

## Outcome Report 2020-2021

This past year, like many other charities, we have had to learn to quickly adapt our services, to ensure the safety of our clients and staff. This has included stopping our drop-in services and supporting people remotely. Whilst in many ways it has been the most challenging of years, we are proud of the way that we have both continued and developed our services to meet the needs of the people we support.

Due to the pandemic, we welcomed the Government's 'Everyone In' scheme which for the first time saw no rough sleepers within our community. This allowed AHAG, alongside many other agencies, to engage with clients in a more meaningful way. At times, this was challenging, as many of the people we worked with had complex support needs, which were further exacerbated by lockdown. However, we also saw some really exciting stories of transformation as people began to engage in support and move into long term housing.

We have also seen the impact of the eviction ban which was in place until 31st May. This has resulted in us, seeing fewer clients whose housing is at immediate risk. We are concerned that we will see an increase in the number of people at risk of eviction following the lift of the ban. We have prioritised increasing awareness of our advocacy service through social media and our website.

This outcome report, through the use of data, client quotes and case studies demonstrates the impact that AHAG has had on its local community. The report is divided into the five sections of our key values: creative, collaborative, integrity, consistency and respect.

### **Creative** – plan new options to deliver the best outcomes

Covid 19 has had a significant impact on the way that we had delivered our services. In the past we had prioritised supporting people either through our drop-in sessions or face to face.

This year we needed to adapt our services to ensure that people could still easily access support. Staff very quickly had to learn new ways of assessing and supporting clients by phone, email and video. Whilst some face to face continued, this was the exception rather than the rule. We also set up an online chat function, which has proved to be very successful.

### **Outcome 1 – AHAG has supported 185 people from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. 106 of those were new to our service.**

Clients have reported that they have felt well supported by staff. Whilst, at times it has been challenging supporting clients remotely, it has meant that we have been both able to keep staff and clients safe, but also more quickly and efficiently respond to clients' needs.

Client quote, "It's been the most challenging and emotionally draining few months of my life - so I honestly can't convey to you all there at the charity how much you are appreciated! It's not just a job - you have truly saved my life!"

### Case Study

Last year, a client's partner passed away and he asked for help from a bereavement counselling service. Months later, still not being able to access support for his declining mental health, this client began to take drugs as a means of self-medication. This led him to lose his job not long before Christmas. He started accessing our St Mary's drop-in for the Aylesbury Foodbank, as he struggled through a 5 week wait for Universal Credit. Eventually at the start of this year, he approached us to say that his landlord had issued an eviction notice, after falling in to rent arrears.

We immediately began to liaise with Universal Credit, Buckinghamshire Council and his landlord in order to prevent an eviction from taking place. A housing officer confirmed that the landlord's eviction notice was invalid, allowing us time to convince Universal Credit to put advance repayments on hold and resolve a sanction that had been placed on our client's claim. It was arranged that an outreach mental health worker would have weekly sessions with our client, which helped him to start tackling his drug use. We kept both our client and his landlord up to date on the steps we were taking to help resolve the rent arrears. This included advising the landlord on how to apply for a direct payment of housing benefit, which allowed our client to budget his money more easily, and stopped the landlord's arrears from climbing. Soon after, our client was not only able to start making full rent payments again, but also set up a repayment plan for his arrears. The landlord has since reversed the decision to evict our client.

Today, this man has managed to significantly reduce his drug dependency, and has begun to look for work. He hopes to reach a point by the end of this year where he can significantly increase his arrears repayments.

**Collaborative** – we work together to achieve shared goals

AHAG has been part of Buckinghamshire's Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI). The RSI project involves a multi-disciplinary team which supports those people who are rough sleeping or in temporary accommodation. AHAG's role is to provide housing support to those people placed into temporary accommodation and help them to secure long term housing.

**Outcome 2 – 59% of clients secured housing. This figure is much higher than last year. Due to the pandemic, all rough-sleeping clients were offered accommodation by the council and AHAG supported them to secure long-term housing. Recently there has been a new project providing housing and support for clients with high support needs therefore housing options within Aylesbury have increased.**

#### Case Study

An older person was reported as sleeping in their car at a service-station. We received calls from the service-station manager who raised concerns that this person had disclosed a recent stay in hospital and they had since attempted to end their life. The weather was turning cold and it was vital we established support quickly.

We liaised with the local authority and worked with other agencies to quickly get this person verified and to a place of safety.

The person was placed into emergency accommodation and we spoke with their GP who arranged vital medication to be available locally. Universal credit was set up for an income stream.

A referral was made to a local older persons housing scheme and we worked closely with them to arrange a quick move in. Central Aid in High Wycombe were able to assist with furniture items. A home starter pack was delivered safely. We arranged for support for mental health and this person continues to benefit from weekly contact with one of our volunteers under the befriending scheme.

