

Positive.steps

Thamesmead



A change for the better

Background

Through our regular partnership meetings with local healthcare professionals, it was identified that approximately half of patients were presenting non biomedical needs to their GPs at Lakeside Medical Practice with issues such as debt, immigration and housing causing individuals to turn to their doctors for help.

Similarly, through our ongoing partnership with Fair Finance (FF), it became clear that beneficiaries of the service were dealing with far more complex a set of issues than FF were equipped to deal with. In response, Positive Steps Thamesmead (PST) was established with the intent of creating a single point of contact for an individual to access the whole range of services they require to both address their immediate need and to positively transform their current situation in the longer term. PST removes the need for an individual to navigate around all the services available to them.

Partnership

PST is a collaborative partnership bringing together local advice and specialist support services in:

- Immigration (Lewisham Refugee & Migrant Network)
- Debt and credit (Fair Finance; Greenwich & Bexley Credit Union; Citizens Advice Bexley)
- Housing (Gallions Housing; Citizens Advice Bexley)
- Disability (Greenwich Association of Disabled People)
- Employability, learning & skills (Building Futures; Job Centre Plus; Re-Instate; SEEC; Recovery College Greenwich)
- Emergency food, furniture and household goods (Thamesmead Foodbank; Thamesmead Furniture Recycle)
- Domestic violence and abuse (Bexley Women's Aid; Barnardo's Amber Project)
- Family support (Thamesmead's Children's Centres; faith communities)
- Health, including drug and alcohol abuse (Lakeside Medical Practice; Bridge Mental Health; Lifeline Basis)

How it works

The model is based on a triage system. A team of local, training-accredited, residents carries out an initial basic assessment of need, which triggers a referral to one or more of the specialist partners. The PST trained volunteers team is based in the local Lakeside Medical Practice health centre, where 16,000 patients are registered with nine GPs. Doctors and reception staff refer patients to the project volunteers based in the reception area who are identified by their uniforms and publicity materials. They can then carry out an individual needs assessment and gain permission to pass their details to the relevant support organisation(s).

The partners action each referral within five working days and refer on to other services as appropriate. Data is shared between partners to ensure the support provided matches the evolving needs of the individuals who participate, and to make sure the model continues to respond as a holistic, person-centred process.

All of the partners in PST focus on enabling the individual; providing everything from emergency support (eg food/furniture/loan) to longer-term help (eg skills, education, savings schemes) to build on the strengths and resources they already have to improve their resilience.

Achievements so far

Since launching on 15 April 2015, we have recruited and trained 16 volunteers to join the Positive Steps Thamesmead triage team.

In that time, we have processed 453 local residents through our volunteer triage team, many of whom have been referred on to agencies within the Positive Steps Thamesmead partnership.

We have prevented four cases of homelessness or eviction.

Cost-benefit analysis

A critical element of the Positive Steps Thamesmead programme is to capture the full impact of the project on areas of expenditure by the public purse. From the outset, we have identified the following outcome areas for which we will be aiming to demonstrate savings over the lifespan of the project:

- GP visits
- Mental health interventions
- Evictions
- Temporary housing
- Housing arrears
- Housing benefits
- Employment
- Council tax debt

In October 2015 we undertook our first review of the impact of the project so far and attempted to place a numeric value on the savings created for the public purse through the intervention of PST. We will also be putting in place a qualitative evaluation process to gather feedback from partners, volunteers and users of the service in order to build a more detailed picture of the outcomes of PST so far.

Our aim is to be able to demonstrate to our public sector partners, the spend that has been diverted from their organisations through the early intervention of PST; and through this, build a case for the project to be funded/mainstreamed in the longer term.

Funders

DCLG's Our Place project helped to kick-start the programme, providing support with establishing the Cost-Benefit Analysis and consultancy support to engage with strategic partners and firm up the monitoring process.

In August 2015, we also received notification from the City Bridge Trust of a £90k grant to be awarded over the next three years of the project.

Next steps

The PST project has already begun to receive a lot of interest from neighbouring areas; including other venues in Thamesmead. Now we have firmly cemented the model of delivery at Lakeside Health Centre, we are currently exploring how the service might be rolled out to other venues in Thamesmead. We are also considering the best ways in which we can support other areas (outside of Thamesmead) to learn from our experiences and implement a similar model suitably tailored to their own area's context.

A detailed toolkit has already been produced to assist this; and the potential for other learning mediums is being determined.

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