

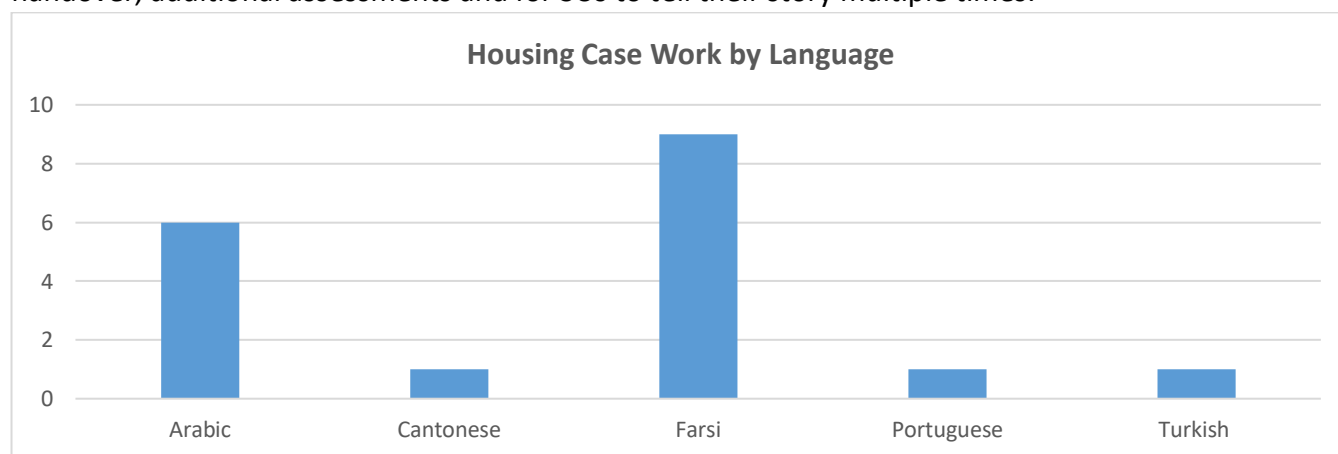
SUSSEX COMMUNITY FOUNDATION TRUST**GRANT 2021-22****What activities have you carried out with this funding?*****Overview***

SIS delivered 18 Bilingual Social Prescribing and Advocacy cases to support Service Users (SU) to receive housing information, advice and guidance then access Housing and Homelessness services at Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC).

This grant funded casework supplemented our existing projects "Social Prescribing Plus" and "Sussex Advocacy Project" (funded by BHCC and B&H CCG) for which there is inadequate resources to meet the needs presented particularly in relation to housing. This tends to require intensive language support over an extended period. The average case length was 13 hours over 4 months.

SIS works with a cohort of Volunteer Linguists to triage needs and then contracts with a pool of accredited Self-Employed Sessional Linguists (SESL) to delivery Bilingual Social Prescribing and Advocacy. SESL are supported by a Projects' Co-ordinator Projects' Manager.

