

homing in

Newsletter of the Scottish Youth Housing Network

No 43 Dec 2002



A scene from "If that was me ..." written and performed by RAB IT drama group - see Page 3

Court pilot scheme takes off in Fife

A Dunfermline-based housing advice agency, Open Door Fife, now provides a pilot court representation service for local tenants facing eviction for rent arrears.

Over the past 12 months 40 individuals and families have benefited from this service; many of those would have lost their homes if Open Door Fife hadn't intervened.

The local council and local housing associations have also benefited with more than £24,000 of rent arrears being recovered from Housing Benefit backdated payments, discretionary housing payments, and repayments from tenants' personal finances.

This new service has been welcomed by court officials and all sides have worked hard in building positive working

relationships. Referral processes have been established and help and advice is now provided between all the parties. Most important of all, homelessness is being prevented and rent arrears are being repaid to landlords.

Success

Due to the success of this service it is now being extended to Kirkcaldy, where Open Door Fife already provide an outreach Housing Advice Service, which is due to be extended in 2003.

Open Door Fife are grateful for the help and guidance they have received from Shelter Scotland in Dundee, which has helped to contribute to the success of this service.

Given the considerable demand, proposals have been

put to Fife Council to fund a properly resourced Fife-wide court representation service. This would be provided by the new independent homeless advice service in Fife, which has been developed to respond to the requirements of The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Open Door Fife, Cornerstone and Fife Council provide the Fife Housing Advice Service in partnership. It will provide access across Fife to a high quality, free and independent advice service covering all aspects of housing law.

If you would like further information about the court representation service please contact Carole Simpson, Assistant Manager at Open Door Fife, James Street, Dunfermline KY12 7QE, tel 01383 312961 or email her at opendoorffife@ukonline.co.uk

Homing In conference diary date

It's never too early to get the date for the next *Homing In* annual conference in your diary. It will again take place in the Stirling Management Centre, Stirling on Friday 16 May.

We will open with input from several groups of young people. Empowerment will be the theme for the session, and so far we have invited the Castlemilk Youth Complex to speak.

Sessions

Other sessions in the conference will include homelessness and mediation; alcohol and young people; Streets Ahead training taster; consulting young people; the Homelessness (Scotland) Bill; what's new in housing rights for young people. Further sessions will be announced.

If you would like to display project materials or put up display boards please contact Norma Jones on 0131 538 8191 or email to syhn@joa.co.uk. All conference bookings go to SYHN admin at 0131 226 4382

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Aberdeen Cyrenians premiere video to fight homelessness

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Homelessness video released

The premiere of a video to educate local young people about homelessness and its prevention was launched in October at the Aberdeen Cyrenians' AGM.

Through this video and related educational sessions, the Cyrenians hope to prevent homelessness amongst this vulnerable group. Produced as a part of the Cygnet programme – Cyrenians Generating New Education & Training – it will be shown to schools and youth and community groups throughout Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

Some clients who have been helped through Aberdeen Cyrenians made short presentations at the AGM, explaining how their lives had changed and what future plans they now have. One young woman has been involved with the project for several years. Working with her support worker and project staff, she has used the services of the Cygnet programme, improving her self-confidence and personal effectiveness.

These skills have given her the confidence to enrol in a media studies course at a local college and the motivation to tackle successfully her heroin dependency. Attending college has widened her social circle, resulting in her looking positively at herself and her abilities once again. Entering into this settled period, she hopes to deal with her rent arrears and begin planning for an independent tenancy.

Another speaker made contact with the Aberdeen Cyrenians during the Winter Watch programme 2001, when Summer Street Drop-In Centre extended its winter opening hour. He was staying at Victoria House, a Cyrenians' hostel.

He has used the Drop-In ever since, and now has a council tenancy with the help of a Cyrenians' support worker. Wanting to give something back to the organisation that has supported him over

the last year, he is becoming a client volunteer, and will work with staff to provide support to others in a similar situation.

"It is all very well for any organisation to say that they provide help," said Paul Hannan, chief executive, "but when you listen to the stories our clients tell, you know that you really have helped".

Aberdeen Cyrenians is one of Scotland's most innovative and largest homelessness charities providing support and accommodation for around 2,500 people each year on a budget of almost £2.6 million. With over 100 qualified employees the Cyrenians work hard to provide support and an

extensive range of services for some of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded people.

It works to find practical solutions to the very diverse and often complex problems that are presented amongst homeless individuals.

Most have experienced difficult, abusive or painful relationship with parents or partners, are often depressed and have difficulty finding anything positive in their lives. A large percentage have been in care and have not been given the skills to maintain a home and the responsibility that comes with that.

