

Belle's Place

A Summary of the service and planning for the future

Belle's Place is a long-standing community hub in Ilfracombe supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantages, including homelessness and rough sleeping; people in supported or temporary accommodation; sofa surfing/insecure housing; addiction and substance misuse; mental ill-health; social isolation and social exclusion; and wider hardship such as low income and barriers to accessing services (for example low literacy and distrust of statutory services).

It provides essential practical support (hot food, showers, clothing, tents/sleeping bags), alongside trusted access to health and statutory services (primary care outreach, mental health, sexual health, oral health, housing advice, probation and social services). Available data shows high, consistent demand (average 29 drop-in attendances per day) and meaningful system impact through improved access to primary care and earlier intervention for people who typically do not engage until crisis.

1. Overview: what Belle's Place does and who it supports

Belle's Place evolved from a youth café into a multi-service support hub. While open to all, it is primarily used by people with complex needs who are often least able to access traditional services. Typical needs include:

- Social isolation / exclusion
- Drug and alcohol dependency
- Mental health needs
- Homelessness / vulnerable housing (sofa surfing, supported accommodation, temporary accommodation, rough sleeping)
- Low income / crisis hardship
- Barriers to services (including low literacy and distrust of formal systems)

Belle's Place acts as a gateway service, building trust and helping people engage with health, housing and support before issues escalate to crisis.

2. Numbers of people supported (reach and demand)

The service operates at significant scale, year-round.

2.1 Drop-in use

- Average 29 people per day using the drop-in
- 5 days per week, 52 weeks per year
- Equivalent to approximately 7,540 drop-in attendances per year (attendances, not confirmed unique individuals)

2.2 Requests for support outside the drop-in

Average 3 requests per day via phone/messages for support (food bank vouchers/parcels, clothing, equipment, signposting).

2.3 School uniform support

- Summer 2020: 72 families
- Summer 2021: 104 families
- Summer 2022: 250 families
- Plus approximately 4 uniform requests per week throughout the year (often linked to emergency accommodation, loss/outgrowing uniform).
- Updated figures required: latest summer and current-year totals (to be inserted when available).

2.4 Wider support outputs

- Household Support Fund: Belle's Place acted as a referral agency and completed 400+ applications with clients.
- C-Card registered: 11 young people currently using the service.

3. What Belle's Place provides (service offer)

Belle's Place provides a blend of essential needs support, health access, and wraparound advice/signposting.

3.1 Essential needs / crisis prevention

- Hot food (5 days per week), feeding up to 39 clients per day.
- Independent Food Bank and Trussell Trust Foodbank (vouchers/parcels).
- Showers and toiletries.
- Warm clothing, plus tents and sleeping bags for those with nowhere to go.

3.2 Access to health and wellbeing support

- Primary care outreach clinic (GP clinic / health screening).
- Mental health support (including monthly Devon Mind presence) and Community Mental Health Team.
- Sexual health clinics (C-Card, STI/HIV advice, condoms/lube).
- Oral health support (hygiene advice and dental referrals; self-referral pathway enabled).
- Podiatry.
- Hep C Trust screening and treatment (screening for blood borne viruses such as Hep C, syphilis and HIV; treatment pathway supported).
- Needle exchange (new service; uptake building).

3.3 Drugs, alcohol, housing and statutory services

- Drugs and alcohol support (Together) – 50+ clients currently on the programme.
- Housing officer support (regular) – support into accommodation including temporary accommodation for 30+ people in Ilfracombe.

- Probation services and Social Services.
- Practical support: online access, form completion, and general advocacy/signposting.

3.4 Wider community support

- Weekly barber.
- School uniform shop.
- Practical advice and support delivered with compassion and respect, enabling sustained engagement.

4. Evaluation and evidence of impact (quantitative and qualitative)

4.1 Improved access to primary care (qualitative, service-led evidence)

Belle's Place provides a setting where people who traditionally do not engage with health services will attend, because the environment is trusted and non-judgemental.

Statement from Dr Sarah Williams (Combe Coastal Surgery):

"Belle's Place is a valuable community asset in Ilfracombe. It supports many of the most vulnerable within our community, particularly individuals who are homeless and vulnerably-housed. People are supported with practical needs such as food, warm clothing, and showers. Additionally, people can access support and advice on engaging with services such as housing or benefits. Throughout they are treated with compassion and respect."

Combe Coastal Surgery has been running a Primary Care outreach clinic twice monthly at Belle's Place for the past 3 years. We have been able to work with individuals who have a high level of health need, and are at high risk of poor health outcomes, but who have previously not engaged well with health services. Delivering this service has been possible due to the high level of trust held between Carol, and the team at Belle's Place, and service users."

This provides credible professional insight that the outreach clinic is reaching high-need, previously non-engaging patients, enabled by the trusted relationship between staff and service users.

4.2 Drugs and alcohol support (quantitative)

50+ clients are currently engaged with the Together programme, supporting progress toward drug and alcohol free lives.

4.3 Improved access to oral health support (quantitative and qualitative)

- Oral health support enabled 6 referrals to dental services.
- Increased trust and ongoing engagement supported advice and treatment for issues such as dry mouth linked to alcohol use and pain management.

4.4 Sexual health engagement (quantitative)

- Since August 2022: 8 people have engaged with sexual health outreach at Belle's Place.

- C-Card is active with 11 young people using the service.

4.5 Harm reduction and blood borne virus support (qualitative; quantitative to follow)

- Needle exchange is newly established and building engagement.
- Hep C Trust screening has identified and supported people through treatment; exact numbers screened/positive/cleared are to be confirmed.

4.6 Immediate welfare and stability (quantitative/operational)

- Hot food provision up to 39 meals per day.
- Consistent daily attendance and year-round demand indicate Belle's Place is functioning as a core stability point in the local support system.

5. Reasonable conclusions from the evidence available

Based on the data and professional/operational evidence provided, it is reasonable to conclude that:

- Belle's Place reaches a cohort that is high need and historically low engagement with statutory services.
- Co-locating and hosting services at Belle's Place improves access to support by removing barriers (trust, stigma, literacy, chaotic lifestyles, fear of services).
- The primary care outreach clinic is likely contributing to earlier intervention and therefore a reduction in crisis presentations, because patients who would otherwise delay care are engaging through a trusted environment.
- The volume and consistency of usage (approximately 7,500 attendances/year) indicates Belle's Place is a high-throughput, preventative community asset.

These conclusions are evidence-informed but not a full formal evaluation; they reflect the reality that no commissioned evaluation resource currently exists.

6. Sustainability plan (next year and beyond)

The long-term challenge is that ongoing commissioning and consistent funding are difficult while there are concerns about premises suitability, health and safety, and governance arrangements.

The proposed sustainability direction is:

6.1 Town Council / One Ilfracombe (or similar organisation) to take over Governance

- Provide stable governance, oversight, admin function and compliance structures.
- Improve commissioning confidence and enable longer-term funding conversations.

6.2 Move to more suitable and expanded facilities

- Address limitations and risks associated with the current building.
- Enable better co-location of clinical/support services and improved delivery capacity.

- Support a more sustainable, professionalised service model while retaining the trusted environment.

6.3 Interim investment to keep the service operating while transition work is completed

- Maintain continuity for vulnerable residents.
- Avoid loss of engagement and increased crisis demand on health and other services.