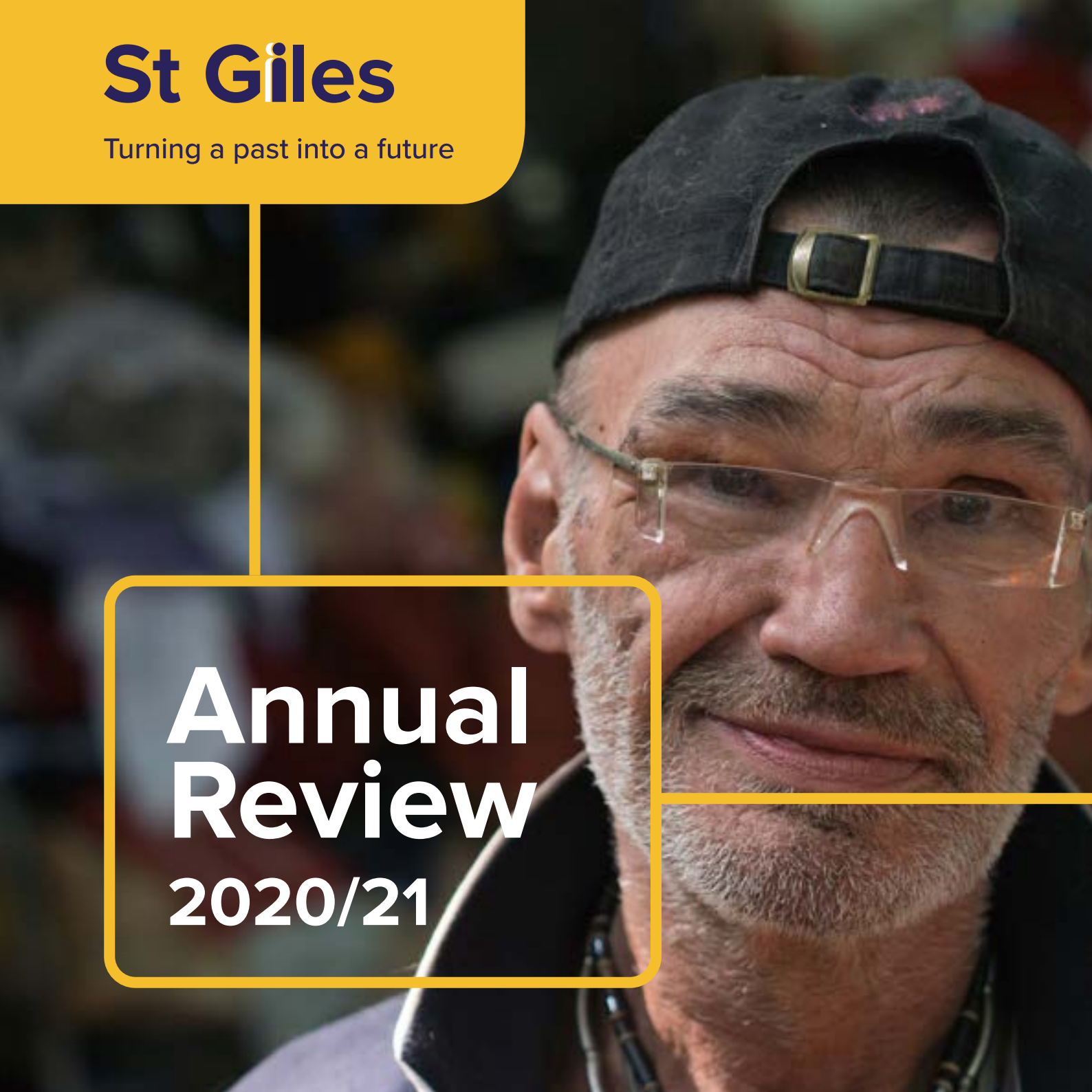


St Giles

Turning a past into a future

Annual Review 2020/21





“

The situation I'm most proud of is a person whose life I saved. It was out by Tower Bridge and the person was a gambler and he lost everything. I could see that this man was going to jump. I spoke to him in a gentle and calm voice and just helped him to get back from the bridge.

The shock hit me...

...and made me realise how affecting having a conversation can be and how big an impact it can have on a person. It showed me that I can make a difference, even if we always think that a conversation can't change someone's life."

Feedback from Peer Advisor

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Foreword from Duncan Gibson

Chair, St Giles

The past year has posed unprecedented challenges for charities. Many have experienced financial difficulties against a backdrop of increased demand for their services.

At St Giles, there were a number of key steps we had to take at the start of the pandemic. The first was to ensure our clients and staff were safe and that they were protected from the effects of the pandemic as best we could. An emergency fundraising appeal was launched which raised valuable income to ensure we could support our clients with essentials needed to get through the coming difficult months – food, shelter, digital equipment and educational resources.

The second was to ensure that we were able to adapt to the immediate changes in our landscape and that we had the right structures and working practices in place to support this. IT and digital moved from the backroom to the frontline as a significant portion of our caseworkers used digital means to carry out their daily work. For those who could not work remotely we needed to ensure that the right measures were in place with our partners to ensure our teams could stay safe and well.

Lastly, it remained vital that we stayed true to our long-term vision and purpose of helping people experiencing adversity build better futures through our peer-led approach. Some of the adaptations to our services and support structures that we made for Covid have opened up new possibilities. Our clients became digitally enabled and empowered through online delivery which in turn improves their employability skills. Our work around food poverty through the Pantries took on a new meaning and access to healthy food has turned into a means of

reaching new clients with our expert advice and guidance services. In a lot of areas we probably won't completely be going back to how we were before.

We are now facing what is possibly an unprecedented recession and there will be some real challenges ahead for everyone in the sector. More people will be in need of support against a backdrop of limited income. We will all need to deliver smart ways of working which involve collaboration, lived experience and digital delivery.

I am confident that St Giles has the resilience, experience and wisdom to overcome these future challenges and ensure that we continue to help individuals and communities successfully navigate the difficulties that the post Covid world will present. We will continue what we have always done best – providing high quality services delivered by people with first hand experience of adversity and who really understand the lives of our clients.

I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues on the Board who give their time and knowledge so freely and to the Senior Management Team at St Giles who have steered us through uncertain times. I would also like to say a huge thanks to the dedicated staff team whose life-changing work impacts us all.

Finally, I am of course extremely grateful to the many funders, partners and supporters who make our work possible. We never take your support for granted and will remain accountable, open to learning and committed to delivering on our promises.



“

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Denise Jagger, Outgoing Chair

Statement from Rob Owen OBE

Chief Executive, St Giles

The Covid pandemic has had a profound effect on all of us. However, the worst of times are hopefully over and better days are ahead. As individuals, we have learned how to adapt and the same has happened to our services and ways of working at St Giles.

Restrictions meant we had to rethink how we continued to offer the quality, caring services we are known for and relied upon under extraordinary conditions. Covid had a disproportionate impact on our clients and many were in crisis – suddenly faced with social isolation, poverty and unemployment. It was vital that we acted fast to provide emergency relief and ongoing support.

Our staff showed the professionalism and resilience for which they known and were there for our clients every step of the way. Many of them lacked any support structure or networks aside from their St Giles caseworker. Our staff gave them the time, compassion and dignity that each of our clients deserve and guided them through the darkest days of Covid.

