

BCAN Homeless Forum Shared Guidelines Outreach Work

Introduction

This paper has been produced by the BCAN Homeless Forum as one of the ways in which we seek to promote 'best practice' among the groups working with homeless people in Bristol.

By 'Outreach Work' we mean activities that take place outside places of work and recognised drop-in centres, whether undertaken by members of staff or volunteers.

Organisations have a legal duty to provide adequate health and safety training for both their staff and their volunteers. Guidelines such as these form an important part of such training.

Detail

The key message for people engaged in outreach work is: *trust your instincts*. If a situation feels unsafe, get out. Remember: God doesn't want you to get killed!

Teamwork

- Always work as part of a team; never work alone.
- Be careful about getting separated from the other team members.
- Always agree a 'get-out' signal beforehand: if *anyone* feels uncomfortable, they give the signal and you all leave straight away without questions. One signal that has been used is: "Isn't it time to pick up George?" – this works when nobody on the team is called George.

Supervision

- Have at least one experienced person working on each team and supervising the less experienced members.
- People on the team should know who is supervising the team, and should be prepared to follow their directions.

Location

- Be careful about where you go – especially derelict buildings, which are very dangerous.
- When possible, travel together to and from the outreach area.
- Be careful about where you park: it is better to leave the car somewhere safe and well lit and walk a bit further. You do not want to be going into a badly lit area with few people around late at night to recover your car.

- When you head back to your car, have your car keys in hand: you do not want to be standing by the car looking for your keys.
- Wherever you go, think about your exit route. Remember, you could need to make a rapid exit at any time, and you are more likely to need a rapid exit if people are blocking your way.
- Remember that most problems are not with rough sleepers, but members of the public at pub kicking-out time.

Infection

- Have Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Tuberculosis (BCG) inoculations.
- Don't wear trainers: wear shoes with good solid soles – Doc Martens or similar – you can't always see what you are stepping on, and used needles can easily go through inadequate footwear.
- Be aware that you *can* pick up Hepatitis from saliva, such as that found on a plastic drinking cup; however the HIV virus is far more fragile, and is very unlikely to be passed on in this way.
- Do not pick up needles or syringes. Note their position and inform your office or the Environmental Health people on 0117 922 3838 between 8:30 am and 8:30 pm (Monday to Friday only).

Theft

- Don't put temptation in people's way. Don't take handbags or purses, credit cards or jewellery, even if you will only be out for a short time.
- Don't leave anything visible in a car. Even if you know it is worth nothing, the thief doesn't.
- Don't wear clothing that is easy to grab, such as scarves.

General

- Check your equipment, supplies, handouts, etc. before you go out
- Don't take risks.
- If a confrontation is developing, walk away.
- Respect the personal territory of people on the street – don't stand too close or put yourself between them and their possessions.
- Don't lean over sleeping people. If they wake up, they can easily hit first and ask questions later.
- At night, don't shine your torch into people's faces.
- Remember your body language – be reassuring, not threatening.