

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stop Gap offers intensive support and accommodation for 16-18 year olds facing homelessness. The project was funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government via the Supporting People programme. This report reviews the project at the end of the pilot period.

1. Background

The purpose of the report is to feedback on the progress of the Stop Gap, a homelessness prevention project, at the end of the Supported People funded pilot period. A comprehensive exercise, which examined temporary housing options for vulnerable young people (16-18th birthday), highlighted that young people with high levels of vulnerability and sometimes complex needs were often placed in unsuitable accommodation.

Wirral Supporting People Team confirmed the need to provide intensive wrap-around support for these young people who were homeless or at risk of being homeless. Supporting People then commissioned a 12 month Housing Support Project Pilot in April 2008. This pilot was later extended until March 2009.

1.1. Project Specification and Aims

The pilot specification was for 12 clients at any one time, in order to ensure that the service could offer a level of support appropriate to the needs of each young person, especially during times of crisis.

The aim of the service is to improve the health, wellbeing and resilience of young people by providing an intensive housing support service to vulnerable 16-18 year olds facing complex issues leading to their homelessness. The service provided support to stabilise the lifestyles of these young people and facilitate their social inclusion by:

- Securing a placement in a supported living environment;
- Preventing homelessness and the events leading to homelessness;
- Supporting young person to establish contact with family and return to/ remain with family where possible;
- Rebuilding lives after crisis;
- Preventing use of Bed and Breakfast placements;
- Establishing and stabilising education, training and employment opportunities;
- Supporting young people to access relevant support and treatment services;
- Providing ongoing assessment to address level and frequency of young people's alcohol, substance misuse and other risk taking behaviours including teenage conceptions;
- Acquiring daily living and coping skills;
- Enabling opportunities for moving on to independent living;
- Improving economic wellbeing and life chances.

1.2. Support Services and Partners

The project has made use of a variety of beds in different settings e.g. two Housing Association flats, assessment bed in Merseyside Accommodation Project (MAP), three different emergency lodgings beds, a private rented house and two private rented flats.

One of the strengths of the project has been the goodwill and strongly established relationships with our partners e.g. MAP, Forum, Our House, Powerhouse and other supported housing

projects. These organisations have been prepared to take young people with additional needs into their provision whilst being supported by Stop Gap staff. Young people have also benefited from being able to access these organisations as part of their planned move on from Stop Gap.

The level of support for young people engaging in the programme has been intensive and often on a daily basis. The range of support includes : accessing education, a range of strategies to actually, 'get' the young person to college, applying for and maintaining benefits, accessing Zero Centre, counselling, access to services such as, CAMHS, GP, Dentist, Solicitor, encouraging return home, mediation, Social Care, lifestyle including hygiene, eating, budgeting, neighbour respect and home safety.

1.3. Outcomes and Achievements

It was originally intended to support the young person over an average period of 3-6 months with follow on tapered support for a further 3-6 months. As is common in pilot projects a degree of flexibility has been required due to the entrenched issues, vulnerabilities and emerging needs of the young people. A number of young people have required a much longer support programme to avoid failure and destitution

During the pilot period 62 young people were referred and 51 young people engaged with the project. Referrals to the project came from a variety of sources and all young people had a variety of needs. The young people who chose not to opt in either, returned home, lost contact with the project, declined the support programme, or accessed other services at Response and other agencies. Young people, for whom the project was unable to match a bed to, were still offered the Stop Gap support programme, whilst suitable accommodation was being sought.

2. Risk Assessment

None.

3. Financial Implications

None.

4. Staffing Implications

None.

5. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

None.

6. Community Safety Implications

None.

7. Local Agenda 21 Implications

None.

8. Planning Implications

None.

9. Anti-poverty Implications

None.

10. Social Inclusion Implications

Reduction and prevention of homelessness amongst young people.

11. Local Member Support Implications

None.

12. Background Papers
None

RECOMMENDATIONS

That

(1) The Committee notes this report.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services