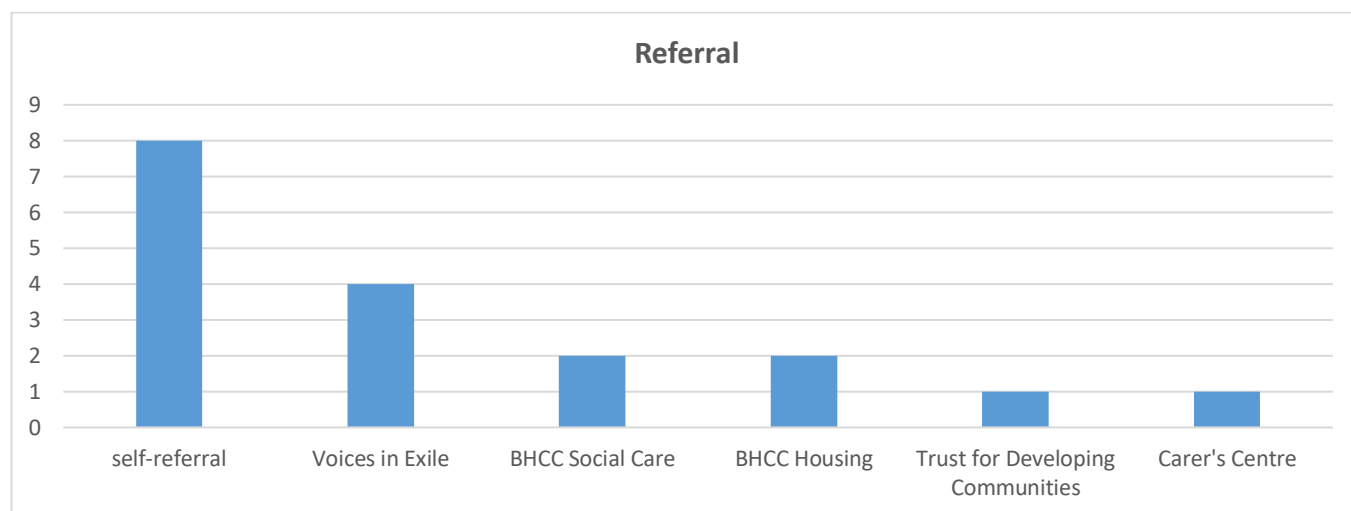
This same caseworkers are involved across all projects providing a high level of efficiency and cost effectiveness whilst enhancing the SU experience; rapport can be built and there is a reduced need for handover, additional assessments and for SUs to tell their story multiple times.

***Promotion***

SIS undertook promotional activities to ensure our services were understood and accessible. We talked with partners in the local authority and community and voluntary sector that we already collaborate with to encourage referrals.

We also undertook promotion directly with SUs which, in our experience, is the most successful way of encouraging uptake of services amongst migrant communities. SIS has a 30 years track record as a

trusted organisation embedded in local community through our linguist network and contacts with over 150 grassroots groups and organisations. The caseworkers in turn, have an excellent reputation and a shared identity with the SUs that helps build rapport and create a safe space to discuss issues and challenges.



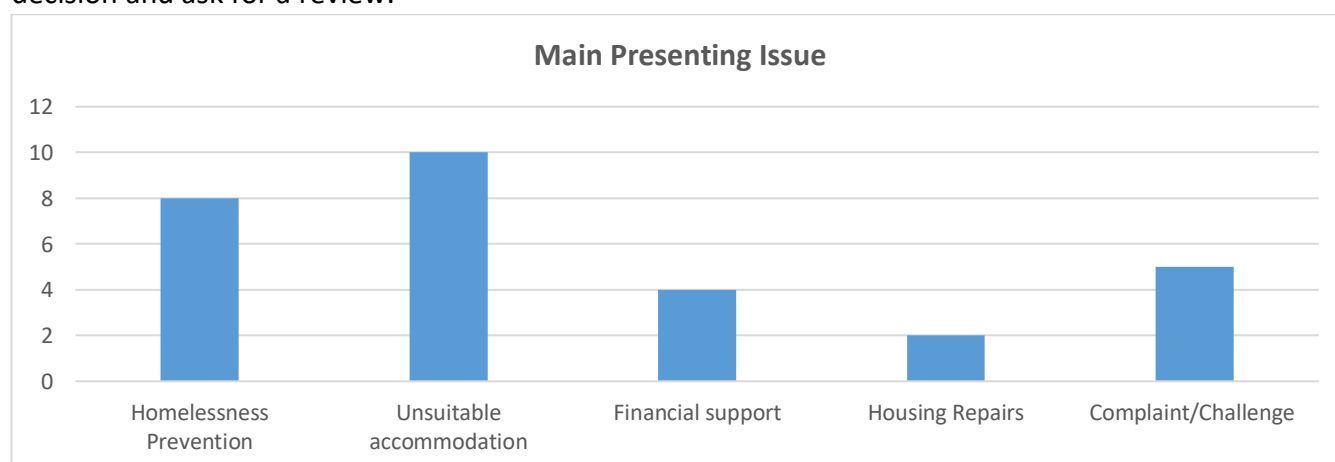
Presenting Issues

All of the SUs wanted to move to a new home.

