



*A member of the Young Scot team gets to work at the Info Line service*

## New source of help for young people

**T**ips to help with budgeting, ways of dealing with debt, young people's rights when dealing with aggressive creditors, details of minimum wage levels and contact details for local sexual health clinics – these are just some of the enquiries which the Young Scot Info Line on 0808 801 0338 has handled since launching in October last year.

This new freephone helpline from Young Scot, the national youth information agency for Scotland, is a confidential service and provides a friendly first port of call for questions about money matters and health.

Staffed by Information Advisors who are fully trained to listen and offer neutral help to callers and supported by Knowledge Officers who con-

tinuously research issues of importance to young people the Info Line has dealt with hundreds of diverse calls in the past few months.

Free to call from landlines and most mobile networks, the service is open from noon until 8pm, Monday to Friday.

### Call-back

Young people can also text a call-back request via 07781 484 317, send a query by email to [infoline@youngscot.org](mailto:infoline@youngscot.org) or visit the new website at [www.youngscot.org/infoline](http://www.youngscot.org/infoline), where they can download factsheets on a range of money and health issues.

The Info Line was set up in response to research which demonstrated that young people were interested in a free-

phone information line and would use such a service. Since launching the helpline Young Scot has continued its research.

Info Line staff recently conducted focus groups with young people through organisations such as the Scottish Council for Single Homeless and the Rock Trust to clarify priority information needs and to establish the best ways of promoting the service.

They've also been sending out promotional resources – such as posters, cards and drinks coasters – to a wide network of intermediaries and will happily forward materials to interested parties.

For more information ring 0808 801 0338 or send an email to [infoline@youngscot.org](mailto:infoline@youngscot.org). ▶

## Mystery shoppers for health

**T**en young people were recently recruited by LGBT Youth to take part in a Sexual Health Mystery Shopper Initiative. They helped develop key rules for working with young people in sexual health and relationship services. They then put agencies to the test.

Healthy Respect and LGBT Youth want young people to have their voices heard about the Sexual Health and Relationships services provided in Lothian, to encourage services to reflect on their practice and make changes.

### Benefits

It is hoped that each young person will develop skills including team work, communication, and report writing; will gain experience in volunteering and skills suitable for the work place; and will then be accredited with a Youth Achievement Award.

This initiative should help ensure that LGBT young people have their say about the services provided for them. For more information contact [cara.spence@lgbtyouth.org.uk](mailto:cara.spence@lgbtyouth.org.uk). ▶

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# Self-harm study calls for better responses

Self-harm among young people is a major public health issue in the UK. It affects at least one in five young people and some evidence suggests that rates of self-harm in the UK are higher than anywhere else in Europe. Self-harm blights the lives of young people and seriously affects their relationships with families and friends. It presents a major challenge to all those in services and organisations that work with young people, from schools through to

hospital accident and emergency departments. Over and over again, the young people we heard from told us that their experience of asking for help often made their situation worse. Many of them have met with ridicule or hostility from the professionals they have turned to.

From *Truth Hurts* – the report of the National Inquiry into Self-Harm Among Young People

Young people who self-harm are more likely to turn to friends their own age for help rather than relatives, teachers or GPs, according to *Truth Hurts*, the report of the National Inquiry into Self-harm Among Young People.

Since 2004 its panel has taken evidence from over 350 agencies and individuals, and has remained determined throughout that the voice of young people with experience of self-harm would be a cornerstone of its work.

The report sets out an ambitious agenda for change. Its introduction stresses that we need to:

- know more about the prevalence of self-harm, across the UK as well as in particular population groups;
- commission services where young people feel listened to, and respected;
- gain much better evidence of what works, both in relation to preventing self-harm and in intervening once the behaviour is underway;
- build a better understanding of why young people

self-harm, and provide high-quality information for young people, their families, and a whole range of agencies and professionals in contact with young people;

- develop the confidence of those who are closest to young people.

The Inquiry was set up by the Camelot Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation because they felt there was “almost universal misunderstanding about self-harm amongst those in closest contact with young people, resulting in a very poor response when a young person finally finds the courage to tell someone that they need help.”

## Initiative

A range of recommendations has now been proposed, and the inquiry has called upon the Government to set up a UK-wide initiative to develop better and more appropriate responses to young people who self-harm, starting with an awareness campaign targeted at professionals, parents and young people.

The Inquiry says that the widespread misunderstandings about self-harm among profes-

sionals and relatives prevent young people who self-harm from seeking and getting support. It finds that little information is available to help parents and professionals learn to deal with self-harm effectively.