A further project that we have set up in January this year has been our Advocacy Service. This is in partnership with Hillingdon Law Centre and Wycombe Homeless Connection. This service provides people living in Buckinghamshire with access to free legal housing advice.

**Outcome 3 – 7 people were supported in the three months from January to March through our Advocacy Service.**

## Case Study

Client X was referred to us by Women's Aid for legal advice on her housing situation. She and her daughter fled the family home due to domestic abuse. They were placed into emergency accommodation as it was not safe for them to occupy their home. They approached the Local Authority for advice and were told that a housing register application would not be accepted as she was a joint owner of the property she had to leave. She was advised that she should remove her name from the deeds but she was reluctant to do this due to amount of time that it would take and the fact it could be detrimental to her situation.

She was offered an appointment at the Legal Clinic where she could discuss her case with a housing solicitor. Following this appointment, the client's support worker from Women's Aid supported her with contacting the Local Authority to request they look at their allocations policy under "reasonable preference". The initial decision was overturned and the client was accepted onto the housing register and awarded a higher band within a few weeks.

Shortly after this, Client X and her daughter were offered long term private rented accommodation. Despite it not being an offer of accommodation via the housing register, the appointment with the solicitor was still very worthwhile. It meant that the client fully understood her housing rights and was given the correct information to enable her to challenge the decision made by the Local Authority.

The client's Women's Aid worker said – "Overall a very satisfying and positive outcome, mainly due to the advice and information received from your team. Thank you so much to the solicitor and AHAG – couldn't have done it without them."

**Integrity** – we are honest, realistic and confidential

The pandemic has had a significant impact on our clients' motivation, physical and mental health. Our outcomes have reflected this.

**47% (61% previous year) of clients demonstrated improved skills and capacity to make informed life choices to live independently.**

**48% (52% previous year) of clients, with complex support needs, demonstrated improved life skills and greater confidence to access the support they need.**

**38% (40% previous year) of clients, with additional support needs, demonstrated that they are more motivated/taking greater responsibility for their physical and emotional wellbeing.**

It has been at times, challenging supporting clients with limited motivation and has made the work of engaging with clients that much harder.

### Case Study:

This person presented as a sofa surfer and rough sleeper who had a number of physical and mental health concerns. Substance misuse led them to unemployment and relationships with family members had become difficult.

Initially this case was straightforward, but then we went into lockdown. The person was then offered temporary accommodation due to Covid 19.

Initially the person settled well into the accommodation, however over time failed to comply with the government guidance which resulted in some safeguarding concerns.

Sadly, this resulted into their accommodation being terminated.

However, we continued to support this person and successfully assisted them into a private rental which was made easier with access to funding grants.

A pack with essential home items was safely delivered to the new address.

Recently, I received an update, from a family member, with great news that this person had addressed their addiction issues and relationships with the wider family had got stronger.

### **Consistency** – we maintain high standards

We are proud of the way that we have successfully managed to provide a consistent service throughout this past year.

We place a high value on client feedback and through the evaluation of our data ensure that our standards remain high.

An example of this has been that we have extended the contract for our mental health worker. With the increasing impact of the pandemic on clients' mental health, this service has offered clients additional support throughout this past year. A further success has been that the worker has also been able to provide supervision and support for staff as they have had to deal with a number of very difficult and complex clients.

“I’ve come so far in the past few months, but I definitely couldn’t have done it without you.”

**100% of the clients that have received this support have improved how they manage their mental health, have improved how they feel about themselves and have a greater sense of hope for the future. 18 clients have been supported with approximately 4 appointments each.**

**Respect** – we listen to understand.

AHAG believes that the client's voice is the most important. Whilst we have had to learn new ways to listen over this past year, we have continued to engage and support our local community.

Within this past year clients have received 2321 sessions from support workers.

One client's feedback was the case worker was "so positive and had helped me to keep my spirits up, she was brilliant at listening and was always so calm and patient - and very knowledgeable".

Due to lockdown, many of the clients that we supported were lonely and isolated. We set up a Befriending Service using our regular volunteers. We identified those clients whose mental health has been affected as a result of the pandemic. We were able to use our volunteers to regularly call each client. This service has been very successful, making a real difference to the wellbeing of our clients.

Client quote, "a big thank you, you have been such a rock through this".

AHAG has made a significant difference throughout this past year. We are proud that we have been able to continue to offer a consistent service and to support people throughout this difficult year.

More recently we have undertaken an evaluation exercise with both staff and trustees. This exercise has been really helpful in analysing what had worked well and what had been challenging. We have used this learning to inform our future strategic planning.