

VOLUNTARY ACTION EPPING FOREST

HANDYMAN



Epping Forest
District Council

www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service – Building a Yacht!

Brief:

- “Do something with the closet so I can use it please, it’s a nightmare. Oh and try not to spend any money.....”

The client:

Mr C is disabled and lives with his bedbound brother. They have clearly struggled for a very long time. The property is untidy and not very clean. The carers that visit do not seem to do much for them which is a real shame because they are unable to help themselves.

The issue:

There is a small room approximately 6ft x 6ft which Mr C calls his closet, within it are two wardrobes, piles of boxes and other items such as steps etc. When trying to reach his clothes Mr C becomes obstructed by the wardrobe doors and as a consequence of his struggle his clothes often end up on the floor and he is unable to pick them up and put them back.



The solution:

This is a small contained room, it was easy to see that the four wardrobe doors were causing access issues and they could easily be removed. Doors could be recycled as shelving. Altering the layout so that the two wardrobes did not face each other giving very little “dressing room” could be undertaken. Space freed up could be used for additional hanging or shelves.

The outcome:



Two doors recycled as shelves, one door with mirror re sited to provide a full length mirror.
Shoes stored in full length rack on the rear of the door providing space and visibility



Feedback from Mr C – (calling out to his bed bound brother)

“Hey XXX, Chris has taken away my closet. I now have a walk in wardrobe like they have on those big Yachts”

Mr C intends to ask one of the carers to help him sort out his clothes now that he can finally get into the “closet” safely.

Cost:

By recycling the wardrobe doors, the cost was limited to the new rail and fixings which came to less than £4

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Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service – Mental Health Impact

Could you:

- imagine that you have lived a lifetime of struggling with mental ill health made worse by the current global pandemic
- imagine having the diagnosis, and prescribed medication for a number of serious mental health conditions
- imagine on occasion taking your frustrations and anger out upon yourself and other objects around you

Then,

- imagine how it feels, even on your “OK” days, seeing the damage you have done and being reminded constantly of your pain and your failure to manage it.

TL: DR one of our clients was constantly reminded of his demon’s every time he looked at his damaged doors. He couldn’t afford new ones and even tried to salvage some from a skip. I managed to source very cheaply priced doors, and when the seller heard about the work we do, he reduced the price even more, making the doors affordable for the client.

The client:

Mr F is an EFDC tenant living with the situation above that you have just imagined. Last year Mr F was encouraged by a Mental Health worker to contact the Handyman Service to try and get help as he needed a curtain rail re installed.

He found this hard as he “doesn’t like to ask” and “really doesn’t feel himself worthy” of help, added to this his sense of failure that he had been “unable to fix” the problem himself.

The referral had gone well and he and I struck up a good rapport whilst completing the work. I was pleased therefore to receive a recent contact from Mr F regarding help with another issue.

The issue:

Mr F has three damaged internal doors; they were damaged as a result of his mental illness. He had tried hard to repair them, which although perfectly useable were quite unsightly. Mr F was asking if I could fit some second hand doors he had seen in a skip nearby, provided if he could get them collected and had the previous owner’s permission.

Whilst this was possible it was far from ideal and I explained that they were unlikely to be the correct size and might possibly be useless. Hearing his disappointment, I took the initiative and priced up three internal doors from Wickes which came to £105 less our discount of 10% which we would of course pass on to him. On telling him, Mr F sounded very despondent and thanked me for trying to help but explained he really couldn’t afford that.

The solution:

Touched by Mr F’s situation and knowing what it would mean to him to have the doors replaced I set out to find a bargain (or three). After a few hours that evening online scouring market places and auction sites I managed to secure three new doors, in the correct size for just £45. Excitedly, the next day I rang Mr F to tell him, however he explained that he really didn’t have much money “at all”. I explained that I really wanted to help, and suggested that we could perhaps fit the doors one by one and he could pay £15 per door as and when he had the funds, happily he agreed.

The outcome:

Today I visited Mr F and fitted all three doors. I noticed him taking pictures on his phone and he explained that he was sending them to his mental health worker and to his mum as the awful reminder of his struggles was being removed.

It took a little while for Mr F to realise that I was fitting more than one door and I could see him becoming anxious. He interrupted my work so that he could talk about money. He apologised that he had only been able to muster £23.50 which he realised wasn't enough for two let alone three doors.

I had hoped to wait until finished to give him the great news that when I collected and paid for the doors, the seller noticed and asked about the VAEF Van and my work. He was so impressed he reduced the already low price even further to just £20 for all three doors. I told Mr F that someone, completely unknown to him, had been so taken by our service that they wanted to help his situation by making a reduction to the total cost of £25. Thus bringing his contribution to £20. So with a smile I gave him back his £3.50 change.

Mr F struggled to remain composed and was clearly overwhelmed by the sentiment of a stranger. He asked me to pass on the following message to them, which I have done:

"Hi, I would just like to say thank you so much for your extremely kind gesture of paying towards my new doors. The fact that you don't even know me but have paid towards something that means a great deal to me is extremely humbling. I can assure you that when I am in a better position, I will indeed pay your kindness forward. Thanks again sincerely"

Feedback from Mr F

"Thank you so much. As I explained to Chris those doors reminded me of my anger and frustration and I haven't got those non-stop reminders now which is amazing, thanks again"



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Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service – Little things

No so very long ago VAEF operated a Falls Prevention Service. What made the service so unique was its total focus on the client's needs. Those of us that delivered the service were trained to look for the tell-tale signs of where a client instinctively reached out for support, hand marks on walls, home-made supports etc. We would watch the client climb the stairs and look for the difficulties they faced and worked to resolve them with them. Never would we visit with a predetermined inflexible plan.

Recently I undertook some handyman work in a property in Ongar. The tenant Ms M suffers from cerebral palsy but does amazingly well managing her home and a young family. She has a bedroom downstairs due to her disability however the only toilet and bathroom are upstairs.

