

EX-SERVICE ACTION GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS (ESAG)

Statement on the outcome of the Research Project “The Experiences of Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London”

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Statement on the outcome of the Research Project

The Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness (ESAG) is led by Veteran's charities committed to tackling the problem of ex-Service homelessness in London. With funding provided by the Veterans Challenge Fund and the Royal British Legion, ESAG commissioned an independent study conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy (CHP) at the University of York, into ex-Service homelessness in London that commenced in 2006 and was completed in 2008. The study sought to:

- assess the scale and nature of ex-Service homelessness in London by providing an overview of the number and characteristics of homeless Veterans in the capital; and
- evaluate the impact of the initiatives employed by ESAG in reducing ex-Service homelessness in the capital.

The number, characteristics and experiences of homeless Veterans identified in the study

- The percentage of Veterans in London's current non-statutory (single) homeless population had reduced from 22% in 1997 to 6% by 2007,
- However, this still means there are an estimated 1,100 non-statutory single homeless Veterans in London on any one night, mainly hostel residents but including some rough sleepers
- Those homeless Veterans who remain are more likely to have alcohol misuse, physical and/or mental health problems than other homeless persons
- Otherwise the vulnerabilities and support needs of homeless Veterans and other non-statutory homeless are, on the whole, very similar.
- Only a small minority of homeless Veterans reported vulnerabilities unique to people with a military history (e.g. combat related PTSD)
- Veterans are nevertheless more susceptible to sustained or repeat homelessness than other homeless people.
- Also, they are rarely classified as statutorily homeless and therefore rarely prioritised in social housing allocations

Routes to homelessness

The Veterans in the study exhibited four main life history trajectories including:

- Those who carried vulnerabilities deriving from childhood or adolescence into the Armed Forces and later into civilian life. About a quarter were in this group.
- Those whose difficulties originated during their Service, such as the onset of alcohol or mental health problems. About a quarter were in this group.
- Those whose difficulties originated from the problems of adjusting from their successful Service life to civilian life. This group comprised less than 1 in 6.
- Those who encountered difficulties after their successful Service and often much later in life such as relationship breakdown, bereavement, or financial crisis. About one third were in this group.

The effectiveness of provision for homeless Veterans in London

The reduction in the proportion of Veterans in London's homeless population and successful resettlement of many of those in the study indicates that the current service network is leading to positive outcomes. Homeless Veterans have better access to emergency accommodation, high quality specialist supported accommodation, and resettlement resources than other single homeless people. They are also eligible for specialist employment initiatives.

However, the study also identified weaknesses in this network, particularly lack of awareness of the services among both potential clients and mainstream homelessness agencies, that ESAG will have to address if it is to continue to successfully tackle the problem of ex-Service homelessness.

Key recommendations arising from the study include:

- Enhance the in-Service resettlement and post-discharge support programme to break down the 'shame' barrier that inhibits Veterans from accepting help; improve promotion of particular resettlement programmes; train staff to better detect risk factors for homelessness and social exclusion (particularly amongst Early Service Leavers); and monitor more proactively the wellbeing of Veterans after discharge.
- Increase awareness of ESAG and other relevant Veterans services amongst homeless Veterans, and staff within mainstream homelessness agencies.
- Streamline and have a well-advertised central point of contact or access for ESAG services
- Provide, or facilitate access to, more settled accommodation, in a range of forms to cater for different levels and types of need. In particular provide more transitional or second stage accommodation. facilitate access to the private rented sector, with tailored support and use of rent deposit schemes
- Formalise tenancy support services for those Veterans rehoused into independent social housing and ensure that assistance with money/debt management is provided as necessary.
- Devise means of combating the social isolation and boredom experienced by many formerly homeless Veterans and Veterans living in hostels, particularly those with substance misuse problems.
- Develop ways of filling the social 'vacuum' that a reduction in drinking leaves in the lives of Veterans with alcohol problems.
- Expand mental health services for homeless Veterans, especially those with 'low level' conditions such as depression or anxiety. There is a particularly acute need for 'low level' counselling services.
- Commission research into the numbers of, and adequacy of provision for, homeless Veterans outside London as a pre-requisite to extending the ESAG strategy to tackling ex-Service homelessness in other areas.

For a copy of the research report please access the following websites:

www.veterans-aid.net www.oswaldstoll.org.uk www.britishlegion.org.uk
www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceFor/Veterans www.york.ac.uk/chp/

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