homingin

Newsletter of the Scottish Youth Housing Network

No 33 Dec 2000

One of the young people who participated in the making of Leaving Home, the new CD-Rom from Open Door Fife – Also see feature on page 3

CD tells the real story of being homeless

Hot off the press is a new CD-Rom from Open Door Fife. Aimed at young people, it tells real stories of young people's experiences when they became homeless. *Leaving Home* comes accompanied by a lively cartoon-filled comic featuring "The fall and rise of young Stan Young", which gives essential information about leaving home.

This inter-active documentary is about the problems faced when leaving home. It includes wild sound mixes intended to reflect the chaotic lifestyle of homelessness as encountered by many of the people interviewed.

Positive feedback

Users are taken on a tour of the likely situations that can face a young person. At each stage the user can click on an icon for straightforward information and practical suggestions for those considering leaving eg "What about your pets?"

Most young people involved in the making of the CD are aged 16–25, and so far only one has found secure, permanent accommodation. This was through a supported tenancy provided by Open Door Fife.

Other young people have given it very positive feedback: "I could relate a lot to the young people talking." "This was a good CD, it gives lots of detail." Another said: "I think it was touching and it's a good thing that has been brought out because for the people who listen to it, it's letting them know that you must think before you make your choices."

The CD made it "very easy to access information". Asked if it gave a clear picture of what it is like to be homeless, one young person replied: "Yes, I've experienced it myself."

Homelessness was graphically summed up in the words of Craig, an older homeless person involved in making the CD: "Rough. I've slept in doorways, slept doon the Glen, slept in a pigsty. I can assure you it's no nice like. How can society justify the situation that I'm in?"

And from Deborah, aged 19, came this advice to other young people: "The advice I would give to anyone thinking about leaving home is don't. Not unless you know – number one, exactly where you're going; number two, exactly how you're going to pay for everything; and number three, that you're one hundred per cent ready for it."

To place an order, see Noticeboard.

Licensing of HMOs begins

The scheme for mandatory licensing for houses in multiple occupation is now in force.

Since 1 October all local authorities must establish a scheme, and all HMO owners must apply for and obtain a license.

Guidance has been issued which sets out benchmark standards for accommodation-related matters and tenancy management standards.

Local authorities now have the power to enter and search premises suspected of operating as an HMO without a licence. There is a maximum fine of £5,000.

Timescales

Twelve months has been allowed for an application to be considered, though six months should be the norm. A threshold will be set stating the number of sharing "households" in an HMO which will bring it into the licensing scheme.

The threshold will reduce each year until licensing for all HMOs is completed. Full details in the next issue of Info.

inside

The Government heeds Advisory Committee and scraps HB backdating proposals. See Briefing on

Page 4

Unique access for Capital homeless

A £1.1 million centre, opened this summer, will give homeless people in Edinburgh unique access to advice and services. Demonstrating this unique partnership between housing and health and social work, the Access Point in Leith Street was opened by Ministers Wendy Alexander and Susan Deacon. It is funded through the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI).

This one-stop shop is the first of its kind in Scotland and aims to provide quick access to health, social work, resettlement and housing services. It has the three main services required by homeless people under the one roof, combining information, advice and GP services to homeless people of all ages.

At the launch, Wendy Alexander said: "Ending the need to sleep rough is not just about putting a roof over people's heads. It is also about tackling mental health problems, alcoholism and drug addiction. That's why we are joining up our approach to housing, health and justice.

Only the start

"This centre shows just that co-ordinated approach. The first of its kind in Scotland, I hope it will become a centre of excellence that other areas can copy."

It was emphasised that this project was only a start, and that £1 million will be available throughout Scotland to develop similar approaches linking healthcare professionals, social workers and housing officers to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

The Scottish Parliament has given a commitment to end the need for anyone to sleep rough in Scotland by 2003. The £4 million for health-related services for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping will be NHS resources delivered through the Primary Care Trusts with the involvement of local RSI partnerships. Of this, £1 million is for Lothian, £2 million for Glasgow, and £1 million for the rest of Scotland.

Lottery boost for Simon Community

Good news! Glasgow Simon Community's resettlement training service has been awarded a further two years' funding from the National Lottery Charities Board. This means that courses and workshops will continue to happen regularly, enabling people to access information that can make them feel more in control of the resettling process.

Staff and volunteers alike are delighted at this news as many of their ideas for the service can now be realised. The volunteer strategy can be further developed and they have already programmed a number of information workshops, which volunteers will be hosting.

More courses

The volunteers are people who have been on a few courses themselves and therefore have the insight on how the courses can influence issues relating to being homeless and the many aspects of resettling.

More volunteers will now be able to develop and deliver sessions for the courses, building on the success of a pilot project. For example, Rab McNamara delivers a session on *Coping with Change*. One participant commented: "Hearing Rab gives us hope. He's been through it and has managed to get on with things. It's good to know it's not just me that has been in this situation."

