

Training Dates

10th September 2003
MEETING SKILLS
Trainer: Diane Woodhouse

15th September 2003
COCAINE & CRACK
Trainer: Kevin Flemen

17th September 2003
'AM I GOING MAD?' -
WORKING WITH BEREAVEMENT
Trainer: Christopher Wood

24th September 2003
NETWORKING FOR THE NERVOUS
Trainer: Chris Liles

8th October 2003
RISK ASSESSMENT FOR MANAGERS
Trainer: David Miller

15th October 2003
DRUGS AND THE PREMISES:
THE LAW AND GOOD PRACTICE
Trainer: Kevin Flemen

24th October 2003
DEVELOPING BOUNDARIES
Trainer: Louise Young Associates

All of the above courses will be held at the King of Hearts in central Norwich between 10am – 4pm with lunch provided.
Rates: £75 members, £125 non-members

FURTHER INFO
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING OUR TRAINING PLEASE PHONE KERRY ON 01603 617299.
OR BOOK ONLINE @ www.vhg-east.org

Dates for your diary

VHG AGM - 24th September 2003
King of Hearts, Norwich

VHG REGIONAL CONFERENCE
20TH & 21ST NOVEMBER
'CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITIES:
CHALLENGING SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE
EASTERN COUNTIES'.
The Cresset, Peterborough
Both events are suitable for managers, service users, trustees and front line staff.

Email the team

Emma Daniel, Chief Executive
emma@vhg-east.org

Kerry Giles, Training Administrator
kerry@vhg-east.org

Anne Stolworthy, Administration & Finance
anne@vhg-east.org

A day in the life of...

I am the Chief Executive of the West Norfolk Council for Voluntary Services, a new organisation set up last September to provide information and support to the West Norfolk voluntary and community sector. We also run a volunteer bureau. There is a great variety of work in the role and I find myself dealing with an extremely broad range of issues.

Today as usual starts with my little boy saying good morning in his own enthusiastic style as I try to listen to what is



going on in the world via the Today programme. I arrive at work at 8.30. My journey is only about three miles and during school holidays takes only 10 minutes. I start by checking my emails: I am a big email fan and use it far more than the telephone. Most days I have a number of meetings but today it is just one fairly long one. I sit on a Panel which recommends allowances made to Borough Councillors. Today we interview a number of Councillors concerning their roles and what allowances they feel they should receive. I am impressed by the level of dedication many of these people give to this voluntary task.

Heather Farley WNCVS

When I return to the office I concentrate on the West Norfolk Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, a project I have worked on for a few years now which will be a purpose built facility for many of the organisations currently occupying unsuitable buildings within King's Lynn. I am working on two Community Fund applications for the furnishings and staff. Today's task is finalising the cost of all the furnishings and equipment a small subgroup has identified as being required.

I try to finish by 4.00 and take the usual pile of paperwork home in the vague hope of reading it this evening.

VHG Managing Inclusion Conference 2003 20th & 21st November 2003 at the Peterborough Cresset

Entitled Constructing Communities: Challenging social exclusion in the Eastern Counties; VHG's second regional conference is aimed at professionals and service users in the fields of housing, housing support and prevention of homelessness. The conference will explore the progress and impact of the Supporting People programme, the Homelessness Act, the Communities Plan and features national and regional experts and decision-makers. This conference provides a unique opportunity for providers in the region to network and share experience and knowledge.

This conference is aimed at service users, tenant representatives, managers and trustees and front line staff from R.S.L.s, charities, local authority and NHS providers.

Keynote Speakers will be Shaks Ghosh, Crisis. Patricia Dearnaley, National Housing Federation. Terrie Alafat, The Homelessness Directorate. Nigel Rogers, SITRA. Mick Sanders, Chair of the East of England Regional Housing Forum. Hilary Mansfield, East of England Regional Assembly.

raising the roof

VHG

the bi-monthly publication of VHG SEPTEMBER 2003 Issue 12



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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Housing benefit direct to tenants

The debate is raging over the ramifications of Government proposals for direct payment of Housing Benefit (HB) to claimants. The intention is to give HB recipients the freedom and responsibility to manage their own budget, but housing charity Shelter is amongst those raising concerns. Spiralling rent arrears and homelessness are the feared consequences.