Cygnet's overall aim is to "improve the employability" of its clients. They are also involved and represented on the Grampian consortium for New Deal Gateway Provision; New Futures Fund Initiative; and the Inclusiveness Initiative.

Through support, care, training and education Aberdeen Cyrenians work to address all of these issues. You can contact Paul Hannan at Simon House, 106 Crown Street, Aberdeen AB11 6HJ email paul.hannan@aberdeen-cyrenians.org. The Cygnet Team is at 62 Summer Street, Aberdeen on 01224 625732. The web site is at www.aberdeen-cyrenians.org. ▶

“When you listen to the stories our clients tell, you know that you really have helped”

Neighbour nuisance found in all tenures

Recently published research into anti-social behaviour across tenures has attracted considerable media attention.

The study confirms that anti-social behaviour can occur in all types of tenure. The report's authors – advocate Derek O'Carroll and senior lecturer Suzie Scott – recommend reform of the legal aid and legal advice system in Scotland and the development of a national network of mediation services.

The report is a valuable source of recent court cases, newspaper articles, relevant legislation and legal remedies.

Three quarters of those in the private quarters affected by neighbour nuisance sought advice, whilst others dealt with it themselves. The problem lay in accessing "a coherent system of affordable legal advice and assistance."

Cost

Where a person wants to use a remedy it is not the lack of what is available that is the difficulty. It is the cost. "Only those who are very poor or very rich can afford to take legal action." The rest were reliant on public authorities using their legal powers. But the evidence shows that they are sometimes unwilling to use their powers to tackle neighbour nuisance.

Published by Glasgow University's Department of Urban Studies, *Anti-Social Behaviour in the Private Sector in Scotland: Problems and Remedies* is available from their site at www.gla.ac.uk/urbanstudies/onlinepaper.html. ▶

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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.

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SPECIAL FEATURE



Another scene from RAB IT's play about young people and homelessness. Here, Amanda attempts to beg money from Jimmy, having been set up by Ross and Gemma.

Greenock youth drama

RAB IT is a constituted group of young people delivering issue-based drama. Having been funded by Millennium Volunteers, they researched, wrote and performed a play about young people and homelessness.

The play revolves around three young people of different ages and with different circumstances that led to them being homeless: Ross is not a local boy; he suffered sexual abuse from his stepmother at the age of eight. When he plucked up the courage to tell his father, he did not believe him and Ross ended up in care.

Gemma, a 21 year old, lost her house through rent arrears incurred because she was spending her money and getting into debt through drug use. Now clean, she was trying to get a house and avoid those who

may tempt her back on the slippery road.

Amanda is just recently homeless. She has not been getting on with her father, and a recent belting has forced her to leave home. She meets up with Ross and Gemma who take her under their wing and show her the ropes.

The action takes place in and around the streets of Greenock. The people they encounter in their day to day lives are introduced to the audience: Jimmy, an old war veteran; Skidge, the local chancer; and old "friends" of Gemma, trying to entice her back to her old ways.

The play ends on a high note but with sad undertones. Old Jimmy has been battered to death when sleeping rough. Gemma has also died from a drugs overdose but Ross and Amanda are together as a couple

with a small apartment and part-time jobs.

The production was taken around the three towns of Greenock, Gourock and Port Glasgow to High School theatres on the evenings of September 30, October 1 and 2. Entrance was free to groups of young people and a donation was asked for from adults.

"These hidden problems of Inverclyde were brought to young people's attention in a way that was funny but also hard hitting. The group got the mix just right and everyone enjoyed it," commented Peter McGhee (researcher, writer and performer).

If you would like more information about the group's activities contact Anne Crawley at Youth Connections, 9 Clyde Square, Greenock PA15 1NB on 01475 787049 or email annecrawl@yahoo.com. ▶

Information pack offers help

Inverclyde's Young Tenant Information Pack offers invaluable advice and handy hints on how to go about finding a suitable home to rent, and how to keep it. The pack has been produced in collaboration with Youth Connections – one of the frontline agencies helping homeless young people in Inverclyde – along with Communities Scotland and Inverclyde Regeneration Partnership. It is the culmination of targeted research carried out to identify the support needs of Inverclyde's young tenants.

It covers all types of rented accommodation, both public and private, and gives tips on how to budget to pay bills

and rent, along with suggestions on how to furnish a first home cost effectively. There is useful advice on what to do in a crisis such as a power cut or gas leak.

Guidelines on how to be a good neighbour are included along with advice on what standards of behaviour a young person should expect from their neighbours. It also contains advice on what to do if there are problems and where to go for help.

