

# Overcoming Homelessness



## Annual Report & Accounts 2014-15



[www.spelthornerentstart.org.uk](http://www.spelthornerentstart.org.uk)

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## What is Rentstart?

We are a homelessness charity established in 1997, based in the borough of Spelthorne, Surrey. Our mission is to provide access to the private rented sector for local homeless people who have no entitlement to any statutory help. We are the only organization in Spelthorne to which they can turn.

Our team works directly with homeless clients and local landlords from an office based in the council building in Staines. The location also enables us to maintain close ties to the Housing department which enhances our ability to work collaboratively.

Our flexible working and low core costs enable both staff and volunteers to spend as much time and money as is available working directly for local people in housing need.

# What do we do?

We help individuals through all stages of homelessness and vulnerable housing. We reach out to the street homeless and those hidden from view and continue to mentor them, often for well over a year, with training and advice on their path to a stable home life.

Specifically:

- ✓ We maintain links with our local Council and other statutory bodies so that those who need us get an immediate referral. We work with those who are street homeless, hidden homeless (e.g. living in sheds, cars or on friends' sofas) and those who are at risk of homelessness.
- ✓ We build up long term relationships with private landlords and estate agents. We do this by offering both rent in advance and a deposit guarantee scheme, which means that landlords feel secure in letting to our clients whom they might otherwise have turned down. The guarantee allows landlords to call on us if the tenant defaults and helps to sustain the supply of suitable properties in which to house our clients. We also offer advice and assistance to our landlords, checking with them periodically that all is well with the tenancies we have provided them with.
- ✓ We seek out homes appropriate for our clients, which may involve stages of tenancy. For some clients we will refer them to supported accommodation that helps them with the skills necessary to take on a tenancy of their own.
- ✓ We provide ongoing support to those we house, for example, on how to manage their tenancy, how to budget and what their responsibilities are. In this way we aim to reduce defaults on payments and a reversion to homelessness. This support also means our landlords can have more confidence in our tenancies as they know problems will be addressed quickly.





## Where we are today

High demand continues for our services to local people threatened with homelessness. We have interviewed 345 people during our 2014-15 year and conducted another 1385 follow-up contacts

with existing tenants to give further advice and assistance. This level of demand, coupled with regulatory change and the rising cost of private sector rents, means we are constantly challenged to deliver.

We have a small, loyal and effective team of paid staff and volunteers who bring a wealth of relevant experience and expertise to the organisation. We also welcomed additional financial expertise during the year as a new trustee joined us to work with our Treasurer with a view to taking over the Treasurer role in the coming year.

We place great emphasis on developing working relationships with complementary organizations, notably with our sister charity Elmbridge Rentstart. This serves to enhance our fund raising capabilities and professionalise our operational capabilities. We continue to seek to develop new links with other agencies and to fundraise from a wide range of sources.

We enjoy long term financial support from Spelthorne Borough Council, who have also agreed to inject further sums both for 2014-15 and 2015-16 from Surrey County Council's Homeless Alliance. This has given us some visibility over our future funding position and supports our sustainability. A final year's funding from Crisis of £25,000 to continue the Rentstart+ scheme was a huge help.

Thames Homeless Project has generously supported Spelthorne Rentstart for some time and in anticipation of that charity winding up in late 2015 gave us a generous grant to fund our own rent in advance fund as that has been an issue since the abolition of the Social Fund in 2013. Although Spelthorne Borough Council has

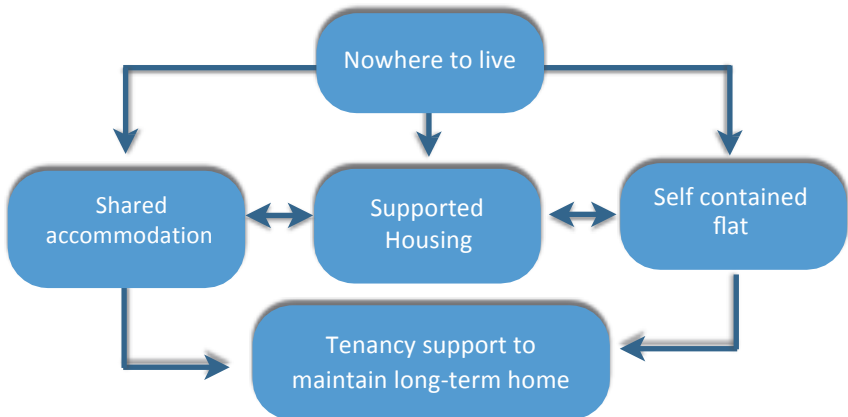
helped us with support for clients in critical need, it was not a permanent solution.

We continue to look for innovative ways to tackle homelessness and raise awareness throughout the Borough via a programme of local events.

The time, commitment and resourcefulness of our team of paid staff, volunteers, committee members and our many supporters ensures we are able to deliver cost effective services to our clients. We extend our thanks to all those who have made such a positive impact this year.

## A Client's Journey

The client's journey to a stable and sustainable tenancy is rarely straightforward. There are sometimes setbacks and our ongoing support is vital to ensure successful outcomes. Clients differ in their housing needs and the kind of tenancy they can afford and maintain and may involve more than one move and our ongoing help before they secure a long-term home.



