

Tackling homelessness and learning needs through partnership working

In Scotland, every local authority has a statutory duty to assist people affected by homelessness and depending on the needs of the client, this duty can range from temporary accommodation, advice and assistance to permanent accommodation.

Every local authority also has a duty to prepare and implement a homelessness strategy. The production of each homelessness strategy ensures that local authorities take a holistic approach in working towards the prevention and alleviation of homelessness in their area. That is, that the support needs as well as the accommodation needs of those affected are appropriately identified and met.

The strategy also requires local authorities to adopt a partnership approach with housing associations, health boards, voluntary organisations and employability/ training organisations in order to develop sustainable solutions to homelessness.

Further reading and websites

Your local homelessness strategy which should be available on your local council website

Glasgow Homelessness Network: www.ghn.org.uk

Affected by Homelessness?: www.hipinglasgow.com

Scottish Executive: www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk

Communities Scotland: www.Communitiesscotland.gov.uk

Scottish Council for the Single Homeless (SCSH): www.scsch.org.uk

Shelter Scotland: www.shelter.org.uk

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Supporting Learners Affected by Homelessness

Anyone who supports learners can be in the situation where the need to understand and offer the right kind of help to a learner facing homelessness arises. This article describes some of the issues and barriers and suggests ways to provide support that also enables learning.



The only thing that people affected by homelessness have in common is their homelessness!

There are different types of homelessness, from the family living in temporary accommodation to someone who is sleeping rough on the streets.

When attempting to negotiate a route out of homelessness, the length of time spent being homeless may affect the multiplicity and complexity of barriers that are encountered.

The barriers in relation to training and employment most often cited by people affected by homelessness are:

structural barriers

- accommodation issues
- lack of previous education or training
- benefits issues

personal and social barriers

- addiction issues
- mental health issues
- physical health issues
- lack of experience or skills
- lack of confidence
- literacies

It is important to note that not everyone who has been affected by homelessness will experience these barriers. It is equally important to note that these barriers are not exclusively associated with homelessness.

Most people find it difficult to believe that homelessness can happen to anyone. But anyone can expect to face divorce, redundancy, business failure or mental illness at some time and all of these can lead to homelessness.

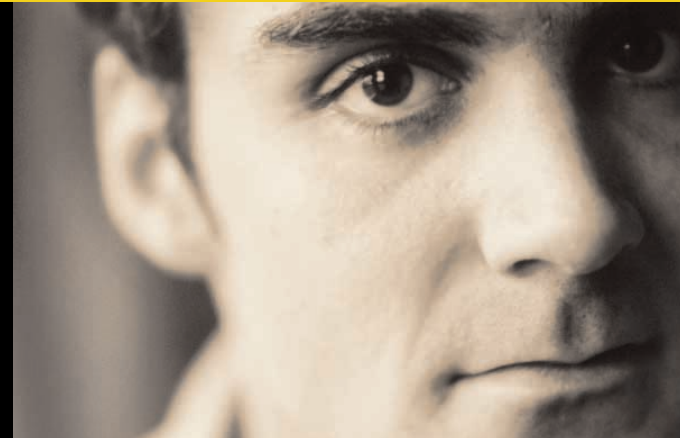
A number of groups appear more vulnerable to homelessness. Ex-offenders, people leaving care, people who have experienced mental illness, and ex-military personnel are a few examples which show how people leaving institutions are more at risk of homelessness.

After the initial engagement, it is important to have an induction which makes the learner want to return to, and sustain, their learning



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Reasons for homelessness

Some examples are:

- relationship breakdown (partner, family or friends)
- eviction from previous accommodation (temporary or permanent)
- discharge from hospital or prison
- victim of violence or harassment
- contributing complex needs: addiction issues, mental ill-health, physical ill-health

The causes of homelessness are clearly complex, and often go beyond the simple need for accommodation. Homelessness is best tackled by a holistic and multi-agency approach with the individual needs of the homeless person at the centre.

Many people who have experienced homelessness will have appointments with numerous agencies, eg, housing, medical, support worker and benefits agencies, as part of a resettlement process. Learning centres that offer flexible provision routinely will therefore be best placed to accommodate people undergoing this transition. The key points to bear in mind are:

- arrange learning times around these appointments
- have later opening times in the evening and/or at the weekends, allowing learning to fit around more fundamental priorities
- provide a variety of start dates so that learners do not have to wait long periods of time to start programmes which could result in a loss of motivation and interest

Perhaps because of previous negative experiences at academic institutions, some people may wish to have a choice about the type of learning centre where their learning takes place. Those advising should therefore prepare a list of outreach centres and locations where learning is available with information of those who provide crèche and other facilities.

Some people may have to try out any learning activity more than once or twice before they are able to settle into the routine of their learning because of periods of ill health or personal problems. Again, a learning centre accustomed to flexible provision will:

- reduce the pressure of having to complete a programme within a certain period of time by having flexible timescales for completion
- provide opportunities for re-starting programmes

For people who have not accessed any kind of formal learning for a long period of time, their confidence and levels of self esteem may be particularly low. Around 20% of people affected by homelessness have poor literacy skills which has implications about the type of support that they will require.

Factors to consider include:

- initially, it may be advisable to have one to one sessions with learners to help to build up their confidence and self esteem before moving on to group work or less intensive support
- adopt a person-centred approach that meets the varying levels of support that the individual may require
- provide adult based literacy learning material
- agree clear and short term goals so that progress can be viewed and confidence increased
- recognise achievement of goals, which supports personal motivation
- provide clear information about costs and what programmes can be accessed at no costs

Engagement with potential learners who have experienced multiple barriers to learning can often be problematic. After the initial engagement, it is important to have an induction which makes them want to return to, and sustain, their learning:

- outreach events and marketing materials which take information to places where potential learners are, eg, housing support providers, supported accommodation, hostels and day centres
- induction programmes that set out exactly what learners can expect and what is expected of them
- information events or open days with flexible access hours
- leaflets and posters that are targeted at potential learners with literacy problems
- provision of diaries to learners to enable them to record appointments with their learning advisers and learning timetable

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