Whilst at the property I saw Ms M climb the stairs. I was frightened for her as she had little to hold onto partially due to the cramped position of her arms and the lack of proper rails. Of course, like she does many times every day she managed it. I mentioned that it looked like very hard work for her and she agreed. Ms M explained that she had been assessed to have a stair lift fitted. However, despite being eligible it could not go ahead as she was unable to lift her legs high enough to get on and off it. So instead plans have been submitted for an extension downstairs with a downstairs toilet and bathroom. Although approved, this was going to be many months off.

Despite this Ms M remains extremely positive saying that she had managed without extra help for over two years now and was simply grateful for what the future will hopefully hold. She has been extremely appreciating of all and any support especially as she was struggling financially like many young families.

Ms M is significantly weaker on her right side and struggles more ascending the stairs than descending them. However, the only existing stair support was on the right hand side and only reached about half way up the stairs. I was amazed that no one had previously discussed this with her or watched her climb the stairs, to me it was obvious she needed a stair rail on the left hand side.

A normal stair rail would cost around £40 in materials, that's pine mopstick (which she could grip) and the correct number of correctly spaced brackets (in this case 4) however I knew that Ms M prioritises her family over herself and that £40 was a fortune to her. After a week or so of searching I found a used rail, with brackets for sale online – incredibly it was about a mile from Ms M's home. I collected the rail, sanded it down, treated it and arranged to install it.

Ms M said: "You won't understand how much that means to me, the fact that it looks like it could be in anyone's house means I'm not reminded of my disabilities every time I use it either. I am so grateful and feel so much safer!"

The recycled rail cost just £10.

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Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service – Light Bulbs

Do not be Afraid of the Dark. : PART1

Don't be afraid of the dark, little one, the earth must rest when the day is done.....

Ruskin Bond

Mr L lives in Chigwell in a third floor flat, he is 86. One morning he woke to find his kitchen had turned into a primitive disco as the strip light would do nothing but flash and flicker.

There's nowhere local that sells them, his neighbours sadly have little community spirit and at 86 we certainly don't want him climbing ladders so I was asked to attend to remedy the problem.

We purchase these tubes in bulk and always have stock on the van of the common sizes, similarly we hold stock of the starters which are recommended to be changed along with the bulb, so we can offer a prompt, one visit fix. Additionally, we purchase the bulbs at approximately half the price of the like of Homebase **saving** the tenant around £4-5 per bulb & starter.

Mr L was delighted to have his light fixed quickly and economically and he shared the fact he had found the flickering to have made him feel quite ill.

Do not be Afraid of the Dark. : PART 2

Don't be afraid of the dark, little one, the earth must rest when the day is done.....

Ruskin Bond

Whilst I was with Mr L another referral came through regarding another Kitchen light, this one in Epping.

Mrs B had called in and the referral stated:

Tenant says strip light in kitchen not working and needs replacing. This 77-year-old lady is shielding and her husband is coming home from hospital today following surgery for bowel cancer. They are worried they could be stumbling around in the dark.

I arrived at Mrs B's about 48 minutes after she had phoned in, she was so impressed. Again I had the correct bulb on the van and undertook an immediate repair.

Whilst there she asked me to report her toilet cistern for repair. However, upon inspection a simple internal lever had detached and I fixed it in minutes whilst I was there.

Upon leaving, Mrs B said: *"With all the stress of my husband's surgery I could have sat and cried when I turned that light on and it just flickered. My neighbours are elderly so couldn't help and I have no idea where to buy such a bulb let alone get up there."*

She finished by saying *"You have no idea just how grateful I am; you have made such a difference"*

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Case Study – Handrail

Mr H is 93 years old, Mrs H is in her late eighties. Mr H still drives a car which he parks on the driveway by the side of the bungalow.

The top part of the driveway is flat however there is quite a steep slope going up from the road before that flat area.

Both Mr and Mrs H have found it hard to get up the slope when exiting the car, they hang onto window ledges, pipework, anything that might help. I was asked to assess the location for a handrail.

Neither Mrs H nor Mr H wanted to go through the health service to get a rail installed they just wanted it “done”.

Their neighbour Cath, mentioned a younger family a few doors up who had a steel handrail at the side of their bungalow. So off I went to meet the young neighbours. I explained my role and what the charity does, asked about the handrail which they said they didn't have any use for. So I asked if they might like to donate it to their elderly neighbours. I was really shocked when he said he wanted £30 for it! I didn't bother to explain that it wasn't his to sell or how needy they were, nor did I bother to share my thoughts on his selfishness, I just left. Needless to say, Mr & Mrs H didn't want to accept his offer.

Pulling in every favour I could the best I could get the materials for was £60, however they gratefully accepted provided I painted it white for them.



My wife thought we had gone into the flag pole business with over 30ft of mopstick rail:

Before & After:



Case Study - shelves

Shelves, shelves and more shelves. Who doesn't need more shelves?

Mrs R in Loughton and Mr G in Debden both wanted shelves. Mrs P to make better use of the two cupboards in her bedroom where she previously had free standing wobbly racks (wipeable melamine). Mr G wanted some small shelves for trinkets – (varnished timber)

Both jobs were very straight forward but most notable was the client's remarks on the value for money – as you know clients pay for the materials.

Mrs R – total cost £20



Mr G – Total cost £11 (including the varnish)



Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service

An EFDC Scheme manager had contacted the handyman service regarding some much needed repairs to Mrs F's garden shed.

Recently a very large conifer had been removed from the neighbour's garden, the result of which had been some serious disturbance of the garden around the trunk. Mrs F's garden shed was now sitting very unevenly as the paving base had lifted in some areas and sunk in others. The door no longer closed properly and the felt had been damaged rendering the roof porous.



It's a large shed, some 8ft by 6ft and other than the problems above was in good shape – well worth trying to save.

