

Commonweal Housing

Impact Review 2013 - 2014



The Commonweal Journey



Idea sourcing

1. We welcome and consider many ideas and suggestions coming from both Commonweal staff and diverse external sources. Around 30 ideas are considered for every one ultimately adopted.

Our Vision

Developing innovative housing solutions to social injustices, capturing the learning and achieving replication of proven success.



Feasibility

2. This can include everything from reviewing the business plan, to demand analysis, to contract negotiations.



Project initiation

3. Signing of contracts and fundraising comes under this stage.



Project implementation

4. We work with partner charities who can use the housing we provide to deliver projects on the ground. At this stage we undertake process learning, constant internal project evaluation and review, and go through a learning cycle.



Evaluation

5. While evaluation is ongoing from stages 3 and 4; at this stage external evaluation provides an opportunity to review the project in full swing.



Promotion

6. Campaigning and lobbying on the outcomes of the project and evaluation, and seeking policy change / expansion.



Replication

7. After we have tried and tested projects that we know work, we make sure that we share and replicate the key principles of the model; so we can help as many people as possible overcome social injustice.

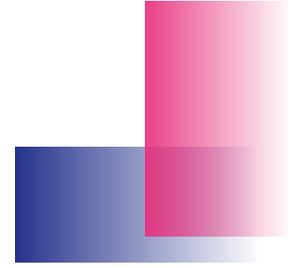


Handover

8. When a project has gone through elements of the project-life cycle we evaluate the best way for Commonweal Housing to step back. This then allows us to extract our capital investment, enabling us to invest in new projects and tackle emerging injustices.



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Our progress on last year's targets:

1. Identify a sustainable future for Re-Unite to allow Commonweal to step back from front line support from 2015.

We are on course to conclude our future model by the end of 2014.

2. Achieve replication of learning for projects using the principles of the Chrysalis model.

New services based on the approach are being actively developed across London and elsewhere.

3. Continue to raise awareness and keep the Peer Landlord approach at the heart of discussions around shared housing models.

We are linking in with other research projects looking at successful shared housing models.

4. To identify our next project for 2014/15 and secure social investment funding to support it.

We are just embarking on a £2.5M social investment funded No Recourse to Public Funds model.





Challenging injustice

Chair - Fiona Mactaggart MP

In the last 12 months Commonweal has housed and supported more people who face a wide range of social injustices. We started a new project, we secured new social investment, we won awards and external recognition – but we also made mistakes and brought one project to an early end. But using our action-learning principles means that future project plans will avoid the flaws in this one. When another project could not effectively be replicated, we used what we have learnt to establish key aspects of how best to address the problem.

Testing and learning is as important to Commonweal as our mission of finding housing solutions to social injustice. As we try to make our successful Re-Unite project independent, we discover that this stage brings new challenges we have not faced before. We will use what we learn to further our mission.

The people we have housed also have much to teach us. At a meeting I convened in Parliament about the Chrysalis project - *Julia who has moved on in her life, leaving behind her the dangers and trauma of street-based prostitution, showed us how giving her secure space, hope and options has helped to change her life.

Similarly, *Harry had been wrongly imprisoned by the state, the victim of a miscarriage of justice. He was subsequently rejected for housing support by local authorities; he has now been able to hold down a job, rebuild relationships and plan for the future – thanks in part to the flat made available by Commonweal. Commonweal doesn't feel the model we developed was working as we hoped and we have ended that project (read more about this on pages 16 - 17) – but it has changed his life and has contributed to our learning.

We know that the areas we work in - seeking 'housing solutions to social injustice' - is the right one. We are making a difference.

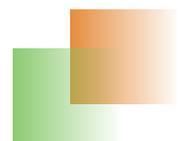
Helping two people – indeed helping over 70 people who are housed at any one time in the 30 or so properties bought by Commonweal over the last 6 years is great, but it isn't enough for me or my fellow Trustees. We are determined to ensure that what we learn can help influence other providers, can create new solutions to old problems, and can make housing responsive to social injustice. We know the right housing and support can help women exit prostitution; can enable people who have been wrongly imprisoned to make a fresh start; can rebuild shattered families or can help single people learn how to make shared housing work.

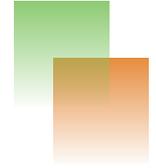
We encourage our project partners to ensure that their practical learning is shared. So where our models work we replicate them - sharing what works and why it works, and where it hasn't been a success we share that too, so that they can avoid making the mistakes we might have made.

I thank the Trustees of Commonweal for their time and insight, our project and replication partners across the country who develop solutions on the ground, the staff team who keep us going, and the wide group of supporters and friends that form our Advisory Panel – helping to shape new project ideas and giving us the benefit of their wide knowledge and expertise.

I particularly want to record our thanks to Grove End Housing for continuing to support the aims and activities of Commonweal. This support has been invaluable throughout our existence but this year especially it has enabled us to secure important new social investment funding, multiplying the value of their own generous financial support for Commonweal – a vital step in the development of our organisation.

*Names have been changed





Explaining what we do

Chief Executive - Ashley Horsey

Talking to people about who Commonweal are and what we do is at the same time one of the best and hardest things about my job. The best because it is a fantastic tale to tell, a remit to seek out that which others think can't be done or is not worth trying – finding imaginative and progressive partners and making it work. Commonweal has a fantastic group of Trustees who recognise the pitfalls such groundbreaking work may entail, who have no fear of project failure – only fear of failing to understand why.

