
Supporting homeless people into work: recommendations for the future of Government-led employment support

July 2015

This paper has been produced in partnership by;



Supporting homeless people into work: recommendations for the future of Government-led employment support

Tens of thousands of people become homeless every year¹. Many thousands more are at risk of homelessness, live in temporary and supported accommodation or face unstable living arrangements².

The lack of a stable and settled home makes it extremely difficult to find and maintain employment. The percentage of homeless people in work varies; only seven per cent of St Mungo's Broadway's clients are in work³ whilst just two per cent of Crisis' clients are in full time work and five per cent are in part time work⁴.

Homelessness can also create or exacerbate a broad range of other issues which act as barriers to employment. These include mental and physical ill health, substance misuse, learning difficulties, offending and being a victim of violent crime.

Despite the barriers they may face, most people who have experienced homelessness or housing issues want to work. We believe that with the right support, many more can.

This paper has been produced in partnership with;



Overview

ERSA, the representative body for the employment support sector, and organisations specialising in delivering homelessness support, are calling on Government to help some of society's most vulnerable people into work. The recommendations outlined in this paper present a real opportunity to change the lives of homeless people through the design and delivery of more targeted support.

Drawing on the expertise from within the sector, we set out recommendations for Government outlining how the next round of future commissioning could enable more people with acute housing needs to find and sustain employment and prevent a rise in homelessness. The recommendations focus on vital improvements to the assessment process, programme design and conditionality regime. If adopted across all support services, these could make a significant impact to the success of employment programmes and the lives of homeless people.

The initial assessment process should identify jobseekers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

It is widely recognised amongst the sector and government officials that the assessment process is critical to ensuring jobseekers receive the most appropriate support to meet their needs. In order to make this work for homeless people we recommend the following:

- Homelessness should be incorporated into an official assessment framework, used by Jobcentre Plus and incorporated into guidance for employment support providers that deliver their own assessment. This must identify an individual's support needs in relation to housing, as well as their employability and capability to work.
- Homelessness should be detected via the assessment process on day one of an individual's claim so that housing needs are addressed as quickly as possible and homelessness is prevented. Research by Homeless Link, Crisis and St Mungo's Broadway found that Jobcentre Plus does not always identify people as homeless at their initial assessment when they open a benefit claim⁵. This can result in low levels of jobseeker engagement and support needs can escalate quickly if not addressed early on. Regular reviews and an effective feedback loop to update the initial assessment findings should also include housing as people's support needs change over time. Such changes in circumstances should be reflected in the pricing structures.
- The assessment criteria should reflect all forms of homelessness, not just rough sleeping. This includes people living in hostels, supported housing projects, shelters or refuges, as well as those sleeping on friends' or family's floors, squatting or living in Temporary Accommodation. Assessments should also recognise that people at risk of losing their accommodation may also face significant obstacles to gaining employment and may require specialist housing support.
- Assessors should undertake specific training in order to develop the skills needed to identify housing support requirements. Not all jobseekers are able or willing to reveal their housing situation and many may not self-identify as homeless if they are not sleeping rough. People may also be reluctant to disclose their situation due to the stigma associated with homelessness and a lack of trust in officials.
- Guidance on assessing housing needs should be issued to all assessors. Former and current clients of homelessness services should be given the opportunity to feed into the drafting of this guidance. It should emphasise that certain groups are more likely to be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, including care leavers, ex-offenders, refugees or those with physical and mental health conditions, and that assessors should build a secure and trusting relationship to help identify such support needs.

Alex told us that when giving his address to Jobcentre Plus "I didn't want to put that I live in a bloody hostel!" He didn't want to state that he was homeless as he felt that this may lead to him being discriminated against.

Source: 'The Programme's Not Working: experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme' (Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's, 2012)

Employment support programmes should address housing needs

The most recent evaluation of mainstream employment provision for the long term unemployed suggests that stable housing can underpin (re)entry into work⁶. Whilst mainstream provision supports some jobseekers with housing needs, those that have more acute housing needs require more intensive support. In order to increase the success of future provision for homeless people, or those at risk of homelessness, we recommend:

- Future commissioning should recognise housing support as a priority area within mainstream employment support provision. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness may require support around tenancy sustainment, resettlement into secure accommodation, disclosing housing circumstances to potential employers, securing documents to prove identity and to claim in work benefits. Such support should be reflected within the commissioning process so that housing support organisations are present in future delivery models.
- Specialist provision for jobseekers with multiple, complex barriers to employment should be commissioned and better integrated with housing agencies to best support homeless people and those with acute housing needs. Often called the 'hardest to help', those requiring a more intensive support programme will face a multitude of more complex barriers to work alongside their housing needs; including addiction, severe mental health conditions and having a criminal record.
- Employment support could be included in any new Social Impact Bond (SIB) for people who have experienced homelessness. Any new homelessness SIB would be likely to be targeted at a specific cohort, and so should exist alongside other effective specialist and mainstream provision for people with experience of homelessness. We would wish to see cooperation between DCLG and DWP if employment outcomes are integrated into any future homelessness SIB.
- Government should ensure providers can work effectively with homelessness and housing agencies, including charities and local authorities. To enable a multiagency approach between the employment support sector and specialist services, data sharing policies should be established and work targets and cultures between providers and housing departments within local authorities and Universal Support should be better aligned.

