



THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOMEGROUND WITH SUPPORT FROM THE COMINO FOUNDATION

SYNOPSIS

The re-settlement young homeless people is a necessary social service in cities where there are high levels of social deprivation. The Comino Centre based in John Moores University in Liverpool identified that there was a need to provide a better process of resettlement from the Homeground residential hostel which is part of Local Solutions – a charity and social enterprise delivering a range of services in Merseyside. In 1999, the Comino Centre funded an initial pilot project to provide a Resettlement Worker who would manage all aspects of resettlement for the young people going through the hostel.

The pilot demonstrated that a Resettlement Worker significantly improved the success rate for resettlement and the Comino Foundation took over funding from 2001. Over time the work of the resettlement worker was refined with John Moores University evaluating the value of the process in 2006. Two conferences were held to promote the value of resettlement workers in resettling young people. By 2010 the use of resettlement workers had become recognized as best practice in resettlement hostels for young people.

In refining the work of the resettlement worker Homeground expanded their client group to include young people who had been released from custody. In many cases these young people suffered from 'deep exclusion' and faced isolation and multi-dimensional problems that entrap them in a cycle of disadvantage. The J Paul Getty Foundation funded a pilot to employ an Intense Support Mentor who would manage customized packages of support to enable these young people to take control of their lives and re-engage with society. The pilot was successful and demand increased for this service. Comino Foundation switched their funding to enable an additional Intense Support Mentor to be provided.

The Intense Support Mentor Programme is similar in principle to the Family Intervention Project programme that the Government introduced in 2006 to address the problems of co-ordinating social services in cases of critical family breakdown.

The full paper on this work extends to 11 pages.

INTRODUCTION

The resettlement of homeless people is undertaken by the Housing Services department of local authorities or, in some cases, by the voluntary sector who obtain their funding from a number of sources.

In 1989 government made arrangements to ensure the closure of all large hostel units, which often had overcrowded dormitory accommodation, and establish smaller scale hostels with self-contained accommodation. The aim was to move people from the un-satisfactory communal form of accommodation to individual accommodation and accelerate resettlement to independent tenancies.

Of particular concern in re-organising the arrangements to resettle people were those for young people. Most single homeless people are not identified as having a priority need for housing under the 1996 Housing Act, or previous legislation, which simply states that young people should be classed as vulnerable and given priority. The scale of the homelessness problem for young people in Liverpool was illustrated when the circumstances of 3,000 young people with housing difficulties in Merseyside was analysed in 2000. Of these, 2607 young people were already homeless when they approached a housing agency for help, 42% were under 18 and 25% had experienced some form of care. The causes of youth homelessness are very varied with many individuals suffering from some form of social exclusion, lack of educational opportunities, or relationship or family breakdown. All of which lead to a lack of confidence, emotional problems, low self-esteem and a reduced sense on self worth.

Resettlement of young people is not simply a matter of re-housing. If new accommodation is provided without some form of preparation for resettlement an individual can find it difficult to survive on their own in new accommodation. Often they are forced out and then return to the homelessness situation – a revolving door process. Professionals in the provision of resettlement services have come to realize that 1:1 support must be provided on a range of issues if young homeless people are to be resettled, successfully, into mainstream society.

Homeground was established as a small residential unit in 1993 as part of Local Solutions which is a charity and social enterprise delivering a range of services across Merseyside and part of the North West. It provides accommodation with 29 single bedrooms and provides help with resettlement, entry to training, education or work for homeless young people aged 16 – 35.

Young people were, and still are, referred to Homeground by Liverpool City and 5 Borough Councils and other voluntary agencies such as the Salvation

Army and the YMCA. Eight key workers were employed on a shift basis to support 29 young people on a 1:1 basis. A major aspect of their work being to develop personal and life skills with each young person as well as encouraging formal vocational training, employment or education.

