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## **SHEN Focus Event, Inverness, December, 2009**

### **Attendees:**

Gordon Fleming, Highland Homeless Trust; Werner Frardz, Crossreach; Patricia Macdonald, Crossreach; David McNulty, Apex Trust; Sue Mackinnon, Albyn Housing; Heather Mackay, Albyn Housing; Iver Forsyth, Highland Council; Mary Macleod, New Futures Sutherland; Peta Garbett, Barnardos Works; Isobel Smith, Homeless Day Centre, Highland Council; Ferga Perry, Calman Trust; Anne Mackay; Highland Council; Julia Campbell, New Futures Sutherland.

### **Apologies:**

Jamie Macdonald, Jobcentre Plus, Laura MacMillan, Jobcentre Plus; Dr Liz Whittle, Homeless Day Centre; Zandra Kinnaird, Crossreach; Nigel Patterson, Barnardos; Mairi Clunas Neinaber, Highland Homeless Trust; Helena Bryce, Calman Trust, Careers Scotland; Sheena Menzies, Cairn Housing Association.

### **Summary**

The aim of the day was:

To provide an opportunity for regional peers to share experience & knowledge, and for this to be extrapolated into national learning points.

With the objectives being to:

- To identify barriers to employability, particularly within the context of the recession
- To identify and share good practice in employability
- To identify specific regional issues
- To identify specific issues for frontline workers
- To formulate action plans
- To gain feedback on changes, and plan for coming changes.

Specific areas looked at were:

**Barriers to employability** in terms of regional context, the recession; policy & legislation and frontline worker perspective.

**Solutions/good practice examples** in relation to the recognised barriers.

**Welfare Reform** past and future.

**Action Points** to be identified.

See tables on following pages.

Some of the things that participants on the day hoped to gain were:

- How to motivate those not "at the sharp end" - those young people who are not in crisis but may be at risk of becoming so if not positively engaged with.
- How to get clients to engage with the employability process, and to address perceived barriers.
- How to deal with the problems thrown up by the benefits system.
- How to motivate and incentivise clients in relation to the benefits trap.
- To build closer working relations and to learn from each other.
- To promote own services and shape provision.
- To share any good ideas/good practice.
- To discuss any ideas around the temporary accommodation trap.
- How to sustain clients once engaged with the employability process.

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Solutions</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor transport links.</li> <li>• Availability of appropriate, affordable accommodation</li> <li>• Dispersed infrastructure.</li> <li>• Employment is often seasonal and/or linked to accommodation</li> <li>• Services are predominantly in Inverness.</li> <li>• Lack of single assessment routes to homelessness support.</li> <li>• The benefits system works against those in rural locations.</li> <li>• Lack of positive engagement with colleges.</li> <li>• Lack of positive engagement with employers, particularly for clients with addictions.</li> <li>• Not enough entry level work experience available.</li> <li>• Some accommodation (Cale House) will only house those on benefits.</li> <li>• Joined up approach not as robust as it could be (eg lack of presence today of key agencies).</li> <li>• Fragmented access to education because of location. Distance learning also affected by technological disparities – e.g. lack of broadband.</li> </ul>	Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factor regional factors such as transport into business planning, and identify funding streams (e.g. Barnardo Works driving lessons funding)</li> <li>• Increase sector cohesion by increased networking &amp; practice sharing.</li> <li>• Feedback any benefits system concerns via SHEN to the DWP customer representative s group.</li> <li>• Work out an organisational strategy to engage employers &amp; the business community, using existing local knowledge &amp; experience.</li> <li>• Consider in house traineeships/ placements.</li> <li>• Establish a regional employability forum.</li> <li>• Feedback to Skills Development Scotland.</li> </ul>
Recession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General decrease.</li> <li>• Impact on construction industry a particular issue in Inverness.</li> <li>• Decrease in college courses available, particularly those of most</li> </ul>	Recession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build links with colleges, gather evidence of interest/ relevance.</li> <li>• Build links with the business community to increase opportunities for</li> </ul>