Despite the uncertainty the whole world was under, our services continued to develop and grow. Our national network of Peer Hubs flourished and – alongside our existing Peer Hubs in London, Coventry, Leeds and North Wales - we launched our hub in Norwich as well as developing our presence in Scotland and Northern



Ireland. The county lines intervention services we are known for received Home Office funding to enable us to expand these across the UK and work with Violence

Reduction Units to address local needs specific to each area. From one single Pantry in West London we now have five across England helping to lift our clients out of poverty and distress.

I want to shine a light on the extraordinary effort, commitment and dedication shown by my staff over the past year. The pandemic brought about challenging circumstances for many of them too – bereavement, illness and anxiety – and I was humbled by the way some of them used their own adversities to empathise and support their clients.

Behind the headline figures lies a great deal of patience and persistence as the situations we are working with are complex and there are no easy solutions. For the first year, we have begun to record small victories which mark individual successes with clients who have experienced particular challenges. These include three elderly gentlemen who regularly met up in our West London Pantry who were supported by our team to continue to meet outdoors during the lockdown for companionship and support – particularly important as two of them were recently bereaved.

Another was a young man who was heavily involved in gangs and drugs who agreed to move back in with his mum and – with our support – his school attendance improved to over 90% and his predicted grades ‘looked promising’. A man being supported by our employment support team was finally successful in securing a job after 1,000 applications.

There are many, many more of these small victories I could share and they would all add up to show the true value of what our teams do. These successes are only possible thanks to the generosity and support of all our donors and funders. For this I would like to say a big thank you from all of us here at St Giles and from the clients we support.

“

Just like we are there for our clients, thank you for being there for us. With your continued support, we can ensure individuals and communities flourish as we hopefully move beyond Covid.

**Rob Owen OBE,
Chief Executive, St Giles**

As we move forward – hopefully towards a time when Covid plays a less dominant role in our daily lives – we will be responding to the pressing social needs left by the post-pandemic situation. 2022 is St Giles’s 60th anniversary and we will be using this celebration as an opportunity to take St Giles to the next level and help more people who need our life-changing services.

We already know that unemployment, child criminal exploitation, poverty and mental health issues will continue to prevent our clients from moving forward. Despite the challenging landscape and lack of public funds, it is vital we continue to grow and develop to ensure that individuals who are often forgotten about are supported and able to thrive well.

Who we are

ST GILES is an award-winning social justice charity using expertise and real-life past experiences to empower people who are not getting the help they need.

People held back by poverty, exploited, abused, dealing with addiction or mental health problems, caught up in crime or a combination of these issues and others.

We show people there is a way to build a better future – for themselves and those they care about -and help them create this through support, advice and training.

The people we help each year have a diverse range of needs. These cover:

- Help for vulnerable young people involved in or at risk of criminal exploitation
- Services helping adults and young people facing unemployment and poverty
- Help for vulnerable women and families
- Prison and community-based support for people in the criminal justice system

Our objectives are:

- Building a sense of safety and stability
- Building aspirations, skills and positive futures
- Building connections to move forwards

We believe people have the power to turn their life around, regardless of their situation. Many of our employees have been in similar situations and use their lived experiences to inspire and support those living through it right now.

Our vision

We want to see a society where everybody – no matter what their background – has a positive future. This is because when somebody turns their life around, everybody benefits – their families, their children, the community they live in and society as a whole. Those we help are facing huge challenges which have been made more acute as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we are working with our partners and local communities to do something about it – supporting people to turn their pasts into positive futures.

Our purpose

We believe strongly that, given the right support from someone who has been there, people can be empowered to turn their lives around.

We show people there's a way to build a better future – for themselves and those they care about -and help them create this through support, advice and training. It's not easy – we empower and encourage each person to overcome the adversity they face. If they stumble, we're there to pick them back up.

We inspire people to think big for themselves and their families, helping them to build internal resilience and a place in society. We raise awareness of their situation and fight their corner, agitating the current landscape to ensure long term changes are put in place to ensure people succeed.



Our solution

We see the person behind the problems and help them turn their lives around, then train and support them do the same for others. We know that they aren't defined by those problems, they're trapped by them and we help them see their strengths and find a way forward.

We can do that because many of our staff come from the same backgrounds and have overcome similar problems – they've been there, done that and speak the language of the people we support.

That combination of lived experience and expertise means that our staff work with passion and quality throughout everything they do.

Overview of the year



April /May 2020

With the first national lockdown, our teams swung into action and moved to offering intensive online and phone support. We launched an urgent appeal to pay for the essentials our clients needed to see them through the pandemic. We repurposed our Brewbird social enterprise café in south London to become a Pantry which provided food parcels for self-isolating clients who had no access to online resources to buy their essentials.

June 2020

Generous support from our donors enabled us to raise over £250,000 through our Covid 19 Appeal. It created a fund to help our clients with essentials such as IT equipment, training resources, stationary and educational resources.

This was further enhanced by a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund which helped us meet additional needs which emerged amongst our clients as a result of the pandemic.

July 2020

Building on our existing county lines support services, we launched a new Home Office funded service helping children and young people criminally exploited through county lines make a safe and sustained exit.



August 2020

Figures showed that the London-based Pantry supported around 700 clients each week at peak delivery and some 83,000 healthy, sustainable meals were delivered in the first two months. Alongside food support, the team helped clients access essential information and advice to address underlying issues trapping people in poverty.

September 2020

Our hospital-based violence reduction work expanded to Northwick Park hospital in north west London. A Mayor of London report into the work of the multi-agency Rescue and Response project demonstrated that over half of the young people support through the project either exited or made positive progress to exit county lines activity since the project's start in 2018



November 2020.

Internationally acclaimed menswear designer Martine Rose chose St Giles to benefit from her collaboration with streetwear label Stussy. We were further delighted when Martine then chose to become a Patron and for St Giles to become her label's charity partner.

December 2020

St Giles launched Peer Hubs in Scotland and Northern Ireland, training people facing disadvantage in local communities to become qualified Peer Advisors helping others make positive progress.

Quarterly performance figures showed a fourfold increase in the need for employment support amongst our clients when compared to the first quarter of the financial year.

January 2021

A City & Guilds Foundation grant enabled a digital platform to be created for our Peer Advisors, meaning they could stay connected and in contact with each other digitally during the lockdown and beyond.



February 2021

An award from the Youth Futures Foundation meant we were able to offer more employment support to young people whose employment prospects were negatively affected by the pandemic.

March 2021

Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner announced they were extending funding for the Wonder Project helping vulnerable women across the county for a further year. The Wonder team also spoke at an online event we held to mark International Women's Day.



How we allocated our funds





Our services across the UK

Camberwell
Southwark
Kensington
Chelsea
Hackney
Northwick
Whittington
Newham
Whipps Cross
Enfield
Greenwich
Lambeth
Hounslow
Brent
Norfolk
King's Lynn
Great Yarmouth
Margate

Cardiff
Vale of Glamorgan
Swansea
Gwent
Newport
Wrexham
County Lines
Tonbridge
Maidstone
Coventry
Wolverhampton
Coventry
Dudley
Leeds
West Yorkshire
Humber
Wakefield
Glasgow
Belfast

London

Service: Lambeth Early Helpers Area: London

For young people on the periphery of entering the youth justice system or criminal exploitation, or youth violence.

Service – South London Peer Hub Area: Camberwell, south London

Training people from the local community who have experienced and overcome disadvantage to become qualified Peer Advisors who help others in their community also make the same journey of positive change.

Service: Adder-accelerator Hackney Area: London

Working with individuals who have complex substance misuse needs and other issues with the end goal of reducing deaths caused by substance misuse.

Service: Edge of Care Project Area: London

Works with families that are at risk of going to legal proceedings, and their children are likely to go into care. They also work with isolated care leavers and those in foster placements that are breaking down.

