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Homelessness heroes celebrated

16 October 2014 | By Simon Brandon

The winners of the 15th Andy Ludlow awards showcase the most creative projects for homeless people in London. Simon Brandon reports

Source: [Jo Mieszkowski](#)

Innovation goes hand-in-hand with the voluntary sector, as it must when simply throwing money at an issue isn't an option. The finalists of this year's Andy Ludlow Awards deserve extra credit for running these projects at a time of shrinking budgets and increasing demand for their services.



Now in their 15th year, the awards recognise and celebrate innovation, creativity and forward-thinking among public bodies and charities tackling homelessness in London. They are sponsored by the London Housing Foundation, the London boroughs and Shelter and run by London Councils. *Inside Housing* magazine is a media partner.

According to a report published in July this year by St Mungo's Broadway, the number of [rough sleepers](#) in London this year has [increased by almost a quarter on 2013](#) to 1,268 people.

The prizes themselves - the prize fund this year is £55,000, split between a winner and two runners-up - can make a real difference to the nominated service providers and their users. Last year's winner, the Spires Centre's Streetlink project for street-based sex workers, used its winnings to extend the assistance it provides to even more marginalised and hard-to-reach clients.

The finalists this year provide services to - and improve the lives of a diverse group of clients that includes **homeless** migrants, hospital patients and victims of domestic abuse. *Inside Housing* profiles the 2014 winners and finalists.



WINNER: Groundswell UK

Homeless Health Peer Advocacy Service

Prize: £30,000

The overall winner of this year's Andy Ludlow Awards is Groundswell UK's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy Service, a project launched in 2010 that offers one-to-one support to homeless people to help them attend health appointments.

'An independent evaluation of the project by the Young Foundation found that costs to the NHS of treating these clients fell by 42%'

Each of the volunteers who provide that support has had personal experience of homelessness. They help clients with travel arrangements and appointment keeping, as well as focusing on building their confidence and skills to enable them to carry on accessing healthcare services independently. This means better health outcomes for the service users, among them earlier diagnoses, more sustained treatment and fewer visits to A&E.

In 2013/14, the project engaged with 293 clients. But it's not just those clients who are better off as a result.

'It's really all about the peers themselves,' says Bronwen James, development manager at Groundswell. 'The fact that it's led and delivered by them is the key to why our project works so well.'

The volunteers' understanding of the challenges faced by their clients is hugely important to the project's success, but they also benefit from a programme of structured training and support, provided by Groundswell, which aims to build skills and self-reliance. Of the 44 peer advocates recruited so far, 18 have gone into full-time employment.

There's another beneficiary, too - the public purse. An independent evaluation of the project by the Young Foundation found that costs to the NHS of treating these clients fell by 42%. And the work being done by Groundswell and its peer advocates is, the charity says, generating a greater understanding of the issues homeless people contend with when accessing - or not - the right healthcare. That information is now being shared with other healthcare and homelessness service providers in order to increase the knowledge and skills of their staff, and to further improve the health outcomes of their users.

Readers' comments (1)

- [John Smith](#) | 16/10/2014 8:35 pm

I see Smugness Broadway didn't get shortlisted but who cares? Howard will be cashing in with his mates from SERCO soon

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