



*Evaluation of the Amari Project: Supporting women exiting prostitution  
and sexual exploitation*

**Executive Summary**

**Helen Johnson**

**April 2019**



HBJ Research and Projects

solace

**commonweal**  **housing**  
Housing Solutions to Social Injustice



# 1. Comments

---

## Introduction from Commonweal Housing

Commonweal works to tackle social injustice through housing. Together with expert charity partners we test new housing models that seek to help people and at the same time, create outcomes that can be replicated by others. The aim is to build knowledge and learning, and have an impact at the same time.

There was no question for us when it came to working with Solace Women's Aid on the Amari project. Amari works with women exiting prostitution or sexual exploitation who can struggle to maintain tenancies after leaving emergency accommodation. It was developed from the Chrysalis project, which started in 2009 in partnership with St. Mungo's and Lambeth Council. Funding cuts meant the project was ended, but the learning from Chrysalis helped develop the model for Amari. It flagged the need for second stage accommodation alongside specialist floating support. The lack of suitable second stage accommodation means that women leaving dangerous situations sometimes aren't able to manage a tenancy without support. When Solace approached us, it was clear that there was a desperate injustice happening to women who had already been through trauma.

Amari fills these gaps by providing good quality housing and individualised support for some of the most vulnerable women. It is helping to break the cycle of homelessness and sexual exploitation that can occur once women leave emergency accommodation. A key tenet of Amari is the tailored support, provided by Solace. Working with women directly, the support allows them to become independent, ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills to navigate systems such as universal credit and healthcare on their own.

We have worked with an independent researcher and expert, Helen Johnson, on evaluating Amari. Hopefully the results speak for themselves. The impact this project has had on the lives of those taking part has been great, leading most of the women to secure tenancies, with a more positive outlook on the future. Our hope is that Amari will continue, as it is with Solace, and that other organisations will come on board to take up our learning and move it forward themselves.

## **Solace Women's Aid: The need for the Amari Project**

At Solace Women's Aid we believe that housing is a human right. As a specialist VAWG organisation we know that survivors who have access to safe, secure and suitable housing and the right support are better able to move on from the trauma they have experienced. Since the closure of the Poppy Project, we were aware of a lack of staged accommodation with support available for women who have been sexually exploited and were keen to fill this gap. The staged support model is crucial as those who have experienced trauma need the time and space to stabilise and develop independent living skills at their own pace.

The Amari Project came about through a strategic partnership with Commonweal Housing and vital funding from London Councils, providing good quality housing with a trauma-informed tailored support service. Its success to date is testament to the importance of evaluating and adapting to the needs of survivors and we hope that this will inspire other commissioners to consider replicating this model.