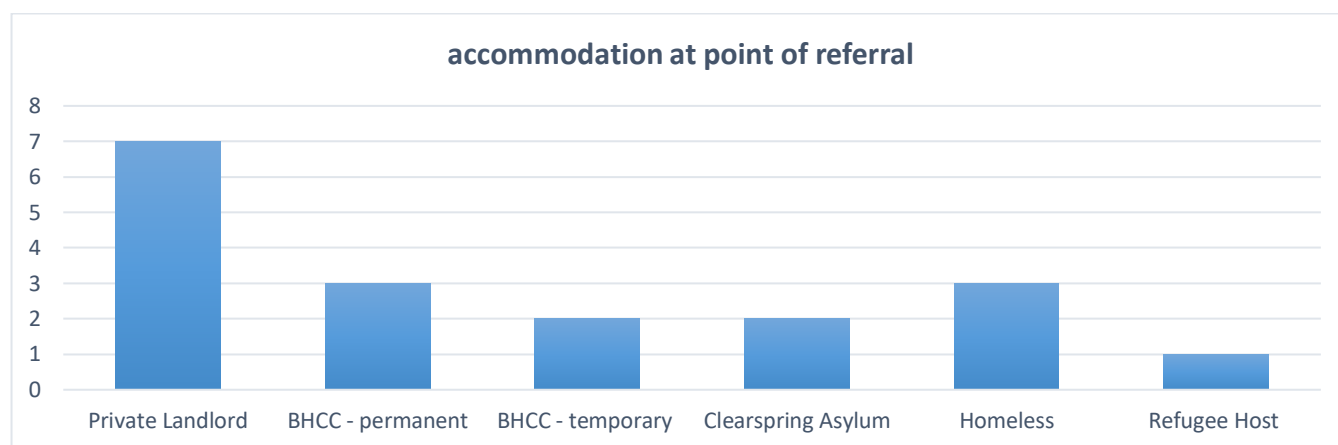
44% because they were already homeless or at risk of homelessness; section 21 notices, unable to afford rent, eviction from asylum accommodation. For 4 cases we also helped with securing additional financial support through universal credit, local discretionary grants and securing deposit payment help.

56% because they were living in unsuitable accommodation; overcrowded, poorly maintained, temporary emergency housing, incompatible with a disability. For 2 cases, we also helped with requests for housing repairs and maintenance.

Some SUs had already applied to the Council through HomeMove and were supported to complain about the process and their unequal, discriminatory treatment or to appeal the current banding decision and ask for a review.



Only 3 SUs were Homeless at the point of referral but conversely only 3 were in secure (permanent council) housing. All the others were in less secure accommodation such as private rented. All the SUs in the most precarious accommodation, or already homeless, were Asylum Seekers.



Support Issues

All the SUs needed extensive help to source and understand information about their rights and the processes and procedures regards housing so that they could make informed decisions about what to do. All SUs then required further help with their correspondence and communication to pursue the outcome they wanted.

BHCC Housing is very inconsistent about providing language support; there is virtually no translated information and interpreters infrequently booked even with the caseworker continuously asking for this service.

The caseworkers were required to take on these additional roles and get involved at every stage of the process. This was discouraging and disempowering for some SUs who, outside of the language barrier, were highly capable individuals who could have advocated for themselves if consistent language support had been provided.

An important role, and considerable time, was taken by the caseworkers to bridge the digital divide. All of the paperwork for BHCC Housing Department, is on-line and the access difficulties for our SUs are multi-layered. The divide is caused by a combination of soci-economical , physical , cultural and psychological factors which manifest variable as a lack of access (to devices and internet), skills, confidence or motivation.