Service: Community Harm and Exploitation Hub Area: London

For 18-25 year old males that are involved in gangs, criminal behaviour associated to serious youth violence, child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation.

Service - Brewbird Café – Camberwell

Brewbird offers fresh new opportunities to people who need added help to find employment. It gives them a stepping stone towards permanent employment, helping them gain confidence and new skills.

Service: Southwark Inclusive Learning Service Pupil Referral Unit mentoring Area: Southwark

Working with boys in Key Stage 4 that have been highlighted as having concerns around criminal behaviour, gang affiliation and those that are likely to be excluded from the alternative provision.

Service – The Pantry (Southwark, Kensington and Chelsea, Hackney)

The Pantry offers high quality, nutritious and healthy food to those struggling to feed themselves and their families. Expert advice and personal face-to-face support is on hand from our trained Peer Advisors, who help address the underlying issues leading to poverty.



Your Path

Area: Southwark

Skills and employment service working with young people who have added support needs. Funded by Southwark Council and part of the Southwark Works network.

Hospital interventions with young people

Areas: London hospitals – The Royal London, Northwick Park, Whipps Cross, Whittington Hospital, Newham Hospital

Supporting victims aged 10-25 of serious youth violence in London, being present when they're brought in and discussing their situation directly with clinicians. The team also trains and supports clinical colleagues to identify and engage with victims so that when St Giles workers are not present, the chances successful follow-ups is increased.

Working Out Southwark

Area: Southwark

Skills and employment support working with Southwark residents over the age of 18 who are unemployed or looking for better work. Funded by Southwark Council and part of the Southwark Works network.

London borough-based gangs work

All boroughs provide a holistic support package to clients, covering a broad range of services. Intensive mentoring services covered, working in a multi discipline, multi-agency approach. All referrals are sent to caseworkers via the community safety/ services teams they are embedded in.

Enfield - working within the Community Safety Team

Greenwich – for children and young people involved in or at risk of gangs and criminal exploitation

Islington – working within the Targeted Youth Services and Integrated Gangs Team

Hackney – working within the Integrated Gangs Unit

Lambeth - working within the Community Safety Team

Kensington & Chelsea – working across the borough

Hounslow – working within the Community Safety Team

Brent - working within the Community Safety Team

London South East Colleges – embedded into the college Community Services Teams

Choices

Area: across London

Help for young people aged 16-24 who have involvement in the criminal justice system or are at risk of becoming involved.

Eastern England



Service: WREN (Women Rising Empowering Neighbourhoods)
Area: King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth, Margate

Grant programme offering grassroots organisations providing support to women the opportunity to train them as community champions through providing free training and qualifications.

Service: Footsteps
Area: East of England

In collaboration with the Wise Group and funded by the Ministry of Justice, Footsteps provides wraparound support to women in the criminal justice system, acknowledging the complex array of issues female offenders face to help them get their lives back on track.

Service: Pathways Out
Areas: East Anglia

In partnership with the DWP East Anglia, Pathways Out tackles substance misuse through a whole system approach, particularly around providing opportunities around education, training and employment.

Service: Wonder+
Areas: Norfolk



Commissioned by Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner, WONDER+ works with vulnerable women in Norfolk, helping them get the help they need to prevent issues from escalating further.

Service: Peer Hub
Area: East of England



Supports women who have experienced complex disadvantage with one-to-one, tailored interventions through the use Women's Wellbeing Coaches and volunteer Peer Advisors

Kent

Service: Peer Advisor Programme
Area: Kent

Trains community members, including parents, young people who have been supported and others within the community who may have been out of education and training.

Service: Neck of the Woods
Area: Tonbridge and Maidstone

An early intervention project that offers both outreach and case management work.

Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation

Area: Kent

Support for young people aged under 25 who are involved in or at risk of violence and exploitation.

West Midlands



Service: SOS+ **Area: Coventry**

Preventative work in schools and other similar settings raising awareness of issues around weapons crime, drugs, serious violence and child criminal exploitation. It uses trained professionals with first-hand experience of these issues to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to stay safe.

Service: The Pantry **Area: Coventry**

The Pantry offers high quality, nutritious and healthy food to those struggling to feed themselves and their families. Expert advice and personal face-to-face support is on hand from our trained Peer Advisors who help address the underlying issues leading to poverty.

Hospital interventions with young people

Area - Wolverhampton, Coventry and Dudley

Supporting victims of serious youth violence, being present when admitted to hospital and discussing their situation directly with clinicians.

Transform and Desist

Area: Coventry

A combination of two existing projects - A community service supporting under-25's involved in the child criminal justice system, at risk of exploitation or youth violence. The service also includes supporting care leavers in prison to increase their chances of education, training and employment on release, funded by the Department of Education and based in HMP Brinsford and HMP Warrington

Peer Hub

Area: Coventry

Training people from the local community who have experienced and overcome disadvantage to become qualified Peer Advisors who help others in their community also make the same journey of positive change.

Ending Violent Abuse and Exploitation – Nurturing New Adventures

Area: Coventry and Wolverhampton

Supporting young women and girls under 18 who are at risk, on the periphery or entrenched within child criminal exploitation, gangs, county lines and/or child sexual exploitation.

Yorkshire



COPE (Children of Prisoners Empowered)

Area: Leeds

Working with children and the wider family where a parent is in custody to support them emotionally and to break down the stigma of having a parent in prison.

SFT- (Strengthening Family Ties)

Area: Leeds

Supporting people in custody to make or maintain family ties and helping them through their release back into the community.

West Yorkshire Accommodation Service

Area – Yorkshire and Humber

St Giles, in partnership with Shelter and Nacro, deliver the HMPPS Commissioned Rehabilitative Services accommodation contract in Yorkshire and Humber, supporting men on probation or in prison to maintain the accommodation they already have, or to find new accommodation if they are facing homelessness.

Wellbeing support for women

Area: Yorkshire

Support for female prison leavers around wellbeing to ensure they feel connected and supported.

The Peer Hub

Area: Leeds

Training people from the local community who have experienced and overcome disadvantage to become qualified Peer Advisors who help others in their community also make the same journey of positive change.

Early intervention

Area: Wakefield

Outreach support working with young people at risk of being involved in gangs and child criminal exploitation to support them to look at changing their mindset, build aspirations. referrals come from local services.

SOS+ service

Area: West Yorkshire

Preventative work in schools and other settings including Youth Offending Institutions to raise awareness of issues around weapons crime, drugs, serious violence and child criminal exploitation. It uses trained professionals with first- hand experience of these issues to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to stay safe.

Teachable moments

Area: Wakefield

Working alongside the police in the Wakefield and surrounding areas to attend after an incident has taken place, offering support at point of arrest and following this up in the community.

Scotland

The Peer Hub

Area: Glasgow

Training people from the local community who have experienced and overcome disadvantage to become qualified Peer Advisors who help others in their community also make the same journey of positive change.

Northern Ireland

The Peer Hub

Area: Belfast

Training people from the local community who have experienced and overcome disadvantage to become qualified Peer Advisors who help others in their community also make the same journey of positive change.



Wales

Service: Personal Wellbeing – Wales **Area: Wales**

Eight wellbeing contracts across Wales supporting men leaving custody who need personal help.

Service: ATLAS **Area: Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan**

European Social Fund commissioned project supporting people who are long term unemployed or economically inactive.

Service: Children & Family Service **Area: Wales**

Supporting disadvantaged families in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Service: Prevent **Area: Cardiff**

Holistic support for people in Cardiff referred to us through the Channel Panel.