Whilst the support workers were able to help develop the skills of young people it became increasingly difficult to provide adequate support in helping them transfer, successfully, from Homeground to their own independent accommodation. Due to shift working patterns support staff were unable to dedicate sufficient time to individuals making the transition with the process often being haphazard and uncoordinated. The transfer problem was sometimes exacerbated because housing providers often offered unattractive accommodation which then contributed to the revolving door process. Management in Homeground identified that there was a need for a dedicated, specialist resettlement worker to address these problems.

The Comino Foundation had established, and provided funding for, a Comino Centre in Liverpool John Moores University. Part of the Centre's work was focused on social and educational inclusion projects in the Liverpool area. At a local event in 1999 to promote the work of local voluntary agencies, David Ellis, who was the Homeground coordinator, met Ros Phillips, the then Director of the Comino Centre, and discussed the need for a Resettlement Worker. Some Comino funding was subsequently allocated to providing a Re-settlement Worker, initially for two years.

DEVELOPING THE ROLE OF THE RESETTLEMENT WORKER

The specific brief of the Resettlement Worker was to provide an effective resettlement programme which would assist young people to make the difficult transition from hostel style living to their own accommodation. Objectives for the resettlement programme were:

1. the young people would be prepared emotionally and practically for living in their own accommodation;
2. appropriate accommodation would be secured for the young people who were ready to move-on;
3. young people would be helped to become settled into their tenancies by providing practical assistance with basic furnishings and help in moving;

4. drop-in and advice sessions would be provided for young people who have left the unit;
5. outreach and ongoing support for young people would be provided;
6. young people would be introduced to Comino's GRASP process which would help them take charge of their lives and plan their futures;
7. GRASP would be introduced to Homeground as a whole through the resettlement project to improve the quality of management.

A Resettlement Worker, Ronnie Thomas, was appointed.

A successful resettlement programme was established and 18 young people left Homeground for their own tenancies in the first year. 3 of these returned home to their families on a permanent basis after some reconciliation support. The programme was developed so that that all the young people in Homeground progressively approached completion of their re-settlement process with tenancies being found for them.

Of those who had left 8 received on-going regular support in their tenancies, 4 secured full time employment, 3 attended a full time training programme, 1 was engaged on voluntary work and 2 attended college. In addition, the resettlement worker established regular contact with landlords, the Careers Service, potential employers, local professionals and family members. He made sure that he understood the problems of each young person and was able to secure external help so that each young person could overcome their emotional problems, structure their lives and then successfully move to independent accommodation. Using the GRASP process with the young people was found very useful in helping them establish their goals and work towards their achievement.

The key benefit of the resettlement programme was the impact on the young people whose life prospects stabilized and moved forward. Case studies of young people demonstrated substantial individual improvement. In addition the cost of continued agency support for those who were stuck in the revolving door syndrome with little personal progress was significantly reduced.

A further benefit of the resettlement programme was that it provided the opportunity for student placements from Liverpool John Moores University. These students supported the work with the young people and enabled them to gain an understanding of their problems and in some cases support their degree course.

Towards the end of the initial two year period in 2001 Local Solutions decided that the programme had been so successful that they would apply directly to the Comino Foundation for funding to ensure that they could continue to employ the Resettlement Worker and maintain the re-settlement programme. Local Solutions believed that the application would meet Comino's funding criteria in that the funding would enable the young people who were re-settled to lead more fulfilled lives because:

- ?? their personal and lifetime skills would be developed;
- ?? they would be trained in the GRASP process;
- ?? they would be permanently resettled in independent accommodation;

The application was approved by the Foundation for a period of 3 years with the funding allowing Homeground to continue to employ the Re-settlement Worker. In 2004 Ray Smith replaced Ronnie Thomas with the programme:

- ?? continuing to provide support and resettlement for approximately 25 young people each year;
- ?? developing relationships with housing providers to provide better accommodation and with a broader range of support agencies, for example the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Fire Service and other agencies who provided wider counselling in money management, fire prevention, behaviour, drug misuse and relationship problems;
- ?? supporting the placement of a number of second and third year students who gained a valuable insight and experience of working in a community setting with a challenging client group. Some have used the experience as a springboard into employment;
- ?? supporting talks to undergraduates on youth homelessness and the issues that arise through lack of education and breakdown of relationships;
- ?? developing the GRASP process both with young people and the Homeground team.