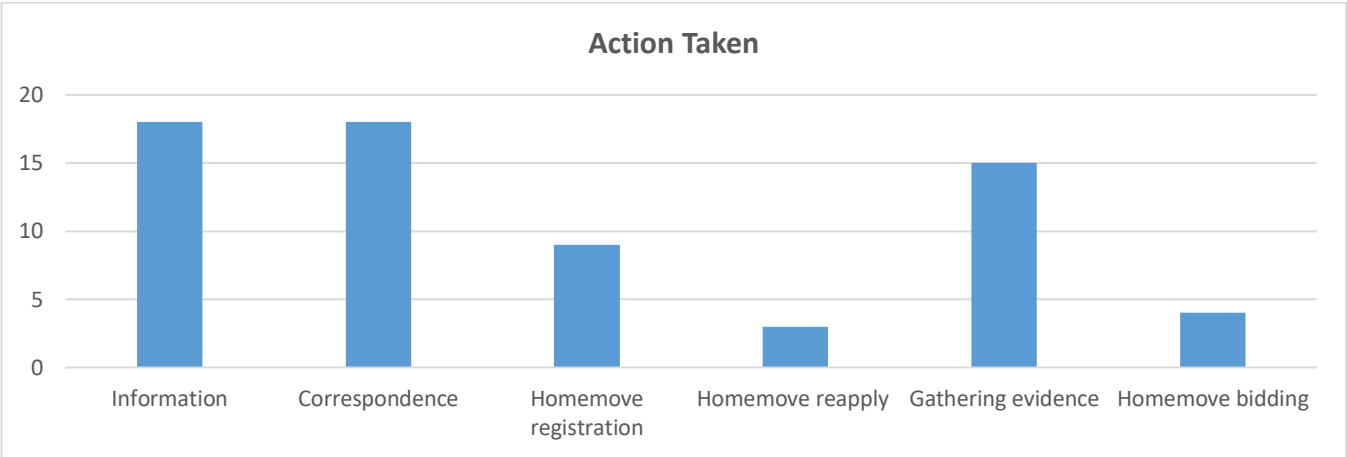
One recent development is that the Homemove website, including the registration forms and bidding process, has a Google Translate function. SIS volunteer linguists “mystery shopped” the site for accessibility and functionality. They found that, while the translations were largely good (except where some specific terminology and names were used), it doesn’t work across all devices, is very difficult to locate on the homepage (without good English), navigates away to the main BHCC website and needs to be reselected on every new page.

A particular challenge for SIS SUs was understanding the need for and then sourcing the supporting documents for a Homemove application and evidence required for accurate “banding”.

Frequently this was as many as 20 separate documents (all in English) from multiple sources including Government departments (e.g. Home Office, DWP, social workers), NHS (e.g. GPs, Mental Health

practitioners), Financial institutions (e.g. banks, loan companies). SUs needed help on each occasion to contact the right department and ask for the correct piece of evidence.

