



## **Working for Health**

*Helping the homeless*

### **Presenter**

Brighton Housing Trust. First John Holmstrom talks about the wider role of the Trust.

### **John Holmstrom**

It hasn't just stuck with just accommodation, it has looked at the whole needs of single homeless men and women. So for example our day centre would deal with the very practical realities of surviving on the streets in terms of food, showers and clothing. But also we look at the other issues that can arise in a homeless person's life. The niche that we've developed is round vulnerable individuals who need a lot of support that need for support may go on for quite a number of years in as far as people's health may go up and down. We can have a situation where somebody may be very stable and happy and their cat may die and that bereavement may trigger a whole process which means you then need very intensive support. So it's not just a linear process where you go through first day second third stage and then some how you've hit the jackpot and everything's OK, that's not the reality as we see it. It seems to me you need flexible long term support so that you can put in the resources when it's needed but also when it's not needed let people just lead their lives.

### **Presenter**

The First Base Day Centre is run by the Trust. Nicki the manager and Michael a health worker talk about their work at the centre.

### **Nicki Homewood**

The day centre is used by an average of a hundred and fifty people a day, some of those people are regular attenders who will come to the day centre, most days, for company for support and in particular for food, that's why a lot of people come. The practical services we provide are food, we provide breakfast and we provide lunch some of which is free some of which is at cost price. we have free shower facilities here, and washing facilities. We have a very cheap laundry service, we have a free clothing store, a free bedding store, a free furniture store for when people move into accommodation, and we also have storage facilities and so on. The other half of the work we do is advice and information work on a range of issues to do with benefits, mental health, drug and alcohol work, work with younger people, and also the area of work that Michael does around health.

### **Michael Curtis**

Mainly HIV and sexual health which is preventative work. and that involves talking to people about what risks they may have taken, explaining to them again the different services that they can go to, where they can go to be tested if they want that, and try and sort of build up people's confidence, 'cos like general health people are very nervous about that and once it comes onto sexual health people are even more reluctant often to talk and to go to services about that. And a lot of people who we see here as well because of the position they're in they are quite vulnerable, they're quite open to people saying to them that you can come as stay for the night if I can sleep with you. So a lot of sort of problems around their own self esteem, and negotiating and having safer sex. As well as the sexual health the thing that's sort of become much more to our attention at the moment because people are becoming more aware of it is Hepatitis C, which is quite serious amongst IV drug users, it's estimated about eighty per cent of all IV drug users could be infected and we find a lot of people who've been told that they have got Hepatitis C, because the information around it's changing so quickly at the moment, who've had no explanation of what that means to them. They may have been tested at a drugs service or while they were doing a prison sentence, and they are just told you've got Hepatitis C and they'll arrive here thinking I'm going to die next month and

then in situations like that it's explaining to them that that's not the case and talking through what they can do to prevent the onset of Hepatitis C, and that's a lot of stuff around reducing their drug in, if they are using illegal drugs, making their GP, if they have a GP, aware that they've got Hepatitis C because a lot of prescribed medication is liver toxic and also talking about alcohol use obviously that's anything effecting the liver is really quite serious. So really talking to people around things like that but built in with all the other work that goes on in the day centre. People can talk you know and that's part of how we work I think that people can talk to us when we're serving up the soup or clearing a table, or doing the showers, so it becomes much less formal it's not sitting in an office with somebody behind a big desk giving them a lecture. And it can take a long time for people to have the confidence to know that they can talk about those issues. So it's very much client lead the way we work, and at their pace.