Case Study: Building Trust and Supporting a Homeless Asylum Seeker in Crisis

Background

ABC's Equity Team regularly attends Open House in Crawley to provide health checks and wellbeing support for people sleeping rough or staying in homeless accommodation. Alongside physical health checks, the team offers Point of Care Testing (POCT) for HIV, promotes safer sex awareness, and discusses access to PrEP.

Recognising that many individuals have had negative experiences with healthcare services, the team focuses on relationship-building and informal engagement. Arriving early, sharing a cup of tea, and creating a welcoming environment helps build trust with people who often report feeling unheard by mainstream services.

During one session, clinicians noticed a man sitting quietly outside who avoided eye contact and was not engaging with others. Concerns were raised with Open House staff, and later in the session he agreed to speak with the team.

What We Did

The client disclosed that he had recently become homeless after leaving asylum accommodation and was seeking support with medication.

With his consent, clinicians reviewed his records and identified that his GP had previously declined requests for Tramadol appropriately, instead prescribing medication to support his mental health and offering follow-up appointments. However, the client disclosed he was not taking the prescribed medication despite carrying full packets with him.

During the conversation, he appeared highly unsettled, struggled to remain still, and made very limited eye contact. At his request, the team also spoke to a friend by phone, who explained that the client had previously received mental health treatment in Kuwait and was fearful of healthcare professionals because of these experiences.

Using a trauma-informed approach, ABC clinicians completed mental health screening tools and worked with Open House staff and Sussex Emergency Housing to put immediate support in place. The client remained involved in all decisions and consented throughout to information sharing.

ABC contacted his GP to raise concerns regarding his mental health deterioration and

non-engagement with medication. An urgent appointment with the Mental Health Team was arranged.

Impact

The client is now engaging with the local Mental Health Team and has been allocated a support worker. He has moved into HMO accommodation and continues to attend Open House regularly, where he reports feeling safe and supported.

This case demonstrates how informal, relationship-based outreach can help individuals who are disengaged from traditional healthcare settings access vital mental health support before they reach crisis point.