

WE recently asked people using our services to tell us what three things would improve their mental health and well-being.

Unsurprisingly, housing and housing-related support came out as two of the most common themes.

Many people said that more affordable, better-quality housing would improve their mental health, and others talked about the importance of supported accommodation and tenancy support. Building up confidence and being able to live independently were also cited as crucial factors.

We believe that these issues go hand in hand - a secure home with the right support can help to transform people's lives.

The Welsh Government has recognised accommodation as one of eight key areas of life in recent men-

EWAN HILTON

COLUMNIST

tal health policy and legislation. And our 25 years of experience tells us that the quality and security of accommodation can have a huge impact on people's well-being.

We also know that many people using our services face significant challenges accessing or maintaining accommodation, whether they are homeless, leaving hospital or struggling to pay their rent and keep up with their bills.

The recently implemented Housing (Wales) Act seeks to address some of the key issues surrounding

housing and homelessness. However, it is a 12-year-old housing programme that currently plays an important role in supporting people with mental health problems to live fulfilled and independent lives in their communities.

Each year the Supporting People programme supports more than 60,000 of the most vulnerable people in Wales to live independent and fulfilled lives in their communities.

As well as people with mental health problems, it also benefits people who are homeless, families

fleeing domestic abuse, ex-service personnel, care leavers and older people.

The programme is centred on preventing homelessness, through the provision of outcome-focused support that enables recipients to increase their independence, improve their health and well-being, reduce re-offending and re-enter education, training and employment.

In fact, research conducted by Carmarthenshire County Council estimated that every £1 invested in the Supporting People programme delivered savings of £2.30 across health, social care, community safety and housing.

There are savings in investing in the Supporting People programme, but there are also some very human impacts that we witness every day.

Eighteen months ago Lisa was experiencing severe depression.

Her illness was having a profound impact on her life and she was struggling to fulfil everyday tasks such as dressing, leaving the house and paying her bills. She was also experiencing physical health issues that were further compounding her mental health problems.

Lisa was referred to Gofal's Tenancy Support Scheme, which is funded by the Supporting People programme.

Lisa started receiving support to address some of the issues that were having a negative impact on her mental health.

Although her journey of recovery wasn't easy, Lisa has made significant progress and is now leading a fulfilled and independent life.

In a recent television interview,

Lisa said: "To have my life back, to start taking control of my own life means so much. I feel there's so much more out there for me now."

As a result of the support she received from Gofal's Tenancy Support Scheme, Lisa has now joined our Pathways to Employment project and become an extremely active and inspiring volunteer - helping individuals, her community and Wales in a number of ways.

Lisa's volunteering work is supporting her recovery and helping her to build confidence and skills for the future.

However, she is also making a valuable contribution to individuals and the wider community, encouraging people to talk about mental health and helping to run the local fruit and veg co-operative. Supporting People-funded support was the beginning of

this journey and the rest would not have been possible without it.

There are many more stories like Lisa's, which demonstrate the positive impact of the Supporting People programme on individuals and communities across the length and breadth of Wales.

At lunchtime on Monday, May 18, Cymorth Cymru and Community Housing Cymru have organised an event in the Senedd to celebrate the success and achievements of the Supporting People programme over the past 12 years. Lisa will be joining other service users and providers at the event and hopes to talk to politicians who will be making important decisions about the health and housing budgets over the coming years.

Ewan Hilton is the Executive Director of Welsh mental health and well-being charity Gofal

ing time to think about your options," 'Legends Live On.'