Getting to the uneven base would be a challenge. Fortunately, the shed was almost empty due to the leaks and removing the roof sections was straight forward especially as the felt needed replacing anyway.

So with the roof removed I used a long round pole as a roller to enable the shed to move – of course it had to be lifted onto the pole first!



With the shed manhandled across the garden the base was revealed.



Every slab required lifting and re-laying to become level. Roots needed to be chopped out in places and soil cut back to expose the full area.



Using the same rolling method, the shed was heaved back onto its new base and the door was rehung.

Finally, the roof was refitted and felted with reinforced felt that has a 15-year guarantee. Total cost to the tenant was £46 which included the reinforced felt and six bags of sharp sand for levelling.



Chris Bullock - VAEF Handyman

Important Keysafe Observations - VAEF Handyman Service

I received a referral from EFDC to install a Keysafe at a flat in a sheltered scheme in Loughton. When I attended I discovered that two key safes already existed on the tenants wall. Both were locked. Further investigation uncovered that no one including the scheme manager or Careline had any codes for these existing key safes and no one knew if they contained keys for the property.

When fitting key safes, we always have to weigh up the pros and cons. The biggest con is that the keysafe itself advertises that a potentially vulnerable person lives in the property. The biggest pro is that the keysafe provides speedy access for health professionals and emergency services in emergency situations.

Also essential are the following:

- 1) The keysafe has been fitted correctly
- 2) The keysafe itself is of a secure design
- 3) There is a key or keys in the keysafe that fits the door

This client was concerned for two reasons:

- 1) Emergency access could be delayed by attempts to open the wrong keysafe
- 2) A door key could be inside the existing locked key safes (and who has a code?)

With permission it was agreed that I would remove and open the two key safes and correctly fit the new one provided by EFDC.

Both key safes are popular and common in their use. One was a combination type, branded as SQUIRE but other brands use this design. The other was a Police Approved Supra C500 keysafe, **this is the keysafe that EFDC, Social Services and ourselves at VAEF supply and fit.**



The Squire combination type is currently available from £15

The Supra C500 is currently available from £60

The item cost has significant bearing upon the client's choice to purchase as does the wide availability of the cheaper model.

Removing the two locked key safes.

Squire – Combination Type



- 1) I slid a flat screwdriver into the gap where the front closes
- 2) I considered hitting the screwdriver with a hammer but opted to simply pry the front
- 3) The bottom of the casing instantly gave way, allowing the front to fall off
- 4) The back plate (secured by 4 screws in wall plugs) pulled out of the wall with ease

Time to access the contents – UNDER 60 seconds

Noise and disturbance made – NONE

Supra C500 – Police approved



- 1) I could not get a flat screwdriver into the gap where the front closes at all.
- 2) I began hitting the key safe with a 1kg club hammer and chisel (with little impression).
- 3) Next I used an angle grinder and metal cutting disc to the hinge area.
- 4) After almost 20 minutes, with neighbour's interruptions regarding the noise the front came off exposing the key inside
- 5) I could not pry the base plate off the wall at all (secured by 4 x T30 concrete anchors)

Time to access the contents – OVER 20 minutes

Noise and disturbance made – Very significant – complaints received

We have all seen these combination key safes both in use and for sale and I feel it is our responsibility to make vulnerable clients aware of their weakness, certainly the product advertising doesn't tell them.

VAEF will **only** supply and fit the Supra C500 – Police approved key safe.

The VAEF Handyman service will **decline** any requests by clients to fit any key safes other than the Supra C500.

The VAEF Handyman service will **decline** any requests by clients / others to fit any key safes supplied by themselves unless they are the Supra C500

Chris Bullock – Handyman Service

Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service

The Handyman service was contacted directly by the local EFDC Scheme Manager requesting assistance for a tenant.

The elderly tenant Miss W has a number of health problems and is disabled. Her mobility is very poor and she is unable to stand for long or walk any more than a few steps. Due to this Miss W relies upon the local taxi cab firm. As Miss W's property is some distance from the road, she would call her cab and then wait patiently in her porch, looking through its window for the taxi to arrive and for the driver to assist her to the car.

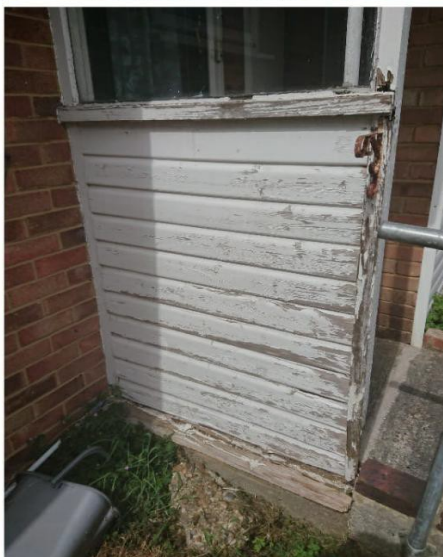
Whilst waiting she would lean upon the side of the porch for support. The EFDC scheme manager had noticed that the porch side was showing its age and had started to rot from the bottom. This rot had significantly weakened the structure to the point that the single glazing was loose and leaked and the side itself was at risk of giving way.

The Scheme manager asked for "the three or four bottom bits of rotten wood to be replaced"

Despite being outside of the normal remit I was keen to assist especially given that it was so important for Miss W to have a safe, dry place to stand and wait.



As you can see, the rot was far worse than anticipated which left no option but to remove the side panel for her safety.



Talking to the tenant with the help of the scheme manager resulted in an agreement that Miss W would pay for the materials to rebuild the side.



We were fortunate to have the internal boarding and a used UPVC double glazed window donated to the service some time ago which were perfect for this job.



The cladding used had already been treated with an anti-rot preservative and for speed it was finished off with two coats of Danish oil.

The new side is absolutely solid and weather proof looking all the better for its opening and lockable UPVC window. The inside is boarded and the edges sealed.

