



Managing Inclusion Briefing 13

Meaningful Occupations

Tackling homelessness and tackling unemployment often go hand in hand. For someone whose tenancy has failed, a boost in skills, inclusion and confidence can be what they need to help them tackle their problems, however extensive these may be. Meaningful Occupations help provide social networks which challenge exclusion, as well as developing the skills which help people find employment and improve their financial and emotional situations. Meaningful occupations are increasingly being seen to be essential in encouraging the homeless and vulnerably housed to become settled and escape cycles of rough sleeping and living in hostels.

Meaningful Occupations work to challenge homelessness through:

- Rebuilding self-confidence and self esteem
- Improving existing skills and promoting the development of new ones, including transferable skills which can improve employability
- Teaching time management
- Encouraging social development and team work
- Providing homeless people with positive alternative uses to their time
- Building the awareness that people do have the strength and skills to challenge the situation in which they find themselves
- Providing realistic vocational goals for clients to work towards
- Reducing evictions and client non-compliance
- Giving staff a better chance to get to know clients, and to really see their skills and strengths
- Encouraging tenancy sustainment by providing newly moved-on clients ways to avoid loneliness, boredom and depression that might otherwise lead to behaviour likely to result in tenancy termination
- Acting as a catalyst to get clients to engage and face up to their problems

Meaningful Occupations do not have to take place solely within the hostel or day centre either. The most empowering meaningful occupations are probably those where partnerships are formed with outside agencies such as drama groups, volunteering groups and crafts centres. If services could encourage service users to contact outside agencies, benefits could include:

- The resources and expertise many such agencies possess and are eager to share with community-based organisations such as services for the homeless
- The change in environment for the service user
- Expanding the service user's social networks outside homelessness services
- Challenging exclusion
- Giving service users the confidence to become involved in mainstream social groups

A service user in Norfolk, an ex-offender who had previously never been in employment, felt his life was turned around by meaningful occupation, because he was forced to focus on independent living and developing his own skills, rather than becoming dependent upon the hostel staff to support him, which he felt took place in hostels without meaningful occupations.

Local Projects

Case Study One: Norwich MIND

Mind, Body and Soul and The Recovery Book

Norwich MIND, obviously, have worked and are working with a number of homeless or vulnerably housed clients, and have become particularly aware over the years of the importance of meaningful occupations for those with mental distress, whether homeless or not.

Norwich MIND were inspired to begin their meaningful occupations work through Mind, Body and Soul, their confidential and open-access service and particularly the Recovery, Discovery Group which is part of that service. Those service users who were still in work or using their skills and talents offered to support others within the organisation and disseminate those skills. The Recovery, Discovery Group offered opportunities for creative writing, movement and drama, and gave evidence on what could help people to recover when they were experiencing periods of mental distress.

Following this work and the overwhelming evidence that meaningful occupations can add enormously to an individual's confidence and well-being, Norwich MIND found they could create The Recovery Guide which guides service users in a huge number of meaningful occupations.

A lot of the advice within the book is applicable to homeless service users, whether they experience mental distress or not, because of the focus on the importance of:

1. Understanding the situation in which a person finds themselves, and accepting what is happening, then,
2. Connecting with themselves and with others, which is where meaningful occupations come in.

Occupations promoted within the guide are vast and varied, including:

- Volunteering, whether with animals or people, for example with the RSPCA, Pets as Therapy or the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
- Education and Training
- Meditation
- Movement
- Music
- Political Action

The Recovery Book is a moving example of positive outcomes originating in tragedy, as it has been funded by a legacy from a family who lost a loved one because of mental distress.

Case Study Two: The Dawe Charitable Trust - Sandy Lane Ceramics

Sandy Lane was established in direct response to the difficulties homeless clients often raise, that without a stable home they cannot get a job, and without a steady income they cannot find accommodation. The Sandy Lane aim is to empower residents so they may be confident enough to approach future employers with a proven record of employment and a valid work reference. The 8 residents have their own bedroom, and the use of the communal facilities, that is, living room, kitchen and bathrooms. As a condition of their tenancy, residents must be in full-time employment or agree to work full-time in the on-site ceramics workshop.

Whilst working at Sandy Lane, residents are encouraged to take on any training and responsibilities that they feel comfortable with, for example, customer service and time management training, or the position of Health and Safety Officer. They can use these training opportunities and responsibilities to assist them in finding a new job when they are ready to move on, evidencing their willingness to improve themselves and take on accountability.

