



Preventing Homelessness with Faith Communities

Making a difference together



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

**Mayor of the
West Midlands**

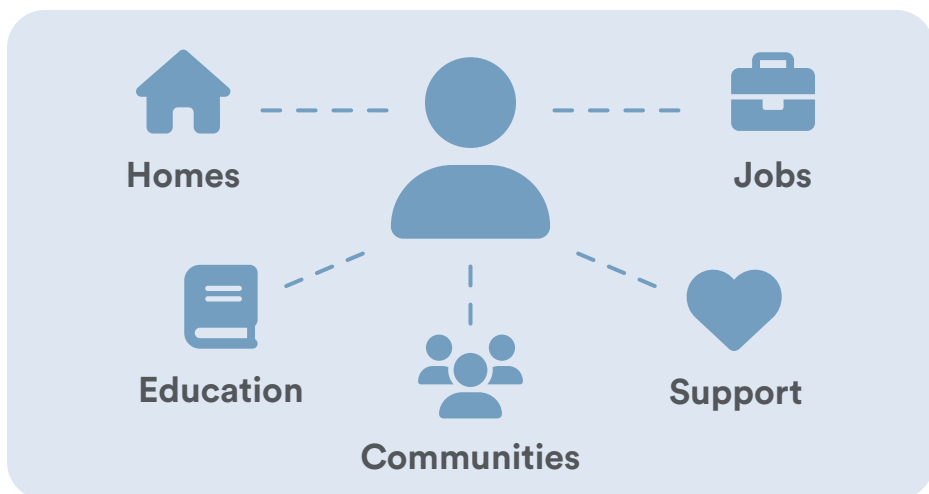
Introduction

Since forming in 2017 the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce has been dedicated in its commitment to collaborate with the region's diverse faith communities to design out homelessness, in all its forms. Over the past two years, this commitment has extended to an exciting collaboration with the West Midlands Faith Strategic Partnership (FSPG) and their Homelessness Working Group.

In partnership we have explored the key strengths and unique contribution of faith communities to supporting people experiencing homelessness. Working together we have also considered the role of faith communities in preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity, so that citizens are supported well before they reach crisis point.

This booklet serves as both a call to action for faith communities across the region and an invitation to collaborate with the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and the FSPG. The purpose of this call to action is to help us to jointly articulate and build upon the critical contribution that faith communities can make, and are already making, towards our ambition to design out homelessness.

It is our hope that together we can draw on our collective resources and expertise to build a universal prevention approach that keeps people in their homes, jobs, communities, education, and connected to safe support.



Developing a Universal Prevention Approach

Adapted for use by the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce, the Positive Pathway Model provides a flexible framework that can be used to help us develop planned approaches to homelessness prevention.

The journey into homelessness is rarely a linear process or experience which is why the Positive Pathway Model seeks to ensure that prevention-focused support is provided as early as possible and builds long term resilience so that the experience of homelessness is averted for citizens.



Most homelessness or homelessness-related services are focused on the ‘help’ space of the model, when people are either already homeless or at the brink of crisis point. This model helps us to reflect, refocus and redeploy as much activity as possible in universal prevention.

Universal prevention can be described as activity, infrastructure and support that is not primarily or specifically focused on homelessness but ensures that the protective factors that we all benefit from are created, nurtured and maintained so that homelessness does not occur. For example, access to affordable housing, income, education and health services. Effective universal prevention results in the knowledge, resilience, options, and opportunities that ensure that homelessness is avoided.

The approach requires the wholehearted collaboration of organisations well beyond housing and homelessness services and it is our belief that the region’s faith communities are important partners in developing this work with us.

Faith Communities and Universal Prevention

There are already some great examples of work being undertaken by faith communities that demonstrate universal prevention in action, such as providing welcoming community spaces for people to meet and connect with others, and community befriending services.

This type of activity is as important as support provided in crisis situations to people experiencing homelessness. This work highlights the particular strengths of faith communities in building resilience, promoting positive social support networks and as a trusted and influential presence within communities.

Through this booklet we want to consider how a faith-based approach to universal prevention can be developed further alongside existing crisis intervention activity.

Our long-term aim is that as much work as possible is undertaken upstream and on universal prevention so that we can reduce the need for crisis work. We think that faith communities are uniquely placed to make an important contribution to this goal.

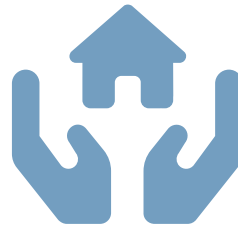
The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and FSPG are keen to support, encourage and collaborate with faith groups to develop and promote a universal prevention approach that can be embedded within communities. This call to action is built on the work faith groups are already doing and how that contribution can go further, impacting on the strategic changes we need to see so that homelessness is prevented wherever possible.

