



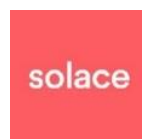
*Evaluation of the Amari Project: Supporting women exiting prostitution
and sexual exploitation*

Helen Johnson

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HBJ Research and Projects



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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.

1. Introduction and Research Focus

Amari is a housing project provided by Solace Women's Aid that supports women who have been sexually exploited through trafficking or prostitution to become independent and make sustainable positive change in their lives free from exploitation, hardship, and vulnerability. The accommodation is provided to women who have already accessed crisis accommodation and are ready to move on to step-down support and more independent living.

Women live alone (or with their children up to 2 years old) in private flats but are supported to transition into and maintain independent living. Support is provided on a casework basis that is tailored to their individual needs. The project is pan-London and is not tied to a specific referring organisation or pathway ('floating support'). However, all referrals must be from agencies/support services and require the consent of the participating woman. Applicants then go through an assessment process, which includes an interview. Women are eligible for the project only after having successfully maintained a first stage tenancy, with higher levels of support. These women must be ready to live more independently and transition into a new stage of accommodation and support.

The rationale for the project is 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, and other issues such as immigration, parenting, and lifestyle. Importantly, women frequently find that they are not ready to transition from 1st stage accommodation into independent living. The provision of 2nd stage accommodation enables the continuation of the staged recovery process, in a safe supportive environment.

This evaluation of the Amari project examines:

- Outcomes of the project over 12-18 months
- The impact the project had on participants
- Whether the model needs any amendments
- Points of learning
- The extent to which the model is replicable and sustainable

Commonweal is a charity that investigates, tests, and shares housing solutions to social injustice. Recognising that women affected by commercial sexual exploitation are particularly marginalised and vulnerable to homelessness, finding solutions for this group is one focus of their work. The project is also supported by London Councils who have funded Solace Women's Aid for a second term of four years (2017-21). This funding forms part of a wider set of projects providing safe housing and support for survivors of violence against women and girls.

2. Methodological Approach

The research approach consisted of:

- One round of semi-structured interviews with 11 tenants (service users) and 5 practitioners, including 2 staff at Solace and 3 partners offering specialist support to survivors of trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation
- Gathering and desk-based review of other forms of data, which included minutes of meetings, reporting to funders and partners, and records of assessments and support offered to the participants
- An analysis of the project's operations and funding structure in order to identify the specific interventions that are most effective and to identify possible areas for change if needed

The interviews focussed on the following themes (both client and practitioner):

- The women's experience of the project
- Changes in wellbeing and lifestyle (e.g. improved confidence, mental and physical health, and so on)
- Key points of change
- Any barriers to positive outcomes
- Moving on
- Demand for this kind of project
- The contribution of the project to meeting service user need
- Successes and challenges in implementing the project

Quantitative data:

- General demographic data
- History of involvement and engagement with the project
- Interventions
- Self-reported outcomes on a scale of 1-10 from before entering the project and after, relating to: where they live, motivation/resilience, self-care/living skills, managing money and responsibility, relationships, physical and mental health, meaningful use of time.

The outcome scales were administered during qualitative interviews at whatever stage the interviewee was at. The “before” figure was captured as a subjective “looking back” as opposed to being contemporaneous with their first entering the project.

3. Background to the Amari Project and Operating Model

3.1 About Solace Women’s Aid and the Amari Project

What is Amari?

Amari is an action learning housing pilot project conducted in collaboration between Commonweal Housing and Solace Women’s Aid, with funding from London Councils. Its main features are:

- Commonweal provides housing to Solace Women’s Aid at subsidised rent. They provide strategic support, regular operational review, and overall independent evaluation.
- Solace Women’s Aid provides exiting support services on a holistic casework basis for the Amari project. Solace is the largest specialist provider of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Services in London (across 21 boroughs) with over 40 years of experience providing services

- The Amari project provides accommodation and support to women who have been involved in prostitution or trafficked. So far, 17 women have been supported by the project, including 11 who have immigration issues.
- The project has been designed to respond to their multiple and complex needs – such as mental and physical health, social marginalisation, financial stability, complex immigration issues and other unmet needs, not least histories of unstable or unsuitable housing.
- By providing women with good quality, stable accommodation for a period of 12-18 months combined with tailored support to facilitate independent living, it was hoped that this intervention would lead to wellbeing, independence, and sustainable change. Instead of focusing on crisis intervention, the project affirms the right of this group to not simply be safe but also to live a full life, which echoes the ‘good lives’ model of service provision (Ward and Brown 2004).
- Rent comes under the purview of Housing Benefit and is significantly lower than the private rental market, in line with Local Housing Authority (LHA) rental rates

Why was it created?

- The need for effective service provision that leads to lasting change is exacerbated in the context of reduced public funding for women’s services. In particular, the closure of the Poppy Project at Eaves Housing for Women means that there is currently no Pan-London accommodation based 2nd stage project to support women exiting prostitution or trafficked for sexual exploitation.
- Cuts at a local level, changes to welfare benefit support, and the ongoing housing crisis continue to have a severe impact on vulnerable client groups and sexually exploited women are among some of the most marginalised in society.

Why is Amari innovative?

- Amari offers flexible support to meet the specific needs of one group of women who struggle to find suitable accommodation as they move on from emergency accommodation. Service providers often struggle to find suitable accommodation for this group and this is the only project that meets this specific need.
- Service providers rarely have the capacity to support women into independent living. Because of this, women may be put into accommodation without the skills to maintain a tenancy and live independently. This can lead to serious issues down the line, including relapse and loss of tenancy. Amari provides a solution to this, reducing the likelihood on further reliance on emergency support, as well as improving outcomes for this group of women.

Who is it for?

All service users have been involved in commercial sexual exploitation. Of the 17 tenants who have used the service, 14 were trafficked and 3 had exited prostitution. Service users typically had experience of problematic substance use, domestic violence, sexual abuse, previous homelessness (all women have experienced this) and CJS involvement.

3.2 A New Staged Approach

Previous research has shown that staged models - which involve a first stage in emergency temporary accommodation, a second stage of supported independent accommodation (as offered by Amari), and a final stage of moving on into total independence - produce better outcomes for women, result in cost savings (particularly over the longer term because women are less likely to cycle back through services), and equip women with the skills to be better able to live independently (Matthews et al 2014). An evaluation of the Chrysalis model in Lambeth was hugely supportive of their three-staged model, which included emergency accommodation, followed by communal accommodation, followed by independent living with case worker support (Easton and Matthews 2012).

A staged model provides both structure and flexibility to meet the individual needs of women service users, as well as allowing for a longer period of intervention that ensures change is maintained. Key aspects of Commonwealth's original staged model through the Chrysalis Project includes:

- Tailored therapeutic intervention
- Accommodation support
- Access to a range of interventions
- An approach that promotes the development of non-prostitute identities and social support networks

The staged model also provides benchmarks for women as they move through stages and allows them to be at different stages and progress in a way that is appropriate to them.

The adapted model for Amari incorporates these elements, taking into account the effectiveness of the Chrysalis model. The Amari project offers an independent version of the Chrysalis third stage support, allowing referrals from other projects for any woman who fits their criteria and then focuses on supporting these women to live independently. Women are encouraged to learn self and lifestyle management and to develop positive connections and daily activities. Amari plays a key role in linking women with the services and support that they need, as well as supporting them to learn about managing their household and finances.

Women access support subject to the following criteria:

- Have been living successfully in refuge accommodation i.e. managing tenancy and paying rent for at least 6 months
- Have access to public funds, although their immigration status may be in progress
- Have exited prostitution and those with problematic substance use issues will be actively receiving support and working towards recovery
- Are willing and able to actively engage in support programmes, including 1-1 counselling and therapeutic group work
- Are willing to engage in employment, education or training programmes
- Are willing to work towards resettlement into more permanent/ long-term housing

As women enter the project, they are subject to a thorough needs and risk assessment and interview by Amari support staff, firstly to determine their suitability for the project, and secondly to identify their unique needs and develop a plan for support.

Amari allows any service provider to refer women into the service, as long as they meet the criteria for eligibility. Relationships have been developed across VAWG service providers within London, as well as second tier organisations and other providers to identify women in need of support. As referral pathways were already in place for Solace's range of services, these could be capitalised on to identify women suitable for the Amari project. Amari advertise on Routes to Support and the Solace network explaining the nature of the project and the eligibility criteria. They also rely on word of mouth, emailing key contacts (particularly VAWG Coordinators), and visits to key agencies and borough leads. Information is disseminated by way of a referral form and explanatory leaflet. Key contacts include:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Gaia Centre
- Beth Centre
- Mosaic - Living Well Centre
- Ascent
- Homelessness and Housing Advice staff across London
- Lambeth and other VAWG Fora

The spread across London Boroughs is uneven because referrals come from services and spaces are provided in line with need as opposed to ensuring representation from across boroughs. The project works within a non-discriminatory framework and seeks to promote diversity.

The final aspect of the project is support with arranging and managing move-on, which is predominantly achieved through application to the relevant Local Authority, although three service users arranged their own accommodation (two through friends and one private rental). Until service users find appropriate accommodation to move into, they remain in the property. However, service users begin making applications once their 12 months (previously 18 months) is coming to an end. Service users are

supported for 3 months after moving into new accommodation in order to ensure that they have time to transition smoothly.

Amari has incorporated exit interviews and service user feedback forms that capture their view of the service and improvements they would like to see.

4. The Amari Support Model

4.1 Principles

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' (see Ward and Brown (2004) for the 'Good Lives' model, which promotes the idea of capitalising on people's strengths and aiming for a fulfilling and positive life)

Crucially, the project adopts a psychologically informed approach (Breedvelt 2016), which necessitates embedding emotional intelligence and compassion into all aspects of service design and delivery. In practice this means being responsive to emotional needs, acknowledging the risk of relapse and reversals and planning accordingly, addressing trauma and depression, and interacting with service users with both appropriate boundaries and positive regard.

