

**WORKING IT OUT:**  
towards an employability  
strategy for those facing  
homelessness

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A research report for SHEN



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## CONTENTS

<b>1.INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 The context	4
1.2 Background	4
1.3 Social inclusion	5
1.4 The projects	5
1.5 The aims of SHEN	5
<b>2 THE EMPLOYABILITY MODEL</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. THE POLICY FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1 The Homelessness Task Force	9
4.2 The Homelessness Monitoring Group	9
<b>5. RECENT INITIATIVES</b>	<b>11</b>
5.1 The New Futures Fund Initiative	11
5.2 Business Initiatives – building partnerships	13
5.3 Demand-led initiatives – working with the labour market	14
<b>6. ROUTES TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY</b>	<b>15</b>
6.1 Research background	15
6.2 Recent research	16
<b>7. IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>8. ACTION POINTS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CASE STUDIES</b>	
<b>APPENDIX 1</b> : Albyn Housing Association Ltd.	23
<b>APPENDIX 2</b> : BUDS project	25
<b>APPENDIX 3</b> : ACCESS project	28
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES</b>	<b>32</b>



# WORKING IT OUT: towards an employability strategy for those facing homelessness

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The context

1.1.1 Identifying the current position on homelessness and employability in Scotland is not a straightforward task. Very few longitudinal studies of the subject have been produced, and much of the work in the field covers a wider client group with multiple needs which may include being at risk of homelessness. Quantitative evidence of the employability of those facing homelessness is not recorded, and systematic tracking of individuals as they progress through employability is rare amongst service providers.

1.1.2 However, policy initiatives and projects at all levels have recognised the importance of employment and employability in providing sustainable routes out of homelessness. This has been reflected in the programmes set up under the New Futures Fund Initiative (NFFI), which has demonstrated how a pre-New Deal approach is effective in supporting this client group. Mainstreaming this type of provision and securing a long-term approach to homelessness and employability is now a matter of urgency if the lessons learned from the NFFI pilot projects are to be sustained and improved.

### 1.2 Background

1.2.1 Since the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 required local authorities to prepare strategies for "preventing and alleviating homelessness", it has become increasingly recognised that employability is a key route out of homelessness, providing that it results in sustainable employment. This was reinforced by the Homelessness Task Force's final report (Scottish Executive, 2002), which is currently being followed up by the Homelessness Monitoring Group. As homelessness strategies have to be regularly reviewed, the changing emphasis on employability is likely to be increasingly reflected in revised strategies as they evolve to meet the demands of the 2001 Act.

1.2.2 This report is intended to review the way employability as a route out of homelessness has been considered in Scotland since 2001; to look at the evidence in Scotland for employability as a successful strategy to combat the risk of homelessness; to show how individuals progress towards employability and consider whether this process leads to sustainable employment; and to set out a workplan for SHEN which responds to these findings and underpins the development of strategies for employability as a route out of homelessness.

### 1.3 Social inclusion

This increasing awareness of the need to link employability with routes out of homelessness reflects wider policy approaches to social inclusion and the labour market at both the national and European levels. The Beattie National Action Group has taken forward the Scottish Executive's commitment to improve the employability of all young people post-school, with some specific projects in the field of homelessness such as an employment support pack for young people in a homeless unit. The "welfare to work" principles of UK-wide policy are also reflected in many of the employment initiatives such as "Ready for Work". This approach also fits firmly into the European Employment Strategy. The European Commission's 2003 Guidelines state that "*effective integration into the labour market of those at a disadvantage will deliver increased social inclusion, employment rates and improve the sustainability of social protection systems*" (FEANSTA 2004).

### 1.4 The projects

This research draws on a range of published reports on projects which focus on employability and homelessness in order to examine and update the evidence of current practice available in Scotland. In addition, three new case studies have been compiled (appendices 1-3) from different regions of Scotland which demonstrate the ways in which employability can provide a route out of homelessness. All illustrate many of the issues raised in the more general reports, and demonstrate the complexities involved in building sustainable routes out of homelessness through employability.

### 1.5 The Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network (SHEN)

1.5.1 SHEN has been set up to improve employment opportunities and promote employability for people facing homelessness, in the context of mainstreaming the provision which was piloted under the NFFI. Education, training and employment are now recognised as an important part of the route out of homelessness, so local homelessness strategies need to address employability as an integral part of their solutions to homelessness. At the same time, the service providers in the field also have to adapt their practice to take employability issues into account. In addition, the employment providers - agencies, Job Centre Plus and employers - need to develop and adapt their processes. This should give those at a distance from the job market a realistic opportunity to develop "job readiness" and enter employment.

1.5.2 SHEN's task is to bring together this wide range of stakeholders in the employability process, and collaborate with them to identify and promote "what works". This involves the identification and sharing of models of good practice, and influencing policy, funding and legislation in order to ensure that the employability model can be a sustainable and effective route out of homelessness.

## 2. The Employability Model

2.1 There are apparently uncontested understandings about the meaning of employability in both Scotland and the wider UK. In general, practitioners and policy makers would define it as: “...*the combination of factors and processes which enable people to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to move on in the workplace*” (Effective Interventions Unit, Scottish Executive Health Department). Employability implies that individuals achieve a sustainable position in the labour market. However, in the context of resolving homelessness issues there is a lack of clarity as to when this process should begin, and whether the focus of employability “training” should be individual development or the process of linking the individual to the job market.

2.2 When looking at the available case studies, the model of employability and homelessness used in Scotland is more likely to be seen as a consequence of resettlement rather than an integral way of providing a sustainable route out of homelessness (McNaughton 2004; GHN, 2004). Established training models (see Cameron et al. 2003) tend to place the emphasis on personal development rather than identifying and developing transferable skills which can improve employability and lead to entry to the labour market.

2.3 It is rare for employability to be assessed when people register as homeless with either a local authority or a hostel. So there is virtually no quantitative evidence to indicate the level of employability amongst service users at the point of seeking support from homelessness services. Although some services do track users through their process, this is by no means a widespread practice in identifying users’ progress. It is therefore difficult to comprehensively assess the employability of those facing homelessness at any point in the resettlement process.