Miss W has a very dry sense of humour and declared that "she would just have to get used to it"

Given the donated items the cost of materials came to just over £50. A further discount from the supplier meant that the total cost to Miss W was £46

Just look at the difference!



Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service

Mrs S has learning difficulties and has very recently lost her husband after a long period of ill health during which she was his main carer. The loss of her partner of 50 years has left her nervous and afraid of her surroundings. She was particularly concerned about the dark alley way between her house and her neighbours and the small un secured gate into her garden. Mrs S said she never really thought about security until she found herself alone and vulnerable.



The existing gate was about 3ft high and easily stepped over. Whilst talking about solutions she pointed out her neighbour's taller gate, but remarked that someone could still get over it if they wanted. Clearly we were going to need to provide a stable – unclimbable solution. We also agreed to fit a sensor light to illuminate the dark alley (which was dark both day and night).

A very sturdy frame was built using 75mm x 75mm treated timber. This was bolted to the wall each side using recessed M10 concrete through bolts as anchors.



We had selected a heavy duty fully framed ledged and braced timber gate to replace the original, however every supplier was out of stock and the job couldn't wait.

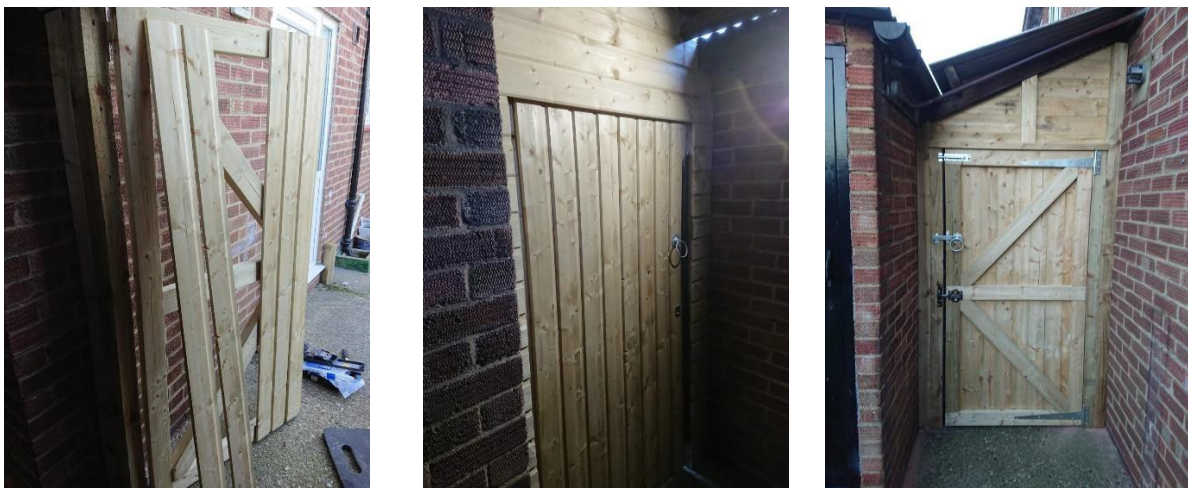
The only option was for us to build a fully bespoke gate. The gate we built was made from heavier gauge timber than the “shop” one and was also fully framed, ledged and braced using half lap joints and hardware. Time was taken you ensure the gate was square and very strong. All timber was fully pressure treated with preservatives to enhance resistance to rot and insect attack



Using the existing pent roof as the top of our frame we could infill with exterior timber cladding ensuring there was no access point available by climbing the gate.

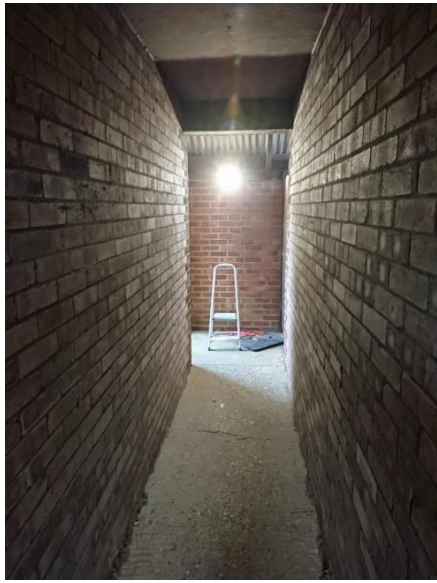


Next to clad the gate:

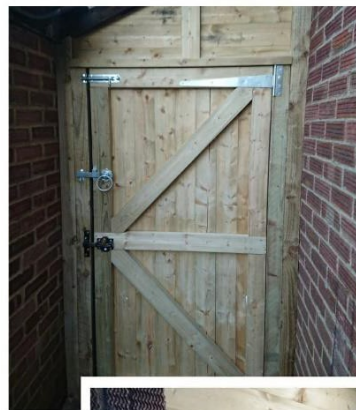


Heavy duty galvanised hinges were used to hold the gate along with a matching galvanised ring handle and latch. A solid steel stop was fitted to prevent the gate opening outwards. Finally, a galvanised bolt and stainless steel high security long throw double sided lock was fitted.

A small 10 watt LED light with movement sensor was fitted to illuminate the alleyway. We anticipated that the light would come on during the day as well as at night we provided a very low power consuming unit which would shut off when no movement was detected hence being the most economical option available.



Finished pictures:



Feb.13,2019



Client Feedback

1) How has the service helped you?

The work that was carried out has made me feel safer in my own home for the first time after the passing of my husband. The new gate has fully closed off the alleyway

and is secured with a padlock. A new light was fitted so if anyone attempts to come up the alley I will be alerted.

2) How do you feel about the way the work was done?

The work was carried out to a high standard. Chris and his other member of staff made sure that the garden and alley were clean and tidy and took away all the rubbish with them.

3) How can we improve our service?

Honestly the service that was provided was exceptional and I couldn't fault it or give any areas for improvement.

