

# SPEAR

*homelessness to independence*



## **Our impact during the cost-of-living crisis**

SPEAR 2023 - REVIEW

[www.spearlondon.org](http://www.spearlondon.org)

# ABOUT OUR WORK

We are a local charity supporting people who experience homelessness in South West London. Our mission is to enable people to find secure accommodation and work towards a positive future.

We provide far more than a roof over people's heads; we help them rebuild their lives.

We offer a range of vital support tailored to each person, such as accessing essential health and wellbeing services, opening a bank account or help with benefit claims, developing skills, building confidence, and gaining employment.

We break down the barriers that people face and together overcome their challenges. We wholeheartedly believe everyone deserves a chance to achieve their goals and dreams.

## Read about...

- Foreword from our CEO
- **2023 at a glance**
- Cookery classes
- **David's story**
- Lottery funding for health
- **Digital Skills Workshop**
- Young people winning with Springboard

### SPEAR's Services



# 845

people accessed  
SPEAR's services

### Female



# 21%

were female

### Youth Support



# 105

were under the  
age of 25

### Homelessness



# 352

were verified  
rough sleepers

### Health



# 212

We supported 212  
people to improve  
their health

### Accommodation



# 263

We provided  
263 with SPEAR  
accommodation

\* 2022/23 figures

# FOREWORD

from SPEAR's Chief Executive,  
Tim Fallon



The impact and challenges of the cost-of-living crisis continued throughout 2023. However, thanks to your generosity we were, and are, able to continue our vital work which is predicted to be even more challenging in 2024 and beyond.

“As ever, none of our work would have been possible without the tremendous support from funders, volunteers, and supporters.”

## More people rough sleeping across the capital

In March 2023, 53% of rough sleepers in our boroughs were sleeping rough for the first time in their lives. According to government data a total of 4,389 people were sleeping rough across London between October and December 2023, a shocking 23% annual increase. This figure is expected to rise as the cost-of-living crisis continues.

## Advocating to protect homelessness budgets

In June 2023, in partnership with over 30 homelessness charities, we wrote to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. We expressed our deep concern that given the 23% annual rise in people sleeping rough, the Government is going backwards in meeting its target of ending rough sleeping in England by 2024. The letter called for increased funding for specialist organisations, like SPEAR, working to support people experiencing homelessness.

## Enabling access to healthcare for people experiencing homelessness

In April, we were delighted to receive further funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to support our Homeless Health project. This project tackles the many barriers to accessing healthcare often faced by people experiencing homelessness.

We also received further funding from the NHS South West London Integrated Care Board to run vital healthcare drop-in days.

**Our community-based healthcare drop-in days bring NHS and support agencies together under one roof. We had 344 attendees over the course of 6 drop-in Health Day events.**

## Part of a dedicated local community

I am very proud of our teams for continuing to respond to challenges and ensuring people who have experienced homelessness receive support tailored to their individual needs. Whether that's in temporary accommodation, working to break the cycle of homelessness or providing a friendly and safe contact for those facing their first night on the streets.

I am also grateful that SPEAR is part of such a dedicated local community and look forward to continuing our important work together in the year ahead.

Thank you once again for supporting us.

**Tim Fallon, Chief Executive**

# 2023 at a glance

## JANUARY

- Government announces end of financial energy support for charities in April.
- Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) announced on 16 January as temperatures drop below 0°C.

## FEBRUARY

- Cost-of-living crisis pushes more people into homelessness.

## MARCH

- 53% of rough sleepers in our boroughs were doing so for the first time.
- Tim, our CEO, walks 42.2km in The London Walk.

## APRIL

- Cost-of-living crisis: half of people sleeping rough in London are first timers say Combined Homelessness and Information Network.

## JUNE

- We joined 31 other charities calling on Rishi Sunak for urgent action to end rough sleeping.

## SEPTEMBER

- Hot weather SWEP activated. Our volunteers distribute water, sunscreen, hats and more.

## OCTOBER

- Seven local coffee shops supported us during World Homeless Day.
- SPEAR releases a video to raise awareness and encourage more supporters to help us change lives.

## NOVEMBER

- SWEP activated as temperatures drop below 0°C.

## DECEMBER

- SPEAR is one of first organisations to sign the London Charter to End Rough Sleeping.

