



Life Skills Programme



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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

St Basils Life Skills programme has revolutionised the way we deliver key working and support to young people. Life Skills is an opportunity for young people to develop skills in 10 key areas in order for them to increase confidence, skills and the ability to sustain their own tenancy.

The Life Skills Programme is an accredited course, delivered in a “mini” NVQ format whereby young people build a portfolio of evidence to illustrate their development in core life skill areas.

All young people on the programme take an initial basic skills assessment so we can ensure the appropriate support is in place for each individual young person.

The key results for young people living in St Basils accommodation are that they learn the key skills needed in order for them to sustain their own tenancy. This helps them to move towards independence. The key result for young people living in their own tenancy is to reduce the risk of repeat homelessness by equipping young people with the skills to sustain their tenancy.

The key results for all young people are to learn core skills for life that will increase confidence and also to learn and achieve a recognised accredited qualification that is a gateway into further learning.

Although the Life Skills Programme is a standard format, it provides a great opportunity for young people to be creative and learn the core life skills areas that they need. The course can be delivered in a group work setting or intensive one to one work making it a course that can fit every individual’s need.

Over the period the Life Skills Programme has run we have achieved an average of 72% success rate. Bearing in mind most of these young people had no previous qualifications, some were young mothers with care responsibilities, we consider this to be a tremendous success.

The Life Skills programme is an integral part of the Learning, Skills and Work (poss change of name) element of the St Basils network.

The challenge and the evidence

For years St Basils has supported young people in a variety of ways. Keyworking is seen as a critical tool in the development of a young person who lives in St Basils accommodation. Structuring this in a way that produces clear, tangible outcomes can be difficult. The outcomes and results that the Life Skills Programme has delivered have led us to integrate this approach as our keyworking model.

We know that there are a number of factors as to why a young person becomes homeless. We also know that when they have been through the supported accommodation route and get their own tenancy, this can be a very risky time if the appropriate skills have not been learned in order to sustain this tenancy. A lack of these skills means a very high risk of a young person experiencing repeat homelessness.

95% of young people who moved on from St Basils in a planned way, successfully sustained their tenancies. We believe the Life Skills programme is one of our key interventions that contributes to this figure.

A big challenge has always been engaging homeless young people or those at risk of being homeless in some form of sustainable learning. The assumption being that young people are more concerned with their housing situation whereas their education and learning options are of little or no interest and low priority.

The Life Skills Programme has enabled us to tackle both of these issues. Focussing on core life skills areas that young people require to sustain their tenancy and make a success of their lives, delivered in an innovative and creative way has had a very positive impact on the personal development and opportunities discovered for young people.

Developing the Life Skills Programme

St Basils Life Skills programme developed out of the Foyer Federation's Personal Development Profile course.

We have developed the programme to suit the needs of the young people we work with in partnership with a local FE provider who provides the internal verification, routes to accreditation and programme support.

We have found that "buy in" from all key staff including project managers has been key in the successful implementation of the Life Skills Programme. This has revolutionised the way of working with young people, ultimately achieving better outcomes for them.

How it works

The Life Skills Programme is a structured way of delivering some important aspects of key working. It provides an opportunity for young people to develop skills in up to 10 key areas that will increase their confidence, skills and the ability to sustain their own tenancy.

The project is run in partnership with a local FE provider who act as the supporting educational body for St Basils and young people.

The programme's format is that of a "mini" NVQ whereby young people collect evidence throughout the programme to illustrate development in the core areas set out in the programme. There is no attainment level attached to the qualification, however a young person is required to undertake a basic skills assessment to ensure the optimum support is provided.

A young person is required to spend at least 20 hours on the course that includes reviews with key workers to discuss progression. However, this is the bare minimum and we have found that young people tend to spend around 40 – 50 hours on their portfolio and produce exceptional pieces of work.

At the first meeting with the Key Worker, the young person carries out a self-assessment on all 10 core areas of the programme. Numeracy & Literacy modules are compulsory with 3 – 4 options to also be completed. The idea is that the areas scored lowest in the self-assessment are then worked on throughout the programme. On completion, the young person will be able to show the positive development in these areas with the evidence provided in their folder.

On completion, young people will be awarded with their Life Skills qualification. This qualification is recognised by education institutes for further education, and landlords to show the young person's ability to sustain their own tenancy.

