



Nicola Baxter of Scottish Social Networks proudly displays their new Toolkit

Toolkit aims to help build social networks

A new Toolkit for successful project development has been launched. Designed to make it easier for local authorities, voluntary organisations and others to develop successful mentoring, befriending and mediation projects to help prevent homelessness, it was developed thanks to Scottish Government funding.

Launching the Toolkit at SCSH's National Homelessness Conference in November, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Well-being, said: "Strong social networks can play a key part in preventing homelessness and breaking the cycle of repeat homelessness. I am certain Scottish Social Networks' Toolkit will prove to be an invaluable resource for public bodies and other organisations

with an interest in helping homeless or newly-housed people stabilise their lives and rebuild their confidence.

"Feeling valued as part of a social network is essential for everyone's wellbeing – and especially for people feeling isolated because of homelessness."

Research

Research has shown that a lack of positive social networks puts you at greater risk of homelessness and makes the transition out of homelessness more difficult than it already is. In addition it often leads to failure to sustain a new tenancy and repeat episodes of homelessness.

The Homelessness Task Force's final report highlighted the importance of social networks and identified the mentoring, befriending and med-

iation projects as key measures in building and rebuilding social networks and preventing homelessness.

By investigation of these projects, the Toolkit seeks to answer the question: "what makes a successful social networks project happen?" It identifies the key triggers that enable these projects to be set up, the key features of successful projects and the risk factors.

"I want to thank everyone who gave their time to help develop the Toolkit. They shared their experiences openly and in the true spirit of partnership to develop new successful social networks projects and prevent homelessness," said Lesley Stenhouse, SSN Coordinator. Order from: 0131 524 9869 info@scottishsocialnetworks.org. ▶

Witness advice on web

Young people about to be a witness in a court case or a children's hearing can now get information on a website about what will happen.

Witnesses In Scotland has been set up by the Scottish Government Justice Department because it is recognised that some people worry about being a witness or don't know what being a witness means.

Support

The site has sections for children and for young people. Witnesses over 16 should go to the information in the adults section.

The topics covered include: being a witness; going to court; giving evidence; and how to get support.

You can take a virtual tour of a court, see video clips of who the people in the court are and what they do. The site shows how vulnerable witnesses can be protected. The virtual tour is at www.witnessesinScotland.com. ▶

inside

Edinburgh consults on Homelessness Strategy 2007-12

Page 2

Looking to future

The road to 2012 has seen each local authority in Scotland formulate a Homelessness Strategy.

In Edinburgh's case, some of the main themes include developing measures to prevent homelessness and to increase the numbers of people able to sustain their tenancy.

To develop a strategy that was as relevant as possible, and which could be targeted to meet the true needs of homeless people, Edinburgh decided to commit heavily to a process of service user involvement in the strategy-writing process.

A total of 283 people who were currently homeless – or who had previously been homeless but were now successfully maintaining a tenancy – were happy to contribute, with no incentive involved other than the opportunity to directly influence the policy process.

Every month their views and the emerging and recurring themes of the research were fed directly into the strategy steering group, ensuring the views were heard directly by those writing the strategy. These views were influential.

We were interested in people's experiences and their opinions, and wanted to achieve as wide and diverse a response as possible, to reflect the fact that everyone's journey into (and out of) homelessness will be unique to them.

We wanted to know what's missing at the moment, what would help prevent people becoming homeless again (or what would have prevented the last time from happening). And, particularly for those who had suc-

cessfully exited homelessness (even if for just a short time) we wanted to know what worked, and what we need to do more of, to help sustain a tenancy.

"The top three things Edinburgh needs are more houses, more houses and more houses" was a common theme. Most people had experienced being on a waiting list which has 5000 weekly bids for around 30

Iain MacPhail is Voluntary Sector Liaison Officer with the City of Edinburgh Council's Homelessness Strategy section. Here Iain describes a consultation exercise with service users to help inform the Council's Homelessness Strategy for 2007-12

properties. Many other themes also emerged.

A majority of people had a negative experience of the Housing Benefit two homes payment and identified that "if you let me stay in a hostel or temp for the time it takes furniture, carpets, grants and white goods to arrive in my new tenancy, so it's liveable, then there's a much better chance I'll be able to cope when I eventually move in".