	<p>relevance such as tourism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased competitiveness of labour market.</li> </ul>		<p>placements &amp; to raise a positive profile of the client group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with community initiatives.</li> </ul>
Policy/ Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of preventative work in schools.</li> <li>• Long term funding is not readily available.</li> <li>• Emphasis on hard outcomes, often on a short term basis.</li> <li>• General benefits trap, particularly in temporary accommodation.</li> <li>• Lack of funding for college training/education.</li> <li>• Employability isn't necessarily embedded in existing skills development courses.</li> <li>• Some accommodation (Cale House) will only house those on benefits.</li> <li>• Lack of long term strategies for training.</li> </ul>	Policy/ Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link in with <a href="http://www.leavinghome.info">www.leavinghome.info</a></li> <li>• Look at all funding options.</li> <li>• Introduce soft indicator measurement e.g. the outcomes star.</li> <li>• Gather case study evidence &amp; feedback via any available mechanisms.</li> <li>• Assess in house capacity to embed employability in existing services.</li> <li>• Pathways through accommodation should include an assessment of employability needs and aspirations.</li> </ul>
Frontline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of disclosures policy.</li> <li>• Difficulty in challenging negative perceptions – both clients and employers.</li> <li>• Difficulty in engaging clients – lack of motivation &amp; incentive.</li> <li>• Often not appropriate to deal with negative influences/pressure – eg, family pressure to stay on benefits.</li> <li>• How to overcome generational and peer pressure.</li> <li>• Increased caseloads due to funding limitations.</li> <li>• Burnout.</li> <li>• Employability not understood or seen as a</li> </ul>	Frontline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link to Apex to be put on the SHEN website. Services/teams to include in induction/discuss at team meetings</li> <li>• Undertake community initiatives. Build positive links with the business community.</li> <li>• Use role modelling &amp; peer mentoring. Ensure access to specialist benefits advice.</li> <li>• Identify what clients are interested in and wrap skills building around this e.g. the Calman Trust, Inspiring Arts. Encourage engagement at pre-vocational level e.g. the Highland Homeless Trust walking group.</li> </ul>

	<p>priority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to specialist services or resources is limited, and not always tailored to the individual</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access specialist training such as CBT. Provide regular, quality supervision, comprehensive induction &amp; personal development opportunities.</li> <li>• Incorporate employability in the business planning &amp; action planning and needs assessment process.</li> <li>• Keep an evidence base of unmet needs – share knowledge of funding streams, specialist resources etc via an employability forum.</li> </ul>
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As shown above there are a significant number of barriers faced when trying to engage clients with education, training and employment opportunities.

These can be regional as a whole, or apply to certain areas of the region, For example, the lack of emergency accommodation in Sutherland means that people end up being housing outwith their area, subsequently potentially finding it hard to maintain any existing links with ETE. As a whole the region attracts a lot of people from outside the area, meaning there are often no existing networks and possibly no desire to reconnect with their past. This can prove to be challenging in terms of engagement and supporting people in moving forward. With the diminished manufacturing base, tourism is a main source of income and employment opportunities, yet the local colleges have decreased access to tourism courses. The nature of employment for many is seasonal, and often linked to accommodation meaning that the ebb and flow of work and possible loss of accompanying accommodation is not a natural fit with the current benefits system. Lack of appropriate, affordable transport and access to technology are seen to be key barriers for many in engaging with ETE.

In terms of the recession the key challenge is the increased competitiveness of the labour market. A major factor in supporting clients through this will be increased joint working and sharing of expertise, particularly in relation to engaging with employers and creating a positive profile of our client group .This kind of development work can lead to both employment, training and indeed, funding, opportunities. The recession has seen an increase in lone working due to funding pressures, but has

conversely also led to some job creation via specific funding streams such as the Future Jobs Fund and Fairer Scotland.

The benefits trap continues to be the main disincentive for many in moving towards ETE opportunities. Welfare reform is likely to continue to increase conditionality for benefits claimants, with homeless people likely to be disproportionately affected by this. Housing Benefit reform may lead to some improvements particularly if extended HB periods and reporting of change of circumstances rules become less rigid.

Frontline staff are increasingly under pressure to work to targets based on hard outcomes which are often diametrically opposed to the nature of work being undertaken. The greatest challenge, apart from the benefits trap is motivating clients to engage with the employability process and sustaining this engagement. Most agencies are working towards targeting formerly homeless people via the volunteering progression route which may aid with role modelling and mentoring opportunities.

The key learning points from the day were:

- Regionally there needs to be shared ownership of the solutions. Possibly via an employability forum.
- Links need to be made with employers, with a view to joint initiatives and positive profiling.
- Employability needs to be an integral part of both the business and action planning processes.
- Frontline staff need to be supported and trained in being motivated and motivating.
- Prevention work is key, particularly in schools and within the traditional seasonal work sectors.
- Joined up assessment and a holistic approach is essential.
- Goal setting in the form of a small steps approach is crucial.
- Creative ways to engage and encourage clients need to be utilised.

## ACTION POINTS

Action	By Whom
Information on community garden projects to be forwarded to Iver Forsyth	Clare Archibald
Barnardos business model to be shared	Peta Garbett
Setting up of an employability forum to be considered	ALL
Good practice examples to be shared with SHEN & regional peers	ALL

## FEEDBACK FROM THE EVENT

All of those submitting fully completed evaluation forms scored the event 4 or 5 (with the range being 1 – 5, with 5 the most positive) in terms of how useful it was. Some of the comments were:

“Excellent day, good networking experience”

“Very engaging – good mix of information and sharing thoughts with others, and discussion”

For further information, or to discuss issues in your organisation or region contact [clare@scsh.org.uk](mailto:clare@scsh.org.uk)

