

# Beyond Homelessness

## Putting Research into Practice



SCOTTISH  
SOCIAL  
NETWORKS

## Seminar 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 Summary Report



### Welcome

**Chairperson and The Rock Trust Chief Executive, Kate Polson,** welcomed delegates, and outlined that the day's purpose was to disseminate initial research findings from a national survey on social network support provided by local authorities (LAs) and in the voluntary and community sector (VCS). It also offered an opportunity for delegates to share their experience and knowledge and contribute to practice and future research priorities.



### Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick

School of the Built Environment,  
Heriot Watt University



### **The Broader Policy Context for Homelessness in Scotland**

Suzanne's extensive experience and contribution to homelessness literature meant she was able to offer delegates an extensive legal and policy review.

Suzanne determined that the UK's unique homelessness law with legally enforceable rights to long term, settled accommodation will be extended in Scotland by abolishing priority need categories by 2012. This statutory safety net model has won international acclaim but is notably limited as it is fiscally unfeasible 'to build our way out' of housing demand.

Consequently, an approach which alleviates demand pressure is inevitable.

#### Looking across the border

English prevention policy, 'Housing Options', has provided credible successes and gate keeping concerns have been largely swept aside. A 70% drop in homelessness acceptances reflects these accomplishments.

The alternatives provided include:

- Private Rented Sector (PRS)
- Tenancy Support schemes

- Guaranteed Deposit Schemes
- Family Mediation
- Sanctuary Schemes –for victims of domestic violence

Significant outcomes in 2009/10 include:

- 165,200 cases of relieving and preventing homelessness through Housing Options

- 61% found alternative accommodation (usually PRS)
- 39% assisted to remain in their own home

In Scotland, Homelessness Prevention has been endorsed and funding for regional Housing Options Hubs has been made available to deliver similar prevention in challenging economic times.

### Incorporating Social Networks

Suzanne confirmed that this offers an opportunity for social networks to be incorporated into statutory homelessness assessments. Applying her research on The Glasgow hostel closures, Suzanne reflected on the positive impact of social networks on re-settled men when given purposeful opportunities and helped to re-engage with positive social networks

## Katey Tabner

Research Fellow, The Rock Trust



### **Developing Positive Social Networks: Research**

Katey reminded us that social networks practices in support and services, as endorsed by the Scottish Government, include befriending, mentoring, mediation and independent living skills. She underscored the potential these services have in alleviating the social isolation of homelessness and helping to build routes out of homelessness. It was also emphasised that this research is essential in understanding the progress towards the 2012 targets.

### Aims of Research

- Measuring the significance LAs and VCS place on social networks
- Gauge service providers' understanding of social networks
- Understand the key issues support services face in developing and promoting social networks
- Look at best practice in services
- Reflect on policy and financial implications of incorporating social networks into support services.

### Structure of Research

#### Stage 1

- Literature review of current policy, research and theory around key themes of the research;
- Survey, developed from the literature review and dispensed to all LAs and their support service partners. Total of 129 responses including at least one from each LA homelessness department;

- 64 one hour unstructured interviews with LAs and support providers.

#### Stage 2

- 12 month, in-field case studies in four LA areas;
- Working with 80 service user participants - 20 from each area;
- Employing service user researchers who will be trained and mentored to interview participants – 5 in each area;
- Entry/exit interviews establishing and reviewing needs and aspirations of service users.

### What are Social Networks?

Utilising Lemos (2002), in pinning down a definition of positive social networks, Katey determined these are lasting, mutual and reciprocal, and beneficial to individual wellbeing. Social networks can also be **formal**, (service user and support worker). Often these are temporary and non-reciprocal. However, they can link service users to the wider community and ease isolation.

**Informal** family and friend relationships offer more opportunities for reciprocity and exchange and are more likely to be mutual. Positive outcomes will result from (re)building a balance of these formal and informal relationships.

