



Floating Support



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'Trying hard and being well meaning is not enough we want to get the results that help change young people's lives''

St Basils is a youth agency which uses housing as the medium to work with young people aged 16 - 25 to enable them to find and keep a home, to develop their confidence, skills and opportunities and to prevent homelessness. To do this we provide a range of services to young people in Birmingham and some of the surrounding areas of the West Midlands.

This briefing paper tells you about one aspect of the range of services we provide.

Summary

Floating Support is a key element of the St Basils service network and an essential part of helping us to achieve sustained outcomes with young people. We provide floating support to vulnerable young people including young parents, young people from BME communities, care leavers, young refugees and young people at risk.

90% of those we support are still in their tenancies 12 months after moving in.

Most young people access the floating support services as part of their journey with St Basils so they will have worked with St Basils staff in one of our accommodation projects and with staff in the Learning, Skills & Work Dept.

The floating support service is delivered from a central base which provides a drop in and training facility for the young people we support, we think this is an essential part of our success with young people.

The packages of floating support can last for up to 2 years and are designed with each young person before they move into their own accommodation. The packages are reviewed regularly as the young person makes the journey to a sustainable adult life.

Accessing the accommodation that young people need to make this first sustainable move is a challenge but we have been able to develop networks and links with both Housing Associations and with Local Authorities so that we have access to a wider range of accommodation.

The challenge facing us

Preventing repeat homelessness for young people is about more than just finding people a place to live. We have to help young people develop the skills, confidence and networks of support that will see them through their early adult life.

All young people have to make the journey from adolescence to adulthood in some way, for most it is challenging but not too risky, for some it is a highly risky transition. Our challenge is to promote the most positive transition possible.

The basic life skills of paying bills etc are important but the evidence suggests that young people have to develop a much broader base of skills and ways of behaving, for example; positive ways of coping with crisis, constructive ways of relating to others, being actively involved in training or work. All these help young people to make a sustained success of their tenancies and more importantly their lives, the young person's previous experience can make that very hard to achieve.

The challenge for some young people is to ensure that they stick with us as they have to face the tough challenges inherent in making the transition to adult life. This means planning our work with them so that they deal with the inevitable crisis, bills, relationship break up in positive ways instead of falling back on old ways of coping e.g. 'doing a runner'.

A further challenge is to help the young person, and service providers, view their first tenancy as the start of a bigger journey and to help them see that the way in which they manage this tenancy can have long term implications, e.g. making it harder or easier to get their first shared tenancy with a future partner.

Developing Floating Support

The floating support service has developed in an incremental way as funding streams and social policy have developed. Supporting People is the primary funder of St Basils floating support services

We believe that an important part of our floating support service is the way in which we have developed a life skills approach alongside a broader focus on networks etc. The Resettlement Centre, which is based in central Birmingham, provides young people with a safe but challenging environment where they can access a mixture of very practical support such as access to washing machines, life skills training and emotional and social support from peers. We think it creates a sense of belonging to something positive which focuses on their new lives and not just their past problems.

The floating support services based in Solihull and Redditch also have bases of their own.

Although the floating support service has often been funded with specific issues or groups in mind e.g. refugees, care leavers, mental health distress we have tried to develop a whole approach and service which is bigger than the individual project parts. Our contract base is broad enough to allow us to meet the requirements of contracts and to allow young people to define their own needs and issues.

How it works

This process starts as soon as the young person starts work with St Basils so that the young person is helped to get on to the appropriate housing registers, lists etc as early as possible.

The floating support service gets involved when a support worker in another part of the network, for example in one of the accommodation projects, and the young person they are working with agree it is time to step up the pace of move on.

A referral is made to the Resettlement Team, a worker from that team meets with the young person and they carry out a joint assessment of the young persons needs.

This assessment looks at the following areas:

- The young person's aspirations
- The young person's definition of their own needs and their support networks

- Specific support needs, e.g. does the young person have mental health needs, issues with substance misuse
- Barriers the young person might face in making a sustained move, e.g. previous rent arrears, potential disruption in support networks
- General support needs, e.g. life skills, ways of coping with crisis
- Housing need, e.g. what type of accommodation, which area etc

At this point an initial support plan is developed which includes the results and activities that will support the eventual move.

Following on from that assessment the resettlement worker, key worker and the young person will be working on the practical arrangements for getting a tenancy.

Through our consortia of landlords, we have a service level agreement (SLA) with the major social landlords in Birmingham where they provide access to move-on accommodation and we provide support to the young person as required. In most cases the resettlement worker is able to carry out the initial housing interview and allocations procedures on behalf of the housing provider. This means that the young person goes through what could be quite a challenging process with active support and we can be sure that their housing needs are well represented in allocations etc.

As the young person gets closer to the move we develop the initial floating support plan into a support agreement. This agreement sets out what the young person can expect from St Basils and visa versa.

This is supported by a resettlement support plan that can include very practical results and actions such as buying furniture, getting utilities connected etc.

The support agreement reflects our belief that sustaining a tenancy and avoiding homelessness is about more than just bricks and mortar. So it is likely that the support agreement will include actions to sustain links to Learning, Skills & Work, existing support networks and linked activities at the Resettlement Centre.

On the day that the young person moves we will make sure that they are connected to utilities, have basic foods and know what is happening next. We want them to feel that we care about what happens to them.

