

# News in Brief

## VHG receives office upgrade

Barclays Bank plc gave the VHG team a morale boost and raised the standards of the office interior to a highly professional level to match the services we provide. A team of volunteers from local branches also swapped their business suits for overalls and repainted the office interiors. The team at VHG extend their thanks to all those who helped with the upgrade including a team of willing and very able helpers from Julian Housing Support.

## Charities Insurance battle joined by the statutory sector

Mick Ford of West Norfolk MIND has championed the issue of spiralling insurance costs for charities. Norfolk County Council's Director of Social Services Lisa Christensen has agreed to do what she can to support charities in finding insurance that is at an affordable level. Central Government have recognised that this is such a critical issue for charities that they have established a working party to explore options for the future. This is a great example of sharing the problems of your partner agencies and the responsibility of finding a solution.

## B&B Unit to increase the pressure on local authorities

A consultation document on 'Improving Standards of Accommodation for Homeless Households Placed in Temporary Accommodation' was released in March. Kris Reeves of Shelter Norfolk warned that this has serious implications for local authorities: 'Not only will the use of B&Bs for families with children be unlawful except in an emergency but also the Government intends to legislate around the standards of temporary accommodation for all homeless households including single persons'. She explained that this may have a serious impact on the levels of interim and temporary accommodation for all groups as many of the current facilities may fail to meet standards in the provision of cooking and washing facilities.

# Prevention of Homelessness

## The Homelessness Directorate have launched a new Good Practice Guide in the prevention of homelessness: 'Reducing B&B use and tackling homelessness – What's working: A Good Practice Handbook'

In March 2002, the Government first announced the target of reducing the number of homeless families with children in B&B hotels by March 2004 and ensuring no homeless families with children have to remain in such accommodation for more than 6 weeks. At that time about 6,700 families with approximately 11,000 children were in B&B. Local Authorities around the country have been working to achieve this target and included in the good practice guide is the diagram below which shows the progress nationally and in London.

### Preventing Homelessness Checklist for local authorities:

- Use a Spend to Save policy
- Use a Homelessness Prevention Fund
- Be proactive in preventing homelessness
- Put housing advice at the 'front of shop'
- Carry out home visits before accepting a duty
- Provide financial support and practical assistance
- Use mediation

Beacon Councils have shown that by using these schemes to fund rent deposit schemes, Visiting Officers and supporting people to manage their housing crisis better they are making sustainable improvements. These councils have focused on tackling the key reasons for the loss of a home:

### National breakdown of reason for loss of home:

Recorded reason	Percentage
Parental eviction	20%
Other friends/family eviction	16%
Violent relationship breakdown	13%
End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	13%
Other relationship breakdown	7%
Loss of other rented or tied housing	6%
Rent arrears	2%
Mortgage arrears	1%
Other	21%

There is also an emphasis placed on local authorities showing an understanding of their local homelessness problem. Many local authorities are working with voluntary sector agencies to collect detailed information about why families and individuals lost their home. This is often complex and may not be the presenting problem. VHG would urge voluntary sector organisations to co-operate fully with their local authority partners in complet-

ing surveys and monitoring forms. Emma Daniel, Chief Executive, said: 'If we are to make a lasting impact on homelessness and ensure that the services that exist meet the needs of those in a housing or personal crisis we have to dig deeper for that information. It is absolutely vital that members and other voluntary organisations co-operate with any monitoring projects that help us to understand the local and regional needs better.'

### New Working Practice - Case Study Harrow 2002/3

#### Causes of homelessness Actions Parental/relative/friend exclusion

- Home visits
- Mediation – run by Relate
- Guaranteed interview within 5 working days
- If not homeless (but still in need) will link into Housing Options

#### Domestic violence

- Sanctuary Project – to date 35 families have asked to remain in their home rather than move
- Partnership with Police/Women's aid centre
- Average cost £500 per sanctuary
- Provide a safe room within the home and emergency phone
- Operating since Sept 2002

#### Loss of AST/other rented accommodation

- Assertive Outreach Worker for home/landlord visits to establish exact cause and identify solution
- Face to face work with the landlord
- Housing Benefit arrears issues/fast tracking
- If not homeless (but still in need) will link into Housing Options

Contact: Andy Gale, Housing Needs Manager, London Borough of Harrow

### New Working Practice - Case Study

"We used to make problems for ourselves. Because we were understaffed, if a family came in with a problem with their landlord we would send them back home telling them they had a right to stay in their home until they had received a valid Notice to Quit. The result was that the Notice to Quit was served and the family ended up in B&B because there wasn't time to do anything else.