In March 2003 a conference was held to promote and discuss the concept of Re-settlement as practiced by Homeground. Speakers and guests represented a range of academic, statutory, voluntary and private sectors and two young people resettled by Homeground described their experience with Homeground and then living independently.

During these three years Homeground enabled a number of young people to live more fulfilled lives as well as reducing the cost of their support which has been estimated as £25,000 per annum for a homeless young person.

ESTABLISHING A MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR RESETTLEMENT

Following the continued success of the resettlement programme Homeground applied to the Comino Foundation for a further 3 years period to maintain the employment of the Resettlement Worker. During this period it was hoped to extend the programme by:

- ?? working with Liverpool John Moores University to evaluate the project and identify improvement opportunities;
- ?? formalizing the management and supervision of volunteers and student placements;
- ?? developing small projects with volunteers and students to help the young people develop their personality, e.g. through drama;
- ?? extending the work placement activities of the students so that it was a quality learning experience.

Comino provided Local Solutions with funding for a further 3 years which enabled Homeground to maintain, improve and extend the programme through 2004 – 2007:

- ?? Links with partner agencies were developed and enhanced to make the service more responsive, flexible and suited to individual needs;
- ?? Ongoing support was given to young people who had left their original resettlement accommodation and moved to more permanent housing as their experience developed and personal circumstances changed;
- ?? The programme was extended to meet the specific needs of young offenders who have been in custody or at risk of receiving a custodial sentence.

Homeground identified that it was particularly difficult for offenders being released to secure suitable accommodation and receive an appropriate support. Many agencies do not easily accommodate offenders who are being released with no fixed abode because they are unable to attend interview. To meet the needs of this particular client group Homeground began working with offenders due for release. Initially this involved meeting offenders during their custodial sentence to ascertain their suitability for the resettlement programme offered by Homeground.

The extension of the resettlement service to include young offenders started in April 2005 with 36 young people being received from custody, 17 of whom were subject to an Intensive Support Surveillance Programme (ISSP). This involved each young person being electronically tagged under arrangements put in place at Homeground. Few accommodation providers, except formal bail hostel settings, provide these arrangements. Homeground, being a support-orientated environment, was able to put these arrangements in place.

This extension to the resettlement service provided this client group, which included both male and female offenders, with a sense of security and support upon release. Strong links were developed with the prison re-settlement officers in Strangeways, Style, Liverpool, Hindley, Wymott and Preston prisons. Work was also developed with the Probation Service and the Youth Offending Team and a reserve bed was maintained at Homeground to provide emergency accommodation for a young person leaving custody or to help a young person avoid an immediate custodial sentence.

In addition to extending the programme to include this important client group collaborative working included:

- ?? establishing a formal programme of skills sessions, supported by outside agencies, to better prepare those facing re-settlement;
- ?? maintaining the established student placement and collaborative working programme with students from Liverpool John Moores University;
- ?? producing a DVD with the title 'My Voice' which explored the experience of youth homelessness on Merseyside;
- ?? organising annual celebratory events to recognise and promote the efforts of the young people undertaking and completing the re-settlement programme;

During 2005 Homeground discussed with Liverpool John Moores University the best way to evaluate the approach that Homeground were using to re-settle young people. It was agreed that a PHD student would research the situation and write a report. This work was carried out by Claire Hennessy who produced the paper 'Young and Homeless: An evaluation of a resettlement service on Merseyside'. This paper was published by the Journal of Consumer Studies in March 2005. The paper suggested that while resettlement represents a positive step towards overcoming homelessness, specific working practices are needed to ensure the best outcomes.