Chris Bullock – Handyman Service

Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service

Mr and Mrs B both have a number of disabilities. They had recently purchased (second hand) a large leather corner seat however the low height of the seats made it extremely difficult for them to get up from.

They told me that there were occasions when they would be forced to turn around and slide off the seat and then try and get up from there.

The actual feet on the unit were only about 40mm high and as you can see the whole thing really was quite low.



VAEF used to offer clients a facility to raise chairs / settees as part of its fall prevention service, however ECC restructured this provision and Essex Cares who are the biggest care provider in Essex now have that remit.

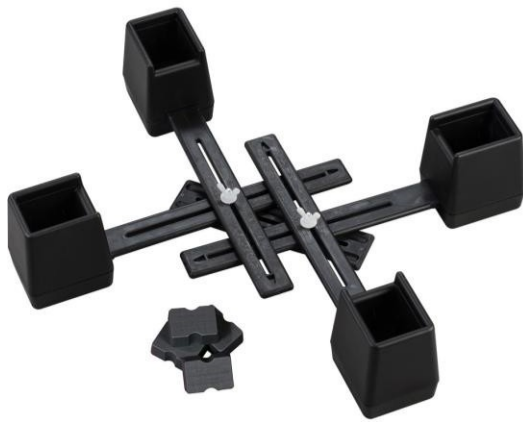
Mrs B had followed the correct procedure and got a health professional to refer them to Essex Cares who duly visited.

Unfortunately, Essex Cares only carry and fit “off the shelf” equipment and whilst they said they were able to raise the two settees, they were unable to find a solution for the centre, corner part, and were therefore unable to assist.

Mr B contacted the VAEF Handyman service as we had helped him previously and he knew that we have a knack for finding solutions. However, both being on benefits money was an issue.



I have always had an issue with some traditional types of chair raisers, because they are so ugly and obvious. I've often had discussions with clients about how solutions can be found to assist them with their mobility issues without advertising it to everyone and creating an eyesore in their living room. Below are some of the typical "in your face" products available.



In this case the corner unit split into three sections, two settees and one corner. If it been raised using the black adjustable product above the material cost would have been in the region of £156 as three sets would be required.

I felt that this was an example of where the solution "could" be practical, economical and aesthetically pleasing. I decided to build a frame of planed timber which would provide an even and secure base affixed to the unit. The client asked for a 150mm increase in height in addition to the original foot height of 40mm – this solution provided a height of 189mm.



You can see from this picture the height difference between the settee and the corner unit

Below with cushions replaced



There was an added bonus with this “fix”. The tenant has a guide dog and often it moulted hair accumulates under the furniture which they found difficult to clean – but no longer!

The finished item actually looks even better than the pictures with the natural wood complimenting the cream leather. Most importantly the new seating height is absolutely perfect for the couple who can now get up from their comfy corner sofa in safety and with relative ease.



Client feedback:

Mrs B: “My heart sank when Essex Cares said that they couldn’t help us as its been such a struggle getting up once seated”

Mr B: “When my legs are bad, I tend to stay in bed as I knew I wouldn’t be able to get up off the settee to use the toilet or get a drink”

And after.....

Mrs B: “Oh wow, that’s so much better than I ever imagined, it the perfect height and the wood looks fantastic – thank you so much!”

Mr B: “This is so much better than those feet things we were told about, we were worried about it wobbling but this is absolutely solid, it’s great.

I mentioned before the material cost of the propriety raisers which would have been around £160. The cost of this fix with each module fully framed and supported was £35

Chris Bullock – Handyman Service

Case Study - VAEF Handyman Service

Mrs W lives in Loughton. She has a disability due to a long term mental health condition and she is particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous tradesmen and others. Mrs W thinks the very best of everyone and is incredibly trusting. Sadly, she has been caught out several times by con men and so called “friends”. The handyman service has undertaken a number of small tasks for Mrs W such as installing battens for curtain poles, fitting curtain poles and curtains and replacing silicone around the bath and sink. Mrs W contacted Housing Repairs to request a Handyman visit in order to put up some pictures around the flat.

When I arrived Mrs W was extremely anxious, concerned that I would judge her badly due to the “state” of the flat. As is often the case, a cup of tea and a chat calmed her and uncovered the story behind the situation. Mrs W had paid someone almost £300 to decorate her hallway. When she described this person's behaviour I couldn't believe how badly she had been treated. The walls, ceiling, doors and skirting had been painted, however there was absolutely no prep work done, nor was anything masked or covered.

The entire floor was covered with paint; the pictures below are after an hour's cleaning.



Unable to make real headway with the clean-up we discussed low cost alternatives and decided upon some self-adhesive vinyl tiles from Wickes.



“Wickes Vinyl Flooring Tiles Black
Diamond Pattern

Vinyl flooring reduces noise and
provides comfort underfoot.

They are durable and time-tested,
maintaining their beauty under heavy
foot traffic and use.

Vinyl tiles are moisture- and stain-
resistant, so spills can be easily
removed.”

We purchased 6 boxes of the tiles and Mrs W benefitted from the 10% trade discount that the service receives.

Still needing a smooth clean surface, the cleaning and scraping continued once satisfied that the surface was ready it was thoroughly degreased and the tiles were laid.

The final step was to place a bead of silicone around the edges.



Mrs W's feedback:

Mrs W demanded a hug before we left as she was so pleased with the outcome.

She thanked us so many times constantly admiring the improvement.

She was noticeably happier, calmer and far less anxious.

The mess of paint spills had gone and the floor in her words was absolutely fantastic.

