Opening Doors, Changing Lives

Measuring the impact of cash grants on disadvantaged individuals and families

March 2016
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Opening Doors, Changing Lives
People can become so isolated, a grant sends a very clear message that we are not giving up on them.

Wilson, Project Manager
Executive Summary

The Open Doors Programme is administered by Family Action and funded by Lankelly Chase. It provides cash grants alongside intensive support delivered to recipients by a range of partner organisations. From the launch of the Open Doors Programme in August 2013 to the end of the programme in February 2016 there have been 1093 grants made to a total value of £350,400. The average grant was £321. This report uses qualitative and quantitative data collected from August 2013 to the beginning of October 2015 in order to tell the stories of grant recipients.

The Open Doors Programme, and the accompanying research on its impact, represents a new approach to understanding the importance and impact of cash grant provision and how this can be delivered to achieve the most benefit to recipients and society as a whole. Previous evidence focuses on access and process, not on outcomes.

It is clear from the evidence in this report that low value cash grants, coupled with appropriate support, enable transformational steps for recipients. The grant has more impact as part of a longer term process, rather than a stand-alone event. Regardless of the type of support provided, a small cash investment has a large impact on the recipient's progress - the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. Therefore, it is important that politicians, policy makers and commissioners note the learning from this report, otherwise false economies may be made during welfare reforms and budget cuts.

The evidence throughout this report demonstrates that Open Doors Grants impact upon a recipient's entire life – from health to support networks, confidence to future resilience.

Therefore, we call on policy makers, politicians and commissioners of services to understand small cash grants make a big difference for people with complex needs. Welfare reform and the provision of all support has maximised impact if delivered holistically and by agencies operating with a joined-up approach.

We also call on other grant providers to use the learning from this report to ensure that other schemes are designed creatively, using an holistic approach, in order to ensure they have maximum impact for recipients and they support and sustain the progress of other support services.

Report Findings

1. All recipients felt they were helped by the grant - with two thirds crediting the grant as helping ‘enormously’.

2. Cash grants provide a number of practical benefits by widening the number of places where a recipient can use money. This additional flexibility enables recipients to achieve the best value for money, and encourages them to budget and take responsibility for how the grant is used.

3. Open Doors Grants help to make a house a home – this is the starting point for helping those receiving support to be safe and secure. The grant also enables recipients to feel secure about themselves in terms of their ability to provide for their families and their standing in the community.

4. After receiving a grant, 73% of recipients felt in control of their lives. For recipients empowerment is not just about this sense of control, but also the feeling of confidence, value and worth that the grant gives them. They are proud of the progress they have made and that someone has given them some responsibility in their life.

5. Our experience of managing the Open Doors Programme shows that receiving a cash grant enables the recipient to make progress towards their aims and meet needs which improve their
wellbeing. Cash grants help recipients feel safer, more valued, more confident and more able to cope. Grants also improve housing conditions that would otherwise impact negatively upon physical health.

6. Grants enhance the services of partner organisations, regardless of what type of support this is, by enabling more holistic support to be provided and giving clients the space to focus on the other changes they need to make in their lives. Support workers are also better able to engage clients. Irrespective of the type of support provided, partner organisations apply for a grant based on the level of progress that a client has made, not at a particular time within the support.

7. Receiving a grant does not alleviate all of the problems faced by those experiencing SMD meaning they are still likely to need further support in the future. However, receiving a cash grant enables recipients to learn skills and develop a structure to their lives, which increases their resilience and sustains progress resulting from the support.

8. Grant recipients and staff feel that without the Open Doors Programme an individual’s situation would have worsened considerably. Both groups identified the likely impact of not receiving a grant to be declining mental and physical health, reliance on criminal activity and a general lack of safety. Provision from elsewhere is seen as unlikely, certainly not with the relevance to needs and straightforward approach of the Open Doors Programme.

9. Grant recipients and staff feel that the Open Doors Programme is much easier to access than other welfare provision. It does not make vulnerable clients feel that they have to justify their situation in order to get assistance and grants are processed at a speed that suits the needs of those who require a grant.

10. Welfare reforms are creating a number of issues for the clients of partner organisations, including housing system problems resulting from the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, and benefit difficulties because of changes to assessments, such as those for Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Increased demand for support has been observed, coinciding with a reduction in Local Welfare Provision and longer term support services. This means that the support provided, and outcomes achieved, by the Open Doors Programme are more significant than ever.
Family Action would like to thank each of the Open Doors partners who contributed their time and knowledge to the creation of this report. We would also like to thank Lankelly Chase for their funding and NEF Consulting for their guidance with the Theory of Change and data analysis.

The Open Doors Programme is administered by Family Action and funded by Lankelly Chase. It aims to empower and de-marginalise individuals and families who have the most complex needs through the provision of grants that alleviate immediate poverty and facilitate engagement with longer-term support.

Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK’s most vulnerable people.

Our vision is that everyone who comes to us will receive the help they need to tackle the challenges they face, whilst giving them a voice and recognising their real-life experiences.

Our mission is to provide services and financial support which will strengthen and improve the life chances of those who are poor, disadvantaged or socially isolated, seeking to empower those we work with to help them look forward to the future with more confidence.

Lankelly Chase aims to bring about change that transforms the quality of life of people who face Severe and Multiple Disadvantage. All applicants to the Open Doors Programme must be experiencing at least two areas of Severe and Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) in addition to living in poverty. These SMD areas are: domestic abuse, frequent contact with the criminal justice system (but not in prison), homelessness or at imminent risk of being made homeless, serious mental health problems, sexual exploitation, and substance misuse. These individuals have interconnecting needs, and can be poorly supported by individual services and public policies, which often focus on single presenting needs.

The Open Doors Programme provides cash grants alongside intensive support delivered to recipients by a range of partner organisations. This support is provided through a variety of programmes including parenting support, substance misuse services and support for victims of domestic abuse. In most cases recipients will be supported for between six weeks and one year. The cash grant is intended to support users of these programmes to sustain the progress they have achieved. Appendix 1 details partner organisations and their perspectives on the Open Doors Programme. Only these organisations can access the online grant application form (Appendix 2), completing this for individuals as appropriate to need and circumstance.

The principles followed by the Open Doors Programme are:

- That the grant making process involves personal interaction between the grant making body, partner organisations and the intended recipients.
- That the grant making process recognises that everyone is an individual and has differing needs. The programme accepts that individuals are best placed to decide what they need most and what will make the most ongoing difference to their lives.
- That the grant making process is as transparent and easy to access as possible, only requiring information that has a direct bearing on the decision to provide a grant.
- That grants are made non-judgementally and based solely on applicants fulfilling the criteria, not on their lifestyle choices.
- That the panel who make decisions on grant awards make the assumption that the money is needed, with evidence being simply provided, rather than a negative assumption that the money is not needed and applicants have to prove otherwise.
The grant process is very efficient, with the majority of grants being paid within seven to ten days of application submission.

From the launch of the Open Doors Programme in August 2013 to the end of the programme in February 2016 there have been 1093 grants made to a total value of £350,400. The average grant was £321. This report uses qualitative and quantitative data collected from August 2013 to the beginning of October 2015 in order to tell the stories of grant recipients.

**The Theory of Change**

The Programme is run according to a Theory of Change, represented graphically by Figure 1. This ensures the Open Doors Programme grants are well-targeted – by understanding what really matters to recipients. Appendix 3 illustrates the methodology of how this was developed.

The Theory of Change describes how access to cash grants, as part of a package of support, creates change in the lives of those experiencing Severe and Multiple Disadvantage. It presents anticipated outcomes based on the knowledge, experience and expertise of the partner organisations.

**Expected Short Term Outcomes**

These are the initial changes that we expect individuals or families to experience when they are first offered a cash grant as a part of support package.

Accessing cash grants helps recipients to tackle immediate issues that affect their sense of physical and emotional safety and security. For example, supporting a recipient to move to a safe space, with physical needs supported by the grant also ensures that the recipient can continue to engage with the support being provided.

In addition, cash grants can help to reduce chronic psychosocial stress2. This often results from being in a difficult situation which cannot be resolved by the individual alone. This stress has an immediate effect on the recipient’s wellbeing, and may further impact family members.

Each of the specialist support services puts the recipient’s voice at the heart of their support, ensuring that the person feels listened to and consequently, feels valued. Cash grants support this outcome by helping the recipient to access the things they need, therefore reinforcing the other support they are accessing to help them move towards independence.

Accessing cash grants as part of a package of support helps to build the confidence of recipients because they can be used to help recipients achieve something or prevent a further crisis. Accessing these grants as part of a package of support means that the recipient has been supported to identify their needs and desires, and prioritise those which require immediate action. Taking an active role further reinforces a sense of control over their lives and provides hope that things can change.

Being able to support someone to access additional cash to help with their needs builds the relationship between the recipient and the support worker. The grant is a positive way to engage with hard to reach families and individuals. Taking the time to support recipients to access something tangible demonstrates an investment from the organisation, and can build positive relationships that help to deliver more effective support.

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2Psychosocial stress is the result of a cognitive appraisal of what is at stake and what can be done about it. More simply put, psychosocial stress results when we look at a perceived threat in our lives (real or even imagined), and discern that it may require resources we don’t have.
Figure 1: Theory of Change for Open Doors Programme Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenting issues</th>
<th>Financial needs</th>
<th>Short term outcomes</th>
<th>Medium term outcomes</th>
<th>Long term outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Poverty</td>
<td>Precarious financial situation, difficulties, budgeting</td>
<td>Sense of safety and security</td>
<td>Meaningfully engage with support</td>
<td>Safety and stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Unexpected financial need</td>
<td>Relief of immediate stress</td>
<td>Improved ability to meet physical needs</td>
<td>Increased independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Misuse</td>
<td>Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>Feeling valued</td>
<td>Increased self-esteem</td>
<td>Resilient against future trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Abuse</td>
<td>Contact with CJS</td>
<td>Growing confidence</td>
<td>Feel daunted</td>
<td>Increased personal capacity to meet needs of self (and family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>Sexual Exploitation</td>
<td>Improved relationship with staff</td>
<td>Positive memories</td>
<td>Improved health and wellbeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CRISIS

Recipient accesses a package of support, including an Open Doors Grant

Enablers: wellbeing and practical
Preventers: individuals and systemic

Improved relationship with staff
Sense of ownership and control
Others feeling not as well supported
Sense of ownership and control

Others feeling not as well supported
Sense of ownership and control

Mistrust/feeling pressured
Relief of immediate stress
Feeling valued

Feeling valued
Growing confidence
Increased self-esteem

Increased self-esteem
Feel daunted

Feel daunted
Growing confidence
Increased self-esteem

Resilient against future trials
Increased personal capacity to meet needs of self (and family)

Increased personal capacity to meet needs of self (and family)
Improved health and wellbeing

Focused on the person and their needs
Receiving something without conditions
Creation of time and space

1 Open Doors Programme Theory of Change, NEF, November 2013
There may also be some immediate negative outcomes as a result of being supported. Initially, recipients may experience mistrust or disbelief that someone is offering cash without any formal requirement on their part, other than to spend the money as agreed. This outcome is likely to be negated by the other emotions they experience, especially once the money has been spent. Staff also felt that some recipients may feel a sense of pressure as a result of being given something tangible as they do not want to take on the responsibility of the money.

The criteria for the funding may also cause friction for those who have not received support, as they may feel that they have not been as well supported. Accessing cash grants in addition to support may also create additional dependency: the support is intended to help people to become independent, but knowing where an additional source of money is could create a crutch for vulnerable individuals if not managed properly.

**Expected Medium Term Outcomes**

The medium term outcomes identified are broadly shared across the partner agencies and are, in some cases, directly linked to the goods or services purchased by the cash grant.

The support offered by the organisations helps individuals to meaningfully engage in the support provided. By building on the trust and confidence recipients experience at the start of the programme, the grant can help to lay the foundations for future support work. The removal of immediate threats and stress can help recipients to settle down into a routine.

As a result of accessing cash, the recipient may be in a position which allows them to better deal with challenges in their lives. In the medium term it was reported that this should help them to be more able to meet their own physical needs.

Accessing the support and gaining tangible help enables recipients to improve their self-esteem, through experiencing ‘normality’ in their lives.

The experience of something working out well can offer recipients positive memories, a validation to refer back to a time when they were able to move forward. In some cases, this may result in an experience which is a marker in someone’s life, something which distinguishes the transition between two periods. The recipient will be able to use these as examples of a time when they showed competence and were able to take steps forward.

The cash grants can offer recipients the chance to take ownership and control. This can be in terms of ‘things’ and also their situation. Staff felt that going through the process of identifying what they needed, making a decision to pursue these, and then experiencing ‘owning’ something would help recipients to take control.

Having access to cash, the positive experience of dealing with something in their lives, and being supported by an organisation that develops a personalised action plan helps recipients to be more optimistic about their future - they have the space to see something different for themselves (and for their family).

It was acknowledged, however, that the medium term is a fragile time, and recipients may experience a dip. They may feel daunted after the initial support has helped them to somewhere more secure - either due to chaos or due to a realisation of the journey ahead.
Expected Long Term Outcomes

We have assumed the Open Doors Programme (and partner organisation activities) are mostly able to influence the short and medium term outcomes, leading to the longer term outcomes presented in this section. However, these outcomes could also occur upon completion of the support.

The packages of support are about creating safety and stability for individuals and families. This stability should enable them to live safe and fulfilling lives and provide further positive outcomes for their children.

The support should help recipients to move towards greater independence, in the sense of developing independent living skills. It could also help recipients to understand where their personal responsibilities lie, and when they might need to seek additional support. In addition, this should decrease the isolation that individuals and families encounter when they are faced with challenging situations, as they would have been supported to identify and maintain positive social relationships.

Independence from systems and institutions is a key aim of the partner organisations which refer to the Open Doors Programme. The support is intense and works with the individual or family. Key to this is helping recipients to build safe networks, relationships and links to communities. This, alongside building self-worth and giving them positive experiences, helps them to develop resilience against future trials. It is about supporting them to build their personal capacity. An example is support with budgeting - developing the ability to understand and manage a household budget will help to reduce the chances of future financial crises. Bringing together a sense of the future, some stability and positive experience helps recipients to trust their own decisions.

Improved health and wellbeing is both a direct and indirect outcome of supporting individuals and families with specific needs. Staff felt that recipients would be more confident in both understanding and asking for what they needed and wanted, helping to improve their sense of meaning and purpose and competence - key elements of personal wellbeing. Moving into a safe place also contributes to grant recipients maintaining or improving their health.

Enablers and Preventers

Enablers are the conditions or factors that need to be present or absent to allow the Open Doors Programme to succeed. The enablers can be classified into two groups: wellbeing enablers and practical enablers. The wellbeing enablers mirror the outcomes in the Theory of Change, as they are about individuals and families gaining a sense of value, trusting the partner organisations, developing self-esteem and resilience, and having a sense of empowerment. The practical enablers are about gaining knowledge about where to get support, having access to education, employment, housing and learning practical skills such as budgeting and cooking.

Partner organisations identified a range of preventers to the outcomes being achieved and/or maintained. Regarding recipients themselves these ranged from a lack of skills (such as literacy and IT) or ongoing mental health issues, to lack of commitment through fear or mistrust. Pressure from friends, family or a peer group who are dysfunctional was also highlighted. Systemic preventers include increasingly stringent funding criteria and an unequal access to support across the country. The underlying preventer is a lack of continuity of social support which will disrupt any stability facilitated by the cash grant and support provided.
Critical factors for change

Identifying the factors that enable change to occur are as important as naming the change itself. Through engagement with staff and stakeholders the following key factors for change were identified:

- **Focus on the person and their needs:** the personalised manner in which support is delivered to recipients provides the building blocks for trust, hope and optimism of a better future. This allows recipients to feel valued, important and to have a sense of meaning and purpose. The cash grant further facilitates these outcomes because it removes obstacles or creates opportunities that allow recipients to engage meaningfully and sustainably with the support provided.

- **Receiving something without conditions:** the act of being given the grant creates a sense of responsibility, provides a sense of control and ultimately, empowers recipients to take positive steps to improve their lives. This can be a turning point but also an unfamiliar experience, which may create initial negative outcomes for the recipient.

- **Time and space:** the opportunity to remove an immediate problem from the lives of recipients creates the time and space to deal with the underlying causes of that issue (for example tackling immediate debt and then working on their financial management). This is a crucial step in helping recipients to move from addressing their physical needs only to being able to consider some of their wants and aspirations.
Previous evidence focuses on access and process, not on outcomes.

The Open Doors Programme aims to improve understanding of how accessing cash, alongside other support, helps to achieve sustained results for recipients, as well as giving a sense of the magnitude and significance of the changes achieved. This report elaborates on the experience of individuals and families facing SMD in order to better understand the support needs of those experiencing these issues and influence policy makers to address these needs adequately.

Currently the evidence available regarding grants focuses on how people access these, and how local authorities are managing the process, rather than what outcomes cash grants can achieve. To begin to understand the impact of cash grants alongside support, we produced an Interim Report on the Open Doors Programme in January 2015. This staged reporting enables us to see whether any of the interim findings have changed over time as a result of other external factors, such as welfare reform. The Interim Report identified further questions we had about the impact we were seeing. We have sought to address these questions within this Final Report.

The reports represent a significant new approach to understanding cash grants, in particular by considering their impact alongside the other support received by a grant recipient. The Open Doors Programme offers cash grants on the assumption that this has a number of benefits for recipients, stemming from the flexibility and independence cash can provide over other forms of provision. This report investigates whether these assumptions are true.

Changes to welfare provision have made this understanding of outcomes, not just process, particularly important. In April 2013 the discretionary part of the Social Fund, providing crisis loans to disadvantaged people and Community Care grants to those with special needs, was devolved to 152 local authorities in England. Following this, many local authorities stopped providing grants or loans - with 81% providing direct or ‘in-kind’ support through the provision of goods rather than cash assistance. The Government cut this funding from April 2015, but as part of the Local Authority Finance Settlement 2015/16 Local Authorities continue to have the option to offer local welfare assistance, funded by their existing budgets. Each Local Authority’s Revenue Support Grant has an amount identified for welfare provision, however this is not ring-fenced. This was originally announced as £130 million nationally, but following consultation, an additional £74 million was included in the finance settlement for upper-tier authorities to provide welfare assistance schemes.

It is sincerely hoped that the information provided in this report will encourage and enable decision makers to make informed choices about welfare policy and provision nationally and locally.

**Approach**

This report is based on qualitative and quantitative data from August 2013 to the beginning of October 2015. During this period 832 grants were made to a total value of £265,993, and the average grant was £320.

Report findings are informed through:

- The collection of case studies from grant recipients and staff at partner organisations via telephone. All names have been changed to protect identities.
- Online surveys with grant recipients and staff at partner organisations, conducted by NEF Consulting.
- Analysis of the data within the 832 grant applications.

The methodology is detailed in Appendix 3. The full text from each case study can be found in Appendix 4.

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From August 2013 to October 2015 over a third (39%) of grant recipients were experiencing three or more areas of Severe and Multiple Disadvantage (SMD). The Open Doors Programme criteria require individuals to be experiencing at least two areas.

In the 2014-15 period the proportion of grant recipients who experienced disadvantage in two category areas dropped, whilst those experiencing three category areas grew from 25% in 2013-4 to 32% in 2014-5. This could indicate the increasing severity of difficulty experienced by people supported by partner organisations.

The most common areas of SMD seen in the grant applications are: homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness (29%), domestic abuse (23%) and serious mental health problems (21%). This has not changed over the course of the programme. The most common areas of support provided by partner organisations, as demonstrated by case studies and application forms, align with these common areas of SMD:

- **Support to access safe and secure housing.** In many cases partner organisations are supporting women fleeing domestic abuse, those who are homeless and those with drug and alcohol problems. They are trying to help these individuals to access housing, alongside specialist support. For example, staff requested support with rental deposits to enable people to secure homes or support to purchase essential items so that moving into the property was feasible. It is apparent staff often need to help service users navigate an overwhelming and competitive housing market.

- **Support for mental health issues.** 21% of grant recipients had diagnosed mental health problems. In some cases, mental health problems were the root cause of the current situation in which recipients found themselves in. In addition to this, many staff and grant recipients mentioned the stress, anxiety and depression that resulted from experiencing other areas of SMD.

It is also clear from the data regarding the number of grants made for each category of need (Figure 2), and the total amount given, that grant recipients are experiencing a number of disadvantages concurrently.

By far the most common category for both the number of grants made and the amount granted was ‘Multiple Needs’, where an individual or family needed more than one item. 467 of the 832 grants and £154,626 of the £265,418 given was for this category. **Grants are clearly covering some of the most basic needs for the recipients.** Table 1 lists specific items included within grant applications, including those under the Multiple Needs category.

### Table 1: Items requiring grants, including those under the Multiple Needs category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Furniture:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Appliances:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Cleaning:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Clothing:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Furnishings:</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee table</td>
<td>Fridge/freezer</td>
<td>Washing machine</td>
<td>Water-proof winter coat</td>
<td>Carpets/floor covering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wardrobes</td>
<td>Cooker</td>
<td>Money to fix washing machine</td>
<td>School uniform</td>
<td>Curtain poles and curtains, nets, blinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-chair</td>
<td>Microwave</td>
<td>Iron, ironing board</td>
<td>Hat, scarf, gloves</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sofa</td>
<td>Kettle</td>
<td>Cleaning materials</td>
<td>Shoes/boots/trainers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chest of drawers</td>
<td>Toaster</td>
<td>Vacuum cleaner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table and chairs</td>
<td>Small electrical goods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookcase</td>
<td>Heater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Housing:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Utilities:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Bedroom:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Safety and security:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Decoration:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced rent/deposit</td>
<td>Top up gas and electric meters</td>
<td>Beds</td>
<td>Stair gates</td>
<td>Decorating equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent arrears</td>
<td>Pay off bills – water, electric, gas</td>
<td>Bedding</td>
<td>Panic alarm/security system</td>
<td>Paint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Removal fee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blanket</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plumber</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Bathing:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Kitchen utensils:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Other baby needs</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bath towels</td>
<td>Pots and pans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric shower</td>
<td>Crockery, cutlery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Characteristics of Grant Applicants

The number of grant recipients who are experiencing three or more areas of Severe and Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) has increased since the Interim Report on the Open Doors Programme. The most common areas of SMD remain the same: homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness, domestic abuse and serious mental health issues.
The proportion of grants made in the Multiple Needs category dropped between the period 2013-14 and 2014-15 from 59% to 53% of all grants awarded. Grants awarded for rent, rent arrears or rent deposits increased during the same period from 7% to 16%.