- Additional support to address jobseekers' housing needs must be adequately funded. The pricing structures of employment support programmes should reflect the additional resource required to address the often high support needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Financial models should be introduced that facilitate longer term support and recognise 'distance travelled' for people with acute housing needs.

STRIVE, a Government funded homelessness skills and employment support pilot, was created to fill a gap in basic skills and employment support for homeless people with multiple and complex needs. It is delivered by specialist staff who can ensure that employment, skills and housing needs are addressed in a coherent and joined up manner.

The programme is delivered by St Mungo's Broadway and Crisis and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and facilitated by the Department for Work and Pensions. It enables participants to develop basic skills in English, maths and IT as well as the confidence they need to prepare for and get into work.

One year into the programme, STRIVE has enrolled 73 participants, with an attrition rate of only 15%. In one year 48 qualifications have been obtained in IT, English and maths; six people improved their housing situation; four people obtained full time employment; six people progressed into full time further education; and seven people took up volunteering opportunities.

Conditionality should be better tailored to individual circumstances

There is growing evidence to suggest that homeless people are disproportionately affected by sanctions. Research by Homeless Link indicates that a third of homeless people claiming Jobseekers Allowance and one in five claiming Employment and Support Allowance have been sanctioned, compared to just three per cent of all people in receipt of these benefits⁷. Sanctions can leave homeless people, who are already on very low incomes and coping with difficult life circumstances, without enough funds to cover their most basic needs. This can make it much harder to take steps to find work. To make employment support more effective for homeless people we recommend:

- The activities and support that homeless people are required to do as part of their conditionality should be meaningful and tailored to their individual circumstances. Any mandated activity should take into account the impact of someone's housing situation, and any other complex needs, on their ability to effectively seek or prepare for work; only conditions that an individual can meet should be imposed.
- The application of sanctions should be thoroughly reviewed with greater clarity about which jobseekers are classified as 'vulnerable'. Sanctions should never be imposed if they are likely to put people at risk of homelessness or destitution. Providers should be given more discretion about when to report a jobseeker to Jobcentre Plus decision makers for a potential sanction, taking into account when a sanction is clearly inappropriate. Jobseekers should be made aware of the importance of disclosing any change in their housing situation in order to prevent a sanction being issued unfairly. If applied wrongly, sanctions can not only exasperate the chaotic lifestyles that homeless people are often associated with, but also result in people falling into rent arrears, leading to possible eviction.
- 'Easement' rules, allowing some newly homeless people to have their work conditionality requirements lifted while they take steps to find housing, should be better publicised. The use of these rules should be evaluated to make sure they are being applied appropriately and consistently.

'Ellie now lives in her own flat after living in a St Mungo's Broadway project for homeless women. She has been sanctioned for missing an appointment while she was in hospital and for missing an appointment because she was at work at a part time job. Ellie finds it hard to eat enough when she has been sanctioned. She has been told that she is ineligible for hardship payments and finds it embarrassing to ask friends and family for money to buy food. Ellie reports that she finds it harder to work when she has been sanctioned because she has less energy, migraines and feels 'like a zombie'

Source: St Mungo's Broadway evidence submitted to DWP Select Committee inquiry, 2014

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government Homelessness Statistics.

² The Crisis Homelessness Monitor.

³ St Mungo's Broadway Client Needs Survey of 1,805 residents, June 2014.

⁴ Crisis [survey](#) of 10,255 clients who used Crisis Skylight services, June 2014.

⁵ The Programme's Not Working: experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme' (Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's, 2012)

⁶ Work Programme evaluation: the participant experience [report](#), December 2014

⁷ Homeless Link, *A high cost to [pay](#)*



ERSA is the representative body for the employment support sector. It has around 200 members, including all the prime contractors of the major back to work programmes and a significant number of subcontractors. Two thirds of its members are not for profit.



Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people, dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.



Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who experience homelessness in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.



St Mungo's Broadway helps people to recover from the issues that create homelessness and to rebuild their lives. We provide a bed and support to more than 2,500 people every night and work to prevent homelessness with around 25,000 people a year.

Contact information:

ERSA UK LTD
Elizabeth House, York Road, London SE1 7NQ | ersa.org.uk | 020 3757 9145 | membership@ersa.org.uk