

## Manna Centre: Report on Telephone & Email Activity – w/e 17/04/20

Inbound Calls (from clients)	88
Outbound calls (on behalf of clients)	86
Clients emails answered	86
Client emails inbound	130

### Brief synopsis of activity

Areas covered – outreach referrals, medical assessments for homelessness applications, countering evictions form temporary accommodation, “ better off” welfare benefit calculations, council tax assistance, legal guidance signposted or obtained from specialist advisers– family law – child support claims and civil small claims court applications, housing advice and referrals, advice on housing benefit calculations, financial support for clients through grants, appointments for housing

### Issues arising

- a) I want to put the current situation in context – on 26<sup>th</sup> March the Homelessness Minister provided direction in a letter to local authorities to “bring everyone in”. The letter makes it clear that councils and their commissioned homeless services should assist those that are sleeping rough, **at risk of sleeping rough or in accommodation where self-isolation would be difficult.**
- b) Our experience is that there is a disjoint – we acknowledge that services are under considerable pressure but our experiences prove how difficult fulfilling that aspiration can be.
- c) Just to outline a few instances – we have a family effectively squatting in a friend’s house where social isolation is not possible whilst 2 councils argue about who should take responsibility for them – they have fled because one of the children – only 9 years of age had been approached by a gang organisation, effectively grooming him and significant harassment from within their own community. We have been able to move this on and the social worker involved has put together a case which has now been put forward to the receiving local authority in London. A proper homelessness application has been opened and together with a local law centre, we are providing support for that application. A Homeless Link webinar just yesterday outlined some “key asks” to government and local authorities coming from organisations like ourselves. To quote - *remove legal barriers to assistance for people facing homelessness and ensure access to appropriate self-contained accommodation, with support as required.*
- d) Secondly, many local authorities are asking newly homeless individuals to access support via StreetLink, the organisation responsible for passing on referrals to rough sleepers to local outreach services. Just yesterday, I phoned to chase up a referral where the outreach team had connected with a

rough sleeper who has MH issues and physical disability issues – but there had been no further connection or direction given to that rough sleeper The phone message I listened to advised me that Streetlink was concentrating on new referrals. I know again from reporting via Homeless Link that Streetlink has seen a 250% increase in self-referrals from 23<sup>rd</sup> March. My concern is that how are we ensure an appropriate outcome consonant with the directive from the Homelessness Minister

- e) Most striking is the number of people who were previously what we would call “hidden homeless” coming to the fore as people in whose accommodation they had been living feel unable to support them. In normal times, they would have been working albeit intermittently and possibly just being able to keep their heads above water by being very resourceful
- f) Current crisis emphasises the extremely stretched resources of local authorities and current weaknesses in the homelessness system – yesterday, I tried to contact the relevant officer in a local authority – no human answered the phone after trying 2 different named officers– I left 2 messages on voicemail; I then resorted to email which bounced back with the message “mailbox full”. We understand that people are remote working but so are we and we have set up communication channels so clients and others can get through to us. Not everything is perfect at the moment but how can we resolve someone’s problem if we cannot access those that could be a pathway to so doing.

Margaret Shapland – 20/04/20(revised)