Rab recently attended the Scottish Housing and Support Conference and hosted a workshop with Wallace Blake, another volunteer, looking at *The Impact of Resettlement Training.* Wallace said: " I gained the knowledge of where the support I needed was available and also some cunning strategies on how to deal with situations I was about to encounter".

Many of those who attended the conference workshop felt that it had helped their understanding of the role they play in supporting individuals through the process of resettlement. The Resettlement Training Service intends to build their volunteer programme further as this helps people to grow in confidence. And the volunteers can use the knowledge that they have gained on the course not only to change their own situation but to be able to support others in a similar situation to access appropriate support.

Education and training

Sandy Simpson has been appointed as Housing Education Training Worker with Scottish Council Single Homeless's Youth Housing Strategy Unit.

Since December she has been building on the award winning HEID materials – the ***I'm Offski*** classroom video pack and the ***Little Blue Guide*** for young tenants – by providing training throughout Scotland to teachers, youth workers and housing professionals on the use of housing education materials.

If anyone is interested in the development of housing education in their area please contact Sandy on 0131 226 4382.

■ In response to requests we have devised a new SYHN course on Working with Young People with Mild Learning Difficulties. For staff working in an everyday residential setting who would like to develop new ways of working, it runs in Stirling on Friday 16 February.

And a follow-on course on Challenging Behaviour will run in April.

SYHN SCOTTISH YOUTH HOUSING NETWORK

The **Network** and **Homing In** provide the ideal forum for news of youth housing initiatives, problems and events in your area. ***All ideas and feedback welcome.***

Contact the **SYHN** c/o SCSH, 5th floor, Wellgate House, 200 Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1NQ, tel 0131–226 4382 fax 0131–225 4382.

SYHN SCOTTISH YOUTH HOUSING NETWORK

getting on the network is easy!

FEATURE: Open Door Fife

Open Door keeps moving forward

A young person shows the frustration of being homeless in this shot from Open Door's CD

Open Door Fife's track record has been one of constant development to meet the complex and challenging needs of local homeless people.

It began in 1992 as a project run by a voluntary management committee and staffed by volunteers in two rooms in local church premises. Since then it has grown and now has a staff of eleven and new premises in James Street, Dunfermline.

Its key areas of activity are:

- to set up and maintain crisis accommodation for 16–21 year old single homeless people;
- to raise awareness of the problem in the community;
- to liaise with housing providers to help clients move on from the crisis accommodation;
- to provide professional support.

Its Drop-in centre is now a full-blown Advice Centre providing advice and advocacy to ensure that the local homeless community know their rights to accommodation and how to pursue them.

Research into the private rented sector in West Fife helped to identify young people's housing needs, and the type of accommodation being offered in the private sector.

By setting up the West Fife Keyfund, ODF can now offer rent in advance and deposit guarantees to help homeless people secure tenancies in the private sector. This has now been extended to joint working with the North East Fife Keyfund and the Lomonds Trust, resulting in the Fife Keyfund service.

Open Door Fife's Supported Accommodation Project offers scatter flats for young homeless people through Fife Council and Kingdom and Link housing associations. All flats are single occupancy, fully furnished, carpeted and with washing machine, fridge and cooker. Over the year 19 young people have been supported in 17 flats. Three now have their own tenancy, with a further two about to sign up.

With the emphasis on prevention, ODF's Homeworks programme delivers leaving home education to local young people and has now produced a CD Rom and comic which describe local people's experience of homelessness. (see front page).

The project also obtained funding last year through Shelter Scotland, Fife Council and Carnegie Dunfermline Trust to distribute food to homeless people over the winter. Over 17 weeks the service was used by over 100 people.

For more information about any aspect of the project's work contact Carole Simpson, Open Door Fife, James Street, Dunfermline Fife KY12 7QE tel: 01383 312960

Award to Corner health project

The Corner Young People's Health and Information Project in Dundee, recently featured in ***Homing In***, has been presented with a national sex education award from Scottish Health Minister Susan Deacon.

The project received the Pamela Sheridan Award for its innovative and holistic approach to sex education. This earned it first place in the community projects section of a national competition which was organised by the FPA – formerly known as the Family Planning Association.

Presenting the award the Health Minister said: "It is essential that young people have access to effective support and services."

Empowerment

She added: "I believe that the services provided by organisations like The Corner empower young people and give them the confidence to make their own decisions, including decisions to delay starting a sexual relationship as well as providing essential information in a way which encourages young people to make informed choices."

The Corner has a drop-in facility, cafe, health informtion and advice and is at18 Dock Street, Dundee DD1 3DP, tel 01382 206060.

noticeboard

Rightsnet

RIGHTSNET is a social security website, which has been relaunched with Lottery funding. A valuable resource for the welfare rights world since spring of 1998, the site has been visited by almost 1,000 organisations and individuals.