To date 545 women and 287 men have received grants. Only 3% identified themselves as being part of a couple. 83% of applicants are unemployed and 33% have previously applied elsewhere for support. These figures have remained fairly constant since the Interim Report.

The majority of successful grant applications are received when a partner organisation has been working with the recipient for between 2 weeks and 3 months. This has not changed since the Interim Report.
As expected from the initial development of the Open Doors Programme, there are a number of practical benefits of receiving cash grants, free of limitations to certain shops or specified voucher values. Benefits identified from case studies and the application forms include:

- What is needed is not available via vouchers e.g. funding for removal companies
- It enables the grant to be used at separate places more easily
- The recipient can get more with the money by being able to shop in second hand shops and markets
- It widens the choice and flexibility of available goods – the recipient can choose to buy the things that they most need
- Transport issues may limit the places that a recipient can reach so cash is more convenient. Cash also enables a travel fare to be paid to reach the places needed
- Cash enables recipients to use local suppliers/independent shops who would not accept vouchers
- The partner organisation may have local contacts that can source items more cheaply but cannot accept vouchers
- Having cash can speed up the transaction and provides better control over when goods are bought and delivered
- It enables recipients to learn basic budgeting skills, and save money in future through bulk purchase of frozen items, or benefit from reduced heating bills as a result of obtaining carpets and curtains
- Cash enables partial funding of items – it can be given in addition to funds already raised to support an individual

The practical benefits of cash grants also lead to short and medium term outcomes expected by the Theory of Change, such as a sense of ownership and control.

**Case Study – Natalie, Project Manager**

Natalie’s service works with vulnerable women with multiple needs. They may have had an offending history, experienced domestic abuse, be abusing substances or be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Natalie’s team knows the grant will come through in a timely manner. The clients and support workers choose the goods that are needed most but have the flexibility to find these at the lowest cost.

‘It is so empowering for people to be able to make a choice, it gives them the freedom to create a home and builds ownership. The grant says that they are capable, that they are an adult and it is up to them to make it count. For me, they help a woman get the most out of the money and they give a woman choice. Vouchers are great but cash gives so much more. A voucher can say ‘you won’t spend money on what you need’. A cash grant helps with budgeting and asks ‘how are you going to get what you most need?’ so it builds trust and raises recipient’s expectations.’
Developing a ‘Normal’ Life

Open Doors Grants help to make a house into a home – this is the starting point for helping those receiving support to be safe and secure. The grant also enables recipients to feel secure about themselves in terms of their ability to provide for their families and their standing in the community.

A Place to Call Home

Open Doors Grants help recipients to make a home for themselves, providing a basis for further progress as a result of ongoing support.

The initial criteria for the Open Doors Programme were amended following the development of the Theory of Change to allow more flexibility with housing related needs. Risk of homelessness was added to the qualifying areas of SMD - with grants being used to pay for rent arrears. Many staff felt that in order to help those they support to be safe and secure in their lives, the real starting point is often a place to call home. It is significant that this qualifying area of SMD has now become the most common category seen in grant applications.

Gaining access to housing is a big step forward for many grant recipients. However, the difficulties of receiving housing with no other basic equipment or furnishings can feel overwhelmingly difficult to manage. Research with both grant recipients and partner organisations shows that the grant ensures that people are able to remain in the housing they have secured by making the environment more liveable and hospitable.

"A lot of properties are totally unfurnished so on viewing, clients are rather overawed. However, after securing a grant quickly, clients can begin to see how their future home may look. I have known clients to feel like walking away from properties due to lack of furniture so the difference a grant makes is very significant"

– Support worker

"Without the grant] I would have gone back to my old ways, I might have left the flat. The place was really bare - it has set me up, made it like a home"

– Grant recipient

It is not just material goods but emotional needs that can be met through improved housing. This supports the expected outcomes of the Theory of Change, such as a sense of safety, security and/or stability.
“\[ I \text{ would have gone back to my old ways, I might have left the flat. The place was really bare - it has set me up, made it like a home. } \]"

Grant recipient
Case Study – Talik

Talik is in his late 20s and was experiencing SMD through mental health and substance misuse issues. He has emotional and behavioural difficulties.

After spending 18 months in a hostel, Talik has now lived in his new flat for 9 months. His support worker helped him find a flat with the support he needs.

Having a nice home is a really stabilising influence for Talik. He likes to keep the place really tidy and finds that he can establish a routine. Hoovering, washing and doing the ironing keep him on the ‘straight and narrow’. Talik describes himself as a lonely person but finds being at home comforting and reassuring. Talik used some of his grant to buy a coffee table, mirror, pictures and a lamp for his flat to make it more like a home.

Talik’s support worker also sees Talik’s home as very important in building his resilience.

The grant has been very important to Talik. He feels that without it, he wouldn’t be where he is - in a decent home with possessions that he really likes and values. Talik thinks he would be out drinking if he didn’t have a comfortable flat. He thinks he might also be stealing and says that because his brother is in prison, he doesn’t fear being in prison.

Because people have trusted him with the grant, Talik feels that it helps him to understand that he has to take more responsibility. He says that now he sees money as something to be saved, to be put towards his home.

Figure 3: Talik’s progress mapped to the Open Doors Programme’s Theory of Change
Max works with single fathers and sees the grants as both supporting and also maintaining positive change. ‘The grant takes away a problem and so makes room for something else – the things that the dad has to deal with’. Max gives the example of a dad who got a new fridge.

Max has seen people lose or give up their tenancies because they have not been able to make their homes comfortable or safe. A house without a washing machine or a fridge may not be a home. Anyone who gives up their tenancy becomes ‘intentionally homeless’ - many ending up back on the streets.

‘Normal’ Family Life

It is not just setting up of a home that is important to grant recipients - a grant enables them to meet the needs of their family, just like most of us. This was anticipated in the long term outcomes of the Theory of Change for the Open Doors Programme. The case study data has shown that there is a link between feeling able to provide for and be a ‘proper’ parent for your family and the impact this has on sustaining progress in other areas.

Case Study – Lilia and Aaron

Lilia and Aaron are a young couple in their early 20s who were experiencing SMD through mental health issues and imminent risk of homelessness. They received support for Lilia’s mental health difficulties, to improve their finances and to develop their capacity to parent Lilia’s daughter.

They needed to move house to be nearer to Lilia’s dad who is very ill. Lilia is dyslexic so needs help with paperwork. Aaron wants to work but can’t as he is currently acting as Lilia’s carer. He wants to reconnect with family as there have been issues but they live away and he has to budget to visit them.

Lilia and Aaron were finding it hard to buy toys or treats for Lilia’s daughter, and to spend quality time together as a family. They were visiting foodbanks which they hated. Aaron was stressed as he didn’t feel that he could support Lilia properly or pay for the things that the family needed.

Lilia and Aaron used their Open Doors Grant to buy clothing, as well as a gym and pool pass, which means that Lilia can take her daughter swimming. Lilia said that ‘it is so good that the grant is there. It helps. It gives a confidence boost.’

Aaron and Lilia’s support worker applied for a grant because she felt that they needed a boost. She felt that the priority for Lilia and Aaron was to help them to go out more and do more with Lilia’s daughter, such as go to the park or the swimming pool.

Lilia said getting the grant felt brilliant - instead of walking past shops, they could both go in and buy things they needed. Aaron and Lilia said that it was just like being normal people spending money.

Aaron said that ‘knowing that there is someone out there – it means a lot. Somebody wants to help, that’s not how it usually happens, as there is nearly always a catch’. For Lilia and Aaron it was very important to feel trusted with the responsibility of spending a grant.
"Knowing that there is someone out there – it means a lot. Somebody wants to help, that’s not how it usually happens…"

Aaron, Grant recipient
Case Study – Wilson, Project Manager

Wilson’s service works with the most vulnerable people, who have fallen through the net and have a range of highly complex needs. The majority will be experiencing at least three areas of SMD. The service is designed to provide long term, intensive, support to people aged 18-50 years old.

The service is currently working with Maisie, who has her own house but is at risk of losing it. She has debts, a serious alcohol problem and the house is in a terrible state. Many problems stem from the fact that Maisie nursed her husband through cancer at the home and this led to her drinking. Maisie has a 17 year old son, Jason, who acts as her carer but also has significant needs of his own as he has ADHD and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Wilson and his team have worked to ensure that the family is getting all the benefits to which they are entitled. They have also sorted out the house, created proper bedrooms for Maisie and Jason and have begun to address Maisie’s drinking. They are working with Jason to keep him at college and to look at the potential for him to live independently.

The Open Doors Grant has provided very specific support for this family as they used it to buy a washing machine. It is very important to her to be a mum, to do the washing and cooking for her son. When the old one broke, Maisie relapsed and started to drink again. Without the washing machine, she became very distressed.

Wilson says the grant is making a tangible difference to this mother. She has seen that people have wanted to invest in her. Maisie feels valued as well as supported. ‘People can become so isolated, a grant sends a very clear message that we are not giving up on them’.

The grant has improved Maisie’s quality of life and ensures that the team can focus their support where it is most needed.

Fitting In

An Open Doors Grant enables recipients to maintain links with extended family, as well as helping to build further social support networks by enabling recipients to feel that they ‘fit in’ and are not judged by their community or public services. This ability to build or improve personal relationships and links with the community was expected as a long term outcome of the Programme in the Theory of Change in terms of recipients’ ability to build their personal capacity, achieve greater independence and develop resilience against future trials.

Case Study – Shannon

Shannon was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and imminent risk of being made homeless. She is in her mid 40s and has received family support to improve her parenting and confidence.

Shannon has recently moved into a new property, but was struggling with its upkeep as well as looking after her family. Shannon’s daughter, Sarah, was growing out of her clothes and there was also nowhere suitable to keep them. Shannon used the grant to buy Sarah new clothes and a wardrobe and drawers to keep them in. This increased Shannon’s confidence as a parent as she felt able to provide properly for her daughter.

Shannon had been trying to save small amounts towards buying these items herself. As a result of receiving the grant, Shannon was able to use the small savings she had made towards paying for a visit to her sick parents. This has meant Shannon and Sarah could have a break from the stress of their situation and they were able to see family who they had not seen for a long time.
Case Study – Nicola

Nicola is in her mid 20s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse that impacted on her mental health.

Nicola and her four children, aged two, four, six and eight, fled domestic abuse, leaving their 3 bedroom flat. Nicola’s ex-partner then broke into the property and destroyed all her furniture and urinated on her belongings. Nicola became mentally unwell due to the psychological impact of the stalking and harassment she faced after she finished the relationship.

Nicola was placed in a three bedroom house in a new area and her grant was used to buy carpet, which the Local Welfare Provision would not supply. When Nicola’s support worker gave her the Open Doors Grant she cried. She felt that it was a new start.

When Nicola moved into the property she started to feel well again. Her children were now living away from the abuse and had nice living conditions. Nicola feels that having the grant has meant that no one will judge her - she had imagined they were going to live in a property without furniture and the neighbours would report her to social services.

Case Study – Supreet

Supreet is in her mid 30s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and imminent risk of homelessness. Supreet has been receiving support to improve budgeting skills and her family’s financial situation. Family support was also provided to improve the children’s attendance at school and emotional wellbeing.

Supreet and her family have debt issues. The children often looked unkempt and had inappropriate clothes for the season. Her eldest child, Dhamendra, aged 14, explained that he did not attend school on non-uniform days because he did not have any clothes he felt happy wearing. Supreet’s youngest child, Kush, aged 9, said he did not want to attend a school party because he didn’t have any suitable clothes. Supreet also did not have many clothes or outdoor wear. This meant that before she received the grant she did not like going out as people ‘looked at her funny’.

The Open Doors Grant was used for new school and leisure clothes. Supreet also received support to budget with the money in order to purchase good quality items and get better value for money. Dhamendra and Kush love their new clothes and no longer feel like everyone is looking at or talking about them. Supreet is going to continue to budget so that the family will always have clothes in the future.
Empowerment and Dignity

After receiving a grant, 73% of recipients felt in control of their lives. For recipients empowerment is not just about this sense of control, but also the feeling of confidence, value and worth that the grant gives them. They are proud of the progress they have made and that someone has given them some responsibility in their life.

Being in Control

Before accessing the grant, only 14% of recipients reported feeling in control or completely in control of their lives, whilst after receiving the grant 73% felt in control or completely in control - a substantial change (Figure 4). The number of recipients feeling they had some control before receiving the grant has more than halved since the interim report, from 29%, suggesting the conditions causing their SMD are getting worse. The number of recipients who felt out of control before the grant has remained nearly the same since the interim report, decreasing from 57% to 56%. This improved sense of control was correctly anticipated as a medium term outcome by the Theory of Change.

The feeling of being ‘out of control’ may be linked to the fact that the grant is often received at a point of crisis or a point of significant change, such as moving from homelessness into secure housing. Receiving a grant is part of being able to transition to feeling in control and for recipients to feel more able to ‘take charge’ of their lives. For those that feel neither in control nor out of control, there is a sense that progress has been made but the grant recipient is not yet feeling secure:

“ I don’t think I feel in complete control but the grant showed that there is a way out - before I was stuck and trapped” – Grant recipient

Figure 4: Chart showing the extent to which grant recipients feel in control of their lives before and after receiving the grant
Pride

Receiving a cash grant also gave many recipients a sense of pride in the responsibility they had been given to use the grant sensibly and judge for themselves how the money should be spent. Recipients reported a sense of achievement from feeling that their worker at the partner organisation was ‘proud’ of them and ‘impressed’ by how quickly they have got back on their feet using the grant. The Theory of Change does not explicitly refer to pride or a sense of achievement as an outcome of the Open Doors Programme, but it does expect improvements in self esteem, and, in the long term, improved understanding by recipients of where their responsibilities lie.

“My worker is proud of me, I feel proud. If you can use the money wisely, it really makes a difference. I could choose what I needed - very powerful for me”
— Grant recipient

Confidence

Empowerment is not just about control, but feeling confident, valued and worthy of support. This aligns with the Theory of Change which states that recipients will be more confident in both understanding and asking for what they need and want, improving their sense of purpose and competence.

Case Study – Aggie

Aggie was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and mental health issues. She is in her late 60s and had to flee from her abusive husband. Her refuge helped her find a safe and permanent home.

‘I keep reminding myself that I am the victim, I have done nothing wrong. When I moved in I had just two suitcases, my clothes and bedding. I slept on a blow-up mattress on the floor. I had nothing. The grant has been a safety net, it got me lots of things you need to make a home.’

‘Without the grant, I would have been miserable. I am determined to make this place mine. I used to be scared of life, I had everything but I was scared of life. Now I know I am safe. You can have a beautiful house, with lovely things but it is what is going on inside that really matters.’

‘My worker really helps me. It is good to have an adult to talk to and she pushes me too. She is very reassuring. She knows that I want to keep my independence. Since I got the grant, I am more confident, just having some money in your purse makes you more confident.’

‘Since I have had my grant and got sorted here, I feel more assertive. I am not letting my partner sell our old home under me. The support has really helped me, it has made a big difference. Knowing that you have a little bit of money in your purse, planning things step by step, it’s allowing me to put down roots, I am not moving again.’

‘Respect is a two-way thing: no one has felt sorry for me, they have been prepared to give me a kick up the bum when I have needed it but they have also trusted me to use the money wisely. It was there when I needed it most.’
I used to be scared of life. I had everything, but I was scared of life. Now I know I am safe.

Aggie, Grant recipient
Case Study – Shaniqua

Shaniqua is in her late 40s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and homelessness. Shaniqua had to flee the property where she had been staying due to domestic abuse and as a consequence she had no possessions of her own. She was having to borrow clean clothes from her 17 year old son’s partner.

Shaniqua’s support worker applied for an Open Doors Grant in order for her to purchase some new clothing for herself and her son. The cash grant made a significant impact on their life. Shaniqua now feels able to go shopping again and buy her younger son clothes for the coming winter. The cash grant has enabled Shaniqua to start to rebuild her life and has meant that she has not had to compromise her safety by contacting her ex-partner to request her clothing back. The grant also gave Shaniqua back her dignity - as she did not have to ask others to meet such a basic need.

Case Study – Samson

Samson was experiencing SMD through mental health and substance misuse issues. He has received support to access housing and benefits, reduce his substance misuse and improve his mental health.

Samson is in his 40s, has very complex needs, is vulnerable to being exploited and needs support to ensure that he doesn’t slip back into addiction.

Samson became homeless when he was seriously assaulted by a gang. Samson left his flat with the clothes he stood up in. He spent three months having psychiatric treatment.

Samson feels that he was rescued by the service that is now supporting him. Samson says that ‘meeting my worker was the best day of my life’. He helps Samson to talk things through, has given him practical help with forms and benefits and also challenges him.

Samson’s grant was very important to him - It bought him a complete set of clothes. Samson likes to look neat and tidy and he enjoys the routine of washing and ironing his clothes. When he gets down, he really lets himself go. The grant has helped him stay positive.

Samson feels he has changed a lot - he no longer feels worthless. The grant has shown him that there is help out there. He says it is very hard when you don’t feel there is anyone who can help you.
Opening Doors, Changing Lives

Health and Wellbeing

Our experience of managing the Open Doors Programme shows that receiving a cash grant enables the recipient to make progress and meet needs which then improve wellbeing. Cash grants help recipients feel safer, more valued, more confident and more able to cope. Grants also improve housing conditions that impact upon physical health.

This is in accordance with the Theory of Change - providing individuals and families with something creates a series of interlocking changes, increased safety and security reduces their overall stress and thus improves their wellbeing.

Feeling Good About Yourself

Before receiving the grant none of the clients felt good about themselves all of the time and only 9% felt good about themselves some of the time. After receiving the grant over half (54%) of the recipients feel good about themselves most of the time and 17% feel good all the time (Figure 5). This is a substantial improvement. Interviews with grant recipients reveal that part of this impact stems from increased confidence and the impact this has on wellbeing – receiving a grant makes the recipient feel valued and trusted. The health and wellbeing of recipients improves because the grant enables the recipient to move to a place of safety and remain there. This aligns with short term outcomes of the Theory of Change around feeling valued, having growing confidence and recipients having a sense of safety and security.

Figure 5: Chart showing whether recipients feel good about themselves before and after receiving the grant
Case Study – Jacinda

Jacinda is 18 and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and mental health issues. She has received support to access benefits and improve her self-esteem and general mental health after being the victim of ‘honour’-based violence.

Jacinda was physically assaulted by her father, who had also made threats to kidnap and kill her. She was removed from the family home for her own safety and was put into a hostel.

Jacinda had no money for clothing and as she had left home under police escort she did not have any spare clothes. She also did not have anywhere to do laundry. This Open Doors Grant enabled Jacinda to purchase additional clothing, which was invaluable in allowing her to improve her general mood and sense of worth. She was under exceptional pressure and her mental health was very poor. The grant alleviated some of the pressure and anxiety that she was experiencing and gave Jacinda back some of her independence by being able to shop for herself.

Case Study – Cho, Support Worker

Cho has been a Children and Families worker for over 10 years. She works with families in crisis with children usually on the Child Protection Register.

Cho has recently supported Marie who left her husband after years of abuse and had nothing. The children had left their toys, their friends and their family home and moved to a totally new city. Cho applied for an Open Doors Grant for Marie to spend on new clothes for her and her children. Marie’s first priority was to buy her son a red sweater. He had just started at a new primary school and he was finding it very hard. It was mid-term, he didn’t know anyone and he was different because he only had a blue sweater while the school sweater was red. With the grant Marie was able to buy enough clothes to ensure her children will be warm in winter while she starts to budget and save. Marie was not only able to ensure that her children had clothes, she also got herself a new bra, something that made herself feel so much better about herself. Cho described that grant as ‘empowering Marie when she was feeling most powerless’.

Cho says ‘an Open Doors Grant is about safety, it can help turn a house into a home, it can mean that a child can settle in to school. It is about the money, but it is about so much more. An Open Doors Grant is like stretching out a hand, it says ‘things can get better’.
Optimism for the Future

Before receiving the grant, optimism about the future was low. A third of respondents never felt optimistic at all, but after receiving the grant almost two thirds (63%) report feeling optimistic most of the time (Figure 6). This substantial increase in optimism was expected by the Theory of Change because the programme allows recipients the space to envisage something different for themselves.

For those that feel optimistic some of the time after receiving the grant, there is still concern about the future but the grant has reinforced the sense of having a support network or help.

“I do worry because I need a permanent home. But I know there is help out there and that helps. I was really low, my life was down the toilet. The grant has meant I have one less thing to worry about, it really keeps the edge off” – Grant recipient

Case Study – Faiza

Faiza is in her 30s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and homelessness. She has received support to improve her confidence and help her to navigate the justice system.

Faiza and her young son had to abandon everything after she experienced domestic abuse. When she was able to find her own accommodation she needed beds for herself and her son, which the grant was able to provide.

‘As soon as I heard that I had got the grant, a smile came on my face - I hadn’t smiled for months. When you have come from a domestic abuse scenario and when you hear no, no, no all the time, when somebody turns around and says YES, it makes you feel positive, it makes you feel you can achieve something, you can do it.’
“…asking for help can be positive, it says that you want to make things better, that you want to change, it says you are confident to ask for help. It is a strength.”

Faiza, Grant recipient
‘Some people never get to experience that kindness, that a simple yes can change everything. One small thing can change major things. ‘The grant is AMAZING. I never used to ask for help. I saw asking for help as being wrong. I thought I would be judged. Now I understand that asking for help can be positive, it says that you want to make things better, that you want to change, it says you are confident to ask for help. It is a strength.’

‘When I got the grant, everything started to get better. If you see me now, I am a happy woman, I am back in work. My son is a bubbly normal little boy. It is not about the money, it is not about having things. Being able to have a home makes me feel confident, I can come back from a busy day and relax and say THIS IS MINE.’

‘The grant helped me close a really bad chapter in my life. With the support of my worker and that grant, I have opened a new chapter. If I had one message for the funders, it would be “thank you for helping me live”.’

