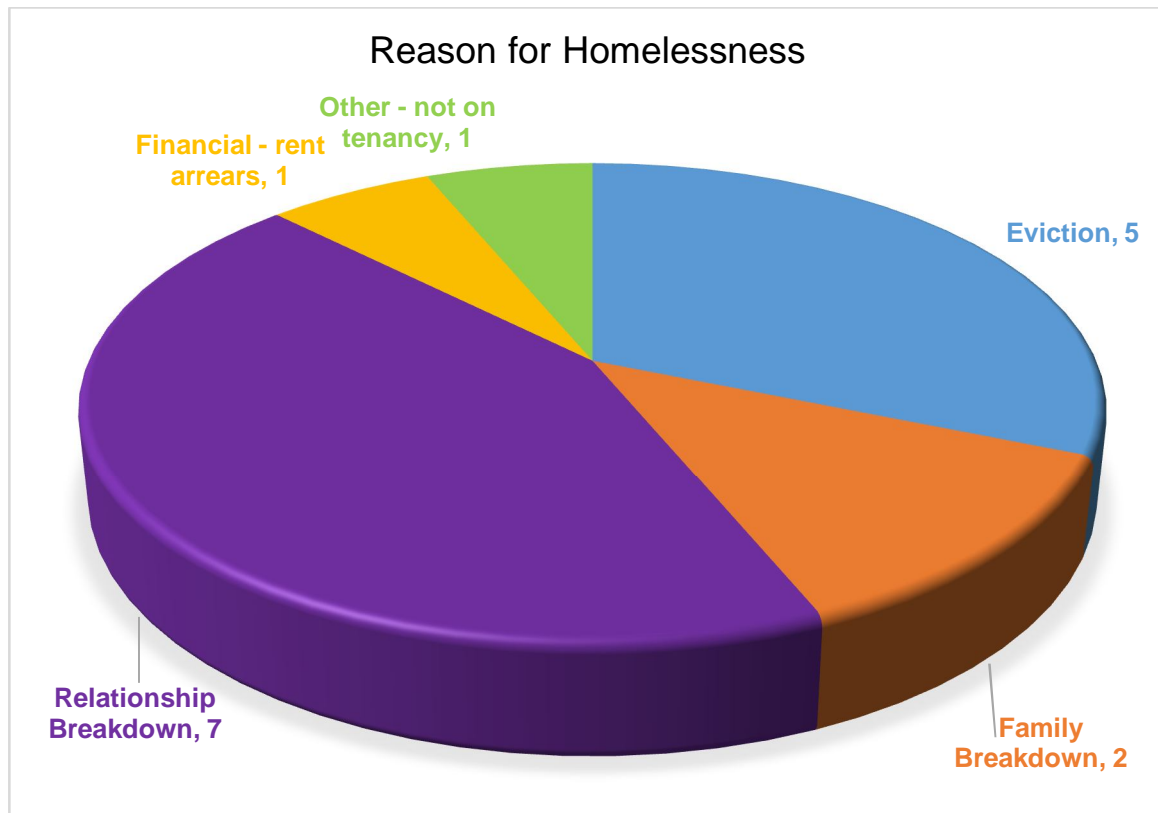
	Gay	Heterosexual	Prefer not to say	Bisexual	Lesbian
2018	0	11	4	0	1
2017	0	13	0	1	1
2016	0	15	1	0	0
2015	0	22	3	1	0

Local Connection

Twelve clients had a local connection to the area.

Reasons for homelessness

When clients are referred into WEP, they are asked the primary reason that caused them to become homeless. The causes of homelessness are complex, often with many events which combine to create 'the perfect storm.' However, the information given by clients is vital in understanding why a person has become homeless.



Whilst the sample is comparatively small, understanding the reasons for homelessness, enables us to disseminate this information to look at some of the areas where there are gaps in service.

If as a community, we are to prevent homelessness from occurring, we need to look at the causal factors of homelessness and ensure appropriate support and funding is given.

Five of the clients who accessed WEP became homeless due to an eviction. It is possible that if the client was offered tenancy support, prior to eviction, this could prevent them from facing a housing crisis.

Length of time homeless

Again clients are asked how long they have been homeless for on the initial referral form.



