

InterACT Conference Briefing

The InterACT conference held in Peterborough in November 2002 was VHG's first regional conference. The event brought together the voluntary, statutory and private sectors as well as the voices of homeless people to network, exchange ideas on tackling homelessness and effect housing support. The event explored how agencies can put policies and ideas into practice and work more effectively together. This briefing outlines some of the key action points, recommendations and ideas which arose during the conference. There is a 'Resources' section which outlines materials including video tapes and websites with Good Practice material available from the conference and participating organisations. Plenary sessions at InterACT explored both the Homelessness Act and the Supporting People Programme:

The Homelessness Act - Current Issues - Joe Tuke, The Homelessness Directorate (ODPM)

Speakout session 'Do I count?' - A Speakout is a way for homeless and excluded people to communicate directly with the people and organisations that make decisions which affect their lives

Local Authority Perspectives on the Homelessness Act - Presentations from Peterborough City Council, Norwich City Council and Ipswich Borough Council

Housing Associations, Support Providers & Contracts - Nick Reed, The Housing Corporation

Supporting People & the interaction with Care Standards - Nigel Rogers, SITRA

Key Issues for small providers in the Supporting People Programme - Chris Griffiths, HACT & Andrew Van Doorn, Homeless Link.

What participants thought of InterACT:

VHG has used the evaluation forms returned from delegates and speakers to compile a brief report. Delegates scored VHG on the following areas:

Administration 81.3%

Venue 76%

Content & Delivery 80%

Suggested improvements were:

- Not the best environment for a speakout but a good start – good to have Groundswell involved.
- More handouts from speakers
- Tea and coffee on arrival as well as orange juice

Thank you to those delegates who took the time to complete an evaluation form. VHG will use this information in future event planning.

Networks Represented at InterACT:
Peterborough Housing Forum
Norwich Supporting Agencies Liaison Group
VHG
Supporting People Forum
Homeless Link
NCVO
SAVO
COVER
YMCA England
Transcultural Forum
Peterborough Supporting People Inclusive Forum
Groundswell
Ipswich Hostels Liaison Group
SITRA
Norfolk Voluntary Mental Health Providers Forum
NVS
CHP

'I was extremely impressed by the administration of this conference – nothing was too much trouble for the organisers' Groundswell.

On page two of this report we have included a summary of Graham Tomlinson's contribution to the plenary session 'Local Authority Perspectives on Homelessness'.

On page three we have also included notes from two of the 14 workshop sessions- Supporting Families & Involving Service Users.

To order videos of the full plenary sessions please see the Resources Section on page two.

For Key Action points and recommendations which arose during the conference see page four.

InterAct Workshops

Involving service users in planning & decision making - **Groundswell**

Developing Compacts - **NVS**

Private Lodgings Schemes - **Solo Housing**

Rent deposit schemes & the prevention of homelessness - **Coastal Homeless Action Group**

Current funding issues for voluntary sector providers - **Chris Hedges**

Prevention of homelessness through effective advice provision - **Mancroft Advice Project** (Featured in the RSU Good Practice Guide 2001)

'Local Connections' - **Cambridge Homeless Partnership**

Floating support & tenancy management - **Peterborough Supporting People Officer**

Reducing re-offending through housing support - **Anglia Care Trust**

Supporting Families - **HomeStart and West Norfolk Borough Council**

Changing the culture: making participation in supported accommodation work - **HACT**

Housing drug users - **NORCAS**

The relationship between supporting people and homelessness strategies - **Andrew Van Doorn Homeless Link**

InterAct Conference

Resources

Conference Videos

All videos can be ordered by contacting VHG (details below). The videos cost £10 each (members)/ £15 each (non-members) or buy a full set for £25 (members) or £40 (non-members).

Video 1 - Involving Service Users
'Involving Service Users in planning and decision making' Groundswell Workshop

The Peterborough Speakout

Video 2 - The Homelessness Act
'Current Issues with the Homelessness Act' Joe Tuke, The Homelessness Directorate
'Local Authority Perspectives' Norwich City Council, Peterborough City Council, Ipswich Borough Council

Video 3 - Supporting People
'Key Issues for small providers in the supporting people programme' Chris Griffiths, HACT & Andrew Van Doorn, Homeless Link
'Supporting people and the interaction with care standards' Nigel Rogers, SITRA
'Housing Associations, Support providers and contracts' Nick Reed, The Housing Corporation

Online Resources

www.sitra.org.uk
SITRA are a national resource for providers of housing support. Log on for information and training.

www.vhg-east.org
VHG are a regional network of housing and support providers providing support, information and training to members and organisations within the network.

www.homeless.org.uk
This is the website of Homeless Link - log on for information designed for organisations working with the homeless. Look out for updates on the Homelessness Act and Section 8 Misuse of Drugs Act.

www.groundswell.org.uk
Groundswell is a network for homeless and excluded people. Contact Groundswell for a Speakout 'Recipe Book' and other resources to enable better participation.

Other resources

MIB02 'The Homelessness Act' Briefing

This free briefing provides 'The Homelessness Act' in a nutshell as well as a list of further resources. To order a copy please contact VHG.