Once the young person is in their accommodation we offer a minimum of one visit per week, each young person at this early stage can have up to 2 hours of individual time in their flat with the support worker. As they become more settled this can reduce to a minimum of one 2 hour visit per month.

All visits are planned in advance and we have a 4 weeks contact clause in the support agreement, so that if we do not have contact in that time we actively track the person down and make contact with them. We try to make it as hard as we can for the young person to exit before they are ready.

Running alongside this home based support we offer a range of opportunities at the Resettlement Centre, everything from life skills sessions, access to the internet, to washing machines and to a network of other young people.

Contact time at the Resettlement Centre is separate to any time allocated for floating support in the young person's home. We may build it in to the support agreement but it is an additional support mechanism not an alternative one.

We believe this additional support is essential in helping young people to continue to develop skills and to stay in contact with positive social networks.

As the young person moves towards the end of this stage of their journey we begin to reduce the home based support and agree a planned exit from the floating support agreement. The young person is still free to make contact through the Resettlement Centre once the floating support ends.

Most young people have made a successful transition to either very limited support or no support within 6 to 12 months.

Key principles and assumptions

All our work is based on a theory of change which we have developed through practice, experience and by searching out good practice in other areas of work. This theory is based on some key principles about how homelessness can be addressed and assumptions about what works best for young people. We have highlighted the assumptions that we think are central to resettlement work:

- The journey to becoming an adult is a challenging one for all young people, but for some the challenge is either too big or too complex to make that transition without support
- Growing up is about making changes to your world and to how you relate to it

- Successfully tackling homelessness at a primary and secondary prevention level is about more than just a roof over someone's head
- It is young people who have to make some of the key changes needed in order to make sustainable lives as adults, these include changes in how they feel, how they act and how they think
- Families, communities and services have an important part to play in helping to create change in the material conditions that young people have to deal with during their transition into adult life
- The more young people can be engaged in deciding about their own lives, their environment and their communities the more likely they are to successfully move into independence
- The more young people can contribute to the running of St Basils the more effective and relevant we will become and young people will see that they can influence the world around them
- When young people have tangible evidence that they can succeed and change their own world for the better they make rapid progress on their journey
- Positive social networks reduce the risk of further exclusion, increase the range of resources and skills available to a person and helps to smooth out the inevitable ups and downs of growing up.

Impact

Feedback from partners in the housing consortium and City Council suggest that they have grown more confident in the young people we support and that they feel positive about letting properties to young people supported by St Basils.

Our headline impacts:

- 95% of young people we support are still in their tenancies 12 months after moving in.
- Young People now have a planned move on process to access permanent accommodation. This has enabled St Basils to improve the average waiting time of 12 months for accommodation to six months.

What young people say about floating support

Young People Comments:

"Floating Support helped me a lot, they helped me to understand housing issues."

"It has given me the skills and confidence to deal with my current situation."

"I did not feel alone, I could ask for help anytime. I feel better, and it helped me live on my own."

"The floating support service has helped me a lot with sorting out problems with my housing benefits which has been an ongoing problem."

"They have helped me with sorting out my debts that I got into within the first few month of my tenancy."

"They have helped with a lot of things 1. Bills 2. Grants 3. Helped when I have needed help."

Lessons Learned

- As the service has developed we have reviewed and reflected on what has worked well and also on what we might do differently. The following are some of the key lessons we have learned over the last few years.
- Start the process of resettlement as quickly as possible, it can take a long time for accommodation to become available and waiting at the end of the journey can be detrimental.
- Access to high quality housing is essential and it is made easier by developing strategic partnerships with housing providers. It has been worthwhile committing time and energy to build good working relationships with RSLs and local authority providers.
- It is helpful to think of the accommodation that the young person moves into as being their first step on the housing journey and not the end of the journey. How they manage their first tenancy will have an impact on the housing choices they have later as their circumstances and life styles change.

- Viewing this first accommodation as a start point might also change the way in which we view the type of accommodation that is suitable, for example it maybe appropriate for some young people to be in accommodation that has a shorter life span where they will be in for only 2 or 3 years before moving to the next stage on their journey.
- We have come to the conclusion that using a broad life skills approach, which includes elements of knowing, feeling and doing, is a helpful model and out performs the more restricted independent living skills approach we used in the past.
- The Resettlement Centre has been essential to our success; this easy access service helps young people to come forward and ask for support long before issues turn from being a minor drama or risk into a crisis.

Risks

Availability of accommodation is a risk to successful resettlement, but you probably knew that anyway!

Young people need to move with furniture and enough resources to help them feel safe and comfortable in their first accommodation. If they do not they are at greater risk of ending their tenancy quickly.

The location of accommodation is as important as the quality, young people come with networks of support but some also come with less positive networks. Both need to be taken into account when allocating properties.

Equally the location of accommodation can play to a person's strengths as well as their risk factors; there is a danger that the accommodation on offer is in areas of highest turnover of tenancies which could be a risk factor for some young people. Neighbourhoods with high levels of vulnerable people do not make a great start point for young people.

Isolation is one of the biggest risks to young people, this relates to the earlier points about location but also the way in which support is delivered.

The Resettlement Centre helps us to tackle isolation and keep a watching brief on people's levels of engagement.

Floating Support



Further Information

Contact Manager of St Basils Resettlement and Floating Support Services at

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