Case Study – Amanda

Amanda is in her 50s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and mental health issues. She has received practical support around her debts, benefits and housing and is also supported to reduce problems related to her physical ill health where possible.

The second floor private rented flat Amanda is currently living is far from ideal. Amanda has Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and diabetes so she finds climbing stairs very difficult and tiring.

Amanda bought a freezer with her grant. She says that the grant has been ‘brilliant. I feel better, I have got something new, something I have not had before and I really appreciate it.’ Amanda is often tired because of her COPD and she finds it hard to manage. The freezer is really helping her. ‘I can go to Iceland and buy a month’s worth of shopping. It means I don’t have to carry heavy bags, and I don’t have to go down to the shops every day. I can invite my friend round - yesterday we had dinner together at mine. I can also have my granddaughter to stay.’

Amanda does find life hard but the grant has given her something she finds so worthwhile. She knows her home is not ideal but the grant has helped make it as good as it possibly can be.

Amanda says that she never realised there would be people who would help her. She feels that she can see a change in herself and can be a bit more positive. Amanda feels that at last ‘something is going her way’.

Amanda’s support worker Roisin felt that an Open Doors Grant could really help Amanda and give her a lift. Roisin was very concerned that Amanda would walk away from the flat and so the grant has really helped her keep a roof over her head.

Roisin sees lots of bonuses as a result of getting Amanda an Open Doors Grant. ‘It has helped forge a relationship, all along Amanda has felt mistrusted, she has had a sense of suspicion about why people want to help. The grant builds trust but has also helped Amanda to feel more ‘human’ and has given her back some control in her life. Roisin says ‘Amanda’s grant is like a gift and Amanda is not a person who has received a lot of gifts. It makes a real difference.’
Physical Health and Quality Time

The Open Doors Grants have not just impacted upon mental health and wellbeing, but the physical health of recipients and their children too – a medium term outcome established in the Theory of Change. Grants can lead to improved diets and quality time spent as a family, as well as positive impacts where a recipient has physical disabilities, such as improved mobility.

Case Study – Lucy

Lucy is in her late 20s and was experiencing SMD through mental health issues and domestic abuse from her mother. Lucy is receiving support to improve her ability to set boundaries and routines for her children, improve the family’s health and wellbeing and to improve her confidence as a parent. She is also supported to improve her mental health, as it is believed she is borderline bi-polar.

Lucy has two very lively, intelligent girls; the oldest, Diana, is six and the youngest, Jessica, is four. Jessica is also awaiting an assessment but probably has ADHD.

Lucy’s support worker applied to the Open Doors Programme for a grant to buy a freezer because she could see it would really help Lucy to look after herself and her children. Lucy knows that there are days when she is not able to leave the house when Jessica is particularly hyperactive, meaning she can not go shopping. Having the freezer ensures that the children will have a good, nutritious meal. Lucy always has to take things day by day; she cannot predict her moods so it is hugely reassuring to have food in the house. The freezer has also helped Lucy to budget.

Best of all, Lucy says that having a freezer has freed up time for her to spend with the children. ‘I cook before I collect Diana from school, then I can ensure that we have time together to read stories and to play’. Lucy and her children can cook evening meals together and then put them in the freezer.

For Lucy’s support worker, the Open Doors Programme is really helpful. She only has 12 weeks to work with a client so the grant really helps make her input count. Lucy’s freezer has brought lots of benefits in itself, but it also dovetails with the goals of the support worker: good nutrition, positive parenting and mum and children spending time together.

Case Study – Paul, Support Worker

Paul has been working with an older lady, Joyce, who has experienced domestic abuse, broke her back, was further injured in a car accident and then developed breast cancer. She was moved to sheltered accommodation as her previous flat was damp, which was impacting on her health.

Joyce’s sheltered accommodation had no flooring and she needed a special bed. Her Open Doors Grant paid for the flooring. This has increased her mobility around the flat and also made the house much warmer. It has freed up money which can now be spent on a proper orthopaedic mattress. Paul says that there are now very few places where you can get funding for carpets, but ‘flooring is an absolute essential when you make a home’.
Support Delivered by Partner Organisations

Grants enhance the services of partner organisations, regardless of what type of support this is, by enabling more holistic support to be provided and giving clients the space to focus on the other changes they need to make in their lives. Support workers are also better able to engage clients. Irrespective of the type of support provided, partner organisations apply for a grant based on the level of progress that a client has made, not at a particular time within the support.

Partner-client Relationships

76% of partner organisations agree or strongly agree that the grant has helped to improve their relationship with clients (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Chart showing whether partner organisations feel the grant helped improved their relationship with the client

This is consistent with the expectations within the Theory of Change and hugely important for the design of support services for those with complex needs. Comments by partner organisations show that the primary reasons for this improvement in the relationship between worker and client are, firstly, that a grant fosters trust and belief that people are willing to help and, secondly, that accessing Open Doors Grants gives the grant recipient increased confidence that the partner organisation understands their needs and has the ability to take action to help meet these.

“Accessing a cash grant does really help relationships as it is almost proof to a woman that you can do something real and tangible to help her situation in a pretty immediate way. That really helps to develop the trust and confidence a woman has with you as a worker.”
– Support worker
For grant recipients who have previously had bad experiences with professionals this strengthening of the relationship is particularly important. It is not just the relationship that is strengthened but the ability of a recipient to engage.

Case Study – Matthew

Matthew is in his 30s and was experiencing SMD through substance abuse and mental health issues. He is receiving support to improve his mental health and finances, reduce his substance misuse and alleviate his problems with his neighbours and housing.

Matthew has had a lot of treatment for his mental health and addictions over the years but hasn’t always found the local mental health service sympathetic or understanding. He says that his support worker is the first person who has really taken the time to listen to him. Matthew thinks that his support worker and the project she works for have been brilliant. ‘They wanted to have the conversation and they focused on me, not on my mental health, not on my history’.

When Matthew’s support worker first met him he was not going out of the house. He was suffering from serious anxiety, his clothes were old and worn out and he had lost confidence in himself. Matthew was really impressed when his support worker suggested that they apply for a grant for new clothes. He felt that it really showed that she was on the ball, that she understood his needs and also that she knew what she was doing. It gave Matthew confidence in her and the project.

‘It seems a small thing, not having clothes, but it has meant that I can apply for jobs and that I can go out of the house feeling confident. It really has helped me’. Work is very important to Matthew – he wants to get back into the world. Matthew says that he has sometimes felt that he has a simple choice: get a job and reconnect or opt out of life all together.

Case Study – David, Project Manager

David’s project works with very vulnerable clients – some will have offending histories, drug and alcohol issues or poor mental health. His service provides supported housing and floating support for people at risk of becoming homeless.

David and his team use Open Doors Grants to support ‘moves on’. Grants can pay towards deposits and rent, as well as provide basic goods. The flexibility of the grants means they can help a client in the way they need it most. ‘Some people find supported housing (like a hostel) a very negative environment, and the atmosphere in a hostel can change hugely depending on the residents, so being able to help someone move on relatively quickly is very important.’ David says that the grants give workers options - they create a dialogue where they can say ‘this is what I can do for you and this is where I can go for help’.

‘If you help make a house a home rather than a prison it really improves their wellbeing. It means that clients can engage in dealing with their drugs or alcohol, it can help both mentally and physically.’
Mahmud is 30 years old and was experiencing SMD through homelessness and mental health issues. He has received support to access benefits, housing and employment opportunities.

Mahmud fled from Iran for political reasons. He was a successful accountant in his home country. He has been granted asylum in the UK and initially had two jobs. However, he then developed serious back problems and had to stop working. Mahmud became homeless as a result.

Mahmud’s support worker helped him start bidding to get a flat but Mahmud was finding it very hard. He had no savings and his benefits had stopped. Mahmud was desperate for work but the job centre was not helpful. His support worker felt that they judged him harshly and that Mahmud was doing all he could to help himself.

When Mahmud did secure a flat it was dark and cold. His worker applied for an Open Doors Grant to help him establish his home. Mahmud had volunteered at a furniture store so was able to get good furniture. He bought wood and tools so that he could build his own shelves and cupboards.

Mahmud says ‘for me, the best thing was that my worker trusted me to spend my money, he trusted me to get receipts, to get what I needed. In the hostel, there isn’t much trust. When you have no job, no home, it is really valuable to be trusted and feel trusted.’

‘I am really grateful for my grant. It has made me a home. I have been made welcome by people. I can’t forget how hard it was, but now I can focus on getting my job, on my life. I can really concentrate on the future. Now I have a proper home, I can focus on getting a degree, improving my English. I want to get a good job. I have used some of the wood I bought to make these shelves, for my books and learning.’

Mahmud says ‘I don’t feel shame, what happened is part of my life, it is what I do afterwards that matters now. I still have nightmares, every day is like a pressure but having a home helps me in different directions. It helps with my depression, I have hope. I have something to do, there is still stuff that I need to finish in the house. It’s like fuel, it’s really crucial.’

‘I don’t want to be on benefits, I will get a job, I will get there. Now I have a space to learn. I can’t ignore what everyone has done for me. I am very thankful for everything, I hope I can pay back that kindness. When you think you have a chance, some future you have some hope.’
I don’t feel shame, what happened is part of my life. It is what I do afterwards that matters now. I can’t ignore what everyone has done for me. I am very thankful for everything - I hope I can pay back that kindness.

Mahmud, Grant recipient
Niamh’s service works with vulnerable women with multiple needs. All women using the service have issues with debt and housing, regardless of how they came to the service.

The grant is an opportunity to get back on their feet. It gets them set up, it can stop them losing their tenancy. Getting a grant can motivate a woman. Too often they have been rejected by the Local Welfare Fund, so a grant can tell them that they are not worthless.

Niamh has seen women making long term changes because of the Open Doors Grant and she can see how it supports women to maintain their tenancies. ‘One woman who has mental health issues and was abusing substances got a grant for clothes. She was able to do voluntary work and is now doing really well.’

Niamh and her team would not consider an Open Doors Grant if a woman’s life was chaotic or they were not attending appointments. However, they might use it for forward planning - helping a woman to see that if they could establish routines, they might get a grant in the future.

‘Grants definitely build trust. Women can tell their story and see something tangible, an outcome from sharing this. When you get a grant, it can build the relationship between worker and client. It increases the self worth of the client.’

Niamh sees particular value for women who have come through the criminal justice system; ‘it is a really good tool for engaging women after release. It can get the women into the service, reinforcing the fact that there are people who will support them. The local authority might provide some cash for women leaving prison but it is hard for women to focus on their real needs. The grant is really concrete and focuses their thinking.’
The Working Practice of Partner Organisations

Partner organisations do not perceive cash grants as affecting their working practice. Rather, they are seen as enhancing the support or services that they can offer to clients by enabling workers to provide more comprehensive or ‘holistic’ support.

“\textit{It has allowed me to support families beyond my normal capabilities}” \\
\textbf{– Support worker}

“\textit{It makes support much easier to provide. We are able to tangibly and immediately solve problems when it usually takes a lot of time to do so}” – Support worker

This ability to provide more comprehensive support was not explicitly considered in the Theory of Change, nor was the beneficial impact that the grant can have on how workers at partner organisations experience their job:

“\textit{Before accessing a grant, it can sometimes feel that although you would do all you can to support and help a woman you are working with, your hands are tied to the constraints of the ‘system’ - what benefits they are entitled to and what support they can get. After accessing a grant, it really improves your confidence as a worker that you can make a real and practical difference to women’s lives as you can see the difference it makes to them}” – Support worker

Not only do grants enable support workers to feel better able to do their job, a whole service can better demonstrate its impact through use of the Open Doors Grants Programme.

Case Study – Iain, Support Worker

A key element of Iain’s work is to sustain tenancy. Open Doors Grants provide support which will ensure that this is successful. For Iain, Open Doors Grants build relationships, which is very helpful when the length of support that the service can give is short, such as 12 weeks. ‘You can be in and out with a very practical input that can make a real difference.’

Iain thinks that this is not only empowering for support workers and grant recipients, but the grant can also ensure that the service is meeting its Key Performance Indicators. Access to the Open Doors Grants has helped the service in a recent tendering process by being able to demonstrate value for money. All of this can strengthen the service and gives staff security.

Iain thinks that the impact of the Open Doors Grant on the individual is huge too. Grant recipients are often facing so many issues: debts, arrears, experience of domestic abuse, benefit sanctions and poor mental health. The grants increase the options for staff to provide meaningful support. Iain also notes that the grant can be a very helpful way of supporting someone as they withdraw from a service; it is a good exit strategy, helping the client to take responsibility and move on from support.
When Partner Organisations Apply for a Grant

A question raised by the Interim Report on the Open Doors Programme was ‘at what stage during support are partner organisations most likely to apply for a grant for an individual?’ Since that report, grant application data shows that partner organisations are still most likely to apply between two weeks to three months into support. For partner organisations it is not always about the length of time that someone has been supported that encourages them to apply for a grant, it is more to do with the level of progress that their client has made.

The grant is has significant impact at the pre-tenancy point - when a client has accessed housing but has not yet moved in. It helps both practically, in terms of recipients setting up their home, and emotionally by helping them to feel in control. This supports the Theory of Change which expects the short term outcome of relief of immediate stress and medium term outcome of a sense of ownership and control.

Another time when it is useful to apply for a grant is when the client is near eviction or in rent arrears as it enables them to remain in their home. Securing a grant early in the relationship is important because of the impact this has on the relationship between the client and the support worker, as detailed in the Theory of Change and discussed previously.

Case Study – Charlie

Charlie is in his 30s and was experiencing SMD through mental health issues and imminent risk of homelessness. He has received support to manage his debts and improve his mental health, making his life less chaotic.

Charlie previously worked as a translator, having gained a law degree and worked in recruitment. Charlie started working with his support worker after being referred by the mental health unit at the local hospital, where he was receiving clinical support for anxiety and depression.

Charlie describes his house and life as being in ‘chaos’. He had no electricity or gas in his house due to being in severe arrears. In a practical sense, Charlie also needed cooking implements and new clothes. His support worker stated that ‘he couldn’t stay in the property in that state…he couldn’t move forward without dealing with his arrears.’

His support worker, Stan, says that he is really careful about when to apply for a grant. Charlie was at the stage where he wasn’t able to move forward without the extra support provided by the Open Doors Grant. Stan stated that he could apply every day for different clients, but they need to be engaging with the support provided.

When asked what the grant meant to him, Charlie replied that ‘I have a different perspective now. I am quite aware that if I get into a bad condition it’s a red flag that my mental health is declining. I couldn’t have done it [got to this place] without the cash.’

Charlie isn’t ‘sitting still’ and is starting to become reintegrated into his daughter’s life.
Case Study – Gloria, Moving On Co-ordinator

For Gloria, the Open Doors Grant is most helpful when it can help somebody move into permanent accommodation. Often her clients are offered properties at very short notice and once they have signed for it, they move in. These flats won’t have even the basics that make a house a home. Without these things, it is so much harder to maintain a tenancy. ‘Moving on can be a really precarious time; people have so many hopes but moving into independent living can be very lonely, suddenly there are no staff around you. People need to have a home to help them cope. The first six months of a tenancy can be very fragile’.

For Gloria, an Open Doors Grant addresses basic needs and helps build the relationship between the support worker and the client. The workers can be creative about how they discuss the grants with the client, helping them think about their future beyond the hostel. A grant can help deal with practical details to help the client focus on the other things that they need to do in their lives. ‘The fear of moving on is very real, many will have found supported housing very positive. Many of our clients will have tenancies that have failed previously. A grant provides motivation and can really help the client feel positive about moving on.’

Impact Related to Type of Support Received

The Open Doors Programme Interim Report raised the question of whether a grant’s impact differs depending on the type of support being provided by the partner organisation.

The data used for this report has not shown any particular differences in impact depending on the type of support provided by partner organisations to the recipient. It may be that all grant recipients are experiencing at least two areas of SMD and therefore are all receiving a mixture of support. The data does show that some organisations still apply for grants much more frequently than others (Figure 9), but the most frequent applicants do not all come from one area of support work, such as domestic abuse, and therefore this does not provide any further insight. The question of why some organisations apply more than others could not be answered by the data.

Figure 9: Chart showing the number of applications received from each Open Doors Programme partner organisation August 2013 - October 2015.
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Resilience and Sustainability of Progress

Receiving a grant does not alleviate all of the problems faced by those experiencing SMD, meaning they are still likely to need further support in the future. However, receiving a cash grant does enable recipients to learn skills and develop a structure to their lives which increases their resilience and sustains progress resulting from the support.

The Theory of Change expects that giving recipients positive experiences will help them to develop resilience against future trials and build their personal capacity to deal with the needs they still have to address. For example, in many of the case studies it is clear that the grant has helped recipients to maintain their tenancies, enabling them to benefit from the stability and structure that a home provides in order to deal with other issues that still remain, such as susceptibility to substance misuse.

Ability to Make Positive Steps

84% of grant recipients felt that since receiving the grant they have made positive steps forward, and almost half (46%) strongly agreed that this was the case. This is a significant outcome. The Theory of Change’s expectation is that recipients will progress through a series of outcomes based on the positive steps made previously. The case studies support this, demonstrating how, for people who have chaotic lives or multiple needs, the routine and structure that a grant provides is extremely important as a basis for further progress. We have seen previously how a grant has created a home for Talik where he can vacuum, wash and iron his clothes, keeping him on the ‘straight and narrow’. For Andrew his grant was the springboard he needed to move forward with his life.

Case Study – Andrew

Andrew is in his late 20s and is experiencing SMD through homelessness and mental health issues. He is receiving support to access housing and volunteering opportunities and manage his hospital appointments. His support is helping him to improve the stability of his life.

Andrew was a trainee jockey until a serious car accident meant he could no longer ride professionally. He is still recovering from his injuries. He ended up on the streets after he split up from his partner and received a short custodial sentence for criminal damage. Andrew lost everything: his career, his dream life and his family. He has struggled to put the pieces back together but is very determined that he can change and adapt. Andrew is currently living in a hostel and he is finding the environment very depressing.

Andrew’s local partner organisation has supported him in trying to find a new home and to access the Open Doors Grant. The grant will pay both the deposit and the administration fee to rent a privately owned property. For Andrew his grant is a key step in helping him get his life back on track. He has a very clear idea of what his grant will help him achieve - he has already lined up a new job for himself with a charity that provides riding for the disabled. Andrew has also done some volunteering and has found it very rewarding. He feels that he is being given a second chance. Andrew is clear: ‘I need to prove it to myself, to my family. They have done so much, supporting me when I was riding, I need to prove that I am still fighting. The grant helps me, I am starting to feel stronger, I can’t wait to move.’

Andrew says ‘I am very determined, the grant and all the help I have received are moving me forward. Having a home will give me the stability I need. The grant will close a bad chapter in my life.’
Case Study – Sara-Lee, Andrew’s Support Worker

‘In Andrew’s case, I could see his desire to better himself’. Sara-Lee has not been supporting Andrew for very long but she can see how challenging he is finding life in the hostel. Most importantly, she can see how he is engaging with help and support.

Andrew’s grant is the first time that Sara-Lee has applied to the Open Doors Programme. She has worked with Andrew to look at his core needs and help focus his priorities. ‘I can see that Andrew does have ability to know what he needs to do.’ Sara-Lee describes his grant as ‘solving a problem by pushing him forward’.

Sara-Lee can see that while there may be times when a grant builds engagement, but she also thinks that ‘structured support needs to be there for someone to move on. If they are engaging well, if there is a process in their own mind to move on, the grant can really help build the stability that people need. In Andrew’s case, he has the focus to move on and to find work and this grant will help him achieve that.’

Resilience

Where clients of partner organisations have already made significant progress, receiving a grant improves future resilience against future trials, a long term outcome detailed in the Theory of Change. Grant recipients were asked: ‘In general, would you say that when things go wrong, it takes you a long time to get back on your feet?’ 70% felt that before the grant it took them a long time to bounce back when things went wrong. Now, after receiving the grant, only 21% feel that way (Figure 10), an impressive reduction.

![Figure 10: Chart showing resilience (the extent to which grant recipients feel they take a long time to recover when things go wrong) before and after receiving the grant](image)

As Janek says below, it helps him ‘to bounce back’. For those that still find it takes a long time, there has been improvement in their resilience but recovering from setbacks remains a struggle:

“*It is bad at the moment, but I feel stronger than before when it was a mess*”

– Grant recipient
Case Study – Janek

Janek is in his 40s and is experiencing SMD through homelessness and substance misuse issues. He is being supported to tackle his substance misuse and become involved in social activities.

Janek had a successful career in hospitality for many years before he started to associate with a new group of people and ended up abusing alcohol. Janek’s drinking was so excessive that he had fits and there have been serious concerns about his health. His marriage failed, he had to give up his flat and he has been left with absolutely nothing. He was found sleeping rough by the local homelessness team and got placed in a hostel.

Janek accepts that his alcohol problems have not gone away and that he is still very vulnerable to binge drinking. He knows it is up to him to sort that out.

Janek’s grant has really helped him start to build that stability. It bought him clothes, bedding and toiletries. His room feels safe and welcoming, it is a ‘nice little room’. Janek views his grant as something that helps him ‘to bounce back’. Janek says that the support alongside his grant has also really helped him get back on his feet.

He sees the grant as something that he is responsible for. It has helped Janek create a proper structure for his life. Janek has always been independent and so it has been hard for him to have to rely on others. He says the grant is helping him ‘get back on track’ and it has made him really happy.

Janek is involved in lots of activities at the hostel. He helps in the garden and cooks once a week. He is very proud of his Sunday lunches and the fact that most of the residents come for his meals. He is very supportive of other residents and his workers speak very highly of him.

The Need for Further Support

Just over a third (35%) of grant recipients think it is likely or very likely that they will need to continue to access support in the future. By contrast 30% feel it is unlikely or very unlikely (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Chart showing client perception of likelihood of needing further support from the partner organisation in the future
This suggests that the need for further support, whilst arguably reduced by the grant through the recipient’s improved ability to make progress and be resilient, is not removed completely. This is understandable as those suffering two or more areas of SMD are likely to still have many other problems that need to be resolved after receiving the grant. Sometimes grant recipients find a number of systems difficult to navigate and will therefore need further support to do so, even where progress has been made. This also agrees with the Theory of Change, which expects the short and medium term outcomes to be seen during support work, but more time to be needed to fully achieve the long term outcomes.