Homelessness in Peterborough - Working together to agree the size of the problem and the way forward

Peterborough City Council have carried out a Best Value Review of Housing services. In the past Peterborough City Council have carried out 'headcount' style research into rough sleeping as required by the RSU (Rough Sleeper's Unit) which is now part of the Homelessness Directorate which sits in the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). These 'headcounts' were deeply unpopular with both service providers and service users who felt that they didn't produce a true picture of rough sleeping and certainly no picture of 'hidden homelessness' e.g. sofa surfing and those housed inappropriately or vulnerably. With increasing pressures on resources both statutory and voluntary in Peterborough including the use of B&Bs it was felt crucial to review the services provided and research the needs of the homeless in Peterborough. There were also new challenges to meet such as choice based lettings and the Homelessness Act. As part of the Best Value Review a Homelessness Survey was carried out in the first week of June 2002. It was distributed via local agencies and 65 respondents took part.

The Findings

- 46% had been in the city for more than 5 years
- 73% had a local family connection
- 26 people said they had slept outside the night before
- 50 people said they had previously slept rough in the city
- 47 said they had stayed at a Peterborough hostel
- 41 had been refused access to a hostel
- 9 were currently banned from a local hostel
- 35 had previously held a public sector tenancy with 18 of these having been evicted and 20 with arrears
- 35 had drug or alcohol addictions
- 6 were from the armed force
- 22 had been in care
- 37 had been in prison

Peterborough City Council is committed to improving services in housing and homelessness as well as improving relationships with service providers in all sectors. The new Allocations policy and the Housing Options team will be a vital part of reducing homelessness and improving service delivery. The information and relation building gained by carrying out the Homelessness Survey and the Best Value Review provides a solid foundation for continued improvements.

The Way Forward

- Develop a local Homelessness Partnership
- Improve on-going data collection
- Bid for new services if needed
- Reduce service duplication
- Spot the gaps and fill them
- Homelessness Review
- Homelessness Strategy

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Supporting Families - Pauline Bantoft, HomeStart (King's Lynn and West Norfolk)

Home-Start is a voluntary organisation that exists to offer support, friendship and practical help to any family with at least one child under five years of age. In some schemes, in some circumstances, support may also be offered to expectant parents. There is also a national network of Home-Start schemes, although each local scheme is autonomous, has its own local management committee and is registered as a Charity in its own right.

Befriending support is offered through home visiting. Volunteers are recruited and selected for their understanding, skills and attitudes towards parents who are experiencing stress or difficulties in their parenting role. The volunteers selected all have parenting experience themselves and can relate to the ups and downs of family life. After the initial introduction by the organiser, they visit regularly once a week for about one and a half to two hours.

The simple underlying philosophy of Home-Start is based on the notion or belief that the best people to care for and bring up children are their own parent(s). Bringing up children is the hardest job in the world and one for which there is little training or preparation. Most of us as parents need support in that role even at the best of times. At the worst of times - when the going gets tough and problems overwhelm us - often the last thing we need is a good talking to. In fact what helps most of us "when we are down or troubled and need a helping hand" is actually a good listening to - and that is the essence of what Home-Start does.

The approach taken to our work with families can be summed up as "being alongside" them. The volunteer aims to build the confidence and self-esteem of the family by enabling them to talk through their stresses and strains and find their own resolutions to those stresses and strains.

Key Questions for any participation process - Groundswell

- Why do we want participation and what is our rationale?

It's always a good idea to start by making sure that everyone has a common understanding of why you are thinking about developing a participation strategy. There are as many reasons as there are organisations, and tackling this basic question at the beginning will prevent confusion later on.

- What are we trying to achieve and how far do we want and expect involvement?

Approaching this one in a thorough and honest way with everyone involved can make or break your entire strategy. It is really important for all parties (staff, clients, trustees, and any other stakeholders) to understand what the organisation's goals for participation are. Undeveloped or misleading ideas about where you want to go can lead to disillusionment later on.

- How are we going to do it and what is the process?

Although this might seem like the tricky question, in many respects it is the easiest. Thinking about what you are actually going to do should be the fun part. But you should keep in mind that your 'how' should be about developing a process (i.e., what activities are we going to do?) so that you leave room to negotiate and bring others into the planning.

The regular weekly visits to a family in their own home, as an arranged "friend", offers emotional, moral and/or practical support based on the needs of the family. The "Gift of Time" that the volunteer offers and the relationship of trust that develops as a result is built on the confidential and non-judgemental approach taken by Home-Start.

In my "other" role as councillor I chanced to meet Lorraine Douglas (West Norfolk Borough Council) who knew a bit about the organisation that I work for and she suggested that Home-Start might be a candidate for the Floating House Support scheme. I read through the papers, looked at the list of "client" groups, and thought about the range of support needs being included in the Support Summary Plan. I considered our own working standards and methods of practice, looked at the pros (focused/targeted/sometimes hard to deal with issues, additional funds, looking towards future) and the cons (seemed to be nothing to lose), so I signed up. Discussions held internally amongst staff and the management committee (including a significant number of home-visiting volunteers) & directly with Lorraine felt that we had two or three families already receiving support from the scheme that would be eligible and could benefit from the three way agreement that focused on specific issues connected to their housing situation.

