

**An Investigation into the Effectiveness of
Sacro's Supported Accommodation
Services in Glasgow, from a Stakeholders
Perspective.**

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Introduction

Sacro's **Supported Accommodation Service** in Glasgow is a facility which helps to reduce the risk of individuals re-offending, particularly following release from prison. It enhances social work supervision of offenders in the community by providing monitoring, supervision [intensive supervision in cases of certain high risk offenders] and support in a various types of accommodation.

In Glasgow, this service can accommodate up to sixty tenants at any one time, providing temporary supported accommodation within Glasgow boundaries. Support is provided both in the service users' home and via office visits, where appropriate.

Forty flats are designated as Sacro tenancies by Glasgow Homelessness Partnership [fixed addresses]. This support provided by Sacro is funded by Criminal Justice Social Work. A further twenty service users receive support in temporary accommodation funded by Glasgow Homeless Partnership, [formally RSI – Rough Sleeper Initiative]. All tenancies are single accommodation and fully furnished.

In order to access the service eligible applicants must be single, homeless, subject to a statutory order, aged 16 or over, have a 'live' Glasgow connection, be seeking support to stop offending and resettle into the community and be ready and motivated to change their offending lifestyle.

Prospective service users are advised to either a) ask their social worker to make a telephone referral on their behalf or b) [if in custody] ask to speak to a housing caseworker who will assess clients housing and support needs and make a referral to Sacro for support. When it is feasible tenants can move out of their supported accommodation [placements usually last up to eight months] on a planned basis into a permanent home with the joint agreement of the resident, key-worker, Social Worker and Housing caseworker.

(Sacro, 2004; Sacro, 2007)

Aim

The overall purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of effectiveness held by a sample of eight key stakeholders of Sacro's Supported Accommodation service in Glasgow.

Glasgow's Service Manager selected one service user and one professional colleague from seven of Sacro's diverse partner organizations, all of whom are part of the Criminal Justice Sector and a multi agency approach to reducing re offending. Efforts were made 'to try to obtain as wide a representation of individuals as possible, taking account of the likely sources of difference in their views and experiences' (Hall and Hall, 1996).

Stakeholder's were representatives from the following organisations; MAPPA [Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements], the Drug Court Team, Prison Through-care, Criminal Justice Social Work, Glasgow Community Justice Authority, Glasgow City Council Social Work, Homeless Partnership, Assessment and Diversion Team, and a service user of Sacro's Supported Accommodation Service.

Method

'Evaluation of criminal justice services should employ research methods that are in line with the values of the organization that delivers the services' (Kirkwood, 2008). Sacro's values include 'fairness, empowerment, personal responsibility and capacity for change (Sacro, 2005 cited in Kirkwood, 2008). Based on this, Kirkwood (2008) recommended that research should strive to use methods – such as qualitative methods that acknowledge these values and highlight the capacity for change.

Since Padgett (1998) explained that ‘the ways in which respondents view their worlds and create meaning from diverse life experiences can best be tapped by a qualitative approach’, it was decided by the agency and the researcher that in order to achieve the desired outcomes it would be best to utilize a qualitative account of stakeholder’s experiences in this study. It was essential that ‘the pursuit of knowledge meshed with the goal of improving practice’ (Padgett, 1998).

Hence, in order to carry out this research it was decided that a combination of face to face and electronic interviewing techniques using standardised open-ended questions would be the most suitable. This extended the scope of the research, enabling the researcher to target a larger sample size, one which was feasible and academically sound. A total of six stakeholders completed electronic interviews whilst a further two members took part in face-to-face interviews.

Findings

This section looks at the findings derived from the 6 electronic interviews and the 2 face-to-face interviews which were carried out. In exploring what criteria stakeholders used for making judgements on Sacro’s effectiveness, four headings have been utilised to display the findings - since the information gathered from the questions was in line with the overall aim of the research.

