



STaMP

Schools Training
and Mentoring
Project



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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

The Schools Training and Mentoring Project (STaMP) has become a key part of the prevention work that St Basils does with young people. The project is designed to provide information and insight to a broad range of young people and to target support at those at greatest risk of becoming homeless.

The key results for young people at risk of being homeless are to have accurate information about finding and keeping a home and that where they need extra support that is offered through a range of interventions including peer mentoring. It is also designed to support the professionals that work with young people to make sound assessments of their needs and risk of homelessness.

The key results for young people not at immediate risk of homelessness are that they have accurate information and insight into the ways in which young people become homeless and the impact that can have on their lives and that they use this new knowledge to reflect on their own experience.

These contribute to the bigger outcomes of ensuring that young people do not become homeless and that they make a safe and positive journey from adolescence into adult life.

The STaMP project has two parts to it: training aimed at whole class groups, or youth groups, and peer mentoring for young people most at risk of homelessness.

Young people who have been homeless are a key part of the project helping to deliver the schools based training as peer educators and more targeted interventions as peer mentors.

STaMP has provided schools based training to over 6500 young people across a wide range of schools and mentored young people at greatest risk. We train around 10 - 20 yp each year young people from St Basils as both peer mentors and trainers.

STaMP is an integral part of the Education & Skills element of the St Basils network and to be most effective needs to be seen in the widest possible promotional or preventive context.

The challenge and the evidence

Our experience and the literature on youth homelessness suggest that tackling homelessness is best done before a young person becomes homeless.

We believe that there is strong evidence that leaving home at too young an age increases the likelihood of young people becoming homeless. From that jumping off point the project is based on the premise that many young people who become homeless are making decisions that lead to homelessness based on assumptions that are not supported by evidence, on poor or no information about alternatives and because they have limited access to alternative ways of dealing with issues that make them want to move away from home or stable settings.

STaMP sets out to address these issues by sharing information and resources with young people so that their decision making is grounded in reality and by providing workers with the tools to identify and support those who show the early risk indicators of potential youth homelessness. Incorporating peer education and the voice of young people who have been homeless into the programme has contributed to it being grounded in experiences that young people can relate to.

So fewer young people make the decisions that lead them to leave home too early and more young people at risk of homelessness are identified and supported.

This links to the agendas on prevention set out in policies like the Regional Homelessness Strategy & Every Child Matters and to our developing work on 'promoting a successful journey into adult life' for some of the most at risk young people in the community.

The challenge we face is to deliver a programme that can help to change knowledge and attitudes whilst not alienating those at greatest risk by preaching at them.

Developing STaMP

STaMP developed out of the Excellence in Cities (EIC) programme in Birmingham in close cooperation with the local education department.

We have developed a clear and reusable session and plan based on testing out a variety of approaches in the class setting.

The peer educator's role has grown out of our work with young people and now fits both with the prevention work we do and with the training and development work young people do as part of Life Skills development.

How it works

Schools Training

The schools training element of STaMP is aimed at young people in years 10 and 11 of secondary education, we have also carried out the workshops in youth groups with a more mixed age range. This part of STaMP is not specifically targeted at those identified as being at risk.

The training element is offered to whole class groups usually as part of the PHSE or similar strand of the curriculum. The training is delivered by a member of the STaMP team and by a young person trained as a peer educator. All the young people who work on the programme as part of the training team have been homeless themselves.

As part of their preparation for working on STaMP the peer educators take part in an extensive training course and receive supervision from the STaMP team.

The aim of the schools session is to enable young people to find out about homelessness, in particular what might trigger homelessness for young people and then the impact of homelessness on their later life chances. We want to encourage young people to think about their move from home as being part of a planned journey into adult life and not a crisis response to immediate problems.

The session is split into two main segments, the first being a whole group exercise that looks at the triggers and impacts of homelessness with a focus on dispelling some of the myths about homelessness and the kinds of people who become homeless. The second part of the session is direct testimony from the peer educator about their experience of homelessness and its impact.

Peer mentoring

The mentoring is available to young people in the schools we work with and the majority of those getting mentoring support are in years 10 and 11. Staff in the schools we work with have been given some robust tools to use to help assess the risk of homelessness for the young people they work with.

When they have identified homelessness as a risk, one of their options is to refer to the STaMP project so that the young person at risk can be linked to a trained peer mentor who has direct personal experience of homelessness.

Once that referral has been made we talk through the possible support options and if it is relevant will suggest setting up a mentoring relationship. We have developed a matching process which identifies both the needs of the young person being mentored and the skills and experiences of the mentor.

We also pay careful attention to the networks that the mentor and mentee live and work in, to try and ensure that the boundaries in the mentoring relationship can be maintained effectively.

We know that supervision is key to helping people get the most out of the mentoring once it has started and we provide regular supervision to the mentor and make sure that the schools are kept up to date with how the mentoring is developing.

This type of peer mentoring is usually only one of many mentoring options in schools so it needs to be well coordinated with other mentoring projects in a school.

