

NEA workshop speaking slot 07.11.22

Hello, my name is Rhi from South West London Law Centres.

I am going to speak in brief about two projects we currently have running and how they are connected to this cost-of-living crisis discussion.

The first one is more obvious – we recently launched a cost-of-living project that focuses on alleviating this crisis which includes support with things to reduce debt and increase income such as Discretionary Housing Payment applications, grant and benefit applications and discounts. If more specialist appointments are needed our front-line crisis navigators will try to put those in place within our specialist teams which include housing and welfare benefits.

There are 1:1 crisis support pre-booked appointments, outreach appointments with a number of partners and events in community settings where we provide crisis support.

The project also includes community workshops and public legal education.

Law centres and legal advice agencies can't just keep operating within such extreme austerity measures – we must push back. We have been supporting public campaigns such as energy for all calling on a national Energy for All that would provide an automatic free amount of energy – that is enough energy, to cover the basics like heating, cooking, and lighting.

We are also pushing locally also for greater support and the prevention of further cuts to welfare support locally.

We have recently started work on a temporary accommodation campaign initially focusing on the boroughs of Croydon and Wandsworth.

Lots of temporary accommodation is poor quality housing, where doors don't shut and windows don't close.

Often people either pay for fuel through expensive Pre-Payment Meters or expensive service charges. Many people in temporary accommodation are reliant on welfare support due to poor health, age, having young dependent children and/or unable to find suitable work and they have to cover fuel costs out of the nominal welfare support they receive each week. Everyone in temporary accommodation will have at least one vulnerable member in their household otherwise they wouldn't be in temporary accommodation or will be vulnerable themselves.

A brief example to highlight how extreme the crisis is for people in temporary accommodation, a man I met last week I will call him Jed received £77 per week living costs and paid £27 a week in service charge alone for his one room which was in an office to residential conversion block. This means that more than one third of the money he got for 'living' was going on service charges alone which included a waking watch because the building he resides in is unsafe. He had to pay for laundry and other household essentials separately to service charges.

Temporary Accommodation rents are extortionate whether you are working or not, the charges are often way above what the landlord letting the temporary accommodation would receive on the open market for awful condition properties. Service charges, not covered by housing benefit are also high. Sometimes people don't have adequate cooking facilities which leads to higher costs. As people

don't know how long they will be placed in the accommodation most are unable to implement any fuel saving measures.

Although we call all these things facets of the *cost of living crisis* it is a crisis being driven by greed and met with austerity.

To access the Cost-of-Living project appointments **email**
crisis@swllc.org

send a WhatsApp message to 07743 729833

call free on freephone 0808 109 8032 and leave a message

If you would like to be involved in the temporary accommodation project you can message me at community@swllc.org, please put 'temporary accommodation' in the subject line and I will respond.