For people contending with aggressive creditors or battling addiction problems, withholding an HB payment of perhaps several hundred pounds from the landlord could be irresistible. Other vulnerable people, for example those with mental health problems, learning difficulties, or literacy problems will lose the reassurance of knowing the Housing Benefits department is automatically meeting a substantial proportion of their rent. For lower

income households, without a bank account from which to conveniently arrange standing orders and direct debits, financial planning is difficult.

John Booty, Housing Benefits Manager for Ipswich Borough Council, revealed that of the tenants being paid HB direct to them 57% had funds transferred to a bank account. The Banker's Automatic Clearing Service (BACS)

eliminates the administration expenses and potential for fraud associated with issuing cheques.

The solution, which was championed by the Government, was for all banks to offer basic accounts without the credit facilities that if misused can lead to debt problems. John Booty has discussed with banks in Ipswich the possibility of promoting with the Council basic accounts but has received mixed responses. Two of the four main high street banks declined the publicity opportunity, possibly because the client group for these financial services are less commercially attractive.

Throughout the region, including Ipswich, private landlords are becoming increasingly reluctant to let to people receiving HB. The change to direct HB payments to tenants threatens to jeopardise landlord confidence further. It would signal the end as well for rent guarantee schemes, where in exchange for giving a good service to tenants the local authority pledges to pay all HB straight to the landlord. The proposals for direct payment to tenants is amongst a raft of reforms to HB, which include Standard Local Housing Allowances (SLHAs) and alterations to Single Rooms Rents.

Progress and future challenges in the national service framework for older people

Minister of State for Health, Jacqui Smith, has unveiled a progress report on the National Service Framework (NSF), entitled Shaping Our Future: Championing Change for Older People. Successes over the last two years have been in tackling ageism, delivering person centred care, intermediate care, and improving treatment for specific conditions that affect older people

Stroke, falls, and mental health problems can readily affect older people. The NSF contains four methods for enhancing the services typically used by older people: rooting out age discrimination; providing person-centred care; promoting older people's health and independence; fitting services around people's needs.

Examples of good practice are included in the report, such as the

open access memory screening clinics being run in Milton Keynes to identify people in the early stages of dementia. Such initiatives are helping towards achieving the NSF. The actual milestones set for the mental health standard of the NSF are to be formally gauged against future information to be collated in 2004.

The report does identify areas for change, "there are not enough suitable care homes in some areas, for example, and few local authorities have yet developed sufficient services to help people with dementia to continue living at home."

The full report is available at <http://www.doh.gov.uk/nsf/oldpeople/olderpeople-updatemar03.pdf>. Communicator Magazine

VHG

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providing help where needed most

News in Brief

VHG Service Co-ordinator

Jeff Compton of St. Martin's Housing Trust has joined VHG as our Service Co-ordinator on a six-month secondment. Jeff can be contacted by telephone on 01603 617299 or by email jeff@vhg-east.org.

Directory of Homelessness Services Launch imminent!

The Norfolk Directory of Homelessness Services will be available to order in October. To reserve your copy please email anne@vhg-east.org with your full address and number of copies required. The cost is £18 to voluntary sector organisations and £22 to other organisations (price includes p&p).

Manchester Man threatened with jail for begging

Leonard Hockey, who had previously been arrested 97 times for begging in central Manchester, faces jail if he breaches an injunction won by Manchester City Council to prevent him from begging. Homelessness charity Chief Executive Shaks Ghosh pointed out that there had 97 opportunities missed to help Hockey and that criminalising begging is a waste of resources and doesn't help tackle the real problems.

RSL under scrutiny for 'fat cat' pay

Housing press and tenant representatives have put the Directors of Sanctuary Housing Association under fire as the Managing Director, David Bennett, received pay and relocation assistance totalling £213,000 last year. The relocation awards to five executive directors in the housing association totalled £201,000. Housing Corporation CEO Norman Perry is to investigate following an 'Inside Housing' magazine story.