2.4 Anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of those facing homelessness are in some form of employment, and/or are eager to seek employment. But resolving benefits issues is usually seen as a far higher priority than developing employability, mainly because of the perceived need to move people from crisis to stability before employability issues can be dealt with. However, the long-term effect of the “benefits trap” may mean that this approach runs contrary to the employability model. There is little doubt that a culture of benefits dependency has dominated the sector, mainly due to the way in which the benefits system discourages risk-taking in entering the labour market. Both service users and providers face cultural change if employability is to become an integral part of resettlement, but this cannot be achieved without more flexibility in the benefits system. At the same time, both service providers and Job Centre Plus need to be able to identify links between homelessness and employability if the effectiveness of the employability approach is to be evaluated.

2.5 Similarly, without the ability to track individual client's progress through the employability process, and effective partnerships between service providers which can support this type of tracking, it is difficult to ascertain just which forms of support are effective in improving employability. There is anecdotal evidence that service users are "churning" in the system, rather than progressing through the process to employment. Although there is a proliferation of measurement tools, especially for soft skills, they rarely "follow" a service user through the process so cannot effectively evidence the success (or failure) of support systems to progress service users through the employability process. Some resources, such as Wise Move's employability and mapping tool, have been developed to help assess the effectiveness of services, and there have been some localised tracking studies (McNaughton 2005) but these techniques are not yet in wide use across Scotland.

2.6 If SHEN is to fulfil its brief to promote employability and employment-led routes out of homelessness, then it could be argued that the resettlement process and the employability process should run alongside each other. There are clear links between the two, and little evidence to suggest that the resettlement-led model is the most efficient or that it leads to sustainable employment. If anything, the concentration on the acquisition of "life-skills" rather than "employment skills" leads to clients focussing on the acquisition of soft skills rather than moving on to employment-focused skills. This is not to say that soft skills are irrelevant to employability, but rather to suggest that both service providers and clients should see these skills as relevant to both resettlement and employment. Clients need to address the dual aspects of these skills and recognise their transferability right at the start of resolving their homelessness issues.

### **3. Barriers to employment**

3.1 The Homelessness Task Force recognised that "the creation of employment-led routes out of homelessness ... need(s) to be a high priority" (Scottish Exec. 2002), but noted that changes are necessary for this to succeed. Homeless people need to be able to access information about employment and training from wider sources and in different ways; the benefits system needs to be more flexible, and homelessness should be recognised as a specific reason for entitlement to additional support.

3.2 Progress has been made in this field with homelessness giving immediate entitlement to New Deal schemes, and some pilot projects have addressed the problems of the benefits system (such as North Lanarkshire Equal Access Supported Employment Initiative). Further reform to the housing benefits system in April 2004 should mean moving into employment is a "change of circumstances" rather than a new claim, eliminating the delays which often result from re-assessments. But nevertheless, many SHEN members continue to report that the "benefits trap" is a major barrier to achieving sustainable solutions to homelessness through employment.

3.3 This is clearly illustrated in all three case studies (appendices 1.3). The fear of losing housing when benefits are withdrawn (see the BUDS case study appendix 2) is a very real barrier to service users' confidence in employment as a route out of homelessness. As the ACCESS project (appendix 3) points out, this can become disempowering for the individual concerned, and makes it difficult for the project to move the client from "job readiness" to employment. However, Albyn Housing has ensured continuation of the support element even when Housing Benefit is withdrawn, which allows the service user to maintain their supported accommodation without financial pressure.

3.4 Further barriers are encountered on the labour market side. Much of the policy surrounding the inclusiveness and the labour market does not specifically recognise the needs of homeless people. For instance the National Employment Panel does not identify homelessness as an area for developing welfare to work (NEP 2004a), although it does acknowledge homelessness as a key marker for disadvantage in the New Deal 25+ schemes (NEP 2004b). This means that employers may not be encouraged to consider homelessness as part of their inclusion strategy, even though there is evidence to show how business involvement can make a substantial difference (Bain and Company, 2002). Employers are often unaware of the skills which those facing homelessness can offer, and need more information about the ways in which they can support people rebuilding their lives through employment (see appendix 2). Scottish Business in the Community is addressing these issues in Scotland (SBC, 2003), and Wise Move has developed resources to support businesses participating in their project.

3.5 Another problem in tackling the issue of homelessness and employability is the difficulty of identifying homelessness in the context of the labour market and linking it to employability. Jobcentre Plus does not generally record the housing status of their clients, although they do provide the following definition of homelessness for New Deal applicants:

*"The client's homelessness must be a significant barrier to them gaining employment. Homelessness is not just someone living on the streets; for example, someone staying in a hostel may be classed as homeless and eligible for this provision if it is a significant barrier to them moving onto provision or into work."*  
(<http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk>)

3.6 Local Authorities on the other hand do not normally record the employment background of homeless applicants. This makes it difficult to assess the level of employability amongst those facing homelessness, or track employment progress alongside the resolution of housing issues. The problem of lack of evidence is compounded by the fact that employability and homelessness cover two major, distinct policy areas at governmental level - the labour market and social inclusion. The case for "joined-up government" in the area is clear, which has been acknowledged in recent decisions by the Scottish Executive to create an Employability Framework for Scotland.

## 4. The policy framework

### 4.1. Homelessness Task Force (HTF)

4.1.1 The key document underlying policy in this area (post 2001) is the Homelessness Task Force Final Report (Scottish Exec. 2002). This specifically targets employment opportunities as an area where services need to be developed for people facing homelessness. Whilst recognising that some homeless people will require a great deal of support in order to be ready to enter the labour market, the HTF emphasizes the importance of developing individual skills and confidence through engaging in rewarding activities and transitional employment programmes. It notes that 41% of the NFFI programme participants have been homeless people, demonstrating the importance of these schemes in providing pre-vocational support for this client group. At the level of employment opportunities it recommends the further development of private sector initiatives in partnership with support agencies, and encourages the public sector to consider similar initiatives.

4.1.2 However, they note that the inflexibility of the benefits system is impeding the transition of homeless people into the labour market. The withdrawal of benefit, especially housing benefit, at the point of employment is a strong disincentive to work. The HTF recommends that the Dept. for Work and Pensions (DWP) either find ways of introducing flexibility into the system or that the legislation is changed to accommodate a more gradual transition from benefit dependency. This would require a responsive approach from Jobcentre Plus both in the provision of benefits advice and also access to employment services and programmes.