## **2. Overview**

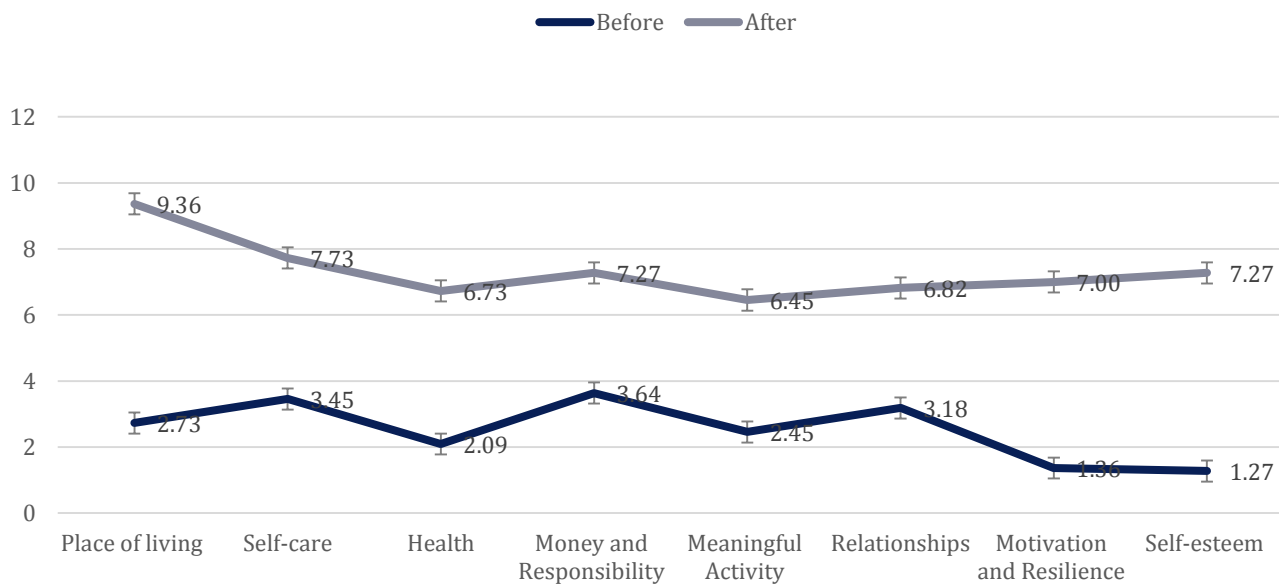
---

Amari is an action learning housing pilot project conducted in collaboration between Commonweal Housing and Solace Women's Aid. Amari is the successor of the Chrysalis project, which was set up in 2009 as a staged housing model to support women leaving sexual exploitation. Chrysalis was funded through Lambeth Council and took place in partnership with St. Mungo's. Local funding cuts meant it could no longer be sustained and the learning from Chrysalis helped to create Amari.

During the Chrysalis project it was identified that floating support within second stage accommodation provides a vital resource that is currently missing within London for this particular group. According to Easton and Mathews (2012), the provision of this staged option allows women something to aspire to and provides them with safety, stability and support while developing their skills at living independently. Women frequently find that they are not ready to transition from first stage accommodation into independent living. The provision of second stage accommodation enables the continuation of the staged recovery process, in a safe supportive environment.

As such, Amari provides this second stage single occupancy housing for women who have experienced sexual exploitation and are ready to move out of first stage emergency or refuge accommodation, with a view to transitioning into complete independence. Each woman housed by the project must be willing and able to actively engage with the project. This sort of accommodation is unique in its approach, offering tailored, holistic support, allowing women to leave past traumas behind and transition into independent living.

Since Amari started in late 2016, 17 women have benefited from the project, seeing improvements across many facets of their living situation and personal circumstances (see figure 1). This has allowed 7 women to move on from Amari and live in their own home.



(With standard deviation error bars)

Figure 1: Self-reported aggregate ratings of various categories of characteristics, activities and living situations from 11 current and previous clients of Amari. Data was taken before and after entering Amari accommodation, and rated from 0 (very negative) to 10 (very positive). One service user stated:

*“Coming into my own flat it has given me such a boost, yeah there are problems but things have really changed. All the things I’ve been doing, they’ve all helped me make peace with the past.”*

### 3. Funding

---

The Amari project has access to good quality subsidised housing and a small amount of grant funding. The project also generates income through charging rent to tenants. Overall, its per annum cost per unit of supported housing is £6,410 **excluding rent**, compared to the Government's UK-wide figures of £8,400 to £14,000. There is some possibility for the model to be replicated and self-sustaining, or alternatively more expensive, depending on location, overheads, and housing stock and subsidies.

### 4. Key elements of the project

---

#### Secure Housing

Housing that meets the needs of this specific client group was essential in ensuring that women felt safe and supported by the project. For example, danger areas and experiences of trauma impacted on whether a property was suitable for the women in the Amari project. Crucially, it was the service user's own secure space.

#### Referrals

Ensuring that referrals to the project were suitable was vital. Amari allows any service provider to refer women into the service, as long as they meet the criteria for eligibility. All referrals were subject to a detailed assessment process by SWA to ensure they were the right fit. The project is for women who are ready, able, and motivated to progress into independent living, and for this to be achievable within the timeframe.

#### Tailored support

The core values that underpin the project are:

- 1) Treating each service user as an individual
- 2) Preparing service users for the future

- 3) Promoting a 'good life' (the 'Good Lives' model<sup>1</sup> promotes the idea of capitalising on people's strengths and aiming for a fulfilling and positive life)

Amari's tailored support is designed to be responsive. Activities vary on a day-to-day basis. However, some key themes can be identified. In general, support is more intensive during the first three months and the last three months of a service user's tenancy. This corresponds to two key stages: as they settle in and set up their living arrangements and then as they prepare to move on.

### **Signposting to External Support Services**

Whilst Solace Women's Aid were able to provide a large proportion of the holistic, tailored support required for positive outcomes from the project, connections with external agencies were also important. In turn these helped to improve the confidence and self-esteem of the women within Amari.