Then why is it sometimes so hard? Partly because social injustice is a huge canvas. Even when narrowed down by thinking about only those areas where housing has a role to play, it is still a vast range of issues, and this can lead to frustrations that we are not aware of all the areas where we might be able to make a difference. We are attracted to try and find solutions to the frequent 'systemic nonsense' we all come across e.g. where you can't get the service without housing and you can't get housing without the service. At Commonweal we are interested in providing housing that can help people escape this spiral of despair.

Regularly talking to other people with an interest in such areas is however the best way for us to identify new potential project areas.

We outline areas of general interest each year but at the same time we also continuously explore new issues and new areas for potential projects that arise from conversations, and long may that continue.

Once the ideas have come to the fore we put them through our development process, considering what the housing element would be – what the hypothesis we would be testing is, and importantly what replication might look like if our pilot proves successful. We work closely with our project partners throughout, we are clear that we want Commonweal to be facilitating their projects, they are the experts and we greatly appreciate their openness and acceptance of our constant drive for action-learning and understanding why.

I am delighted that we continue to progress in attracting new social investment – helping us to deliver more new projects, and seek to tackle more areas of social injustice. The foresight of those that first established Commonweal back in 2006, channelling social investment funding into vital homes, has proven a successful model. This year we have secured another £2.5M of investment funding from like minded Trusts and Foundations, their support for our work is greatly appreciated.

Targets for 2014/15

1. Secure a future for Re-Unite independent of Commonweal.
2. Develop a project replicating the principles learnt from the Chrysalis model.
3. Influence policy through what we have learnt, starting with achieving better support for victims of miscarriages of justice leaving prison.
4. Deliver a successful start to our new No Recourse to Public Funds project utilising new social investment.
5. To increase Commonweal's profile amongst our target audience of decision makers and policy shapers.

Looking Forwards

Future Areas of Interest

Commonweal is constantly seeking to identify new potential project areas, new examples of social injustices – especially those systemic nonsenses that crop up all too often in social policy – where we might be able to help find or prove a solution.

Each year we produce an indicative list of the areas we think might be of interest. This is published in our rolling 3 Year Business Strategy document on our website.

Social injustice is a huge canvas, and housing, as we have seen from our projects, is crucial to making sure individuals and families are able to progress. A house or somewhere safe and appropriate to live is generally not the solution in itself, but it enables other support and additional services to gain traction and really deliver.

For 2014 we have identified the following areas of interest:

- Housing needs of the growing elderly population.
- Trial tenancies linked in with apprenticeships or other structured employment or training programmes.
- Medium term leasehold options and equity build-up opportunities.
- The housing and support needs of young people and difficult transitions to adulthood.
- Innovative solutions for re-using empty properties, especially around mutually supportive housing.
- Unlocking move-on housing for probation and especially Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) clients.
- Meeting transitional housing and support needs for those with disabilities and chronic health and social care needs.

Key Human Needs

Self Actualisation
You are living to your highest potential

Esteem
You have acquired the skills that lead to honour and recognition

Love and Belonging
Achieving deeper, more meaningful relationships

Safety Needs
Home sweet home

Physiological Needs

Food, water, sleep

Hierarchy of Human Needs (Maslow)

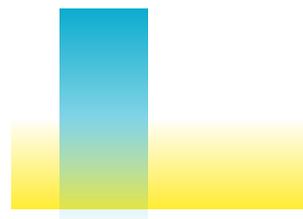
We are providing the resources at the first couple of layers of the key human needs hierarchy; needs which once achieved then enable people, with the help of our expert project partners, to achieve at the higher levels - especially esteem and self-actualization.

Highlight Reports

In 2014 we have started to publish six-monthly research reports that address and highlight important housing and social innovation issues of the moment.

The first of these reports - *Rough Justice* - is published in early July, and highlights the negative unintended impacts of policies that create homelessness.

A copy will be available to download from our website.



Impacting people

“It’s clear to me that Commonweal are interested in hearing the real point-of-view about what I can see from my working with tenants day to day. **They don’t make judgements** and expect things to go a certain way, instead they allow the project to develop naturally and in a way that works best for our tenants.”

Leon Honneyset
London Services Manager, Catch22

“When I was told there was a Commonweal flat about to become available, as part of the Chrysalis scheme, I was desperate to get it. Since moving into the flat I could not have been happier. It has given me confidence and a feeling of permanence I have not felt in years.”

Stacey, tenant of Chrysalis project

Helping

“Both St Mungo’s and Broadway have been working together with Commonweal on a range of issues, including the Chrysalis Project, for a number of years now. A common factor which we have always valued has been the support and openness of Commonweal in facilitating us to develop projects that work. The prime example of this is the Chrysalis Project where we have found Commonweal to be **an organisation that welcomes innovation**. We are hopeful that together we can expand Chrysalis - something we at St Mungo’s Broadway are keen to explore given the difference it has made to the lives of our clients.”

Howard Sinclair, Chief Executive, St Mungo’s Broadway

“Aside from the sourcing and procurement of suitable properties for the project, I also manage the renovation of Peer Landlord houses. **I’m actually one of the few people who get to see the transformation of properties** from when Commonweal first buys them to when they are handed over to Catch22 or Thames Reach, as homes to be lived in. Although each house has different upgrade requirements, we always aim for a consistently high standard - to offer future tenants a home they’ll be happy in.”

Chris Burke, Surveyor, Peer Landlord Project

“Commonweal have made a huge contribution towards Praxis’ recent work on developing new solutions to the homelessness of London’s vulnerable migrants. It was clear from the start that Praxis and Commonweal shared a common methodology and value base. **What we liked about Commonweal’s approach, was they offered a valuable combination of practical housing advice as well as the chance to learn as we progressed**. They were really interested in drawing out the long-term learning from our project, to test out our model, see what works and think through how it could be replicated to have maximum impact.”