Service: Swansea Serious Organised Crime/Serious Youth Violence **Area: Swansea**

As part of the South Wales Violence Prevention Unit, support for young people in Swansea who are involved in serious organised crime, youth violence and county lines.

Gwent Serious Organised Crime/Serious Youth Violence

Area: Gwent

Supporting young people in Gwent involved in SOC/serious youth violence and/or county lines. Also facilitate sessions in schools focussing on county lines and knife crime prevention.

CLIC – County Lines in Cymru

Area: Cardiff

Supporting young people in Cardiff who are involved in county lines.

Newport Schools

Area: Newport

Preventative sessions aimed at girls at schools in Newport raising awareness of child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation.

Service: Peer Hubs **Areas: Cardiff and Wrexham**

Training people from local communities who have experienced and overcome disadvantage to become qualified Peer Advisors who help others in their communities also make the same journey of positive change.



“

Nine clients who previously refused to engage with our service have all been in contact and are moving forward with support.



Bringing others with them on their progression

Peer Advice

The Peer Advisor Programme forms the foundation of our work. It provides a structured programme of accredited training and support for people with lived experience, enabling them to gain sustainable employment whilst helping others on their journey.

We have been delivering the programme for the past 20 years and its alumni have progressed to work in a diverse range of fields and careers. It's tried and tested approach of providing advice and guidance training to people with lived experience of complex disadvantage has transformed thousands of lives.

We are extremely grateful to the National Lottery Communities Fund for supporting our Peer Advisor Programme and the network of Peer Hubs which deliver it.

The Covid challenges

The restrictions posed by lockdown meant we moved the Peer Advisor training and support online. Practically, this posed challenges for clients training as Peer Advisors who did not have access to IT equipment. The Covid 19 Crisis Fund help us secure laptops for these Peer trainees and without access to this safety net many would not have been able to continue their training. Our teams developed online training resources whilst both Peer Advisors and Trainers got to grips with Zoom and Teams to ensure training could carry on as smoothly as possible.

Beyond these practicalities, the lack of face-to-face and personal contact was extremely difficult for many Peer Advisors and their clients as they tried to stay resilient in the face of anxiety and other emotional issues. However, the ability to continue supporting others has been crucial:

Mental health support

Lockdown and other Covid restrictions increased levels of anxiety and social isolation for some Peer Advisors and their clients. As such, we have introduced specialist mental health support into our services with teams able to benefit from in-house mental health support workers. They offer direct help and link people up with further services from external sources where needed. This has been of critical importance at a time of severe pressure on statutory mental health services.

Digital coaching

A switch to online learning and services has meant we have had to ensure our Peer Advisors are fully supported when using IT for themselves and their clients. Many trainee Peer Advisors lacked confidence and experience in this area due to factors such as lack of access to digital devices, long-term unemployment and limited work experience in jobs that use IT. Digital coaches have been engaged to help our Peer Advisor learners gain skills, confidence and practical knowledge. Support from the City and Guilds Foundation enabled us to develop the Connectedr digital platform which has helped Peer Advisors to stay connected, share knowledge and learn from each other despite limited face-to-face contact.

59%

of partner organisations questioned said they would probably or definitely host Peer Advisor placements in the future.

Matrix assessment

We participated in an assessment for Matrix Standard which is the international quality standard for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance. St Giles's Peer Advisor Network was successful in securing re-accreditation as one of several services from St Giles. This required work by all peer hubs to prepare evidence of impact, learning, and quality assurance, and participation in interviews with the assessor. The assessment report notes the significant strengths and benefits of the peer advisor programme model and states "There is a clear strategic and operational aim and framework in place for the Peer Advisor Network project."

Job successes through the pandemic

One of the most heartening outcomes was our continued success in helping Peer Advisors continue to successfully gain employment through the pandemic with Peer Advisors securing jobs in a range of areas but most commonly continuing to work in the field of advice and guidance.

Scotland and Northern Ireland

A National Lottery Communities Fund Reaching Communities grant secured in 2019 enabled us to expand our Peer Advisor Programme and develop a network of Peer Hubs across the UK. In 2020, we established our Peer Advisor Programme in Scotland and Northern Ireland – the first time St Giles has ever worked outside of England and Wales. This has given us an exciting opportunity to work with new partners to grow the Peer Advisor Programme in these two countries and develop approaches meeting regional needs and priorities.

“

"I am providing telephone support for people who are finding things difficult, or have nobody to talk to. It has helped reduce my own isolation. It has given me confidence and the skills to be better at supporting others... seeing people feel better in themselves, knowing I am making a difference. One person was feeling really low and had nobody to talk to. We talked each week and looked at how she could get help. She felt listened to, from someone who understood how she was feeling. She tells me she is in a better place now and has the confidence to tell the doctor how she is feeling."

**Peer Advisor who trained through
Covid restrictions**

Looking ahead

We are embedding our peer-led approach across the sector and are committed to continuing this positive progress through extending our range of partners and finding new ways to offer our services. Partner organisations from across the country are now benefitting from the authentic, professional, committed input of our Peer Advisors and the rich diversity they bring. We will now be taking this to the next stage, providing opportunities for a wide range of organisations to consolidate best practice around peer-led services through commissioning our experienced Peer Advisors as consultants, advisors and trainers. Not only with this help generate sustainable income for the programme, it will also help promote sector change and ensure that organisations have the tools and skills to incorporate lived experience into their services.



“

My client has been supported into a football coaching programme and not smoked any weed for four months as a result.



“

I helped someone to save his tenancy. He got a 28 day notice and we were able to change this around for him. He's doing really well now, he's got a job and stayed in his flat. My support in this situation came through communication and liaising. He didn't speak to social workers or placement officers so I was bridging communication between everyone involved and finding solutions and problem solving.

Feedback from Peer Advisor

“

Nearly all my caseload have shown improved attendance at school and are keeping up with their studies!

Sustaining personal growth, creating independence

Employment support

Our work in this area has been extremely busy over the past year as many of our current and former clients lost their jobs due to the pandemic effects. Hospitality and retail were two areas particularly hard hit and both of these were ones in which our former clients were heavily employed. At one point, help with employment accounted for 25% of all client contact with our teams, rising fourfold in the first six months of the year.

Much of this work involves addressing the underlying issues which might be holding our clients back. These are typically related to poor housing and/or homelessness, poverty, being young care leavers or carers, leaving prison and long-term unemployment. Alongside the practical barriers these issues can present, lack of a job can also knock a person's confidence and levels of motivation. Our role is to offer added support, working with each individual at their own pace.

Alongside employment, our teams have also continued to support people to access the skills training they need to boost their employment prospects. Lockdown presented challenges given the restrictions on face-to-face contact but we adapted our services to offer online and phone support and training.

This included encouraging clients to enrol for online courses and training which also helped provide structure and motivation during periods of staying indoors. Many clients, particularly the younger ones, have been supported with applying for college courses.

Redundancies and furloughs have frequently affected our clients over this past year, some of them former clients who had successfully transitioned to independence with our support and returned to us once more after experiencing job losses. This was an added blow after previously making such positive progress. Both emotional and practical support has been provided to help clients stay motivated, reassured and engaged.

As reported last year, in-work poverty continues to affect many of our clients through the continued prevalence of zero hours contracts and jobs that fail to pay a living wage. Our teams helped clients access further training in order to secure work with better pay and conditions, offering emergency help with finances and food through our Pantries if needed.

The types of jobs our clients have obtained over the past year have been varied – from hostel work, construction to engineering apprenticeships.