The cost of materials was just £37

Case Study

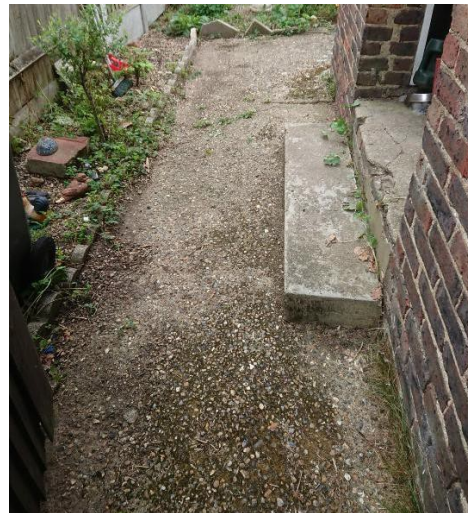
Mrs W – Loughton

Mrs W is a lovely lady who is surprisingly cheerful considering the challenges she faces each day. She has been physically disabled since the age of two when she was hit by a car. Due to her reduced mobility (subsequent to the accident) she has over the years developed a number of other health conditions including diabetes. She has also been diagnosed as requiring both knees being replaced. She lives alone since her long term partner passed away.

She rang Housing Repairs to ask if anyone could help with her uneven and cracked garden path at the rear of the property.

When I visited she had already convinced herself that I wouldn't be able to help, however whilst talking she shared the fact that she had had way more falls outside the home, on the pathway, than anywhere else including two falls in the last week where she required emergency help via Careline. Part of the problem is that she cannot lift her feet very high and therefore tends to shuffle.

My first observations:



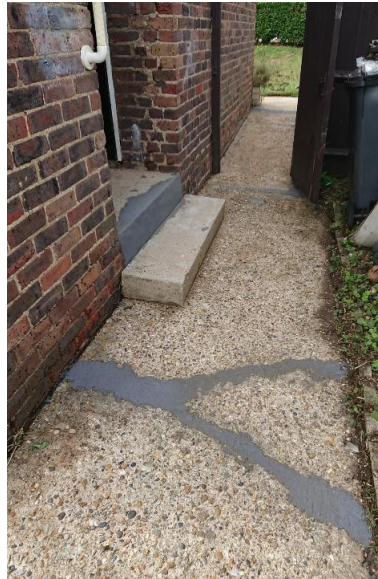
Multiple cracks, holes, weeds and moss – so much moss

I decided that the first step would be to power wash the area to get a decent look – I actually washed the front steps and pathway too as the difference was incredible.



Power washing exposed the extent of the problem and revealed the very dangerous, crumbling step.

I used quickset concrete with Sovereign SBR Bonding Agent to ensure long term adhesion to the surrounding area. Whilst I was unable to fully level the area I was able to build gradual sloping repairs which removed the physical trip hazard.



So, remember the step? (it will dry grey!)



Conclusion:

Mrs W was overwhelmed with the results, she was particularly surprised and pleased that I had power washed the front pathway too and cleaned and repaired a couple of her front steps.

Knowing that she climbs down the back step sideways whilst grabbing onto the two handrails for dear life I am confident that the repaired step will make this journey much safer for her as will all the other repairs.

I could have easily believed that no one had ever helped this lady before as her gratitude was immense.

The cost to the tenant for this work was £9.50

Case Study

Mrs Y – North Weald

I have undertaken work for almost everyone in this particular cul-de-sac in North Weald. The bungalows are overseen by the Scheme manager of the nearby sheltered accommodation and she has been a wonderful champion of the Handyman service.

I had a referral for a relatively small job for Mrs Y. Whilst there she mentioned how frustrated she was with the bathroom and how she had tried without success to make it look better.

Prior to Mrs Y moving in, 15 years ago, one wall had been boxed-in around the sink and toilet with the lid on top heavily coated with gloss paint. There were some small yellowing tiles over the sink and the wall simply painted.



Whilst functional, Mrs Y really wanted it to look better and more in keeping with the rest of her home.

The top of the boxing in was fixed, providing no access to the pipework behind for the toilet and sink. So part of the improvement would be to address this by providing a removable cover.



Sadly, removing the top cover took some of the wallpaper with it.

Mrs Y had saved a few white tiles from her kitchen and amazingly tucked away at the back of a cupboard found almost a full roll of wall paper.

I decided to use white UPVC fascia board for the lid. This is extremely light weight, and fantastically easy to clean. Once cut correctly just two capped screws would be required to hold it in place until such time as maintenance or repairs are required.



Coming together:

With the wall papered Mrs Y's mirror was rehung (at her requested height) and I turned my attention to the tiles above the sink.

Once the tiles were on I could fit the top cover and added a small piece of tile trim at the back to enhance the fit along the slightly uneven wall.

My apologies for the guy in the mirror!



The Finish:

As I loaded the van Mrs Y darted excitedly into the bathroom as she was unable to wait to arrange her decorations and trinkets.

Mrs Y was absolutely beaming, so delighted with the outcome which she said was way better than she had ever dreamt it could be.



Case Study

Mrs B – North Weald

I have done a few small jobs for Mrs B during the 6 years that the handyman service has been available. She is in poor health with both mental health and heart problems but she has a really lovely down to earth way about her.

I made a small repair to her garden fence recently and noticed that she had been actively tidying her garden and planting flowers. I commented on how good it looked and noticed a tatty wooden bench. Just in passing I said that perhaps we could have a go at tidying it up someday.

I had no idea that it was in fact a memorial bench with an inscribed plaque to commemorate her mother. The bench is over 17 years old and has not been treated or protected in its life and the plaque was a very tarnished brown colour.