**Case Study – Davina, Support Worker**

Davina works with people with very complex needs and her role is to help them maintain their tenancy as well as deal with a complex range of issues. Their needs are such that putting aside money or saving is just not a priority. Some of her clients have mental health needs and struggle to budget, and some clients have suffered financial abuse from a partner and have never been allowed to budget for themselves.

Davina also says that systems in general are hard for her clients. ‘Often they will not know how to set up paying for their electricity or gas. They will not always be good at replying to mail. Some will struggle to find local authority houses’. Davina supported one person who had failed all the criteria for a house, had no job and had huge rent arrears. He is now in supported accommodation, has managed to deal with his drinking and has a job. A stable roof over his head has really helped him. The Open Doors Grant was not just about getting him a cooker but also lampshades and the sorts of things that make a home cosy. As Davina says, ‘if you are in a dismal flat, you are not going to want to stay. If you have experienced domestic violence, it can take years for you to stop feeling the effects, and if your home has no curtains and feels unsafe then you are not going to want to stay. An Open Doors Grant can help us feel we are not setting up our clients to fail.’

Grant recipients also have varied perceptions of what the future will hold and whether they will be in a position to need an emergency grant again. 28% feel that it is likely or very likely that they will need another grant (Figure 12). In these cases there is a sense of still being on unstable ground or having a long road ahead where more support might be needed. They have not yet achieved the long term outcomes from the Theory of Change, such as resilience against future trials, increased independence and increased personal capacity to meet their needs. By way of contrast, 28% feel it is unlikely or very unlikely.
Some of the grant recipients highlight the fact that in the past they have held down a job and they want to ensure that they are never in the position to need a grant again. Other recipients want other people to have a chance to access the valuable support they got.

“"I have had my grant. There are lots of people who need help more than I do now.”"  
- Grant recipient

**Case Study – Waseme**

Waseme is in her 20s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and homelessness. She has received support to help find rented accommodation and improve her confidence, and she has been signposted to education opportunities.

Waseme is now living in a completely new area having escaped from very serious domestic abuse, but she has had to start from scratch. When she first went to the refuge she had absolutely nothing, only the clothes she stood up in. A partner organisation has helped her move into rented accommodation and her Open Doors Grant was able to buy her basic furniture, including a baby chair and table. She has used the leftover money to buy cleaning materials, paint and the material to make new curtains.

Her three children have already settled well. They like the neighbourhood and the park is close by so they can go and play. Waseme says that ‘the grant helps me see that I am strong. I need to be strong, I have the kids and I need to be strong for them. Now I want to go to college, improve my English; I don’t want to work in a factory. I want to do a course and have a good job like I did before.’

‘I feel confident that life can get better, I am on my way forwards. At the moment, I am trying to save money, there are things I need for the children. I want to find my own way now. I don’t want another grant from Open Doors because you have given me the start I need. There are lots of people who have problems - I see women who have nothing, they need help more than me. The grant has made things so different: I am happy, the kids are happy to be here now and I know I can help myself now I have had a start. Thank you, really.’

![Figure 13: Waseme’s progress mapped to the Open Doors Programme’s Theory of Change](image-url)
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Sustainability

Additional questions posed by the Interim Report were:

- What impact does the grant have on the sustainability of progress made by grant recipients?
- What long term impacts are achieved from providing cash alongside other support?
- What other conditions need to exist alongside cash grants for them to have the most impact?
- What are the potential cost savings from providing grants alongside support?

The data collected for this report was not able to provide a robust answer to the question on cost savings, and a further specific study of this is recommended. However, the case studies have shown that partner organisation and recipients do believe that grants enable progress to be sustained and long term impacts, as defined by the Theory of Change, to be achieved.

Generally, partner organisations feel that the grant needs to be combined with budgeting support and advice in order to have the most impact and make it less likely future support will be needed. Sometimes there will need to be a planned/pending benefit application or other income in place in order for the impact of the grant to be maximised.

“Grants in and of themselves aren’t going to change a person’s life. If they aren’t supported in other ways, whether emotionally or practically, they are likely to need the same thing again and again. That’s why we combine grants with advocacy and support.”

– Support worker

Case Study – Sandra, Operations Manager

‘The Open Doors Programme has been a good process. Partners were involved right in its development and it has been run in a very inclusive way. There has been constant consultation and changes have been made to the programme as a result of that.

‘The programme is very flexible and has a direct benefit on the women our organisation supports. But it is also very helpful for staff. The programme came at a very good time for the organisation with challenges to local welfare funds and cuts in benefits. There was lots of anxiety within the staff team. It is useful to know that there is something tangible that staff can do or provide. So many times, staff are working with women whose issues are intractable, it is very powerful to be able to say “We might be able to do something about this”.

‘The strength of the Open Doors programme is that it can help sustain an outcome. If a woman who has experienced domestic violence gets a new tenancy, that is a key moment for her, but there may be lots of issues for her about sustaining that tenancy. If a grant can help keep a person safe, help her invite friends round and ensure that the social worker sees she is coping, all these are really important.’

‘Underpinning the programme is its genuine positivity about achieving change. We are all trying to achieve change for our service users, through trying to meet their needs, but this Programme is about individual change. It is unusual to have a grant programme that itself wants to achieve lasting change. That is what makes Open Doors different.’
Grant recipients and staff feel that without the Open Doors Programme the client’s situation would have worsened considerably. Both groups identified the likely impact to be declining mental and physical health, reliance on criminal activity and a general lack of safety. Provision from elsewhere is seen as unlikely, certainly not with the relevance to needs and straightforward approach of the Open Doors Programme.

Without a Grant

89% of the grant recipients surveyed felt that their situation would have worsened if they had not received the grant; this amply demonstrates how significant the provision of cash grants alongside support is. 11% of recipients surveyed felt that without a grant they would have had difficulty in the short term but would have persevered until they secured what they needed. In these cases the grant ‘speeded things up’ and allowed them to make progress more quickly.

Both staff and some recipients report that without access to a grant the gap may have been bridged by borrowing money from unreliable sources or taking out payday loans.

The most significant impact would have been on the recipients’ mental health, with half of all respondents to the survey feeling they would have suffered depression or low mood. In three survey responses there would even have been a risk of suicide.

“\You couldn’t ever know what a difference it has made. I was that low, I think it would have been suicide\” – Grant recipient

“I was at rock bottom, without the grant and the help my worker gives me, I would be dead by now” – Grant recipient

“[Without the grant] I would have given up. I want to say thank you, you saved my life” – Grant recipient

Other likely negative impacts included worsening health problems, a return to alcohol abuse, debt and reliance on crime.

Case Study – Jacob

Jacob is in his late 20s and was experiencing SMD through mental health issues, substance misuse and contact with the criminal justice system. He is being supported to tackle these problems, and is also receiving practical help to access benefits and housing.

Because Jacob is a single man he is not entitled to a washing machine from the Local Authority. The Open Doors Grant has ensured that he can clean his clothes, saving him money. Without it, Jacob would struggle to pay bills. ‘Even if you make the house as nice as possible, if you are freezing cold, you have no food, you don’t want to stay in the house. This is the first time I have been able to pay off debts, first time I have paid my TV licence. Once you start, it gets easy to budget. I can now pay off debts, I can plan. I get support from my worker and I can really help. It helps me maintain a good life. I won’t go backwards, I can think positive, I talk and I feel better and he stops me worrying.’
“The grant has proper changed my flat, it’s changed my life. I’d have been on rock bottom without it.”

Jacob, Grant recipient
Jacob is very lonely and has to take small steps. ‘Rebuilding your life is really hard. Everyone I know is drinking or taking drugs. I have very few friends who don’t.’

‘If I hadn’t got the grant, I would have said ‘What’s the point?’ If I hadn’t got a grant, I would never have been able to afford to do up my flat. The grant has proper changed my flat, it’s changed my life. I’d have been on rock bottom without it. I would have gone back to drugs and alcohol and messed up big time. I am on probation and I know I would have gone back to jail.’

Jacob knows he has to protect himself. ‘I know I am easily led but I am aware of that. I am learning to say ‘don’t do that’. I don’t want to lose what I’ve got. There is no way I am losing what I have got now.’

**Other Support That Could Have Been Accessed**

Other grant programmes do exist that partner organisations and individual clients can apply to, so without the Open Doors Programme some recipients may have found funds elsewhere. However this funding would be less likely to be aligned with other support for the recipient in the way that the Open Doors Programme is. The organisations applied to by the largest number of partners were Buttle UK, Glasspool Trust, Vicar’s Relief Fund and Local Welfare Provision (Figure 15). 17 other sources were mentioned by only one partner and these were not included in Figure 15 for brevity.

![Figure 15: Chart showing the number of partner organisations that have applied for funding from these sources](image)

More than 80% of partner organisations support clients to make other grant applications. However, the Open Doors Grant is perceived as much more relevant to the specific needs of their clients. It can be difficult for partner organisations to help clients access other grants due to their eligibility criteria. For example, a requirement that the applicant has lived within an area for a certain amount of time is a barrier for those who are homeless or have fled domestic abuse. Although the Open Doors Programme is seen as different in its criteria and approach, partner organisations also see it as part of a range of support or grant provision that they try to provide for clients.
Ease of Access to the Open Doors Programme

Grant recipients and staff feel that the Open Doors Programme is much easier to access than other welfare provision. It does not make vulnerable clients feel that they have to justify their situation in order to get assistance and grants are processed at a speed that suits the needs of those who require a grant.

Although partner organisations refer clients to other sources of voluntary and public funding, it is clear that the Open Doors Programme is unique for both partner organisations and their clients. It is accessible to clients where other grants and welfare assistance are not. A key difference is the speed with which the applications are evaluated and processed, and cash is made available.

"The Open Doors Programme gives a very quick turnaround with decisions, which is fantastic as I find that many grant programmes take a very long time to make a decision and whilst this is happening, often a woman is in a very difficult situation." – Support worker

The application process for the Open Doors Programme is streamlined and less complex than others, and this in turn reduces the stress that clients experience as they go through the process. Bernadette and Tristan admit that they may not have bothered to complete many other complex forms for support if they had not first of all received help via the Open Doors Programme. The complexity of other available support can be a particular problem for certain groups - women who have fled domestic abuse are already questioning their decision to leave and a lengthy and intrusive process to access support undermines their sense that they have made the right choice.

Case Study – Sharon, Support Worker

Sharon oversees a Floating Support Team for women and a Young People’s Project. She feels that the Open Doors Programme has been very helpful. ‘The application process is very simple and common sense. Particularly helpful is the fact that the turnaround for grants is so quick, with a typical application being assessed and the money transferred within a week. Many of the women her service supports are in crisis. If there is an eight week wait, many women will disengage.’

Local Welfare Assistance is challenging as it is out of the support worker’s control when goods are delivered and it is hard to follow up on these as there are now no phone numbers for the local authority team. Sharon says that liaising with the local authority has become harder. Over the last five years they have lost named contacts. Liaison roles have been cut and it can feel chaotic. Support workers find this very challenging - it can feel like ‘taking a ticket at the deli counter’.

This matters because the women Sharon supports are so vulnerable; they constantly question their decision to leave and are often under huge pressure from their ex-partner, friends, families and sadly, even professionals. Too often women are made to feel that they are being asked ‘why did you put yourself in this situation’. They have to continually evidence their need which can be both prescriptive and distressing. ‘With domestic violence, there are so many levels of disclosure so it is not surprising that women will not want to talk to a Housing Officer behind a counter, why should they trust them?’ One of the most important elements of Sharon’s project is that ‘we believe you, we understand, we know what you can and can’t say’. They can advocate and they can challenge agencies, especially if women have been made to feel that they are lying.

The Open Doors Programme fits well with Sharon’s organisation’s ethos. Women can choose what they feel they most need from the grant and the forms do not ask too much about each woman.
Case Study – Bernadette and Tristan

Bernadette and Tristan are in their late 40s and were experiencing SMD through mental health and substance misuse issues. They are being supported to access housing and benefits, as well as to develop resilience to prevent further problems with substance misuse.

Tristan was a chef and he and Bernadette ran their own business very successfully. When his mum got ill, they moved to look after her and then, during the recession, the business went bankrupt. At the same time, Tristan’s mum died and Bernadette and Tristan were left with nothing. Tristan’s drinking became out of control. He was eventually referred to a detox unit and from there to a specialist rehabilitation unit and ‘dry’ house.

Tristan found leaving the dry house very stressful and Bernadette says that getting a property was a challenge. When they got their house, it was a shell. They had a few basic things and it was a mess. Bernadette and Tristan wouldn’t have chosen the house they have. They know that the local bidding system does not really work. It was their support worker who really helped them and Tristan acknowledges that without him, he probably wouldn’t have bothered. ‘The form I had to fill had over 50 pages and I couldn’t have done it on my own.’

Tristan’s support worker said that the system has become so complicated. ‘In the old system you might have got a community care grant. Now the system is automated, there is no empathy, no contact. You become a number and who cares if you get the grant or not’.

Tristan says ‘Getting a grant alleviates another headache and it is a weight off your shoulders. It helps you have a routine. It stops you making mountains out of molehills. The grant helps give a bit of structure, it gives a foundation, I know how easy it would be to trigger my drinking again. If you live in a dung heap, you will go back to what you know. It is such a little part, but it is another little part that helps put things back into place. It is part of lots of ingredients that come together.’ Bernadette says ‘It is nice that someone bothers. It’s nice that someone cares – you are not a government statistic anymore’.
Welfare reform and austerity

Welfare reforms are creating a number of issues for the clients of partner organisations, including housing system problems resulting from the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, and benefit difficulties because of changes to assessments, such as those for Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Increased demand for support has been observed, coinciding with a reduction in Local Welfare Provision and longer term support services. This means that the support provided, and outcomes achieved, by the Open Doors Programme are more significant than ever.

The Open Doors Programme Interim Report asked whether changes to Universal Credit availability and local welfare schemes would have an impact on grant recipients. The impact of changes to local welfare assistance and the introduction of Universal Credit thus far has been an increase in the number of clients coming to partner organisations for assistance. Some partners have also seen an increase in a certain type of client – for instance more clients from European Economic Area (EEA) countries who have seen their access to benefits restricted. The removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and changes to benefits assessments are also worrying for partner organisations because of their potential to increase the issues faced by their clients. Clients identified that there has been a significant reduction in access to Local Welfare Provision and they have also experienced more benefit sanctions due to issues like missed appointments.

The evidence stated previously about the relative accessibility of the Open Doors Programme highlights that there are problems with the welfare system not meeting the needs of vulnerable people – a situation only worsening as austerity leads to ever more stringent support criteria and reduced human contact within local authority benefit systems.

Case Study – Lorraine, Money Advice Team

For Lorraine it is hard to judge what the long term effects of Universal Credit will be, however, there are already some concerns. First of all, there is a lack of understanding about Universal Credit from clients. Also, because Universal Credit is paid monthly, many claimants have to wait 5 weeks or more for their first payment. Lorraine feels that when those currently in receipt of housing benefit move over to Universal Credit, there will be further problems.

The two biggest concerns around welfare reform for Lorraine and her team are changes to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) assessments and the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. The issue around the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy is that there are not enough single bedroom properties in the area. Many of Lorraine’s clients will have lived in their properties for many years and so they do not want to move. Moving also makes these people more vulnerable because it may take them away from social support networks.

ESA is problematic because there are so many appeals. There is also a more challenging issue around mental health; not all people with drug and alcohol issues see their GP and it is sometimes difficult to identify whether someone has an underlying mental health issue which is compounding their alcohol or substance misuse. Lorraine and her team have recently supported a young woman who had built up significant arrears. She was agoraphobic, had failed her ESA assessment and had become so depressed that she did not appeal. “She just shut the front door on the world.”

Lorraine is concerned that there is now very little funding to provide on-going support so that people can maintain the progress they have made with managing their money and supporting their wellbeing. Lorraine has also seen reductions in support from local welfare, with some schemes closing completely. Local Authorities have become very strict on loans and some have stopped crisis loans altogether. This makes the role of the Open Doors Programme all the more important.
Corinne manages a service supporting ex-offenders. It provides tenancy support and helps ex-offenders to access appropriate housing.

The majority of Corinne’s client group struggle to access local authority housing. The nature of their offending, such as anti-social behaviour or burglary, may mean that they are barred from applying. This means that they are reliant on private landlords. While there is a bond scheme in operation in Corinne’s area, not all landlords accept bonds. In these cases, landlords are now often asking not only for a deposit but an administration fee as well. An Open Doors Grant is really helpful in these circumstances, ensuring someone is able to move into a new home.

**Corinne has noticed that cuts have meant that it is harder to make personal contact with housing officers.** ‘You used to meet with your housing officer, now it is done on a phone-based call back system. So many times, you will have the client with you, then they have to go to another meeting and by the time the housing officer rings back, they have gone and you have to start again. There are really good people but they often have really large caseloads and so are struggling too.’

Corinne is concerned at the lack of supported housing in her area; this impacts on those clients who have an offending history or who accrued large arrears. While they will try and make the case with the local authority on grounds of vulnerability or mental health, it remains challenging. ‘It can be very hard to find a place for somebody over 25. This is why Open Doors is so important. It really suits what we are about. It can help get somebody a flat through a private landlord and can really boost their self-esteem, or it can help someone already in a flat to help create a home. There are so many hurdles and barriers, so making access easier is really important. But also if someone can take pride in their home, there is more chance that they will invest. Vulnerable people need something to be proud of.’
It is clear from the evidence within this report that the Open Doors Programme has had a significant impact on the recipients of cash grants and on the support provided by partner organisations. There is no question that the grants provided by the Open Doors Programme respond to a high level of need that is increasingly unmet by other provision.

Short, medium and long term outcomes detailed in the Theory of Change for the Programme have been achieved. Further research into the cost savings of this type of programme would be beneficial to fully understand the extent of the long term outcomes achieved, but it is clear from the evidence in this report that low value cash grants, coupled with appropriate support, enable small steps that are transformational for recipients.

As grants are made where there are multiple needs, the flexibility and practicality of cash provision is vital. By providing cash grants, recipients can experience feelings of control, normality and responsibility that are otherwise frequently lacking in their lives.

Coupling these small cash grants with support ensures that the grant has more impact as part of a longer term process, rather than being a stand-alone event. Cash grants improve the efficacy of support from partners by improving staff-client relationships and allowing recipients space to focus on addressing their other needs. They also improve the sustainability of progress through the recipient’s improved resilience and desire to uphold what they have achieved. Regardless of the type of support provided, a small cash investment has a large impact on the recipient’s progress - the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. Therefore it is particularly important that politicians, policy makers and commissioners note the learning from this report in order to prevent false economies which could be made during welfare reforms and budget cuts.

For partner organisations the transparency and personalised approach of the programme is important, as difficulty of access to other support negatively impacts clients, requiring further support to address issues such as low self-esteem or guilt at leaving an abusive partner.

In addition to its transparency, the Open Doors Programme allows staff at partner organisations to offer tangible, holistic support. The evidence throughout this report demonstrates that Open Doors Grants impact upon a recipient’s entire life – from health to support networks, confidence to future resilience. Therefore, we call on policy makers, politicians and commissioners of services to ensure that welfare reform and the provision of support for those with complex needs also take an holistic, life cycle approach, with joined up working by agencies and organisations in order to maximise impact for those experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.
Appendix 1 – Partner Organisations

The Open Doors Programme Partners are:

- Bethany Christian Trust
- Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid
- Cranstoun
- Eaves (until 30 October 2015. Transferred to nia as of November 2015)
- Family Action: Kent Intensive Family Services, Newham Families First, Tower Hamlets Building Bridges, Bradford Advice Services
- Hull Lighthouse
- ISIS Women’s Centre/Nelson Trust
- Local Solutions
- Richmond Fellowship
- Riverside
- St Mungo’s
- Street Talk
- Together Women Project
- women@thewell
- WomenCentre

**Bethany Christian Trust**

Bethany Christian Trust works with over 7,000 people across Scotland. We focus on preventing homelessness as well as alleviating the suffering of people who are homeless by providing tailored visiting support and community development. We also support individuals and families to help them address long-standing issues including: social isolation, unemployment, and drug addiction.

Dealing with housing and helping or supporting the families to be settled and more independent is our goal and the Open Doors Programme allowed this to happen by accessing household goods that would otherwise not be available. The Programme has supported staff to be confident to access goods for people that are not funded from any other source and has helped strengthen the working relationship between workers and people we work with. It has helped people to be in a better situation in housing and lifestyle for themselves and the families.

**Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid**

Across a range of services, Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid works to support women and children suffering the effects of domestic violence and abuse. Increasingly we see that financial pressures present our service users with real barriers to accessing appropriate support and being able to make decisions in their lives that will inevitably impact upon their future safety and wellbeing.

The impact of a small grant, to enable women to take independent steps towards improving the situation for themselves and their children cannot be underestimated. Many of our service users initially report that don’t feel that they ‘deserve’ a grant, and yet these awards are a very tangible acknowledgement of the unacceptable hardships that families face, offering hope for a better future.

The Open Doors Programme has helped us to reflect on impact and the underpinning Theory of Change has offered the chance for positive reflection. The Open Doors Programme wants to achieve lasting change and that is what makes it different. It uses what it has learned and encourages partners to do the same. It is different and it is fantastic that it is different.
Cranstoun

Cranstoun’s vision is to beat alcohol and drug addiction; we rebuild lives and communities affected by alcohol and drugs. We change the lives of those affected by alcohol and drugs; helping them realise their potential and giving them a fresh start.

We provide a broad range of services in Greater London, the Midlands and across Southern England. These services include:

- Critical Care and Residential Pharmaco-Treatment Services
- Residential Treatment and Recovery Services
- Community Treatment and Recovery Services, including engagement and access services, specialist services for women, families and carers and young person’s services through to day programmes, criminal justice services, and integrated treatment and recovery provision
- Residential Recovery and Reintegration Services

We aim to help individuals seeking recovery from addiction to remain stable and to meet their goals - the Open Doors Programme has played a vital role in assisting our service users to grow, develop and eventually reintegrate into the community.

Eaves (until 30 October 2015)

Eaves’ mission is to expose and address violence against women and girls in the UK. Eaves specialises in the areas of trafficking, exiting prostitution, and sexual violence and offers housing and employment services and services for women who have been in contact with the criminal justice system. Within each area of work Eaves provides frontline support and advocacy as well as undertaking lobbying and campaigning.