Client support needs

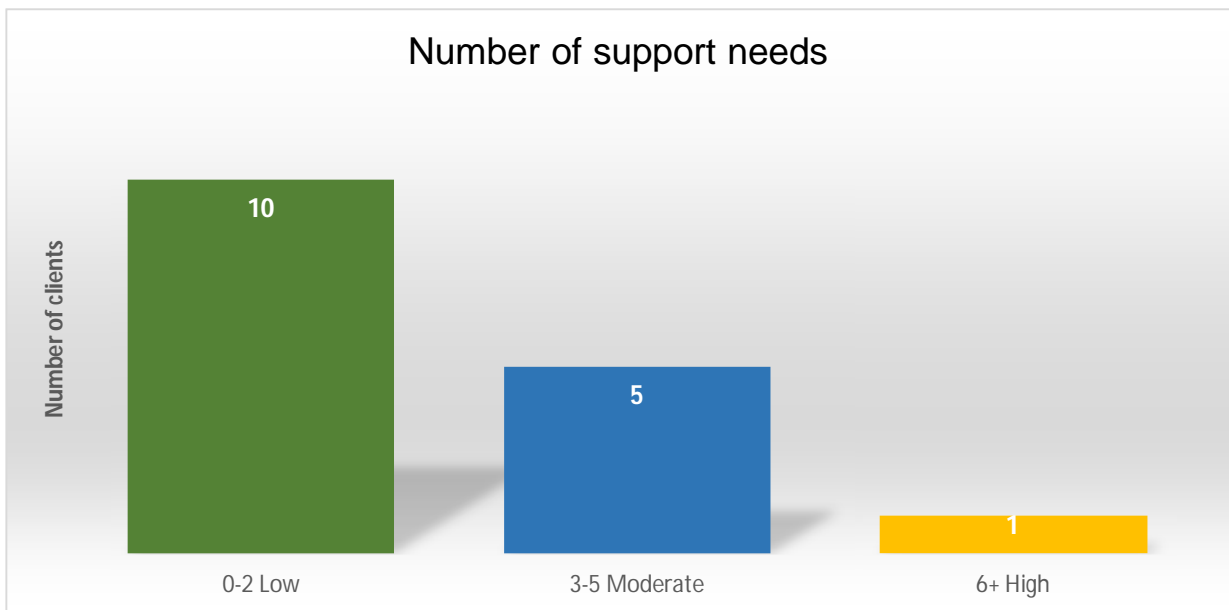
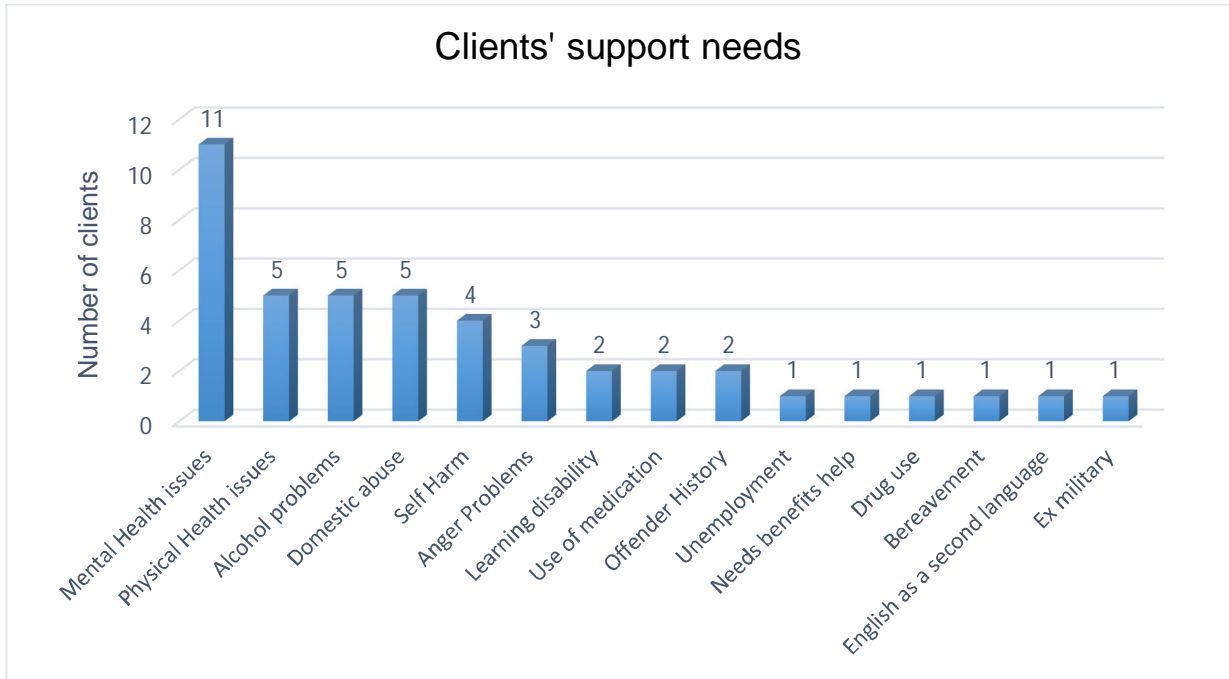
Homelessness is complex. It is usually the resulting factor of a number of events that have occurred in an individual's life. Often by the time a client refers into WEP they have hit a crisis point and often feel overwhelmed and out of control.