Now, if a family come in with a housing problem we don't let them leave us until we have understood the problem, spoken to the landlord and tried to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of all. It is so much easier than leaving it to the last minute – and there's the family to consider too. It saves them months of uncertainty."

South East HPT Leader

# Homelessness – What Works?

## Julian Housing Support and Crisis ReachOut project in Norfolk

In 1999 a multi agency working party was formed to identify the links between mental ill health/homelessness/accommodation difficulties/ psychiatric hospital discharge/delayed discharge and multiple re-admissions. A process was developed to promptly identify needs as soon after hospital admission as possible and in March 2000 Julian Housing Support began a pilot scheme funded by CRISIS reach out grant at Northgate Hospital Gt. Yarmouth. Crisis funding enabled JHS to appoint a housing Link worker to visit inpatients with identified housing needs. This pilot ran for three years and was independently evaluated in 2002. The evaluation showed that the Link work prevented loss of accommodation, provided clear pathways to housing for those without a home and ensured that users of this service were connected to ongoing tenancy support. The Crisis pilot and subsequent evaluation helped JHS to further develop and refine the process and provided evidence of positive outcomes leading to successful bids for funding from ODPM homelessness directorate. This funding is matched by Norfolk Social Services and Norfolk PCTs. A service is now provided to every psychiatric acute ward in the county.

For a full copy of the Evaluation and details of the dissemination event please go to [www.crisis.org.uk](http://www.crisis.org.uk)

## Learning lessons in tackling Homelessness and Mental Health

Crisis have released the evaluation report on their 'Crisis ReachOut' project which funded projects around the country including four in Eastern region to work with people with both homelessness and mental health issues who experienced barriers to accessing other statutory and voluntary sector services. The interpretations of both 'homelessness' and 'mental health' varied in these projects which was seen as a strength allowing projects to work with the local need.

The projects were similar to the assertive outreach model of working with clients who are resistant to accessing services.

The similarities are outlined in the report as:

- Multi-tasking staff members
- Attending to the concrete details of everyday life, often as a way to establish trust and engagement
- Small caseloads
- Not being time limited
- Services are provided mainly in the community, rather than in an office setting

The projects' aims were to enable clients with high and complex support needs to reengage with relevant statutory and voluntary services. Most clients were able to do this with the ongoing support of their ReachOut worker. One worker described in the report that he continued to support a client even when they had accessed a hostel as that was necessary in order to ensure the progress made was continued. The project sought to identify barriers in accessing both statutory and voluntary sector agencies:

## St John's Housing Trust

### Project Manager & Senior Project Worker Coppice Court

The Trust is a charitable organisation providing accommodation and support for homeless people across 5 projects in Lowestoft and we are now seeking to recruit 2 posts to an exciting new project – Coppice Court. This is a project comprising 24 units of self-contained, newly refurbished, temporary accommodation for homeless families on one site with access to communal facilities. Staff work closely with Waveney District Council and statutory/voluntary agencies to engage with families who will move on to Local Authority permanent accommodation with resettlement support.

#### 1. Project Manager

Full time – 37 hours per week

Salary - £20,469 - £22,689

Applicants will have considerable experience of managing a team, in this case 9 full/part-time staff and a resettlement worker. Ideally educated to graduate level the post holder will have knowledge and experience of the health and welfare issues relating to families. A qualification in supported housing would be desirable as would previous experience in the homelessness sector. Knowledge, experience and understanding of child protection issues and working within a framework of inclusion and diversity would be expected.

The post holder will be a dynamic, enthusiastic, self-motivated individual eager to work in a challenging, though rewarding environment and play a full role in the generic management of a growing organisation. A working knowledge of the Supporting People funding stream and Health and Safety procedures would be an asset.

#### 2. Senior Project Worker

Full time – 37 hours per week

Salary - £17,442 - (Pay Review pending)

(Note: This is a re-advertised post – previous applicants need not apply)

Applicants will have experience of working in a senior role with responsibility for supervising staff or have considerable potential and a good mix of skills, ability and experience to fill this position. Knowledge of the homelessness sector and/or a qualification in supported housing or related field would be an advantage.