The countdown for decent homes

The Government target for improving the physical condition of social housing is looming before local authorities and housing associations. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) wants definite answers for how each local authority plans to meet the absolute, final 2010 deadline for improvements.

As well as meeting the statutory fitness standard, properties must be to a reasonable standard in terms of facilities, thermal comfort, and state of repair. The emphasis on modern kitchen and bathroom facilities has brought criticism that older properties could fail for having high-quality, desirable features, which residents would want to keep, such as cast-iron sinks and baths. Despite concerns and the fact most social housing is of a high standard, the Decent Homes target has been welcomed as the opportunity to compensate for past under investment.

The 2010 target, which was outlined

three years ago in the Planning Green Paper – Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All, is integral to building sustainable communities and alleviating health problems linked to cold and damp homes. The 2002 Spending Review renewed the Government's commitment to the 2010 Decent Homes Target. In April, 107 local authorities were at risk of failing to meet the target, but a recent Public Service Agreement (PSA) Plus Review has renewed confidence that social landlords can deliver on time. The Government believes Councils now have the means to obtain the necessary money.

The reality of 76,000 evictions during the past year.

The popularity of Big Brother and other reality TV programmes means the public more commonly think of eviction as bringing temporary tabloid fame. Housing charity Shelter is taking advantage of the media phenomenon to highlight the true trauma of

eviction, and often-consequent homelessness, as opposed to being ejected from a game show before a cheering crowd and TV audience of millions.

Shelter wants to raise awareness of the variety of social and financial factors that has brought about the 76,000 evictions in the last year. The statistics published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), for the 12-month period ending June 2003, include people made homeless due to friends or family being no longer able or willing to accommodate them, mortgage and rent arrears, and the termination of short tenancy agreements. Ill-health, relationship breakdown, and sudden unemployment are common triggers for causing homelessness.

To curb the number of evictions, Shelter is calling for reform of the housing benefits system and for social landlords to review their arrears management. Errors in calculating benefits and an over readiness for some landlords to commence possession proceedings have been blamed for contributing to the numbers of people losing their homes. It is estimated by Shelter to cost between £2,000 and £3,000 for local authorities to evict each household.

Ultimately, the challenge rests with social landlords to find the funds for repair backlogs from its own budgets. If seeking additional resources, a local authority can opt for Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) to an especially formed housing association – South Norfolk District Council recently received permission from a ballot of its tenants to do just this. Alternatively, the choices are for setting up an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) for the housing service, or, a Private Finance Initiative (PFI), where a private contractor takes responsibility for managing a council's housing service.

According to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 40% of non-decent properties are located in the 10% of most deprived wards. As the majority of deprived wards are within cities, it is usually the urban local authorities that are faced with finding the means to make the most substantive increases to repairs and modernisation programmes. Typically, housing associations own newer properties, less likely to fail the Decent Homes Standard, but there is still much work to be done.

Decent Homes remains an important issue in the private sector. By 2020, it is projected 75% of vulnerable households will be living in private sector accommodation. The ODPM has

outlined three main methods for private sector renewal nationwide:

- Local authority assistance for private sector renewal is beginning with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, which gives wider powers for assisting owners and tenants to repair and improve their homes. Low-cost loans, and equity release will be available alongside grants. Regional Housing Boards will be able to allocate grants to local authorities to spend on private sector renewal.

- The Warm Front programme will provide grants to vulnerable households for heating, insulation, and energy efficiency measures.

- The Housing Market Renewal Fund -- which has already begun in certain pathfinder areas -- is likely to encompass, in the future, clearance and renovation of non-decent private sector homes. Other regeneration programmes, for example the New Deal for Communities, and Neighbourhood Renewal, can also be valuable in supporting the private sector.

Information about the Decent Homes implementation plans is available at www.odpm.gov.uk.

By D Gilbert, Norwich City Council.