### Relationship Types

Katey also provided a typology of relationships which help people to engage on a practical level, provide support and build resilience:

- Bonding - Informal relationships such as family and friends
- Bridging – Institutional relationships including employment
- Linking – Access to institutional support such as doctor and dentist

### Social Capital

Subsequently, social networks provide individuals with social capital to deal with life's complications. These are:

- Social Capital - Benefits of knowing people
- Economic Capital - Assets at your disposal
- Cultural Capital - Knowing how to behave in certain situations

### Analysis

Significantly, the survey revealed that although practitioners tended to support formal relationships, LAs and VCS felt that providing mentoring, independent living skills (ILS), befriending or mediation, offered best value for service users:

- 68% of respondents felt these provided Best Value
- 62% of respondents felt that developing informal social networks helped maintain tenancies

Cross analysis revealed that ILS was most utilised by support services. Nevertheless, evidence from the survey highlights that, mentoring and befriending had greater success in tenancy sustainment than the more widely used ILS:

- 89.9% successful tenancies through ILS
- 94.7% successful tenancies through befriending
- 93.6% successful tenancies through mentoring
- 86.2% successful tenancies through mediation

Katey's report – "Overview of 2010 Survey Findings is available at [http://www.scottishsocialnetworks.org/event\\_reports](http://www.scottishsocialnetworks.org/event_reports)

## Round Table Discussions

### Discussion 1: Implications of the findings

Delegates were positive regarding social networks but also flagged up many challenges.

A concern was how to deal with **negative social networks** and **chaotic lifestyles**. Although, delegates flagged up challenges, it was also suggested that a recovery/substance misuse model could be utilised in certain circumstances.

Delegates believed that the research demonstrated the need for a **multi-agency, holistic approach**.

Another factor raised was that **homelessness stigma** presented significant challenges to building positive social networks.

**Best practice** also figured high up in the minds of delegates and many wondered how this could be achieved in relation to social networks.



## Jim Anderson

Policy Advisor,  
Scottish Government



### **Housing Options: an overview**

#### Why Housing Options?

Jim Anderson offered an extensive background into Housing Options (HO). Jim informed delegates that moves towards prevention have been accelerated by a combination of 2012 targets and lack of housing supply. A key objective of the joint 2012 SG/COSLA Steering Group aims to assist LAs to achieve the 2012 target. Furthermore, Housing Options will not undermine Scotland's unique

statutory rights but will prevent needless homelessness. Jim believes that Housing Options offer a 'viable suitable option' which permits LAs to look at outcomes as opposed to the statutory homelessness process.

#### Making Housing Options Official

The Minister for Housing and Communities has enabled funding of £500,000 for Housing Options. To take this forward, COSLA and the Scottish Government have sought an equitable solution to share funding between 32 LAs. An enthusiastic response from LAs, RSLs and VCS, culminated in 5 LAs offering to take a lead in the hubs:

- North Ayrshire
- Highland
- Edinburgh
- East Dunbartonshire
- Perth and Kinross

It was decided that Hubs would be set up on a regional basis. Each hub will set out plans, based on their regional needs. 4 of the 5 hubs have submitted action plans

for funding and 3 have been approved.

#### The Way Forward

Jim advised delegates that as part of this process, independent evaluation of Hubs is paramount to gauge and drive future success. The Hubs will act independently, but quarterly reports should help develop and share good practice. A noteworthy resource will be the Housing Options website and Jim encouraged delegates to join this sub-community and hopes this will aid transparency and facilitates a forum for discussion.

[www.communities.idea.gov.uk](http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk)

#### Social Networks

As these Regional Hubs are intended to offer outcomes, Jim recognised that a holistic approach will offer the best outcomes for service users. Jim, in line with Katey and Suzanne, believes that incorporating social networks will help establish positive resolutions, resulting in improved sustainment and individual wellbeing.

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## Janeine Barrett

Principle Officer,  
North Ayrshire Council



### **Housing Options in Practice**

Principal Officer, Janeine, revealed the achievements that North Ayrshire LA has had by using a Housing Options approach. Pre-Housing Options, the cost of homelessness, repeat homelessness and B&B use had spiralled. Also, a lack of housing supply prolonged the duration of homelessness. To alleviate the problems, North Ayrshire looked towards England's Housing Options approach.

The implications of North Ayrshire's Homelessness characteristics led them to focus on:

- Youth prevention and support services
- Housing Support
- Advice and Information
- Tenancy Support
- Mediation and Family Support
- Guaranteed Rent Deposit Schemes (PRS)

Offering these in a centralised service, with trained staff, has empowered clients to command their own aspirations.