Open Doors Grants were an enormous support to service users at Eaves; they enabled many women to begin new lives with fewer financial burdens and made them feel worthy. Women have been able to furnish new homes and clothe themselves and their children in times of financial crisis after fleeing domestic and sexual violence as a result of receiving Open Doors Grants. This has had significant positive impacts on women’s lives, supporting them to stay with and support their children, and start new lives.

nia (from 1 November 2015)

nia delivers services to end violence against women and children. We have three main aims:

- Providing services for women, children and young people who have experienced male violence
- Working to end male violence against women and girls
- Inform and influence policy and public awareness

We achieve our aims through:

- Providing high quality services for women, children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of male violence
- Increasing awareness of male violence and developing services, contributing to research, debate and policy initiatives to prevent it
- Empowering and supporting women and children
Family Action

Family Action is a national charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK’s most vulnerable people.

We seek to empower people and communities to address their issues and challenges through practical, financial and emotional help.

Our work is wide-ranging and includes help for parents-to-be, the provision of many Children’s Centres in local communities, intensive family support, emotional health and wellbeing services, counselling, mediation and therapies, support in schools and financial grants programmes. Family Action is also recognised as a leading provider of training and consultancy, offering organisations and their employees services that can help to minimise family issues that may have an adverse impact on work or home life, providing child and adult safeguarding training, and delivering training around Family Placement.

Having access to the Open Doors Programme has been invaluable to our work with vulnerable families in the community and in supporting service users through periods of significant crisis. More recently, changes to local welfare support schemes and changes to benefits have contributed to the need for us to be able to ‘lighten the load’ for our families. Having this additional recourse so that our families do not feel they have to suffer deprivation and/or access funds with exorbitant interest rates via ‘pay day’ lenders etc. is reassuring for us as workers and for the increasingly pressured communities we support.

Hull Lighthouse

Hull Lighthouse was founded in 1996 to support women who were street sex working to exit prostitution. The women we work with exhibit the most clear and extreme manifestations of severe and multiple disadvantage: poverty, homelessness, mental health problems, contact with the criminal justice system, domestic and sexual exploitation, and substance misuse.

Our outreach work focuses on building the women’s financial, social and personal stability, and enhancing their self-esteem.

We help women to negotiate the system and stop them falling through the gaps in services, including advocating on their behalf and building relationships and understanding across organisational boundaries. The service is based on respect for the women’s voices and informed by their own personal priorities, from housing and benefits information to access to children.

ISIS Women’s Centre

ISIS was created to support, guide and empower women in Gloucestershire whose lives may be affected by emotional or practical challenges. This is a service for women who may be vulnerable because they have complex problems, and could be at risk of offending or re-offending.

By addressing issues which may have contributed to offending behaviour, we aim to divert women away from custody and towards a more stable future.

The service provides immediate access to support and guidance on issues including families and relationships, housing, health, debt, employment and training. Through partnerships with other organisations, we also offer a wide range of help and information including:
- family support services, with an in-house crèche for under fives
- domestic violence support services
- substance misuse services
- in-house courses, leading to qualifications
- housing benefit and debt advice
- accommodation services
- emotional wellbeing and self-esteem building
- life skills

Local Solutions

Local Solutions is a charity delivering services to people primarily across the North West of England and North Wales.

Established in 1974, we have a proven track record of improving the quality of life for vulnerable and excluded people. This is achieved through a wide range of services, including supporting young homeless people through an intense mentoring programme.

Generally the young people who have been beneficiaries of the Open Doors Grants are those who have been caught in the cycle of homelessness, moving from hostel to hostel, and who are suffering severe and multiple disadvantage. The service supports young people out of this cycle by assisting these challenging and complex young people into a life of independence that includes stable relationships, accommodation, training and employment.

Mentors also assist with all aspects of resettlement and are very aware of each young person’s situation, including whether there is any other support from family, friends, or others in their life. For the majority there is no other support. The grants are valuable in providing the vital finishing touches that create what can be described as a home, not just another flat.

Richmond Fellowship

Richmond Fellowship is a national mental health charity. We provide residential, supported living, and wellbeing services.

We believe that each person is unique, and should have the opportunity to take control over their life. We concentrate on the person and their individual needs, choices and aspirations, rather than on diagnostic categories or labels. We enable people to actively take part in decisions about their support and have as much control over this support as possible, helping them achieve new levels of self-confidence and independence.

Richmond Fellowship has helped a number of vulnerable people who use its services to access the Open Doors Programme and receive life changing grants. The grants provide a short term practical respite for individuals in need of help, which is enormously beneficial to their overall mental wellbeing and progress in other areas in their lives.

Riverside

Riverside is a major provider of affordable housing, care and support services in England and Scotland. Our vision is to transform the lives of the people we house and revitalise the neighbourhoods in which they live.
We transform lives by providing well maintained, good quality affordable housing whilst creating opportunities to increase household income through our programmes of employment, affordable warmth and money advice.

Through our housing, care and support services we enable people facing a wide variety of challenging circumstances to lead more resilient and independent lives. We revitalise neighbourhoods by building new homes, creating and maintaining green spaces and bringing people together through our community engagement programmes.

With reductions to local welfare support schemes, the Open Doors Grants have become a precious resource to better support our customers in hardship and transitioning towards independent living. This has had a huge impact on each individual, not only increasing their confidence and resilience, but also empowering them to live independently in their own homes.

St Mungo’s

Our vision is that everyone has a place to call home and can fulfil their hopes and ambitions. We provide a bed and support to more than 2,500 people a night who are either homeless or at risk, and work to prevent homelessness, helping about 25,000 people a year. We believe in our clients’ potential. We are committed to every individual’s sustainable recovery.

We support men and women through more than 250 projects including:

- Emergency, hostel and supportive housing projects
- Advice services
- Specialist physical and mental health services
- Skills and work services

The Open Doors Programme has provided crucial support to clients moving into unfurnished accommodation from St Mungo’s hostels and supported houses. Open Doors has been timely in providing grants just as the local support funds became less accessible. The grants have helped support staff to instil confidence in clients who are understandably apprehensive about moving on.

Street Talk

Street Talk provides mental health care to women who are trapped in street based sex work and women who have been the victims of trafficking. The services provided include counselling, clinical psychology, group therapy, mediation, advocacy and representation before the courts.

When a person experiences repeated abuse, their confidence and self-belief are destroyed and eventually they might even believe that they deserve to be hurt. The first step in helping someone who has been repeatedly abused is to enable them to believe that they deserve better. This is an essential step, without which other forms of help are likely to fail. Our aim is to reach some of the most vulnerable and marginalised women on our streets to enable them to feel entitled to live safely and with dignity.

Together Women Project

Together Women Project moves women out of crime into positive futures, working with them in safe, women-only spaces, building resilience and developing strengths that enable them to move away from damaging lifestyles.

Our approach produces savings on criminal justice budgets and results in wider benefits for children, families and communities.
Improved parenting skills, increased employability and safer, happier families bring benefits to local people

**women@thewell**

women@thewell is a women-only drop-in centre in Kings Cross, London, dedicated to supporting women with a complex range of needs relating to:

- Street based prostitution
- Offending and anti-social behaviour
- Problematic drug and alcohol abuse
- Rough sleeping
- Trafficking

Our workers offer individual support and advocacy in a variety of areas. Areas we can help with include:

- Access to physical, mental and sexual health services
- Support with finding accommodation
- Help with getting the right benefits, and debt management
- Links to legal advisors
- Help to access domestic violence services
- Advice for safer working on the streets
- Links to drug and alcohol services

**WomenCentre**

WomenCentre provides holistic, one-stop services at centres in Huddersfield and Halifax and in the community. Our wide-ranging services include emotional and practical support on issues such as debt, benefits, mental or physical health, domestic violence, counselling, training and development and much more.

WomenCentre enables women to:

- Improve health and wellbeing
- Increase training and employment opportunities for improved economic conditions
- Raise self-confidence, self-esteem and social interaction skills
- Improve citizenship and social inclusion
- Support the development of positive, safe and stable circumstances and relationships
- Improve safety and wellbeing of their children
# Grant Application Summary

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Grant information continued

| Applications made to DWP or local authority? | |
| If no, why not | |
| If yes, outcome | |

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| Expected outcomes | |
| Other outcome | |
| Expected difference | |

What if the applicant does not receive the money?

Financial information

| Benefits received | |
| Financial situation | |

Financial information - benefits

| Benefit sanctions | |
| Details of benefit sanctions | |
| Benefits capped | |
## Financial information - benefits continued

| Details benefit cap |  |
| Direct deductions from benefits |  |
| Details of direct deductions from benefits |  |
| Applicant has savings |  |
| Details of savings |  |
| Applicant has debt |  |
| Details of debt |  |

## Supporting statement


## Referrer information

| Organisation name |  |
| Branch/area office/service |  |
| Staff member submitting application |  |
| Telephone |  |
| Email |  |
| How long accessing support |  |
| Informed consent from applicant |  |

## Equal Opportunity Monitoring

| Ethnicity |  |
| Disability |  |
| Disability types |  |
| Sexual orientation |  |
The following data collection and analysis has been undertaken in respect of this work:

- Qualitative data analysis of all successful application forms (n=832) between September 2013 and October 2015. Grant application forms were also analysed quantitatively regarding key personal characteristics, their circumstances, areas of need related to the criteria of the programme and the length of time that they had been receiving support.

- Primary research with staff members. An electronic survey was sent to all staff at partner organisations that had referred individuals for grants. The survey, administered via Survey Monkey, collected quantitative data on perceived changes for recipients, and qualitative data on the context in which they are working. This data has been analysed in Excel, and qualitative responses have been coded for analysis. There were 21 respondents to the survey between December 2014 and October 2015 and 18 respondents between September 2013 and November 2014, making a total of 39 responses. The self-selecting bias of respondents means findings from these surveys are indicative.

- Primary research with people who received Open Doors Grants via questionnaire. This has been the most challenging aspect of the research as the recipient group is, by circumstance, difficult to access. Recipients were selected each quarter using random sampling, and then the referral organisation was contacted to ascertain whether it would be possible and practical to contact the recipient. Initial informed consent was sought by the referral organisation before contact details were shared. Interviews were undertaken by telephone with individuals, using a mixture of open and closed questions. There were 17 respondents between September 2013 and November 2014 and 27 respondents to the questionnaire between December 2014 and October 2015, making a total of 44 responses. The responses came from Riverside (38%), St Mungo’s (31%), Bethany Christian Trust (13%), Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid (9%), Together Women Project (7%) and Family Action (2%). The self-selecting bias of respondents means findings from these surveys are indicative.

- Case studies were selected by partner organisations. Interviews were then conducted either face to face or by telephone.

The Theory of Change has been informed by:

- A desk review of the available literature on cash grants
- Primary stakeholder engagement with programme staff and partners in a focus group of 18 participants across 11 referral organisations. This was held at Family Action’s offices in London in June 2013
- Telephone interviews with six front-line staff from partner organisations, and one recipient of cash grants
- Review of the initial outcomes and process with key representatives from Family Action
Case Study – Natalie, Project Manager

Natalie’s service works with vulnerable women with multiple needs. They may have had an offending history, experienced domestic abuse, be abusing substances or be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Natalie and her team discuss each Open Doors Grant before they apply. It must be beneficial and must be what a client needs most to support them. The team know the grant will come through in a timely manner and they also reflect value for money in the amount of goods that can be obtained through them. The clients and support workers choose the goods that are needed most but have the flexibility to find these at the lowest cost. In Natalie’s service the Open Doors Grant is always a ‘supervised spend’ - the support worker and client discuss what they can buy and it is a managed conversation.

‘It is so empowering for people to be able to make a choice, it gives them the freedom to create a home and builds ownership. The grant says that they are capable, that they are an adult and it is up to them to make it count. It is important to feel proud of where you live; it is fine to have a roof over your head but making it your own, that is special. For me, they help a woman get the most out of the money and they give a woman choice. Vouchers are great but cash gives so much more. A voucher can say ‘you won’t spend money on what you need’. A cash grant helps with budgeting and asks ‘how are you going to get what you most need?’ so it builds trust and raises recipient’s expectations.’

Case Study – Talik

Talik is in his late 20s and was experiencing SMD through mental health and substance misuse issues.

Talik has complex needs and, although he comes across as very talkative and confident, he has emotional and behavioural difficulties. He had a very hard childhood - his father killed himself and he has a brother in prison. He has taken cocaine and is trying to stop using cannabis. Talik likes to talk about himself as a ‘big player’, but actually he is very vulnerable and easily led. Talik knows this and is working with his support worker to take more responsibility.

Talik used to live with his mother but after a couple of incidents at home with his neighbours he had to leave the area. He spent 18 months in a hostel and has now lived in his new home for 9 months. Talik found the hostel quite difficult because of too many bad influences. His support worker helped him find a flat with the support he needs.

For Talik, living in a flat is quite challenging - now he has to look after himself. He has also built up quite a few debts so it has been important for him to learn how to pay his bills and budget for himself. Talik gets a lot of help with this from his support worker who sees him regularly and checks in with him every day.

Having a nice home is a really stabilising influence for Talik. He likes to keep the place really tidy and finds that he can establish a routine. Vacuuming, washing and doing the ironing keep him on the ‘straight and narrow’. Talik describes himself as a lonely person but finds being at home comforting and reassuring. Talik used some of his grant to buy a coffee table, mirror, pictures and a lamp for his flat to make it more like a home.

Talik’s support worker also sees Talik’s home as very important in building his resilience. Talik has struggled to understand the value of money so they have had to do lots of budgeting and planning together. Talik thought his grant was ‘brilliant’ and his support worker spent a lot of time talking to him about how he could use the money wisely and get what he most needed from the grant. Talik is very proud that he has ensured that the money has gone so far. Talik is also really proud of the jacket he bought with his Open Doors Grant. It is very smart and is also waterproof.

*All names have been changed to protect identities
“The grant says that they are capable, that they are an adult and it is up to them to make it count.”

Natalie, Project Manager
The grant has been very important to Talik. He feels that without it, he wouldn’t be where he is, in a decent home with possessions that he really likes and values. Talik thinks he would be out drinking if he didn’t have a comfortable flat. He thinks he might also be stealing and says that because his brother is in prison, he doesn’t fear being in prison.

Talik now goes on Service User Days and has started to join in with more activities that take him out and about. He feels he is learning all the time. Because people have trusted him with the grant, Talik feels that it helps him to understand that he has to take more responsibility. He says that now he sees money as something to be saved, to be put towards his home.

**Case Study – Max, Support Worker**

Max works with single fathers. Though he can access support for dads through the Local Welfare Fund, single men do not qualify for washing machines. This can be very hard for dads who are trying to reconnect or support their children.

Max worries about local welfare funding: ‘You do talk to a person but they are a call handler and they take a very low choice approach. The system isn’t bad, it’s quick but it doesn’t offer choice.’

Max describes an Open Doors Grant ‘as a conversation in itself, it offers dads lots of choices, they can chose the colour of the carpet, what they really need’. He sees the grants as both supporting and also maintaining positive change. ‘The grant takes away a problem and so makes room for something else – the things that the dad has to deal with’. Max gives the example of a dad who got a new fridge. He had been spending lots of money on food and wasting lots of it. The grant allows him to save and to have fresh milk for his children. ‘My client can now move on and can deal with stuff.’

Max has seen people lose or give up their tenancies because they have not been able to make their homes comfortable or safe. A house without a washing machine or a fridge may not be a home. Anyone who gives up their tenancy becomes ‘intentionally homeless’ - many ending up back on the streets.

Max feels that the Open Doors Programme is very flexible, allowing positive discussion between a support worker and their client. He feels it builds trust. Max sees Open Doors as a last resort, something they can call on when other avenues don’t work, but it is important and helpful for the people he supports.

**Case Study – Lilia and Aaron**

Lilia and Aaron were experiencing SMD through mental health issues and imminent risk of homelessness. They received support for Lilia’s mental health difficulties, to improve their finances and to develop their capacity to parent Lilia’s daughter.

Lilia and Aaron are a young couple in their early 20s who are in a lot of debt. Lilia has a young daughter and struggles with mental health problems including depression and low self-esteem.

Aaron and Lilia needed to move house to be nearer to Lilia’s dad who is very ill. Their home is freezing cold and they needed help getting repairs. Lilia is dyslexic so needs help with paperwork. As her support worker says ‘She needs to have somewhere manageable, but private rental is very expensive. Aaron wants to work but can’t as he is currently acting as Lilia’s carer. They have lots of issues, they want to marry but it is difficult. He wants to reconnect with family as there have been issues but they live away and he has to budget to visit them.’

Lilia and Aaron were also finding it hard to buy toys or treats for Lilia’s daughter and to spend quality time together as a family. They were visiting foodbanks which they hated. Aaron was stressed as he
didn’t feel that he could support Lilia properly or pay for the things that the family needed. Lilia always
tries to put money aside, ‘but it is really hard when you do get money to know that it is all spent already
and there is not enough for something nice.’

Lilia and Aaron used their Open Doors Grant to get clothes, a jacket, shoes and a swimsuit for Lilia. They
also bought shoes for Aaron and a gym and pool pass, which means that Lilia can take her daughter
swimming. Lilia said that ‘it is so good that the grant is there. It helps. It gives a confidence boost.’ Lilia
struggles with self-confidence, but now she feels she looks good. She feels great about the fact that she
has things that she can keep nice.

Aaron and Lilia’s support worker applied for a grant because she felt that they needed a boost. She felt
that the priority for Lilia and Aaron was to help them to go out more and do more with Lilia’s daughter,
such as go to the park or the swimming pool.

Lilia said getting the grant felt brilliant - instead of walking past shops, they could both go in and buy
things. Their support worker feels that it has built goodwill and enhanced their support. Their support
worker, Aaron and Lilia all went shopping together. Lilia and Aaron did one visit to check prices and see
what they could afford. They were really happy because the pair of boots they had seen for £40 on the
day turned out to cost £20. It meant they could buy some much needed shoes for Aaron. They even had
a bit left over for a proper cup of coffee. Aaron and Lilia said that it was just like being normal people
spending money.

Aaron said that ‘knowing that there is someone out there – it means a lot. Somebody wants to help,
that’s not how it usually happens, as there is nearly always a catch. There are no strings attached. If you
get a crisis loan, you have to budget to pay it back.’

Lilia and Aaron agree that they have really benefited from their worker’s support. ‘She always takes the
time and she doesn’t look like a nodding dog. She listens.’ They both say that their support worker gives
them both confidence. The support worker makes space so that Lilia can focus on what she needs to do
to get through things. Lilia knows she is in a cycle, she knows there are big things she has to sort but her
grant has helped her get perspective. Aaron feels they are lucky to have support and to be able to get a
grant that can make such a difference to how they feel.

Their support worker says ‘the importance of the grant is that it gets to people where it helps them most.’
She could show how she trusted Lilia to spend the grant wisely. For Lilia and Aaron it was very important
to feel trusted with the responsibility of spending a grant. Lilia is very proud that they bought well-made
clothes, kept the receipts just in case and chose items that would be hard wearing.

Case Study – Wilson, Project Manager

Wilson’s service works with the most vulnerable - people who have fallen through the net and have a
range of highly complex needs. The majority will be experiencing at least three areas of SMD. The Open
Doors Programme is therefore a natural fit with his client group.

The service is a partnership of three local organisations in the North West, supporting people ranging
from 18 to 50 years old. The service is designed to provide long term support, reflecting the needs of the
client group. Once a case is open it is open for as long as the person needs the service. Workers will see
clients every day or two or three times a week. There is no culture of ‘if you miss three meetings, we will
close your case’. The service recognises that vulnerable people may not sustain engagement.

The service is currently working with Maisie, who has her own house but is at risk of losing it. She has
debts, a serious alcohol problem and the house is in a terrible state. Many problems stem from the fact
that Maisie nursed her husband through cancer at the home and this led to her drinking. Maisie has a
17 year old son, Jason, who acts as her carer but also has significant needs of his own. He was living in a hostel but was the victim of a malicious false accusation of sexual assault. Jason has ADHD and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Wilson and his team have worked to ensure that the family is getting all the benefits to which they are entitled. They have also sorted out the house, created proper bedrooms for Maisie and Jason and have begun to address Maisie’s drinking. They are working with Jason to keep him at college and to look at the potential for him to live independently. So far, Wilson’s team has worked with this family for 9 months, taking small steps.

The Open Doors Grant has provided very specific support for this family as they used it to buy a washing machine. When the old one broke, Maisie relapsed and started to drink again. It is very important to her to be a mum, to do the washing and cooking for her son. Without the washing machine, she became very distressed. Maisie also used the grant to buy clothes. Her workers wanted her to focus on her needs more and so buying clothes for herself was a very definite positive. Wilson says the grant is making a tangible difference to this mother. She has seen that people have wanted to invest in her. Maisie feels valued as well as supported. ‘People can become so isolated, a grant sends a very clear message that we are not giving up on them’.

The grant has been helpful for the team too. It has given a real reason for Maisie to engage with them. This is because the grant came through so quickly and Maisie saw an immediate improvement in her situation. The grant has improved Maisie’s quality of life and ensures that the team can focus their support where it is most needed. There are some big decisions coming up for Maisie - if her son goes away she will lose benefits and will have to deal with the bedroom tax, as well as losing his companionship.

Case Study – Shannon
Shannon was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and imminent risk of being made homeless. She is in her mid 40s and has received family support to improve her parenting and confidence.

Shannon has recently moved into a new property, but was struggling with its upkeep as well as looking after her family. She was having problems with a previous landlord to whom she had been making payments for ‘damages’ during her previous tenancy. This meant Shannon had very little left over to buy anything other than food and pay the bills and rent.

Shannon’s daughter, Sarah, was growing out of her clothes and there was also nowhere suitable to keep them. Shannon therefore used the grant to buy Sarah new clothes and a wardrobe and drawers to keep them in. This increased Shannon’s confidence as a parent as she felt able to provide properly for her daughter. The grant has made Shannon feel more positive about being independent and raising her child alone. It has taken some of the pressure off her.

Shannon had been trying to save small amounts towards buying these items herself. As a result of receiving the grant, Shannon was able to use the small savings she had made towards paying for a visit to her sick parents. The grant was very positive as it has meant Shannon and Sarah could have a break from the stress of their situation and they were able to see family who they had not seen for a long time.