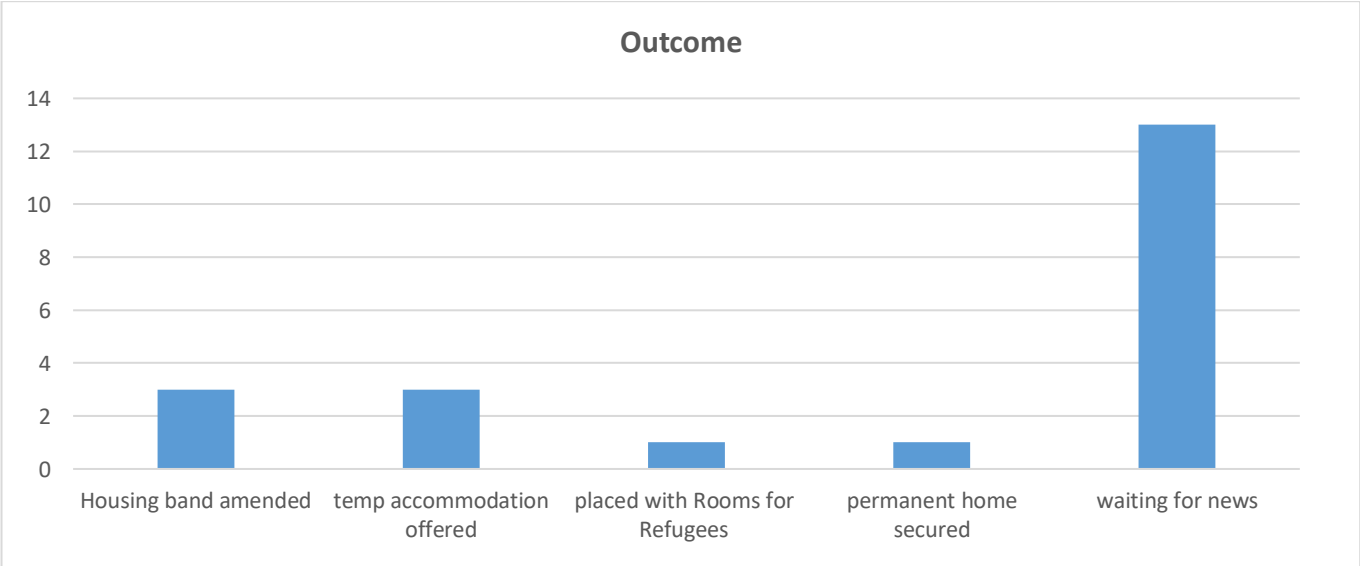
For 3 SUs, their original Homemove application hadn't been processed because this evidence was lost or missing and they either hadn't been informed or hadn't understood what was required.



Outcomes

This funding had some positive outcomes with all SUs making some forward progress with their Housing issues. However, there were few cases where the final sought outcome was achieved; 1 SU secured BHCC permanent accommodation, 3 SUs were offered BHCC emergency temporary accommodation and 3 successfully achieved a re-banding at a higher priority level.

72% of the SUs are waiting to hear further from BHCC about their application. This is mainly because their banding is not a high enough priority for them to be invited to bid on properties and they are therefore on a waiting list. One SU has been invited to bid on properties but feels the housing options given are an inappropriate match to their circumstances and are of poor quality.



What difference has this grant made to beneficiaries and the wider community?

The intervention of a SIS caseworker helps to make an individual, their family and their community feel seen, understood and valued. This is very important when the bureaucratic systems of local government are dehumanising individuals and putting up barriers in communities.

SUs reported not feeling listened to by the housing department (and other public services) and are often unsure whether they've been understood. SIS caseworkers provide an opportunity to talk to someone in their first language and fully express themselves, knowing that the same person can then articulate their needs, frame their argument and evidence their situation more precisely. This provides a boost to confidence and self-esteem, eventually helping empower individuals to support other community members.

The importance of the shared identity between caseworkers and SUs cannot be under-estimated. Caseworkers may not have undergone exactly the same struggles but they all had a shared migrant experience; learning about and navigating a new country, culture and systems, to make improvements to their lives. Caseworkers are an aspirational example of what might be.

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, basic physiological requirements including adequate housing are the most fundamental building block to wellbeing. People living in insecure housing are under constant stress which, at best means existing with high levels of anxiety and, at worse can contribute to severe clinical depression.

All the SUs reported their housing difficulties having an adverse effect on their mental health and wellbeing. They described a wide range of symptoms which showed how poor mental health can permeate all other aspects of a person's life; poor sleep, short tempered, inability to concentrate and focus, feelings of hopelessness, fear, etc. 77% of cases concerned a family in housing crisis with all members being affected and resultant behaviours being taken into schools, workplaces, transport etc. Support with housing issues lifts some of the burden and liberates SUs to start considering higher needs that benefit their family and community such as education, employment, health, friendship, family. Our on-going work through social prescribing indicates this progression.