At St Basils, we provide young people with completion bonuses to spend on their tenancies as well as hosting a Graduation Celebration for those young people who have achieved their qualification.

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:

There are some key principles that underpin the Life Skills Programme that formulate our success:

- Life Skills Programme is instrumental for young people successfully sustaining their own tenancies and making the transition from dependence to independence.
- Life Skills Programme provides opportunities for young people to gain worthwhile qualifications that speeds up their pathway to fulfilling their aspirations.
- Embedding Life Skills into all the support that is delivered to young people creates very positive outcomes.
- It is important to allow young people to take ownership of their work. Self assessment with support will give them the opportunity to develop the skills they know are lacking.
- Allowing young people to build their portfolios and address key life skills areas at their own pace with support from workers, rapidly increases the chance of successfully completing the course.
- Good partnerships with FE providers allow for a smooth verification and certification process for young people. The additional support provided by the FE provider is also important.
- The Lifeskills model has helped keyworkers structure their support and focus on outcomes which are meaningful for young people.

We have a set of assumptions about involvement and working with young people which underpin all our work including the Life Skills Programme. The most relevant are shown below:

- Allowing creativity within the Life Skills Programme tends to capture the enthusiasm and motivation of young people
- The more pre-tenancy support young people receive, the better chance they have of sustaining their tenancy, the Life Skills Programme provides this support
- Concentrating on young people's interests helps to tackle those key life skill areas that are in most need
- Acknowledging achievement not only raises self-esteem but encourages young people to pursue further life changing experiences
- The importance of learning key life skills can not be underestimated
- Providing end bonuses on completion should not be the only reason young people access the programme – but it does help!

Impact

The Life Skills Programme has some clear outcomes that are achieved i.e numbers of young people who pass and percentage in terms of pass rate. It also provides softer outcomes around confidence and self-esteem.

Our desired outcomes are that as many young people achieve the qualification as possible but recognising that for many young people it is the first qualification they may finish, let alone pass.

Since its conception in 2004, over 250 young people have enrolled onto the programme. Of these, 72% successfully achieved their qualification, which is an extremely high figure.

We anticipate this figure to improve each year as each year a greater percentage have achieved the qualification as staff become accustomed to the way of working with young people to achieve these results.

Softer outcomes contribute to the organisation's bigger outcomes of young people successfully sustaining their tenancies. Not only have young people learnt the key life skills required to develop themselves, they have learnt how to keep a home, moving from dependence to independence.

The Life Skills Programme therefore is critical in the 95% figure of young people leaving St Basils in a planned way successfully keep their tenancies

What young people have to say about it

“(My keyworker introduced life skills to me and ever since I took it on board I have been learning so much”

“I feel this course has taught me many things about myself and many different things about life..”

“..become more aware of other people and their feelings..”

“..learnt how to get involved in team activities and to value my own strengths..”

“This Lifeskills course has helped me to do things I never thought I would or could do!.”

Lessons Learned

We do think there are key lessons we have learnt through developing the Life Skills Programme. These points may be helpful if you are thinking of developing a similar service or want to refresh your existing approach:

- Young people must choose to do the programme otherwise, if forced to do it, they will not benefit from the course and probably not complete
- Life Skills Programme works best if it is an organisational approach to key working
- Providing young people with incentives at the conclusion of the course is a good way to keep them motivated and focussed
- Develop a strong partnership with an FE Provider who believes in the Life Skills Programme and its benefits to young people
- Encourage creativity and encourage young people to express themselves through their portfolio – they will enjoy the course more and are more likely to succeed
- Acknowledging achievement through celebration events affirms self-esteem and raises aspirations in those that attend and encourages those young people not on the course to enrol and develop their skills
- Young people who are homeless or at risk of being so, do want to engage in learning and develop their skills. Tailor-making a programme to suit their needs is key for their involvement

Risks

- Limited numbers allocated from the FE provider
- Demand – too much or too little from young people
- Funding the resources required to effectively deliver the programme
- Key Workers not buying in to the programme and embedding it into their key working approach
- Young people leaving the project / organisation before completing the Life Skills Programme
- Ensuring those young people access the programme who really need it – not those who already have the skills but are on it for the end bonus!
- Delivering to funders and partners expectations and targets

Life Skills Programme



Further Information

If you want further information about the Life Skills Programme and how it operates, how it was set up then please contact

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