We have had only one direct new referral of a family in a B&B waiting to be re-housed and have been able to work with them through the allocation of a house. So far we are only three months into the scheme, and we have yet to receive any income from it and we do need to clarify some of the paper procedures. On the people front we have an initial positive response from staff working with complex needs and we have developed relations with neighbourhood officers.

- Who does what: who is going to be involved and who makes the final decisions?

Another question to be thought out before you begin, making sure everyone understands who is going to do what is in many ways similar to making sure everyone understands what you are trying to achieve. Being clear at stage one about what people can expect and where final decisions are made will definitely help you avoid problems further down the line.

- How do we know that we have succeeded: Monitoring, evaluation and development?

Many groups manage to get straight down into the business of implementing new strategies on participation (amongst other things) without thinking in advance about how they will know when they get there. Remember that participation is about people, not numbers, so it isn't always obvious when you have succeeded. Spend some time at the outset with your stakeholders thinking about what a successful participation strategy will look like. Otherwise, you might not even notice what a good job you are doing months down the line.

The information on this page is a combination of comments on evaluation forms, plenary sessions and workshops. This information will be used by VHG to inform our planning around information, training and events.

Key Action Points

Arrange another Speakout for Peterborough: Speakout session.

Ensure Service Users are invited to Supporting People

Inclusive Forums: Involving Service Users workshop

Better user participation at all levels: Making participation work in supported housing: Involving service users in planning & decision making.

Ensure that organisations participate in regional and sub-regional housing forums and into the Regional Assembly as well as contributing to LSPs (Local Strategic Partnerships).

Ensure that voluntary organisations are as professional as possible and that they have robust internal systems

Increased understanding of the role and risks taken by RSLs by their voluntary sector partners

Nick Reed, The Housing Corporation

Explore issues on Quality Standards and accreditation

particularly around housing advice: Prevention of Homelessness through effective advice provision workshop

Key Recommendations (from Delegates):

- Involving service users in the Supporting People project now!
- Avoid complex funding bids – always balance the effort to access funds with outcome/ return (Community Fund cited in particular by delegates).
- Resist the implementation of the 'Local Connections' policy
- Embrace evidence base/ quality standards in user involvement
- Develop floating support for families & ensure local Homestart is involved
- Work very hard to ensure continuing dialogue with L.A., Supporting People team, and elected members (Homelessness Act & Supporting People)
- More contact between prisons and the community
- Ensure that service user participation is meaningful
- Need for L.A. to consider a rent deposit scheme
- The need for a review of how housing support is provided to offenders before their release
- Consider carefully what information is required from funded organisations – remember it is a partnership!
- Rent deposit schemes – Get on with it and do it!
- Supporting People strategy and Homelessness Strategy must be well co-ordinated.

Further Training, Support & Information required by delegates

- Continual updates on Supporting People
- Networking
- Update on guidance for Section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act
- Information & training on involving service users
- Housing ex-offenders training
- Substance Misuse training
- Funding workshops

How the conference will improve practice or contribute to planning

Homelessness Act 2002 Sessions:

- Reinforced my belief that we need a well co-ordinated advice team in prisons especially regarding housing
- Rent deposit schemes - I would like to set up a rent deposit scheme – the workshop provided me with good information and inspiration
- Rent deposit schemes – The pack provided by Jim Overbury will be useful
- Effective Advice Provision - I would like to explore issues on quality standards & accreditation especially around housing advice
- Involving Service Users – Clarified many of the issues and gave good guidelines as to how to structure participation
- Local Connections – Be afraid...be very afraid!
- Local Connections – I hope that Peterborough do not implement this scheme
- Local Connections – Reinforced current knowledge/ understanding of the implications of the Homelessness Act and Local Connections

Voluntary Sector & Statutory Sector Relationships

- Compact development – helped me focus on the responsibilities of consultation and the Norfolk Compact
- Compact development – I have information and feedback to pass on to trustees – I will recommend that our organisation signs up to the Norfolk Compact
- Funding Issues – Has given me some serious thinking to do before looking for funding
- Funding Issues – Reinforced current understanding of the challenges and new opportunities ahead in a new marketplace created by the Supporting People programme.

Supporting People

- Housing Drug Users – Idea sharing and future networking
- Participation in supported housing – Listening to users is vital
- Supporting People and Homelessness Strategies – Should help Peterborough Housing Forum to engage effectively with the Supporting People Officer and the Housing Dept. in arriving at a realistic strategy
- Supporting People and homelessness strategies – I have a better understanding of the strategies.
- Housing Drug Users – Reinforced the need to remain focussed on coal-face resources and the cost of these and the complexity of client need
- Reducing Re-offending through housing support – There is a need to persuade Peterborough City Council that this group is worth spending time/ money on
- Housing Drug Users – Ensure user involvement
- Participation in supported housing – Ensure we meet quality standards
- Participation in supported housing – Networking
- Floating Support – Ensure Peterborough City Council maximise the opportunity to develop this service