Alex Sutton, Deputy Chief Executive, Praxis

“I was delighted to have chaired Commonweal’s Re-Unite conference in 2013 - ‘The Price of Justice: The True Costs of Imprisoning Women,’ which drew together people from across charities, women’s centres and the Criminal Justice sector. It was wonderful to see how successful Re-Unite has become through replicating a model that works and rolling it out across the country. It’s now helping even more women to re-unite with their children and to avoid reoffending.”

Jane Garvey, Journalist and Broadcaster

Transforming

Happier

Facilitating

Impact in numbers

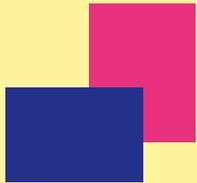


£10,000

Given to support SASE
Stand against Sexual Exploitation



People are housed
in homes provided
by Commonweal at
any time



£4 million

External social
investment funding
raised to fight injustice

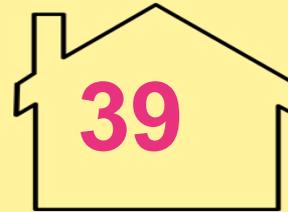
£50,000

Seed corn funding given
to charity delivery partners
for Re-Unite replication

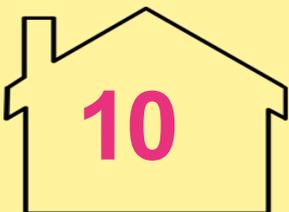
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Social investors support
our work, in addition to
our principal benefactor
Grove End Housing



Tenants live in supportive
Peer Landlord houseshares



Charities deliver Re-Unite
projects across the country,
re-uniting mothers and children

9



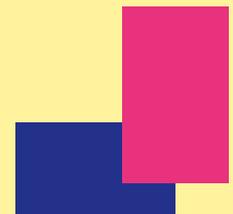
Delegates attended
Parliament to
discuss the future
of Chrysalis

£4 million

Capital funding received
from Grove End Housing

£1.6 million

Social return on investment
to be achieved over a 10 year
period for the Chrysalis project





No Recourse to Public Funds

A project set up to help failed and vulnerable asylum seekers, left without access to vital public funds.

Commonweal wishes to identify social injustices where part of the solution is housing or accommodation related. From there we can explore with expert partners whether there is scope for a pilot project to be developed. This process involves testing a hypothesis and model with a view to promoting and encouraging others to replicate any successful model.

Commonweal are interested in those areas where a lack of appropriate accommodation means other support to address wider issues in people's lives is not getting the traction it needs.

One such example is our latest project - No Recourse to Public Funds - we are working with Praxis, a specialist migrant and refugee support agency. The issue that sparked our interest and desire to help was the systemic destitution for those caught in the asylum system; those that have received a negative decision but who are not being deported as they may be able to appeal or re-apply. While staying here they are unable to work to support themselves or to access any benefits including Housing Benefit.

In developing our project with Praxis we looked in detail at the existing alternatives which currently rely on the generosity and goodwill of benevolent individuals or organisations gifting houses, short-term, to the many groups up and down the country seeking to address this immediate humanitarian need.

We liaised closely with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation who are exploring ways to encourage more of this type of giving. However, we agreed with them that, fantastic as such selfless generosity is, it can be subject to short-term change and is not enough on its own to meet the demand. Therefore finding a sustainable financial model to cross subsidise the free housing needed was a useful additional activity. Providing more free housing for this group was the end result, but we needed to work out how best to deliver the 'means to that end.'

The issue that sparked our interest and desire to help was the systemic destitution for those caught in the asylum system.

This project aims to:

- Provide free accommodation to address the extreme vulnerability of destitute and homeless failed asylum seekers who have no access to public funds and are ineligible for mainstream homelessness services.
- Raise standards of accommodation.
- Provide vital holistic support and immigration advice aiding new applications and/or appeals, also raising the potential for positive integration.
- Cross subsidising the free accommodation from a local authority contract - providing temporary housing and support to other destitute asylum seekers including families in need of temporary accommodation with no recourse to public funds but who are eligible for social services support.
- In practical terms – Commonweal will buy seven houses which will then be leased to our partner Praxis. Praxis will then make six of them available to local authorities. The seventh house can then be provided free of charge for those who have received a negative initial asylum decision.

Project Development

Praxis had been in discussion with London boroughs about how those councils support the group of asylum seekers they do have a responsibility to house under Section 17 of the Children's Act. This Act means that local authorities have a duty of care to families with children at risk from homelessness. To date most are housed in relatively poor quality B&B 'hotels' or housing rented from private landlords who are unable to provide the specialist support such households need. Praxis proposed to provide that housing and the support as well – using the income to cross subsidise a small number of additional homes for others with no recourse to public funds; but Praxis didn't have the houses available to them. This is where Commonweal stepped in.

Using core funding from our principal benefactors, Grove End Housing, Commonweal has been able to leverage further social investment from a range of Trusts, Foundations and investment funds. This will enable Commonweal to buy bespoke housing of the right type, in the right location to give this model the best chance of succeeding. Commonweal and Praxis aim to deliver this accommodation in 2014.



Kwame's Story

Lost in the system - Kwame's ordeal

Kwame is a 31 year old man who comes from Ghana. He arrived in the UK with his mother in 1994 when he was 12. His mother made an application for asylum which was refused. She was subsequently removed from the UK, however Kwame was not. Instead, he was taken care of by a neighbour while an appeal was lodged.

His case was lost in the UK Border Authority backlog (eventually known as Legacy cases) - cases that were started and due a response before 2007. In the meantime, Kwame established his life in the UK. He met his wife and had two children, all the while supporting himself by doing cash-in-hand work.