One WEP client said, **"I was truly in a dark place when first going to AHAG. I was emotionally drained and didn't know whether I was coming or going due to a recent break up. I was physically exhausted due to lack of sleep, provisions to eat or drink."**

AHAG's belief is that the combination of offering some stability and regular support, enables the individual to begin to regain some control in their life.

One WEP client said, **"It makes me feel that there are people out there that care and understand the situation I am in."**

The graph below demonstrates the support needs as identified either by the client at the time of referral or by staff during their stay at WEP.



AHAG addresses a client’s support need by providing a holistic approach to each person. It is the skilled role of the case worker to identify support needs and encourage the client to set realistic and achievable goals and enable them to regain control. The courage and determination of our clients, who work so tirelessly to achieve these goals, can never be underestimated.

One WEP client said, **“I finally felt safe and secure, I also felt that I was moving forward for the first time for years!!”**

AHAG cannot tackle the issues of homelessness alone. We work in partnership with a wide range of local agencies to ensure that each client receives the most appropriate and specialised help and advice. These partners include AVDC Debt Advice, Citizens Advice, One Recover Bucks and Women's Aid.

All clients were offered daily support at our office during working hours. Most clients had a minimum of one hour face to face support a day. One of the challenges of providing such intensive support, was the increased workload on staff.

AHAG has seen an increasing number of who were employed and homeless. The option of staying in a hotel enabled them to continue to work with minimum disruption. However, this did increase the amount of work for staff who were providing support during the evenings and weekends.

What are the main areas of support that AHAG gives to clients?

Housing Support

AHAG specialises in providing housing information, advice and support. The case worker will support the client to look at their housing options. These will be different for each person depending on their support needs. Some of the options include:

- Registering and bidding for Bucks Home Choice
- Referrals into supported housing both within Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- Finding affordable private rentals
- Accessing grants and funding to assist with deposits and rent in advance.
- Exploring tied accommodation options.
- Housing benefit applications.

Financial Support

AHAG recognises the need for clients to be able to access affordable housing. One of the biggest barriers is the financial costs required to secure a property. AHAG has been able to provide financial support through the provision of rent in advance and a deposit. This was funded through a combination of grants.

This funding has made a significant difference to the number of people we have been able to house. We are particularly grateful to Bucks County Council and the Vicar's Relief Fund which has enabled us to make this possible.

All clients are supported with completing a budgeting form before any application is made to ensure that the property is affordable.

AHAG recognises that debt has a significant role to play in causing homelessness. Case workers offer on-going assistance for those clients who require additional skills to manage their finances. This is vital to prevent the repeating cycle of homelessness.

Employment Support

AHAG are passionate about encouraging clients to further their life choices through education and employment. Throughout WEP, clients are encouraged to improve their working options. Clients are offered access to computers and telephones in AHAG's training room. Staff and volunteers were available to assist with CVs and job applications as required.

One WEP client when asked about any his support said;

“Due to the support I received they gave me the needed push and inspiration to better myself, which I managed to do. I have now secured myself a full time job and have my car theory test booked. So going from what seemed a total dead end. However AHAG provided that light at the end of the tunnel that initially I couldn't see.”

First Aid training

During the running of WEP, we were fortunate to be offered free First Aid training through the Red Cross for our clients. The trainer was amazing and the course was well attended and enjoyed by clients.

Feedback

At the end of WEP clients were asked “What support had been given by AHAG and had this helped to improve their housing situation?”

Some of the responses included:

“Food bank certificate- I had no food. Deposit- I would not have been able to pay on a low income. Ongoing support with Bucks Home Choice.”