Put more starkly, one respondent said: "I'd like to see

the lawmakers survive on my benefits in an unfurnished uncarpeted tenancy, miles from family and friends, in the winter, but still be able to turn up (with everything washed and ironed) on time for work and all other appointments, but without a cooker, heating or hot water. They wouldn't last a fortnight and I bet things would change right away if they understood that."

Some felt that spending a relatively small sum, to allow for a better transition to the new tenancy, would save councils a significant amount in the long run, given the social and economic cost of failed tenancies.

Suggestions to change the way a tenancy starts were also made.

One person made this suggestion: "Instead of handing me my keys, a bit of paper with some "useful" phone numbers on that I'll probably lose between the office and my new front door and asking me to sign a 40-page document that I couldn't hope to understand, can there not be a system where someone – it could be a volunteer, it could be a staff member – spends time with me, takes me to the door, shows me into the flat, and is on hand to show me round my new area, helping report any maintenance issues (maybe taking photos too) and best of all, having a phone to help me register my new address with benefits, with utilities (a 45 minute wait! How much credit do they think I have in my phone?), and help with chasing up grants or furniture applications. That would make a huge difference." ▶

Parents guide unveiled

A guide devised for the parents of teenagers who are thinking about leaving home was presented to Cabinet Secretary Nicola Sturgeon MSP at the National Homelessness Conference last month.

North Lanarkshire Council and Argyll & Bute Council were key partners in the development of the guide, *Stay or Go?* and each now has their own local version.

The Youth Unit of SCSH wrote the guide and its production was sponsored by LinkLiving.

The guide aims to help parents and their children talk about the harsh realities of leaving home and covers housing options, legal rights, mediation and sources of advice and support.

Consultation

It is hoped that the guide will help parents and teenagers decide when is the right time to make the move from home, how to prepare, how to cope afterwards and what to do if things go wrong.

The resource was developed in consultation with parents, young people and the professionals who work with them.

As one young woman involved in the consultation said: "I didn't know where my head was so I just didn't tell my mum and dad anything. If I'd have just spoken to them then maybe it would have been different."

For a copy of *Stay or Go?* contact the Youth Unit on 0131 226 4382. ▶

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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

Young parents have their say

Dundee young people's centre at The Shore was the location when SYHN consulted young parents about their experiences of housing and support. Young people from Loreburn HA, Streetwork, the Big Step, Perth and Kinross Council, and Dundee Council took part in workshops on help and support networks; education, training and work; and health.

The aim was to find out how becoming a parent had affected the young peoples' access to housing and support, how they thought services for young parents could be improved, and what advice they would give to other young parents.

Workers supporting the young parents gave their views in a workers' workshop. At lunchtime the young parents collected their children from the creche for a range of activities: parent and child photography, massage, a video diary room, and information stalls. There was a focus on healthy eating and the day closed with a "Ready Steady Cook" style demonstration of healthy cooking via video link-up to The Shore's kitchen.

We collected information



through quotes, drawings, charts and video. In the help and support networks session young people were asked to place stickers representing different sources of support onto a target. At the centre was "most useful or accessible" and on the outer ring "least useful or accessible".

Partners ranked as the most useful and accessible sources of support. Friends were useful and support workers were accessible. Young people said

GPs were accessible but that some health workers could be judgmental. The less useful sources of support were housing officers, homeless officers and teachers/tutors. Views on social workers and family were varied. Some were useful and accessible, others the opposite.

Comments included: "The best thing about the day was getting your voice and opinion heard"; "It was good to talk to people about your circumstances"; "Very interesting to find out I'm not the only one to have problems with my GP"; "Made me understand my goals to get to the job I want"; "Having a baby is something that everyone has to do but professionals tell you, you are not doing it right. It's not all written in the book. Any parent no matter what age is always learning."

Some smaller scale events will be run to consult other young parents, and a report will be published in 2008. Details from Wendy Devall on 0131 226 4382, or wendy@scsh.org.uk.

Our pictures show some of the young parents who participated in the consultation day



Vulnerable groups

THE SCOTTISH Government is consulting on its proposals for the secondary legislation needed to implement the vetting and barring scheme in the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007.