General findings were that stakeholders judged the effectiveness of the supported accommodation service on the basis of their [own] role, knowledge and experience of the service and organisation - hence they had their own specific and differing criteria to assess how well the service performed for them.

To what extent does the service contribute to the aims and objectives of partner organisations?

‘Sacro provides an invaluable support service to our clients. They are an integral resource in our objective to address drug use and offending behaviour through structured drug treatment and social inclusion’.

'Providing a range of support to offenders to integrate them back into the community is an aim of the CJA and the [Sacro's] service model appears to meet those objectives'.

'Reducing offending is a key objective of the Drug Court intervention. It is in my experience that stable and safe accommodation is an integral part of our treatment recovery process. A Sacro flat is a significant step to independent living for individuals who have been caught up in a cycle of drug use, homelessness and offending'.

'Sacro contributes to Criminal Justice Social Work in terms of assisting in the resettlement of offenders and working alongside offenders to ensure ease of integration back to society'.

'With regard to MAPPA, Sacro's contribution is invaluable in terms of the level of support and additional monitoring of the service provides'.

'Sacro offers accommodation with a high level of support together with knowledge of offending behaviour. In its absence we would struggle to find community placements for the more risky patients. If concerns are noted then we are informed immediately and appropriate action is taken'.

Clearly, the extent of Sacro's co-operation and co-ordination as a service delivery partner has an important role to play in assisting partner agencies in meeting their aims and objectives. This is important, especially considering that 'gathering a number of organisations together to tackle a common problem or set of issues requires considerable skill and commitment' (Locke et al, 2004).

Further, it is obvious that everyone is talking to each other – exchanging information, discussing problems and approaches, and networking at a local level. From these accounts it is particularly evident that the success of the criminal justice system as a whole depends on a partnership approach between the statutory and the voluntary sectors. Locke et al (2004) reinforced why this is so relevant; 'collaborative working, where two or more organisations work on a problem simultaneously and in close co-operation, can result in a combined outcome that is more effective than that of any one organisation working in isolation'. For Sacro, having a decent working relationship on the ground and a strong sense of common purpose [to reduce re-offending], while accepting that different agencies have different priorities is helping improve the service for current and prospective service users.

**How well do stakeholders see the service in meeting its own aims and objectives
[contained within the service profile]?**

The Scottish Government (2007) has confirmed that ‘it is important to be clear about the nature and purpose of services for people in criminal justice supported accommodation’. Based on this, it was necessary to ask stakeholders [from their experience] what they believed the strengths of Sacro’s supported accommodation service were, in order to examine whether or not these perceptions corresponded with the aims and objectives of the service.

When the responses were gathered, **seven** out of **eight** respondents underscored the advantages of partnership working. Comments were as follows;

‘I feel that the service provided by Sacro is of the highest standard and the outcomes we achieve through joint working clearly demonstrate this’.

‘Sacro succeeds as a partner agency in working together to reduce the risk of harm posed’.

Seeing that stakeholder’s views were the focus for this investigation and ‘team working and partnership is so crucial to Sacro’s achievements’, it was reassuring to note that all partner organisations apart from one acknowledged that they were satisfied with the working relationships they had with Saco (Sacro, 2007).

Significantly, all **eight** of the respondents mentioned how effective the service was for offenders who in previous years had their time ordered for them by prison life in acquiring the practical skills [budgeting, healthy eating, employment etc.] needed to sustain a tenancy and live independently in the community.

‘I feel that in order to successfully re-integrate clients back into the community and achieve tenancy sustainment, a comprehensive assessment of client need, and a detailed care, support and accommodation plan must be in place, and this is something I feel Sacro achieve and implement to the highest standard’.

‘A Sacro flat is a significant step to independent living for individuals who have been caught up in a cycle of drug use, homelessness and offending’.

Based on the reports chronicled in the findings, it became apparent to the researcher that stakeholders held the view that Sacro strives to meet its aims and objectives with regards to the supported accommodation service.

How does the impact of the service relate to reductions in re-offending and increased community safety?