4.1.3 Some progress has been made in this area (see 4.2.2, 5.3.2 and appendix 1) but SHEN members continue to report difficulties. The fear of withdrawal of Housing Benefit when service users enter employment, and the potential cost of the support element, still discourage service users from seeing employment as a sustainable route out of homelessness.

### 4.2 Homelessness Monitoring Group (HMG)

4.2.1 The HMG has followed up the recommendations of the HTF. Their first report "Helping Homeless People" (2004) notes five main response areas outlined in the HTF final report and identifies where progress has been made. The main recommendations of the HTF that it responds to are:

- The improvement of access to mainstream employment services and programmes through Jobcentre Plus
- The engagement of Jobcentre Plus, the Scottish New Deal Task Force and employers in developing employment initiatives to support homeless people

- A pilot programme of transitional employment to test how flexibility in housing benefits might overcome the poverty trap faced by homeless people trying to access employment.
- An action plan to mainstream the successful NFFI service elements by 2005.

4.2.2 The report identifies the following main responses to the HTF recommendations:

- Improvements in access to New Deal programmes, with homelessness giving entitlement to early access regardless of age or length of unemployment.
- The development of a protocol on joint working which enables NFFI and Jobcentre Plus staff to work together (piloted in Glasgow and Dumfries and Galloway).
- The extension of the **progress2work** initiative to Linkup in Fife, providing local support and access to Jobcentre Plus services to a client group which includes homeless people.
- The Welfare to Work Task Force has worked on labour market aspects of employment for homeless people, developing a model of good practice for recruitment and retention of workers from disadvantaged groups including the homeless.
- Jobcentre Plus has developed two "Passport to Work" courses in Edinburgh to improve the employability skills of homeless people.
- The development of an action plan to mainstream NFFI projects through Local Authorities, either bringing them in-house, or contacting voluntary agencies to provide services.

4.2.3 However, little practical progress has been made on the mainstreaming and/or future funding of the NFFI projects. At the time of writing (January 2005) no long-term plans have been made, although short term funding has been extended to June 2005. The risk of losing the expertise built up in these projects, and the confidence of service users, is increasing.

## 5. Recent initiatives

### 5.1 The New Futures Fund Initiative (NFFI)

5.1.1 The work of the HTF in the field of employability reflects the wider scope of the NFFI, established by Scottish Enterprise. The NFFI provides the main employability skills programme for those furthest from the labour market in Scotland. It was set up in two phases, starting in 1998, to offer a suitable level of support to those who face substantial barriers to labour market entry through either direct routes or via the New Deal options. The interim report on phase 1 was made in 2001 (LRDP Ltd., 2001) and a final evaluation of the initiative is currently being prepared.

5.1.2 Full details of the final projects funded by NFFI can be found in their report "*New Futures Fund Project Summary*" (2004). 19 out of 71 projects funded by New Futures directly target homelessness, and many others address aspects of multiple disadvantage which are known to put people at risk of homelessness. These pilot programmes address two major concerns in the area of social exclusion and the labour market:

- many support agencies do not focus on employment as an outcome for their client group
- training agencies fail to understand and provide sufficient flexibility to support the most vulnerable clients.

5.1.3 In the interim report on phase 1 (LRDP Ltd 2001), homelessness is identified as the second most prevalent barrier to labour market entry for this vulnerable group. Lack of qualifications is identified as the main barrier to employment. As many clients face multiple barriers, it is hardly surprising that of the 41% of the NFFI clients in phase 1 that were identified as homeless, approximately half have no qualifications. New Futures provides "a bridge between a chaotic lifestyle and the next step towards the labour market" (LRDP Ltd 2001), demonstrating that it is possible to address multiple disadvantage through appropriate, flexible training and skills development.

5.1.4 LRDP Ltd's interim evaluation considers the profiles of NFFI clients, the potential size of the "market" of socially excluded clients, and evaluates the way in which the NFFI projects have reached this market. It finds that the clients of these projects are generally those ready to make the transition from chaotic lifestyle towards the labour market. However, it is difficult to assess the size of the market as few records are kept, especially in the client group of people facing homelessness.

5.1.5 In terms of outcomes, at the interim report 14 -15% of this group has achieved employment, 8.5% entered further education and 3.4% Community Education. But the outcomes for over 50% of those identified as homeless or facing housing problems could not be identified. However, clients' increased confidence and improvement in "soft" skills, as well as their progress in

resolving the main problems they face in entering the labour market, are also important evaluation criteria. At least 55% of all clients reached positive outcomes, even if these could not be reported as "hard" outcomes in terms of progress towards the labour market. It's worth noting that many of the "soft" skills which are developed through these projects are valued by employers, so there is a case for identifying these skills in terms of employability outcomes.

5.1.6 Outcomes have improved since 2002, with 21% of the overall group entering employment, 14% on training, and 12% in further education (source: Jackie Baillie MSP). However, clients moving on from NFFI projects will probably still need a high level of support in developing and sustaining progress towards employability, including support in the workplace.

5.1.7 NFFI projects provide the first link between social support and economic activity for this disadvantaged group. For some of the providers, this was the first opportunity they had had to offer an employment orientation in the support services context. For instance, before the NFFI projects there was no employment support for young people leaving care, so the NFFI provision often offers a unique service which is not replicated by the New Deal provision. Many clients of NFFI projects are not ready to move into the New Deal style of skills development, or may not be eligible, as they are not claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). In addition, this level of support can prevent relapses or further excluding behaviour from clients by providing a purposeful and supportive environment in which to address a range of client needs. Overall, NFFI offers additional support which was not available prior to the programme and is unlikely to be funded from any other source on a national basis.

5.1.8 The interim report also recognised some of the barriers which homeless people come up against in progressing towards the labour market. NFFI projects in themselves tended to break down barriers as they have the flexibility to respond to clients' chaotic lifestyles. As entitlement to benefits is not withdrawn whilst participating in these projects, the major barrier of the benefits trap is at least temporarily avoided. However, the report finds that clients in the "move on" phase, who often still need a high level of support, face the problem of loss of benefits on entering employment or education. Also the obligation under JSA rules to enter a New Deal form of training has been reported as problematic if service users are not ready for this type of training. Both these problems provided further barriers to vulnerable clients.