Kwame lodged a Human Rights application in 2008 based on the Right to Family Life to ensure that, should the Home Office decide he can remain in the UK, his family would also be able to remain. Kwame and his family were renting a house found for them through his church until recently when his landlady told him he had to leave.

At this point he sought housing advice from Praxis and discovered that his landlady was subletting illegally from an estate agent. Although the situation was discussed with the landlady, she refused any compromise or negotiations. The letting agent was made aware of the situation and so were the police.

Unfortunately it was too late for Kwame and his family as the landlady changed the locks whilst they were out and removed all their belongings to a storage space. Praxis provided Kwame and his family with somewhere to stay in their temporary accommodation for people with NRPF. During this time his caseworker at Praxis requested an emergency assessment under Section 17 of the Children's Act.

As a result of Praxis' intervention Social Services subsequently accommodated Kwame and his family pending the outcome of his Human Rights application.

Peer Landlord

A supportive model of shared housing where more advanced tenants provide informal, positive, role model peer-support to other tenants.

The Peer Landlord scheme continues to provide high-quality, affordable and supportive private accommodation for those at risk of becoming homeless.

Over the past year we have seen the Peer Landlord scheme continue to grow and develop. Our partners, Catch22 and Thames Reach have been delivering the project for two years now. They are learning from early experiences and adapting the model to work in the best possible way for those it intends to support. Lucy Burns from Thames Reach tells us more about how the scheme works in practice, see her insightful interview on the next page.

Catch22 and Thames Reach each work with distinctive groups. The key objective of Thames Reach is to help people of all ages who have been made homeless and who want to get back into work. Whereas Catch22 specifically focus on providing support for young people - up to age 25 - a group that is particularly struggling due to high costs in London's private rental market.

Working with two partner charities has given us a great opportunity for comparison of similarities and differences and an opportunity to test which common elements work for both. For example, over the last year, both partners have found the need to develop stricter criteria when choosing tenants and when dealing with rent arrears.

Interim evaluation has provided some useful recommendations. It was identified that greater clarity for all tenants was needed in order for them to better understand the role of the Peer Landlord, it was also found that some tenants expected greater support from Thames Reach and Catch22 than the project intends, and there was some initial uncertainty about the length of tenancy – as the Peer Landlord model specifically keeps this open-ended until tenants naturally feel they want to move on.

The benefit of the Commonwealth approach to ongoing evaluation throughout projects is that such concerns have been identified early on and changes have been made in response to these findings.

This is an exciting point in the project, when we are looking to the future, making sure learnings are captured and thinking about the potential for replicating the scheme.

“ I like being a Peer Landlord because ultimately I like helping people, and it's satisfying when someone says thanks. ”

Henry - Peer Landlord

Who are Peer Landlords?

They are tenants who provide positive role models for other sharers, with a responsibility for making sure their house runs smoothly.

So making sure the right person is chosen to take up the role is crucial to the scheme.

Continuation



Lucy Burns
Employment & Resettlement Lead Worker
Thames Reach

What does your role involve?

My role is to promote the Peer Landlord properties and to make sure the houses are filled with the right tenants. I get involved in the full process, e.g. meeting with and interviewing tenants, doing house viewings, carrying out health and safety checks, and advising tenants if they're having financial problems.

What changes have you seen in the two years since Thames Reach has delivered Peer Landlords?

We have become a lot stricter with our tenants criteria than we were at the beginning of the project. At the start there was a feeling that we wanted to help all people, but now there is a greater focus on those individuals that are actively seeking work. We realised that the project is not like 'supported' housing, so people actually needed to be at the right point of their own journey if they are going to benefit from what the Peer Landlord project has to offer. This means that the interview process is now also more involved and the stricter criterion has made a big difference with who we take on as tenants.

How do you choose who the Peer Landlord will be?

I choose through a mix of practical evidence and using my judgement. Looking at the initial tenant application form helps to get an understanding of a person and whether they may be suitable.

Interview with Lucy at Thames Reach



When a peer landlord moved on from a house recently, another tenant was coming to me to organise bill payments and energy suppliers, I could see he would be a good peer, so I asked him and he accepted.

What are some of the successes of the Peer Landlord project?

I am a real advocate of the Peer Landlord project. I also have another role in the private rented sector where I see individuals in receipt of benefits that get a one bedroom flat or studio. They then struggle to get off benefits and into employment because they can't afford to work and pay the rent; they are trapped in an unfortunate cycle. Peer Landlord bridges this gap, our tenants don't need to worry about whether working will mean they can't afford their rent.

Can you share a memorable moment in your role?

There are so many of these, but one in particular comes to mind. A tenant, *Holly, had been living in one of the houses for a year when she came to me to give her one month notice, she had been offered a job in another part of London. Holly had been volunteering in the field of social care throughout her tenancy and had now been offered a job in this area. These kinds of things are great to see.

What would you say are the biggest challenges?

Rent arrears are the biggest challenges. With the transition from benefits into work this leaves a gap in income and tenants sometimes fall behind. They also sometimes get tangled up with how to apply for benefits. I always encourage them to tell me if they are having problems meeting rent as early as possible so we can work together to put a payment plan into place.

And what are the biggest successes?

That I now have referrals coming to me from across Thames Reach. At the beginning I had to actively promote the Peer Landlord project across the organisation and I regularly sent out emails when rooms were available. We are now in a position where colleagues across the organisation are contacting me to see if there are any spaces available for suitable individuals they are working with as part of other projects.

*Name has been changed.



Chrysalis

A partnership with St Mungo's Broadway providing a resettlement programme for women wanting to exit prostitution.