The young people from St Basils who act as peer educators and mentors are integral to the success of both elements of STaMP. We have developed a systematic training and development package for young people so that they can build the skills and confidence to become highly effective educators and mentors. This training package contributes towards a young person's wider development and skills portfolio. The training for peer educators lasts for 12 weeks and the mentoring training lasts 13 weeks.

For STaMP to work well we believe that both the peer educators and the young people in schools must see some benefit from their commitment and energy.

Key Principles and assumptions

As we said earlier we believe that there is strong evidence that leaving home at too young an age increases the likelihood of young people becoming homeless.

STaMP sets out to address these issues by sharing information and resources with young people so that their decision making is grounded in reality and by providing workers with the tools to identify and support those who show the early risk indicators of potential youth homelessness.

We have developed the work of the STaMP project based on the following key principles:

- Preventing homelessness can be done through a mixture of education, support and family work
- All young people can benefit from information and insight into homelessness and how it can be avoided
- Young people need accurate information about the impact of leaving home too early
- Delaying the age at which a young person leaves home improves their outcomes as young adults
- Peer educators have a crucial role to play in sharing their experiences and helping others to gain from them
- For the young people who act as peer educators and mentors it provides excellent experience and helps them to consolidate their personal gains
- For programmes like STaMP to work there needs to be close liaison and support from schools

We have a set of assumptions about involvement and working with young people which underpin all our work including STaMP, the most relevant are shown below:

- 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
- Leaving home too early increases the risk of a young person becoming homeless
- Homelessness is not inevitable even for the most chaotic young people, we believe we can move to a point where homelessness can be dramatically reduced and crisis avoided

- Where a young person does become homeless this adds to the challenge of making the transition to sustainable adult life, homelessness never makes it easier for people
- Growing up is about making changes to your world and to how you relate to it
- 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

Impact

Measuring something that has been averted is problematic, however we think we can identify some key indicators or results that can help. We believe we can measure effectiveness in both the short and medium term in the following ways.

Firstly by tracking the changes young people on the programme make in the way they think about their own plans for the future, for example if we encourage young people to plan to move away from home later rather than sooner we hypothesise that this helps to contribute to a reduction in homelessness later on.

Working with the schools and other services involved with STaMP we can measure the numbers of and impact on young people that better identification and support provide.

In the medium term we will begin to track changes in the numbers of young people who present as homeless or at risk of homelessness, we can also track changes in the routes young people take to get to services when they are in need.

We have some evidence for the difference the education programme is making to attitudes by using a pre and post session evaluation form.

Comparing the Pre and Post Evaluation Forms in answer to the question, 'When do you think is the best age to leave home' : overall over 55% showed a marked difference in the age they thought it was sensible to leave home, rising from 16 to 19 as being the mean age for leaving home. A further 40% showed some smaller shift in their understanding.

Our key Performance indicator, 'improved understanding' showed that 84% had improved their understanding to level 3 or above on a scale of 1 - 5 (5 being the highest).

Our anecdotal evidence for the mentoring suggests that we are getting early results with young people and delaying or stopping a significant number from moving from home and into homelessness.

What young people have to say about it

'... (I learnt) not to take the things I have for granted and respect the people around me because I don't know when I'll need them most.'

Year 11 female – Colmers Farm School

'People who are homeless, are people like us. They don't have to be from a poor background.'

Year 11 female – Swanshurst School

'It was an eye opener into the harsh reality of life. Basically you live with your decisions, good or bad, it doesn't matter.'

Year 11 male – Heartlands High School

'This visit was a very good experience. I found that your visit has changed many people in our class and one was me.'

Year 9 pupil, Baverstock Specialist Arts College

Lessons Learned

There are some key lessons that we think are worth passing on:

- Firstly that the work is likely to be more successful if the education authorities and schools are involved in identifying the need for the programme and demonstrate commitment to using it once it has been developed.
- STaMP can not provide all the answers for young people and any promotion or prevention programme needs to act as a signpost to other interventions or opportunities for young people.
- The single session approach has strengths but we think there is scope for some young people to benefit from a multi session approach over a number of weeks.

- The mentoring programme needs to have very robust policies and procedures to ensure that all parties are kept safe and benefit from the intervention.
- Start the monitoring and evaluation of the programme at the earliest stage possible.

Risks

There are risks with any innovative venture, the trick is to spot them early and to avoid them. Here are some of the key risks we have had to manage and overcome:

- Ensuring that peer mentors are not put at risk through their mentoring relationship.
- Managing the expectations of partners about the numbers of people who can be supported by mentors.
- Too many referrals or too few!
- Cost to schools of the sessions.
- Ensuring that senior staff in schools are in tune with the programme and support its use.
- CRB checks for mentors and peer educators can take a long time.
- Ensuring a throughput of newly trained mentors and work for them to do once they complete.

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Further Information

If you want further information about the STaMP programme and how it operates, or how it was set up then please contact:

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