5.1.9 Recommendations from the phase 1 interim report:

- Further research into the extent of the client group which could be reached by NFFI projects
- The emphasis on employability, and the link between "soft" skills and employability skills needs to be emphasized across the programme

- Projects need to be developed to ensure that they can provide the transitional support needed to move clients on and follow them up as they move towards the labour market.
- Opportunities for networking and sharing experience should be developed between projects.
- The age group of clients (currently cut-off at 35) should be raised.
- NFFI has been a successful initiative and could be mainstreamed, but should continue to be managed centrally in order to maintain a co-ordinated approach.

5.1.10 The second stage of the NFFI project evaluation (Scottish Enterprise, 2002) concentrates on the issues around mainstreaming and the evaluation of client's progress. There have been concerns that if the NFFI projects are mainstreamed to statutory agencies they might not be as responsive to the client group, and this has been recognised in the mainstream action plan (Scottish Enterprise, 2002). Two options have been considered in this proposal for mainstreaming provision for homelessness people to enter the labour market. Firstly, mainstream providers could fund and contract out provision. However, there is no specific stream of funding, and a range of agencies would be involved - Local Authorities through Homelessness Strategies, Jobcentre plus, the Scottish Executive, the DWP and the Scottish New Deal Task Force. Alternatively, mainstream practice within these organisations could be adapted to take on the NFFI approach - however, this may not be the best use of resources given the fragmented nature of the mainstream in this field.

## 5.2. Business initiatives - building partnerships

5.2.1 As evidence from London shows, (Bain and Company 2002) involving the business community in the homelessness and employability equation can have very positive effects. This can be both in terms of jobs as positive outcomes for clients, but also for the business - the drivers behind business involvement range from commercial business practice to outright philanthropy (SBC 2003), and often depend on local labour market conditions. But employers report that they need support and information (see appendix 1) to become involved, and to achieve successful outcomes for all stakeholders the process has to be well coordinated and clearly focused.

5.2.2 Business needs to make resources available to, and provide support for, internal staff engaged in the induction of clients into the workplace. Funding also has to be available for agencies to continue to work with clients after they enter employment. The link to agencies must be clear, and agencies and employers need to exchange expertise if clients are to substantially benefit from the employment experience on offer. Most studies suggest that on-going support for clients in the workplace is important if employment is to become sustainable.

5.2.3 Businesses offering employment opportunities to those at a distance from the labour market often feel overwhelmed by approaches from numerous agencies supporting those at a distance from the labour market. To make the process efficient they need to build strong relationships with reliable partners. Co-ordinating agencies, such as Wise Move in Edinburgh, have had considerable success in building bridges between homelessness organisations and the business community. Partnership working seems to be the way forward in progressing from employability to employment, but this depends on outcomes being attributed across the partnerships, and each partner recognising their expertise and that of the other members.

5.2.4 Scottish Business in the Community (SBC) is developing this type of structure. In partnership with Marks & Spencer, Cymbiosis Consultancy and Wise Move launched Business Action on Homelessness in Edinburgh in February 2004. SBC works in partnership with local agencies in each area e.g. Glasgow Homelessness Network in Glasgow, Cyrenians in Aberdeen, Step in Ayr, The Council in Inverness & Blue Triangle in Cumbernauld. The programme now runs in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness, Ayr, Cumbernauld and Fife. It is business led by a leadership group headed up by Boots. This programme offers motivational and confidence-building sessions followed by work experience with employers. It is being rolled out across Scotland using the SBC network in 2005 with increased business partners (SBC, 2003).

### 5.3 Demand-led initiatives - working with the labour market

5.3.1 The traditional approach to employability has tended to focus on client needs in the resettlement process, but to achieve hard outcomes in terms of employment, the link between the client-facing services and the employers needs to be developed and nurtured. In labour markets with high employment rates it is possible to create employment opportunities relatively early in the resettlement process, providing clients and advisers have positive perceptions of employment as a sustainable route out of homelessness. The active labour market in Edinburgh has enabled this approach to be successful.

5.3.2 Wise Move was set up to create a Coordinating Employment Agency in Edinburgh and to find new ways of working within agencies and an 'aspirational' approach with clients. The key aims of the project are integrating employability within resettlement practice, giving a clear employment focus to employability training, and nurturing mutually beneficial links with employers. The project encourages co-ordination between and builds the capacity of agencies in Edinburgh to deliver employability and employer focused activities. It also demonstrates the practicalities of progressing people into employment through an employment agency approach. These two aims, though complementary, are about working from both ends of the labour market equation. Over the last year (Jan 04 – Dec 04) Wise Move has engaged with 128 people and has achieved 94 positive outcomes, which gives evidence of the effectiveness of a demand-led approach.

5.3.3 The project is currently drawing up recommendations for a strategy in Edinburgh to disseminate the learning from these specialist programmes (mostly NFFI funded) to mainstream support and funding sources. The local authority is also using Wise Moves' employability forums to consult with agencies with regard to employment related activities within the homelessness strategy.

5.3.4 In terms of capacity building, Wise Move has developed and facilitated an employment agency, a common employability assessment, an employability mapping & evaluation tool and resources for participating businesses, including awareness raising awareness, a motivation and assessment training package and a 'Placement Pack'. Many of these developments could be transferred to other locations, and provide a firm basis for mainstreaming approaches. However, given the wide range of geographical and economic conditions across Scotland, their success may be dependent on local labour market conditions. Information on these tools is available directly from Wise Move.

## **6. Routes towards employability**

### **6.1 Research background**

6.1.1 The long-term evidence for employment as a route out of homelessness in Scotland is still in the process of being developed (see, for instance, McNaughton 2005). Although the positive reports on the NFFI schemes (LRDP Ltd 2001) indicate the overall success of this approach, they do not follow the outcomes of individual participants over time. In addition, it is difficult to determine whether there are specific issues linked to gender or ethnic group.

6.1.2 Given the limitations on information about homelessness and employability in the mainstream community, it is hardly surprising that little is known about how the issue affects Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. However, some projects dealing with this in Scotland are identified by Netto et al (2004). One gypsy/traveller project includes the development of job-seeking skills and the enhancement of employability; the BME project working with women escaping from domestic abuse "includes support ... in finding employment"; another issue which has been identified is that when contractual workers from Eastern Europe reach the end of their contract, they are at risk of homelessness as many live in tied accommodation. However, there is no information on whether there are barriers to employment for people from BME communities facing homelessness which are unique to or more prevalent in this group than the mainstream community. Anecdotally, people working with asylum seekers and refugees often report an eagerness to access the labour market, which suggests that this group may face fewer personal barriers than the "mainstream" client group to resolving homelessness through sustainable employment.