Case Study – Nicola
Nicola is in her mid 20s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse that impacted on her mental health.

Nicola and her four children, aged two, four, six and eight, fled domestic abuse, leaving their 3 bedroom flat. Nicola’s ex-partner then broke into the property and destroyed all her furniture and urinated on her belongings. Nicola became mentally unwell due to the psychological impact of the stalking and harassment she faced after she finished the relationship.
Now
I don’t feel
like people are
judging me any more…

Nicola, Grant recipient
When Nicola’s support worker gave her the Open Doors Grant she cried. Nicola felt that it was a new start. Nicola was placed in a three bedroom house in a new area and her grant was used to buy carpet, which the Local Welfare Provision would not supply.

When Nicola moved into the property she started to feel well again - as her children were now living away from the abuse and had nice living conditions. Nicola feels that having the grant has meant that no one will judge her - she had imagined they were going to live in a property without furniture and the neighbours would report her to social services.

**Case Study – Supreet**

Supreet is in her mid 30s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and imminent risk of homelessness. Supreet has been receiving support to improve budgeting skills and her family’s financial situation. Family support was also provided to improve the children’s attendance at school and emotional wellbeing.

Supreet and her family have debt issues. When the children were going to school, they often looked unkempt and had inappropriate clothes for the season. Her eldest child, Dhamendra, aged 14, explained that he did not attend school on non-uniform days because he did not have any clothes he felt happy wearing. Supreet’s youngest child, Kush, aged 9, said he did not want to attend a school party because he didn’t have any suitable clothes. Supreet also did not have many clothes or outdoor wear. This meant that before she received the grant she did not like going out as people ‘looked at her funny’.

The Open Doors Grant was used for new school and leisure clothes. Supreet also received support to budget with the money in order to purchase good quality items and get better value for money. Dhamendra and Kush love their new clothes and no longer feel like everyone is looking at or talking about them. Supreet is going to continue to budget so that the family will always have clothes in the future.

**Case Study – Aggie**

Aggie was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and mental health issues. She was supported to regain her confidence and improve her mental health.

Aggie is in her late 60s; she has a large family and a daughter who lives close by. Her original home was in Scotland but she had to flee from her abusive husband. She struggled to find safe accommodation before she applied to a refuge. They helped her find a safe and permanent home.

‘At the refuge, they have an open door policy, you could always go in and have a chat. There is always someone there with no questions asked. There, I got space, which I really needed. I got peace and quiet, nobody hassled me and when I needed it I could find company in the lounge.’

‘I was surprised when I got a house so quick. It was all so quick and I am paying a really reasonable rent. I came here because I had links in the area. I count myself really lucky.’

‘I keep reminding myself that I am the victim, I have done nothing wrong, but when I moved in I had just two suitcases, my clothes and bedding. I slept on a blow-up mattress on the floor. I had nothing, no dishes, but then I was able to get things like curtains. Neighbours have given me the settee but I got nicer bedding, things like towels. The first night here I got some soup from the Chinese [takeaway] and then realised I had nothing to drink it with, no cutlery at all. The grant has been a safety net, it got me lots of things you need to make a home.’

‘It is very important to me to live somewhere nice. I always had lovely things, I used to have everything
matching but now I have a ‘shabby chic’ style. I am saving up, I know it will take time but I can wait.’

‘Without the grant, I would have been miserable. When I moved in here I had to clear an electricity debt. I am determined to make this place mine, it is very important for me to make things mine. I am determined to do things my way. I used to be scared of life, I had everything but I was scared of life. Now I know I am safe, it is perfectly safe. No one can get in, I walk in, click both locks on and I am safe. You can have a beautiful house, with lovely things but it is what is going on inside that really matters. Now when I come home I can eat what I like, read all I want, I couldn’t do that before.’

‘My worker really helps me. It is good to have an adult to talk to and she pushes me too. She is very reassuring. She knows that I want to keep my independence. Since I got the grant, I am more confident, just having some money in your purse makes you more confident.’

‘I am not in great health, I used to drink but I have a grand-daughter and now I look after her during the week. Getting my home sorted, caring for my grand-daughter, they all happened all together.’

‘Since I have had my grant and got sorted here, I feel more assertive. I am not letting my partner sell our old home under me. The support has really helped me, it has made a big difference. Knowing that you have a little bit of money in your purse, planning things step by step, it’s allowing me to put down roots, I am not moving again.’

‘The grant helped me make a home, my home, it is not just a roof. I know I am good with money, £250 is a lot of money and I have spent it really well. I don’t want another grant from Open Doors. Respect is a two-way thing: no one has felt sorry for me, they have been prepared to give me a kick up the bum when I have needed it but they have also trusted me to use the money wisely. It was there when I needed it most.’

Case Study – Shaniqua
Shaniqua is in her late 40s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and homelessness. Shaniqua had to flee the property where she had been staying due to domestic abuse from her partner. As a consequence she had no possessions of her own and was having to borrow clean clothes from her 17 year old son’s partner.

Shaniqua’s support worker applied for an Open Doors Grant in order for her to purchase some new clothing for herself and her son. The cash grant made a significant impact on their life. Shaniqua now feels able to go shopping again and buy her younger son clothes for the coming winter. She feels more able to meet her son’s needs and having a wardrobe of her own was a big weight off Shaniqua’s mind. The cash grant has enabled Shaniqua to start to rebuild her life and has meant that she has not had to compromise her safety by contacting her ex-partner to request her clothing back. The grant also gave Shaniqua back her dignity - as she did not have to ask others to meet such a basic need.

Case Study – Samson
Samson was experiencing SMD through mental health and substance misuse issues. He has received support to access housing and benefits, reduce his substance misuse and improve his mental health.

Samson is in his 40s and was addicted to drugs for most of his adult life. He has very complex needs, is vulnerable to being exploited and needs support to ensure that he doesn’t slip back into addiction.

Samson used to live in a block of flats but a gang started forcing themselves into his flat and stealing his money. Samson stopped eating and became very depressed and frightened. He became homeless when he was seriously assaulted by the gang. He had a complete breakdown, was suicidal and was
"It is hard when you don’t feel there is anyone who can help you. Meeting my worker was the best day of my life."

Samson, Grant recipient
referred to a psychiatric unit. Samson left the flat with the clothes he stood up in and spent three months having treatment.

Samson feels that he was rescued by the service that is now supporting him. Samson says that ‘meeting my worker was the best day of my life’. The first thing that his support worker did was make sure that Samson had a new home. Samson was so frightened of the gang that he had to move area, away from friends and people he had grown up with. When Samson fled his flat, he left all his possessions. A friend in the block did manage to go to his flat but the gang had trashed almost everything.

Samson recognises that he is safer and better off now. He lives in semi-supported lodgings, so there is someone from the flats who will check in on him, there is CCTV and the neighbours are all friendly and help each other.

Samson says that his support worker has done ‘So much for me, it really is unbelievable’. He helps Samson to talk things through, has given him practical help with forms and benefits and also challenges him. Samson knows that he can suffer from paranoia but feels that his support worker always talks sense. His support worker feels that Samson always listens and is very honest about his issues.

Samson’s grant was very important to him. It bought him a complete set of clothes, from underwear to shirts, trousers and shoes. Samson likes to look neat and tidy and he enjoys the routine of washing and ironing his clothes. When he gets down, he really lets himself go. The grant has helped him stay positive.

Samson really couldn’t believe that he could get the grant. For him, it really is a gift. He feels he has been turned down so many times in his life before. Samson describes getting his grant and going shopping as really exciting. It has taken the pressure off him too - he can now focus on putting money aside and saving. Before, when he was using drugs, Samson would shoplift but he says it is a great feeling to be able to go shopping and not need to steal. Samson feels that the grant has changed him. He thinks that without it and without the help of the project, he would have gone back to his old ways.

Samson is now doing lots of activities to get himself stronger and fitter. He has got himself a bike and his next big goal is to give up smoking. Samson has also started to learn the guitar. This is really important to him. Samson’s dad was a musician who died of cancer in his 40s. Samson can remember sitting on his bed, while his dad showed him how to play the guitar. Samson’s support worker also plays the guitar really well and there is a guitar group starting at the service. Samson says that when he was doing drugs, ‘he was always too busy getting up to no good to play the guitar’.

Samson feels he has changed a lot - he no longer feels worthless. The grant has shown him that there is help out there. He says it is very hard when you don’t feel there is anyone who can help you. For Samson his grant felt like ‘winning the lottery’.

**Case Study – Jacinda**

Jacinda is 18 and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and mental health issues. She has received support to access benefits and improve her self-esteem and general mental health after being the victim of ‘honour’-based violence.

Jacinda was physically assaulted by her father, who had also made threats to kidnap and kill her. She was removed from the family home for her own safety as she had also been assaulted by her older sister.

Jacinda was put into a hostel and made an application for Employment and Support Allowance but, whilst waiting for this to be approved, she did not have any source of income. Jacinda received a Local Welfare Provision card with a value of £50 to spend in a supermarket on food and she also used the food bank.
However, Jacinda had no money for clothing and as she had left home under police escort she did not have any spare clothes either. She also did not have anywhere to do laundry. This Open Doors Grant enabled Jacinda to purchase additional clothing, which was invaluable in allowing her to improve her general mood and sense of worth. She was under exceptional pressure and her mental health was very poor. The grant alleviated some of the pressure and anxiety that she was experiencing and gave Jacinda back some of her independence by being able to shop for herself.

Case Study - Cho, Support Worker
Cho has been a Children and Families worker for over 10 years. She works with families in crisis with children usually on the Child Protection Register. Her main role is to provide housing support, prevent homelessness and ensure that children are safe. However, Cho’s role is not just about practical help – it is about supporting families to feel empowered, to understand that they have each other for support, and to see that despite their problems they are working to keep their children safe.

Cho has recently supported Marie who left her husband after years of abuse and had nothing. She and her two children had the clothes they stood up in. The children had left their toys, their friends and their family home and moved to a totally new city. The local authority was able to provide housing and Cho was able to get basic furniture - beds, tables and chairs, a cooker and fridge freezer.

Cho applied for an Open Doors Grant for Marie to spend on new clothes for her and her children. Marie’s first priority was to buy her son a red sweater. He had just started at a new primary school and he was finding it very hard. It was mid-term, he didn’t know anyone and he was different because he only had a blue sweater while the school sweater was red. Marie was able to buy enough clothes to ensure her children will be warm in winter while she starts to budget and save. She is not building up debt or taking on a loan she will struggle to pay back in order to provide for her children.

Marie was not only able to ensure that her children had clothes, she also got herself a new bra, something that made herself feel so much better about herself. Cho described that grant as ‘empowering Marie when she was feeling most powerless’.

Marie has given up so much to make herself and her children safe. For her, an Open Doors Grant is not just about money. Cho says ‘an Open Doors Grant is about safety, it can help turn a house into a home, it can mean that a child can settle in to school. It is about the money, but it is about so much more. My clients have often hit a wall in their lives. An Open Doors Grant is like stretching out a hand, it says ‘things can get better’. All the families I support feel isolation, desperation and despair. An Open Doors Grant helps me say ‘you are not alone as there are people who want to help and who care about you’. It is so important that families can see that someone will help. For some of my clients, it provides a space, one thing they can sort out so that we can focus on the other issues in their lives.’

‘The question most people ask when they get a grant is ‘why did they give this grant to me?’ and ‘Do I have to do anything?’ It is very soothing for someone in crisis to know that this is someone who just wants to help – no strings attached. That is so important when you are dealing with people in crisis - it can build trust. It breaks down barriers as sometimes mums are suspicious, the grant can offer the most important tools in rebuilding trust and self-belief.’

Case Study – Faiza
Faiza is in her 30s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and homelessness. She has received support to improve her confidence and help her to navigate the justice system after she was the victim of domestic abuse.

Faiza felt she had no one else to turn to. She and her young son had to abandon everything after she experienced domestic abuse. She moved in to her mother’s home, sleeping on a settee with her son. When she was able to find her own accommodation, despite applications made by her social worker
and family support worker, nobody was able to help her furnish her new home.

It was her worker who suggested they apply for an Open Doors Grant. Faiza could not believe how quickly the grant came through - in just two weeks she had the money to buy the things she needed most: beds for herself and her son.

‘Basically, as soon as I got the grant a weight was lifted off. When I left home, I had some stuff but everything else had been destroyed by my ex. I had to make a totally fresh start. I had white goods but nothing to make my house a home.’

‘I was also totally terrified all the time. I was terrified to think, terrified to leave the house without my mum. My worker helped pick me up. She and the grant put me back on the path. I was so terrified I couldn’t sleep, my son was having nightmares and couldn’t sleep. This time last year, I was a wreck, I couldn’t say what I was. And I felt that no-one gave a rat’s a**e about me’

‘As soon as I heard that I had got the grant, a smile came on my face - I hadn’t smiled for months. I didn’t know that there were people out there who had a kind outlook. When you have come from a domestic abuse scenario and when you hear no, no, no all the time, when somebody turns around and says YES, it makes you feel positive, it makes you feel you can achieve something, you can do it.’

‘Some people never get to experience that kindness, that a simple yes can change everything. One small thing can change major things. We never know what someone is going through, now if I see someone who is upset or crying, I will go up to them and see if I can help because I know the difference that simple kindness can make.’

‘The grant is AMAZING. I never used to ask for help. I saw asking for help as being wrong. I thought I would be judged (Social work has been part of my life since I was a kid). Now I understand that asking for help can be positive, it says that you want to make things better, that you want to change, it says you are confident to ask for help. It is a strength.’

‘When I got the grant, everything started to get better. If you see me now, I am a happy woman, I am back in work. My son is a bubbly normal little boy. It is not about the money, it is not about having things. Being able to have a home makes me feel confident, I can come back from a busy day and relax and say THIS IS MINE. My old home wasn’t a home, it was a shell. I am glad and comfortable, I have a home. Since the grant, I am starting to have my life.’

‘I couldn’t have got here without help from my worker. She found me the grant but she did much more. She gave me the confidence to stand up in court and get a nasty person put away. You need to have confidence, to feel that you have the strength so you can do marvellous things. If all you hear is no no no, that YES when you get a grant, it’s a real wow moment. I know I can be capable of doing what I want; standing up in court, getting a job.’

‘The grant helped me close a really bad chapter in my life. With the support of my worker and that grant, I have opened a new chapter. If I had one message for the funders, it would be “thank you for helping me live”.’

**Case Study – Amanda**

Amanda is in her 50s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and mental health issues. She has received practical support around her debts, benefits and housing and is also supported to reduce problems related to her physical ill health where possible.

The second floor private rented flat Amanda is currently living is far from ideal. Amanda has Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and diabetes so she finds climbing stairs very difficult and tiring.
Her support worker, Roisin, is looking at options for a move but this seems unlikely at the moment.

Amanda is also experiencing serious problems with her utilities. Though she was regularly paying her bills, it transpired that because she is illiterate she was paying the wrong company. This has meant that she has accrued major debts and it is proving very difficult to sort out the problem. The debt is causing Amanda high levels of distress.

Amanda’s flat is very small with little storage space. She used her grant to buy a wardrobe which means she can now store things away, leaving more room for her and her furniture. Amanda also bought a freezer. She says that the grant has been ‘brilliant, I feel better, I have got something new, something I have not had before and I really appreciate it.’

Amanda can get really down, she is often tired because of her COPD and she finds it hard to manage. The freezer is really helping her. ‘I can go to Iceland and buy a month’s worth of shopping, they deliver orders over £25 and that goes a long way for me. It means I don’t have to carry heavy bags, and I don’t have to go down to the shops every day. I can invite my friend round – yesterday we had dinner together at mine. I can also have my granddaughter to stay. My daughter has her troubles so it is good.’

Amanda is full of praise for Roisin, her support worker. She found the grant when Amanda did not think grants like this existed. Roisin takes Amanda out for coffee and pushes her to keep going and be positive. Amanda knows that Roisin is doing everything she can to help her.

Amanda does find life hard but the grant has given her something she finds so worthwhile. She knows her home is not ideal but the grant has helped make it as good as it possibly can be. Amanda is clear that there have been times when she thought about ‘slamming the door’ and walking away. She is not sure where she would go.

For Amanda, having the freezer is helping her manage her money better; she feels she can now budget and put money aside. ‘It’s hard to explain but I would be lost without it. If you don’t know, if you haven’t experienced it, you don’t know how it feels to have money in your hands, I didn’t have that before’. Amanda says that she never knew there would be people who would help her. She feels that she can see a change in herself and can be a bit more positive. Amanda feels that at last ‘something is going her way’.

**Case Study – Roisin, Amanda’s Support Worker**

Roisin is currently supporting Amanda and feels that Amanda lives in a ‘state of disempowerment’. The problem with Amanda’s electricity is out of Amanda and Roisin’s control and is frustrating for all of them. Roisin has found the Open Doors Grant helpful as it has given back control both to her and to Amanda. ‘The Open Doors process is quite quick, other applications can be very laborious. Sometimes we feel helpless, so many doors are being closed in all directions.’

Roisin felt that an Open Doors Grant could really help Amanda and give her a lift. Roisin was very concerned that Amanda would walk away from the flat and so the grant has really helped her keep a roof over her head. Roisin feels the grant has bought Amanda some time while Roisin and the team at the service do all they can to help Amanda. Roisin also sees other benefits for Amanda - ‘when someone expresses a need, a need that they can’t fulfil, when that need is met, it is like a ‘ding’ in their mind’.

‘When we get involved, it is mainly tenancy issues. But there are all the other issues along the way. Too many organisations now use a ‘tick box’ approach. At our project we have freedom to provide support in other ways. We can make time to do the little things, take people out for a coffee. People are people and we can treat them with respect.’
Roisin feels responsible for ensuring that grants are spent wisely and she also says that you can use the grants to open up conversations. Spending the grant together can build the relationship between worker and client. Roisin sees lots of bonuses as a result of getting Amanda an Open Doors Grant. ‘It has helped forge a relationship - all along Amanda has felt mistrusted, she has had a sense of suspicion about why people want to help. The grant builds trust but has also helped Amanda to feel more ‘human’ and has given her back some control in her life. Roisin says ‘Amanda’s grant is like a gift and Amanda is not a person who has received a lot of gifts. It makes a real difference.’

Case Study – Lucy
Lucy is in her late 20s and was experiencing SMD through mental health issues and domestic abuse from her mother. Lucy is receiving support to improve her ability to set boundaries and routines for her children, improve the family’s health and wellbeing and to improve her confidence as a parent. She is also supported to improve her mental health, as it is believed she is borderline bi-polar.

There are many times when Lucy feels very depressed and struggles to leave the house. Lucy has two very lively, intelligent little girls; the oldest, Diana, is six and the youngest, Jessica, is four. Jessica is also awaiting an assessment but probably has ADHD. She is a bundle of energy, never sits still and needs lots of stimulation.

Lucy was referred to her support worker by the Special Needs Co-ordinator at Diana’s school. Lucy says that looking back, she doesn’t recognise that person. She would come into school ‘like a drowned rat’. She knew things were not right but she couldn’t admit it to herself. Getting Diana to school was a nightmare because Jessica might suddenly run off. This was very stressful for Lucy, who was getting lower and lower. The Special Needs Co-ordinator helped Lucy to access the help she needed. She was referred to a local organisation, given a family support worker and went to the doctor. For Lucy, suddenly everything started to come together at once.

Lucy has found her support worker invaluable and has a great rapport with her. She has helped Lucy establish good routines with the children and has also given Lucy really good techniques to manage her wellbeing. Lucy can be a worrier and get ‘stuck’ or agitated. Lucy’s support worker encouraged her to keep a simple checklist, to aim to achieve one or two things and avoid giving herself too much to do.

Her worker has also helped Lucy be more assertive. Lucy really appreciates this as her mum is very strong and her worker felt that she undermined Lucy’s confidence. Lucy’s mum would often drop in unannounced or try and take over parenting. Lucy’s worker has given Lucy a very strong message that ‘she is the mother’ and this has given her the strength to set boundaries on her mum. She has also helped Lucy set boundaries with the children and to be much more positive in how she parents.

Lucy’s support worker applied to the Open Doors Programme for a grant to buy a freezer because she could see it would really help Lucy to look after herself and her children. Lucy says that having a freezer has made an enormous difference. Lucy knows that there are days when she is not able to leave the house when Jessica is particularly hyperactive, and Lucy can not go shopping with her. Having the freezer ensures that the children will have a good, nutritious meal. Lucy always has to take things day by day; she cannot predict her moods so it is hugely reassuring to have food in the house. The freezer has also helped Lucy to budget.

Best of all, Lucy says that having a freezer has freed up time for her to spend with the children. ‘I cook before I collect Diana from school, then I can ensure that we have time together to read stories and to play’. Lucy and her children can cook evening meals together and then put them in the freezer.

Lucy also sees another positive as a result of the grant - there is now more room in the fridge. Lucy wants Jessica and Diana to try loads of different sorts of food - last week they tried passion fruit and
mango, this week it is watermelon. Having the freezer means that there is always food that the children like to fall back on if needed.

For Lucy’s support worker, the Open Doors Grant is really helpful. She only has 12 weeks to work with a client so the grant really helps make her input count. Lucy’s freezer has brought lots of benefits in itself, but it also dovetails with the goals of the support worker: good nutrition, positive parenting and mum and children spending time together.

Lucy knows that there will be days when she is really low, but having the freezer means that her children will always have a good meal. It is helping Lucy gain in confidence and overcome her sense of being overwhelmed. Lucy thinks the support she has received and the grant have been ‘brilliant’, and her support worker has seen how Lucy has grown in confidence as a mum.

Case Study – Paul, Support Worker
Paul has been working with an older lady, Joyce, who has experienced domestic abuse, broke her back, was further injured in a car accident and then developed breast cancer. She was moved to sheltered accommodation as her previous flat was damp, which was impacting on her health.

Joyce’s sheltered accommodation had no flooring and she needed a special bed. Her Open Doors Grant paid for the flooring. This has increased her mobility around the flat and also made the house much warmer. It has freed up money which can now be spent on a proper orthopaedic mattress. Paul says that there are now very few places where you can get funding for carpets, but ‘flooring is an absolute essential when you make a home’. For Paul’s client, having a comfy flat is so important as she cannot travel far. It has made a huge difference to her mental health and wellbeing. Her children and grandchildren can now come and stay.

