

## Key facts

### Location

Elmbridge, South East England

### Grant

£25,000

### Duration

1 year

### Start Date

1/1/13

### Purpose

To increase capacity through building new partnerships and projects, fundraising and training staff

### Supported during the period of the grant

Increased fundraising capacity (income up from £60,000 to £200,000 per year); up-to-date training for all staff including housing benefit training, housing health and safety rating system, welfare reform, engage and empower; new partnerships and projects delivered; secured HTF main grant of £58,000 for 1 year

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## Elmbridge

## Rentstart

PRS access and more for people who become homeless in Surrey

## Overview

**The Future Ready Fund is to 'protect and enhance essential and strategically critical services for single homeless people and support them in the transition to becoming sustainable'. This involves funding work to help organisations fundraising more effectively, grow and reach more people, prepare for change and develop skills, for example in leadership.**

Future Ready funding from the Homelessness Transition Fund has enabled Elmbridge Rentstart to transform into a rapidly growing, influential local service, helping more people out of homelessness in a more sustainable way.

“This grant was instrumental in our growth. Without this initial funding we could not have paid for fundraising help. The funds we have raised have literally transformed our work - we can reach more people, have formed new relationships, hired additional (and excellent) staff. We now deliver a joined up, quality service which goes far beyond our original brief. In addition, by securing some significant three year grants, we now face the next financial years from a position of some security.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

## Identifying need

Elmbridge Rentstart started as a small rent deposit scheme in 2001. It was developed because its founders saw unmet need for single people experiencing homelessness in the area. The project grew slowly and organically for the next eight years with stable small-scale local authority funding and unrestricted income from local events, such as cake sales. However, the Project Manager felt that there was more they could do:

“In 2009 we wondered: if we ‘grew up’ as an organisation could we do better? Could we do more? We were putting people in places but with no support we saw a revolving door of homelessness for some.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

## The funding

Future Ready funding was identified by a volunteer providing initial development advice to the Project Manager. There was, however, some resistance to applying for restricted funds from board members who were more comfortable with the existing flexible funding. This was a pivotal point for the organisation. The opportunity to find out more about the Future Ready fund was vital to giving the Project Manager the confidence to make an application:

“The Future Ready webinar by Homeless Link made us realise that we might fit into their world – we had thought we were so small, we thought we would be asking for half our income - as one grant, they won’t give us that!”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

In 2012 Elmbridge Rentstart was awarded £25k from the Future Ready fund. The organisation’s income for 2011/12 was £60,000. By 2013/14 this had increased to £200,000.

The funding was spent on a range of capacity building activities to make Elmbridge Rentstart ‘Future Ready’. The investment included:

- Increasing staff hours to develop partnerships and new projects
- Support with fundraising from an external consultant
- Providing more staff training.

## Achievements

### More funding, diverse funding

Support with fundraising has resulted in more funding from more diverse sources, including CRISIS and the Tudor Trust.

An additional statutory funding award from Surrey Homelessness Allowance, via Elmbridge Borough Council, gave Elmbridge Rentstart £25,000 over two years, from 2014 to 2016, for 20 extra private rented sector placements per year.

The assistance from an external fundraising and development consultant has been central to this work.

“I was writing for the same Local Authority audience all the time. I needed to message differently, present ourselves differently, stop thinking ‘We are too small’. (The consultant) would say to us – imagine money is no object, what do you need to do.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

One of the most significant funding partnerships, which has grown with the development of Elmbridge Rentstart, is with Walton Charity. As a local funder Walton Charity was a natural source of support, but the Future Ready grant meant that Elmbridge Rentstart was positioned to maximize this relationship and develop an ongoing partnership:

“If we were like we were in 2001, yes they (Walton Charity) may have given us grants, but the sophisticated projects we are doing now would not have had traction without the projects the HTF had enabled me to establish.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

Elmbridge Rentstart was in a position to influence the priorities of Walton Charity in a way that developed the partnership going forward.

“Rentstart were a huge part of bringing homelessness to the table for us. Street counts never came up with people sleeping rough but through Rentstart we knew there were homeless people who were hidden.”