The residents, through their Goal Plans, are assisted in putting together CVs, and in learning skills for independent living, such as reading and writing, budgeting and home skills. Even in this, meaningful occupations are in force, with those service users who can, for example, cook, often passing on their knowledge to those who cannot. Service User, Leroy, who hopes to move on to his own home and a new job in the next few


months, discussed the project and meaningful occupations for the homeless:

"Living at Sandy Lane gives you the opportunity to change your behaviour and social patterns. It imparts the ideology of work, such as teaching you to work a 9-5 shift, and motivates those involved to work through money in your pocket at the end of the week.

"Residents came to Sandy Lane with emotional scars and a lack of confidence, but through peer support, staff support, and goal plans, they got an opportunity to change. The Goal Plans are

dependency which prevents people from having the courage to move-on."

Leroy came to the service with only one qualification, which he had gained whilst in prison, and with a huge number of prison convictions in his past. However, being able to work at Sandy Lane, and finding how much he enjoys the responsibilities and routine of a working life, he has sought out many training opportunities and qualifications, and taken on additional responsibilities within the Ceramics factory, as Health and Safety Officer, with



The important thing is to overcome the fear of change that holds people back, and encourage a commitment to move forward. The Goal Plans, first and foremost, set down the goal of moving on and prevent people from getting dependent. Without meaningful occupations and this incentive and drive, there is a danger of co-dependency which prevents people from having the courage to move-on."

useful as they are unique and find out what someone's skills are.

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training in First Aid, Fire Safety and Health and Safety. He is a natural ambassador within the organisation, passing on what he has learnt to the other service users. Now, although he doesn't know precisely what his future holds, he says he is certain he wants to work.

Case Study 3: Prince's Trust 'Team' Programme - Bedford YMCA.

The Team programme is a national programme lasting 12-weeks for 16- to 25-year-olds, mostly aimed at the unemployed. During the 12 weeks, the young people involved undertake teambuilding, work experience placements and presentations, mostly within the community. The programme aims to teach teamwork, leadership, communication skills and motivate young people to seek employment.

Bedford YMCA will be introducing this programme from late April to May 2006, and both staff and service users are extremely excited about the opportunities it presents. The programme is expected to really add to service

user's sense of community and belonging, particularly as one of their projects will be the regeneration of a community space, whether that is a community garden or building which has fallen into disrepair.

The programme is also expected to improve partnerships and support the community overall, because the programme is open not only to service users aged 16-25 from any of the hostels in Bedford, rather than just YMCA clients, but also to one employed team member, whose company will sponsor that individual to take part in the team building and confidence building activities alongside the unemployed team members. Also, local organisations will be taking on service users for two weeks of work experience, and local corporate sponsors will be helping to fund the programme.

Bedford YMCA have great expectations for the project, recognising that a lot of companies, voluntary agencies and individuals will be interested in getting on board, particularly because the Prince's Trust and YMCA are both strong brandnames with recognised success records.

Nationally, since the programme was launched in 1990, more than 80,000 young people have taken part, with a 79 per cent success rate of young people moving into employment, vocational training or further education after completing the programme.

Projects

National Projects

The Booth Centre, Manchester

An open-door day centre which runs activities for service users, The Booth Centre is well-known for the number of activities it offers, including drama, music, writing, basic skills, photography, and trips to the countryside. Recently, the Centre published a book, entitled *Manchester Stories*, written by service users and describing their perceptions of Manchester. They have also exhibited the creative works of service users to the public.

Cambridge City Council, Cambridge.

As part of their Sports Development Service, Cambridge City Council have created Social Inclusion and Addressing Health Equalities programmes, which offer homelessness service users swimming and gym sessions at extremely reduced costs, and free football coaching. Opportunities are promoted in the Hopebridge News.

The Farm Project, Thames Reach Bondway, London

Service users are given the opportunity to get out of London, for some their first trip outside London for many years, to help on an organic farm in Sussex. Service users have found they have something to look forward to in the week, and an opportunity to form real relationships with others in the peaceful atmosphere of the countryside. The participants receive lunch, refreshments and therapeutic earnings, and the opportunity to eat some of the fruits of their labour and make the most of their achievements. Some participants have substance misuse problems, and as these substances are not allowed on the farm, it assists service users in giving up. Other Thames Reach Bondway projects include StreetShine, a route into work, and Moving In Moving On, a painting and decorating training scheme.

Edinburgh Cyrenians.

Edinburgh Cyrenians see motivation as the first step in working towards success, and therefore they pursue a programme of 'Individual Interest', offering activities which include a scheme helping clients to obtain their driving licence, take part in the Cyrenians F.C., attend training on anger management, hill walking and rock climbing, and most particularly, they run a Good Food Programme, with 'Cooking at Home' classes advising the homeless on nutrition, budgeting and easy cooking skills.