Paul says that it has become immensely time-consuming to get even the most basic benefit. In this case, his client did not speak English and needed support. Paul says the system has become ‘faceless’ - it is hard to talk to a person and it takes time. There is a local fund but everything has to be purchased from Argos, and if it is not in stock it can be a long wait. With any one client, workers are dealing with a huge range of issues and so having to spend so much time on one thing can be frustrating. Paul is aware that there are more and more people needing support but many local funds’ criteria are tightening all the time and less people are eligible for support.

The Open Doors Programme helps Paul in his work because it is flexible, quick and the criteria for funding are relatively open. Most importantly, it meets needs that are currently not being met.

Case Study – Matthew
Matthew is in his 30s and was experiencing SMD through substance abuse and mental health issues. He is receiving support to improve his mental health and finances, reduce his substance misuse and alleviate his problems with his neighbours and housing.

Matthew has been experiencing psychotic episodes linked to his drug usage. He has enduring mental health issues and has experienced money problems. Matthew was referred to a local project by the Mental Health Team. He has had a lot of treatment for his mental health and addictions over the years but hasn’t always found the local mental health service sympathetic or understanding.

Matthew says that his support worker is the first person who has really taken the time to listen to him. Many mental health professionals have assumed that everything that Matthew has experienced is the result of his drug-taking, and that many of the issues that affect him have been things he has imagined. For example, Matthew has had lots of trouble with neighbours - his support worker understood that this was not paranoia but a genuine problem that needed fixing. Matthew’s support worker took the time
to talk to him, understand the issues affecting him and has also helped solve some of those problems. Matthew thinks that his support worker and the project she works for have been brilliant. ‘They wanted to have the conversation and they focused on me, not on my mental health, not on my history’.

When Matthew’s support worker first met him he was not going out of the house. Matthew was suffering from serious anxiety, his clothes were old and worn out and he had lost confidence in himself. Matthew’s support worker has really helped him with his finances, sorting out his debts and getting him back on an even keel. Matthew was really impressed when his support worker suggested that they apply for a grant for new clothes. He felt that it really showed that she was on the ball, that she understood his needs and also that she knew what she was doing. It gave Matthew confidence in her and the project. He did not expect to get the grant but it has made a huge difference to him.

‘It seems a small thing, not having clothes, but it has meant that I can apply for jobs and that I can go out of the house feeling confident. It really has helped me’. Work is very important to Matthew - he wants to get back into the world. Matthew says that he has had a very bad time and he has sometimes felt that he has a simple choice: get a job and reconnect or opt out of life all together.

For Matthew it was a ‘buzz’ to buy the clothes - a very good feeling that reminded him of good times. Matthew feels that the grant speeded his progress up; it gave him a push and some real motivation. Matthew knows that he is the one who has to improve things for himself and he is the one who has to gain self-reliance. He knows he has strengths - he has had a good education and has transferable skills. But the grant was a real positive - Matthew never knew that there were people who would help in this way.

Matthew also used his grant to get his phone fixed; this has been important as Matthew had become quite isolated from his family and friends without it. Matthew is a determined person and he thinks that his parents deserve to see him doing well.

Matthew says that getting the grant ‘felt like getting a bit of my identity back. I feel I lost that doing drugs, it was really damaging. The grant is helping me get in touch with the man I used to be.’ He thinks his grant has made a huge difference, ‘grants can meet needs that are not being met anywhere else, my grant has made a huge difference and I really appreciate it’.

Case Study – David, Project Manager
David’s project works with very vulnerable clients - some will have offending histories, drug and alcohol issues or poor mental health. His service provides some supported housing and floating support for people at risk of becoming homeless.

Many of David’s clients are currently exempt from Universal Credit because they are deemed vulnerable due to their mental health needs. However, other clients who are renting from private landlords are receiving Universal Credit. This can be difficult because there is usually a wait for the first Universal Credit payment. In David’s area, there is still a Local Welfare Fund but it is much reduced. What people can apply for will become more restricted through the year as the Local Authority’s resources become depleted.

The biggest challenge for David and his team is the lack of social housing in his area. It can be a struggle to find local authority housing for his client group as those who have displayed anti-social behaviour or have a history of crime will often be exempt from applying. The lack of one bedroom flats is also a problem as it means that tenants will automatically be subject to the Spare Room Subsidy. Younger tenants often end up living in shared accommodation and though they will have a room with a lockable door they will have no control over who the other tenants are. Crucially, private landlords not only want to have a deposit, they may expect an advance payment for utilities like electricity and water.
This is very challenging and a key area where Open Doors Grants can help.

The way David’s service has been commissioned has also changed. Previously, they could take anybody in need, but now clients must show that they can engage - with his project, with probation services or with a drugs service. By their very nature, this client group finds it hard to change and hard to engage. If a client misses an appointment, even if they have a valid reason, it can result in them having benefits stopped and it can take time to re-present their claim.

David and his team use Open Doors Grants to support ‘moves on’. Grants can pay towards deposits and rent, as well as provide basic goods. If the grant is being spent on goods, the worker and the client spend the money together. David’s team have also used Open Doors Grants to pay arrears; some of their clients will have no other way of paying arrears and this can ensure that they stay in the property. The flexibility of the grants means they can help a client in the way they need it most. ‘Some people find supported housing (like a hostel) a very negative environment, and the atmosphere in a hostel can change hugely depending on the residents, so being able to help someone move on relatively quickly is very important.’ David says that the grants give workers options - they create a dialogue where they can say ‘this is what I can do for you and this is where I can go for help’.

‘The grants help clients living in supported housing see that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Currently they may be entitled to a bond for a maximum of £40 but that won’t pay for a deposit. Living in a hostel makes it hard to get a job or go back to education and we know getting work is a key step forward. Because time in supported housing is limited, it can make people very stressed, it can lead them to re-offend and will impact on their wellbeing. For those who have moved on, moving into a place that is dank, empty and cold can be really depressing. They can get caught in a cycle of depression and it gets worse and worse. If you help make a house a home rather than a prison it really improves their wellbeing. It means that clients can engage in dealing with their drugs or alcohol, it can help both mentally and physically.’

**Case Study – Mahmud**

Mahmud is 30 years old and was experiencing SMD through homelessness and mental health issues. He has received support to access benefits, housing and employment opportunities.

Mahmud fled from Iran for political reasons. He cannot go back and fears that one day political rivals will find him. Mahmud was a successful accountant in his home country. He has been granted asylum in the UK and initially had two jobs – one in customer services and another in cleaning. Mahmud got a flat but then had to move, losing his job and his flat. He found himself a new job but developed serious back problems and had to stop. Mahmud then became homeless.

Mahmud says ‘being homeless is really hard, you feel really bad, especially to be homeless in such a lovely place. Having a home, it is so crucial to everything. I went to the night shelter but it was hard. Before, I slept on benches.’

‘In Iran, I had a good job, I was Head of the Office. I split from my family, from my friends when I left. It is really important for me to work, I have always worked hard.’ Mahmud got a place in a hostel. He felt it was a good place and that he had a chance. ‘People in the shelter, they had good hearts, they were good people. Some people had problems like drugs and alcohol, but they were kind and they needed help. I won’t lie, before I used to judge but I found they were not like that. Everywhere I found good and kind people, like the staff at the shelter, like the council, everyone was trying to help.’

Mahmud used his time in the hostel really positively; he got voluntary work, he studied, got new qualifications and passed his driving theory test. Mahmud tried for job after job but was ‘disappointed, disappointed, disappointed’. Mahmud applied for jobs every week but he got depression and his back
problems worsened. Mahmud says he was in a very dark place. Staff at the hostel could see how hard he was trying but he began to get more depressed and more hopeless. They extended his stay at the hostel as much as they could but the point came when he had to leave.

Mahmud’s support worker helped him start bidding to get a flat but Mahmud was finding it very hard. He had no savings and his benefits had stopped. Mahmud was desperate for work but the job centre was not helpful. His support worker felt that they judged him harshly and that Mahmud was doing all he could to help himself. Together they completed the forms he needed and sorted out the Job Seekers Allowance.

When Mahmud did secure a flat, it was dark and cold. His worker applied for an Open Doors Grant to help him establish his home. Mahmud had volunteered at a furniture store so was able to get good furniture. He bought wood and tools so that he could build his own shelves and cupboards. He also bought good bed linen and was even able to find a really good fridge on Gumtree.

Mahmud says ‘for me, the best thing was that my worker trusted me to spend my money, he trusted me to get receipts, to get what I needed. In the hostel, there isn’t much trust. When you have no job, no home, it is really valuable to be trusted and feel trusted.’

‘My home makes me feel fantastic. I have settled down, I don’t have to carry stuff around with me all the time, I don’t have to throw things like food away. I can buy what I need, freeze it, store stuff. When you live in a hostel, you can’t do that. I can save up for stuff that I really need.’

‘I am really grateful for my grant. It has made me a home. I have been made welcome by people. I can’t forget how hard it was, but now I can focus on getting my job, on my life. I can really concentrate on the future. Now I have a proper home, I can focus on getting a degree, improving my English. I want to get a good job. I have used some of the wood I bought to make these shelves, for my books and learning.’

‘My home means that I can invite people round, I have made some new friends and they can come here, I can welcome people here.’

Mahmud says ‘I don’t feel shame, what happened is part of my life, it is what I do afterwards that matters now. What happened to me could have happened to anyone. It was very harsh but it was an experience. I still have nightmares, every day is like a pressure but having a home helps me in different directions. It helps with my depression, I have hope. I have something to do, there is still stuff that I need to finish in the house. It’s like fuel, it’s really crucial.’

‘If I hadn’t got a grant, I would be in so much debt, it takes a long time to pull yourself up, I would have been lost. The grant has helped me move on. I manage the money I have really well, the grant showed me how much I could get with £250.’

Mahmud says he is thankful to his worker and the charity that supported him. His worker feels that Mahmud has been a model resident, trying so hard to sort his life out. The Open Doors Grant has enabled Mahmud to start to make progress.

Mahmud says ‘I don’t want to be on benefits, I will get a job, I will get there. Now I have a space to learn. I can’t ignore what everyone has done for me. I am very thankful for everything, I hope I can pay back that kindness. When you think you have a chance, some future you have some hope.’
Case Study – Niamh, Project Manager

Niamh’s service works with vulnerable women with multiple needs. Women can self-refer or they may be referred by probation or court. All women using the service share common characteristics: they will have issues with debt and housing, regardless of how they came to the service. More young women are presenting to the service and the service now works more closely with the police.

Niamh finds the Open Doors Programme ‘really responsive’. Women experiencing domestic abuse will often leave at night, without food, sometimes moving to a new area. They may also have faced financial abuse. A grant provides the support to help keep them safe.

For women experiencing housing issues or debt, the grant is an opportunity to get back on their feet. It gets them set up, it can stop them losing their tenancy. Getting a grant can motivate a woman. Too often they have been rejected by the Local Welfare Fund, so a grant can tell them that they are not worthless. Niamh believes the Welfare Fund and housing support are becoming harder to access. For her, a key advantage of the Open Doors Programme is that it is highly responsive, highly flexible and it is quick. ‘It is a needs-responsive grant’.

Niamh also points out that Local Assistance packages are becoming more limited. A woman moving into a home would get what the Local Authority defines as essential: this includes a bed, bedding, basic utensils and a microwave, but not a cooker. A fridge is not defined as essential unless a woman has diabetes.

This is why an Open Doors Grant is so important. A cooker will be particularly important for a woman with children; ‘if you only have a microwave you rely on frozen meals that are hard to share and expensive. If you can buy a cooker it can support other work - teaching life skills, helping a family to improve nutrition’.

Niamh says that most women cannot believe they have got the grant, they cannot believe they haven’t had to fight for it, there is no interest to be paid and that it doesn’t have to be deducted from their benefits.

Niamh has seen women making long term changes because of the Open Doors Grant and she can see how it supports women to maintain their tenancies. ‘One woman who has mental health issues and was abusing substances got a grant for clothes. She was able to do voluntary work and is now doing really well.’

Niamh and her team would not consider an Open Doors Grant if a woman’s life was chaotic or they were not attending appointments. However, they might use it for forward planning - helping a woman to see that if they could establish routines, they might get a grant in the future.

‘Grants definitely build trust. Women can tell their story and see something tangible, an outcome from sharing this. When you get a grant, it can build the relationship between worker and client. It increases the self worth of the client.’

Niamh sees particular value for women who have come through the criminal justice system; ‘it is a really good tool for engaging women after release. It can get the women into the service, reinforcing the fact that there are people who will support them. The Local Authority might provide some cash for women leaving prison but it is hard for women to focus on their real needs. The grant is really concrete and focuses their thinking.’

Niamh says that the Open Doors Grants are ‘fantastic. The grants team are highly responsive so you can get emergency grants, they have a ‘not a problem’ attitude. The grants are really powerful, they give another angle.’
Case Study – Iain, Support Worker
A key element of Iain’s work is to sustain tenancy; Open Doors Grants provide support which will ensure that this is successful. He feels that it is getting harder and harder to get grants - a local provider has had to narrow its criteria and the Local Welfare Fund is not always appropriate. In one case, Iain used a grant to hire a skip to clear out the home, ensure that other agencies did not become involved and the grant recipient did not lose their house.

For Iain, Open Doors Grants build relationships, which is very helpful when the length of support that the service can give is short, such as 12 weeks. ‘You can be in and out with a very practical input that can make a real difference.’

Iain thinks that this is not only empowering for support workers and grant recipients, but the grant can also ensure that the service is meeting its Key Performance Indicators. Access to the Open Doors Grants has helped the service in a recent tendering process by being able to demonstrate value for money. All of this can strengthen the service and gives staff security.

Iain thinks that the impact of the Open Doors Grant on the individual is huge too. Grant recipients are often facing so many issues: debts, arrears, experience of domestic abuse, benefit sanctions and poor mental health. The grants increase the options for staff to provide meaningful support.

Iain thinks it is particularly helpful that Open Doors Grants will help with arrears - he sees this as a huge burden that can be removed. It can take away the risk of eviction. Practical goods can also be really helpful; they can provide a boost to wellbeing and help stop the sense of ‘revolving doors’ that many people experience. Iain recognises that people have to want to change and stay in their homes, but the Open Doors Grants can give the boost people need, or provide security, that can help them work on their other issues.

Iain and his team are very thoughtful about how and when they apply for the grant. They will only tell a client about the grants when they think they are ready. They will often have done lots of work ensuring that the person is safe, paying bills or has signed on before they think about the grant. If these things are in place, then the grant can focus much more on sustaining a tenancy or establishing a home. Iain sees the grants as really practical.

He thinks that is very good that the grants are rarely refused, which is in contrast with local funds. Iain also notes that the grant can be a very helpful way of supporting someone as they withdraw from a service; it is a good exit strategy, helping the client to take responsibility and move on from support.

Case Study – Charlie
Charlie is in his 30s and was experiencing SMD through mental health issues and imminent risk of homelessness. He has received support to manage his debts and improve his mental health, making his life less chaotic.

Charlie previously worked as a translator, having gained a law degree and worked in recruitment. Charlie started working with his support worker after being referred by the mental health unit at the local hospital, where he was receiving clinical support for anxiety and depression.

Charlie describes his house and life as being in ‘chaos’. He had no electricity or gas in his house due to being in severe arrears. He ‘had nothing’. In a practical sense, Charlie also needed cooking implements and new clothes. His support worker stated that ‘he couldn’t stay in the property in that state…he couldn’t move forward without dealing with his arrears.’
In terms of the grant, Charlie shopped in charity shops in order to budget, to try to ‘clean up’ in terms of how far he could make the money go.

For Charlie the grant was provided in a non-judgemental way in relation to his needs. He said that his support worker helped him to ‘foster discipline… it was essential that he helped as I don’t like spending someone else’s money’. Charlie still needs a hoover and eventually he would like to move out of the house he is in as ‘it’s too big… when I was working it was okay’.

When asked what the grant meant to him, Charlie replied that ‘I have a different perspective now. I am quite aware that if I get into a bad condition it’s a red flag that my mental health is declining. I couldn’t have done it [got to this place] without the cash.’

Charlie is enthusiastic about the future. He’s taking part in a local drama group and looking to do some volunteer work with refugees. Charlie isn’t ‘sitting still’ and is starting to become reintegrated into his daughter’s life.

His support worker, Stan, says that he is really careful about when to apply for a grant. Charlie was at the stage where he wasn’t able to move forward without the extra support provided by the Open Doors Grant. The main concern was how long he would be able to remain in his situation. Stan stated that he could apply every day for different clients, but they need to be engaging with the support provided. He also emphasised that many clients need fast finance - their needs don’t respond well with red tape and long delays.

**Case Study – Gloria, Moving On Co-ordinator**

For Gloria, the Open Doors Grant is most helpful when it can help somebody move into permanent accommodation. Often her clients are offered properties at very short notice and once they have signed for it, they move in. These flats won’t have even the basics that make a house a home. Without these things, it is so much harder to maintain a tenancy. ‘Moving on can be really precarious time; people have so many hopes but moving into independent living can be very lonely, suddenly there are no staff around you. People need to have a home to help them cope. The first six months of a tenancy can be very fragile’.

There are Local Welfare Funds but they are very varied, and one Local Authority she works with has stated that demand is outstripping resources. The majority of Gloria’s clients are single men and therefore not always a priority for support from the local authority or other agencies.

For Gloria, an Open Doors Grant addresses basic needs and helps build the relationship between the support worker and the client. The workers can be creative about how they discuss the grants with the client, helping them think about their future beyond the hostel. A grant can help deal with practical details to help the client focus on the other things that they need to do in their lives. It provides motivation and can really help the client feel positive about moving on. ‘The fear of moving on is very real, many will have found supported housing very positive. Many of our clients will have tenancies that have failed previously. Sometimes we will work with older people who have never had a tenancy or others who have long offending histories or been in care so moving on is not easy’. The Open Doors Grants really help by ‘taking some of those worries away and can help them think about the other things they will need to do, like building networks of friends’.

Gloria finds the speed with which the grants are processed very helpful. ‘It feels a very trusting experience as it is not over bureaucratic. Also, the grant allows the client to be in charge of their own spending, and they can make the decisions about what they most need. This is helpful because they will need to make their own decisions, it helps encourage independence.’
For Gloria, the flexibility of the Open Doors Programme is also helpful – she feels that the grants team really understand the needs of her client group. ‘It’s a small amount of money but it makes such a big difference. I have seen people take more pride in themselves. Many clients would wait months to buy things like carpets if they had to save up. It does help people maintain their tenancy.’

Case Study – Andrew
Andrew is in his late 20s and is experiencing SMD through homelessness and mental health issues. He is receiving support to access housing and volunteering opportunities and manage his hospital appointments. His support is helping him to improve the stability of his life.

Andrew was a trainee jockey until a serious car accident meant he could no longer ride professionally. He is still recovering from his injuries. He ended up on the streets after he split up from his partner and received a short custodial sentence for criminal damage. Andrew lost everything: his career, his dream life and his family. He has struggled to put the pieces back together but is very determined that he can change and adapt.

Andrew is currently living in a hostel. This is not a life that suits him. Other residents knock on his door in the middle of the night and some of the residents are drinkers or drug users. He is finding the environment very depressing.

Andrew has just received a grant from the Open Doors Programme which will pay both the deposit and the administration fee to rent a privately owned property. He is very appreciative of how his local partner organisation has supported him in trying to find a new home and to access the Open Doors Grant. Andrew’s worker has really supported him. He says that he has needed so much help with applying for houses and sorting out hospital appointments. He has found it all so stressful. There have also been lots of problems finding Andrew a new home. He will only be able to move to property owned by a private landlord and many local landlords not only expect a deposit, they charge an administration fee too. His grant will pay both the deposit and the administration fee.

For Andrew his grant is a key step in helping him get his life back on track. Andrew has always worked and finds it very frustrating that he cannot work at the moment. He hates going to the doctor for medical certificates and is desperate to be back at work. He says that there is a real stigma in living in a hostel, he cannot invite his friends around and though he has told some of them where he lives, it is isolating. He also wants to move closer to his children.

Andrew has a very clear idea of what his grant will help him achieve - he has already lined up a new job for himself with a charity that provides riding for the disabled. Andrew has also done some volunteering and has found it very rewarding. One child thanked him for ‘making her feel like a normal little girl’. He feels that he is being given a second chance. Andrew is clear: ‘I need to prove it to myself, to my family. They have done so much, supporting me when I was riding, I need to prove that I am still fighting. The grant helps me, I am starting to feel stronger, I can’t wait to move.’

Andrew says that ‘I am very determined, the grant and all the help I have received are moving me forward. Having a home will give me the stability I need. The grant will close a bad chapter in my life. When I was 16, 17, 18, I had all those years of hard work, now I am back at square one. But my grant is a BIG START, the grant backs me, it keeps me going. It cheered me up, honestly I never thought I could get a grant. Living in a hostel, I thought this is the last place anyone would want to help.’

Case Study – Sara-Lee, Andrew’s Support Worker
‘In Andrew’s case, I could see his desire to better himself’. Sara-Lee has not been supporting Andrew for very long but she can see how challenging he is finding life in the hostel. She is very clear that this is not the right place for Andrew. Most importantly, she can see how he is engaging with help and support.
Andrew’s grant is the first time that Sara-Lee has applied to the Open Doors Programme. She has worked with Andrew to look at his core needs and help focus his priorities. ‘If Andrew was able to work, he would have a better mind set. That is what he is working towards. However, the first thing we need to address is the change of environment. I can see that Andrew does have ability to know what he needs to do.’ Sara-Lee describes his grant as ‘solving a problem by pushing him forward’.

Sara-Lee says that it is very hard for people like Andrew that have been in trouble with the law or have other issues. Even if they can get a job, they are unlikely to be able to pay for both a deposit and an administration fee. The service has tried to get Andrew Local Authority housing, but even though he has been registered to bid and has been shortlisted for a number of properties, he has not been lucky. If Sara-Lee had not been able to access an Open Doors Grant, they might have been able to apply for a property bond. But the bond process can take a long time and not all landlords will accept a bond.