Chief Executive, Walton Charity

Walton Charity provided Elmbridge Rentstart with wide ranging support, including funding for a Deposit Guarantee Scheme, use of three guest rooms in blocks for emergency situations, and use of three properties with support and training for people who are not yet ready to secure their own tenancy. The charity has a flexible approach, helping Elmbridge Rentstart fill in gaps left by more prescriptive funding:

“You can get the state entitlements but there are missing bits – we can try and fill the last bit of the jigsaw, for example provide (small extra amounts of money to) people who have a place to stay but no bedding, or someone who really needs a train ticket for a job interview.”

Chief Executive, Walton Charity



## Leading and influencing

The additional management time and development of funding partnerships has given Elmbridge Rentstart the 'strength to enable change in areas outside our direct work' (Project Manager) thereby becoming a strong advocate for single people who become homeless. This is particularly important in an area where homelessness is not very visible and there is reluctance from some in the community and in services to recognise the problem.

The external support funded by the HTF was also helpful in giving the project manager the confidence to become the leader of a larger organisation with more influence, requiring new skills and the confidence to take ideas forward.

“It's been good and challenging, I have grown as a manager, taking on things I would not have done before.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

Over three years, Elmbridge Rentstart worked in partnership with Walton Charity to secure commitment to and delivery of a winter night shelter in the area, serving local people experiencing homelessness. 18 months of engagement activity led to the Year one pilot in 2014. The pilot was funded by Walton Charity, Elmbridge Borough Council, Paragon Housing and the local community, with service delivery led by Transform Housing & Support.

Having demonstrated the need for the shelter, three local authorities (Elmbridge, Spelthorne and Runnymede) were involved in the second year of provision for 2015. Walton Charity, Whiteley Village and the local community were also involved. This work started with evidence gathering to show that people from the area were seeking support from homelessness services in other boroughs. This evidence was used to raise the profile of the issue.

The project provided essential shelter in the coldest months of the year. Rentstart could refer people to the service when they needed an emergency option for someone, and also identify others in need of housing by attending the shelter.

## A better deal for single people experiencing homelessness across North Surrey

After its rapid growth and development, Elmbridge Rentstart is able to offer a more complete and flexible package to their customers.

“We always provided a deposit – now we do much more: pre-tenancy training, support, employment coaching. We want to offer something to people wherever they are on their homelessness journey.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

An essential component of this is Rentstart Rescue which was funded by the Homelessness Transition Fund in 2012. Rentstart Rescue has been developed into a flexible service with the



capacity to reach people early in their homelessness across the three boroughs of Elmbridge, Spelthorne and Runnymede, and facilitate access to the private rented sector, often avoiding the need for hostel accommodation.

While the organisation has been transformed, many of its founding principles remain the same. The organisation is available to all its tenants in an ongoing way and believes that the private rented sector can provide a good route out of homelessness for people in a wide range of circumstances. It also seeks to provide a service and an offer that landlords will often choose over commercial lettings agents.

“We spend time working with people and have a holistic approach. If people have been told they are 'not a priority' that's a negative message. Here we are a service provider working with a customer, it's all about (the customer), a nicer relationship, we ask for more of a story ... We expect you to do well; it's a positive, reinforcing thing. We have 52 people currently saving for their own deposit for the future.”

Project Manager, Elmbridge Rentstart

“They are approachable and focused on the individual. If they say they will sort things out, you know something will happen.”

Chief Executive, Walton Charity

# Learning from Elmbridge Rentstart

The Elmbridge Rentstart project provides useful learning about how a small organisation can grow rapidly and become larger and more sustainable.

## Capacity building

The support and training funded by the Future Ready Fund laid essential foundations for moving the organisation forward. This included support for the Project Manager in fundraising and developing new projects as well as investment in more staff time to develop and deliver services.

## Partnerships and relationships

'Identifying friends' (Project Manager) and developing trusting relationships created an environment for growth. A 'can do, will do' approach helped to consolidate support and trust from funders.

## Communication

The project has very diverse stakeholders from private landlords to borough councils. The Project Manager recommends that small organisations seeking to grow and develop should 'Really set out your store, explain what you do and why, thinking about your audience'.

## Develop a track record

Doing small projects well builds up trust and reputation. The Chief Executive of Walton Charity explained the appeal of one of the first projects they funded Elmbridge Rentstart to deliver.

“The Rent Guarantee Scheme was a low cost and easy to administer project, which built up a track record. We also saw the numbers of people helped and supported.”

Chief Executive, Walton Charity

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