Understanding long term aspirations, merging this with realistic advice and treating homelessness as a last option has led to impressive outcomes.

A member of Janeine's staff defined what this means for service users:

***“Service Users are provided with realistic, clear and transparent housing options empowering them to make informed choices to respond to their housing need”.***

As a significant proportion of homeless presentations were within the 16 to 21 age group, North Ayrshire trained their staff in mediation skills and helped prevent homelessness by

encouraging mutual flexibility and understanding in familial relationships. After quantifiable accomplishments, this was extended to the 16 to 25 group. Through embedding social network considerations in assessments, over 70% of 16-25 year olds presenting as homeless have been enabled to remain at home.

## Round Table Discussion

### Discussion 2: Approaches to Housing Options

This discussion arrived at several conclusions, including that Housing Options were already being practiced by several other LAs.

It was posited that different LAs required differing approaches.

Delegates discussed what their own LA and VCS groups were doing in relation to prevention. e.g. specific arrangements being made for care leavers and supported accommodation for young people.

Although delegates were supportive of the concept of prevention, concerns were raised regarding the Private Rented Sector.

Turning Point Scotland expressed concerns about how easy it is to secure accommodation and they advocated Assertive outreach as a form of support.



### Katey Tabner Research Fellow, Rock Trust

**Assessment and Prevention** Katey's research raises important questions around embedding social networks in assessments. In light of figures for tenancy sustainment and best value, incorporating social networks would offer best value in service delivery. Most people enter homelessness after the breakdown of key anchor relationships. This can lead to social exclusion and marginalisation from wider communities. Entrenchment within the margins can lead to the formation of negative social networks and social networks with reduced social capital, hindering routes out of homelessness. As current homelessness assessments are focussed on meeting statutory duties, such as securing temporary accommodation or assessing access to benefits, social networks are rarely seen to be of immediate importance. However, Katey posits that by extending assessments to address social networks, there is an opportunity to ensure support is available to maintain these networks which are often needed to help people out of the margins and out of homelessness. By skilling staff with the tools to sensitively tease out social networks information, staff will be able to help service users to mobilise their social capital and enhance their wellbeing.



# Round Table Discussion

## Discussion 3. Assessment and Prevention

Delegates expressed concerns that although social networks might figure in tenders for service provision, were they really clearly understood?

Social networks should become part of homelessness officers' skills sets.

Social networks training should be available to all practitioners.

Is it appropriate to question people on their personal lives? Delegates liked the idea of using hypothetical questions to gauge social networks.

Effective joint working would enable comprehensive social networks assessments.

Delegates welcomed the incorporation of informal social networks into services.

Concerns were raised about support services being supplied by the voluntary sector alone.

There is a need for congenial, discrete, sensitive assessors who build and facilitate good relationships with service users.



## Deborah McAlpine

Contracts and Commissioning  
Officer  
West Lothian Council



## **Incorporation and Implementation of Social Networks**

Deborah highlighted that West Lothian has a relatively young population so it is not perhaps so surprising that of approximately 1,700 homelessness presentations per year, around half are under 25 years old.

As a result, West Lothian has developed a strategy - **'whose problem is it anyway'**.

***"The solution to homelessness lies in a person centred approach and will require involvement from a range of agencies, including housing providers; professionals in health, social work, and education; the voluntary sector and employers"***.

Hence, West Lothian is keen to share assessments with other agencies to get a holistic profile of required support needs. Separate homelessness assessments are no longer used. In-house provision is refocusing on prevention with ideas and practice shared through the joint strategy group.

## Social Networks

Support for social networks is already an integral part of much of the provision in West Lothian. As part of West Lothian's approach, they have endorsed and provided their staff, through The Rock Trust, with social networks training. Like the North Ayrshire Housing Options approach, social networks have been given corporate recognition and training has been earmarked for valuable partners in the voluntary sector. Furthermore, a focus on self-directed support aims to reconfigure empowerment for service users and support social networks development.

## Ally Calder

**Youth Development Manager  
The Rock Trust**



Ally confirmed that the seminar had been fruitful in advancing themes around social networks which are vital in aiding those faced with homelessness. She contended that the presentations and discussions revealed that there ought to be an understanding of social networks in local authorities and in the voluntary sector with an agreed

description. This would mean everyone is working to the same principals.