The pack is free from any Social Work and Housing Services office, from Youth Connections and from the Zodiac Information Centre, both on 01475 787049. ▶

Big Issue

THE BIG Issue in Scotland is changing. In addition to its regular features, columns and reviews, they are introducing several new sections. One is called Excluded Voices, aimed at "those people pushed to the outer margins of society, giving them a chance to be heard". It will include personal accounts, news, events, interviews, campaigns and features. If you or your organisation have any information that you would like to see in Excluded Voices, please contact Catherine Coyle on 0141 418 7047, email c.coyle@bigissuescotland.co.uk

HomePoint

HOMEPOINT's website is the access point for information on housing options in Scotland. The HomePoint Guide to Housing Options in Scotland has details about provision such as housing from local authorities and housing associations and provision for special needs groups. There are links to other websites and local versions of its guide. Basic housing text is also in Punjab, Urdu, Cantonese, Arabic, French, Farsi and Kurdish (Sorani). So why

noticeboard

Housing law: what's new for young people?

A new SYHN training course is being run in Glasgow. Housing Law: What's new for young people? will look at the changes being brought in by the new Homelessness Bill and recent changes in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 including Scottish secure and short Scottish secure tenancies, allocations and homelessness. The trainer is Alice Ann Jackson.

The course is on Wednesday 26 February. To book please contact SYHN on 0131 226 4382. The cost is £75.

not link your own website to their one at www.homepoint.communitiesscotland.gov.uk. Contact Judi Reid, HomePoint, Communities Scotland, Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EH, 0131 479 5305

Tender help

THE Glasgow Homelessness Network now has a Technical Support Co-ordinator to help Glasgow organisations bidding for Housing Support Services. Introduced to assist with the change to a more competitive culture brought about by Supporting People, technical sup-

port will include help on how competitive tendering works; contract law; organisational budgeting and cost control; advice on Council Instructions to tenderers; and analysis, completion and submission of tenders. Contact Iain Grant at GHN, 32 Albion Street, Glasgow G1 1LH, 0141 302 2760; or email ian@ghn.org.uk

Debt event

DEBT on our Doorstep is the national campaign for action to eradicate irresponsible and extortionate lending; reform the Social Fund; promote credit unions and socially responsible

services by high street banks; and work for fairer ways to recover debt. As we went to press it planned a major conference for 3 December. This included a briefing session, a chance to meet your MSP, and a live video link between Holyrood and Westminster. Contact Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office on 0131 622 2278.

Befriending

GLASGOW Rent Deposit Scheme is setting up a befriending service for its tenants and needs local volunteers. Training is given. If you are over 16, and can offer a couple of hours a week get in touch. Activities are one-to-one: going to the cinema, having a meal, going shopping, etc. GRDS want to hear from landlords interested in letting their property through the guarantee scheme. Contact Peter Dempsey on 0141 423 0232 or you can email him at glasgowrent.depositscheme@virgin.net.

New link

THE *Homing In* website has now been included in the Social Science Information Gateway which is at www.sosig.ac.uk. ▶

Pilot HB scheme brings change

The Government is about to pilot a new form of Housing Benefit which will no longer be directly linked to rent levels. Their plans for "the biggest reform of Housing Benefit since 1988" are set out in a paper called *Building choice and responsibility: a radical agenda for Housing Benefit*.

Ministers say that Housing Benefit currently works against choice and responsibility because it is difficult to understand; is mostly paid to landlords; and is tied too closely to actual rents, not to the local market.

In the pilots – of which Edinburgh is one – a standard flat-rate housing allowance will be paid based on family size and broad local rent levels in the private sector. It is intended to make administration easier and cut out the need to refer rent levels to local rent officers.

Direct payments to landlords will be replaced with an allowance paid to

benefits briefing

claimants, to encourage them to shop around for accommodation.

The allowances will be based on rents in the local market. Rent officers will calculate allowances monthly and make them public so that claimants and landlords will know what, given a household's size, the allowance in a particular area will be.

The allowances will still be means-tested but those tenants who rent a property at below the standard allowance, or move to a cheaper property locally, or negotiate to keep the rent below the standard allowance will be able to keep the difference!

The Government is also looking at

bringing in standard allowances for socially rented housing, and will test this out in an early pilot site "where conditions allow."

They also plan to end the requirement that every time a person gets a job they need to make a new claim for Housing Benefit.

And claimants returning to work after six months of unemployment who are already entitled to a four week run-on of benefit will, if they give the local authority the information about their new circumstances, be entitled to a benefit run-on until the local authority has re-calculated their entitlement.

It is expected that the pilots will be launched from mid to late 2003 and, depending on the results of their evaluation, be brought in nationally from 2005.

Copies of the paper are available at www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/publications/2002.htm ▶