If you haven't considered your impact in this space before we hope this booklet helps you to reflect, take action and collaborate to impact on some of the fundamental causes of homelessness. This is important if the region is to be successful in designing out homelessness and limiting the impact of homelessness on citizens across the region. Our ambition to design out homelessness is as critical now as it has ever been in the context of increasing levels of need across our communities and the ongoing challenges as a result of the cost of living crisis.

We believe this area of work can be led by faith groups in local communities with our support. By collaborating with us we believe we can enable faith communities to maximise their impact and build on their unique strengths.

Our ask is for you to work with us to articulate the role faith can play within universal prevention and come together with organisations across sectors as part of a positive pathway to design out homelessness.

Our offer is to collaborate with you and to support your efforts in this work and build a shared approach to universal prevention.



A Shared Approach to Universal Prevention

The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and FSPG Homelessness Working Group have been working to develop a shared understanding and approach to promoting universal prevention.

Our collaboration has helped us to start defining the contribution of faith communities to universal prevention. We consider that role to involve fostering resilience and reducing risk in respect of the factors and causes that lead people to be more vulnerable to homelessness.

Our joint work has resulted in the creation of a **framework** that faith groups can use to consider how they can embed a universal prevention approach within their local communities.

Underpinning this **framework** is the principle that everyone is of value and the explicit acknowledgement of the transformational effect faith groups can have within communities.

The Framework in Detail

Faith groups offer support that is transformational not transactional

Faith groups fulfil a unique role supporting people within communities. Much of what they offer has a transformational effect. In this context, we are referring to transformational support provided by faith communities that can create sustained and meaningful changes in people's lives. The role of faith groups in providing people with a safe space for belonging and a sense of being part of a community is critical to building resilience and connections with and for people so that homelessness is prevented.

Many groups undertake vital work in supporting people experiencing homelessness, for example providing food, items of clothing or a wide variety of other help that people might need. This crisis support is important but only makes up part of the story. This framework focuses on work in the universal prevention space and goes beyond those transactional forms of support by refocusing on the transformational activity that faith groups can provide in helping build resilience and preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

It is an approach, not a project or service

Many faith groups have an important role in providing projects and services to people in need across communities within the West Midlands. This includes a long history of faith groups delivering services to those who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Some of the most prominent homelessness support organisations both nationally and regionally originate from faith. The aim of developing a shared universal prevention approach is to go further and add value to what can be offered by any one project or service. Rather than focusing on specialised service provision it emphasises the role of community in supporting people well before crisis. Therefore looking upstream and preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity, building on the strengths of faith communities to create and sustain the protective factors which help prevent homelessness.

It builds on the strengths, role, and place of faith within communities

Faith groups operate in a unique and distinct space within communities. A universal prevention approach can be built on the sense of community that faith groups offer people. The unique position faith groups occupy as trusted members of local communities offers the opportunity to maximise their impact on building resilience and connections for people who might otherwise be at risk. This should not mean that faith communities are left with the sole responsibility for addressing social issues but it does mean that faith communities have a distinctive offer to contribute as collaborators and partners.

It is about how communities can identify people or groups that might be at risk

Given their unique place in communities faith groups can play a critical role in helping to identify people who might be at risk well before crisis points occur. Homelessness is the result of the interaction of a variety of factors and multiple disadvantage including trauma, poor mental and physical health, structural inequalities, experience of poverty and adverse childhood experiences. Through the development of a shared universal prevention approach, we hope faith communities can reflect on how these risk factors can be identified early and how this approach can support them in addressing those risks. For example, where people are identified as being at risk we know that offering evidence based advice and guidance at the earliest possible stage has a major impact on reducing the risk of homelessness. There is an offer from the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and FSPG to work together with faith groups and upskill communities in this area.

It builds on the important role faith groups have in nurturing a sense of belonging and creating social support networks

Faith has a central role in providing people with a sense of belonging and offering transformational social support networks. Shared social support networks are integral to ensuring that those that might be at risk of homelessness feel supported and engaged within their community. It is through these relationships that trust is built and it offers the opportunity of increasing the protective factors and resilience within communities that help mitigate risk. For example, faith groups have offered critical support around cost of living issues and within the region faith based social support networks provide a way of meeting the practical and spiritual needs for those who might be at risk. There is an offer from the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and FSPG to work with and link groups to other partners who can provide support to build the capacity of faith groups to meet these emerging needs.