6.1.3 Gender distinctions are also difficult to identify in the homelessness/employability equation, mainly because the information available is rarely gender-specific. LRDP Ltd. (2001) identify one possible gendered disadvantage in accessing New Deal training - single parents (predominantly women) may not be eligible for JSA due to their family commitments, and as such are excluded from New Deal opportunities. But Rosengard et al indicate that single parents are very likely to take up training when moving into a stable housing situation. Nevertheless, the only recent gendered survey in Scotland concerns young men (Furlong and Cartmel 2004).

## **6.2 Recent research**

6.2.1 The PATHE project in Glasgow (McNaughton 2004) is providing some longitudinal evidence for routes out of homelessness. Interim evidence from this project suggests that concerns about employability, and the search for employment, are not an early stage in the progression towards sustainable housing. Most participants in the study cite employment as a final stage in resolving their homelessness issues, and some fear that taking on employment too early in the process would put them at risk of repeat homelessness.

6.2.2 This concern is well-founded. Another longitudinal study on Glasgow (Furlong and Cartmel 2004) is based on 32 young men first interviewed in 1996, and recontacted for this study. Although not specifically identified as being at risk of homelessness, the young men in this study exhibit many of the characteristics faced by the homeless client group (low educational achievement, unstable employment etc) so the findings are likely to be relevant to those facing homelessness.

6.2.3 The difficulties of sustaining jobs experienced by these vulnerable young men, who faced multiple disadvantage in the labour market are highlighted. The outcomes indicate the importance of quality training in resolving unemployment. About one third of participants managed to achieve sufficient qualifications to move into sustainable employment. The remaining two-thirds underwent repeat patterns of unemployment over the years.

6.2.4 Furlong and Cartmel identify a range of problems which need to be taken into account in working towards employability with those facing homelessness:

- Young people with multiple disadvantages travel longer and more complex paths from education to the labour market than their peers. They are likely to require support beyond the age of 19, particularly as they may not be in contact with their families. Care leavers are particularly likely to need long-term support.
- As time goes on, young people remaining unemployed are increasingly those with multiple problems, who may be some distance from being able to take work. Many such young people need flexible and intensive

forms of support in order to achieve a stable position in the labour market.

- Funding for employment support work needs to reflect the long-term and incremental nature of the process of redressing labour market disadvantage, and should not necessarily end when somebody finds a job.

6.2.5 Rosengard et al. (2002) identified employment and/or training as a possible route out of homelessness, especially for single parents. A significant proportion of people in their study who had resolved homelessness through a tenancy with a social landlord were also in employment or training. It was clear from their study was that a majority of their interviewees were interested in finding work and/or training, and even low-income jobs provided important resources "to make a house into a home". Family tax credits helped single parent families to sustain tenancies. Although employment and training was taken up by single homeless people, they often faced barriers because of high rent levels which could not be sustained if housing benefit was withdrawn once employment or training were taken up.

6.2.6 Overall, this study found it difficult to ascertain whether employment as a route out of homelessness could be sustainable, given the size of their sample and the multiple barriers faced by many homeless people. However, several studies (McNaughton 2004, Furlong and Cartmel 2003), as well as the reports of workers in the field, support the view that people facing homelessness see employment as a desired outcome, but face structural barriers as well as personal difficulties in achieving this. Other studies (see LSC 2004) also confirm that employability is not a straightforward progression from pre-mainstream to mainstream training provision, followed by sustainable employment. Service users may experience reversals at all points, and therefore provision needs to be flexible.

6.2.7 Further evidence that employment can only be achieved in the long-term, rather than as an immediate route out of homelessness, can be found in "*Routes into Employment for Homeless People*" (Verve Associates, 2004). Communities Scotland commissioned this action research "to provide useful information for local authorities in formulating the employment aspects of their homelessness strategies". The report uses four projects - Aberdeen Foyer, Apex Scotland, Edinburgh Cyrenians and the Glasgow Simon Community BUDS project - to provide evidence for the way in which employability skills can provide a route out of homelessness. At the same time the report outlines good practice for service providers, and is a useful reference point for statutory agencies and potential partners looking to develop programmes in this field.

6.2.8 The key findings of this report are:

- Homeless people often have multiple needs and have to move from crisis to stability before employability can be developed. Employers may lack awareness of these needs.

- Employment may not be an immediate outcome for some clients. Volunteering may be meaningful part of the route out of homelessness for some clients.
- Employers are looking for "core skills" rather than paper qualifications. These do not necessarily have to be "learned" through traditional learning methods.
- Agencies work within contradictory financial structures - providing long strategic and business planning whilst functioning on short-term funding.
- Agencies need to form partnerships but often lack the time and resources to build these up effectively.

6.2.9 In addition, this report recognises that employability strategies for those facing homelessness are dependent on labour market issues as well as the quality of the training and support offered to clients. "As labour markets become tighter, employers have to be more proactive in developing strategies to ease recruitment problems" (Communities Scotland, 2004).

## 7. Implications

7.1 The findings of Verve Associates (2004) and LRDP Ltd (2002) obviously support many of the ideas which underpin current policy on homelessness and employability in Scotland. Life skills and employment skills training - such as CV writing, job search skills etc. - are seen as effective ways of supporting those facing homelessness through the resettlement period. But there is a general reticence about the role of employment, or even "job readiness", in the early stages of the resettlement period. There is an emphasis on acquiring soft skills, and a reluctance to place emphasis on hard outcomes. The overall implication is that achieving sustainable employment is possible provided the employability process begins after a client has reached stability. Training is seen as a key route into employability, with the key aim of "bridging the gap between people's existing skills and those they need for the job market" (Lownsborough et al., 2004).