The Act will put in place safeguards for children and protected adults by keeping people who would harm them out of caring positions. The Government wants a fair and consistent system which is quick and easy to use. You can read the consultation paper at www.scotland.gov.uk.

2008 Conference

NEXT year's Homing In Annual Conference will be held on Friday 30 May in the Stirling Management Centre, Stirling University Campus, Stirling. Get it in the diary now!

Drugs help

HELP for families affected by drugs is available from Adfam which works with families,

noticeboard

SYHN training courses for 2008

- Working with young drug users: 24 Jan.
 - Young people and mental health: 8 Feb.
 - Working with survivors of sexual abuse Level 2: 14 Feb.
 - Working with young people who use alcohol: 13 Mar.
- £100 to subscribers. Ring 0131 226 4382 to book a place.

drugs and alcohol. To order a video/DVD pack that shows how other people have coped with drug misuse in their family call the orderline on 0207202 9434 or send an email to publications@adfam.org.uk. Website at www.adfam.org.uk.

Qualifications

THE Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland is now certified to deliver the Level 2 certificate in Housing. Four training days will qualify you for the certificate. No need to attend col-

lege, no workplace assessment and no need to give up evenings and weekends. All of the criteria are covered in the classroom with very little extra homework. Contact Wendy or Tim for further information on 0131 225 4544.

Noise control

INFORMATION on noise pollution and control is available from NSCA, the environmental charity. A range of leaflets include *Sound advice – Deal with domestic din* and *Noise pollution*

Scotland. The information covers what the law says, and gives helpful tips in how to control noise levels at home. Contact 0141 287 6530 to order leaflets or visit the website at www.nasca.org.uk.

Literacy help

THE BIG Plus gives free help with reading, writing and numbers. They can help you to become better at things like filling in forms at work or home; understanding and writing letters; and handling bills and bank statements.

It's a free service and help is available throughout Scotland. To arrange an informal chat call 0808 100 1080. You will be put in touch with someone locally.

News wanted

TOPICAL news items, project features and pictures always welcome. Let us know when you have something you'd like covered. Ring Norma Jones, 0131 557 1954 with your ideas, or email to syhn@joa.co.uk.

In work – really better off?

It's been a busy year for welfare reform. Soon after the Welfare Reform Act 2007 received Royal Assent in July, a new Green Paper titled *In work, better off: next steps to full employment* was published for consultation.

The Green Paper continues the aim of increasing the employment rate to 80%, and this time lone parents are a specific focus. Proposals include reduced entitlement to Income Support once a dependent child reaches 12, with appropriate help and support such as financial incentives and improved childcare provision.

The Green paper also proposes additional support for people at a distance from the job market, with the promise of skills checks, work experience and training for people with difficulties finding work.

The Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network welcomes the opportunities this may offer to people at risk of homelessness, but we are concerned that these opportunities may be linked to benefits sanctions. Homeless people often face multiple

benefits briefing

challenges in entering the job market, and the threat of "conditionality" may act as a deterrent to developing employability skills and taking up opportunities offered by the proposals.

In addition, we are disappointed that the DWP has not proposed any

By Geraldine Wooley,
Co-ordinator of SHEN

modifications to the well-known and long-standing employment barriers of housing benefit taper, the 26 hour rule and tax credit eligibility. Without changes to break down these barriers, people in high-cost supported or temporary accommodation are more likely to be worse off if they take a job.

We had hoped that the DWP would take the opportunity offered by the Cities Strategy to pilot greater flexibility in housing benefits. However,

although Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee all have Pathfinder status, none have been able to agree modifications to the Housing Benefit system which would make employment financially attractive to people in high-cost accommodation.

Overall, the current proposals for welfare reform offer only limited chances of being "better off" to people at risk of homelessness. SHEN is concerned that many people at risk of homelessness will find themselves in the 20% without work, facing further exclusion from the labour market, inadequate housing provision and reduced access to benefits.

We would like to see the DWP developing the current proposals to ensure that the welfare system offers incentives to those who wish to work, supports their employability needs and provides them with appropriate housing support.

This would ensure that work will make people really better off, so employment can become a sustainable route out of homelessness.

Contact us on 0131 226 4382, or email to SHEN@scsh.org.uk