# Client's Story

**C is a 59 year old male** with a longstanding history of depressive illness and problems with alcohol. In the recent past, these problems had affected his ability to find and maintain suitable tenancies and had impacted upon his relationships with family members, to the extent that he was no longer able to stay with them. C thus eventually found himself sleeping rough which exacerbated his alcoholism and led to him neglecting to take his medication.

The opening of the Winter Shelter provided C with a much-needed stepping stone away from the street and towards getting his life back on track. Referring C to the Shelter meant that for the first time in many months he had a roof over his head and this gave him breathing space to regain some self-esteem and to focus his energies toward looking for a new home. We offered C the use of telephone and computer facilities and he showed enormous determination and tenacity in searching for possible properties and arranging meetings with prospective landlords. There were some false starts along the way, but eventually C's resolve paid-off and he was pleased to find a room in a very welcoming family home. C's own family were thrilled that he had managed to take these positive steps towards re-building his life and he and they re-established proper communication.

**An update:** Since moving into his new home, C has continued on his positive path. He has begun volunteering and is deriving immense satisfaction from assisting other people. His volunteering experiences have further boosted his confidence and he has now begun actively looking for work.

## Who do we help?

Last year we supported over 340 local people who were facing homelessness as well as providing continued support to those we had previously assisted into accommodation and their landlords. Those we help are officially called "non-priority homeless" and are often termed as the "hidden homeless" as they do not always show up on rough sleeper counts. They move from sofa to sofa, or sleep in sheds or cars. Our clients include ex-offenders, people recovering from drug or alcohol dependency and those with mental health issues. We also see a large number of people struggling with job loss and spiraling debt.

# Key Statistics

<b>During the year:</b>	<b>2014-15</b>
Total number of new people seeking help	345
Total number of follow up contacts	1385
Total number housed	86

## Gender

Male	66%
Female	34%

## Age of Clients

18 – 24	32%
25 – 39	28%
40 - 59	33%
60 plus	7%

## Employment Status

Unemployed	54%
Employed full time	30%
Employed part time	10%
Retired	3%
Student	1%
Other	2%

## Housing Status

High risk of losing home	43%
Staying with friends/family	14%
Sofa surfing	19%
Street / car homeless	16%
Other	8%

## Cause of homelessness

Relationship breakdown	21%
Family eviction	16%
Formal eviction	10%
LL selling or renovating	9%
Released from prison	4%
Domestic violence	1%
Tied accommodation	1%
Repossession	1%
Other	37%

“Other” includes drug & alcohol issues, sickness, rent no longer affordable.

# Our Results 2014-15

Although financial support for Rentstart Rescue ended on 31 December 2014, we continued to track statistics on rough sleepers and the help we could provide. For the period April 2014 to March 2015 we registered 56 new clients as homeless. Some were sleeping in tents or their cars but many were sleeping rough on the streets. A further 20 of our existing clients contacted us to request our assistance as their circumstances had changed and they had become homeless. We were able to assist 6 clients into private rental sector (PRS) with a deposit bond and 2 found their own rooms following our advice and support. A further 8 clients were accepted for supported housing. The lack of shelter accommodation in Spelthorne and nearby other than the winter shelter means it is very hard to help with something immediate.

The Thames Homeless Project grant of £10,000 will enable us to create our own rent in advance fund. The model is that as tenants move on to new accommodation, the RIA would be paid back to Rentstart and so the fund will be self-sustaining. However, as tenants are increasingly staying in longer tenancies – a good thing for their own stability and future prospects – that model may not move as quickly as initially planned.

Since Rentstart started in 1997, 746 Deposit Guarantees have been issued, giving us a total financial exposure of £307,480. Of those, 141 claims, representing 18.9% of the guarantees issued, have been received and we paid out £40,003.20, or 13.0% of total financial exposure. During 2014-15 we received 4 claims totaling £1,392.96. We were grateful to the Thames Homeless Project who contributed 50% of the cost of these claims, a total of £696.48.

With Rentstart+ we achieved our target to successfully move 30 clients into PRS housing and support them so 80%+ achieved a sustained tenancy.

For the second year a winter night shelter was open January to March which accepted referrals from Spelthorne, Runnymede and Elmbridge. 19 people were referred from Spelthorne and 14 were accepted for a place in the shelter. Unfortunately the night shelter was at some distance from Spelthorne which made it harder for some of our clients. Although Rentstart neither funded this initiative nor managed it, it is a very important resource for us to have available to help those most in need with a short-term solution.



# Key Challenges in 2014-15

We have experienced another busy and challenging year. The high volume of follow-up contact made through further assessments, interviews, telephone calls and e-mails puts significant strain on the organisation.

A key challenge continues to be the availability of suitable housing at an affordable cost. Fewer and fewer landlords are willing to take on tenants on benefits. With the pressures of the rental market landlords have a choice of tenants and perceive that the risk is lower with tenants not relying on benefits. To meet this challenge we have had to become more flexible with our deposit guarantees, extending them beyond our previous 12month limit and sometimes for the duration of the tenancy.