With regards to reducing offending and increasing community safety, significantly, all **eight** of the respondents perceived Glasgow's supported accommodation service to be effective. Stakeholders commented on their views of Sacro as effective because they perceived it as well-run, responsive and efficient.

'Once a client moves into their accommodation, the Sacro worker is key to the maintenance of the tenancy. Participation and links to community resources, education/employment are issues which are covered within Sacro. This is important since 'the constructive use of an individual's time is considered to be essential within the recovery process'.

Some of the key features of successful resettlement are suitable and sustained accommodation, practical and emotional support, assistance to constructively fill a person's time in the community, someone whom in previous years had their time ordered for them by prison life. In each of these elements, Sacro is able to contribute to address them effectively'.

'Sacro housing provision and support are paramount in the recovery and treatment process. Stability in treatment and therefore cessation of offending is most successfully achieved if the client is has stable and secure accommodation'.

'The support of being able to talk to someone makes a big difference. If you build it all up and suppress it all you're just going to explode one day. The options are there to get things resolved. If you're feeling low at any point in time it's noticed, it's not just pushed under the carpet'.

‘Supported Accommodation staff are involved in often complex multi agency work with high risk offenders which has within it an element of supervision and monitoring which contributes to overall public safety’.

‘In order to successfully re-integrate clients back into the community and achieve tenancy sustainment, a comprehensive assessment of client need, and a detailed care, support and accommodation plan must be in place, and this is something I feel Sacro achieve and implement to the highest standard’.

These findings suggest that Sacro has reduced the risk of re-offending by their presence, support and awareness of risk. It appears that the current forms of engagement and interventions employed by Sacro are ‘up to scratch’ so to speak in promoting desistance since they allow service users to acquire the attitudes and skills required to enhance their quality of life and promote inclusion.

For those ex-offenders fortunate enough to secure supported accommodation with an organisation such as Sacro, the ‘*high level of expertise built up by the staff group*’ is perceived as helpful in averting recidivism and reintegrating the offender back into the community.

It should be realised however that there are ‘great differences in the degree to which each individual reacts or adapts to a profound change in their physical surroundings’ (Reuss, 2003). Interventions do **not** therefore always result in desistance. Nonetheless, although there is no blueprint for solving the complex problems associated with offending behaviour, and deviations do occur from time to time, the evidence derived from the findings points out an important strength of the service Sacro provides - its ability to identify and deal with risk through collaborative working with offenders and stakeholders.

What are the stakeholders’ views in terms of how the service can be improved?

The International Information Support Centre (2005) has highlighted that ‘the process of evaluation should demonstrate what is being done well and should be continued, as well as what needs to change and what additional activities could be undertaken. Importantly, question **five** asked respondents ‘*are there things Saco does less well, what are the weaknesses or problems of the service?*’.

It has been submitted that ‘the supply of accommodation and support for ex-offenders is outstripped by demand’ (The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995). Significantly, in response to question five, **five** respondents made reference to the supply and demand of the service;

‘Capacity of the service, I would like to see the current Sacro service increased to meet current demands’ .

‘The funding structure for the service puts constraints on service delivery. It is not sufficiently flexible to cater for changes such as increases in demand for the service’.

‘As with everything in the current climate, waiting lists and lack of resources hamper the service delivery’.

‘There will always be a need for some elements of supported accommodation. Clearly it’s not available to all’.

‘Lack of appropriate accommodation in areas which are conducive to recovery’.

Evidently, stakeholders recognise that there is a demand for the service in and around Glasgow which is not met by Sacro. It was confirmed by one stakeholder that this deficit is out of the agencies control – it is *‘a financial issue and a capacity issue in terms of what Sacro and others will provide’*. Kirkwood and Richley (2008) reinforced this point further - they explained that ‘across Scotland there has been a tendency to develop supported accommodation provision in line with the availability of housing stock and local housing policy rather than having services which have been developed on a ‘needs led’ basis’. The lack of availability of suitable housing stock, funding restrictions and difficulty with community perceptions about the needs and risks of offenders, are all contributory factors.

