

Case study:

Invisible Voices

An energetic group using art to raise funds and change lives

Invisible Voices has been running since January 2016.

The group was set up by a group of friends who wanted to raise awareness and raise funds to support homeless people in Brighton & Hove. After talking to some of the organisations who provide services to homeless people, they decided to reach a wide audience by participating in the Brighton Fringe Festival.

In the May 2016 festival, they created a book and photographic exhibition, telling the stories of people who are moving on from homelessness. The group has continued to meet and is currently preparing a performance and another book and exhibition for the May 2017 Fringe Festival.

Both exhibitions have been staged at the Cascade Creative Recovery Café, and members of Invisible Voices have worked closely with users of the café during the year, helping with the Café's photography group and drama group, and supporting Café users to contribute to this year's exhibition and show.

Janet, a founding member of Invisible Voices, is now a volunteer trustee at Cascade.

How Invisible Voices supports better health

By raising funds for local services such as First Base and Cascade Recovery Café, Invisible Voices helps directly to provide nutrition, information and emotional support to people who are living on the streets or in temporary accommodation.

The 2017 book is focused particularly on the issues faced by people in temporary accommodation and those who are both homeless and disabled. By providing a platform and outlet for their creative work, the group helps to boost the confidence and motivation of people who are facing an uphill struggle to rebuild their lives.

The Cascade photography group includes four individuals who have found the process of being involved in the exhibition immensely valuable. One has suffered a relapse into addiction in the past year, and the photography group has been an important aspect of his recovery, giving him a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

For all the members of the photography group, it is a source of enjoyment and achievement, helping directly to improve their mental health and their chances of staying free of addiction.

Invisible Voices' focus on telling the stories of homeless people also helps to break down the stigma and isolation felt by members of the homeless and recovery community.

Support accessed by Invisible Voices

Invisible Voices is a small group, run by a core group of six volunteers.

They work closely with Cascade Recovery Café and also received information about homelessness issues from Brighton Housing Trust.

They have successfully applied for funding from the Hedgcock Bequest and have had some in-kind support from Brighton Fringe.

They use the Resource Centre's print room to produce their publicity and describe the Centre as "invaluable".

They have used the Centre's online information and find it extremely useful to be able to tap into the knowledge and experience of the Centre's staff team. Janet said: "We love coming to the Resource Centre because you know you are going to get the help you need".

How the city can support groups like Invisible Voices

Invisible Voices is a good example of the specific support needs of small community groups.

They have very little funding, and need access to low-cost printing services.

They are learning as they go along, and have had to solve a lot of practical problems quickly – they need to be able to pick up the phone and ask a question, rather than waiting for a scheduled training course.

They organise events once a year and have no premises, so they need access to equipment without having to buy, store or insure it.

They are organising the group in their spare time, and need online information which is easy to understand and access out of hours.

They are not experienced fundraisers and need access to a simple small grants scheme to support their valuable work.