7.2 However as Furlong and Cartmel's study demonstrates, even the training route to employability is not straightforward. As one of the few longitudinal studies in Scotland, its implications need to be looked at carefully. It points out how both the training and job opportunities available to vulnerable young men are often of poor quality, and do not lead to sustainable employment. Although there is some acknowledgement that the multiple disadvantage experienced by vulnerable workers can, of itself, lead to a insecure place in the labour market, it also points out that problems which are inherent in the structure of the labour market lead to long-term unsustainability in employment for vulnerable groups. *"While it was common for young men to end a period of unemployment after a training programme, few gained skills*

*that helped them move into secure sectors of the labour market".(Furlong and Cartmel, 2004)*

7.3 A general critique of the labour market in Scotland is beyond the scope of this research. However, this evidence highlights the necessity of linking the social inclusion issues involved in employability to the local labour market and general economic conditions. The "business case" for social inclusion needs to lead to change in employment practices as well as developing employability skills if sustainable employment is to be a realistic route out of homelessness. As the BUDS project indicates (appendix 1) employers need to be more aware of employability projects, and encouraged to adopt their principles, if the necessary change in employment practice is to be made. This is particularly true in slack labour markets, where the business case may be a weak motivator for employers.

7.4 However, the evidence from Furlong and Cartmel, as well as from many NFFI projects, supports the general view that direct access to the labour market or mainstream training such as New Deal is not sustainable for those with multiple barriers to work (Simmonds 2004). However, without further longitudinal research it is not clear whether the traditional training approach is as effective as it is currently believed to be; there may be training approaches which lead to more efficient development of "job readiness". Attention also needs to be paid to the quality of the training, how well it is adapted to local labour market conditions, and whether it really helps clients move through the employability process rather than "churning" in the system. The availability and efficiency of training, and the ability of projects to move clients through the process, needs to be assessed on both a local and national basis.

7.5 At the same time the difficulties in achieving hard outcomes for this client group have to be acknowledged. In the first place, flexibility in the benefits system has to encourage those facing homelessness to enter the job market, and given the likelihood of repeat unemployment amongst vulnerable groups, barriers to reclaiming benefits should be minimalised. Secondly, the complexity of working with multiple disadvantaged clients should not be underestimated. As the ACCESS project (appendix 1) shows, for this work to be effective it needs adequate funding to reflect the highly intensive staff input needed. Lastly, appropriate benchmarks for training and skills development projects, and a firm basis for long-term partnerships need to be established. This would allow individual service providers to develop expertise in specific areas of the employability process, with all members of a partnership taking credit for individual client outcomes.

7.6 For partnership arrangements to function effectively, the time necessary to build up and maintain such arrangements needs to be acknowledged. Partnerships between service providers, statutory authorities and education institutions are illustrated in the case studies (appendices 1-3).

## 8 Action points

8.1 If employability is to be mainstreamed and integrated into local Homeless Strategies SHEN recommends the following strategies should be adopted. Some of this work has been started in specific locations under the NFFI projects, and as part of some local strategies, but there is a need to adopt a national strategy to ensure both equitable treatment for clients and effective mainstreaming of the employability process for those facing homelessness. At the same time, it is necessary to be able to adapt the employability process to local, and indeed individual, circumstances.

- In order to ascertain the current level of provision across the country, local mapping of current availability of all support and training available to those facing homelessness needs to be carried out. All providers (voluntary and statutory services, education and training providers, Jobcentre Plus provision etc.) need to be identified. Once local provision is evident, gaps in the service can also be identified and new provision developed.
- Measures, such as benchmarks, need to be established at the national level in order to assess the quality of the provision, and the expertise of each service provider. Service providers should be encouraged to develop expertise and core competencies rather than a generalist approach to skills development.
- Partnerships need to be developed in which a range of specialist service providers contribute expertise in specific areas, thus providing a coherent and expert service which can respond to the needs of each individual service user. Outcomes should be "owned" by the partnership rather than individual service providers.
- Once the available services are mapped, routes through the provision need to be identified. These routes need to be able to adapt both to those who can "fast track" to employment, and those who need continued support at some levels before they can move on. The resulting employability process must provide both a clear route towards job readiness, but also be flexible enough to allow alternative routes for those who are unable to make direct progress.
- The employability of service users should be identified at an early stage in resolving homelessness, and employability issues should be dealt with early in the resettlement process wherever possible. Employment status and employability should be recorded when registering as homeless.
- A tracking system needs to be established to ensure that the progress of individual service users can be identified, and appropriate support offered to enable a progression through employability skills towards employment.



# Case Studies

**APPENDIX 1 : Albyn Housing Association Ltd.**

**APPENDIX 2 : BUDS project**

**APPENDIX 3 : ACCESS project**



# APPENDIX 1

## Albyn Housing Association Ltd. Support Services

### Supported Tenancies – moving to independence and aspiration

Albyn Housing Association cover a large area of the highlands, and as part of Albyn Housing Association's services, the Support Service provides 42 supported tenancies for individuals who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness. This support is available to any single person over the age of 16, who is able and willing to engage with their support worker to work towards independent living. The support is provided for up to two years, with tenants then being assisted to move into their own independent tenancy, or in some cases alternative supported accommodation that may be more appropriate for their needs. Thirty supported tenancies are available in Inverness, six in Dingwall and six in Nairn. In Inverness the thirty supported flats are located in the former homeless hostel, which was converted in 2001 using RSI funding. In Dingwall the support is specifically provided to young people under the age of twenty-five. In Nairn the support is 'floating' and the tenant can remain in the same tenancy once their support needs have been resolved.

Homelessness in rural locations is often 'hidden' with people staying with friends, relatives or in sub-standard or over-crowded accommodation before referring themselves to Albyn's Support Services. Alcohol misuse is particularly problematic in the Highlands and many of the individuals Albyn's Support Service work with are experiencing a time of chaos in their life, that has preceded their homelessness, and they may have multiple issues such as mental health problems, experiences of traumatic incidents in their life, and substance misuse problems that they are also receiving support with.

The Support Service also receives referrals from social workers and other support agencies. The Support Services employ eight people to support the 42 tenants, and they offer varying levels of support depending on the current needs of that individual, although this is usually for about ten hours a week. After the initial referral and assessment to ensure the individual meets the criteria to receive support from the Support Services, the Rickter Scale is used to develop an Action Plan. The Rickter Scale allows service users to explore their current circumstances, identify priority areas in their life that require support and intervention, and explore their future potential. In this way they can make realistic goals and begin to regain control over their lives. Their support worker will then support them to achieve these goals. The Rickter Scale is also used to review the service users' progress, and develop their Action points for the future. Whilst the Support Service can also use the information from the Rickter Scale to monitor the 'soft' outcomes their service users have achieved, they are currently exploring other methods to accurately monitor this, and the 'hard' outcomes, that are achieved. As with many other

projects, this monitoring remains challenging. A simple and standardised system is required, but it has to accurately reflect the issues and progress that is being made, and take into account the specific context that the Support Service work within, their service users, and the support they can actually offer.