On the other hand, *‘there is a delay in moving people on from Sacro accommodation to a permanent tenancy’*. The mapping of available accommodation for ex-offenders in the mainstream could be problem for a number of reasons – shortage of available housing for low-income groups, the nature of an individual’s conviction[s] etc. It is realised that if there difficulty allocating ex-offenders a tenancy once their stay in supported accommodation is complete, complex problems can arise. Kirkwood and Richley (2008) pointed out - due to the lack of suitable move-on accommodation some service users may be remaining in supported accommodation when they are actually ready for independent living and no longer need as much support – this could be limiting access to supported accommodation for those who need

it, particularly when you consider the stagnant overcrowding problems in Scottish prisons at present.

Seeing that 'key work sessions take place at least weekly, and their duration/frequency reflects the support needs of the tenant,' the following statement was thought provoking (Sacro, 2008).

'I sometimes feel that my clients are requiring more hours than are allocated to them'.

It should be realised that the service is a low level service. Although some individuals could do with additional support at times, the service does not always cater for everyone's needs immediately - E.g. If an individual has a relapse, Sacro cannot always increase levels of support. The researcher was informed that whilst Sacro does what it can, it is not always as flexible as it would like too be. This is to do with the structure of the service, limited resources and the service level agreement etc.

Other comments were as follows;

'Family work would be useful in terms of additional support'.

'One thing which is missing is 'joint agency training'.

With regards to family work, Sacro support workers could speak to service users family members about the typical problems which can arise when offenders are released into the community and make them aware of how the service works and in what way it benefits the client.

Joint agency training – although this is an interesting point to make and it could work in some areas, this would be difficult to achieve as each individual agency has their own aims and objectives which they wish to follow.

Conclusion

It appears that one of the key features of successful resettlement for ex-offenders is suitable and sustained accommodation alongside practical and emotional support and assistance to constructively fill a person's time in the community. In each of these elements, Sacro addresses them effectively.

There is clear evidence of collaborative working, particularly in the field of risk assessment and risk management of high risk offenders where Social Work, Sacro and others have a common agenda – to reduce re-offending. It was widely recognised amongst all of the stakeholders involved that the provision of supported accommodation can and does assist in reducing the 'risk' of re-offending. This can only be attributed to the speed and regularity of feedback and staffs competent preparation and communication skills. It is important to bear in mind that this intervention is not a primary way to address offending, it is only a stepping stone in the recovery process. Bolton (2004) wrote, 'the rehabilitation of homeless offenders reaches far beyond the provision of secure accommodation'.

There is clear evidence that Sacro assists stakeholders in meeting their own aims and objectives. All eight of the respondents pointed out that Sacro makes to an effective contribution to the priorities of their organisation.

The accounts emphasised how the service enables service users to gain practical independent living skills which assist them in reintegrating into society and leading law abiding lives. This has been attributed to the constructive relationships that staff build with their clients and the links to support outwith the service which are sought after based on clients identified needs.

Overall, it is readily apparent that Sacro's supported accommodation service in Glasgow is a very effective service. Sacro, as well as meeting its own aims and objectives, [set out in the service profile] is making an effective contribution to the aims and objectives of partner agencies. There is a dominant perception that the service contributes to a reduction in re-offending and increased community safety, acting as a springboard for offenders into independent living.

Recommendations

· Significantly, five of the respondents pointed out that the supply of the service is failing to meet the demand. This has been a serious issue for many years and is linked to funding problems. Importantly, the Community Justice Authority [CJA] are carrying out an audit of accommodation at present. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations of this audit will have an impact on support agencies such as Sacro and housing providers [including private landlords]. Perhaps the stakeholders' opinions found in this report could be put forward to the CJA to demonstrate the fact that stakeholders are very much aware of the need for more places in Sacro supported accommodation.

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