Support offered should be underpinned by the following principles:

- Emphasising the resilience and capabilities of service users
- Ensuring safety
- Looking beyond safety to living a full life
- Promoting stability and independence
- Respecting the pace of individuals
- At the same time, seeking to encourage new skills and personal challenges
- Focus on moving forward and hope
- Establishing professional boundaries and managing expectations
- At the same time, engaging with warmth, humour, and authenticity
- Proactively and creatively identifying ways of supporting individuals

4.2 Activities (Tailored Support)

It is difficult to pinpoint with exact accuracy the meaning of a 'tailored' and 'holistic' approach to supporting women, precisely because the service 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.

One important contribution of the tailored support is that service users are signposted to and supported to access a range of support outside what is offered by the Amari staff. This includes mental health and wellbeing support, access to English and computer classes, benefits advice, and so on. This means that the impact of the project is wider reaching than simply engaging with one key person.

Service users have fortnightly key worker sessions (although there is considerable flexibility in relation to how and when appointments occur) to provide general support and discuss any particular needs. Individual support plans and risk assessments are completed and updated regularly (4-6 weeks for high risk and 3 months otherwise).

Key interventions include:

- Signposting to services, opportunities, and activities
- "Lending an ear"
- Supporting to make phone calls or attend meetings/appointments
- Researching solutions and opportunities
- Reminders/encouragement to progress activity
- Facilitating relationships

Activities are planned through assessment of the following needs:

- Housing and Finances
Including benefits applications, managing finances (including bills, direct debits, debt support, and money workshops, buying for the household and upkeep, health and safety checks.

- Physical Health and Mental Health
Including arranging and attending health/medical appointments, facilitating access to counselling, signposting to activities that promote health, providing advice and emotional support.
- Meaningful Activity and Social Connections
Including support to find meaningful activity (employment, volunteering, and general daily lifestyle), including identifying needs and goals and signposting to opportunities, encouraging to build wider networks.
- Family and Children
Including support/signposting in relation to maternity, childcare and parenting.
- Immigration or other legal issues (such as safety, divorce, children etc.)
Including facilitating access to legal support for immigration, legal entitlements, domestic and sexual violence, and relationship breakdown/divorce, emotional support, help in understanding, help liaising with solicitors and attending appointments ensuring that cases progress and giving information to legal advisors.
- Recovery from addictions or other similar issues
Including ongoing assessment of need and facilitating access to support, as well as encouraging continued engagement with recovery programmes.
- Move On
Finding suitable accommodation according to the specific needs of the service user, including consideration of trauma related needs, networks, and local services. This support starts from when women move in, with resettlement plans being introduced early on in the process. Amari will support women by identifying their needs, liaising with the Local Authority, supporting them to visit properties, ensuring that formalities are in place (for example, issuing a s21 Notice), and any other aspects that need to be considered.

4.3 Example Week for the Floating Support Worker

Daily tasks:

- Updating Routes to Support (an online resource) and other places where Amari vacancies are advertised (currently fully occupied)
- Checking and answering emails, messages, and phone calls
- Responding to any enquiries
- Being on hand for tenants

Monday:

This day was spent in the office to catch up on emails and write up notes from meetings from the previous week. In addition, much of the day involved reaching out to clients to remind them of any appointments coming up in the week and catching up on how they are.

Tuesday:

The Floating Support Worker ('FSW') spent a short time in the office (90 minutes) to start working on a support letter for a PIP claim and during this time made a call to a service user to support her in setting up heating in her property. The rest of the day was spent out of the office meeting service users. One service user was met in a coffee shop to catch up on her general wellbeing, chase up her Child Tax Credit claim, and to discuss her daughter's progress and wellbeing and offer general advice. Later, FSW travelled with another service user to an ESA assessment centre for her assessment.

Wednesday:

FSW spent the morning preparing for and attending a meeting with the project partners to feedback on progress of the project, highlight any issues, and agree steps for moving forward. The afternoon was spent accompanying a tenant to a viewing as she is now ready to be moved on. This meeting also involved discussing plans for move on and providing emotional support

Thursday:

In the morning, FSW attended a meeting about an upcoming event to prepare for a workshop Amari will be holding alongside a service provider they work closely with. In the afternoon, FSW attended meetings with tenants. One tenant had a key work

session at her property. The second tenant was accompanied to the Registry office in Lambeth to register her new born child. Later, FSW returned to the office to catch up on emails and write notes.

Friday:

In the morning FSW went to another viewing and the service user accepted the property. Again, move on was discussed and the tenant was offered emotional support. Midday was kept free for phone calls and writing up notes. Later, FSW had a meeting with her manager. They both then met with a tenant to discuss her progress and engagement with the service.

5. Funding and Finances

This section outlines the indicative costs associated with this pilot project. It also attempts to provide some context in which to understand the possible cost variations depending on the type of housing stock available to any project seeking to replicate the Amari model. It will be shown that there is considerable opportunity for the model to be cost effective. However, these figures are purely indicative, not audited, and non-exhaustive. They are reproduced here as a case study with the caveat that the financial landscape will change if the model is adopted by other providers, groups of service users and in other locations.

5.1 Staff

Solace employs one full-time dedicated Senior Floating Support Worker to manage and develop the Project and provide support as outlined in section 4. This one worker covers 10 properties and service users. Originally this Support Worker was supported by a Project Manager responsible for Amari and one other project at Solace Women's Aid. However, subsequently a part-time Facilities Co-ordinator has been assigned to support the project and carrying out certain property management & compliance tasks, freeing up the Support Worker's time.

A Support Worker may have capacity to support more service users if they were located in a smaller geographical location because travel takes up a considerable amount of staff time.

5.2 Affordable Housing

Commonweal lease flats to the project at below market rate (starting at 40% of LHA and increasing year on year to 45%, 55%, and 65%, years 3, 4, and 5 respectively). The quality of the housing stock combined with the subsidy offered by Commonweal has enabled Solace to pilot the project in a cost effective way. However, other organisations seeking to replicate the Amari model will have differing access to housing stock and their ability to deliver on the project is likely to depend on this stock being available to them below market rate (although this very much depends on the market and funding conditions).

Service user rent is paid for through housing benefit - directly to the project, not via the tenants - which is paid in arrears. Only one service user has had issues with paying rent and accruing arrears when on sickness benefit. However, a payment plan is now in place.

Because of the nature of housing prices relative to LHA rates in many parts of the UK, particularly in London, the provision of affordable housing is likely only possible with some form of charitable intervention or social housing (or use of existing owned stock). It is very unlikely service users could go straight from first stage refuge accommodation to maintaining independent tenancies through private rentals as they are almost always considerably more expensive than social housing and benefits levels, whereas rent is charged at LHA rates for Amari service users

5.3 Indicative Income Statement

Project Income Statement - 9 months ended 31 December 2018

Rent received (net of arrears and void costs)		67,967
Grant income (London Councils)		24,547
Total Income		<u>92,514</u>
<i>Costs</i>		
Staff costs	29,676	
Service user costs	1,032	

Admin, comms, IT	1,659	
Property costs inc. rent	45,765	
Total costs	78,132	(78,132)

Remaining Funds **14,382**

Estimated facilities and other overhead allocation 10,660

Remaining funds after overhead allocation **3,722**

Variations

a. Remaining funds before rent payable	44,445
b. Remaining funds before rent payable, no grant funding	19,898
c. Cost per unit excluding Rent	4,807

- These figures are for the **9 months ended 31 December 2018**. Solace Women's Aid produce account to 31 March, and so the latest full year accounts were not available as at the time of completion of this report.
- These results depend upon lower than market rate rent from Commonweal and low utilities costs. Utility costs are generally passed onto the service users, who are entitled to support with utilities, so Amari only incurs costs on empty properties.
- The remaining funds before property costs and overheads is **£44,445** for the year. If grant funding is excluded from the figures then the project has remaining funds of **£19,898** before rent and overheads. These are useful figures to consider for replication as the relationship between the organisation delivering the service, the housing providers and any other funders will vary on a project-by-project basis. Different organisations may have access to different housing options, types of properties and property management arrangements which will result in different cost structures.

- When property costs and overheads are deducted, the remaining funds after all costs and income directly related to Amari is **£3,722**. These remaining funds contributes to the charity's reserves and financial sustainability allowing Solace to develop and improve services to help more women.
- The per annum cost per unit is conservatively estimated to be **£6,410**. This cost **excludes** rent, which will differ for different providers. For this pilot, including rent brings the cost per unit to ***£10,418** per annum. This can be contrasted to the Home & Communities Agency (HCA 2016) report that suggested supported housing across the UK costs between £8,400 and £14,000 per unit per annum.

*reflects a subsidised arrangement with Commonweal

5.4 Overall Value for Money

It is my opinion that, so long as housing stock is available and most likely subsidised in some way, the project represents excellent value for money. I consider that the project represents potentially very significant savings not just in the year of delivery but on-going as women transition into independence. With an increasing burden on public bodies to provide housing, offering a supported model such as this one would appear to be a very beneficial use of limited resources. Considering the benefits the project brings to service users, and the favourable cost per unit estimates relative to Home & Community Agency figures (HCA 2016), replication of this model should be considered.

Factors that could improve value for money include providing smaller – though good quality – properties (such as studios with lower rental costs to the project), perhaps having a Floating Support Worker responsible for more properties in a smaller area, and having a larger project with more Support Workers so that administration and other general tasks can be shared.

6. Challenges

Move-On Housing

One important outcome of the project is to arrange suitable move on accommodation and plans. However, this has been hindered by limited availability of onward housing pathways and extreme shortage of affordable housing in London. Tenants usually apply through the Local Authority and Amari supports this process by advocating for the tenant, as well as supporting on visits to possible properties etc.

One major barrier has been local authorities offering unsuitable accommodation to service users. One key skill offered by the Amari project is to mediate between Local Authorities and the service user, by ensuring that service user expectations are realistic whilst their essential needs are met. For example, making sure that service users are moved into safe environments that take account of their histories of trauma (such as not being asked to share kitchen facilities with men and other obviously unsuitable situations). Despite limited housing stock available for move on from the project, Amari has had some success in advocating on behalf of tenants to obtain something more suitable.

One practitioner described how difficult the transition into move on can be for service users. The emotional impact of worrying about move on and being offered unsuitable accommodation was echoed by tenants, practitioners, and Amari staff:

Some of the rooms offered, there is not even enough room for a cat or a pet to live there on its own, let alone a human being, and I think it is the shock of seeing that. Sometimes it's not even the room, it's who you are situated with...