In particular it was found that agencies offering resettlement must find time to work with young people and provide emotional support which would build their confidence and improve their life skills which should be enhanced by working with external agencies. Young people must be properly prepared before transferring to independent accommodation to avoid triggering the revolving door process. It was also found important to support and monitor the actual transfer by checking that the new accommodation is suitable, providing a starter kit of small living items and providing friendship, introductions to local agencies and advice. Planned integration into the local community was seen as essential for success.

Following this research and the receipt of her further degree, Dr. Claire Hennessy researched and wrote a further paper 'Developing a model of housing support – the evidence from Merseyside' which was also published by the Journal of Consumer Studies in July 2006. This paper built on the findings of the previous paper whilst highlighting the delicate relationship between the young person and the resettlement worker who must have a non-judgemental approach. Each young person must be determined to succeed in maintaining their independent accommodation. The need to improve the availability of appropriate accommodation for young people was also emphasized.

Following this evaluation work Local Solutions and the Comino Centre organized a Resettlement Conference in 2006 which was attended by approximately 80 delegates from local councils, housing associations and other agencies associated with resettlement of young people. The conference promoted the model developed by Homeground as justified by the evaluation papers researched by Dr. Claire Hennessy. The conference clearly recognized that Homeground had progressively developed a successful process for the resettlement of young people which minimised the costs of the revolving door syndrome.

Subsequent to the conference the Homeground process was progressively introduced to similar resettlement units and began to be seen as good practice in the homelessness sector. Local Solutions are reluctant to claim that their pioneering work in resettlement, as funded by Comino, was responsible for the more widespread introduction of good practice, but it is clear that the success of the Homeground approach clearly supported progressive deployment.

MOVING ON TO THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE 'DEEP EXCLUSION'

Having justified their approach and with a broader, more difficult client group Homeground looked to maintain and further develop the role of the Resettlement Worker. It was seen appropriate that broader responsibilities should include:

- ?? a greater role in carrying out pre-release assessments with young offenders;
- ?? teaching critical life skills;
- ?? working with others to find worthwhile, constructive activities to help each young person engage with the community on release;
- ?? co-ordinating responses between Homeground and other agencies.

Ray Smith, the Resettlement Worker, had progressively developed his skills in supporting young people since his appointment in 2003 was seen to be competent to work with this client group who are predominantly difficult to engage and support because they have a high risk of re-offending, usually have low expectations and a negative attitude towards agency support.

Comino provided Local Solutions with further funding to enable Homeground to broaden the role of the Resettlement Worker throughout 2007-2010. This funding enabled the work with young offenders to develop, for relationships with other agencies to advance and for the re-settlement practice of Homeground to further improve. The Homeground model continued to develop with many young people benefitting from positive, successful resettlement, integration into their communities and greater purpose to their lives.

By the end of 2009 the authorities that fund resettlement provision realised that Resettlement Workers are essential to successful resettlement outcomes and in minimizing cost. This opened the door to mainstream funding which Homeground believed they would be able to access.

During this funding period, however, Homeground found themselves working with an increasing number of young people with complex, embedded needs. Members of this group are very hard to engage with many experiencing 'deep exclusion'. Typically they are isolated and facing multi-dimensional problems that entrap them in a cycle of disadvantage. Their lifestyles often involve high levels of risk taking, chaotic behavior and a focus on immediate, short-term gains all of which leads to a constant state of dependency. Approximately 20% of those referred to resettlement have deep exclusion problems.

This client group has access to a wide range of support services but many individuals make little progress in achieving positive outcomes. Many are consistently re-referred through housing agencies without ever becoming resettled in stable accommodation – the revolving door process becomes a way of life. This client group puts an abnormal strain on the resources of the

statutory agencies through frequent crisis intervention by the emergency, health and criminal justice services. Individuals in this client group are often in contact with multiple agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors without any 'lead' person seeing the whole picture for an individual and coordinating the necessary support.