This has been a busy year for the Chrysalis project. We have spent some time on further understanding the project and identifying **key principles that make Chrysalis work:**

- Giving women the option to exit
- Individual, flexible and tailored pathway recovery
- Safe and stable housing pathway
- Staggered recovery programme

Chrysalis provides a resettlement programme for women wanting to exit prostitution. We have worked with St Mungo's Broadway, who have delivered the project since April 2009. St Mungo's Broadway already owned large hostels needed for stage one emergency, and stage two supported women's only accommodation. Commonweal provided seven one bed flats for the final independent living stage of Chrysalis.

We understood early on that to replicate the St Mungo's Broadway model would be a big ask for any potential new service providers and funders so we set about sharing these principles in a way that got the right people talking about the subject of women wanting to exit prostitution.

At the end of 2013, the London Mayor launched the second Violence Against Women and Girls' strategy (VAWG), where exiting prostitution was put more firmly on the agenda.

This has helped us talk to London boroughs, especially the ones that haven't yet fully adapted to the VAWG strategy. With a strategy that the whole of London is aiming for, the topic has become easier to discuss, not only with service providers but with the local housing and health commissioners too.

Since last year we approached service providers that were either already delivering services that helped women actively engaged in prostitution, or who expressed recognition of this group of women in their work.

After some good initial discussions with Solace Women's Aid we decided to help them progress with replicating the Chrysalis project. We knew that whilst Solace have the capability to deliver a service similar to the current structure, finding the right locations in the right borough, with the required funding would be a challenge.

We offered Solace some initial seed corn funding so they could work with a consultant who would conduct a feasibility study.

The results of the study came back at the beginning of 2014, it showed that a small number of London boroughs had a real interest in having a Chrysalis type project. The project was adapted and talks about setting up service in these borough are ongoing.

“ Drugs and alcohol took everything from me. I went from being a university graduate with a career earning £35k plus commission, telephone and travel expenses to being an unemployed drug user living in a hostel, with nothing to show from my former life. ”

***Stacey - prior to Chrysalis**

St Mungo's Broadway are also replicating and implementing the key principles of Chrysalis across some of their other projects in London and Bristol. Commonweal will be supporting them to evaluate these other projects so we can get further insight into how the projects are adapting and the impact it is having on the women involved.

*Name has been changed.

Replication

Stand Against Sexual Exploitation

Commonweal are proud to help support Helen Easton, Lecturer in Criminology at London Southbank University, and member of our advisory panel who helped evaluate the St Mungo's Broadway Chrysalis model, in a new network she has set up called Stand Against Sexual Exploitation (SASE). This is a non-profit, non-government, voluntary network of individuals, professionals and services supporting people involved in and exiting prostitution. The network aims to campaign against sexual exploitation in its many forms and to promote legal and policy change in relation to all forms of prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation.

SASE aims to raise public awareness of these issues and to act as a resource and information hub - disseminating research, policy and practice. The network also wants to offer a safe and supportive space for practitioners and others to connect with one another and progress these issues relating to sexual exploitation.



Stacey's Story

Stacey tells about life before and after Chrysalis

My life prior to Chrysalis was very difficult. By the age of 26, my drink and drug use was so serious that I suffered double organ failure and was hospitalised for six weeks.

I've been placed in a number of different hostels since January 2011, but I found they weren't really suitable for my needs. In one - I was taken advantage of by a male - as I was so intoxicated it was unclear if the relationship was within the law. I was then moved to a women's hostel for my own safety because I was using alcohol to such an extreme level that I was very vulnerable, and actually spent much of my time in blackout.

But after struggling for many years, when I finally became clean in April 2013, there were still people using in my hostel, a constant reminder that drugs were easily accessible. I was determined that I wanted to stay clean. The one thing I felt kept holding me back was my hostel; I couldn't help but think that if I remained in a using environment, I would in fact return to using.

Drugs and alcohol took everything from me. I went from being a university graduate with a career earning £35k plus commission, telephone and travel expenses to being an unemployed drug user living in a hostel, with nothing to show from my former life. So when I was told there was a Commonweal flat about to become available, as part of the Chrysalis scheme, I was desperate to get it! The responsibility of a tenancy was not new to me, still I knew that managing a flat while on benefits would be a struggle; but I also knew that it was just what I needed to keep heading forward.

Through my drug use and constantly feeling trapped in a cycle of relapse and hostels, my life just seemed transient. Since moving into the flat I could not have been happier! It has given me confidence and a feeling of permanence I had not felt in years. I feel I am now building a home for my future. I am looking to go back to university next year to do my PGCE to become a teacher, and now have a safe drug free environment to do this from.



Re-Unite

A programme providing housing for women leaving prison to swiftly re-unite them with their children.

Re-Unite is the first of Commonweal's projects to have progressed to each stage of a project - from conception to handover. This is therefore new ground for Commonweal in identifying the most appropriate and sustainable final handover of overall strategic oversight and co-ordination of the project.

The main focus for 2014 will be for Commonweal to identify and implement a sustainable future operational model to ensure the continued growth and development of the Re-Unite project.

The last year has seen a great deal of activity for Re-Unite, with replication of the project in Brighton, the North East and South Wales. This brings the total number of delivery partners to ten throughout the UK – joining existing schemes in Greater Manchester, Gloucestershire, Birmingham, and three across Yorkshire and Humberside.

There have been some exciting developments within each of these projects, with a particular focus on expanding the work being done with the children of mothers released from custody. Re-Unite South London now has a full time Children's worker dedicated to this area of support and other projects are now following that lead. Our partners continue to form productive multi-agency partnerships with prison, probation and housing officers.