They make (the Amari property) their home, they're really proud of it, they've got something they never had, and then the tenancy is up and then there is no housing and it goes downhill and even down a legal route, it turns quite sour. They feel frustration and anger and in the end they think what's the point.

There are a range of issues that must be understood by boroughs when offering suitable accommodation. These include: the floor level, health issues, danger areas, and experiences of trauma that impact on who tenants can live with. Amari has played a strong role advocating on behalf of service users but the issue of suitable move on accommodation remains pressing.

A related issue is that service users were also advised by boroughs to wait until they were made homeless before they would be offered suitable accommodation. This has been rectified through advocacy to the local authorities by Solace, explaining that the service users are in second stage supported accommodation and the nature of the Amari project. In response to this issue, Amari plans to use licenses as opposed to ASTs - this changes service user's legal status and residency status, meaning that they will not be considered to be in permanent accommodation.

Some service users have been told that they will be put in a hostel if they make a homelessness application. For many service users, the hostel environment threatens to trigger a regression into substance use and involvement in prostitution, resulting in a return to high service needs. Many women described being deeply affected by drug use, predatory behaviour from punters, and issues with mental health and aggression within the hostel environment.

In some cases, service users themselves were reluctant to accept alternative accommodation that has been offered to them because they have high expectations due to the exceptional nature of the accommodation offered by Amari. For example, one service user refuses to be moved to a studio having got used to living in a relatively spacious one-bedroom apartment. One issue identified is that the original running period of 18 months combined with potentially many months of seeking appropriate accommodation meant that service users were not preparing themselves for moving from the accommodation. It was decided that a shorter running time (i.e. 12 months instead of 18) would mean that service users were more clear that Amari is only a temporary project and therefore helped to manage expectations. In this evaluation, it was found that service users who had been in the project for longer and not had their expectations managed were less ready and willing to move on into smaller accommodation, whereas those who had more recently entered the project had more realistic expectations. However, as this policy change is relatively recent, its overall outcome has not yet been established.

Voids and Maintenance

Because of a) maintenance issues and b) lengthy referrals processes, the properties have been subject to more voids than expected. This has largely been unavoidable.

Although the properties are generally in excellent condition, maintenance issues are inevitable. In particular, there was one case of damp in the property which led to a service user moving out.

In addition, as the quality and suitability of referrals is important, the project does not rush to fill voids and instead ensures that a thorough process is adhered to.

Welfare Benefits

When some beneficiaries first accessed the project they experienced difficulties with their personal welfare benefits when establishing them for the first time, although Housing Benefit was relatively easy to arrange. This meant that service users had no income for some time. Amari addressed this by referring women to a range of emergency measures and by advocating on their behalf to the DWP. Unfortunately, this reduced capacity for addressing other aspects of women's lives, such as finding meaningful activity.

The system for claiming Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance continues to be challenging as it is very difficult for service users to comply with and navigate. GP Sick Notes are routinely 'lost' in the post or by the DWP resulting in benefit delays and challenges for service users in getting another GP appointment and a new sick note. Further, when women start work, this affects their benefits, resulting in further need for support to navigate their benefits situation.

Additionally, as the service users have a fragile financial situation, any unexpected expense can cause difficulties and slow progress in achieving positive outcomes. For example, one woman was asked to pay an £80 fee to pursue her divorce and she could not afford it. Her Amari support worker helped to search for a solution. In particular, winter time is an expensive time for people on a low income as their energy bills increase. Service users have found it very difficult to afford their heating and other regular costs.

Moving into Universal Credit may mean that women will have a completely different financial landscape to contend with and that more advocacy will be required.

Legal Barriers

Slowness of legal decision making inhibits women's ability to progress with move-on and independence both practically and psychologically. The stress of immigration and other legal cases (such as divorce) can contribute to a sense of instability, stress, or concern about the future. This then means that positive outcomes are harder to achieve.

In addition, three service users were referred to MARAC due to risk of harm, domestic abuse, and risk from ex-partners, which also hinders progress and leads to feelings of fear and instability.

Referrals

At the outset of the project, there were a number of referrals for women with support needs that were too high to manage in the project. Now, only women who are ready and able to maintain a more independent tenancy are considered. This includes having the capacity to pay bills, engage with outside support agencies, and refrain from drug and alcohol relapse. Although service users may need support in these areas there should be confidence in their readiness to live independently and the ability to move forward into independent living within the timespan of the project.

This readiness is judged in relation to support needs, emotional resilience, motivation, and ascertained through consultation with existing support and one to one interviews with service users. It was reportedly quite difficult to get all the information needed to try and assess this and make sure that Amari accepted women with support needs that would be appropriate to the level of support on offer. However, there has been no shortage of suitable women to fill the available spaces.

One tenant in particular has unanticipated mental health difficulties and very high support needs in relation to this. She cannot go outside alone and often has fits or cannot find her way home. Although she is maintaining a tenancy, it is highly unlikely

that she will be able to live independently as she often blacks out in public spaces and can't remember what happened or where she lives. This client needs more intensive and on-going support than the project allows. This underlines the importance of ensuring that referrals are appropriate, particularly through the interview process and engagement with the referring service. However, in this case, the problem was that these issues were not disclosed until the tenant had moved into the property.

Mental health support

The majority of women involved in the project have significant mental health difficulties, such as trauma and depression. Although the project is aimed at women who are able to transition into independent living, it would not be feasible to expect that they had no mental health issues. Therefore, the project must assess whether mental health needs are so serious that they will significantly hinder independent living or whether they would in fact benefit from the period of respite and recovery that the service offers. Service users must also be willing to engage in mental health recovery processes (such as accessing counselling). This is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Progress on improving mental health has often been slow because of waiting times for getting support and the appropriateness/trust and rapport that is necessary when the support is put into place. Amari has therefore had to play a large role in supporting women with emotional issues and mental health difficulties, which as with financial issues, has reduced staff capacity for supporting progress towards other outcomes.

In addition, long waiting lists for long-term trauma focused therapy suitable for women who have experienced multiple trauma and sexual exploitation is a challenge as this makes it much more difficult for women to engage in activities and progress to independence. Overall, there are limited options via community mental health teams for essential mental health support.

Relationship between Key Worker and Client

A degree of challenge emerged during the project through having a Support Worker who also works for the landlord of the flat and therefore has to implement flat rules.

This was addressed by ensuring the service take a psychologically-informed approach to housing management and reinforcement of the service user and tenancy agreements. In addition, staff apportioned responsibility so that the project manager was responsible for enforcing rules as opposed to the Support Worker.

Another challenging issue was the original Support Worker left the project, with agency staff replacing her for a short period of two months and then a new staff member joining the team. All of the women who experienced this transition reported that they found it difficult, with some finding it harder than others to bond with the agency worker and the new staff member. For a small number of women, developing rapport continued to be a problem. Others stated that it undermined their sense of stability for a short time while they adjusted.

The nature of the work means there may be a risk of blurring professional boundaries and potential for confusion in relation to the levels of emotional and practical support offered by the Support Worker. As such, another key element of Amari's work is to ensure that there is a balance between offering emotional and practical support and facilitating independence. This requires a level of emotional intelligence on the part of the Support Worker. Maintaining these standards is important in order to keep service users engaged and motivated and to ensure that the accommodation is utilised to its best advantage. So far, the Amari project has maintained a good balance between offering support and maintaining boundaries, not least because of a strong commitment to quality recruitment.

Availability of Meaningful Activities

A lack of agencies providing specialist employment support for women accessing the project is a big challenge as some service users would like to do other activities but have no spare money to do so. These activities would in turn improve their mental health and self-confidence. One aspect to consider is that any work of 16 hours or more will affect benefits and may create a complicated financial situation to be navigated.

Operational

There is a large amount of travelling time involved in delivering a pan-London service. This can be particularly challenging as it may necessitate meeting service

users at some distance from their property in order to ensure that meetings are held regularly. This reduces engagement and convenience. At 10 properties, the Support Worker is now at capacity and needs additional support. The Support Worker can handle around 8 properties comfortably.

7. Impact

Below is a discussion of firstly, whether Amari is meeting basic objectives and secondly, the impact of the project on the tenants. Though both are linked, it shall be shown that the impact has reached further than these basic objectives. The basic objectives of the project can be identified as:

- Meeting need, both for individuals and in terms of demand for accommodation for this group
- Fostering independence
- Promoting stability and a “good life”

7.1 Meeting Basic Objectives

Meeting Need

All service users reported that both their emotional and practical needs are being well met by the project, due to having stable accommodation, support, or both (as was most often the case). These results were taken from interviews from 11 of the 17 tenants who have used the project, Amari staff, and referring agencies.

17 women have been helped through the project, with 7 successful move ons so far. A successful move on is deemed to be where a woman moves into suitable accommodation, maintains her tenancy, and is satisfied with her new living situation. All service users report an improvement in their wellbeing and confidence, as well as their practical abilities to maintain independent living, aside from one whose mental and physical health needs mean that she will continue to need high levels of support. The circumstances of each woman’s move on situation are outlined in Table 1 below,

Table 1: Move on circumstances of each service user

(Names have been changed)

Tenant	Planned or Achieved	Move On Circumstances
1. Alice	A	After achieving leave to remain she moved to privately rented accommodation, accessed through the council (there was a period of temporary accommodation supplied by the Council in the interim).
2. Kathryn	A	Moved into privately rented accommodation through the Council - 1 bedroom
3. Melanie	A	Moved into privately rented accommodation through the Council – studio flat. Although the tenant was disappointed at the size of the accommodation she was pleased to be able to remain in the Local Authority area of her choice.
4. Asma	A	Moved in with a friend. During resettlement support, the tenant fell pregnant and also obtained a job at a sports clothing store. She continues to work there, balance family life, and maintain her private accommodation arrangement with her friend.
5. Rita	A	Was temporarily moved to accommodation outside of her desired area but has since moved into temporary accommodation in her desired area via the Local Council. Recently had a baby so will need a larger property but could not get this while pregnant due to the housing rules.
6. Megan	A	Moved into a 2 bedroom privately rented property with her son who is currently 1 year old. She sourced the property herself and felt very independent and empowered.
7. Cheryl	A	Moved out early on in the project after only 3 months to live with her partner. This was a very positive move for her and she has maintained this situation.