To meet the special needs of this challenging client group Local Solutions secured funding from the J Paul Getty Foundation to employ an Intense Support Mentor Programme (ISMP) worker on a pilot basis to specifically work with those who have been in the temporary homeless sector for many years with multiple short term tenancies, who are regular drug or alcohol users and who have complex emotional needs.

The objectives of the Intensive Support Mentor Programme are to:

- ?? deliver intensive, customised packages of support to meet identified, individual needs;
- ?? enable individuals to make positive choices and take control of their lives;
- ?? provide 1:1 support and closely monitor agency interventions;
- ?? be flexible and responsive in supporting the choices made by clients;
- ?? help, clients stabilise and maintain their accommodation;
- ?? identify, organise and monitor crisis intervention support;
- ?? enable individuals to gain confidence, skills and rebuild their lives.

The very essence of this programme is the intensity of interventions and 1:1 support. In practice it has been found that an ISMP worker has a case load of 4-8 young people at any one point with approximately 8-12 receiving the service each year. To date a number of case studies have demonstrated that this pilot project has been very successful and by the end of 2009 the ISMP service was running at maximum capacity.

From the initial pilot work Local Solutions identified that

- ?? demand for the service is escalating as its reputation for success grows;
- ?? there is evidence that client interventions can be reduced after an initial intense period but it is then necessary to provide a lower level of support over a longer period to prevent the possibility of breakdown;

- ?? the complexity of need with some young people in this group is often significant and complex;
- ?? housing organizations are beginning to require use of the ISMP service as part of their tenancy agreements with young people from this group;
- ?? the current programme has only one ISMP worker which is insufficient to meet escalating demand, necessary flexibility within the programme and cover for periods of normal absence;
- ?? there is scope for research, evaluation of outcomes and developing the programme with other client groups.

It was clear that an additional ISMP worker was needed and Local Solutions applied to the Comino Foundation to fund this additional post for 3 years so that the Intense Support Mentoring Programme could be extended and validated.

Comino agreed to provide the funding for the additional ISMP worker.

PROSPECTIVE FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The ISMP service is already proving valuable in addressing the needs of young people who have deep exclusion problems and are locked into the revolving door process with regards to accommodation and the extensive use of support services. The pilot work has demonstrated that there is an effective and economical method of improving the lives of this hard to reach client group. Extending the pilot project into a mainstream service will ensure that the Intense Support Mentoring Programme can be validated and then promoted on a wider basis.

The Liverpool Comino Centre and Liverpool John Moores University are already conducting some research into the ISMP and the outcomes of their research should enable these outcomes to be evaluated both in respect of the impact on young people with complex, embedded needs and in respect of cost savings in agency support.

Local Solutions have identified that Intense Support Mentoring Programme may also be applicable to other client groups which have complex relationship problems, for example families that have featured in recent high profile tragic cases in Brentford and Doncaster. The multitude of different agency staff who spend much time on paperwork and lack co-ordination was identified as a problem in such cases.

In 2006, however, the Government introduced a Family Intervention Project (FIP) programme which sought to address and co-ordinate the problems of families with critical breakdown and to date over 3,000 families have received support through this programme

When the evaluation of the Homeground ISMP is complete it would be appropriate to hold a further conference to promote the value of Intense Support Mentors. Such a conference would demonstrate how ISMP can secure improvement in outcomes and cost savings in agency support.

THE VALUE OF COMINO SUPPORT

The Comino Foundation provided funding to enable the value of a dedicated Resettlement Worker to be demonstrated at Homeground through the successful re-settlement of many vulnerable young people, some of whom had been released from custody. Homeground became recognized as a leading resettlement agency and their approach, which has been developed through the support of Comino, has progressively been introduced as best practice by similar agencies.

In addition Homeground's management has used GRASP principles to recognize that the needs of homeless young people with complex emotional problems can be addressed by Intense Support Mentoring. With time this may become widespread best practice – a real and important benefit to UK society.

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