Ally re-stated that the practical results of training staff, as in North Ayrshire and West Lothian, are positive and give quantifiable outcomes. The Rock Trust Social Network training incorporates social capital, transition theory, attachment theory and resilience models. As an extension of these important theoretical expositions, the Rock trust have developed skills training which provide workers with ideal techniques to investigate relationships and personal narratives in a sensitive manner. These skills enhance confidence for workers to explore the often challenging social networks of service users.

A significant development has been that this training is being extended to service users and to their peer support. A particularly pleasing aspect of the day was that The Rock Trust has been approached by several organisations to provide this training for staff and service users.

Ally confirmed that to take this forward staff, like those in West Lothian, should be equipped so that Housing Options function in a manner that is person centred and holistic. Ally encouraged delegates to take up the training, help Social Network development in their organisations and with their service users and see just how much of a difference it can make.

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## Ailsa Stewart

**Glasgow School of Social  
Work,  
Strathclyde University**



Ailsa determined that social networks development is vital in tackling homelessness and more generally has an impact on the whole social care sector. A focus on empowering people by providing supports, allows individuals to take control of their own lives. The changing balance of the care agenda in Scotland is shifting responsibility from the statutory sector to the voluntary sector and to people themselves.

This aims to enable individuals to achieve their own aspirations.

### Key Themes

Ailsa argued that there are several key themes which will affect the development of social networks. These included:

- Fluid practice and policy context in Scotland
- Shift from crisis management to preventative policy
- Self-directed support model which determines the responsibilities of service users
- Financial constraints
- What is being prioritised?

Ailsa also noted that to successfully embed social networks in services, this requires:

- Assessment and review of social networks
- Training the workforce to handle challenging discussions about individual social networks
- Integrated working and information sharing between statutory and voluntary services
- Identify service gaps

Research can help pin down what social networks are without being overly prescriptive.

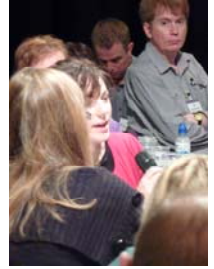
The next stage of the research aims to uncover good practice models to share pragmatically across the country.



# Discussion, Question & Answer Session

## 1. Will prevention methods miss people who require assessment and support?

Janeine Barrett *"The number of people coming through the door is 4,000 and homelessness is an option for all of those people... It's just that 3,000 of them are going down the Housing Options route, so no, I'm quite satisfied that we're not missing anybody".*



## 2. How does the single shared assessment work?.

Kirsty Smeaton-Brown *"Information's on a shared database and this is shared with other services. If referred to another service all details are passed on and this avoids over assessment".*

## 3. In terms of social networks, will the research be looking at return on investment?



Katey Tabner *"It will be examined... through the interviews, getting a general idea of the levels of enthusiasm for the services at each LA and support-providers. I'd also like to drive home that there is a lot of contemporary research into the value of investing in social networks. An old adage holds true that "a little now saves in the long-term"*

## 4. Ann Rosengard enquires where social networks will fit in to assessments. She asks the panel to consider over assessment and self-directed support.

Katey Tabner *"It's a challenge...we're trying to quantify something that's qualitative and we're also doing that within the framework of individually-led support plans. I think we need to be aware of that if we're going to try and standardise social network support. Is it a formulaic matrix, or a method, or is it an awareness of social networks?"*

Janeine Barrett *"I said in my presentation the relationship that we now have with customers is not about us problem-solving - it's about empowering them to make decisions for themselves."*

Deborah McAlpine *"I think that's something West Lothian's reflecting on. It's about dialogue we have with customers and what their expectation is. It's being transparent about what the availability is and empowering individuals to make life choices that are relevant for them".*



## 5. Erica Burberry, CHAI: Can social networks succeed when the focus is on one-to-one interventions (mediation, befriending and mentoring) rather than addressing the issues that are there in the wider community?"

Katey Tabner *"The research focus is on mentoring, mediation and befriending, I think that reflects what's available but I wouldn't say the research exclusively promotes only these. I think it promotes an approach which understands the wider implications of social networks".*

Kate Polson *"Social networks are also about commonalities... not just the individual but about people actually engaging with the wider community".*