“AHAG have provided excellent support with my housing situation, as well as form filling and phone calls to help improve my overall situation.”

“I have had first class support from AHAG and they are only too pleased to help with anything I need to know or need.”

Staffing

The running of WEP places increase demands and workload on all of the AHAG team. This, at times can be particularly challenging as WEP is run in addition to our other daytime projects.

One of the biggest challenges is providing support and cover during evenings and weekends, which was additional to staff's normal working week. This is particularly challenging when supporting a high number of people who are employed and therefore unable to access support during working hours.

If we were in the position to recruit more staffing, we would look at running a weekly evening session, to address this issue.

One client, when asked, “Is there any further support that you need?” replied;

“As I work 07.30- 17.00 an ‘after hours’ service would have helped.”

Overall however, the model of using local hotels has had the least impact on staffing than previous WEP projects.

Resettlement

The ultimate aim of WEP is to give people the opportunity to find appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing.

AHAG did not want to just provide a ‘night shelter’ where clients would return to the streets or back onto a sofa once the project had finished. AHAG is committed to making a difference to people’s lives and breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Housing Options

1. Private Rental

The lack of affordable housing remains a challenge. This is particularly difficult for those people who are on benefits because the Local Housing Allowance is capped at £72.76 for those people under the age of 35 years and £127.29 for those people aged 35 years and over.

AHAG works hard to address the issues of private rentals because there are very few other options available within Aylesbury. Case workers work tirelessly to find appropriate properties on-line. AHAG has signed up for the ‘early bird’ schemes.

AHAG has also secured funding for deposits and rent in advance, meaning that we are able to secure a tenancy very quickly. This has resulted in a large number of people being successful in securing a private rental.

12 clients were supported into private rental

2. Supported Housing

Supported housing in Aylesbury remains a good option for those people with higher support needs. However there is often a large waiting list to access this provision and priority is given for those people with a local connection.

1 client was housed in supported housing.

3. Social Housing

Those clients that were eligible were supported to make an application to Bucks Home Choice. AVDC staff were really helpful in processing these forms quickly. Staff supported clients with the bidding process.

0 clients accessed social housing during WEP

4. Long stay Griffin Place

Griffin Place is owned by AVDC. Within the long stay block there are a limited number of rooms which provide an affordable option for those people who are not working. There is limited availability and clients undergo an assessment to ensure suitability.

1 client accessed Griffin Place during WEP

5. Accommodation with employment

This is a good option for clients who are seeking employment.

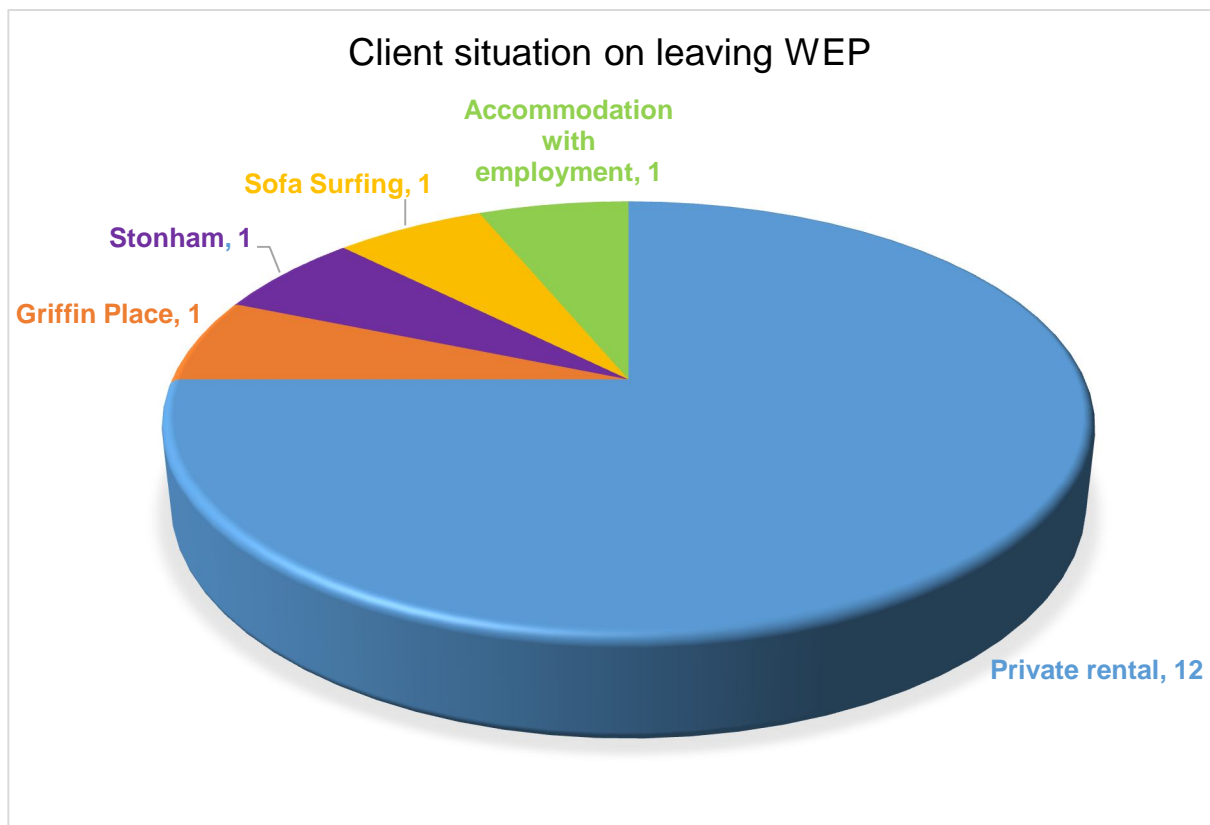
1 client accessed accommodation with employment