Looking ahead

Although the employment market is buoyant for some, many of the most disadvantaged people in society are held back from accessing opportunities. In particular, the young people we support are facing a particularly tough time as they are largely represented in sectors which have been very badly affected by the pandemic – retail, hospitality and leisure.

Whilst we cannot control the employment landscape, we will continue to work with our clients to build their confidence and skills, helping them progress on a road which ends with sustainable employment.

*Quoted in The Peer Advisor Network, Interim Evaluation Report, 2021 Revolving Doors Agency



“

I feel like I'm part of the human race having a job now...it's giving meaning to my life...I'd lost a bit of who I was.

**Former Peer Advisor,
now in paid employment***

439

people in work

105

people sustained their job for
six months or more

1087

people into an improved
employment status

John

Before coming to St Giles I had just left alcohol services after a 13 week rehab program. Before going there I was dependently drinking for about five years. My life was very chaotic and going nowhere. I was a lorry driver and drink driving most days. I had lost my family support and eventually got caught drink driving and lost my job.

The day after, I was admitted to hospital for my liver for three days. This was the last straw and, with the support from my daughter, I decided to do the rehab. It turned out to be the best decision I've ever made. I heard about the St Giles Peer Advisor course when I was in rehab but at first I thought that I would be no good at advising anybody.

However, a couple of the support workers thought that I might be good at it so I decided to give it a go. When the course started I was low on confidence but got on well with everyone on it and it went well despite the lockdown challenges.

Amy (my course Trainer) has been very supportive and has gone out of her way to make sure the course has got finished. It has given me a lot more self confidence not only in my abilities as a Peer Advisor but in life in general. I am volunteering now for Engage Leeds which is something I never thought I would be doing. It's given me a focus and plays a big part in keeping me sober in my recovery. It has also given me the drive to do this as a job. A year ago going back to work was a dream but now it's a distinct possibility.

A close-up, slightly high-angle shot of a man with a shaved head and a short beard, smiling broadly. He is wearing a white tank top. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“

... It has given me a lot more self confidence not only in my abilities as a Peer Advisor but in life in general.

Valerie

Valerie, from North Wales, is a young person who trained as a Peer Advisor through the Wrexham Peer Hub after experiencing homelessness and adverse childhood experiences.

At the time she came into contact with St Giles, she was attending sessions at her local youth centre who referred her to us as she was already providing support to other young people at the centre.

When we first met Valerie, she was lacking in confidence despite the fact she clearly had ability and skills. Our Trainer worked with her to build her levels of self confidence and get her starting on her Peer Advisor training.

It became apparent that Valerie did not have access to a laptop for her coursework or any money to travel to and from her placement with a small local charity. We helped her get funding for travel and a laptop. However, she was not initially confident about using it so we supported her with a Digital Skills Coach who could help her build her IT skills.

Valerie's confidence grew and she successfully completed her coursework whilst doing well in her placement. She has found the experience of training as a Peer Advisor to be a gamechanger and tells us that she is now doing things that she would never have had the confidence to do previously. This included applying for funding on behalf of the young clients she was supporting, helping them build CVs and look for college courses. She has now been offered a paid position at her placement – her first ever job.

We've changed their name to protect the young person's identity.



“

... she is now doing things that she would never have had the confidence to do previously.

Clair Blair

Clair Blair volunteers on the Yorkshire Pantry. She came into contact with us during the pandemic when she ran into difficulties with her benefits. She also has underlying health issues. Here she tells her story.

COVID 19 came out of the blue for me. I had no time to sort out anything as I had to isolate due to my underlying health issues and contact with people who could have had the virus. Told to stay in when you live by yourself and have only a limited income is hard at the best of times and would raise anyone's anxiety levels through the roof. The world as we knew it changed overnight.

Food shopping was hard, going out and the food you usually buy is no longer available, having to go further away than usual just to buy essential items that you need. There were no face-to-face appointments and no internet connection to fill out forms. There were no support staff to help with daily living which a lot of people rely upon each week. It caused a lot of people to lose benefits and they had to go to food banks.

also get help with benefits, housing, bills etc all under one roof.

St Giles helps anyone who is in need of support and all you have to do is register for the service. Without it, many families in Leeds would suffer even more than usual. Not being able to eat a full meal at least twice a day is bad, sometimes people only eat once a day and that could be only a bowl of cereal.

Times are hard for everyone but if we stand together and keep each other safe by wearing our masks and washing our hands more often than usual we'll be good to go. Next year marks the 60th anniversary of St Giles and I'm hoping for another 60 years plus. The staff are so kind and caring, polite, respectful, friendly and helpful to all who come through the doors. Their staff are trained in all aspects of life as they've lived it.

They are always welcoming no matter what the situation is - big or small - helpful is the word that I would use to describe all the staff. No matter who you are they speak to you with empathy and care.

St Giles is a blessing. It's local, it has food that you can choose yourself. And the Pantry only costs £3.50 each week to join and you

They listen to what you have to say and direct you to the right people who can help if they at St Giles can't. They will help you the best they can and put you in touch with the right people.



HOW WE WORK

The Pantry is run and operated by St Giles

Membership costs
a week and
you to one
per week

Members
up to
items

3 items
4 items

“

... St Giles put food on my table and gave me a new lease of life. They gave me hope.

Tommy

Late on a Friday evening, St Giles received a call about 13-year old Tommy who had been arrested for a drug offence nearly 200 miles away from his home in the West Midlands.

The St Giles caseworker headed off to collect Tommy and bring him safely back to his care placement. It was 1am before he finally arrived. On meeting Tommy, it was clear that he had been exploited into county lines activity. He had not eaten for two days, looked dishevelled and disorientated.

The first step was to get Tommy out of harm's way and ensure he was fed. The caseworker used the return journey home to encourage Tommy to open up and persuade him to steer his life back on track. When they stopped at the service station for food, he explored with Tommy what had led him to end up in police custody many miles from home and what his future could look like if he did not start making different decisions. The caseworker went through the consequences of county line involvement and weapon carrying, alongside the risks and effects of grooming and exploitation.

By the time they reached home at 6am the following morning, Tommy had also told his caseworker his concerns around another friend who was possibly at risk and could potentially be going down the same route as him. Both boys are now being supported by St Giles and moving forward with their lives in a more positive way.

“

... Both boys are now being supported by St Giles and moving forward with their lives in a more positive way.



Peter

16 year old Peter had a history of frequently going missing. He was well-known to services but did not trust anyone enough to be able to open up for help.

The only person Peter will confide in is his St Giles caseworker, with whom he had previously been making positive progress until his parent's relationship broke down. This led to more missing episodes and he fell prey to negative influences. Peter was permanently excluded from school after having gone onto school premises with a weapon. He then went missing for a whole month.

Out of the blue, Peter's caseworker received a call from the police saying that they had located Peter but he would not speak to anyone other than the caseworker.

He travelled to meet Peter who was in a very bad way. Peter agreed to return home but said he needed to collect a couple of his belongings and would be ready in a couple of hours. He handed his SIM card to the caseworker to prove that he would return.

Sure enough, Peter was waiting for him as arranged. When he got into the car, he broke up the SIM card that his caseworker handed back to him. When asked why, he said he wouldn't need it any longer as it was linked to a county line and he now wanted out of that way of life.

Peter continued to work positively with his caseworker and there have been no more missing episodes. However, he is not out of the woods yet as things are still far from perfect at home which is affecting his attitude and behaviour. As a result we have recently further stepped up our support for him, with the goal of keeping him on a positive path and preventing a return to county line exploitation.



