

999 Club – Women's Sanctuary

A safe space supporting and empowering women facing adversity in Lewisham.

999 Club is a charity based in south-east London providing a friendly, open door for anyone that is homeless.

In 2022, 999 Club opened the Sanctuary, a women only safe space in their day centre. Vulnerable and homeless women can access services such as rehousing, benefits' advice, employment and training, healthcare and wellbeing support. Funding contributes significantly to the continued running and expansion of this service

"We get women, sometimes with children, presenting in all sorts of states of crisis... having this support and a female case worker is huge." – Project Worker

Why the work is needed

Many women avoid generic homelessness services because they feel unsafe around men and have difficulty trusting others. They are falling through gaps in provision and are becoming trapped in a cycle of trauma and homelessness.

999 club believe they are the only organisation in south-east London providing a dedicated space, services and activities specifically for homeless and vulnerably housed women.



Approach

The Sanctuary, led by the Women's Service Lead, offers tailored support and activities. The team includes Sessional Worker(s) and volunteers, some with lived experience. Many women have complex needs. Some use the Sanctuary as a drop-in for respite and connection, while others access services and support.

Key approaches include:

- Listening to women's needs
- Being non-judgemental
- Working in a person-centred, trauma-informed way
- Tailored support plans
- Specialist partner support (housing, benefits and training advice)
- Refuge (domestic abuse support)
- Access to GPs, nurses, showers, and laundry facilities
- Workshops and activities, including mental health sessions, sewing, and pampering

"the funding gives us the opportunity to provide the breadth and variety of activities" Head of Operations

Impact



Growing Reach: Since launching, awareness and referrals have risen. From August 2023 to June 2024, 329 women accessed the Sanctuary



Flexible Support: Women can use the service as often and for as long as needed



Building Trust: Staff form meaningful relationships, helping women feel safe and confident to seek support.



Reducing Isolation: Women gain confidence, meet new people, and feel less lonely.



Opportunities & Personal Growth: Access to healthcare, counselling, and skill development has changed lives. Some have moved into housing and even volunteering for 999.

"The staff here really care, they are highly professional, really experienced and really discrete when you need it...it is a lifesaver." Beneficiary



Challenges

"It's the demand for services, we are getting so stretched." – Project Worker

The rising demand for the Sanctuary, along with the increasing complexity of women's needs, has been a significant challenge. Reduced support from statutory agencies has added pressure, leading to inappropriate referrals as services become overwhelmed.

Sustainability remains a concern, with funding becoming harder to secure. Systemic barriers, such as women with no recourse to public funds, further complicate support, often leaving them in limbo while awaiting assistance..

Learnings

- The Sanctuary's small space can become crowded due to rising demand.
- A project review led to a dedicated volunteer always being present to help manage the space and foster connections.
- This has improved the experience for women while ensuring the Women's Service Lead remains available for support when needed.

The Future

- 999 Club will continue offering the Sanctuary and its associated support and services while continuing to apply for grants from Trusts.
- Optimistic having the Mercers' Charitable Foundation funding will help leverage additional grants in the future.

"Having someone in there all the time to be welcoming, friendly, and mediate that space." – Project Worker