In relation to demand for the service, the project has been popular and two new properties were acquired during the project. Voids do sometimes occur because of the time it takes to carefully ensure that service users are suitable for the project. Many referrals made into the project do not meet the strict criteria and, crucially, women must be interviewed to assess their readiness. Referring agencies commented that there are certainly many women who are ready and would benefit from the project if it were to be expanded:

A representative from a referring agency said:

I can't refer to hostels and similar because none of the people we work with would be able to tolerate sharing a room with someone. There really isn't another project that fills these gaps.

If there were more provision like this I wouldn't need to be really carefully picking who to refer, it would be amazing if there was more of it. The sector is so used to there not being anything like that they don't necessarily know that there is a go to option. I get asked frequently about where women like our clients can go and I have been sent a lot of information about options but the Amari project is really the only one that is suitable. I definitely think the demand is there.

The ability of the project to be truly pan-London is limited by the availability and location of refuge accommodation. When women are placed in Amari properties and have to move borough, this can create problems as they are separated from their support structures and familiar surroundings. This can be a particular issue in relation to health services.

Fostering Independence

As discussed below, the majority of tenants were able to more proactively manage their own tenancies and finances, with only one service user reporting that she still needs high levels of support. No current tenant reported being ready to be completely independent; however, needs were greatly reduced. Those who had moved on from Amari reported that the project had greatly improved their practical

and emotional resilience. Practitioners and Amari staff echoed this and noted that service users would not have been ready to simply enter independent living without the interim phase offered by Amari.

One of the ways of achieving more independence has been to encourage service users to engage outside of their Support Worker with other support, activity, and opportunity. All service users were successfully linked to different forms of support and activity, such as education, work, health, financial, and legal advice. Service users were also supported to engage with outside agencies, including attending appointments.

Examples of successes include:

- Two tenants gained paid work, two entered education, one entered an apprenticeship and one applied for a Masters
- One was placed in a financial support group after winning at a social security tribunal
- All accessed mental health support and counselling
- One completed a drug use programme and another continues to engage in support around drug use
- One service user whose children are in social care is doing really well with rebuilding this relationship

Stability and “Good Lives”

The majority of women within the project reported a much improved quality of life despite ongoing mental and physical health issues that limit their lifestyles, including their ability to build communities and to take part in daily activities. This is discussed further below.

The majority of tenants who moved on reported feeling far more stable and very removed from their previous lifestyles, with the exception of anecdotal reports that one tenant had deteriorated since leaving the project. While in the project, there has been one incident of relapse, which occurred after a sexual assault. The other tenants have remained stable and free from reversals while in the accommodation. Overall, both staff and tenants stated that without the project it is likely that many of

these women would have deteriorated. This was confirmed by outside referring agencies who experience set-backs regularly.

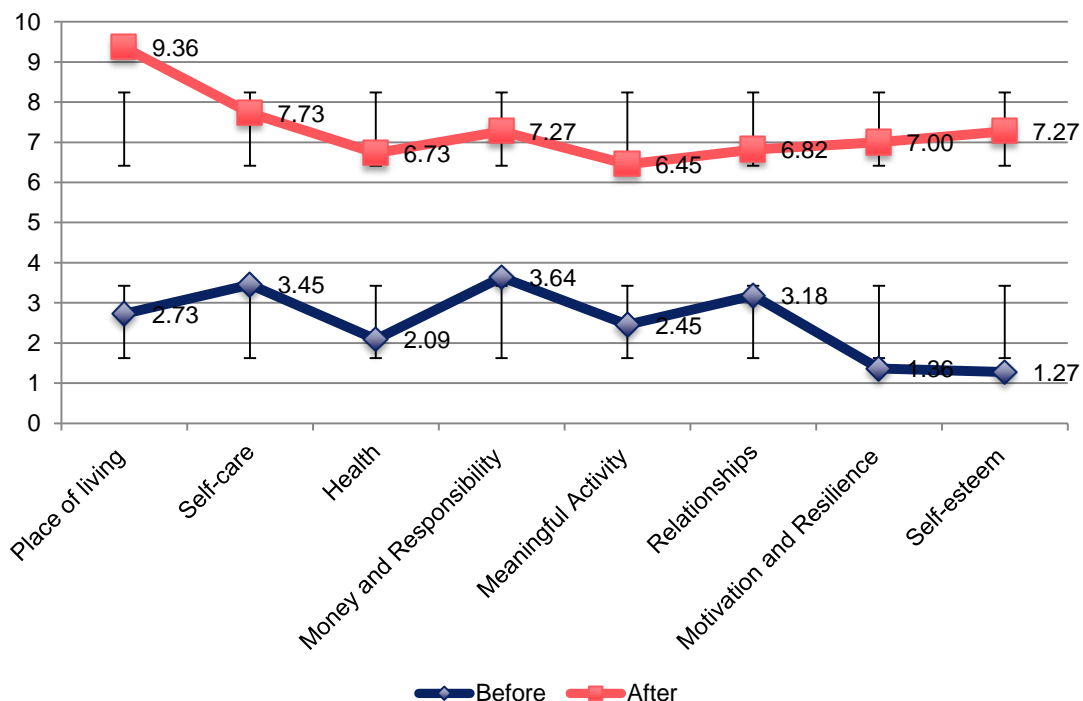
7.2 Self-Reported Impact on Tenants

Overview

Figure 1 depicts the self-reported ratings before and after entering Amari accommodation of 11 current and previous tenants. Participants were asked how they would rate categories now/towards the end of their time with Amari and how they would have rated them just before they entered the project.

Each figure represents their wellbeing in that particular area on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being the most positive and 0 being the least.

Figure 1: Self-reported ratings before and after entering Amari accommodation
(With standard deviation error bars)



Some of those interviewed had only been in the project for a short time and therefore have not had full opportunity to make substantial change. Despite this, change has occurred across all categories. As one service user stated:

Sometimes I sit there and I am in awe of it, I can't believe how different things are from how they were before. (SU 7)

The categories with the most marked difference are 'place of living', 'self-esteem', and 'motivation and resilience', which reflects the overall contribution of the project in providing suitable accommodation and helping people to develop the confidence and resilience to move forward independently. As one service user states:

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. (SU 10)

The least amount of change relates to 'relationships'. This is unsurprising because of the trauma that many women have experienced and the inability to trust or fully connect with others still being an on-going concern. This is followed by 'meaningful activity', which, as discussed below, proves challenging for women because of both internal and external barriers to engaging in work, training, volunteering, and other activities.

Service users emphasised that the holistic nature of the support combined with having secure and private accommodation was the key to making transformations in their lives:

Amari were really nice, they respect me, they cared about me. I was struggling so much and they helped me telling me what to do and how to do it. They had me get housing benefit, council tax, where to find food at food banks, I wasn't working and I didn't have any idea where to go and find work and they helped me a lot. They pushed me a lot to find a job. With the help of them I learned a lot. There has been a big change in my life because of Amari.

Overall, it is clear that the project has a remarkable impact on levels of independence and emotional wellbeing. With greatly improved resilience and practical skills, tenants are not only better placed to maintain future tenancies, but are also less likely to rely

on high levels of support in the future and are more likely to continue to make improvements in their lives. Crucially, it is clear that the project gives women the opportunity to more fully recover from past trauma. Each of the areas of improvement are considered more fully below.

Place of Living

Figure 2

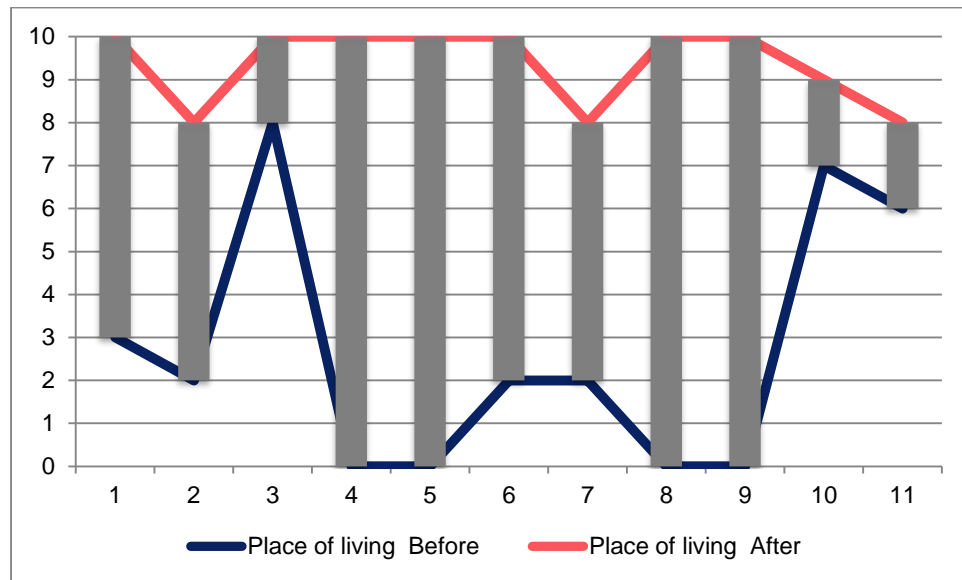


Figure 2 depicts the individual ratings from 0 (the worst) to 10 (the best) for the service users' place of living (i.e. accommodation situation) before and after entering the Amari project

The quality of the accommodation and the very fact of having a safe, private living space meant that the majority of service users rated the Amari living space very highly compared to previously. The dramatic effect this has on quality of life was described by one service user:

All my life I have been in care homes, I've never had stability and now I have stability but I know it's only temporary and I don't know what I am going to do. I am very very limited on what I can do, I've gone to everywhere I can and it's not done anything this is why I ended up in this problem because no-one will help me and I am screwed, I don't know what I'm going to do. Because of my age, I'm too young. They will just put me in a crack head

hostel and when I am in that kind of environment my mental health deteriorates and I will end up going on the streets and escorting.

