

Shelter briefing: Connecting communities by supporting charities and volunteers

Summary

Shelter was founded in 1966 and is the UK's largest housing and homelessness charity. Last year we helped millions of people with their housing problems.

We also carry out research to understand more about the UK's housing problem and develop solutions; we work with the media and with our campaigners to call on the government and others to tackle the causes and consequences of the housing crisis.

We have hubs in 13 locations across England, from Plymouth to Newcastle, providing face-to-face **support for local people** and helping them with a variety of wide-ranging issues. We also have almost 100 shops across England, selling quality, second-hand clothing and furniture. These hubs and shops are bases for connecting communities, **bringing together different people with a shared purpose**.

Last year Shelter set out our new [10-year strategy](#) for improving the lives of people experiencing bad housing and homelessness. We identified 6 million households whose right to a home is either denied or under threat – soaring rents, insecure tenures, unaffordability. And at the same time, we commit in this strategy to **bringing communities together** to help us achieve this change.

Shelter Services

We provide a wide variety of services, such as legal advice, specialist housing support, help for families and people with multiple complex needs, as well as practical help like giving people access to a computer and assistance with filling out forms, in addition to DIY skills training.

Case Study from our Bristol Hub Manager

“The Shelter Hub in Bristol has seen an increased number of visitors over the last year as the impact of high rents, welfare benefit changes and limited housing stock impacts the city and surrounding areas. We remain committed to ensuring that we provide high quality advice and support. We continue to work with strategic and operational partners from across Bristol and the surrounding areas to ensure people get the help they need when they need it. Our dedicated team of Solicitors, Advisers, Support Workers and Volunteers have and continue to work tirelessly for their local communities.”

Our Impact

In 2017/18:

- Our helpline team gave advice to over 44,000 households and spent an average of 25 minutes talking to each caller
- Our online advice pages received 5 million visits
- We had 37,000 conversations with people through our webchat service
- Our advice and legal staff gave face-to-face help to over 26,000 households
- Our prison services worked with 13,000 people

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We helped:

- 12,000 households halted their eviction or repossession
- 5,400 homeless households find somewhere else to live
- 4,000 households improve their poor conditions
- 13,600 households improve the situation with their tenancy or landlord

Case study from our helpline:

“One Friday, I received a call from a very distressed woman called Pauline, who’d arrived home from holiday to find her locks had been changed. This left her, her partner and two young children homeless. Pauline went to the council, but they told her no adviser was available to assess their case and to ‘come back on Monday’; she was beside herself. I immediately tracked down the on-call housing officer and outlined the legal reasons to accommodate this family over the weekend rather than seeing them sleep on the streets. Temporary accommodation was found – and Pauline couldn’t thank me enough”

Homes help build communities

Homes are the **building blocks of our communities**. Which is why communities care deeply when people see that the right to a home is denied to their neighbours, or that their area shuts local people out because prices are too high and social housing has been lost.

We know that in every area we work, many people are deeply concerned about the state of the housing emergency and its impact on their neighbours. Shelter was founded as a community movement 53 years ago, and we believe that our future lies in enabling and leading change at the community level, as well as for individuals and nationally. By connecting with and mobilising the community, fundamental change can be brought about. Hence volunteering is a spark for social cohesion and togetherness.

Volunteering

Volunteering is one of the best ways that people can **give back to their communities** and make a real difference, while doing something inspiring. Our volunteers receive **practical work experience and training**, enabling them to learn about the issues facing society right now, and giving them the knowledge and expertise to tackle them. And without the work of our excellent volunteers, **Shelter would not have been able to help the millions of people that we did last year**. We have almost 100 Shelter shops on high streets across the UK, which helped to raise over £1 million this year, which will help to fund Shelter’s face-to-face services. These are dependent on the support and dedication of over 2,000 volunteers.

Volunteers help to widen Shelter’s reach within local communities – meaning we can spread the word about our services and campaigns. Our hubs **recruit in the local community**, often through community centres so we have a diverse volunteering offer. Furthermore, Shelter ensures that it is regularly consulting with people using our services (and the local community) to understand how we can improve our services.

Shelter Ambassador roles for **people with lived experience of housing and homelessness** help to raise awareness of housing and homelessness issues by sharing their story at events and in the media and to help develop our policy positions. ‘A Night In With Shelter’ was organised by Amelia, one of our London service users, and brought together a number of people with lived experience of homelessness to perform spoken word poetry, music and other performances.

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In addition, our **peer mentorship scheme** relies on people with lived experience, linking up people with experience of homelessness with someone who is currently facing it. This helps them to manage the day-to-day difficulties, providing a friendly face to reach out to, giving that person someone who really understands what they are going through and enabling them to open up and get support. Started in August 2018, this is one of Shelter's **fastest growing areas of volunteering** and it's making a big difference.

Community Organising

Over the past year we have piloted the deployment of community organisers at local level, and this will expand under our new strategy. Through our community organisers, our hubs will identify and support **Community Champions**: volunteers who will work in places of faith, work and education to promote Shelter's values, campaigns and services within diverse communities. They will help achieve the change that – alongside the direct support and help we provide – will mean that individuals in that locality have the right to a safe home.

“My role is to identify and develop local leaders within the housing movement and wider civil society. I then build relationships with diverse groups of people, uniting them under a common banner and organising campaigns that lead to people winning change on their own issues.

“Community organising is important because it allows us to **grow leadership in communities** that may not have local sources of money and power. People are then empowered by Shelter to take action together on issues of common concern. This strategy is a tried and tested way of winning real change and connecting communities.”

Bryn, Community Organiser

Shelter's new strategy

In 2018 Shelter set out our new 10-year strategy for improving the lives of people experiencing bad housing and homelessness. We identified 6 million households whose right to a home is either denied or under threat – from soaring rents, insecure tenures, poor conditions or stuck in temporary accommodation to name a few.

Shelter's purpose is to **defend the right to a safe home**. We're a social justice organisation and we're always looking to form new alliances. In recent months, this has seen us work with **Grenfell United** on our commission looking at the future of social housing, with **renters' unions** on improving tenancies and with **centre-right think-tanks** on reform of land purchase so we can build social homes as cost effectively as they do in other countries.

We plan in the next three years to have 500,000 supporters join us in our mission to respond to the housing emergency, through **volunteering, campaigning and donating**. We can only achieve major and lasting change by **working with local communities** and inspiring a diverse range of individuals and organisations to get involved.

If you have any questions, please contact Angel_Strachan@shelter.org.uk or call 0344 515 1182

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