OVERALL TOTAL OF CLIENTS HOUSED = 15

AHAG currently are unable to provide a long term housing solution for one client who accessed WEP. This is because he is not entitled to benefits. However, the support in WEP has seen a significant improvement in both his mental and physical health. His housing situation has improved from rough sleeping to sofa surfing and we are continuing to provide him with employment support.

On-going tenancy support

AHAG continues to offer on-going tenancy support to clients once they have been housed. This work is essential to ensure that clients have the skills and confidence to maintain their tenancy.



Clients were asked if there was any further support that they needed at the end of WEP. Some of the replies included:

“Housing benefit sorting out”

“On going help with Bucks Home Choice”

“I will continue to visit for assistance with benefits etc. and any other help I may need.”

“I will stay in touch with AHAG just in case I need more support, but I think they have done more than I could ever hope for.”

Clients referred into WEP, who did not access scheme.

There were 5 clients who were referred into WEP, but chose not to access the scheme. Staff continued to provide housing support to these clients. One client went into Women’s Aid. One client was offered social housing and another went into private rental. A client went into a long stay room at Griffin Place and the fifth client was prevented from becoming homeless.

Evaluation of WEP

It is important for AHAG to evaluate WEP at the end of the project to enable us shape future services. Our clients’ opinions and feedback are essential in this evaluation and I have included some of their comments throughout this report.

ADVANTAGES of WEP include:

- Provision of safe and secure accommodation.
- Provision of a 28 day licence, thus giving the client a greater sense of security.
- The flexibility to offer accommodation that is specific to the needs of the individual.
- The accommodation provided greater normality, which enabled them to address their housing needs.
- Clients who were working were able to continue with their employment.
- Clients were offered daily support by AHAG staff.
- It enabled us to be more efficient with our funds as we were able to have greater control over the number of rooms booked.
- We were able to take advantage of pre-booking rooms at discounted rates using the early bird and saver’s scheme.
- Clients appreciated the offer of a hotel room and gave them greater dignity and respect.
- The staff at both hotels were really helpful and respectful to clients.

- For those clients receiving Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA), we were able to claim housing benefit at the rate of £72.76 per week. This helped to offset some of our costs.
- There was low additional staff cost.

DISADVANTAGES of WEP include:

- Securing funding and booking rooms 4-6 months in advance.
- Costing - using a local hotel was more expensive than a local guest house. (see separate page on costings)
- Our bed spaces were limited due to funding.
- Supporting people who were employed was more challenging and required staff to work in the evenings.
- Clients who failed the police check or who had very high support needs were unable to access WEP. Whilst AHAG were able to provide support during day services, there was no other emergency accommodation available in Aylesbury.
- Staying in a hotel can be isolating at times. Staff worked hard to establish a daily routine with clients and to encourage them to access other services alongside AHAG.
- Staff workload is greatly increased during this time. This puts added pressure and on the resources of such a small team.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

SWEP is the response from local authorities which is instigated when severe weather is forecast.