A Call to Action

We hope that this booklet acts as a catalyst to conversations within your faith group and across different faith groups.

We have outlined 5 key questions below to help you consider the important role that your faith group can play in preventing homelessness in your local communities:

1

What activity are you already undertaking that promotes universal prevention?

2

What new areas of work aimed at universal prevention could you develop that you're not already delivering?

3

What are the barriers to developing and delivering universal prevention-focussed activity?

4

How can those barriers be removed and what help might you need to overcome them?

5

Who else might you need to work with to enhance your work on universal prevention?

The partnership between the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce and FSPG demonstrates our commitment to collaborate with different faith groups across the region. This offer and commitment is for all faith groups. To find out more about how you can work with us to embed universal prevention within your local communities please contact us by email:

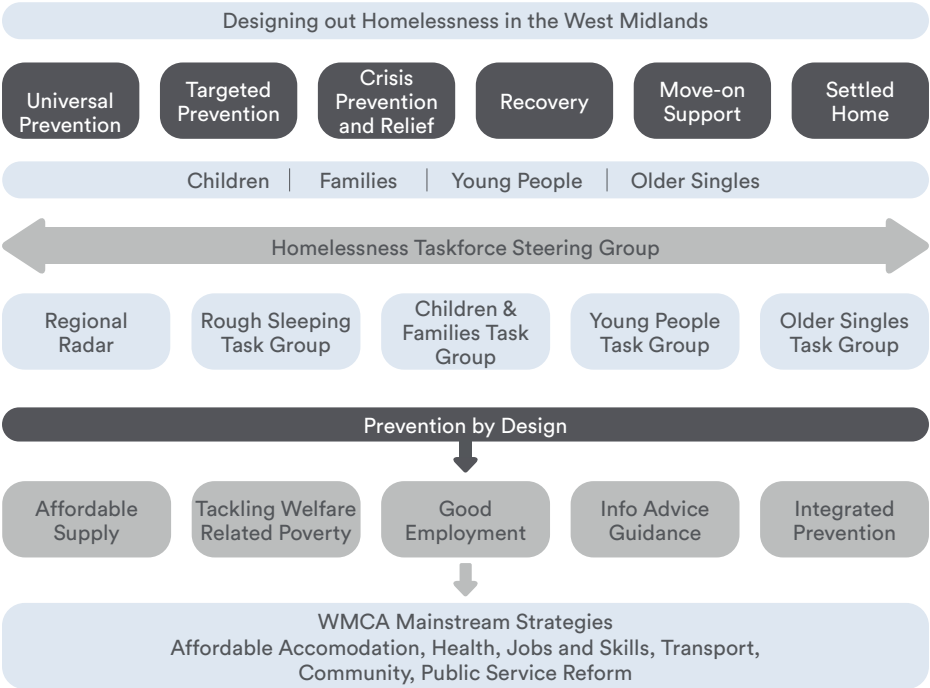
homelessness@wmca.org.uk

About the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce

In 2017 the first Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, established the [WMCA Homelessness Taskforce](#) with the explicit commitment to bring together organisations, people and resources to design out homelessness, in all its forms. Since its inception the Homelessness Taskforce has worked on a wide range of issues and initiatives ranging from Housing First through to research work on Families in Temporary Accommodation.

The Taskforce membership includes all seven constituent local authorities of the WMCA, representation from non-constituent local authorities, key public sector agencies, voluntary, private and charitable organisations, working together to prevent and relieve homelessness. In addition, there is a Members Advisory Group made up of Cabinet Members with responsibility for homelessness from each of the seven constituent authorities, bolstering political leadership and accountability.

The key focus of the Homelessness Taskforce is to design out homelessness from policy, practice and planning by designing in prevention so that we collectively make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.



About the West Midlands Faith Strategic Partnership

The West Midlands Faith Strategic Partnership (FSPG) is a multi-faith group, representative of the region, that offers an opportunity for different faith communities to engage with the WMCA around a variety of policy issues, including homelessness.

In 2021 the FSPG set up their Homelessness Working Group to consider the ways in which faith communities can greater contribute and collaborate with the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce to design out homelessness.

Resources

There are a number of additional resources that you can access that will provide you with further information about our work with faith groups as well as resources that can help you to develop a universal prevention approach in your local communities:

- [The Mayor and Faith Action Plan: Faith in the West Midlands](#)
- [Faith and Homelessness in the West Midlands](#)
- [Designing Out Homelessness with Faith and Community Groups](#)
- [Designing out Homelessness Briefing Paper](#)
- [The Positive Pathway Model Briefing Paper](#)
- [Commitment to Collaborate \(C2C\) Toolkit](#)



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