Groundswell, a national network.

Groundswell provide training, advice and assistance to groups and individuals who are working to tackle homelessness in a people-based, community-led approach. Projects within the network include Exeter Meaningful Occupation Project, set up in 2001 to offer training in subjects from IT and desk-top publishing, to first aid, life skills, and cookery; Huge Move, a project for ex-clients of Thames Reach Bondway who provide peer support, painting and decorating services, and educational training for newly resettled people; and Tell It How It Is (THIS), a group of young people who have experienced homelessness who work with Leeds City Council to increase awareness amongst young people of the realities of homelessness.

An International Project!

The Homeless World Cup

The Homeless World Cup seeks to use the positive power of football to raise the issue of homelessness and poverty worldwide. The World Cup first took place in July 2003 in Austria, with teams from 18 countries taking part. All players were homeless or people who earned their income by selling streetpapers, such as the Big Issue in the UK. Involvement has grown in 2004 and 2005, and 2006 will see the "Big Issue Africa" host the Homeless World Cup in Cape Town. This project has found that social integration through sport is extremely successful, and the passion for football can unite people and break down boundaries.



Meaningful Occupations in Your Organisation

There are some issues which you must be aware of when setting up a meaningful occupations programme.

Rules

One of the most important aspects of meaningful occupations is reintroducing excluded people to social interaction, and the accepted rules of behaviour in such situations. This means you should look into setting down rules which follow those of normal public social interaction, for example that alcohol and drug use is not tolerated at all whilst clients are taking part in activities. Although it has been felt that this will exclude some clients, most services have found that service users themselves prefer the environment such rules engender.

Consultation

Before anything can be arranged, you should consult with service users to find out what they want. Obviously, their interests and desire to participate will vary, and funding will limit the range of activities which you can offer, therefore it is vital to ensure you offer the most popular choices. You might find you can arrange taster sessions for possible activities, which also gives you the opportunity to make sure the trainer is capable of engaging with the client group.

Consultation is vital for meaningful occupations, as without service user empowerment throughout the process, these projects lose much of their meaning. It would probably be helpful to your service if your consultation on Meaningful Occupations were included in a larger consultation exploring Service User Involvement, or even into a general consultation about the service and what service users desire. Although this has obvious demands upon staff hours and funding, meaningful Consultation with service users is increasingly vital to service funding and recognition.

Consultation is important in setting up a project, but also in evaluating the project as time progresses, which will help achieve your aims and those of your service users, and provide evidence to secure funding in the future.

Staff Participation

It can be extremely helpful, particularly with chaotic clients, for staff to take part in meaningful occupations alongside service users, as this breaks down barriers and encourages greater openness and co-operation. However, this obviously depends on the time constraints staff experience, and their own interest in the activities. Staff participation does appear to lead to greater job satisfaction and increased staff retention.

Flexibility/Sustainability

It is important that arrangements are flexible, with each session a stand-alone so that clients can attend or miss sessions as they please without feeling that they will be falling behind the group, as that might lead to clients dropping out and losing confidence.

However, it must also be sustainable, with fairly regular meetings that give clients and staff a sense of progression and improvement. This is obviously a difficult balance to meet. Secure funding and partnerships are vital.

Older Clients

Obviously, for older homeless people, meaningful occupations are generally less focused on increasing employability, however, this in no way diminishes their usefulness, in fact meaningful occupations are vital for this client group. Older people, particularly the frail elderly, desperately need the companionship and sense of purpose meaningful occupations provide. Otherwise, when the client

moves on, they may feel isolated and alone in their home, and lose their tenancy in order to return to the companionship and familiarity of life on the streets or in hostels.

If working with older clients, agencies need to recognise possible limitations, for example, clients who are hard of hearing or who have arthritis which might interfere with creative activities. However, these clients are often eager to learn new skills, such as IT training, and to take part in learning activities such as presentations about subjects of interest.

What could you offer?

There are a number of popular meaningful occupations offered at VCS agencies across the country. A number of agencies offer sports, cooking and other life skills, which are fairly easy to arrange and which improve the likelihood of tenancy sustainment when the client moves on.

One activity your agency could set up is a gardening group in a near by allotment, which interested clients could help landscape, and where they could grow and propagate plants. From this, clients could take away a new interest in gardening (which could even lead to a new career), the achievement and satisfaction of growing their own plants and food crops, greater fitness and better health, and confidence in their own abilities.