The post holder would ideally have a working knowledge of Housing, Welfare and related benefits and be able to liaise with other agencies at an appropriate level. The successful applicant will have excellent inter-personal and communication skills.

To request an application form and information pack for the above posts, please apply in writing in the first instance to Paul Cornell, Operations Manager, St Johns Housing Trust, The Fyffe Centre, Belvedere Road, Lowestoft. NR33 OPR.

**Closing date for applications – 21st November, 2003**

Interviews will be held in December.

#### Barriers in statutory services

Staff bogged down in 'bureaucracy, red tape and paperwork'  
Difficult to place someone with multiple needs  
Reluctance on the part of policy makers to understand the needs of this client group  
Emphasis on targets and move-on rather than long-term engagement  
Strict and inflexible eligibility criteria, for example, what constituted homelessness or mental health problems.

#### Barriers in voluntary services

Drugs agencies only dealing with drug problems and not other issues like mental health  
The reluctance of some agencies to take a risk with a client  
'Cherry-picking' of the most able clients  
Drug taking in hostels  
Lack of women only emergency accommodation  
Inexperienced staff in hostels

# Training Dates

**28th November 2003**

**RECRUITMENT & INTERVIEWING**

*Diane Woodhouse*

**3rd December 2003**

**CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA PROTECTION**

*Claire Pastorius*

**10th December 2003**

**USING RESEARCH EFFECTIVELY**

*Rebecca Foreman*

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](http://www.vhg-east.org)

#### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

VHG REGIONAL CONFERENCE -

20TH & 21ST NOVEMBER

'CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITIES: CHALLENGING SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE EASTERN COUNTIES'.

*The Cresset, Peterborough*

#### EMAIL THE TEAM -

**Emma Daniel, Chief Executive**

[emma@vhg-east.org](mailto:emma@vhg-east.org)

**Kerry Giles, Training Administrator**

[kerry@vhg-east.org](mailto:kerry@vhg-east.org)

**Anne Stolworthy, Administration & Finance**

[anne@vhg-east.org](mailto:anne@vhg-east.org)

# A day in the life of...

I get into work at 8.30 every day to our offices in central Cambridge. This gives me a chance to go through emails and take messages from the answer phone and prioritise what I need to get done today before the other employees arrive from 9.30. I catch up with some paperwork until 10 and then go to our staff meeting.

Staff are based in several offices and the meeting allows me to give them an idea of what I am doing. I update the team on an up and coming project (a new 6 bed house for continuing drinkers – the other supported accommodation is all dry – this is for long term street drinkers) which has been beset by hurdles issues around planning permission. It has taken 4 years to develop and finally seems to be moving. We also discussed the new Anti-Social Behaviour regulations in

Cambridge and the impact of a possible street drinking ban and measures to challenge begging in relation to the development of this project. For us the concern is that the public will think all beggars are homeless and that all homeless people are drug users. We are supporting the Cambridge City Council's alternative giving scheme as the leaflets emphasise these points. We discuss issues around residents and their visitors of the proposed new scheme and what responsibility we had for policing their behaviour in the local community. We also talk about a new post which is an Older Person's project worker for homeless people who are 50+. When we accommodate over the 60s we have can have problems when there are issues around mobility and we need to move them on to a sheltered scheme or care home because of their support needs. We have now gained some successes already through offering

floating support to these clients which has meant that the City Council has placed them in sheltered schemes.

At 11.30am I attend a supervision session with our Mental Health Outreach team Co-ordinator, Oliver, and together we look at the progress of this service. Afterwards I get back to me paperwork and I eat sandwiches at my desk. My role has become increasingly desk bound as the paperwork increases!

In the afternoon I am invited look at resident's bedroom. I know this resident very well and he is keen for me to approve the new colour scheme. I spend some time chatting with him and congratulate him on the improvements.

**Brian Holman - Manager,  
Cambridge Cyrenians.**

The remainder of the afternoon is spent preparing interview questions for the Older Person's Project Worker post and I take questions from a similar post and also adapt them for this post with specific questions around the needs of older people and working with alternative accommodation providers.

Tomorrow I have a Management Committee Sub-group 'Development Group' – I will update on the Contract of Employment and CCVS has recently done a management health check so I prepare a presentation on the outcome and recommendations for our committee.

I live in a village outside Cambridge I take the bus which takes an hour to get in and I make the most of the journey to and from home to do my reading and catching up with editing notes and papers. This has helped me be disciplined about a work life balance and not taking work home especially as I have a young family.