An advocate is "on the side" of the SU providing confirmation that everything possible is and has been done to further their case. The housing system is very slow and ponderous causing high levels of anxiety which can be allayed by the knowledge that, whilst frustrating, this is normal and not the fault of the individual but the system. Some specific errors in advice or information were identified by the caseworkers which would otherwise have not been picked up and could have caused even longer delays and potentially catastrophic outcomes.

Some cases have highlighted antisocial racist behaviour that affects individuals and the wider community. The reporting of these issues can benefit the entire community by galvanising action from police and community safety teams.

Once a family had moved to new property the caseworkers were instrumental in ensuring they had suitable furniture and equipment ensuring they were able to store and prepare food and keep warm and dry.

What have been the main challenges in delivering this work?

Demand outstripped Capacity

We would have liked to support SUs with their housing needs. In 2021-22, SIS Volunteer Linguists triaged 467 referrals (311 individual SUs). 25% (116) of these referrals involved Housing as one of their issues. We were only able to offer casework support for those most in need (18 cases through this funding, 32 cases through Social Prescribing Plus). Volunteer Linguists offered minimal guidance and signposting to the rest.

SIS had set aside a contingency of 30 hours for both Bilingual Advocacy and Bilingual Social Prescribing to cover all SIS casework. This contingency was largely taken up by the Housing project (25 hours of BA and 15 hours of BSP)

Challenges to secure Section 21 from Landlords in order to present to BHCC Homelessness Prevention

Caseworkers have witnessed the unscrupulous behaviour of some landlords within the Private Rental Sector; regularly raising rent without attending to the upkeep of the property and refusing to issue Section 21 notices which would enable the tenants to move on via BHCC Homelessness Prevention.

HomeMove is inaccessible to our SUs

HomeMove has been described by a SIS partner as “an impenetrable fortress”. People needing BHCC support with their housing are already vulnerable but it is particularly challenging for our SUs who are often ignorant of the system, have no social capital, experience a language and cultural barrier, have no money and cannot access the digital systems.

At one point during the year, BHCC Housing launched a “Housing Support Drop-In” which was staffed by a dedicated Housing Manager. This made a huge difference, the dedicated worker took a problem solving approach and was able to get answers to long standing questions, explain blockages and delays and help with advice. Unfortunately, when this worker left the council, they were not replaced and the system felt even more broken than before.

As described in section 1 language support is rarely provided so, without the support of SIS caseworkers, SUs would be unable to present the full picture of their needs and eligibility to Homemove, evidence their claims or explain the unsuitability of their current accommodation.

When the opportunity to join the Sussex Advocacy Partnership was presented in 2018, BHCC Housing declined and the issues that existed have not improved.

Poor administration from HomeMove

There were numerous examples that HomeMove was unable to cope with their workload, leading to errors and delays. Information and evidence has been lost but SUs hadn't been informed (17%). Record keeping and internal communication is inadequate and obstructive causing lengthy delays (33%). Even with caseworkers chasing HomeMove regularly there seems to be little or no progress on cases for months at a time.

SU dissatisfaction with accommodation conditions and locations

The housing stock held by BHCC, particularly temporary emergency accommodation, is in very poor condition, in undesirable locations (often out of town) and beset by antisocial behaviour problems. This is rarely expected or understood by SUs who are then shocked and upset by the offers made.

One SU expressed a preference to live on the street than in the BHCC emergency hotel *“it’s smelly, dark and dirty. I can’t stay in this place, it reminds me of the prison cell where I was held and tortured in [country of origin]”*

These issues have been highlighted in the local press

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19866781.council-pause-use-kendal-court-newhaven-amid-review/> .

There are serious ramifications if offers of accommodation are turned down because BHCC no longer has a duty to house an individual who refuses what is offered.