The support that Albyn's Support Service do provide includes help with completing benefits applications and correspondence, bill payment, money management, advice on managing the tenancy, household tasks, and relationships with neighbours, and support to access local services such as education, or to enter employment and training. Many of the service users are engaged in volunteering or part-time employment, and this can be crucial to assist them achieve stability and progress, however sustaining this can be a real challenge. One barrier to service users entering paid employment, that has recently been resolved for some, is that of the 'benefits trap'. The service users' support is funded by Supporting People, which now means even if they enter paid employment and no longer receive Housing Benefit they still receive the funding for their support package. However for those receiving Disability Living Allowance, or who wish to enter full-time education rather than employment, the possibility of losing their housing and security through the loss of their benefits remains a real barrier to progress.

Volunteering, employment and education can all be key aspects to service users obtaining stability, structure and ultimately progress to sustainable independence in their own homes, and there are many opportunities in the local area for them to access these opportunities. However the internal barriers of a lack of confidence and low self-esteem are particular challenges that support workers have to assist the service users with. Volunteering can be an important 'first step' service users take to begin to realise the potential they have and overcome the isolation that many experience in their own tenancy. The cycle of apathy created by their lack of confidence can be broken and people can begin to move on. Often simple actions from support staff can make a big difference in breaking this cycle. For example one service user who had recently started a training course was finding it difficult getting into a new routine and attending the course on time. Their support worker stopped by every morning on the way to visit other service users, just to ensure they were awake and give them some 'human contact' to motivate them to leave the house and attend their course. Such simple actions can have a huge impact in reducing the alienation and isolation service users may be experiencing, and to assist them get into a routine and break negative cycles.

So whilst the challenges that many service users have to overcome appear to be huge, and cannot always be met, small actions through dedicated support working can have just as huge an impact in assisting the service users to the ultimate goal of their own independent tenancy, as part of their community, with aspirations for the future.

## APPENDIX 2

### **Glasgow Simon Community BUDS (Building Up and Developing Skills) Project**

Breaking through the Barriers – routes out of homelessness and into employability

The BUDS Project is one of the eleven different projects of the Glasgow Simon Community, a voluntary sector organisation that works to assist people move out of homelessness. Whilst the other projects offer accommodation, street outreach, resettlement training courses and resettlement and tenancy sustainment support, BUDS is an employability project open to anyone over the age of 16, who has or is experiencing homelessness. BUDS was established in 1999 with New Futures Funding, and aims to work with people to develop their employability skills, and assist them to move towards employment or further education, as part of their route out of homelessness.

BUDS employs five members of staff and provides two distinct 'streams' of training and education programmes for their service users, phased to assist individual's break through the barriers to progress they may be encountering. People can refer themselves to BUDS (and often do through word of mouth from current service users) or are referred by other agencies they work with. The training courses are taught by tutors from a local college but are organised, developed and facilitated by BUDS staff, who also provide individual support to service users.

Once an individual has been referred to BUDS they will meet with the Training and Development worker, to assess where they currently are and where they would like to be in terms of their life and educational skills. All new service users take part in the 'Challenge of Change' Workshop, which further explores and introduces the opportunities that are available to them through BUDS. By all taking part in this introductory workshop together, new service users have an opportunity to get to know and feel comfortable with each other before beginning the 'Gateway' programme of entry level training courses. On completion of the introductory 'Challenge of Change' Workshop service users have a choice of four training courses, and an optional creative Art course. All the courses run for two hours, one day a week, over six weeks, and participants chose between two to four courses each. Courses include computing, sign language, numeracy, first aid, and personal development, but change as each new block begins so that continuing service users can choose alternative options. At the end of each six week 'block' the service users will review their progress and future goals with the Training and Development worker and then may either be referred to other agencies that can assist them continue to meet these goals, continue with the next block of

Gateway programmes, or move onto the next 'phase' of the BUDS Programme – 'Opening Doors'.

'Opening Doors' is a more structured pre-employment programme, run in partnership with Glasgow College of Nautical Studies. The programme runs for 12 weeks, for 13 hours a week. It is SQA Accredited and particularly focuses on I.T., literacy, numeracy and pre-employment skills, to prepare the participants for future employment or further education. Participants will also attend a week long work placement, developed specifically for them through joint working between the BUDS staff and local employers. Although this is currently set up on an ad hoc basis, the response from both service users attending the work placements, and the employers providing the placements, has been very positive, with some employers saying they had never realised there were opportunities to assist people gain employment skills and re-build their lives in a structured and supported way like this. This perhaps indicates that more needs to be done to highlight employability projects, and the support they can provide, so that more employers realise they could also assist people in this way.

The two 'phased' programmes of 'Gateway' and 'Opening Doors' are a new development, recently implemented by the BUDS project to respond to the needs of their service users, who felt they required more structured and linear pathways through their progress with BUDS. However the project remains flexible and each individual accessing it will be encouraged to develop their own goals, at their own pace. Separate from and alongside 'Gateway' and 'Opening Doors' BUDS also offers literacy support, in the form of both group work and individual one-to-one tutoring. Finally BUDS also has a volunteer programme, open to anyone who has attended any of their courses in the past. The volunteers organise activities such as gardening at a local allotment. They can also attend volunteer training, to develop their volunteering skills, and will visit other agencies and accommodation units, such as hostels, to promote the BUDS project.

Breaking through the barriers to progress that the individuals who are accessing BUDS may be experiencing can be challenging. BUDS service users, alongside homelessness, have often experienced long-term unemployment, have had little opportunity to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in the past, and currently receive Disability Living Allowance. This means they are sometimes afraid if they were to try to enter employment, volunteering or further education, even part-time, they may not be able to manage financially, and may risk losing their accommodation or tenancy again. Many of BUDS service users will still be experiencing problems with their housing, be accommodated in hostels, or may encounter housing or other personal problems whilst in contact with BUDS. In this case they will be referred to other agencies or services that can assist them with these issues whilst they continue accessing the BUDS programme. The Glasgow Simon Community aims to offer a 'continuum of care' to all of their service users by ensuring they are accessing a 'package' of support, depending on their own individual needs. This may mean service users of

BUDS are also being supported by a GSC Housing Resettlement or Tenancy Sustainment worker, or accessing the debt advice worker available through GSC, for example. They may also be referred to specialist support to address non-housing related issues such as mental health problems or substance misuse.

