

Devon and Cornwall Training Network

Homelessness Prevention (18 May 2006) Workshop Notes

During the workshop session's delegates were asked to answer 3 questions. The discussion around these questions is summarised below:

- 1) Do you agree with the homelessness prevention approach?
 - Prevention can avoid long term detrimental effect on people;
 - Prevention saves money by not allowing a homelessness situation to reach crisis;
 - Prevention services need investment and resource to ensure it is truly effective;
 - Early intervention and education is crucial to break the generation cycle of homelessness;
 - If realistic housing options for a person have been offered it should impact on the LA's decision about whether they owe a statutory duty;
 - The expectations of clients need to be managed;
 - The changes are being pushed through too fast;
 - Other agencies are not on board with the prevention approach e.g. social services, mental health services etc;
 - If prevention means putting people into the private sector then support needs to be in place and the affordability gap must be addressed.

In conclusion: If prevention is appropriate, effective and well resourced then the group agreed with the homelessness prevention approach.

- 2) How can the voluntary and community sector (VCS) contribute to the homelessness prevention agenda?
 - Partnership working and sign up to prevention
 - Develop SLA's between LA's and VCS to carry out homelessness prevention work;
 - Increase funding to VCS to provide prevention work;
 - Working with client together for the best outcomes instead of from opposite sides;
 - Multi-agency assessment and service provision;
 - Common referral forms and information sharing;
 - Better communication;
 - Early intervention and education work;
 - Better co-ordination between VCS agencies;
 - Managing expectations and giving realistic advice;
 - Facilitate partnerships between specialists;
 - Neighbourhood management approach;
 - Work shadowing;
 - Political lobbying;
 - Specialists with particular client groups;

- Working with the VCS gives statutory agencies more resources and enables a more holistic approach to housing and homelessness.

In conclusion: There were lots of ideas and commitment to working together. Delegates were conscious that these suggestions for improvement were talked about regularly at events but often little was done. Therefore a pledge was made to ensure that each member of the group made an effort to meet with local voluntary or statutory sector during the following week.

3) What are the barriers to homelessness prevention?

- Lack of understanding about the frontline issues of different organisations;
- LA staff need to sign up to homelessness prevention;
- Gate keeping;
- Lack of affordable rented accommodation;
- Lack of affordable housing;
- Lack of communication;
- Data protection and information sharing;
- Lack of a lead person to contact for trouble shooting between organisations;
- Lack of money, resources, and time;
- Culture change needed;
- Different aims and outcomes measured and valued;
- Staff capacity and training.

In conclusion: There was a feeling that although there were some barriers to better joint working between the VCS and statutory sector, there was a commitment to overcoming them.