“Historically the minimum SWEP response from Local Authorities has been opening provision when there was a forecast of a drop to zero degrees, or below zero, for three consecutive nights. The three-night guideline was an attempt to define ‘severe weather’, but we recommend that a common sense approach is taken – near freezing temperatures or the impact of rain, snow and wind chill should also be considered”. (Homeless Link.)

This was the first year since AHAG has been running that the SWEP was called three times.

One of the challenges for SWEP was that there was not any available accommodation available in Aylesbury and AVDC were only able to offer emergency accommodation in High Wycombe.

Four AHAG clients used SWEP, one of whom used it twice. Another client was offered SWEP but changed her mind. One client was unable to access the accommodation due to lack of public transport in heavy snowfall and sadly was forced to sleep rough that night.

There were many challenges with clients being offered accommodation out of area, particularly as many clients could not afford the bus fare to get there. AHAG provided both financial support and food parcels for these clients.

Costings

		2018	2017
		£	£
Income	AVDC, BCC, VAHT	15,000	15,000
	Aylesbury Town Council	2,000	
	Housing Benefit	1,175	1,965
	Other donations	1,931	
Total income		<u>20,106</u>	<u>16,965</u>
Expenditure	Catering	30	10
	Client emergency provision		18
	SWEP travel cost	38	35
	Miscellaneous expense	67	67
	Office & Stationery	40	41
	Rent	18,955	12,540
	Caseworker staff cost	3,084	2,828
	Administration staff cost	1,260	
	Telephone & Internet	130	136
	Travel & Meetings		5
	Utilities	151	273
Total expenditure		<u>23,755</u>	<u>15,954</u>
	Surplus (Deficit)	(3,649)	1,011

Case Studies

Below are 4 case studies to give an example of how we support clients in WEP. Each person's story is different and unique. However, the underlying theme is the difference that offering WEP has made to each journey.

Case Study 1 – Older female, employed into private rental

Client X was referred into WEP in mid-March. She had been living with her long term partner in his social housing property, but he died unexpectedly in January this year. She had no right to remain in the property and no succession of tenancy had

been put in place. The housing provider had been very supportive but the client had to leave the property and hand back the keys. As she was in good health there was no duty by AVDC to provide her with emergency accommodation. This client was grieving and utterly torn apart by the loss of her partner and now her home, she had no family here in the UK to support her and a limited network of friends.

Whilst in WEP, AHAG assisted her with securing a great room in an HMO with a landlord who will release her from a contract without penalty should an appropriate social housing flat become available. Although she is employed she has only been in a new role since January and has no savings. We have been closely working with this lady and looking at affordability

The client is now bidding on Bucks Home Choice and we will continue to support her for as long as she needs. Without quick access to the LES funds, this lady would be at risk of sofa surfing when the WEP licence ended and the impact on her fragile mental health could have been devastating.

Case Study 2 – Male, not entitled to benefits

This client is one of our most challenging to date in terms of ongoing support and a positive outcome.

This gentleman is an EU national who has been in the UK since 2005. He became known to AHAG last year following the pending eviction of his then partner from social housing. He is a long term alcoholic who is unemployed and with limited recourse to public funds.

AHAG have worked closely with the client and his probation officer as well as a contact at the local job centre.

His addiction has got him into all sorts of trouble but relatively low key offences. He is known to the paramedics and police.

For the past few months this gentleman has engaged well with AHAG, stopped drinking without support of professionals and has taken advantage of SWEP and now WEP. He has come to every appointment without fail and is trying his best to improve his situation. AHAG have supported him with applications to both ESA and JSA. However he was refused ESA and JSA seems highly unlikely as he does not qualify for housing benefit at all due to poor work history.

With regards to seeking employment, this is proving to be challenging. The client has only had one confirmed period of employment from 2005-2007 and cannot recall the name of his employer, making a CV almost impossible to build. He also has two ongoing injuries, one to his foot and an older one to his arm. He is unskilled.

Whilst AHAG have, as yet, been unsuccessful in securing permanent accommodation, the client's housing situation has improved. He is now sofa surfing which is better than sleeping rough. His mental and physical health has continued to improve since being in WEP, giving him a greater opportunity to improve his life choices.

