



Places of change

The DCLG's Hostels Capital Improvement Programme and Homeless Link's regional managers are making waves right across the country. Connect gets three reports on how it's all fitting together

Maff Potts

Specialist Advisor
Department for Communities and
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When somebody makes a change to a street or a house – or a hostel(!) – they often say, 'I can't imagine what it was like before'. The changes made such sense and are now making life so much easier that your mind wipes away the bad old days. I suspect this is how the homelessness sector might feel about the Homeless Link regional managers. You can't imagine not having one.

I am very aware of the contribution they have made to the work that I do and am forever referring people to them as a resource. I live on England's train network and often step onto the platform and think, 'Is this going to be a tough meeting?'. The regional managers

are my kindred spirits. They understand the life where a scheme has the chance to succeed and it's your job to find out the secret to that success.

The difference between us though is that they are on the ground and close to the real work, not removed behind the protective wall occupied by us funders. I run the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP) for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the regional managers were originally charged with the primary aim of supporting this programme. The Active Communities Unit - then with the Home Office – funded the DCLG as part of the ChangeUp initiative to deliver one of five public service priorities identified by five government departments. The DCLG's was homelessness hostel provision.

The support for the HCIP has seen tangible success. It would have been quite easy for Homeless Link to hold a few regional events and sit on the occasional local forum. However these people knock on doors and get involved. To find solutions they have to understand both sides of the funding fence and work for the good of both sides. The virtual coach tours have been fantastic way to get across the 'places of change' agenda. I've got as much from them as the delegates. It's rewarding to look out into the audience and see Blackburn beside Derby beside Liverpool beside Grimsby. It's a great job. They get to meet extraordinary people in extraordinary projects and guide them towards areas that will benefit them and the people who use their services.

Ben Dickenson

North East Regional Manager
Homeless Link

Recruitment adverts for police officers used to say, 'No two days are the same'. They should try a job-swap with a Homeless Link regional manager!

We facilitate networks within the homelessness sector, and with the world outside the hostel front door. We help provide frontline agencies with the tools to make exciting changes, which improve opportunities for homeless people.

On any given Monday I could be at a Middlesbrough hostel in need of physical re-design, offering advice on using the building and introducing architects that can deliver this vision. On Tuesday I can be facilitating a seminar on Tyneside, where hostel managers and voluntary agencies discuss meaningful activity programmes. On Wednesday I might visit a 'self-build' accommodation scheme in Newcastle: meeting service users and construction foremen. On Thursday I would add these findings to an email bulletin, and update Homeless Link's website with names of organisations providing opportunities for move-on activities. Then, on Friday, I'll work intensively with HCIP projects. Together we'll solve problems with building works, engage with local communities and find the best activity providers.

In the North East we've supported the country's first hostel building programme delivered by homeless people themselves. Stage one will be complete in Newcastle this September. Stage two, which is even more exciting, gets underway next year. Through HCIP we will also have the first Crisis Skylight education centre outside London. Sector wide we've developed a regional youth homelessness

network, organised seminars about employment routes for homeless people, and created a homelessness sports activities network.

This calls for a careful balance between intensive work with accommodation providers and developing regional and sub-regional initiatives. It's not always easy, or instantly successful, but by developing good relationships with providers we can change the lives of the homeless people we work with.

Stephen Bell

Chief Executive
Tyneside Cyrenians

HCIP is about 'places of change'. We decided that we would passionately embrace this and try an innovative scheme that would encompass many of the HCIP objectives.

Eleven unskilled homeless people, all of whom were residents and service users of Tyneside Cyrenians, are now employees and are constructing new accommodation and office space in the grounds of one of our supported housing projects in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The building is timber framed and ecologically and environmentally friendly.

The 'self-builders' are being trained on the job by skilled workers from a local construction company. All of the men involved in the scheme are studying for an NVQ Level 2 in construction which, importantly, makes them eligible for their Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card, the construction sector 'passport' for site workers.

Those with learning difficulties or other secondary support needs will be supported so that every individual has the chance to take part. We made it clear that what they were looking for was

enthusiasm to take part, and to learn and the motivation to take advantage of this positive life changing opportunity.

It has been a startling success. At the beginning of the project 10 out of the 11 self-builders lived in our hostels. Within the first 20 weeks of their employment, eight of those 10 moved into their own homes and are now living independently. The group has grown into a confident, skilled team of builders.

Ben Dickenson, the North East regional manager, has provided valuable support and advice throughout the process, reinforcing the main principles of the ChangeUp programme and providing a constructive overview. Ben has regularly acted as an effective liaison between ourselves and the local authority, and has been very effective in disseminating the good practice Tyneside Cyrenians are currently implementing resulting from HCIP funding we have received.

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Sources

For more information on HCIP go to www.communities.gov.uk

Find out more about what regional managers are doing at www.homeless.org.uk/inyourarea

Contact Tyneside Cyrenians on 0191 273 8891 or at head.office@tynesidecyrenians.co.uk