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For further info:  
**01603 750200**

# VHG

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## Government launches tough anti-social behaviour strategy

*David Blunkett launched the new Anti-Social Behaviour strategy on 14th October 2003: 'Together- tackling anti-social behaviour'. Louise Casey (formerly of the Rough Sleepers Unit) heads the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit which was set up in January 2003. This action plan underlines the Government's determination to help rid communities of the scourge of anti-social behaviour.*

Key aspects of the strategy are:

### TRAIL BLAZER ACTION AREAS –

Nuisance Neighbour Trail Blazer Action Areas in Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Sunderland. Begging Trail Blazer Action Areas in Brighton, Bristol, Leeds, Camden and Westminster.

### SPECIALIST PROSECUTORS –

These prosecutors will specialise in the prosecution of anti-social behaviour and low level order offences. They will link closely with communities, tenants groups and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

### 'Together' ACADEMY –

Centres of excellence may be extended from London to regional level to promote good practice in tackling anti-social behaviour.

### What is anti-social behaviour?

The action plan focuses on graffiti through 'Operation Scrub It', abandoned cars and other related issues through a '100 day clean up' and noisy or problem neighbours through 'Nuisance Neighbours Panels'. Along with these issues 'begging' has been highlighted as an activity which the Government is determined to deal with far more seriously than ever before.

Reactions to the launch of the action plan vary but beneath these apparently conflicting approaches is a common thread, in tackling the very small minority of seriously dysfunctional households the Government's approach is punitive rather than rehabilitative:

Tim Winter of the Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group applauded the high profile given to anti-social behaviour by the

government and the £22 million cash injection to crime reduction partnerships. He said, "Whilst I warmly welcome the Government's plans I regret that no specific funding has been earmarked for working on more complex cases."

Shelter warned that the Government's reluctance to include more prevention-focused measures in its antisocial behaviour strategy will severely damage its effectiveness in the long-term. The charity is also extremely alarmed that despite widespread criticism, measures to dock housing benefit from people accused of antisocial behaviour still appear to be on the agenda.

VHG joined Shelter in voicing concerns that the measures outlined are too tabloid focused in their approach to tackling excluded households and individuals. Emma Daniel, Chief Executive of VHG said: "It is

right to deal with anti-social behaviour and RSLs and tenants groups will be pleased to see the emphasis placed on this issue. However, the Action Plan seems designed to grab tabloid headlines and punish those who are in reality in need of a wide range of support and intervention. These households need to be supported in living in a community and these measures, which potentially exacerbate their problems, will mean that the solutions are delayed and the overall costs increased both to that household and the wider community"

Cambridge City Council is already developing actions to crack down on street drinking and begging. Charities are supporting this scheme locally which includes an 'Alternative Giving' scheme for residents and businesses in the City centre. For more information on the issues in this article: Meet Tim Winter at VHG's 2003 conference 20th & 21st November – email [kerry@vhg-east](mailto:kerry@vhg-east) for further information. [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk) – To see Shelter's response to the 'Together – tackling Anti-Social Behaviour' action plan. [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) – To download a copy of the 'Together – tackling Anti-Social Behaviour' action plan.

### £5bn Funding Strengthens Government Affordable Homes Commitment

A £5bn housing allocation was unveiled today by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott to drive forward the Government's commitment to affordable housing, key workers and decent homes over the next two years.

The new key worker initiative will ensure support is better targeted and tailored to meet the needs of public services. Most assistance will continue to be directed towards priority categories, such as health workers and teachers. However, it is also proposed the programme should be widened to include other public sector workers to tackle recruitment and retention problems.

The programme will offer four simple options to help key workers into home ownership, upgrade to family homes or rent at affordable levels. There will also be more emphasis on larger homes, reflecting the problems faced by many key workers when they seek to upgrade to a family home.

Mr Prescott also announced additional funding for transitional arrangements following the abolition of Local Authority Social Housing Grant in April. Schemes totalling £680m will provide over 14,000 homes over the next three years. The Deputy Prime Minister praised the work of the Regional Housing Boards which were created as part of the Sustainable Communities Plan to tackle the individual housing needs of each region.

He said: "The task the Boards faced - balancing the competing demands within the region - was a difficult one. I have been impressed by what they, councils and other stakeholders have achieved in a short space of time. I am especially pleased that in most regions the recommendations have been accepted in full."

For more information on the issues raised in this article: [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)