Andrew had come to the end of the 13 week programme with the partner organisation and though this can be extended, Sara-Lee was concerned about how a continued stay at the hostel would have impacted on Andrew’s wellbeing. She feels it would have affected his mood and got him down. His single-mindedness and determination, which she sees as a strength, could have got him down if he continued in a bad environment. He is an ‘everything or nothing sort of person’.

For Sara-Lee, applying for a grant was about Andrew’s attitude and his readiness for a change. She would not recommend a grant for someone who cannot manage for themselves. She also believes that ‘there may be other things to address first before someone is ready for a grant’. Sara-Lee can see that while there may be times when a grant builds engagement, but she also thinks that ‘structured support needs to be there for someone to move on, if they are engaging well, if there is a process in their own mind to move on, the grant can really help build the stability that people need. In Andrew’s case, he has the focus to move on and to find work and this grant will help him achieve that.’

Case Study – Janek
Janek is in his 40s and is experiencing SMD through homelessness and substance misuse issues. He is being supported to tackle his substance misuse and become involved in social activities.

Janek had a successful career in hospitality for many years before he started to associate with a new group of people and ended up abusing alcohol. Janek’s drinking was so excessive that he had fits and there have been serious concerns about his health. His marriage failed, he had to give up his flat and he has been left with absolutely nothing. He was found sleeping rough by the local homelessness team and got placed in a hostel.

Janek accepts that his alcohol problems have not gone away and that he is still very vulnerable to binge drinking. He knows it is up to him to sort that out. Janek has got to a point where he knows that now, living in the hostel, this is the best chance he has of establishing a stable and settled life.

Janek’s grant has really helped him start to build that stability. His room feels safe and welcoming, it is a ‘nice little room’. Janek views his grant as something that helps him ‘to bounce back’. Janek says that the support alongside his grant has also really helped him get back on his feet.

Janek’s Open Doors Grant has set him up in his hostel. It has bought him clothes, bedding and toiletries. When he was on the streets he had nothing, his stuff kept getting stolen and his clothes were in a bad state. Janek felt that he spent the grant money really wisely, and he has even been able to get himself a cheap phone with it. He sees the grant as something that he is responsible for. He has bought good quality items that he can take with him when he eventually begins to live independently.
The grant has helped Janek create a proper structure for his life. Janek has always been independent and so it has been hard for him to have to rely on others. He says the grant is helping him ‘get back on track’ and it has made him really happy. Janek didn’t think he would get the grant and did not realise that these sorts of grants were available.

Janek has got involved in lots of activities since he moved to the hostel. He helps in the garden and cooks once a week. He is very proud of his Sunday lunches and the fact that most of the residents come for his meals. He is very supportive of other residents and his workers speak very highly of him.

He thinks the power of the Open Doors Programme is that it is not just money - it is the support that comes with that money too. Janek has found it very reassuring to know that he is not alone. The money has given Janek choices, which really helps, and he is proud that he has used his grant so wisely.

**Case Study – Davina, Support Worker**

Davina works with people with very complex needs and her role is to help them maintain their tenancy as well as deal with a complex range of issues. Very often they will come to the service with only the clothes they stand up in. Some will have debts or arrears or may be paying back Social Fund loans. Their needs are such that putting aside money or saving is just not a priority. Some of her clients have mental health needs and struggle to budget, and some clients have suffered financial abuse from a partner and have never been allowed to budget for themselves.

Davina can access the local support fund but this has now had to reduce the amount of support it can provide and is limiting the goods it can give. Davina feels that goods such as washing machines are essential because they can meet a health need or help shape a day for a client. However, they are not always available through local welfare support. A key part of Davina’s work with a client may be to teach them how to keep their flat clean and to make it a home, but if the flat has no curtains this is very hard. ‘Sometimes we can feel that we are setting our clients up to fail.’

Davina also says that systems in general are hard for her clients. ‘Often they will not know how to set up paying for their electricity or gas. They will not always be good at replying to mail. Some will struggle to find local authority houses’. Davina supported one person who had failed all the criteria for a house, had no job and had huge rent arrears. He is now in supported accommodation, has managed to deal with his drinking and has a job. A stable roof over his head has really helped him. The Open Doors Grant was not just about getting him a cooker but also lampshades and the sorts of things that make a home cosy. As Davina says, ‘if you are in a dismal flat, you are not going to want to stay. If you have experienced domestic violence, it can take years for you to stop feeling the effects, and if your home has no curtains and feels unsafe then you are not going to want to stay. An Open Doors Grant can help us feel we are not setting up our clients to fail.’

**Case Study – Waseme**

Waseme is in her 20s and was experiencing SMD through domestic abuse and homelessness. She has received support to help find rented accommodation and improve her confidence, and she has been signposted to education opportunities.

Waseme is now living in a completely new area having escaped from very serious domestic abuse, but she has had to start from scratch. When she first went to the refuge she had absolutely nothing, only the clothes she stood up in. A partner organisation has helped her move into rented accommodation and her Open Doors Grant was able to buy her basic furniture, including tables and chairs, a corner unit, big table and baby chair and table. She has used the leftover money to buy cleaning materials, paint and the material to make new curtains.

Waseme did get a Local Assistance Grant and that paid for some basics and beds for her and her three
I feel confident that life can get better, I am on my way forwards… I am happy, the kids are happy to be here now and I know I can help myself now I have had a start. Thank you, really.

Waseme, Grant recipient
children, but for two weeks she lived in the flat with nothing, just with the beds.

When Waseme was in the refuge she stayed in her room and her children did not go to school. The local school will not take children from the refuge even though they are supposed to. For Waseme, getting the right school for her 2 older children was the priority. The children have already settled well, they like the neighbourhood and the park is close by so they can go and play.

Waseme has no family to help her as she has had to leave them behind. She says ‘Where I last lived, I had everything, but I cannot go back. I have had to give up such a lot, separate from my parents and from my brother. If I hadn’t had help from the refuge and from Open Doors, I would have nothing.’

‘The grant helps me see that I am strong. I need to be strong, I have the kids and I need to be strong for them. I knew that I needed to change where I was but I had no one. Now I want to go to college, improve my English; I don’t want to work in a factory. I want to do a course and have a good job like I did before.’

‘Without the grant, I would have felt very bad, it would have been so hard. There was damp on the walls; I have had to repaint everything. The kitchen floor was so dirty I had to wash it four times. I have put wallpaper up for myself and made curtains.’

‘Without the grant, I would have got depressed and I wouldn’t have known how to start. The grant has helped me make a big change. I have good neighbours who help me. It would have been so difficult without the grant. I would have tried to save money for stuff but the children would have had to go without food.’

‘I can talk to my worker. She understands me, she challenges me but she also helps me out. I feel confident that life can get better, I am on my way forwards. At the moment, I am trying to save money, there are things I need for the children. I want to find my own way now.’

‘I don’t want another grant from Open Doors because you have given me the start I need. There are lots of people who have problems - I see women who have nothing, they need help more than me. The grant has made things so different: I am happy, the kids are happy to be here now and I know I can help myself now I have had a start. Thank you, really.’

Case Study – Sandra, Operations Manager

‘The Open Doors Programme has been a good process. Partners were involved right in its development and it has been run in a very inclusive way. There has been constant consultation and changes have been made to the programme as a result of that. For example, the application form was simplified and the need for applicants to disclose great detail about their finances and expenditure removed. Staff have been enthusiastic about providing case studies and that reflects their positive feelings about the fund. They have also been able to see how their work has impacted on the women they support.’

‘The programme is very flexible and has a direct benefit on the women our organisation supports. But it is also very helpful for staff. The programme came at a very good time for the organisation with challenges to local welfare funds and cuts in benefits. There was lots of anxiety within the staff team. But staff know the fund is there and that is very helpful when working with individuals. It is useful to know that there is something tangible that staff can do or provide. So many times, staff are working with women whose issues are intractable, it is very powerful to be able to say “We might be able to do something about this”.’

‘A grant being used to buy clothes for a family and social workers being impressed at how well turned out the family look is a good example of how powerful the grants can be. Whatever you think about the
social workers, even if all this did was make the mum feel more confident it is still a huge benefit. This is the sort of benefit that is hard to measure.’

‘One of our contracts is based on Payment by Results. The strength of the Open Doors programme is that it can help sustain an outcome. If a woman who has experienced domestic violence gets a new tenancy, that is a key moment for her, but there may be lots of issues for her about sustaining that tenancy. If a grant can help keep a person safe, help her invite friends round and ensure that the social worker sees she is coping, all these are really important.’

‘Open Doors Grants have no tricks, it is not a competition; if you meet the criteria you get the funding. The process is transparent and we have all been consulted about it and through that, I feel that our recipients have been consulted too. Some funders can feel anonymous but we have never felt like unequal partners in the Open Doors Programme. It couldn’t be a greater counterpoint to the benefits system.’

‘Underpinning the programme is its genuine positivity about achieving change. We are all trying to achieve change for our service users, through trying to meet their needs, but this Programme is about individual change. It is unusual to have a grant programme that itself wants to achieve lasting change. That is what makes Open Doors different.’

Case Study – Jacob

Jacob is in his late 20s and was experiencing SMD through mental health issues, substance misuse and contact with the criminal justice system. He is being supported to tackle these problems, and is also receiving practical help to access benefits and housing.

Jacob has a family but he and his siblings have a history of drug and alcohol abuse. He is in touch with his mum who is currently unwell. Jacob has struggled not just with addiction but with mental health problems. Jacob was sent to detox and then spent a year in a dry house trying to deal with his mental health issues and live without alcohol.

Jacob is very lonely and he has to take small steps. ‘Rebuilding your life is really hard. Everyone I know is drinking or taking drugs. I have very few friends who don’t.’

Jacob says the housing system is really hard because he knows he is not good at forms. ‘You used to be able to talk to someone in the benefits office, if you couldn’t see someone there was a phone. Now it is all just computers and I have never learnt to use one’.

Jacob’s support worker has helped him to sort out his benefits and with the bidding process for a flat. Jacob had to take the flat he was offered, if he had said no, he would have gone to the back of the list. He said ‘the flat was in a terrible state, it had been used as a toilet. The council sorted a deep clean but I had to do everything else. It took eight months’.

‘If I hadn’t got the grant, I would have said ‘What’s the point? If I hadn’t got a grant, I would never have been able to afford to do up my flat. The grant has proper changed my flat, it’s changed my life. I’d have been on rock bottom without it. I would have gone back to drugs and alcohol and messed up big time. I am on probation and I know I would have gone back to jail.’

Because Jacob is a single man he is not entitled to a washing machine from the Local Authority. The Open Doors Grant has ensured that he can clean his clothes, saving him money. Without it, Jacob would struggle to pay bills. ‘Even if you make the house as nice as possible, if you are freezing cold, you have no food, you don’t want to stay in the house. With the grant, I could actually choose the colour of my carpet and I could get what I want. This is the first time I have been able to pay off debts, first time I have paid my TV licence. Once you start, it gets easy to budget. I can now pay off debts, I can plan. I get
support from my worker and I can really help. It helps me maintain a good life. I won’t go backwards, I can think positive, I talk and I feel better and he stops me worrying.’

For Jacob, his home is now a place where he can invite new friends round. Jacob was really happy when someone came round and said ‘your flat is really nice’. Even two workers from the Department for Work and Pensions who came to help Jacob fill out some forms told him how cosy he had made his home.

Jacob’s support worker believes that having a home is really important for Jacob. It gives shape and structure to his life. Most importantly, it ensures that Jacob can really focus on what is most important, dealing with the underlying issues behind his alcohol and substance abuse.

Jacob knows he has to protect himself. ‘I know I am easily led but I am aware of that. I am learning to say ‘don’t do that, I don’t want to lose what I’ve got. There is no way I am losing what I have got now.’

‘I have lots of stuff to deal with. I know I would be destitute, without help and support. The grant is something I really appreciate. It is so good to know people are helping. This grant makes me feel I am not on my own. I know I have a lot of things I need to do to change.’

Case Study – Sharon, Support Worker
Sharon oversees a Floating Support Team for women and a Young People’s Project. She feels that the Open Doors Programme has been very helpful. The application process is very simple and common sense. Particularly helpful is the fact that the turnaround for grants is so quick, with a typical application being assessed and the money transferred within a week. Many of the women her service supports are in crisis. If there is an eight week wait, many women will disengage. If a woman can get a grant at the beginning, it is so positive. It is real practical and emotional support.

There is Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) available but this can be both good and bad; it provides a very basic package, but carpets and curtains are defined as luxury items and not included. However, a pair of curtains in a ground floor flat can make the home so much safer. It is hard to find funding for clothing and many women will leave with absolutely nothing. LWA is challenging on other levels too - it is out of the support worker’s control when goods are delivered and it is hard to follow up on these as there are now no phone numbers for the local authority team. Everything is done by email. Sharon says that liaising with the local authority has got harder. Over the last five years they have lost named contacts. Liaison roles have been cut and it can feel chaotic. Support workers find this very challenging - it can feel like ‘taking a ticket at the deli counter’.

This matters because the women Sharon supports are so vulnerable; they constantly question their decision to leave and are often under huge pressure from their ex-partner, friends, families and sadly, even professionals. Too often women are made to feel that they are being asked ‘why did you put yourself in this situation’. They have to continually evidence their need which can be both prescriptive and distressing. ‘With domestic violence, there are so many levels of disclosure so it is not surprising that women will not want to talk to a Housing Officer behind a counter, why should they trust them?’ One of the most important elements of Sharon’s project is that ‘we believe you, we understand, we know what you can and can’t say’. They can advocate and they can challenge agencies, especially if women have been made to feel that they are lying.

‘Many women are experiencing a fresh start in a new area and this can be hard for them. There is now a maximum support time for floating support of six months which means that support workers might not see the outcome of their work. Grants can be so useful because they can help deal with a crisis or ‘set things off on the right path’.
Many of the women in my service are in crisis. If there is an eight week wait, many women will disengage.

Sharon, Support Worker
For Sharon it is a tricky balancing act trying to identify when the right time to apply for an Open Doors Grant is, but that is why the flexibility of the Programme is so helpful. Women who have fled domestic abuse may never have been responsible for budgeting or had their own money in their previous life. When women move to a new house, it is so important that they have furniture or curtains, not least because they need to be part of the neighbourhood. Women who have received grants have been so positive and that can really help the support workers too. When a woman is so downtrodden and has become so disempowered, it is really good for support workers to provide something tangible that shows they are having an impact.

The Open Doors Programme fits well with Sharon’s organisation’s ethos. Women can choose what they feel they most need from the grant and the forms do not ask too much about each woman. Sharon is clear that a grant would not on its own stop a woman returning to her abusive partner. It cannot take the pressures away for a woman living on her own for the first time. But it still has a massive impact. Many women leave their homes with the clothes they stood up in, so the fact that Open Doors Grants allow the purchase of clothing is very important – ‘having your own clothes can help you become your own person again’. One grant provided clothes for a woman’s children where previously a non-uniform day at school would have meant a day off school. Sharon also mentions how social workers noted that a family was looking cleaner and better presented, which can be how women leaving domestic abuse are judged.

Women fleeing domestic abuse are facing so many issues that Sharon’s project has now increased the number of food banks and drop-ins it is providing. Many women struggle with debts, arrears or credit agreements built up by their ex-partners and it is still hard for women to get the right advice. In this context, the Open Doors Grants are ‘phenomenal, a vital support to both women and to workers’.

Case Study - Bernadette and Tristan
Bernadette and Tristan are in their late 40s and were experiencing SMD through mental health and substance misuse issues. They are being supported to access housing and benefits, as well as to develop resilience to prevent further problems with substance misuse.

Tristan was a chef and he and Bernadette ran their own business very successfully. When his mum got ill, they moved to look after her and then, during the recession, the business started to struggle. At the same time as the business went bankrupt, Tristan’s mum died and Bernadette and Tristan were left with nothing. Tristan’s drinking became out of control. He was eventually referred to a detox unit and from there to a specialist rehabilitation unit and ‘dry’ house.

Tristan spent a year in the dry house to give up drinking, which he found very hard. He describes himself as a ‘control freak’, who finds it hard to talk and bottles things up. He is a very solitary, private man who has never had to ask for help from anyone before. Bernadette had to find herself a place to stay and she only saw Tristan at weekends, for limited visits. Bernadette is really outgoing and sees the positive in everything, but it was very hard for her too.

Tristan found leaving the dry house very stressful. ‘Days were very structured but when you leave, you lose that structure and that can be really hard. In the dry house, you are in a bubble, nothing to think about: no worries about dinner, no worries about money. But then it is back to the real world, it is all hassle.’ For Tristan, it was a difficult time. He was moving from a structured environment, even though he had Bernadette with him, he was still vulnerable.

Bernadette says that getting a property was a challenge; ‘when you find a property it is really hard. There was no financial support and it was a really slow start.’ When they got their house, it was a shell. They had a few basic things and it was a mess. Bernadette and Tristan wouldn’t have chosen the house they have. They know that the local bidding system does not really work. But it was their support
worker who really helped them and Tristan acknowledges that without him, he probably wouldn’t have bothered. ‘The form I had to fill had over 50 pages and I couldn’t have done it on my own.’

Tristan’s support worker said that the system has become so complicated. ‘In the old system you might have got a community care grant. Now the system is automated, there is no empathy, no contact. You become a number and who cares if you get the grant or not’.

Their Open Doors Grant paid for carpeting. Tristan was able to get really good quality underlay from an old client and so the carpet is properly laid. This means that the house is now much warmer. Tristan and Bernadette are really proud of the fact that they bought good quality carpet with their grant.

Tristan says ‘Getting a grant alleviates another headache and it is a weight off your shoulders. It helps you have a routine. It stops you making mountains out of molehills. The grant helps give a bit of structure, I know how easy it would be to trigger my drinking again. If you live in a dung heap, you will go back to what you know. It is such a little part, but it is another little part that helps put things back into place. It is part of lots of ingredients that come together.’ Bernadette says ‘It is nice that someone cares – you are not a government statistic anymore’.

Tristan knows that without the help he has received and the cash grant, he wouldn’t face up to his issues, he would focus on how rubbish his home and his life was. The grant means he has to face up to things and change.

Case Study – Lorraine, Money Advice Team

For Lorraine it is hard to judge what the long term effects of Universal Credit will be, because it is still being rolled out, however, there are already some concerns. First of all, there is a lack of understanding about Universal Credit from clients. Also, because Universal Credit is paid monthly, many claimants have to wait 5 weeks or more for their first payment. Lorraine feels that when those currently in receipt of housing benefit move over to Universal Credit, there will be further problems.

The two biggest concerns around welfare reform for Lorraine and her team are changes to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) assessments and the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. The issue around the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy is that there are not enough single bedroom properties in the area. Local authorities can make use of a discretionary housing payment to mitigate this, but many authorities are now saying that they cannot keep renewing this. Many of Lorraine’s clients will have lived in their properties for many years and so they do not want to move. Moving also makes these people more vulnerable because it may take them away from social support networks.

ESA is problematic because there are so many appeals. There is also a more challenging issue around mental health; not all people with drug and alcohol issues see their GP and it is sometimes difficult to identify whether someone has an underlying mental health issue which is compounding their alcohol or substance misuse. Lorraine and her team have recently supported a young woman who had built up significant arrears. She was agoraphobic, had failed her ESA assessment and had become so depressed that she did not appeal. ‘She just shut the front door on the world.’

Lorraine is concerned that there is now very little funding to provide on-going support so that people can maintain the progress they have made with managing their money and supporting their wellbeing. Lorraine has also seen reductions in support from local welfare, with some schemes closing all together. Local Authorities have become very strict on loans and some have stopped crisis loans altogether. This makes the role of the Open Doors Programme all the more important.

Case Study – Corinne, Project Manager

Corinne manages a service supporting ex-offenders. It provides tenancy support and helps ex-offenders to access appropriate housing.
The old Local Welfare Fund system was not working for Corinne. Clients were given a large cash payment and too often clients struggled to use the money wisely, because it was an unsupervised spend. The notion of a supervised spend was introduced briefly but now Local Welfare has ceased altogether.

Corinne sees an Opens Doors Grant as a ‘supported spend’. Her project uses the grants in two ways: to help secure a flat or property or to ensure that a flat has basic furnishings, like carpets and curtains. Corinne feels that the grant helps clients to create a home and builds a sense of ownership for them. A lot of the properties in her area are far from nice but the pressure for housing means that clients must sign for them. It can leave them asking themselves ‘why am I bothering?’ While Corinne does try and access funding from other organisations, this is getting harder to access and their resources are becoming more limited.

The majority of Corinne’s client group struggle to access local authority housing. The nature of their offending, such as anti-social behaviour or burglary, may mean that they are barred from applying. This means that they are reliant on private landlords. While there is a bond scheme in operation in Corinne’s area, not all landlords accept bonds. In these cases, landlords are now often asking not only for a deposit but an administration fee as well. An Open Doors Grant is really helpful in these circumstances, ensuring someone is able to move into a new home.

Corinne feels that grants don’t just meet practical needs - they also help build the relationship between a worker and client. Grants play a major role in sustaining a tenancy. In Corinne’s area crisis loans have been stopped. In addition, ex-offenders are often coping with high levels of rent arrears because their social housing tenancies have not been ended when they go to prison. They don’t realise that the tenancy is their responsibility, and although there are supposed to be housing workers in prison to ensure they have ended them, too many people fall through the net.

Corinne has noticed that cuts have meant that it is harder to make personal contact with housing officers. ‘You used to meet with your housing officer, now it is done on a phone-based call back system. So many times, you will have the client with you, then they have to go to another meeting and by the time the housing officer rings back, they have gone and you have to start again. There are really good people but they often have really large caseloads and so are struggling too.’

Corinne’s is concerned at the lack of supported housing in her area; this impacts on those clients who have an offending history or who accrued large arrears. While they will try and make the case with the local authority on grounds of vulnerability or mental health, it remains challenging. ‘It can be very hard to find a place for somebody over 25. This is why Open Doors is so important. It really suits what we are about. It can help get somebody a flat through a private landlord and can really boost their self-esteem, or it can help someone already in a flat to help create a home. There are so many hurdles and barriers, so making access easier is really important. But also if someone can take pride in their home, there is more chance that they will invest. If you move into a home with bare floors and no curtains, it is not a good start. Vulnerable people need something to be proud of.’
... the grant showed that there is a way out – before I was stuck and trapped.

Grant recipient