Despite the challenges and barriers to progress many of the service user of BUDS have experienced they share the desire to move out of homelessness, to become a part of their community, and see the development of their confidence, employability, and a potential route into employment as key aspects of this that BUDS can assist them to achieve. Recent research conducted for the Glasgow Simon Community found that many service users felt entering employment was a final 'phase' in them leaving their homelessness behind, but they would not be able to consider employment until their housing problems were resolved. By offering these 'phased' approaches to developing employability skills, alongside ensuring service users are accessing a 'package' of support to resolve housing and related matters, the BUDS project works with people to assist them reach this final stage, and break through the barriers they have encountered in finding a sustainable route out of homelessness. For many service users however, who have experienced long periods of homelessness and alienation, accessing BUDS and maintaining their own tenancy remain important goals and achievements in themselves.

## APPENDIX 3

### **North Lanarkshire ACCESS (Accommodation, Employment and Support) Services**

#### **Entering the mainstream**

ACCESS is an employment, training and education support and advice service operated as part of North Lanarkshire Council's Community Services. The service was established in 1999 with New Future Funding and works with young people across North Lanarkshire that are experiencing, or are vulnerable to, homelessness. This includes young people in supported accommodation, or that are maintaining their own tenancies after housing difficulties. ACCESS currently employs six workers, and have a caseload of about 75 service users at any one time. They work on a one-to-one person centred basis to provide service users with information and support to access a range of other services and agencies and assist them develop employability skills and awareness.

Service users are referred by other agencies, such as North Lanarkshire Social Work or Housing workers, other support workers, or can make self-referrals. They are then linked to an ACCESS worker who will use a 'profiling' system to assess what the needs and wants of that service user are. They will develop an Action Plan together and the ACCESS worker will support the service user to implement this Action Plan through contact and engagement with other relevant agencies. The Action Plan is then reviewed and developed on an ongoing basis. ACCESS essentially broker contact and engagement between the service user and services that can assist them. ACCESS support both the service user and the agencies they are in contact with to maintain this engagement, and support the development of the employability skills of the service user. They will also ensure that the service user is linked into other relevant support agencies depending on what their specific circumstance and needs are. This may include accessing support to address substance misuse problems, or obtaining advice to ensure they are accessing the correct Social Benefits. In this way the service users can be supported to develop their own route out of social, economic and community exclusion through participation in mainstream education, training and labour market opportunities and their own personal development.

Although each case will be highly individualised depending on the Action Plan most appropriate for the service user, examples of the services ACCESS workers support people to engage with include the Bentley Hotel, the Princes Trust, local colleges and work experience with a range of local employers. For example, the Bentley Hotel in association with ACCESS hold a monthly catering workshop for participants to acquire skills and knowledge in cookery. This assists them to develop potential employment skills, as they may wish to pursue employment and training opportunities in catering, but also assists

with the development of personal and life skills that are crucial for vulnerable young people striving to resettle into their own accommodation after a period of housing difficulty.

ACCESS takes this holistic approach to the development and engagement they have with their service users. Often the young people they work with have 'fallen through the net' and have few other sources of support. Mainstream agencies have been unable to engage with them, and their situations may continue to deteriorate. Innovative, creative and individualised ways need to be adopted to ensure these young people are given the chance to develop themselves and their skills. They also need knowledge of the options and the alternatives that are available to them beyond the chaotic and problematic lifestyles within which some of them are entrenched. ACCESS will continue to work with people in this individualised one-to-one way for as long as they need it, and people can re-engage with ACCESS after a period of no contact. Essentially for ACCESS workers assisting their service users to develop their employability skills is about more than just preparing them to enter the labour market or further education, it is also about supporting them to take control of their own personal potential, and have the mechanisms to control their career pathway, and see the opportunities that are available to them, to see a different future for themselves. This is not without challenges however, with the 'benefits trap' and the trauma of the chaotic lifestyles many of their service users have experienced still sometimes acting as a real barrier to progress.

There also needs to be positive and sustainable employment opportunities available to people. Supported employment and work experience placements with a variety of different employers, are potential ways forward for service users of ACCESS, but for this to be successful there must be incentives and support for both the employer and the employee. It is a lot to ask of employers to give up their time and provide training and mentoring for people if they are not also supported with this process. It has to be a two-way thing, with employability projects like ACCESS working to facilitate and support both sides, to bring them together.

Like many other projects funded by the New Futures Fund, ACCESS has faced challenges over the last year as it prepares for mainstreaming. This has included exploring potential future funding, and ensuring that the value of the work they do is recognised. If continued funding is obtained through North Lanarkshire's Community Learning and Development Department ACCESS will demonstrate the mainstreaming process 'working' and will be able to continue to develop in the future. These developments will include the widening of access for service users, with a broader spectrum of ages and circumstances, more links with local employers to create further work experience opportunities, and continued networking to raise the profile of services such as ACCESS and to highlight the value of such services. However mainstreaming also brings challenges, and the flexibility and innovative, person centred way of working with individuals must be maintained if people are to continue engaging with services such as ACCESS

and to continue developing their employability potential. Brain O'Hagan, co-ordinator of ACCESS, says *'we must engage with the disengaged; often mainstream provisions have already tried but have found it difficult to really get through with this group, this is why they remain disengaged, so we have to try to do things differently if we want to break through that.'*

Getting ready for mainstreaming has been a challenge ACCESS has faced, and now the challenge is to remain flexible and innovative for the service users, whilst becoming part of the 'mainstream.' In this way the mainstreaming process many New Future funded projects are facing can successfully provide them with the security to develop in the future. If this is coupled with flexibility to continue the work they do, supporting some of the most vulnerable and disengaged people to become part of the 'mainstream' themselves and take control of their own lives and opportunities within their own housing and community then the mainstreaming process can work for everyone.

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## **SHEN - who we are**

The Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network (SHEN) was set up in 2003 to improve opportunities for people facing homelessness in Scotland through engagement with education, training and employment opportunities. We make links between organisations and individuals working in homelessness services, education and training providers, policy officers and statutory organisations responsible for developing strategies in this field, and business and employers wishing to develop practices which will enable vulnerable people to gain employment.

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