Most private rental accommodation costs more than Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate, meaning the tenant must come up with the additional each month. Of the 53 clients we housed in private rental accommodation, in 39 cases the rent was above LHA rate.

# Looking Forward 2015-16

Our scheme is free to use for both clients and landlords, so the continuation and stability of our charity requires access to continuing funds now and for the future. An ongoing challenge is fundraising for day-to-day operations versus new or ongoing projects which tend to qualify for more options.

Via the Surrey Housing Alliance, part of which covers Rent Deposit Schemes, Spelthorne Council BC has provided additional funding to Rentstart in the amount of £10,775 per year for 2 years, starting April 2014, which will continue to support our work in 2015-16. However the two year Crisis funding is at an end and will leave a gap we will seek to fill.

Having housed in excess of 1500 people since 1997, demand for our services grows and is not likely to diminish in times of hardship. We will need to redouble our efforts to source additional properties for habitation.

We are hoping that the proposal to increase rent a room tax relief to £7,500 from £4,250 may lead to more available rooms and easing some of the pressure currently on that market.

We will continue to work with other agencies in neighbouring boroughs to ensure the widest possible impact for our services.

An ongoing, but not immediate, concern is the planned move of Spelthorne Borough Council to a different office location. If that location could not offer us the same free office space we have today, that would have a major financial impact on our services.

As of this writing, plans are in place for a winter night shelter for Jan – March 2016, once again giving us an option for immediate referral for those most in need. In good news for our clients, the shelter will be located in Staines, making it much easier for them to access the service.

# Our Funders

We would like to thank all our funders, from local supporters to the larger organisations who support our work:

Spelthorne Borough Council

Surrey County Council

Thames Homeless Project

St. Nicholas Church, Shepperton

St. Mary Magdalene Church, Littleton

Rotary Club of Shepperton Aurora

Crisis

Staines Methodist Church

Rotary Club Staines

And of course all the landlords and agents willing to accept our deposit guarantee and work with us and our clients.



# The Team

## The Management Committee

Linda Marshall	Chair/Secretary
Joanne Buckingham	
Pauline Nicholson	
Les Oaten	Treasurer
Carol Parker	
Avril Pye	Minutes Secretary
Beryl Rowe	
Barbara Royston	
Hilary Stokes	

## Staff

Bryan Pilgrim	Project Officer
Meena Chahal	Project Support Officer
Barbara Pilgrim (no relation to Bryan Pilgrim)	Admin Officer

## Volunteers

Sue Clifford	Interviewer
Maureen Hesbrook	Interviewer
Barbara Royston	Interviewer and Office Support

**SPELTHORNE RENTSTART LIMITED (REGISTERED NUMBER:IP28593 R)**  
**A REGISTERED SOCIETY UNDER THE CO-OPERATIVE AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETIES ACT 2014**

**Income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 March 2015**

	Restricted Funds		Unrestricted Funds		2015	2014
	THP	Big Lottery Crisis	SBC General Funds	Bond Fund	Total	Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS</b>						
<b>Total Income</b>	10,000	25,000	51,417	-	86,417	61,104
<b>Expenditure</b>						
Wages	-	17,200	28,774	-	45,974	47,743
Training	-	300	396	-	696	184
Telephone	-	400	239	-	639	768
Post, Stationery, Photocopy	-	425	262	-	687	801
Travel Expenses	-	225	231	-	456	368
Professional and Regulatory Fees	-	-	145	-	145	90
Rent in Advance	-	-	(153)	-	(153)	2,821
Sundry Expenses	-	-	42	-	42	707
Insurance	-	250	285	-	535	493
Consultancy	-	950	800	-	1,750	-
Meeting Rooms	-	-	52	-	52	-
Guaranteed Fund Claims (NET)	-	-	170	-	170	1,119
Transfer to Bond Fund	-	5,250	1,100	(6,350)	-	1,088
Provision for RIA Repaid	-	-	4,295	-	4,295	-
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	-	25,000	36,638	(6,350)	55,288	56,182
Surplus for the year	10,000	-	14,779	6,350	31,129	4,922
Fund balances at 1 April 2014 (2013 Adjusted)	-	741	25,315	17,491	43,547	38,625
Fund balances at 1 April 2015	10,000	741	40,094	23,841	74,676	43,547

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**A REGISTERED SOCIETY UNDER THE CO-OPERATIVE AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT**  
**SOCIETIES ACT 2014**  
**BALANCE SHEET 31 March 2015**

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Cash at Bank and in Hand	78,998	43,573
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	78,998	43,573
<b>LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	(4,295)	
	<hr/> 74,703	<hr/> 43,573
<b>CAPITAL AND RESERVES</b>		
Called up Share Capital	27	26
<b>Unrestricted Funds</b>		
Spelthorne B.C. and General Fund	40,094	25,315
Guarantee Bond Fund	23,841	17,491
<b>Restricted Funds</b>	10,741	741
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS FUNDS</b>	<hr/> 74,703	<hr/> 43,573





[The Community Link Centre, Knowle Green, Staines, TW18 1XA](#)

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