Literacy has long been recognised as affecting a large portion of society, particularly ex-offenders and others at high risk of homelessness. Running a literacy programme is hugely empowering for service users, improving their lives and opportunity for independence, and also increasing their chances of finding positive employment. There are a number of funding opportunities for such empowering occupations, for example the Learning and Skills Council, and Crisis Changing Lives fund projects which help get formerly homeless people into employment.

Partnerships

One of the most important aspects of meaningful occupations is partnerships. Because of the variety of activities which service users are likely to desire, and because of the prohibitive cost of running a range of those activities on site, partnerships come into their own in facilitating meaningful occupations.

For example, good partnerships with your Local Authority might lead to subsidised sports activities for homeless service users, whilst getting to know and form partnerships with local groups such as creative writing, drama or conservation groups will open up opportunities for service users to take part.

If you work closely with experts in the organisations which run projects your service users are interested in, you will be able to develop programmes which are sustainable and meet the objectives of both organisations.

Celebrate

And finally, once your project is off the ground, make sure you have a party and celebrate! Service users will appreciate the chance for their efforts to be recognised, and the work of your agency can be promoted to others with slideshows of photographs or a display of some of the creative products of the activities. You can then display, with permission, photos or artwork around the centre, in your publications, and on your website, and thus increase service user's feelings of ownership and belonging.

Certificates are another good way of celebrating, and an affordable way to let service users build up a portfolio of their achievements. For many service users, these will be the first certificates they have ever been awarded, and that will go a long way to developing a sense of accomplishment and confidence.



Formerly VHG, is made up of more than sixty member organisations, the majority being registered charities. Most provide accommodation for single homeless people, people recovering from mental illness, women needing emergency accommodation, ex-offenders, people abusing drugs and alcohol and young people leaving care. Some provide temporary or emergency accommodation while others provide long-term supported housing. Others provide services such as housing aid, resettlement, day centre facilities or practical help for vulnerable people needing support.

The voluntary sector attempts to fill gaps left by statutory provision in the accommodation and resettlement fields and this input is recognised as essential by Probation, Social Services, and Health Services as well as Housing Authorities.

Space-East is a regional membership body for organisations providing support services and accommodation working in East Anglia.

We work with members to: Influence policy at a local and national level, provide up to date information, training, advice and advocacy, disseminate good practice, facilitate networking/ partnerships, Assist to identify and access sources of funding, Co-ordinate programmes of research and development & Promote Equality

www.space-east.org

Norwich MIND

<http://www.norwichmind.org.uk/>

Telephone: 01603 432457

Fax: 01603 433268

Email: headoffice@norwichmind.org.uk

The Recovery Book can be purchased from Norwich MIND for £8, this cost is intended to fund a website and further copies of the book.

Sandy Lane

<http://www.sandylaneceramics.co.uk/>

Telephone: 01362 853940

Fax: 01362 854059

Email: sales@sandylaneceramics.co.uk

The Booth Centre

<http://www.boothcentre.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0161 835 2499

Fax: 0161 839 6226

Email: Amanda@croome.net

Cambridge City Council

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/content/housing-services/homelessness-FOLDER/meaningful-occupation.en?page=1>

Email: lucy.howe@cambridge.gov.uk

Thames Reach Bondway

<http://www.thamesreachbondway.com/>

Telephone: 0207 702 4260

Fax: 020 7702 5673

Email: enquiries@thamesreachbondway.com

Groundswell

<http://www.groundswell.org.uk/>

Telephone: 020 7737 5500

Fax: 020 7733 1305

Email: info@groundswell.org.uk

Edinburgh Cyrenians

<http://www.cyrenians.org.uk/>

Their Good Food in Tackling Homelessness Handbook can be downloaded from:

<http://www.cyrenians.org.uk/EZEdit/popups/uploads/04%20Cyrenians%20Good%20Food.pdf>

Telephone: 0131 475 2354

Fax: 0131 475 2355

Email: admin@cyrenians.org.uk

The Homeless World Cup

<http://www.streetsooccer.org/>

Telephone: 0131 561 1790

Fax: 0131 553 6800

Email: office@streetsooccer.org

Funding

Crisis Changing Lives

The Crisis Changing Lives Award programme funds people who have been homeless to assist them in achieving a vocational goal, for example, paying for training courses or buying equipment needed in setting up a business, such as a computer.

<http://www.crisis.org.uk/page.builder/changinglivesawards.html>

Telephone: 0870 011 3335

Learning and Skills Council

The LSC take responsibility for funding vocational education and training across the population, including for homeless clients; for example, the LSC fund nextstep, a free service for any adults wanting to gain new qualifications and vocational skills, most particularly those who have not got 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C.

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/>

Please see the website for contact details of your local LSC office.