“

... he wouldn't need it any longer as it was linked to a county line and he now wanted out of that way of life.

Brianna

Brianna, who has a history of substance misuse, trained as a Peer Advisor and supported others as part of her own recovery and abstinence.

Brianna's goal in becoming a Peer Advisor was to use her experience to support others to turn around their lives whilst gaining a formal qualification and paid employment. She participated fully in training and support sessions with Peer Hub staff to review development and plan progression on her qualification, whilst receiving weekly support around topics like benefit and debt advice, wellbeing, and links to help her access free online training.

Support is flexible to meet Brianna's caring needs for several family members. During COVID19, we helped her with food vouchers to meet urgent new emerging needs she was experiencing due to the pandemic and lockdown. She was volunteering for 15 hours a week in a placement at the organisation where she was previously a client, with regular supervision to ensure the advice and guidance she provided delivered positive outcomes.

Brianna's journey demonstrates the impact training and working as a Peer Advisor can have for the individual, the clients they support and the organisations hosting placements. She increased in confidence and ambition, making good progress with her Level 3 qualification. She says making connections with people supported her own recovery, while her experiences help her spot when others were struggling. The organisation Brianna volunteered with commented on how clients feel safe with her, trust her and choose to go to her for support.



“

... making connections with people supported her own recovery, while her experiences help her spot when others were struggling.

Jamal

Jamal lives in London. When our caseworker Liban first met him, he was being exploited through a county line drug gang and things were looking bleak.

When Liban first started working with Jamal, he had a raft of court cases stacked up due to his county line exploitation. This also led to frequent missing episodes which meant he was not engaged with any form of education, training or employment. Jamal came from a loving family who did not understand why he was involved in drugs. Relations with them had soured and the risks Jamal was facing from the

gang meant that the whole family had to relocate to the other side of London. However, the exploitation and abuse persisted and Jamal was kidnapped and attacked outside the front of his home. At that point, Jamal was moved to a care placement for the safety of him and his family.

Throughout this incredibly traumatic time, Liban was at Jamal's side trying to help him emotionally and practically. Although Jamal was already known to other services, he refused to engage with most of them. However, as Liban came from a similar background he was able to build up a rapport with Jamal. As a result, he was able to find out full extent of

Jamal's county line involvement and identify the fact that, although he was involved in illegal activities, he was being heavily exploited and was a victim himself. Liban supported Jamal through his court appearances and advocated on his behalf, raising the safeguarding concerns with the court and professionals and obtaining additional information required to ensure that Jamal's age and vulnerability were taken into account. He also worked intensively with Jamal around his thinking and behaviour, gradually helping him see that he had choices which could give him a route out of the rut he was stuck in.

This included helping Jamal identify and pursue viable career choices. He helped Jamal build a CV and obtained a laptop so he could undertake short courses which would boost his employability. This paid off when he obtained his Construction Safety Certificate card. As a result, Jamal's levels of confidence and motivation started to increase and Liban encouraged him to regularly attend the gym. Not only would this support his physical health, it would also give him a daily structure and help keep him diverted away from negative influences. With Liban's support Jamal applied for jobs and eventually found one on a construction site working five days a week. With a regular source of steady income he was able to move into his own accommodation and build a new life.

A young man, identified as Jamal, is shown in profile, wearing a white hard hat and a high-visibility yellow safety vest over a black polo shirt. He is focused on his work, using a claw hammer to remove a dark grey roof shingle. The background shows the wooden rafters and blue insulation of a roof under construction.

“

From being trapped and exploited, Jamal is now an independent young man in full time work with positive goals. He has now completely exited county line involvement and relations with his family are much improved. Although he now no longer needs so much support, he still stays in contact with Liban as they have built up such a good rapport.

Enabling stability and independence

Tackling poverty

Our work helping people make ends meet had been growing over the last few years in the face of in-work poverty, cuts to support services and the barriers many of our clients face in securing sustainable employment.

The pandemic compounded this. Many families faced rising fuel and food costs whilst their children were out of school, others were experiencing redundancy and insecure employment.

Support from services such as our Covid 19 Crisis Fund, network of Pantries and access to high quality welfare and benefits advice became more crucial than ever last year.

The Covid 19 Crisis Fund

The rapid turn of events at the start of the pandemic left some of our clients in freefall so we launched an emergency appeal to raise funds to help keep our clients safe and address their basic needs. Thanks to the generous support of everyone who donated, it proved to be a lifeline

297 mobile phones, laptops, tablets and other forms of IT equipment were secured. Without this support, many of our clients would have faced the prospect of lockdown alone with no form of communication with the outside world at a time everyone was confined indoors. Children of families we were supporting would not have been able to continue their schoolwork without the essential laptops and tablets the fund helped us secure for them.

77 food vouchers and utility bill payments were made.

Some families would have faced the prospect of being cut off from their gas and electricity supplies during the cold winter months had we not been able to help them through the fund. Food vouchers were essential for clients unable to afford food for themselves and their families in areas where we do not yet provide a Pantry.

32 books and other forms of educational materials were purchased. This enabled children to continue their education indoors during the lockdowns.

In addition, the Covid 19 Crisis Fund helped us to cover the costs of courses for clients to undertake during the lockdown and secured essential white goods and other appliances for clients who required emergency housing.

If the fund had not been there, we would have found it a very big challenge to help our clients meet their essential needs and many of them would have been in deeply worrying situations. These could have had long term impacts that could have taken many months – even years – to reverse.



536
Crisis grants
to 431 clients



“

St Giles' Pantry has been a blessing. I am able to cook and eat a balanced meal every day. The staff are on hand to help me with any social issues I may have and can signpost me to another agency that can help me. They are kind and friendly, polite and never put me down or look down on me. They encourage me to pick healthy things and help me.

Client using the Camberwell Pantry

The Pantries

The raids on supermarket shelves through panic buying left some of the most vulnerable people in our communities facing the very real prospect of going hungry. Our Pantries swung into action to ensure our clients had access to affordable, healthy, nutritious food that could sustain them and their families.

Alongside our existing Pantry in west London, we established further Pantries throughout the year in Camberwell (south London), Coventry and Leeds. For a small weekly subscription, our clients can shop for high quality food just as they would at any normal supermarket shop.

During the course of the first lockdown, the Pantries distributed emergency food parcels to clients and their families in need. Many were self-isolating and unable to get to the shops. Lack of access to internet meant they could not order online and would have potentially gone hungry if they had not been provided with emergency parcels. These typically contained a mix of healthy, fresh produce alongside dried and tinned goods with added treats included.

122,142 meals have been provided through the Pantries and 700 people were fed each week at peak delivery. Additionally, 51 tonnes of food waste was repurposed and 156 children were provided with nutritious food.

Alongside food, a key role of our Pantries is to help address underlying needs. Our Peer Advisors are on hand to provide practical advice and guidance around any issue which might be trapping our clients in poverty such as unemployment, bad housing or problems with debts. Alongside practical support, they were a friendly face during a time when many of our clients were experiencing a great deal of anxiety and worry.



35 tonnes
of food were
delivered to
500 clients in
London

Benefits and welfare advice

Helping our clients navigate the maze of the welfare system is essential to ensure they have a legitimate form of income to rely on whilst they progress towards employment or move towards improving their employment circumstances. Our staff have stayed on top of changes to a complex system with the support of our in-house specialist Welfare Benefits Advisor. With her support, we have been able to help clients appeal against unfair decisions and stand up for their rights, ensuring there is sufficient support in place for them and their families. For some of our clients – particularly those with disabilities – support in engaging with and sometimes challenging the welfare system is crucial whilst they move forward.