They gave me a lifeline, this flat that I am in, I have never ever felt so contented in my life

Some points of concern were maintenance issues, living in an area that was perceived as unsafe or was connected to social circles they wished to avoid (particularly drug use), and being too far from amenities such as a trusted doctor. Of course, many of these issues are general issues with housing stock in London. In contrast, other service users described relief at being out of a hostel environment, where active addiction and living with people with complex and multiple needs threatened to negatively impact their mental health. One service user stated:

I was living with severely mentally ill women and I was getting worse not better being in that environment so I said that I need to get out there. When you're put in a house with women who have had their kids taken from them, who are alcoholics and drug addicts, who have mental health problems, it was too much for me. (SU 6)

The quality of the accommodation, however, had some potential drawbacks, as all women acknowledged that moving on from Amari would likely mean downgrading unless they were able to move in with friends or some other private arrangement. For some, this was accepted. For others, the anticipated (two service users who had not yet moved) or actual (two services who had moved) adjustment was far more distressing. One service user discussed the possibility of moving into studio accommodation at the end of the project, stating that they would experience this as a setback. It must be noted that this service user entered the project at its inception. Since then strategies have been put in place to manage the expectations of new tenants. Here, the service user describes their apprehension about moving on from Amari:

I won't be happy, I feel like I've been set up to fail. It's starting to affect my mental health already. I know someone else who had nice accommodation but had to move into a bedsit, she's gone

downhill. I don't want that to be me. It's really horrible to see her, she walks around like a zombie. Just to have peace of mind and have some space.... I need somewhere my family can visit, if I am in this tiny place they can't come here, they can't even sleep on the floor. They are going to feel like I abandoned them.

In particular, service users spoke at length about the unsatisfactory conditions they were asked to accept when moving on, including conditions that reminded them of when they were trafficked or that violated their privacy (this is discussed further below).

Self-care

Figure 3

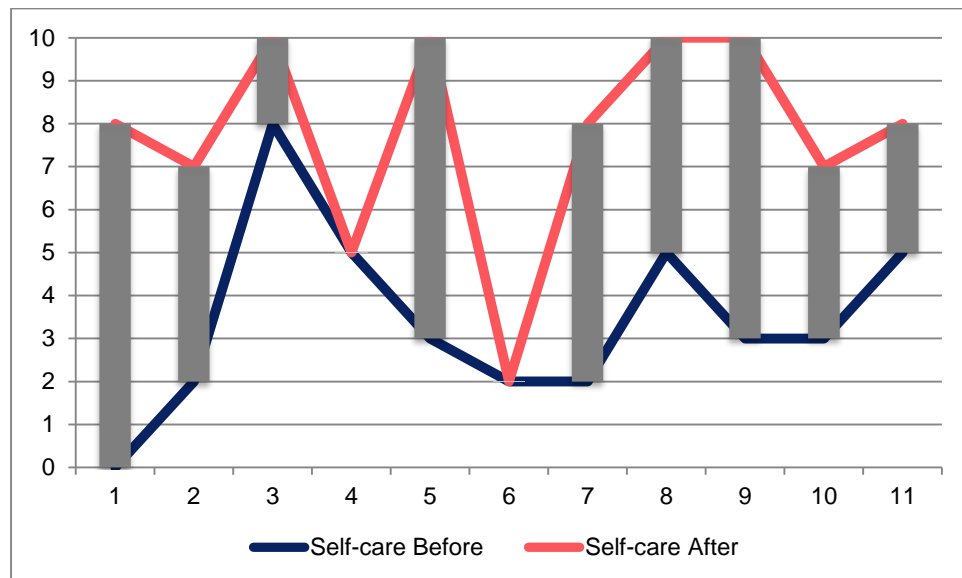


Figure 3 depicts individual responses to rating how well they are able to promote their own self-care and look after themselves from 0-10 both before and after entering the Amari project.

Self-care was broadly discussed as doing what is needed to promote both emotional and physical wellbeing. One service user describes the range of aspects of life that this touches on:

I've learned to have self-respect and boundaries, especially because I got this place, I passed an interview. It has motivated

me to do even more. Since I've been here I've been doing voluntary work down the road, my neighbours I know, I don't have any problems with anyone. (SU 10)

All service users interviewed after having left the project stated that they were better able to look after themselves, despite any particular challenges they faced. The provision of 3 months of support after moving into new accommodation was essential to making sure that they were able to continue caring for themselves. Those who had been in the project for only a short time were more tentative about their ability to care for themselves.

Four out of eleven service users rated their self-care as a '10' after being in the Amari project, while the remaining service users acknowledged that there was still room for improvement, with one remarking that this was probably the case for everybody, not just service users!

Health

Figure 4

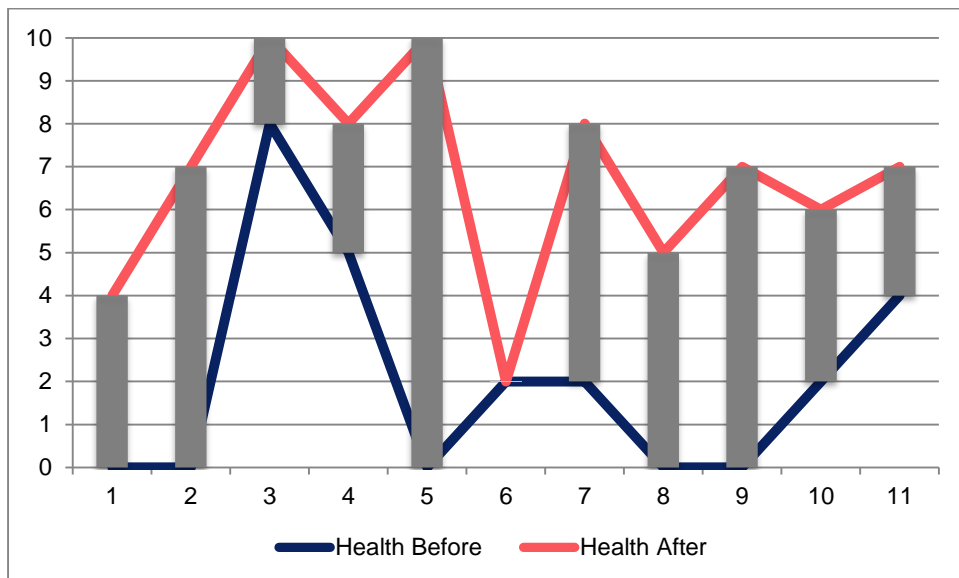


Figure 4 depicts individual responses to rating the strength of their emotional and physical health from 0-10 both before and after entering the Amari project. Figure x depicts the average rating. There is significant variation in responses, although all do depict an improvement after entering the project.

The main reason for there being significant variation is that the majority of service users, with the exception of two, reported on-going mental health issues. For one service user, they were experiencing deterioration in their mental health due to the anticipation of move-on and not being able to find suitable accommodation. In contrast, one service user who had moved on stated that her mental wellbeing had been transformed through her time in Amari:

Before I would tell myself everything is going to be fine but it was just something that I told myself to get through things, whereas now I tell myself that and I know it, I really know it

Physical health was rarely discussed as a major problem, despite health issues being present in service users' lives. The exception to this was one service user who has physical health issues that are linked to her poor mental health. However, many service users mentioned the necessity of being near to a good doctor's surgery and the importance of having a strong relationship with their doctor. One service user stated that being in Amari had made it much easier for her to access health care because she was supported in being able to arrange and attend appointments.

Money and Responsibility

Figure 5

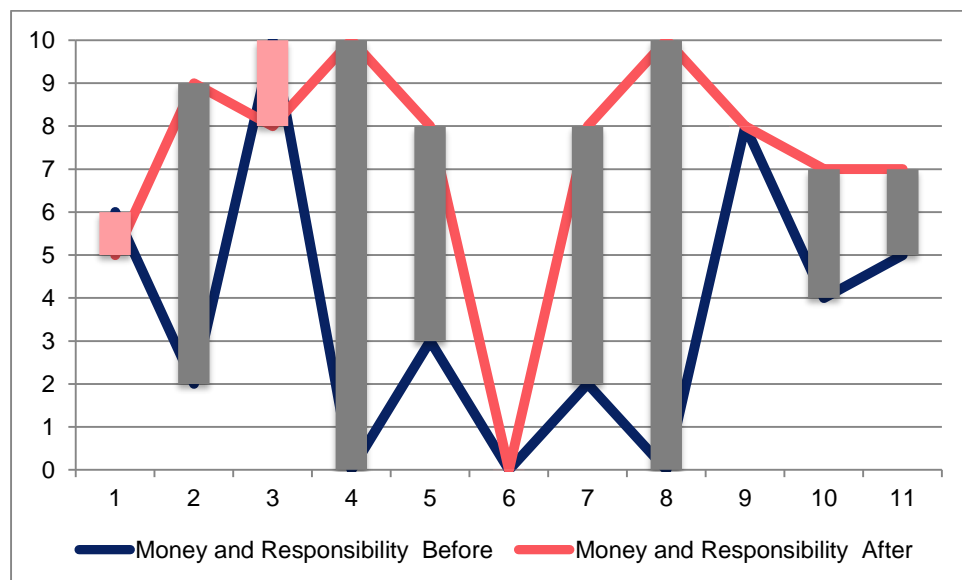


Figure 5 depicts individual responses to rating the strength of their financial situation and their ability to handle responsibility from 0-10 both before and after entering the

Amari project. Overall, there was an improvement in both being able to manage money and being able to handle other responsibilities, such as paying bills, making and keeping appointments, and managing their household.