## **5. Recommendations & Key learning**

---

### **Referrals**

Care must be taken to ensure that referrals are appropriate through assessment and engagement with referring agencies. It is also beneficial to prepare tenants for move in and engagement with the project.

### **Mental Health**

It should be expected that service users will have mental health needs and mental health support plans should be in place early on. However, mental health needs should not be so severe that they prevent progression into independent living.

### **Move On**

It is essential that the Local Authority is aware of the nature of the project so that they do not encourage tenants to make themselves homeless before supporting them. Further, service user expectations should be managed early on in relation to the kind of properties they can expect at the move on stage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ward, T. and Brown, M., 2004. The good lives model and conceptual issues in offender rehabilitation. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 10(3), pp.243-257.

### Relationship with Service Users

Where possible, separate out the roles of support worker and landlord within the project. Engage with service users in a compassionate, supportive, and respectful manner, while encouraging independence and engagement with other services.

### Housing, voids and maintenance

Voids should be expected and anticipated in the project budget to allow for 15% voids per year. Work with service users to ensure that properties are maintained and issues reported.

### Welfare Benefits and Other Entitlements

Seek to find grants and other forms of support for women because of the financial strain of being on benefits, Allow for a significant portion of staff time to be dedicated to supporting financial stability. In particular, prepare for the impact of Universal Credit.

### Meaningful Activity

Investigate ways of facilitating relationship building, engaging with communities, and engaging with meaningful activity, balancing this with service users' needs for privacy and feeling comfortable

### Operational

Consider the possibility of narrowing the location of the project in order to allow the support worker to work more closely with tenants, in particular through building peer support and engagement activities, as well as reducing travel time.

## 6. Replication

---

On the basis of the impacts of the project, its unique operating model set, and clear demand from referring agencies (as per their interviews) for more housing services of this type, it seems clear that it would be beneficial to replicate the model and ensure that this approach expands. Key strengths include:

- *Reduced burden on local authorities:* for a marginalised group that is often difficult to engage, this kind of service is invaluable.



- *The need for housing to support exit:* the provision of adequate and secure housing is a core aspect of being able to move on and create lasting change when trying to exit prostitution or recover from being trafficked
- *The strength of a staged approach:* providing interim support between first stage accommodation (such as hostels/refuges) and independent living gives women the opportunity to 'practice' at living independently, resolve on-going issues, and develop the skills and resources that they need to move on completely.
- *The strength of a tailored approach:* support worker resources are directed towards exactly what is needed in each particular case, which maximises the impact of the project
- *Balancing support with independence:* staff take initiative and exercise judgement in relation to appropriate boundaries with tenants. The project is effective because it balances being supportive with avoiding a 'rescuer' mentality and encouraging independence, including engaging with other services

## **About Commonweal Housing**

Established in 2006, Commonweal Housing is an independent award-winning charity working to investigate, pilot and champion housing-based solutions to social injustice

By using charitable resources Commonweal Housing provide experts and partner organisations the opportunity to trial and test new approaches designed to enhance housing equality and justice

Commonweal Housing has worked with partners such as Housing for Women, Praxis Community Projects, Thames Reach, St Mungo's and Stonewall Housing

## **About Solace Women's Aid**

Solace Women's Aid is the leading specialist charity in London supporting women and children experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence. Whatever form violence comes in, from rape to trafficking to relationships based on psychological or financial control, we work to end it. We know that escaping the effects of violence can be the hardest thing to ever do. That's why the life-saving support that Solace provides to more than 16,000 women and children in London each year is so important.

Solace Women's Aid  
Unit 5-7 Blenheim Court,  
62 Brewery Road,  
London N7 9NY

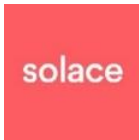
Website | [solacewomensaid.org](https://solacewomensaid.org)

Twitter | [@SolaceWomensAid](https://twitter.com/SolaceWomensAid)

Facebook | [/SolaceWomensAid](https://www.facebook.com/SolaceWomensAid)

Instagram | [@solacewomensaid](https://www.instagram.com/solacewomensaid)





0207 619 1350  
[info@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:info@solacewomensaid.org)  
@SolaceWomensAid



020 7199 8390  
[info@commonweal.org.uk](mailto:info@commonweal.org.uk)  
@CommonwealTweet