Looking ahead

Poverty – sometimes at crippling levels – continues to affect many of the people we support and addressing the core issues underlying this will continue to be central to our work. However, our clients often need emergency support to address their basic needs around food, shelter and clothing. The success of our burgeoning network of Pantries has demonstrated that this is an area of need amongst our clients. We will be looking to develop further Pantries across our service areas which have the added bonus of our Peer Advisors to guide people towards stability and independence.

Offering young people a safe place

Addressing child criminal exploitation

We stepped up support for our young clients during this year as school closures, unemployment and reduced income in their families left them more vulnerable to child criminal exploitation. Restrictions on face-to-face contact meant we had to be adaptable and look at new ways of delivering our support.

One-to-one casework support

The unprecedented challenges posed by lockdowns also presented unexpected opportunities for us to really engage some of the young people we were supporting. Staying home meant some of them seized the chance to really break free from negative influences, engage with education and move their lives forward.

However, school closures and home schooling left some of the most vulnerable young people open to exploitation. Many had no access to suitable IT equipment to continue their studies at home. Our caseworkers made use of the Covid-19 Appeal Fund to purchase laptops and educational resources. They also continued to support their clients over the phone and on Zoom to ensure they stayed motivated with their schooling.

Boredom was a big issue for many young people and so caseworkers organised online fitness sessions and workshops to keep children and young people engaged and support their physical and mental wellbeing.

Family poverty was often an underlying factor. Sadly, some young people felt under added pressure to become breadwinners during this time and support their parents and siblings. Unfortunately, this included going on county lines drug runs which continued to operate during lockdown though under new tactics so the gangs could avoid detection. This included increased use of girls and young women as runners as they were less likely to be stopped by the police at a time when people out

and about were more visible to the authorities. Gangs also sent children and young people away for longer periods to avoid possible detection that can happen during travelling on county line runs. Both of these factors increased the levels of vulnerability.

This work has taken place through a number of projects, including the Mayor of London funded Rescue and Response service, Home Office funded work through the Violence Reduction Units, local authority commissioned projects and work generously supported through loyal donors.

We currently offer services addressing child criminal exploitation in London, Kent, Midlands, Yorkshire Merseyside and Wales alongside providing preventative work in schools across England and Wales.

Casework support

The young people we support have been particularly affected by the lockdown. Many have been cut off from their support systems and struggled with home schooling. Anxiety and other mental health issues have been prevalent as young people have worried about their future on the back of missed education and uncertainty about suitable employment opportunities.

Sadly some of the most vulnerable young people heavily entrenched in county line drug running had no option other than to continue their activities even at the very height of lockdown – putting themselves and their families at increased risk of infection. Debt bondage – whereby young people are set up by the gangs to be robbed of drugs and therefore indebted to work for free – forced many of them to continue to deal from unsanitary drug dens. Our caseworkers intensified their support for these young people under very difficult conditions – ensuring the young people wore masks and used hand sanitiser whilst they were doing the work for the gangs.



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By offering emotional and practical support they help young people overcome what are often horrific injuries and minimise the risk of future harm.

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Work in hospitals and custody suites

Building on our existing service in the Royal London Hospital, our violence reduction work in hospitals has expanded over the last year to new hospitals in the capital. Successful work continues in hospitals in Coventry and Wolverhampton where the teams have been operating at full capacity. They work alongside clinical staff to support young people admitted to the hospitals as a result of serious violence. By offering emotional and practical support they help young people overcome what are often horrific injuries and minimise the risk of future harm. The pandemic has put added pressure on their emotional vulnerability so the caseworkers have giving young people a safe space to talk freely about their feelings.

Our work with young people in police custody suites takes on a similar form to the hospital-based work reaching young people at a point of crisis in their lives when they have been arrested. The caseworkers offer a non-judgemental, independent, credible source of support to help address underlying issues and guide the young person towards a crime-free future.

Work through the Violence Reduction Units

Home Office funding through Violence Reduction Units announced in July 2020 enabled us to expand our county lines intervention work to further regions in Merseyside and the Midlands alongside boosting our existing Mayor of London funded work in London. The work identifies and supports children and young people originally from these areas who are caught up in county lines exploitation and helps them to make a safe and sustained exit. Support for wider families is also available if needed.

Mayor of London-commissioned Rescue & Response Service

This was one of the first county lines intervention projects we delivered and it continues to have a huge impact on the lives of some of the most disadvantaged young people in the capital.

This multi-agency partnership which sees three charities, including St Giles, come together with local authorities to support young people out of exploitation.

Under lockdown, our caseworkers continued necessary face-to-face work to rescue young Londoners who had been trafficked to undertake county lines activity hundreds of miles from their homes. In September 2020, it was announced that over half of the young people supported through Rescue and Response had made a safe and sustained exit from county lines.

This is a significant achievement given the fact that the project is helping some of the most vulnerable young people in the capital.



Work commissioned by local authorities

We are extremely grateful to the local authorities who continue to commission us to work in partnership with them to help address local needs around child criminal exploitation and serious violence in their areas. This is particularly so at a time when most local authorities are having to make extremely challenging decisions around funding. Our caseworkers work alongside local authority staff and are ideally placed to provide on-the-ground expertise and support to their staff.

Preventative work

Despite school closures, our teams continued to work with young people throughout all the lockdowns through virtual sessions. They adapted quickly to support young people through Zoom, WhatsApp and offer more personalised support through phone calls.

The school session content was digitised and placed securely online so young people could still benefit from prevention and awareness raising from their homes. The team worked round the clock to rapidly create animations, targeted online resources and activity packs which were a virtual lifeline for many children, young people and their parents/caregivers.

Looking ahead

The pandemic has had a significant impact on young people across the world but some of the young clients supported by us have been particularly affected. The sudden withdrawal of their usual routines and support structures, coupled with the fact many of them were confined to deprived households, has left them particularly vulnerable.

Young women in particular have been affected and we have seen their growing involvement in gangs and criminal exploitation. We will be looking to grow all of our support services but in particular focus on offering added support around helping young people with their mental health and offering gender-specific services.

“

The team worked round the clock to rapidly create animations, targeted online resources and activity packs which were a virtual lifeline for many children, young people and their parents/caregivers.



Easing the transition from custody to community

Work in prisons and with prison leavers

Throughout the first year of Covid, we were faced with heavy restrictions in accessing people in prison. This impacted on our long-standing custodial based Peer Advisor Programme as we were unable to go into prisons to deliver the training. Furthermore, we could not deliver online training to prisoners in the same way we could to Peer Advisor learners in the community.

Despite these difficulties, 21 prisoners completed the Level 3 training during this year.

We continued to support prison leavers to resettle on their release from prison throughout the most acute periods of the pandemic. Alongside the need for social distancing and safety for both prisoners and caseworkers, accessing suitable housing was a big challenge at a time when many services were operating at reduced capacity.

Despite this, our teams worked exceptionally hard to ensure that their clients had somewhere safe and secure to go and did not need to resort to sofa surfing or sleeping rough, which would have increased their vulnerability to both re-offending and Covid-19.

In addition to housing, we also helped prison leavers access the IT hardware they needed in order to search for employment and apply for training courses.

This was especially important during times of lockdown when many services were either closed or operating at limited capacity.

“

I sit here and realise how lucky I am...on release I will be drug-free and hope I still have the opportunity to be a part of St Giles. Most of my life I've been in a very dark place and my work coach and Trainer Assessor are like big bright lights...I hope with St Giles, one day I can help people the way they helped me.