This outcome is particularly essential as it helps women to obtain tenancies in the future and ensures that if they do find suitable move on accommodation they are able to sustain this. Tenants in the earlier stages of the project were clear that support to maintain independence was very much needed despite improvements in their circumstances:

My life was very hard, very very hard, I was trapped, and now I have independence. But I still need the support from the key worker, I still find it hard to sort everything out. Before I came to Amari I was weak (SU 1)

Two service users reported a deterioration in this category. However, this was because they were not required to handle money or responsibility while living in a hostel and so preferred not having to budget etc. All respondents reported improvements in being able to manage money, regardless of whether they felt positive about this. This was strongly linked to feelings of independence:

It's funny I couldn't even pay the bills, it was the first time living like this independently and I didn't know what to do. I know some people like people to do everything for them but I don't really like it, I would ask Eva to advise me what to do but not do it for me as much as possible (SU 2)

Meaningful Activity

Figure 6

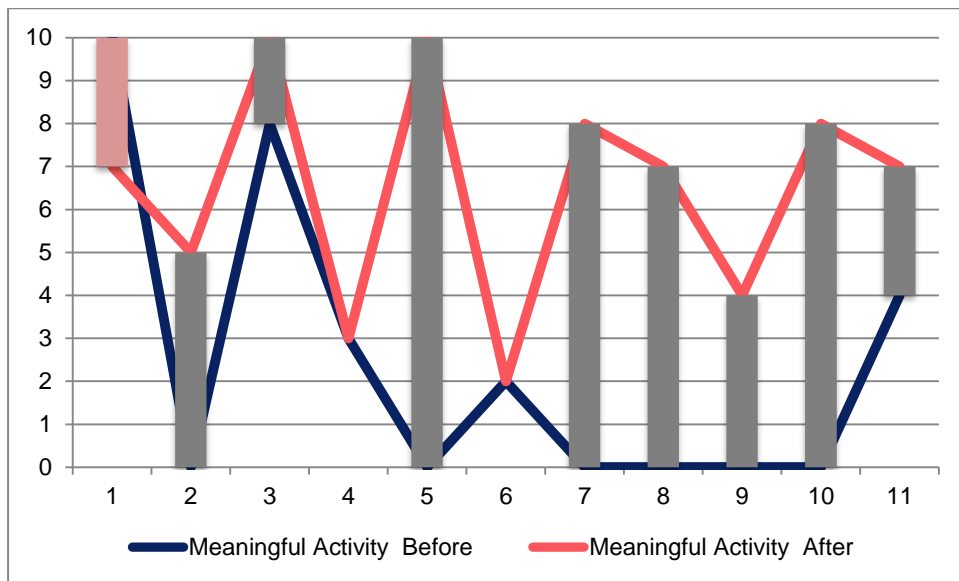


Figure 6 depicts individual responses to rating from 1-10 the way they spend their daily lives and if they participate in work or meaningful activity, both before and after entering the Amari project. Responses were varied, with one service user even reporting a deterioration mainly due to feeling isolated living alone and also mental health issues related to trauma preventing her from going out – previously in the hostel she was more sociable and active. This block around participating in activities was articulated by more than half of the service users who stated that their mental health issues sometimes meant that they chose not to go out and do things even though they would like to.

One important issue raised by service users is their inability to pull themselves out of poverty because of inadequate resources for finding work. Although Amari very much supports service users to find work, there is little by way of specialist external support to help women find suitable opportunities because of all the barriers that this cohort of women face (such as criminal records, gaps in their CVs, and trauma related mental health issues). Financial issues were a great cause for concern for all women that were not currently working:

I need money for travelling, the money I get is not enough for me. At my previous accommodation I didn't need to worry

about money and that was better. Life is too expensive and I cannot even travel across London (SU 3)

For others, this concern was deepened by the fact that their mental health would not allow them to work:

I don't have any concentration, I can't concentrate. It is very hard with money, I have to be very careful, it is difficult (SU 2)

Relationships

Figure 7

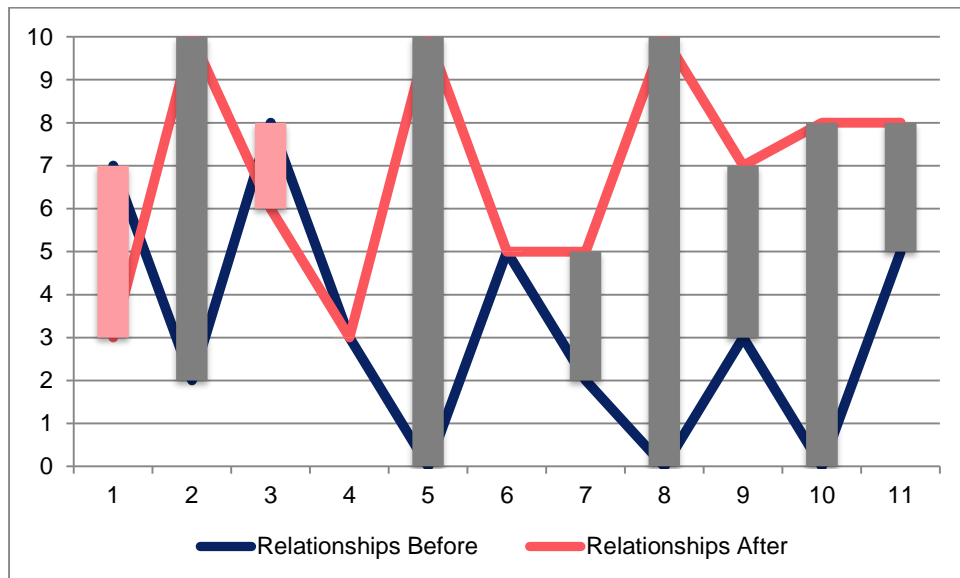


Figure 7 depicts individual responses to rating their relationships from 1-10, both before and after entering the Amari project. As with meaningful activity, responses are varied, with two service users reporting a deterioration in their relationships. Relationships are a particularly interesting area because the newfound independence women experience can actually mean that they choose to disengage with others for a period of time and make use of privacy and space to heal. One service user who had left the project at the time of interview, explained:

At first, I just couldn't trust and wanted to be by myself having come out of a crowd I shouldn't have been in. Towards the end I started going to things and making connections but I still do feel isolated (SU 7)

Loneliness is an emerging social issue and there are a range of new projects within the third sector tackling this (Lepper 2019). The Amari project presents an opportunity to address social isolation within this particular group of marginalised women. Many tenants expressed an interest in engaging with their community, had positive experiences of being a ‘good neighbour’, greatly valued the relationship with their Support Worker, and were interested in peer-to-peer contact within the project.

The success of the project in improving relationships can be most demonstrated by those who had left the project or were close to leaving. More than one tenant discussed now being in a serious relationship and others discussed getting on better with family, as well as building new friendships.

Motivation and Resilience

Figure 8

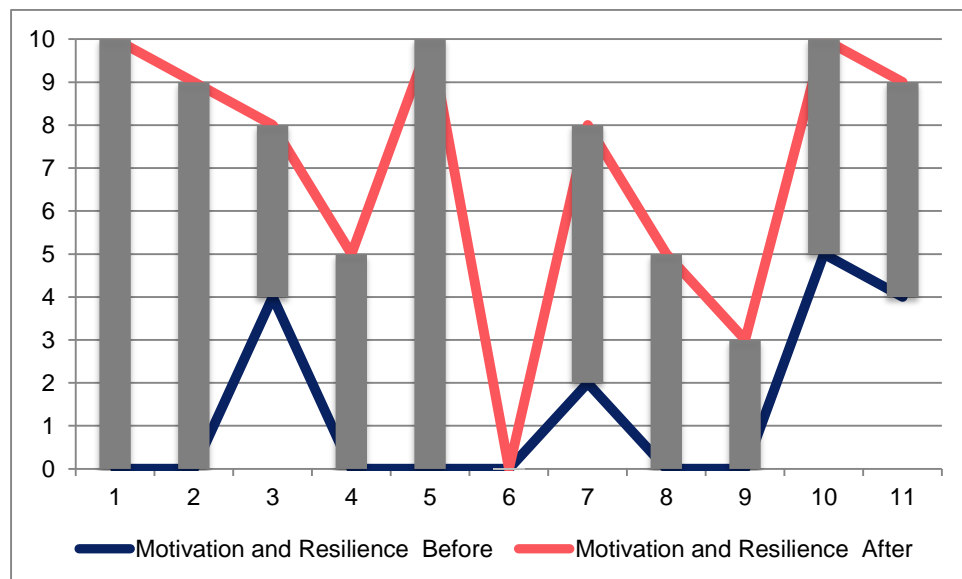


Figure 8 depicts individual responses to rating their motivation and sense of resilience from 1-10, both before and after entering the Amari project. As can be seen, all but one of the service users reported feeling motivated and resilient compared to before entering the project. Even where women were struggling with mental health and practical issues (such as legal cases), there was a belief that they would be able to turn this around, with the exception of one service user who has

very significant mental health issues. Service users may be apprehensive about what the future holds but they were also motivated:

I think during this one year I will feel better and be really grateful for this project but I think everybody wants to move on with their life and the next stage (SU 2)

Service users also expressed hope and discussed wanting to reach goals that they feel are achievable but would not have considered before. One service user aspires to owning her own home so that she can be truly independent and not vulnerable to other people. Another stated that even though she is older and not too far from retirement, she still wants to pursue a career:

I want to be proper – not normal because I don't know what that is really. But I want to do something. I'm not one for sitting around. Even though I am older I still want to work (SU 10)

Self-Esteem

Figure 9

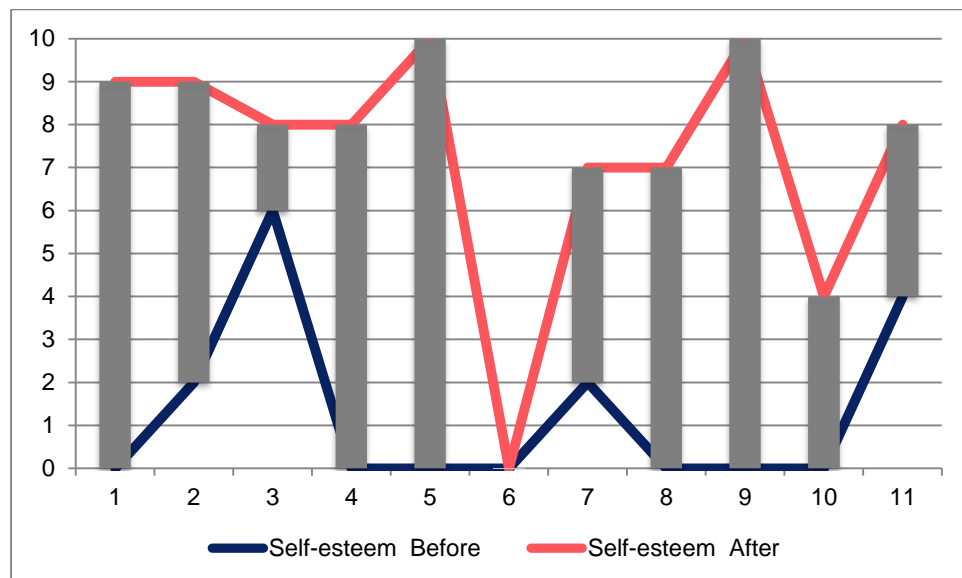


Figure 9 depicts individual responses to rating their confidence and self-esteem from 1-10, both before and after entering the Amari project. All but two of the service users

rated their confidence as a seven or above after entering the project, with those who gave lower scores explaining that this was to do with chronic mental health issues due to trauma.

