

Name of Project: Star Partnership

Lead partner: Shelter

Borough: Lambeth

I was living in shared accommodation until I lost my job due to the Covid-19 lockdown and my employer's inability to continue paying me. I have always paid my rent and was really scared about getting into debt so I left the property and went to stay with my friend, however, my friend's housemate did not want me to stay in the property and I was made to leave on 10th May.

I am HIV positive and in the high-risk category for contracting COVID-19. Frightened of the risk to my health if I was to be street homeless, I called Lambeth Council's out of hours number that same day but I was advised that there were no provisions for assisting people under COVID-19 and that they were only dealing with people who had a priority need. I was confused by this and didn't understand why the council would not help me. With nowhere to go I was forced to sleep on the streets that night.

I called Shelter the following morning and was put through to a caseworker who listened to me and immediately set about helping me. She contacted Lambeth Council and also advised me on my rights to make a homelessness application and get temporary accommodation.

My caseworker made a referral to Thames Reach, and although they do not cover the street outreach team in Lambeth, they agreed to call around hostels for me and also to refer me to the Lambeth Street Outreach team, however I managed to find a friend to stay with for a few nights. My caseworker continued to work non-stop on my case for the next 3 days, sending written representations to the council and calling them to argue my case.

I was starting to give up hope and had exhausted all options of people to stay with, but then 4 days after my first approach to them, the Council changed their mind and confirmed they would provide me with temporary accommodation under the relief duty from that night. I couldn't believe it, a surge of relief washed over me. Lambeth Council advised me to complete a form for the housing element of Universal credit online, however I really struggled with the form so my caseworker helped me with this.

My caseworker's help did not stop there, as a few weeks later I received a letter from the temporary accommodation team to notify me that I was in rent arrears. I immediately panicked and called Shelter and she set up a telephone appointment with a Streatham job centre work coach to help me with my claim. She also referred me for support with managing my paperwork as this is something I struggle with and referred me to Thames Reach for ETE assistance.

I am now in self-contained temporary accommodation which I am really happy with, my Universal Credit application has been successful and I hope to secure a job soon. Thanks to my caseworker I am now hopeful for the future, I cannot thank her enough.