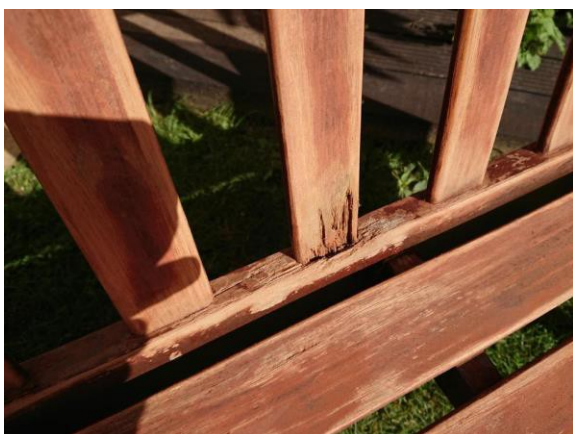
The inscription on the plaque says "Mummy – Somewhere over the Rainbow". Mrs B told me that it was her mother's favourite song (by Eva Cassidy) but that despite her request it was not played at her funeral. Mrs B had bought the bench and the inscription done to make up for this.

Once I knew the history and sentimental value of the bench I was a little nervous, and in fact so was Mrs B. Knowing that this would be a slow and careful task to undertake we decided that I would take the bench home with me which enabled me to spend some of my evenings and time at the weekend in my own time renovating it.



The bench in its original condition:

Stripping away the surface uncovered some damage but it was not as bad as I had feared:



The damage

Filled, repaired and multiple sanding's



The Plaque:

With no “Brasso” available I turned to a “google” home remedy and put the tarnished plaque into a small container and covered it with “tomato ketchup” for 45 minutes – Mrs B thought this hilarious when I told her – but it worked



The Finish:

It was clear that with the filler and repairs it would not give a good finish to simply add oil to the teak so we agreed that the bench would be painted. Mrs B asked if it could be a “really shiny gloss black” – well the customer gets what the customer wants!



*Somewhere over
the rainbow, way up
high*

*And the dreams
that you dream of,
once in a lullaby*

*Somewhere over
the rainbow, blue
birds fly*

*And the dreams
that you dream of,
dreams really do
come true*

*Someday I'll wish
upon a star*

*Wake up where the
clouds are far
behind me.*

*Where trouble
melts like lemon
drops,*

*High above the
chimney top,*

*That's where you'll
find me.*



Mrs B cried when she first saw the bench on its return, she said that no one would ever know how much it meant to her and to have it restored was fantastic. She was so moved and so grateful as was I for the privilege of being trusted with it.

Voluntary Action Epping Forest – Handyman Service

Case Study:

Mrs L – Epping Green

I visited Mrs L to inspect an area of decking in her garden which she was concerned about being unsafe. The garden was her late husband's domain which he enjoyed until ill health meant he was no longer able to attend to it.

We discussed a way forward with regard to an area of rotten decking and it was as I turned to leave I noticed a small planter in the shape of a wheel barrow looking very sorry for itself.

Mrs L said that she couldn't bring herself to throw it out even though it was broken because it was one of the very last things that her late husband Ernie had built. I asked if I could borrow it with a view to trying to fix it. I could sense her reluctance as she agreed, on the condition that I brought it back broken if I couldn't fix it.

Ernie's Wheel Barrow:



Taking it apart revealed extensive rot:





Using some scrap wood and the old parts as templates I started to rebuild:



Finally, by replacing the liner and a few coats of preservative its fixed



The cost of materials to Mrs L was £0

The value of the repair to Mrs L is priceless.

Ernie's wheel barrow is almost, as good as new again!

Chris Bullock – Handyman Service

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Service Overview:

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Falls Prevention:

A large part of the Handyman role involves falls prevention and improving disability access. Whether it is providing a fast response to a light bulb failure, the replacement of a damaged toilet seat, supplying and fitting grab rails or other tasks.

Case Study:

Mrs B has just turned 89 years of age. She is a happy and welcoming lady but her movement is severely impaired and she uses a walking frame and other aids to help her to get around.

Very recently EFDC had arranged for a concrete ramp to be installed at the front of the bungalow to allow her to access the pathway without the hazard of steps. The ramp was duly built and she was very pleased with the team who built it and its appearance.

However she quickly came to realise that the ramp had created some new problems:

- 1) The inward opening gate – Mrs B uses a frame so whilst on the new incline it is impossible for her to pull the gate open and step back to get past it. A small lip around the perimeter of the ramp created a trip hazard of its own.
- 2) The two wheelie bins were now situated to one side of the ramp, Mrs B could no longer get to these or have any chance of heaving them up over the lip and onto the ramp to put the bins out.

I visited Mrs B to repair a kitchen cupboard door and whilst there the EFDC Scheme Manager also visited, we discussed the ramp and the new issues. We came up with the following plan.

- 1) The scheme manager would contact the EFDC estates team with regard to removing some of the existing hedge each side of the gate
- 2) I would remove the gate and once cleared would lay slabs for the bins enabling them to be accessed by Mrs B as well as being in the correct location for collection.

As you can see from the picture, EFDC Estates did an excellent and very rapid job cutting back the hedge.



I removed the gate and set about laying the slabs:



Once done Mrs B was delighted that she could access the bins and that they were able to be collected. Additionally she can now reap full benefit of the ramp as she can move freely through the gate way. The cost of the materials was under £18



Chris Bullock - Handyman Service Coordinator: 07552 948385

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Falls Prevention:

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Case Study:

Mrs W is in her mid nineties. Fairly recently she downsized from another EFDC property with a large garden and three bedrooms to a one bed bungalow in Epping. The handyman service has assisted with minor tasks such as hanging pictures, curtain rails etc.

Mrs W had a nasty trip in her garden caused by the very uneven path. Over time the path has become uneven and in places levels differed by up to 30mm, easily enough to create a trip hazard.

Mrs W now felt unable to even venture into her garden and contacted Housing repairs about the problem. EFDC Housing repairs advised her that garden path's were the tenants responsibility however I was asked to inspect to see if anything could be done within the remit of the Handyman service.

The handyman service is often asked to help with uneven paths, however the nature of the work often means that both time and labour restraints prevent us from assisting.

Upon inspection and chatting to Mrs W it was clear that we "had" to do something, even if it was to enable a safer passage to the gate and washing line so we set to making up the biggest drops with cement / concrete / unbond which was then roughened to provide a good level of grip.