Improved confidence and self-esteem was a theme running throughout the interviews and strongly linked to growing independence and ability to handle responsibility. In fact, one service user even reported that getting through the interview stage had improved her self-esteem and made her feel good about herself that she had been able to demonstrate what she had to offer and her abilities. The ability to change and self-esteem were linked by service users – with the one reinforcing the other – for example:

I have trust in myself and I have confidence and that's why I feel better and my life is better (SU 5)

8. Analysis: Should the Amari project be replicated?

Below is a discussion of the aspects of the project that represent its greatest strengths and the merits of replicating this sort of service. On the basis of the impacts of the project outlined above and its unique operating model set, combined with a clear demand from referring agencies for more housing services of this type of service, it seems clear that it would be beneficial to replicate the model and ensure that this approach expands.

8.1 Reducing Burden on Local Authorities

One of the most important aspects to consider is the reduced burden on local authorities. The project supports women to maintain a tenancy and learn independent skills. This has a number of positive effects for local authorities and support services. Firstly, the project helps women to engage with service provision in a way that is reportedly difficult for other more generic services to achieve, as well as local authorities. This was discussed by the referring agencies when interviewed and has been found to be the case with many exiting projects (Easton and Matthews 2012). Secondly, the project offers suitable accommodation to people leaving emergency accommodation so that the local authority only becomes involved further

down the line when tenants are more ready to maintain the kind of tenancies that they are able to offer. Lastly, because of the period of respite and recovery that tenants have experienced, as well as the new skills they have acquired in relation to independent living, tenants are less likely to encounter future problems thus reducing the risk of needing to depend on service provision in the future. For a marginalised group that is often difficult to engage, this kind of service is invaluable.

8.2 Housing and Exit/Desistance

It has been well documented that housing is a key issue in relation to supporting women out of prostitution (Matthews et al 2014; Shelter 2005; Mayhew and Mossman 2007). Not only is it essential to promoting stability but it also ensures that women are removed from environments and networks that keep them trapped. Many of the women interviewed stated that being in a hostel environment had been detrimental to their wellbeing because of chaotic lifestyles and difficult interpersonal relationships.

The stability offered by safe, comfortable housing offers a launching pad from which they can explore other aspects of their lives and a safe space to address any on-going issues. At the same time, the provision of support means that women have a safety net and are given the opportunity to learn and establish stability before they move on.

The combination of housing and exiting support that Amari offers also meets a key need within the sector that supports other organisations who work with women with multiple and complex needs to achieve their own aims. This is achieved by providing safe and good quality accommodation that enables women to focus on further recovery and establishing independence. Housing needs are a key concern that can impact the effect of other interventions (for example drug treatment. One service provider commented:

Where it has been critical is when working with clients who we haven't known for a long time, when I am advising them what their housing options are, whether they are priority need or whether it might be hit and miss, and if I need to get a solicitor for them, this can actually mean a long legal battle when that is

not best for their mental health. Instead of putting them through that we can refer them to Amari.

8.3 The strength of a staged approach

As has been outlined above, 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. It allows women to work towards independence at a manageable pace and significantly reduces the possibility that they will be unable to cope moving forward and return to lifestyles that lead to higher support needs. In this way, women are able to reach their full potential. One service user commented:

If I had gone into independent accommodation from the hostel I think it would have been a lot more difficult but having that stepping stone, having someone to guide you along the way, tell you what you should be doing and helping you remember what it is like to live alone, deal with bills, that sort of stuff, it was just a massive help.

8.4 The Strength of a Tailored Support Model Approach

The model is particularly effective because of its combination of simplicity and flexibility. Once resources have been secured in terms of accommodation, adding floating support is a simple and cost effective way of ensuring that tenancies are maintained and that women's needs are met. Providing holistic and tailored support means that Support Worker resources are directed towards exactly what is needed in each particular case and maximises the impact of the project.

The fact that the project takes a tailored approach that combines housing with other forms of support is key to its success. Suitable accommodation is essential because of the detrimental impact that unsuitable and unstable accommodation has on mental health and wellbeing, as well as being affected by distressing environments and networks. However, providing accommodation alone would not be sufficient as independently living involves transformations in lifestyle and developing new skills.

Similarly, if only support were offered and not accommodation, then women would be unable to have the space and stability to address other issues in their lives.

Considering that many women involved in commercial sexual exploitation have unstable housing situations, expanding second stage provision has the potential to positively impact the lives of a substantial number of women who can and do want to move on but who need the right resources to do so. Practitioners have commented that the wrap-around support that women receive at Amari is vital and supports them to be more effective in their own work with this cohort of women. One referring agency commented:

I only have positive things to say about the Amari project because they have made my job so so much easier in the past few months.

They take a very holistic approach which fits into what we do, we work with a lot of different issues and we want to work with other organisations that share our values and want similar outcomes. The clients in our service get on better with the things that as a stretched service I don't necessarily have capacity to do – things like bills and maintaining tenancies – and Amari take great care to make sure that these are addressed.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to the approach. The most significant risk is that living independently leads to isolation. Although women are in much need of privacy, particularly those who have been abused or trafficked, they also described in interview being unable to expand their social networks. Such networks have been shown to be extremely effective in supporting changes in lifestyle over the long term (Matthews et al 2014).

An additional consideration is that of meaningful activity. When supporting women to settle into their tenancies and resolve legal issues and other pressing concerns, supporting women into meaningful activity has taken a backseat. Finding out about opportunities and ways of engaging local communities can take considerable time, particularly when spread across geographical areas.

8.5 Reliance on Staff Initiative

As discussed previously, the project relies heavily on the quality of staff that deliver the support. Effective support work means taking initiative and staff making their own judgements about how support is offered and on what basis. This includes how much intervention is necessary or appropriate. A balance must be achieved between avoiding women feeling abandoned at the same time as encouraging independence and not simply 'swooping in' to help unnecessarily. Staff may need support through supervision and training to be better able to make these judgements.

Additionally, health and safety and maintaining proper boundaries are essential. While rapport is needed, a professional relationship must also be established, avoiding dependence or a rescuer mentality.

The project has largely been successful in ensuring that staff have the necessary skills to deliver support, not least because great care was taken when recruiting a new Support Worker and there are comprehensive systems in place for staff support (such as clinical supervision and training). Although relying on the quality of staff poses a risk in terms of ensuring effective delivery of the project, it is a necessary aspect of the model, and a key consideration for any replication of this service.

8.6 Independence

The outcome of this stage approached is to foster greater independence, meaning that women are far better equipped to maintain future tenancies, sustain lives away from vulnerability and exploitation, no longer rely on service provision, reduce the likelihood of relapse and reversals, support their children (where relevant), and become engaged in meaningful activity and work.

One of the most notable (and surprisingly unique) elements of the combined approach is that Amari actively encourage service users to engage with support outside of that offered by themselves. They encourage women to attend appointments and seek advice elsewhere. This develops women's confidence to participate in their surrounding community and to seek out and identify appropriate support.

9. Recommendations and Key Learnings

Below is a comprehensive list of recommendations for moving forward, both for the Amari project itself and for those seeking to adopt and adapt the model within their own organisation. It emphasises changes that could be made, as well as underlining the importance of some current practices (particularly in light of Amari's own learning so far). The recommendations below should be taken into consideration by any organisation seeking to replicate the project.

Referrals

The referral process is a lot smoother if only appropriate referrals are made, saving both Amari and the referring agency time. This has been a learning process for Amari, who now adopt practices in line with the recommendations below:

- Ensure that referring services are aware of the referral criteria when they seek an application form.
- Ensure that high support needs are identified when applications into the project are made. This means emphasising to referring agencies that any mental health concerns should be disclosed so that the project is able to determine whether the service user's mental health issues are a barrier to independent living or whether they can benefit from the respite offered by the project and access mental health support as part of the process.
- Consider the waiting period that service users have until they are able to move in due to the thorough assessment process. It is important to work with service users during this time to prepare them for move in and engagement with the project, particularly to establish a support plan and refer to mental health support.

Move On

A number of challenges to move-on were identified, particularly in relation to liaising with boroughs for accessing suitable accommodation. The following

recommendations have been recently adopted by Amari and should be adopted when replicating the project:

- Engage with VAWG Coordinators in London Boroughs to influence the housing team to offer accommodation that meets the specific needs of the service users for move on. At the very least, local authorities should appreciate the nature of the project as temporary accommodation and not advise tenants to wait until they are made homeless as has previously been the case.
- Service user expectations need to be managed as women enter the project so that they are aware they will most likely be moved to studio accommodation (unless they have children). Service users also encouraged to refrain from purchasing furniture that will not fit into a smaller space.
- For any replicated version of the Amari project, using good quality studio accommodation may be a way of managing expectations around move on without compromising quality of decoration and finish.
- Continue with a reduced tenancy length of 12 months as opposed to 18 (acknowledging that the length of stay may reach well beyond 12 months while finding new accommodation. Amari has recently adopted this approach and so its full impact cannot yet be measured.
- Introduce licenses as opposed to tenancies to avoid the issue of service users being advised to make themselves homeless/wait to be evicted.
- Working with Local Authorities to ensure that the accommodation receive exempt status for HB i.e. that the flats are regarded as 2nd stage refuge. This will then help around benefits rules for younger women moving on.

