

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Ref: 15634

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Positive Transitions**Spires Centre****Adv: Sandra Jones****Base: Lambeth****Amount requested: £210,166****Benefit: Lambeth, Southwark,
Lewisham****Amount recommended: £210,100****The Applicant**

The Spires Centre (SC), a registered charity, has been providing services for 30 years to people who are homeless, or have insecure accommodation, many of whom are facing complex issues such as long-term unemployment, problems with poor mental and physical health, addiction and substance abuse, or who are imprisoned by sex work and suffering from sexual violence and trauma. As well as providing rough sleepers space at their centre, the organisation has a Streetlink service which aims to improve sex workers' personal and sexual safety and empower them to make lasting and positive life choices.

The Application

Funding is sought for SC's Streetlink Project supporting vulnerable women and sex workers with multiple, complex support needs, many of whom are repeat victims of physical, domestic, sexual and financial violence from partners, pimps, drug dealers, traffickers, gangs etc. The work supports vulnerable, mainly women to enable them to make informed choice changes. This will be achieved by funding two half time support and outreach workers, a specialist drop-in session and independent sexual/domestic violence advocacy training for the project workers.

The Recommendation

Spires has a deserved reputation for providing quality services to homeless people and sex workers across Southwark, Lewisham and Lambeth. Working mainly with street-based sex workers, 95% have substance misuse issues, 75% have experienced multiple counts of domestic and sexual abuse and 95% has mental health issues including complex PTSD. This is the only agency working specifically with street and indoor outreach work in South London. A grant is advised:

£210,100 over five years (£41,000; £40,400; £41,700; £42,900; £44,100) towards two 0.5 Outreach Workers and associated running costs.

Funding History

None

Background and detail of proposal

The focus of SC's project is to support extremely vulnerable sex workers with multiple and complex support needs to make changes in their lives, including exiting sex work if they are ready and able to do so. There is also an element which is preventative. Approximately 40% of the organisation's clients are vulnerable women not currently sex working but at risk of entering prostitution by virtue of their current life circumstances e.g. homeless and exchanging sex for somewhere to stay, drug users exchanging sex for drugs, women with no recourse to public funds who may sell sex to survive, women with mental health problems who may be exploited by others. We work with these groups to try and divert them from prostitution.

The work involves three elements. The first element is outreach. As sex workers don't readily access services, the project actively seeks them out by delivering four outreach night shifts weekly with street-based sex workers, and one shift weekly to sex workers working indoors. The support offered is condoms, needle exchange, advice on working safely and within the law, support to report crime and information about SCs services and other services locally.

The second element is engagement and support. This involves two women-only drop-ins each week where clients access food, showers, clothing and toiletries. Those that are ready to engage have a one-to-one holistic assessment and receive long term non-judgemental support from one of the support workers, and where appropriate have advice, advocacy and referrals to other specialist agencies. The final element is well-being activities which includes creative writing, yoga and social activities as well as the option of working with one of the organisation's counsellors.

Despite the challenges faced by the Covid19 crisis, Spires' frontline teams continue to reach out to support women. Some of the women have presented with greater risks, due to the many issues that the crisis presents. Throughout lockdown, Streetlink has continued to support women through online outreach and through regular communication via telephone if women are unable to meet in person. As most of the services started closing down, women said they were totally isolated and those who were homeless took shelter in crack houses, squats, etc. Women also said that their mental health took a serious knock down as the day centre services closed and they remained outside. Further, no one was able to give clear information about Covid19, so they suffered from loneliness and fear, compounded by a lack of food. Additionally, they were using more drugs and alcohol to cope and, as a consequence, they were getting into debt with drug dealers. They also reported increased vulnerability to more sexual and emotional abuse. Women said they were taking riskier decisions about clients and working in riskier locations. Exchanging food and accommodation for sex has become a big topic for women fleeing DV, as well as those who are already vulnerable and living on the streets.

Spires Streetlink Workers have had longer and more in-depth telephone conversations with women. They have used a solutions-focused approach to keeping the women motivated, focusing on their goals, and helping them to recognise and rely on their own inner strengths. Stronger relationships have been built through weekly welfare checks.

Financial Information

2018/19 was a year where the organisation worked to re-establish a more secure operating structure and there have been costs associated with this which lead to a deficit. The new structure is now in place and going forward the organisation will be building back its unrestricted reserves. That said, for 2020 SC is only slightly below their unrestricted reserves target. The organisation is not reliant on earned income therefore the current situation with Covid-19 should not adversely affect them financially.

Year end as at 30 September	2018	2019	2020
	Independently Examined Accounts	Draft Independently Examined Accounts	Forecast
	£	£	£
Income & expenditure:			
Income	579,763	661,239	821,808
- % of Income confirmed as at 08/01/2020	n/a	n/a	83%
Expenditure	(589,530)	(684,799)	(818,798)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(9,767)	(23,560)	3,010
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	(10,274)	768	3,010
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	507	(24,328)	0
	(9,767)	(23,560)	3,010
Total expenditure	589,530	684,799	818,798
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	226,930	180,261	180,261
No of months of totalled expenditure	4.6	3.2	2.6
Reserves policy target	147,383	171,200	204,700
No of months of total expenditure	3.0	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	79,548	9,061	(24,439)

Approved.....

Chief Grants Officer /

Deputy CGO

Date.....

Approved.....

Chair

Date.....

Approved.....

Deputy Chair

Date.....