It also says that professionals and adults often react inappropriately to disclosure of self-harm, which frequently makes the situation worse. They find that there is a tendency for adults to focus solely on the self-harming behaviour rather than the underlying causes. And there is evidence that young people often hurt themselves for long periods without ever disclosing their self-harm.

It finds that health, education and social care professionals are not receiving guidance or formal training to support young people who self-harm, nor are they receiving sufficient support to deal with self-harm cases. The inquiry identifies that education professionals would like information and advice about self-harm to be provided in all schools.

For more information about the National Inquiry into Self-Harm Among Young People visit: [www.selfharmuk.org](http://www.selfharmuk.org).

## Literacy to help sustain tenancies

Perth is now home to the latest Pathfinder project from Communities Scotland, one of eight adult literacy Pathfinders across Scotland being funded by the Learning Connections team.

Homing in on Literacy works with young homeless people and those threatened with homelessness in the Perth and Kinross area to improve their confidence and skills in literacy and numeracy. Form filling, budgeting, understanding bills and meters are some of the subjects that are being tackled.

As a result it is hoped that participants will be better able to deal with tenancy matters and sustain their tenancies. In tandem the project will work with agencies such as health and housing to evaluate forms and make written information more user friendly.

## Model

The project is also working on a young tenants' handbook as well as a possible DVD and website. It is hoped that the project will provide a model of good practice for engaging with, and providing, literacy skills based around the issue of sustainable tenancies which could be copied for use across Scotland.

For more information, contact Christine Miller, Homing in on Literacy Pathfinder Project, AK Bell Library, York Place, Perth PH2 8EP, tel 01738 477066 or email [CMMiller@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:CMMiller@pkc.gov.uk).

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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

# Now there's first aid for the mind



*An exciting new scheme is helping to promote Scotland's mental well-being*

**T**raining in mental health first aid is being rolled out across Scotland as part of the Scottish Executive's National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being.

Based on the well-known concept of first aid training, mental health first aid teaches participants how to give initial help to someone experiencing a mental health problem, how to deal with a crisis situation or the first signs of someone developing mental ill health and how to guide people towards appropriate professional and other help.

The Scottish Mental Health First Aid course – SMHFA – is a 12-hour training programme which is usually completed over two days. It does not train participants to be therapists, counsellors or mental health professionals. What it does do is improve the level of awareness of mental health issues and

gives individuals the confidence to help others and support those around them.

At the end of the training, participants receive a recognised certificate of attendance. First developed at the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University, the training has been adapted for Scotland by Health Scotland.

## Evaluation

A formal evaluation carried out in Australia showed that people who attended this course improved their confidence in helping others, improved their knowledge and reduced any negative attitudes they may have had about mental health problems. It also improved their own mental health.

The training aims to help participants to:

- preserve life where a person may be a danger to

themselves or others;

- provide help to prevent a mental health problem developing into a more serious state;
- promote recovery of good mental health;
- provide comfort to a person who is suffering from a mental illness.

With more than 1,500 trained participants and 100 trained SMHFA Instructors since the launch last June, Health Scotland is on track to train 300 SMHFA Instructors by 2008. By then it is expected that 40,000 people throughout Scotland will have completed the training.

Are you interested in participating in the training, becoming an instructor or just simply learning more about Scotland's Mental Health First Aid? If so, then take a look at the website at [www.smhfa.org.uk](http://www.smhfa.org.uk) for more information, and for dates and training courses in your area. ▶

## Feel better with some Breathing Space

**P**eople in Scotland who are feeling down or depressed can now access a confidential phone line and website.

Called Breathing Space, it has been developed as a unique resource for anyone experiencing low mood or depression. It is also aimed at family members, carers, students, practitioners and anyone interested in improving the mental health and well-being of people in Scotland.

Initially aimed at young men aged 15–40 experiencing difficulties and unhappiness in their lives, it was advertised on local radio stations, in the sports pages of local and national press titles and outdoor locations such as male washrooms at football grounds.

## Self-help

The website has been designed to allow users to explore issues under the headings of "Your Mood" and "Your Problems". It also offers practical advice and information on how to seek help in its "Self-Help Toolkit" section, how to contact a wide range of help services and how to get the best out of them.

The website operates as an extension of the confidential, free phone line service which Breathing Space provides across Scotland every day of the year from 6pm–2am on 0800 83 85 87.

The site is at [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk). ▶

## Registration

ALL PRIVATE sector landlords are required by law to register by 30 April. Failure to do so could mean having their rent withheld or receiving a £5,000 fine. Councils will vet landlords to ensure that they are "fit and proper", and will undertake basic checks to make sure this is the case.