Housing

The project as it stands relies upon accommodation obtained at subsidised rents. Any replication of the project will depend upon the particular access to housing stock that an organisation has:

- For Amari, it is not recommended to seek housing stock of lower quality than currently offered. This is because, firstly, it would be impracticable to change the housing provision, and secondly, because the nature of the quality of the housing provides temporary respite for women as they recover.
- For new projects, an assessment should be made of the appropriate relationships to build with housing providers and what is available, keeping in mind the balance of quality with managing realistic expectations for move-on. Although the properties at Amari are of exceptional quality, smaller properties – such as studio accommodation - would also be workable, avoiding disappointment at move on (discussed further below) and potentially more affordable.

Relationship with Service Users

Some challenges to working with service users are hard to avoid, such as staff turnover or being unable to establish rapport because of personal preferences in terms of personality. However, service users offered their own insights into establishing strong relationships, as set out below:

- Ensure that staff have a long notice period and to attempt to have some crossover with staff so that the new staff member can meet with service users alongside their original Support Worker in order to be introduced. This may help to avoid any future problems with staff turnover in light of past problems at Amari.
- Separate out the responsibilities of the Support Worker from the landlord responsibilities (project manager) – this has worked well so far at Amari.
- Continue with a Psychologically Informed Environment, strengths-based trauma-informed approach.
- Develop a larger project with a choice of Support Workers to mitigate against any personality clashes between staff and service users.

- Take an emotionally intelligent approach to hiring staff against essential criteria such as warmth, communication skills, and authenticity. Amari have sought to achieve this through being careful in their recruitment processes.

The following positive and negative approaches to support, determined by clients themselves, should be used by the Support Worker to shape their approach and serve as both a reminder and tool for reflection:

- A positive approach to support: Providing emotional support and time and space to discuss this.
- Showing general interest and caring about the client's wellbeing.
- Offering hints and tips for dealing with emotional issues.
- Anticipating needs and offering information that could be helpful (for example, providing a list of solicitors).
- Being led by the client on how much intervention is needed.
- Giving the client a chance to do things independently and offering encouragement and direction as opposed to simply leaving them alone or doing it for them.
- Creating opportunities to service users to feedback and help to shape the project (such as being part of a working group), as well as to find out what activities other participants are engaging with.

Clients described the following as undesirable:

- Being too formal or process focused.
- Not having time for small talk or general 'life' discussion.
- Focussing only on practicalities.
- Asking clients to go out of their way to engage with the Support Worker, particularly if it is for a minor issue that could be dealt with outside of a meeting.
- Being left to find out the own answers on how to do things and just being advised to 'find X' or 'set up X'.

Voids and Maintenance

Voids are inevitable, particularly because the project does not have a fast turnover due to being careful about potential service user readiness for entering the project. Further, as with any property, maintenance issues can arise. However, some

measures have been put in place by Amari. It is recommended that these continue and be adopted by any future replication of the project:

- To make sure that there is sufficient flexibility within the project to allow for 15% voids throughout the year. This also ensures that women can be moved to alternative properties if serious maintenance issues occur.
- Work with service users to ensure firstly, that properties are kept to a good standard and secondly, that maintenance issues are communicated as early as possible by service users and that they are dealt with as soon as practicable.

Welfare Benefits and Other Entitlements

Benefits and financial stability are emerging issues. It is likely that women who enter the project will be subject to considerable financial constraints. It is therefore necessary to consider ways to develop better financial health.

- Changes to public funding also mean that it may be harder to enforce other legal entitlements – such as immigration issues – and strong relationships with sources of support must be developed and maintained.
- Allow for a significant portion of staff time to be dedicated to supporting financial stability. In particular, prepare for the impact of Universal Credit.
- Research and maintain an awareness of grants and other sources of financial support – for example, a hardship fund from charitable resources for tenants. Build relationships with small grant makers and financial services to secure funding so that service users are better financially supported. For example, seeking funding to pay for day-to-day items, holidays, travel, and participation in worthwhile activities.
- Continue to ensure that residents have adequate legal support.
- Research donors who may be willing to fund NRPF beneficiaries.

Mental Health

Relatedly, mental health, including possible issues relating to loneliness and isolation, can easily be affected by financial difficulties and this means that vigilance

on mental health support is vital. In fact, even outside of financial considerations, histories of trauma mean that earlier intervention in relation to mental health will be beneficial.

- Ensure that mental health support plans are in place at the outset (as is now the case with the project).
- Begin the process of referring women to mental health support as early as possible.
- Ensure that both prospective tenants and their current service providers are asked to disclose any mental health issues. This means their needs can be properly assessed in order to identify whether these mental health issues may hinder their ability to live independently.

Meaningful Activity

One factor raised by women is their appetite for and confidence in engaging in meaningful activity.

- Investigate ways of facilitating relationship building and engagement with communities, balancing this with service users' needs for privacy and feeling comfortable.
- Develop a strong model of peer support and/or service user social engagements.
- A third prong to the effectiveness of the project would be to align this with more focussed support on training, work, and other activities, perhaps from a third party.

Operational

- If the project – or those replicating the project were to expand, travel time must be a consideration in relation to staffing and the capacity of Support

Workers to handle a caseload that is spread out across a large geographical area.

- There is a potential for upscaling the kind of support offered by having Support Workers be responsible for smaller areas, whereby an individual is present and close by. Most notably, this would allow for more peer networking and support, as well as the opportunity to create stronger systems for tenants to engage with the actual running of the project and help to shape the service.

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Appendix A. Service User's Stories

NB: In order to protect their identity, these names have been made up and also do not match the aliases used in the direct quotes within this report.

Amelia

Background information

I was referred to the Amari project by an Anti-trafficking and Exiting prostitution advocate from Nia. Through Amari, I was moved to fully furnished one bedroom property on 23rd January 2017. I moved to the accommodation on my own even though at the time I already had one daughter who was 13 years old and was looked after by my mother.

My Support Worker helped me to settle down, to make a claim for Housing benefit and Council Tax Support, and to set up all bills (electricity, gas, water) in my name. I received a financial grant at the very beginning so I was able to buy some decoration and small furniture to make it my home. I was supported to register with a GP safely as in past I had been trafficked by medical staff working for NHS. I registered with a GP under a different name. Additionally, I was referred to drug misuse services in Lambeth so I could receive emotional as well as practical support around my substance misuse.

Current Support from Amari project

I met my new Support Worker in January 2018. At the time I was pregnant and my due date was in February 2018. I was on a Child Protection Plan with my unborn baby. The referral to Child Social Care was made by my substance misuse worker after I disclosed to her that I relapsed in November 2017. At the time I was not in receipt of Housing benefit as my claim was suspended and closed since August 2017 – this was caused by part time employment which I started in August and finished in December 2017.

My Support Worker helped me to make a new Housing benefit claim which was then backdated until August 2017. I was referred to the Every Pound Counts service, which helped me to make a claim for PIP. I was awarded PIP in May 2018. I was also referred to Family Action Welfare Grant by my Support Worker in May 2018 and I was awarded £200 for clothes for my baby. Additionally, when I received a letter from Newham Council Tax Debt Collection about a debt from 2012-2015, my Support Worker supported me to communicate with them and she attended the debt advice service with me in June 2018 so I was able to receive specialised advice.

I gave birth to my daughter in February 2018. I was supported to make a claim for Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit in March 2018. My Support Worker attended the local children's centre (baby massage session) with me when I went for the first time, I appreciated that I had someone with me rather than going on my own. I was supported emotionally as well as practically throughout the time when my child was on a Child Protection Plan. My Support Worker attended Core Group meetings and Child Protection conferences with me. In June 2018 the Child Protection was stepped down to Child in Need.

My tenancy with Amari expired at the end of July 2018. I was already linked with housing at Waltham Forest as they accepted the duty to rehouse me even before I moved to the Amari project. My Support Worker has been communicating with my housing officer about the temporary housing I will be moved into until I get a property through the bidding system. I hope to live in Waltham Forest close to my family where I can start my life with both of my daughters.

I would like to add that both my Support Workers went above and beyond. I am a person who does not always ask for help even if I know I need it. What I liked about my Support Workers was that they would always offer help and suggest things, which made it much easier for me to accept the support I needed.

Sandra

Background information

I was referred to the Amari project by my previous Support Worker from supported accommodation where I was living from February 2017. I was moved to a fully furnished one bedroom property on 30th October 2017 by the Amari project. I was pleased that I could live on my own because living in shared accommodation was

very stressful for me. The women I used to live with in the previous house had their own problems and it had a negative effect on my emotional and mental well-being. My Support Worker from the Amari Project helped me to settle down, to make a claim for Housing benefit and Council Tax Support, and to set up all bills (electricity, gas, water) in my name. I was supported to get registered with a local GP.

Current Support from Amari project

Amari helps me in every way possible. Due to the past trauma I experience weekly non-epileptic fits which can happen any time I get distressed or talk about my past. Those fits can happen outside or inside. The most difficult thing about those fits is that I don't remember anything that had happened before the fit, so when I regain consciousness, I do not know where I am, who I am with or how to get home (if it happens outside). It affects my life a lot. My Support Worker first referred me to Adult Social Care but they advised her to seek support from the local mental health service. I was linked with CPN and then with the neuropsychology department of my local hospital. What I appreciate is that my Support Worker attends all these stressful medical appointments with me. Most of the time I have a fit during those appointments and I would not be able to get back home without support. I was also referred to the Benefit Advice Service which helped me to make a claim for PIP. They first rejected my claim but I appealed and I have a Tribunal coming up. My Support Worker will accompany me there to provide help and support. Additionally, my Support Worker liaised with other professionals like CPN and my GP to advocate on my behalf that I cannot attend the assessment for ESA. They were all successful, I did not have to attend the assessment and I am now receiving ESA support group, higher rate benefit. This means a lot to me – this means that I have enough money to travel to see my sister and two nephews who live far. My sister and my nephews are all my world and it is important for me to see them regularly.

On top of all this, my Support Worker recently applied for a Holiday grant and I was awarded £350. This grant allowed me to travel to another country where I met with my other sister who I hadn't seen for over 10 years.

I cannot say "Thank you" enough to the Amari Project.

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.

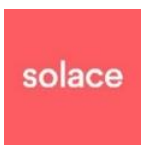
Solace Women's Aid
Unit 5-7 Blenheim Court,
62 Brewery Road,
London N7 9NY

Website | solacewomensaid.org

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

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0207 619 1350
info@solacewomensaid.org
@SolaceWomensAid



020 7199 8390
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