

Summary report of the St Basils project

A team from HM Treasury, with support from the Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell, has been working with the homeless charity St Basils.

St Basils has 27 accommodation projects across Birmingham and North Worcestershire, providing supported accommodation for young people aged 16 to 25, and is the National Centre of Excellence for youth homelessness.

The project, brokered by Pro Bono Economics, was to look at their data collection and advise on potential improvements, with a view to being able to measure their social impact in a robust way in the future.

The volunteers, Patrick Curry and Ben Gill, took over work started by Lottie Murphy working with Sir Gus O'Donnell, and have now completed a report to the charity looking at existing literature on homelessness, outlining potential methodologies for analysing impact, and commenting on and analysing the data currently collected. They say "Working with St Basils through PBE has been a great experience. We have learnt a lot from the expertise of the charity itself, about innovative approaches to homelessness and the practical challenges of measuring and demonstrating impact. We have had the opportunity to broaden our own professional skills across a complex and fascinating set of issues. We would encourage other economists, who are looking to put their skills to practical use outside their normal work and to challenge their ways of thinking, to get involved with PBE."

Jean Templeton, Chief Executive of St Basils says "I am hugely grateful to all involved in this project. Although it has taken longer than we all originally anticipated, I think the delay has made the learning all the more valuable. I have a new language and a new understanding and confidence about the different approaches, so I can join in the debate about them and challenge appropriately. As a result of the work by the PBE volunteers, I have been able to address our previously inconsistent approach to data collection. St Basils has benefited enormously from having access to a range of economic expertise through the auspices of PBE."

Sir Gus O'Donnell comments "I have learned a lot working with St Basils through Pro Bono Economics and I am very pleased that the project has now reached a successful conclusion. The work on the project is a great example of how economists, through PBE, can draw on their skills and make a positive contribution to the work of charities."

The team will continue to support the charity's data collection, as St Basils works with Southampton University, to develop the charity as a PIE (Psychologically Informed Environment) organisation. PBE hopes to offer further assistance in the future, as data is collected over the next months and years to allow rigorous social impact measurement.