Client helped on release from prison

Looking forward

There remains an important role for charities to play in adding value to statutory services in the criminal justice system. We are providing support for prison leavers across England and Wales through St Giles Wise, our partnership with The Wise Group which puts lived experience at the heart of resettlement services.

Through this partnership and other opportunities, we are aiming to further develop our support for prison leavers and enable other providers to develop services which use people with lived experience.

From our own experience as a charity with an established track record in this area, we know that it improves engagement from prison leavers and increases their resettlement prospects.



73%

of Peer Advisors agreed that being a Peer Advisor increased their chances of finding paid work, 88% agreed it improved their confidence

Supporting our staff through the pandemic

We recognised that the lockdown could pose challenges for many of our staff. Keeping our staff safe was of paramount importance and we continue to adopt a flexible approach depending on people's role and personal circumstances.

Alongside practical aspects of ensuring staff had the right equipment and environment to carry out homeworking, we were keen to ensure colleagues continued to feel connected with each other. We established a series of regular online 'Lunch and Learn' sessions where staff could log onto Zoom and hear from a variety of internal and external speakers. We also hosted online quiz nights which staff and their families could participate in.

However, many of our staff – particularly those based in prisons and hospitals – could not work from home and continued to go into their workplaces throughout the course of the pandemic often working in challenging conditions to give their clients the best support possible. We are extremely grateful to them for their perseverance, commitment and consistency.

55%

of partner organisations said that as a result of working with St Giles they were now more open to working with people with lived experience

Source: Interim evaluation into the Peer Advisor Network by Revolving Doors

95%

of partner organisations agreed that their clients had improved outcomes because of the input of Peer Advisors

Engaging and empowering

Support for women and families

Increased levels of domestic abuse hit the headlines during the lockdown and this worrying trend was echoed in our work with women and their families. Alongside ensuring women and children were safe from harm, we also helped to address their basic needs around suitable housing, food and other essentials.

We provided life-changing support to many vulnerable girls and young women, typically those involved in child criminal exploitation.

Covid challenges

Much of this work was delivered remotely which was a first for both our caseworkers and clients. Many clients and their families felt trapped indoors and craved face-to-face contact with other people. This was compounded by limited access to digital hardware – whole families could be sharing one laptop or similar device – with members competing for time on it to complete schoolwork against keeping in touch with family or socialising.

Our teams had to think creatively on ways to address this and often brought families puzzles, art supplies and games as a way of relieving boredom and frustration during times when households could be couped up together for long periods in often cramped conditions.

Support for families

Across our services, we have helped families stay resilient during the challenges posed through the pandemic. Some of these offer specialist support to families who are experiencing poverty, abuse, homelessness, substance misuse and similar issues.

Spotlight on COPE

The COPE (Children of Prisoners Empowered) Project in Yorkshire works with children and young people affected by parental imprisonment whilst offering added support for families who are also experiencing knock on effects of this.

An evaluation of COPE by the Confluence Partnership found that it had exceeded its targets and successfully supported families who were facing a complex set of needs and situations. Gillian, the caseworker on COPE, offered a wide range of support around issues such as finances and budgeting, life skills around cooking and cleaning, help around domestic abuse, forced marriages and bereavement, as well as support with mental health issues, substance misuse and social isolation.

Key areas Gillian helped with were:

- Improved home life, especially for the children who were cushioned from the impacts of poverty and family breakdown thanks to COPE
- Improved ability to express feelings, thanks to the work of the caseworker who used activities with children to enable them to express their feelings and worked with parents/caregivers to provide them with the tools for managing young peoples' emotions
- Reduced isolation, which is a common theme amongst all the families we support often due to poverty and a perceived stigma due to their current situations.



“

I've got a lot more referrals for DV (domestic violence). More children have been witnessing DV and also being sexually assaulted. It's very complex, intensive, sensitive work...support will be needed over a very long time.

St Giles Caseworker



“

I think I've found my calling... I want to be an inspiration to others. It feels amazing to be on the other side.... I flick my badge and get through the door; it makes me feel proud. Working towards the Level 3 Information, Advice and Guidance has definitely increased my confidence to move forward and I've now created a checklist to make sure that my clients are ok, that we maintain boundaries and that I manage their expectations.

Specialist support for women

Both the Footsteps project, which supports women leaving prison, and Norfolk-based Police and Crime Commissioner-funded WONDER+ Project offering community-based support for women in the criminal justice system, have worked intensively with women in vulnerable circumstances to help them stay resilient, positive and motivated throughout the pandemic. Some of the women have been facing multiple challenges around housing, poverty, mental health and substance misuse issues and potential harm from domestic abuse.

Our work has connected the women with specialist support services such as those addressing mental health and substance misuse issues, whilst offering emotional and practical support to sustain positive progress and remove any barriers which might be holding the women back. Such has been the success of WONDER+ that the PCC have agreed to extend funding for a further year.

Targeted services for young women

The pandemic put some girls and young women at an increased risk of exploitation. Out of school and effectively hidden from view, many of them were vulnerable to grooming and other forms of harm. Criminal gangs increased their use of young women in illegal economies, frequently using them to store, transport and deal drugs during the lockdown as they were less likely to be stopped by the police at a time when anyone out and about was more visible. The young women were frequently exposed to abuse, coercion and other forms of harm. Trauma and mental health issues were common. This was evidenced by some of our staff based in hospitals who saw an increase in young women being admitted for self-harming and suicide attempts. Our staff have worked intensively with the girls to help them overcome trauma, identify their future goals and ambitions and set them on a path towards achieving these.

Keeping them focussed on a positive future helps the girls forge a new identity for themselves which is away from old associates and exploitation. Many identify their exploiters as their boyfriends and regard much of the exploitative behaviour towards them as normal. Helping them overcome this is complex work requiring patience and time.

Looking ahead

We have seen a continued growth in demand for specialist support for women and families so we are aiming to further develop this area of our work and raise its profile. Our 60th year in 2022 will provide us with an opportunity to celebrate the successes of our female clients and staff and highlight the added barriers they often face in a post-Covid world which will be especially tough for those who are facing adversity and disadvantage.



“

Three elderly Pantry members used to meet weekly but haven't since the pandemic; two have also lost their partners. We arranged their visits together so they could meet outside and socialise.

Our commitment to supporting equality and diversity

We have established the Black Lives Awareness Group at St Giles. This employee-led movement offers advice, support and development opportunities to black staff members, supports organisational training and awareness raising, whilst actively seeking to improve diversity and inclusion at St Giles. Meeting regularly and through offering a series of events and activities, it promotes better understanding of racial inequality and empowers our staff to discuss and act on any race issues.

The group works alongside our senior team and Board to ensure St Giles is an organisation in which all our staff, volunteers and clients feel accepted, respected and able to call out prejudice if they see it occurring.

We have established a Gender Equality Working Group to ensure that all our staff have the same rights and opportunities, regardless of their gender. The group will empower and support staff through training, advocacy and promoting best practice.

Along with the rest of the world, we were shocked by the tragic death of George Floyd in 2020. It had a profound effect on our staff – regardless of their ethnicity or background.



“

My training has given me insight into looking at other services and what I can do more of to support with referrals and advice. It's given me more confidence giving advice... knowing I'm getting a qualification gives me a boost.

Thank you to our supporters

A huge thank you to all our loyal funders and supporters. Without you we could not have carried out this life-changing work which has victories which are both large and small.

From all of us we say thank you for your kind and generous support.

**We rely on
the support of
individuals to
continue our work**

Please donate securely online at stgilestrust.org.uk or send a cheque made payable to St Giles Trust to the address below

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