



Community dental clinic for people experiencing homelessness

Press Release for World Homeless Day 2020

In January 2018, Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE), a not-for-profit organisation based in Plymouth, established a community dental clinic to improve access to dental care for people experiencing homelessness. The service has been developed collaboratively with a range of partners, including people with lived experience of homelessness, using a community engagement approach.

Initially, the clinic treated people experiencing homelessness, expanding within the last year to include individuals using drug and alcohol services, as well as vulnerable women who are at risk of having multiple children removed from their care. As a committed social enterprise PDSE currently provides this service as a pro bono contribution to the local community as part of its mission to ensure access to dental care for groups who may feel excluded from mainstream dentistry.

Rob Witton, CEO of PDSE says:

"PDSE is absolutely committed to addressing oral health inequalities in local communities and helping those who need it most. I am grateful to all of our partners for making this initiative so successful. Our ambition is to receive NHS Funding so we can expand our model across Devon and Cornwall to help more people".

Since the start of the Community Clinic and up to 18 February 2020, 89 vulnerable individuals have received a range of dental treatments. Outcomes from continuous evaluation of the Community Clinic model often describe dental care as a catalyst for change in many areas of a patient's life:

"Emotionally he's transformed, nutritionally he's put on weight because he's able to eat, his self-esteem, his confidence and employment opportunities, his sense of worth is now fully established ... his decision was 'I either continue on this path of destruction', which was very much influenced by his childhood experiences, or 'I survive and thrive and I move forward'. And he chose the latter, and part of that was because he was linked to the Dental School." (Support Worker)

"It gave me so much more confidence, a lot's come out of that, I mean the day I actually got my dentures I had a job interview and I just felt so much more comfortable and I actually got the job" (Patient)

Lyndsey Withers, community volunteer for the initiative adds:

"Unpicking the complexity of homelessness and its impact on an individual is very challenging. We have found that dental care is an excellent entry point to start supporting people affected by homelessness and can lead to multiple positive health and wellbeing outcomes. That crucial first appointment can overcome years of fear and embarrassment and become a life-changing step."

The community clinic has already been recognised with a national industry award from the Oral Health Awards for Best Care of Vulnerable Patients.

Christina Worle, PDSE community clinic dentist concludes:

“When I first meet a new patient, they have often suffering with dental pain and infection for many years, and are desperately ashamed of their teeth. This can have a massively detrimental effect on a person’s wellbeing. Without the dental care that this service can offer they would have nowhere else to go for help. Working closely with our community partners helps this service to be as effective as possible.”

Results of the evaluation of the community clinic can be found here:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/hex.13111>

Photo

(l-r) Martha Paisi, Lyndsey Withers, Christina Worle, Colin Massey, and Rob Witton