## Making a meal of things - community cooking

Last year we held cookery classes for clients living at Penny Wade House - our homeless hostel in Richmond.

Clients living here have often lived on the streets for extended periods of time. Many have experienced a lot of trauma and often have complex needs, which makes it difficult for them to live independently at this stage in their journey to recovery.

### More than just cooking

The aim of these classes was for people to learn to cook nutritious and tasty meals, but it turned into so much more.

Five residents attended every class, trying new dishes like veggie Bolognese and healthier choices like couscous and quinoa.

Together the class walked to the shops to buy ingredients which doubled as an opportunity to "walk 'n talk", growing relationships and building up trust.

“ These classes have helped me feel good about myself and I am trying new dishes I didn't know about before. ”

Healthy eating can make a huge difference to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

People who were never taught about healthy food or how to cook can often feel overwhelmed. Cookery classes like these enable people to learn new skills in a safe and supportive environment.



# David's story...

**“I feel really safe now, unlike some of the places I've stayed in”**

David was a full-time welder for 12 years, working on top of the range jobs. He lived in a 3-bedroom house and his children would stay at weekends. Mental health problems led him to lose everything and end up rough sleeping for a year until he met Andy, one of our brilliant outreach workers.

“ I never thought I'd end up homeless. You just don't think it's going to happen to you. I worked long hours and then when my mental health deteriorated everything just spiralled – I couldn't cope - I lost everything and I found myself homeless.

**I moved around quite a bit and stayed in temporary hostels for a while then ended up living on the streets for a year. It's a scary place and the winter is really hard – it's so cold.**

Then one night back in June I met Andy, an outreach worker from SPEAR. Andy was amazing, he offered me so much encouragement. It's hard because after you've been homeless for a while you can give up hope – **you don't think you have any more options.** ”



“ Andy knew what I was going through as he'd been in my situation. He sorted me out with clothes, food, and even helped me get my birth certificate as I'd lost all my ID. He gave me a phone and kept in touch while he tried to sort out accommodation.

At one point I thought I had a place, but that fell through. I remember feeling devastated and, **I'm not gonna lie, I cried that day. I just lost all hope again.** But then Andy called and he helped me feel positive again, he told me not to give up. ”

David now lives in one of our hostels with the support of the SPEAR team.

He has taken part in cookery classes, helped with the hostel garden, and has put himself forward to volunteer at a community allotment where they grow food for a local soup kitchen.

He's now got a bicycle which he loves to ride along the river and is helping him to get fit again.



# New lottery funding



## Pivotal in expanding our healthcare services

In April 2023 we celebrated the start of a new 3-year funding award from the National Lottery Community Fund to support our Homeless Health Link Service.

The service empowers people experiencing homelessness to improve their own health and wellbeing by tackling the many barriers to accessing healthcare they often face.

**Over the next 3 years this project will support over 500 homeless people who have chronic and often life-threatening health conditions, which may have not been addressed for many years.**

We know that our clients can struggle to access and engage with healthcare, including seeing a GP or receiving medication and tragically for those experiencing homelessness their life expectancy is dramatically reduced.

A team of staff and volunteers with lived homelessness experience deliver one-to-one support and attendance at other community-based drop-ins and events. This helps us to reach more people in need.

These volunteers have experienced homelessness themselves, so they understand the challenges and barriers to care that our clients face today.

### The aims of the project are to:

- Improve rough sleeper's health and wellbeing.
- Improve rough sleeper's awareness of the health support available to them.
- Improve rough sleeper's confidence to navigate the health system independently.
- Reduce rough sleeper's need for engagement with emergency health services.
- Improve healthcare professionals' awareness and understanding of the local homeless population and their health needs.

### VITAL PEER-TO-PEER VOLUNTEERS

We are very fortunate to have 6 committed volunteers who provide valuable peer-to-peer health support.

Between them, **they have provided 324 hours of volunteering, supporting our clients.**

**The project is also supported by a volunteer GP who runs a weekly surgery at SPEAR, providing a safe space for clients in need.**



# THE DIFFERENCE WE'RE MAKING to people like Jay...

Our Outreach team found Jay\*, aged 22, sleeping in a tent after a family breakdown. We offered Jay our supported accommodation and introduced him to our Health Link team.