## Health research

A TEAM of researchers from Aberdeen University and NHS Grampian have held seminars with school students to discuss the mental health and well-being of young people. The full report – *Open Space* – can be downloaded from their site at [www.wellscotland.com](http://www.wellscotland.com).

## Women's support

CHALLENGING Demand is a one-day conference from the Women's Support Project which will focus on the demand from men to buy sex. Speakers from police, health, media and

# noticeboard

## Homing In Annual Conference

**Don't forget to book a place at this year's Homing In Conference, which will take place on Friday 12 May in the Stirling Management Centre, Stirling. Subscribers pay £100, non-subscribers pay £160. Why not save money by subscribing? An annual subscription costs £45 for individuals and voluntary organisations or £55 for social landlords. To book a conference place or to subscribe please contact SYHN on 0131 226 4382, fax 0131 225 4382.**

research will discuss public understanding of prostitution and its causes; and examples of proactive work taken to challenge demand. 18 May in Glasgow, cost £130 and concessions. From 0141 552 2221 or email [wsproject@btconnect.com](mailto:wsproject@btconnect.com)

## Housing and support

THIS year's Scottish Housing and Support Conference will take place on Thursday 5 and

Friday 6 October at Dunblane Hydro. Residential cost is £340, low income organisations £240. Programme details will be posted on the conference website at [www.joa.co.uk/shasc.html](http://www.joa.co.uk/shasc.html). Bookings to 01383 861 521.

## Teenage health

TWO new sites have been designed specifically for teenagers. Teenage Health Freak has the answers to "zillions of ques-

tions" and includes a visit to Dr Ann's Virtual Surgery where straightforward sexual health questions are answered. Visit [www.teenagehealthfreak.org](http://www.teenagehealthfreak.org).

Mind, Body, Soul is a government website which aims to give accurate and interesting information about health for 14 to 16 year olds. Visit [www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk](http://www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk).

## Abuse booklet

A NEW booklet for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, *Can of Worms*, is designed to encourage staff to feel more confident when working with adult survivors who disclose abuse. You can download a copy of it at [www.wellontheweb.com](http://www.wellontheweb.com).

## News wanted

GOT something to say? Topical news items and project features are always welcome. If you have something to publicise please send to [syhn@joa.co.uk](mailto:syhn@joa.co.uk) along with contact details. Good quality photos are always welcome to accompany items. ▶

# Homelessness code updated

**T**he revised Code of Guidance on Homelessness covers recent changes in the law, in particular the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003.

Section 37 of the Act says that councils must have regard to this guidance when carrying out their duties towards people facing homelessness. Although entitled to treat each case on its merits, failure by a local authority to take the guidance into account could be used as grounds for judicial review of the decision.

Councils are encouraged to find appropriate ways of communicating and providing accessible advice and information for young people. The guidance recognises that failed tenancies are common when young people first leave home, especially if there is a lack of support.

Councils are asked to be sensitive and only find a young person intentionally homeless where there is "compelling evidence" that the person deliberately refused to accept advice or to engage with support agencies, and were aware of the consequences of their actions.

A "clash of lifestyle" with parents

## special briefing

should not automatically be classed as intentional homelessness and "equal weight should be given to both the young person's views and the views of the parent(s)."

Where a person is in rent arrears because of personal or financial difficulties – such as unemployment, short time work, a drop in income following the death of a partner or relationship breakdown – their acts or omissions shouldn't be regarded as deliberate.

A person should not be classed as intentionally homeless if they can't find accommodation due to the loss of a rent deposit which was not their fault. Nor should this be treated as rent arrears.

Whilst recognising there is no absolute test of whether someone is in real financial difficulties, the Code of Guidance gives the example of a person paying rent and being left with

less to live on than income support level; it also reminds councils that young people under 25 get a lower rate of housing benefit.

Those placed in temporary or interim accommodation should be moved on as quickly as possible once they are able to sustain permanent accommodation. However, care should be taken to meet the needs of those who find it difficult to access or sustain accommodation. This would include those with problematic drug or alcohol use, mental health problems or challenging behaviour.

Councils are expected to maintain contact with rehoused people, particularly in the first few weeks, to help them settle and to ensure early action to pre-empt further homelessness. Co-operation from social work, health and local organisations should also be sought as required.

Regular checks should be made on the housing circumstances of care leavers, for at least two years. Contingency arrangements for emergencies should be in place, and young people made aware of what they are.

Download the Code of Guidance at [www.scotland.gov.uk/publications](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications) ▶