Case Study 3 – Male, into supported housing

Client X was sofa surfing for 7 years previous to being referred into our Winter Emergency Provision project. He had no local connection to Aylesbury but had a couple of friends here that he was staying with. He also spent time at his sister's property in London. Due to moving around so much Client X found it difficult to see a GP regularly meaning he would often run out of his medication he required for his mental health. This also had an impact on his benefits and due to missing a medical assessment his PIP was subsequently stopped.

After completing an initial assessment we supported Client X with registering with a GP in Aylesbury meaning he would be able to get his medication regularly. We then helped him with trying to get his PIP back in place. Client X admitted that he found it difficult to complete forms/speaking on the telephone and this was one of the reasons it was stopped. We managed to speak to DWP and requested a review of the decision.

Client X didn't have much of a routine to his day and spent most of it sleeping. He had little confidence/motivation and wanted to address this. I gave him information on local support groups and put him in touch with an organisation called 'Men in Sheds'.

When talking with Client X about his options it was clear that he would benefit from supported accommodation as his housing situation had been unsettled for so long. We completed relevant referrals and he was offered an assessment at Stonham. I supported him with this and he was accepted the same day.

Client X said that "being in the emergency accommodation has made a massive difference. I finally felt safe and secure and felt like I was moving forward for the first time in years".

We are still in regular contact with Client X who has said the supported accommodation is everything he wanted and more! He has recently attended a first aid course with us which has improved his confidence. We will continue to support Client X until he receives the outcome from his benefits.

Case Study 4 – Male, unemployed into private rental

Client X presented to us in January 2018. He is a 56 year old gentleman who found himself homeless after a relationship breakdown. He contacted AVDC who referred him into our Winter Emergency Provision Project.

After meeting with Client X and talking through his options he soon had a plan in place in regards to housing and employment. He very quickly secured full time employment so majority of the support happened in the evening via telephone. Support consisted of a housing register application, advice on how to look for private rentals, support around budgeting/finances/affordability and general welfare checks. Client X engaged well and spent his evenings looking for private rented accommodation and contacting potential landlords. He found an affordable room in a shared house in an area he knew well which was also close to his job. He liaised with the landlord, viewed the room and accepted it.

Client X had some money he could put towards the funds required up front but due to only just getting back into work wasn't able to cover it all. I applied for £350 from Vicar's Relief Fund and with £350 from our funding from Local Emergency Support towards rent in advance we received the full £700 meaning Client X would only need to pay £300. This then meant he could afford to pay for a bed and other furniture items for the room. We were also able to provide him with a starter pack which ensured he had all the basic items he needed. Since moving into the room we have had further contact with Client X who now feels settled and has been able to look for more permanent employment.

He has said that being in emergency accommodation has "really lifted my spirits and made me feel that there are people out there that care and understand the situation that I am in".

Conclusion

I continue to be astounded at the difference that providing safe, stable accommodation and daily support makes to an individual's life. It is seeing the difference that this makes that gives me the drive and passion to continue to run WEP.

We could not do this alone without the trust and belief from partner agencies and the financial backing which enables us to run this worthwhile project.

I would particularly like to thank AVDC pathways team for managing the referrals and to Thames Valley Police for undertaking the police checks for us.

Thank you too for the generous donations from AVDC, Bucks County Council and Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust.

We have also experienced tremendous support from the local community. They have donated both financially and practically through clothing, bedding and food. Thank you too to Bucks County Council's Local Emergency Support who supplied clients with emergency food packs.

I am fortunate and privileged to work as part of an amazing team of staff and volunteers, who relentlessly work to support those people in need within the community. Some of the comments from clients when asked if there was anything more we could do to assist included:

"I have had first class support from AHAG and they are only too pleased to help with anything I need to know and need."

"I could not have asked anymore of the team. They in my eyes went beyond their duties. It's truly wonderful that there are such people out there. They are truly selfless, caring and have that aptitude to give that much needed support to those in desperate need."

“They took time out to listen to me and assist in every way possible, they didn’t judge me or make me feel uncomfortable.”

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the clients who accessed WEP. It is a humbling experience to walk alongside someone as they begin to rebuild their lives. Thank you for letting AHAG be part of that story.

I will end with the same quote that I started with, which for me, concludes the difference that WEP makes to a person’s life.

“I finally felt safe and secure. I also felt that I was moving forward for the first time in years.”

Thank you to all those people that made WEP such a success.

Karen Warner

Operations Manager

April 2018