One of our Health Link workers focused on building trust with Jay, encouraging him to speak up for himself at his GP and mental health appointments, and avoid spending so much time on his own. Jay has responded well to our support, growing in confidence, and building his social skills.

Recently he moved into his own accommodation, but still likes to keep a connection with his Health Link worker.

“ My Health Link worker has helped me change my life for the better. Jay ”

*\*Jay's name has been changed to protect his identity.*

## THINGS WE'VE LEARNED

**95% of those surveyed said they had a physical health issue of some form.**

Key areas where clients really need support are accessing mental health specialists, dentists and podiatry care.

**Informal settings are beneficial for entrenched rough sleepers.**

With new funding from the NHS, we have been able to deliver community-based health

and wellbeing drop-in days, in addition to our weekly volunteer GP sessions at SPEAR.

These are very successful with over 50 people attending each time.

**These days are designed to bring NHS services to rough sleepers, with everything under one roof.**

### OUR EXTERNAL EVALUATORS CONCLUDED:

“ These events provided a vital alternative to traditional healthcare services that require a certain degree of permanency, planning and provision. ”



# Tackling digital exclusion with a skills workshop

It's well established that people who are experiencing homelessness face exclusion from society, due to a lack of digital access and skills (University of Edinburgh, 2019).

In December 2022, SPEAR was awarded funding from the NHS South West London Integrated Care System's Innovation Fund to deliver a digital inclusion project for people experiencing homelessness.

The programme took place in Richmond, Kingston, Wandsworth, Sutton and Merton, with the aim of improving people's access to online healthcare services.

To do this, people not only need access to digital devices like phones and laptops, but also support learning new skills that will hopefully give them the confidence to go online.

**12%** of rough sleepers  
have access to Wi-Fi

**4%** have a device

Many lack digital confidence and skills  
(SPEAR skills survey, 2021)

“ If I had not signed up for the programme, I would not be able to do anything digitally and would not have done it for the rest of my life. All my previous work was manual. This is all new to me, and I will always be learning. But the support you have given me has guided me well, and I look forward to continuing this learning journey with SPEAR. ”

- Workshop participant

## AIMS OF THE DIGITAL WORKSHOP

### 1 Promote self-care and preventative healthcare

By giving people access to online healthcare and advice, they can access GPs, dentists or therapeutic support. Longstanding health conditions, early stages of conditions or those not yet diagnosed, can be treated sooner rather than later.

### 2 Better digital skills = better health

There is a huge amount of useful information online for rough sleepers, so we focussed on guiding them through setting up online accounts, requesting repeat prescriptions, making appointments, and accessing their health records.

### 3 Reduce the pressure on NHS urgent and emergency care

According to research from University College London in 2021, patients who were homeless were more than twice as likely to be readmitted to hospital in an emergency, compared to people in housing. By helping people access online health services they can get treatment before something turns into an emergency.





# PROJECT FINDINGS:



**24**

**people participated** in digital inclusion training



**67%**

**of people** completed the course



**87%**

of those completing the course said the **Digital Inclusion project has increased their digital skills**



**81%**

of those completing the course said they **felt more confident at using their devices**



**62%**

of those completing the course said they felt **more confident about accessing health services online**



**87%**

of those completing the course said the **support** they had received during the course had been **good or excellent**

# Springboard: Watching young people flourish with the right help

We delivered our Springboard project for young people with 3 years funding from Comic Relief.

**Engaging with young people aged 16-25 requires different support to adults and has unique challenges.**

Young people experiencing homelessness are incredibly vulnerable and have often experienced traumatic family breakdowns. They can struggle to trust others, have high social anxiety, and often lead very chaotic lives.

Throughout this project, we have worked with 97 young people experiencing homelessness and have seen them becoming more stable, confident, and happy.

The young people took part in a wide range of activities including:

- Rowing on the River Thames
- Drama workshop with Cardboard Citizens
- Dose of Nature for mental health
- Art and Soul creative workshops
- Life skills workshops – including money workshops for young people

“A really rewarding part of the work is seeing young people feel confident enough to leave the safety of their new home to join a new group. They may have to travel on a new route, try out new things with people they’ve not met before. We know that this takes real courage and is a significant step for so many young people towards a more independent future.”

Dean Ruske, Springboard Team Leader

## **Making friends and building trust**

It’s been a very positive and heart-warming year as young people engaged with our support and reported improvements to their confidence and wellbeing.

