

Summary report of the Toynbee Hall project

An economist from the Bank of England, Chris Peacock, worked with Toynbee Hall, a charity that looks to alleviate poverty in its local area of Tower Hamlets, and beyond.

The Safe Exit project, part of Toynbee Hall's Wellbeing Programme, aims to reduce the scale of street-based prostitution and to improve outcomes for those involved. Safe Exit brings together service providers to take a holistic approach to reduce the harm that women face and support them to change their lifestyles whilst seeking to reduce the impact of prostitution on local communities. Safe Exit does this by:

- Developing effective partnerships to ensure that women are able to access & receive the support services they need,
- Developing multi-agency solutions such as the Diversion Scheme to support women into services; the Change Course to re-educate men buying sex, and the Assisted Reporting Scheme to facilitate women to report offences against them to the police
- Building sector capacity and knowledge to deliver services which are flexible enough to accommodate the complex needs of women involved in prostitution
- Influencing society, policy and strategy to tackle the root causes of prostitution

Safe Exit delivers a Diversion Scheme that offers a practical supportive alternative to the criminal justice system for women arrested for soliciting or loitering for the purposes of prostitution in the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham. The scheme aims to divert women involved in prostitution away from the Criminal Justice System by providing them with a more supportive route into key services which can meet their needs.

Toynbee Hall wanted to understand whether the long-term changes in women's lives as a result of the Safe Exit project could deliver savings in, for example, health and criminal justice spending that outweigh the cost of running the project, and what they might need to do in terms of collecting outcomes data to be able to investigate and demonstrate this.

Pro Bono Economics matched Chris Peacock from the Bank of England with Toynbee Hall. He spent time examining the data the charity currently gathers on the women involved in the Safe Exit project and advised on possible improvements that could allow future analysis of the outcomes and impacts of the programme.

Chris Peacock set out his recommendations to Toynbee Hall which will inform their future data gathering. For the charity, this is the first step in moving towards a better way of recording outcomes. Miriam Merkova, Manager of the Safe Exit project said: "We are extremely grateful for the support and input from Pro Bono Economics. It has been really useful to have expert volunteers looking at how we collect information about the work that we do and particularly how we document the outcomes of our work. As a result of PBE's recommendations, the project will be moving from ad-hoc recording to a more robust framework for outcomes monitoring. We will be introducing regular reviews and a grading outcomes tool. We are thankful that skilled economists give up their time to help out charities with limited resources."

Pro Bono Economics will follow up with Toynbee Hall as data is collected over the next months and years in order to determine whether this assistance has been helpful in enabling a rigorous assessment of the Safe Exit project.

Whilst clearly useful for Toynbee Hall, Chris Peacock is keen to highlight the value of volunteering for economists: "It was a fantastic experience to meet the case workers at Toynbee Hall through PBE and get an insight into the way they are making a real difference to the lives of women under the safe exit scheme. I learned a great deal about the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis and how they work through them with limited resources. It was both inspiring and humbling. I would very much encourage other economists to get involved with PBE as a way of applying their skills to new issues and to challenge their ways of thinking."