It now has links to consultation papers and responses, and a brand new Resources area containing: *FormHelp* – "how-to" guides to making effective benefit claims; *SwapShop* – an area where advisers can share information they produce; *Q&As* – step-by-step guides to some of the most frequently asked questions about welfare benefits. Find it at www.rightsnet.org.uk.

Publications

NATIONAL Homeless Alliance have produced their latest guide to benefits for homeless people. *Benefits Guide 2000/1* includes all key benefits; emphasis on people without accommodation; comprehensive details of new HB rules for supported housing; and section on the "all-work test". £15 for NHA members and £20 for non-members, from 5-15 Cromer St, London WC1H 8LS. Also available on CD-Rom.

SYHN Conference date for 2001

THE HOMING IN Conference 2001 will take place on Friday 11 May in the Stirling Management Centre. We have invited the Minister for Social Justice, Jackie Baillie, to share the platform with some young people.

Sessions will cover the Housing Bill and Supporting People; throughcare and aftercare; resettlement; inclusion in health services; resource transfer and care leavers; and managing projects to avoid exclusion. There will also be the opportunity to display information about your project.

Conceptualising Youth Work – Back to the Future is aimed at those working with young people and those interested in social justice. It contains a range of key youth work articles from the past and for the millennium. £6 inc p&p from Mae Shaw, Dept of Community Education, University of Edinburgh, Patersons Land, Holyrood Rd, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ. Cheques should be made out to Scottish Youth Lobby.

CD-Rom

OPEN Door Fife's CD Rom on homelessness prevention (see cover story) is free to young people in Fife. Otherwise, it costs £5 including p&p from ODF, James Street, Dunfermline Fife KY12 7QE tel: 01383 312960.

HB Review Boards

AS PART of the welfare reforms, housing benefit review boards will be abolished, and their functions put over to the Appeals system. This should bring the proceedings into line with the European Convention on Human Rights and the new Human Rights Act, which came into force on 1 October 2000.

On the web

CHECK out the Homelessness Task Force's activities on their comprehensive web site at www.scotland.gov.uk/homelessness.

Keep up with what's happening with *Supporting People Towards 2003* and feed in your own views on-line by visiting www.scotland.gov.uk/housingsupportingpeople.

And for human rights information and guidance material, browse www.scotland.gov.uk/justice/human rights.

Dial-a-law

THE LAW Society of Scotland provides a 24-hour information and referral service on 0870 545 5554. The enquirer chooses from 40 pre-recorded messages on specific aspects of the law. There is also a tape on how to choose a lawyer and how to prepare for a first meeting. Leaflets on other legal topics are available from 26 Drumsheugh Gdns, Edinburgh EH3 7YR, tel: 0131 226 7411.

SYHN training

DON'T forget to book up for the next two training courses: Young People and Mental Health in Edinburgh on Thursday 18 January and A Beginners' Guide to Housing Law in Glasgow on Friday 9 February. To book phone 0131 226 4382.

HB backdate limits are scrapped

special briefing

Proposals to limit the backdating of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to a maximum of three months instead of the present 12 months have been scrapped.

In an announcement the Minister Angela Eagle said they had listened to the views of the Social Security Advisory Committee and others, and had decided not to proceed. The backdating rules "will therefore remain as now."

The intention was to bring HB and CTB into line with the claiming and backdating rules for other state benefits such as IS and JSA.

What is not yet clear is whether the proposed changes in what constitutes "good cause" will still go ahead.

At present, HB and CTB can be backdated where the claimant can show continuous good cause for a late claim. The notion of "good cause" would be replaced by a prescribed list of circumstances in which backdating would be accepted.

The range was to include situations where claimants with communication difficulties or disabilities had not had anyone to help with their claim; misleading advice given from a variety of stated professionals or agencies; and a list of adverse conditions which might have prevented the claim being made on time.

Extra grounds

Advice agencies asked for extra grounds to be introduced to cover the situation where a person had acted reasonably and taken all the steps which a person in their situation could take, to find out about their entitlement and make a claim in time.

The Social Security Select Committee's latest report in July was critical of benefit payment delays.

Claimants across the country can experience considerable delays in the processing of HB, resulting in the build-up of technical (or actual) arrears and the threat of eviction. Any delays in processing repeat claims can add to this.

The new legislation also proposes that should a claimant wish to dispute the assessment of their benefit entitlement they will have only one month within which to do so. Given the inordinate delays which can be experienced at the hands of Housing and Council Tax Benefit offices, this new rule is seen as unfair.

HB Departments would receive full compensation for all money paid out in the backdating. At present it is only a 50% re-imbursement, which can act as a disincentive to backdate.