We’ve seen them start engaging with specialist services such as counselling services.

The most significant achievements have been building their trust and watching their confidence grow, seeing new friendships develop and see them supporting each other.

## **KEY OUTCOMES:**

- 97 young people **engaged positively** with our support.
- 92 young people improved their **confidence and wellbeing**.
- 78 young people improved their social networks and **engaged with education, training and/or employment**.
- 48 young people **started volunteering, education or secured paid employment**.



# Springboard stories



## Ashley's story

“ I had to adjust to life on the streets.

When SPEAR found me, I wasn't too sure. I was always under the impression that I might not get helped, but when I got my room I started to trust them more.

Springboard helped me a lot and gave me confidence. I didn't go out much before, I stayed in my own bubble.

They made me better at communicating with people and I feel more confident with people now. ”

Ashley now has his own one-bedroom flat in London, is looking for work and is still involved in peer engagement with the services.



## Daniella's story

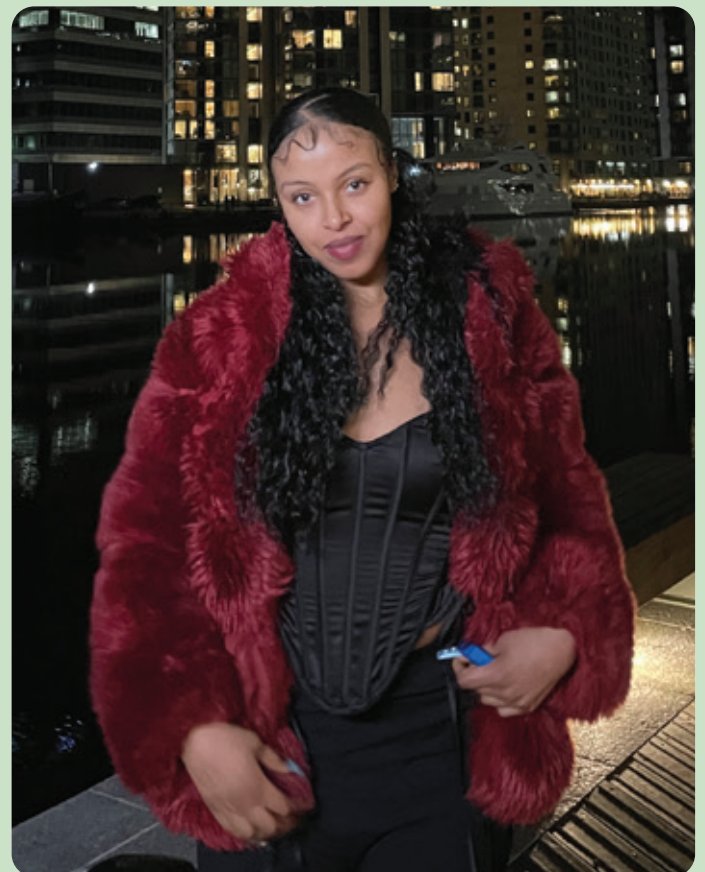
“ Having Springboard there, bringing young people together, was so important because I was depressed, always in my room.

Because of my past, of what happened to me, my confidence was shattered. I was anxious to go out and talk to people.

To me Springboard was important because you are so alone when you go through homelessness and no one can really relate, not even your close friends. ”

After joining SPEAR's peer mentoring programme, the Springboard project supported Daniella to take a Level 3 Education and Training course.

She now works for a charity as a career specialist to support young people who have been through the care system to receive training and employment and rents her own flat.



# SPEAR

homelessness to independence



## Thank you

...for every donation of time, financial support and gifts in-kind given to SPEAR last year. We haven't space to list you all, but to the hundreds of individual supporters, volunteers, community groups, schools, faith groups, companies and charitable trusts and foundations that supported us – thank you – we couldn't do what we do without you.

**Your support is greatly appreciated.**

# SPEAR

homelessness to independence

SPEAR HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Email: [admin@spearlondon.org](mailto:admin@spearlondon.org)

Registered address: 89 Heath Road, Twickenham, TW1 4 AW | Charity Registration Number: 1122206 | Company number: 06396687

[www.spearlondon.org](http://www.spearlondon.org)