The total number of women accepted on to the Re-Unite project throughout the country is now over 100. The work undertaken with all of these women continues to focus on securing suitable accommodation, from which our partner organisations deliver an intensive and holistic package of support that addresses women's criminogenic needs.

“ There is much evidence that Re-Unite is successful in accessing accommodation, establishing effective support, helping the women towards stable lives, and facilitating the restoration of families. Re-Unite has clearly provided the opportunity for children to return to their mother's care with additional support at a time of transition and change. For some children, the existence of Re-Unite has certainly prevented them from being taken into care or remaining in care. ”

Re-Unite evaluation,
Institute of Criminology,
University of Cambridge.



Re-Unite's Development Manager has been working closely with the delivery organisations to identify the 'first order questions' of Re-Unite - that is its purpose and essence. These workshops identified strong themes uniting the various Re-Unite projects from across the country, particularly concerning the project's focus on the intense and holistic package of support offered to the mother and the project's focus on the family as a whole, not simply on the offender.

Work is ongoing to identify the most suitable options through financial analysis and consultations with interested stakeholders. The new operational model and Commonweal's hand over of front line co-ordination of Re-Unite will start to be implemented by the end of 2014.

Handover

100 plus women are benefiting from Re-Unite projects across the country.



Re-Unite is delivered in:

- South London
- Brighton
- Newcastle
- South Wales
- Greater Manchester
- Gloucestershire
- Birmingham
- Leeds
- Bradford
- Sheffield

Mary's Story

Mary is re-united with her children

When Re-Unite first met 33 year old Mary* from Greater Manchester she was serving a three year prison term. She had just given birth to a baby boy whilst in custody and her two teenage daughters were staying with their grandmother. Mary also faced additional challenges around drink and drug abuse.

Re-Unite stepped in to help Mary - to re-unite her with her two older girls. Working closely with other community and statutory agencies, the Re-Unite programme provided a holistic, wrap-around service that gave Mary the real, practical help she needed to get back on her feet and support her make a fresh start.

The first move

On release, Mary was re-united with her two daughters and moved into a one bedroom flat alongside her partner Chris. It was immediately clear however that the small apartment was overcrowded and unsuitable for the family's needs. As a consequence, 13 year old Angela's behaviour deteriorated to a level that meant both Angela and her 14 year old sister Tracey were no longer attending school.

Mary's family were also living on very little income in the early days, exasperated by previous crippling debts and bankruptcy. As a result of this pressure, both Mary and Chris's mental health worsened.

Success

Re-Unite supported Mary to apply for a larger, more suitable home, which she was recently offered in Bury. Re-Unite helped Mary to claim the benefits she was entitled to, which helped ease the financial pressures the family faced and the older children have now also gained places in a new school. Mary also continues to have regular positive meetings with probation and family workers. The great news is that Mary is now on a much better path, has not touched drugs or alcohol since release, has not re-offended, and is really looking forward to moving on.

*All names have been changed.



Miscarriages of Justice

A joint project with the Royal Courts of Justice Advice Bureau to provide suitable housing for people who have experienced a miscarriage of justice.

In early 2013, Commonweal and the Miscarriages of Justice Support Service (MJSS) established a joint project to provide suitable housing for people who have experienced a miscarriage of justice. Because they are not considered to be offenders, victims of miscarriages do not receive the statutory provision delivered to other prisoners on release. They are caught in a loophole in an unfair system.

MJSS, part of the Royal Courts of Justice Advice Bureau, provide advice and support to these individuals; they are referred to the Service by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. They are offered practical advice including help with obtaining housing, state benefits and medical advice. MJSS also helps individuals access both psychological and psychiatric support. Over a hundred people have been helped as part of the project.

However, one year on from setting up the Miscarriages of Justice Libra project, we have been forced to scale back.

Why we are scaling back

So what went wrong for the Miscarriages of Justice project? It was a mix of internal factors, exacerbated by government policy change. As part of our open and honest action-learning approach, we are able to admit that the scheme was over-engineered and had too few clients – which on one hand is of course a good thing.

There were also perceived differences in the roles and responsibilities for Commonweal and our project partner. Also, in establishing the project Commonweal agreed to take on a more direct housing and landlord role as this was something that MJSS was not able to do. This split between ownership of the problem and ownership of the whole solution - was one of the key learning points for Commonweal. We learnt that to succeed projects need to have a committed organisation working in partnership who not only knows the problem but can also take responsibility for delivering the solution.

The full implications of welfare benefit reform also impacted on the project. Limiting housing benefits for under 35s meant we faced difficulties providing one bedroom emergency accommodation to some individuals. The 'Bedroom Tax' also negatively impacted upon the offer of a stage two property large enough to accommodate families - part of the long-term proposal and attraction of the scheme.

What was offered:

The aim was to offer two stages of housing.

- First - short-term, immediate housing for those at a point of crisis, either on the day of release by the Appeal Courts, or later when all too often the family life they return to breaks down.
- During the first stage we work with the individuals to help them choose where they might want to live longer term, and assist them to find and obtain a suitable home, which would be rented to them initially.
- The MJSS would in the meantime identify lawyers and others who could support individuals pursue a claim for compensation. The ultimate intention being that when compensation was awarded, the individuals could then buy the property off Commonweal. So providing a sustainable long-term solution.

Evaluation and Learning

Because they are not considered to be offenders, victims of miscarriages do not receive the statutory provision delivered to other prisoners on release. They are caught in a loophole in an unfair system.

Added to that a legislative change was made that limits compensation payments, so only those individuals the courts deem to be clearly innocent and who are expressly described as such can be awarded compensation. Unfortunately this is something courts do not do, because unless a person is proven guilty, in the eyes of the law they are therefore innocent - so courts do not restate that fact.

As a result of the likely loss of the compensation award, the last stage of the project is no longer viable – that of an onward sale of their rented home to those supported by the project. This change has effectively killed off this innovative project.

Continued Campaigning

However, the issue and social injustice of the way we as a country continue to mistreat victims of miscarriages of justice remains. So Commonweal will continue to champion for better support and access to housing for people who lost their homes when they were wrongly imprisoned. Some victims of miscarriages of justice certainly do face homelessness, and so Commonweal will continue to lobby to ensure that the homelessness regulations and guidance, and those local authorities that have to implement it, recognise the trauma and the exceptional circumstances that such wrongful incarceration creates for these people affected.



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Harry's Story

Harry is rebuilding his life

The first beneficiary was 26 year old Harry* who was in prison for four years from the age of 18, before finally having his conviction quashed some years ago. Since then, the lack of a clear housing and support pathway has meant frequent moves and constantly having to rebuild new support links with other services.

At Commonweal Housing we were committed to assisting Harry and worked with the MJSS at each development stage. As a miscarriage of justice victim Harry was plagued with housing problems since his release, as due to his age Housing Benefit regulation meant he could not afford accommodation that was not shared, so he found himself sharing accommodation with others who did not help him to adjust back into the community.

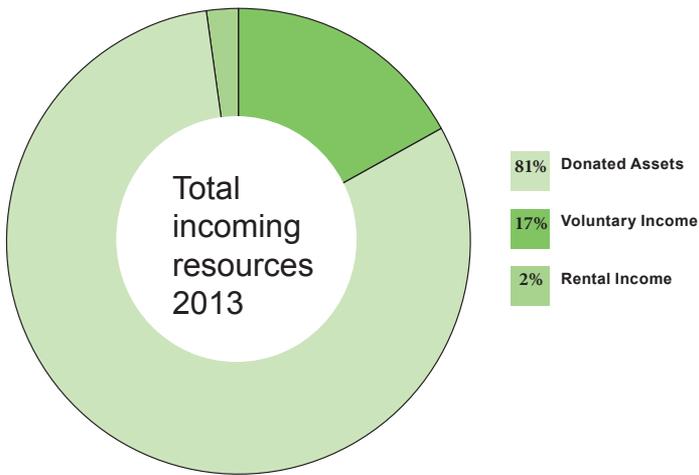
Commonweal threw him a life line by accommodating him in a flat in an area where he felt safe, and consequently he has a much more positive outlook on his future. He has found employment and is attending evening classes for his self-development, and continues to succeed in other areas of his life. He is extremely grateful to all involved in the MJSS scheme for helping him enter a new chapter in his life.

Numbers

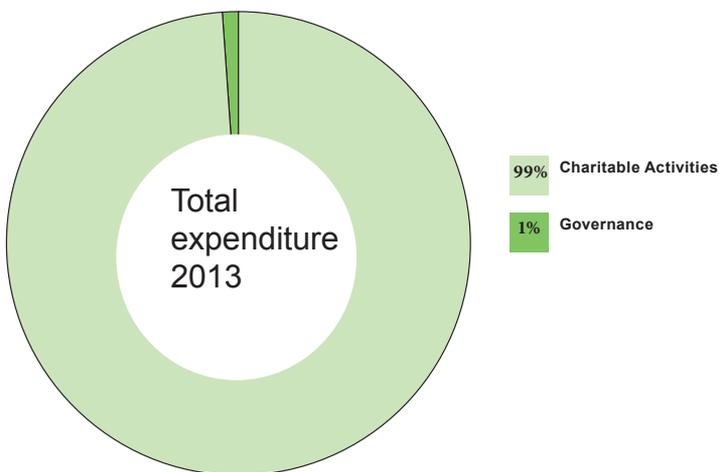
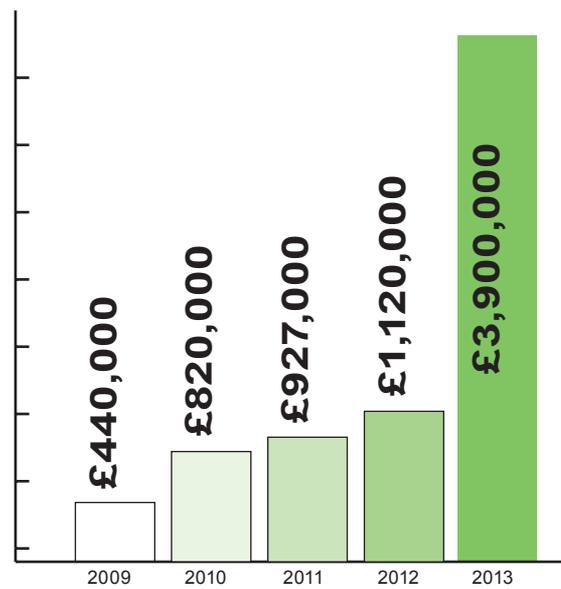
Financial Review

Donated assets in 2013 comprised transfer of 16 properties by way of a gift from Grove End Housing to enable the charity to develop its property base. In previous years similar transfers comprised on average two properties per annum.

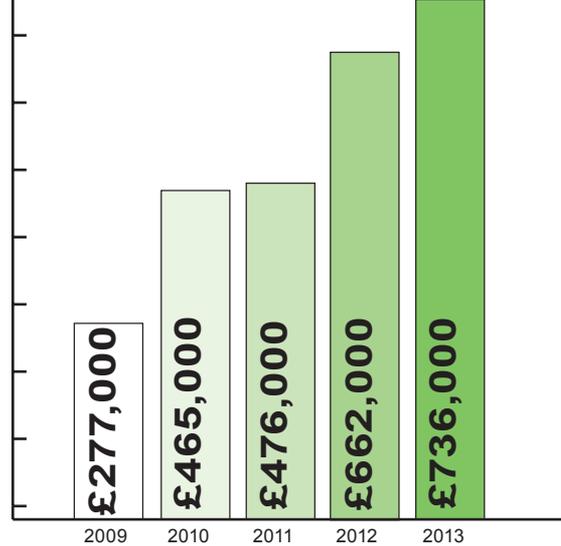
Income and expenditure



Incoming resources 2009 - 2013



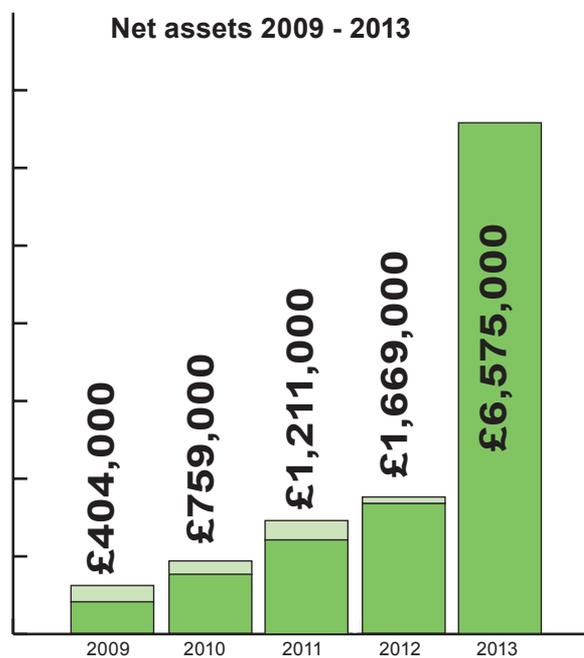
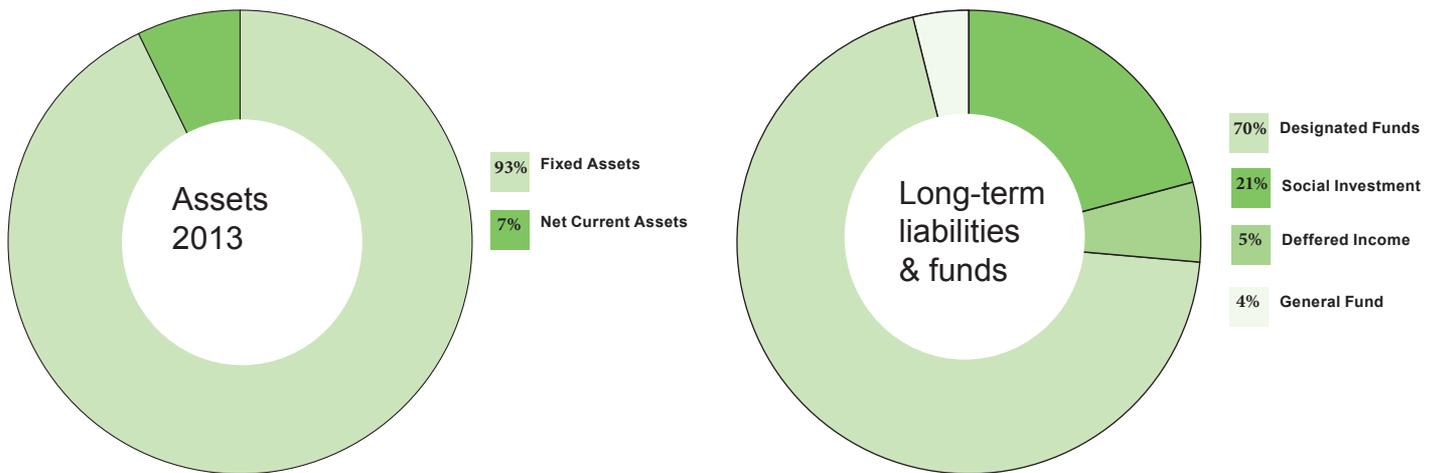
Total expenditure 2009 - 2013



Full details of Commonweal's financial statements are available at www.commonwealhousing.org.uk

Financial Review

Balance Sheet



Full details of Commonweal's financial statements are available at www.commonwealhousing.org.uk

Legal and Administrative Details

Commonweal Housing Limited is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association. The directors of the charity are its Trustees for the purposes of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as the Board of Trustees.

Company registration number: 5319765

Charity registration number: 1113331

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London, SE1 8EN

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Sir John Mactaggart Bt
Gary Medazoumian FCA
Jane Slowey CBE
Laurence Newman
Robert Nadler
Steven Douglas

Company Secretary: Gary Medazoumian FCA

Bankers: Barclays Bank plc, 7th Floor,
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Registered in England:
Number 5319765

Registered Charity: Number 1113331

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Members of the Chief Executive's Advisory Panel over the year include:

Elizabeth Balgobin, Elizabeth Clarson, Neil O'Connor, Kate Dodsworth, Lynne Duval, Helen Easton, Andy Gale, Keith Jenkins, Jeremy Swain, Joyce Mosley, and Heather Petch.

In addition, we specifically record our thanks to the Trustees and administrators of the following organisations that have provided generous project funding in support of Re-Unite South London:

- Lankelly Chase Foundation
- The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
- Wakefield and Tetley Trust
- The Bromley Trust
- Charles Hayward Foundation
- Henry Smith Charity
- Beatrice Laing Trust
- Tudor Trust

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Charities Evaluation Services