An additional visit is planned for the spring to attend to the crazy paved area, until then the tenant knows to avoid this hazard.

The cost of materials was under £18 and the client said she felt far more confident of being able to walk safely around her garden.



Handyman Service – Case Study (Fencing)

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Case Study:

Miss B is a very frail and nervous lady in her eighties; she lives in a first floor flat in Loughton which is in a block with three other flats. To the rear they have a plot of garden which is divided into four, one per flat.

Miss B is too frail to use her garden but she has it maintained by Voluntary Action Gardeners to keep her neighbours happy. There has been no dividing fence between her garden and the next for many years.

Miss B has recently got new neighbours; their garden is adjacent to Miss B's. They have children and a dog. Miss B has had a number of complaints that the new neighbour's children and dog are accessing other gardens by coming across hers as it is unfenced. She had become quite anxious about this and very concerned for her long term elderly friends and neighbours.

Miss B called EFDC housing repairs and was advised that dividing fences were the tenant's responsibility and that they also fell outside of the remit of the Handyman service other than for minor repairs. Tony Hinkley at Housing repairs was so taken by Miss B's situation that he contacted me just to see if I would inspect the garden to see if perhaps I could help, no promises were made!

When I visited, I too was struck by how frail and vulnerable Miss B was and of course offered to try and help. Concerned about the costs Miss B requested something minimal like a wired hazelnut fence. However I knew that this type of fencing was neither secure nor particularly long lived.

I managed to find some reclaimed, good quality fencing from a local contractor; it required some minor repairs and would need new posts but was destined for a land fill site.



A VAEF volunteer and I set to building a dividing fence for Miss B using the “used” panels, we managed to negotiate around a few tree stumps to produce this:



Miss B was absolutely delighted. We showed her the pictures as she was not feeling up to negotiating the stairs at the time. She was also shocked to hear that the reclaimed fencing and new posts cost under £40.

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Handyman Service Coordinator
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Falls Prevention:

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Case Study:

Mr M is 80 years of age and has Parkinson's disease. He is very unsteady on his feet but still mentally very active. Recently he arranged for his brother who lives locally to tend his garden. As the garden has improved Mr M wanted more and more to be able to sit outside and relax admiring the good work of his brother.

Initially Mr M requested that a handrail he had purchased could be mounted by his back door so that he could negotiate the back door step safely, however it was very clear when I visited that the step itself was a risk due to its height. Mr M had hoped to "find" some paving slabs and create a small step by laying them loosely upon each other. This of course would present another hazard as they would not be secure or steady.

The existing step was approximately 300mm high including the door frame.



We agreed that a more robust solution would be safer and more durable however Mr M was of course mindful of costs.



We agreed that I would build a step using rendered breeze block, cement / pva bonded and capped off with paving halving the existing step height and providing a 450mm x 900mm safe and secure half step.



The cost of the materials was just £18 and Mr M was delighted. I also took the opportunity to repair some uneven parts of his pathway using a little left over cement in preparation for when Mr M begins to venture further into his garden.

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Falls Prevention

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There has been a growing number of referrals to make safe carpets, particularly where they join in doorways.

The problem is caused often by natural wear and tear but recently we have noted a highly increased use of walking frames. Walking frames often have wheels to the front and rubber feet to the rear.

Whilst the wheels easily pass over the threshold bar, the rubber feet drag and pull at the carpet edge often resulting in fraying and rucking up of the carpet creating a trip hazard.

It is perhaps a little ironic that those using walking frames who are therefore the least mobile should find that using such equipment results in creating a new trip hazard.



Case Study:

Mr C has recently been discharged from hospital following a fall and a hip replacement. He is well into his nineties and lives alone. He takes time to share war stories and is a really kindly gentleman.

The service has provided previous support with adjustments made to sticking doors and gates and tap washer replacement. This referral was to deal with a trip hazard.

On discharge Mr C had been issued with a walking frame, similar to the one pictured above. As he answered the door I could see exactly what was happening as the back legs dragged up the loose carpet which was now so badly frayed that it simply rolled up waiting for him to trip over.

A standard carpet to carpet threshold bar is approx. 20mm wide and due to the nature of the wear this was no longer sufficient to keep the carpets secured.

As well as the rucked up carpet the bar itself was now raised and loose.



The solution is the reinforce the frayed carpet with woven tape and install a wider threshold bar occasionally more than one bar is required to "bridge the gap



The replacement strip costs approximately £3 and takes 20-30mins to fit, small price considering the cost of hip replacement and the staggering number of elderly patients who die within a short period of undergoing such a huge operation.

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Case Study:

Mrs T - Ongar

Mrs T is a very frail older lady suffering from considerable ill health, living in Warden assisted EFDC accommodation. I was contacted by the scheme manager requesting help as the front door spy hole was way too high for Mrs T to use. I duly attended and installed a lower spy hole.

Whilst on site, I noticed Mrs T's leg was heavily bandaged. She explained what had happened. There is a concrete ramp installed for disability access at the front of the property which goes across the front of the storage areas within the porch. As a consequence there is a 200mm step down into the bottom space. Whilst trying to open her front door Mrs T had stepped back and had fallen by putting her foot down into the storage space grazing her leg badly on the concrete edge.

Mrs T simply asked if the bottom storage space could be blocked off to prevent this reoccurring. However she was concerned about any material costs and in actually losing the useful storage space.

We chatted and came up with the idea of fitting a door which would enable her to keep the storage space but also to remove the hazard. Still Mrs T was very concerned about the cost.

I managed to source reclaimed materials from a local Charity called Woods Forever. Sue at Woods Forever has been so supportive of our service not just in providing materials but also in making suggestions and ideas. With the timber collected I set to building a wooden door which would prevent her from falling but retain the space.

Mrs T was amazed and delighted with the result and even more so with the material cost of £5

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Pictures:

