

Homelessness prevention project, Gloucestershire

Project dates: 2007–2010

Who better to engage teenagers than other young people with first-hand experience? That's the imaginative route this project will take to prevent teenage homelessness.

Advice from those who really know

The story of a young person, driven by problems at school to run away, is acted out in front of a group of pupils. Young people in a residential children's home hear directly from a care leaver who used to sleep rough. Pupils watch a film made by teenagers who know the tough truth about homelessness because it's happened to them.

These are some of the ways our peer educator project tells young people about the realities of homelessness.

Whether a young person has school or family problems, or is leaving care for independence, our peer educators will use their inside knowledge to help.

Targeting schools in Gloucestershire and focusing on some of the county's most vulnerable teenagers, specially trained young people will turn their own experiences of homelessness into a positive, preventative service for others.



Photo: Steve Hall

Our peer educators will pass on their first-hand experience of homelessness. These young people will send a powerful message about homelessness to others who are 'at risk'.

Project summary

- This project aims to prevent teenage homelessness in Gloucestershire.
- It will build on Shelter's highly successful Ricochet peer education project in Rotherham.
- Peer educators will use their first-hand experience to pass on information and advice in credible and compelling ways.
- Venturing not only into schools, but also care homes and young offenders' units, the project will offer vital help to hard-to-reach and high-risk young people.

Shelter Keys to the Future



Bridging the gap between young people and professionals

We will:

- train and support 20 young people as peer educators
- communicate the risks and effects of homelessness to thousands of schoolchildren, as well as more vulnerable young people such as offenders or those living in care
- make sure teenagers are directed to sources of advice and help, and are educated about alternatives to running away
- identify from among our audiences any young people facing immediate risks of homelessness, caused by problems such as unhappiness at home or at school
- provide valuable peer support in small groups for young people most at risk of homelessness.

Breaking new ground

The project will take exciting new approaches to reach and engage young people.

By taking advice and information not only into schools, but to young people excluded from school, in supported lodgings, residential children's homes and young offender institutions, our peer educators will make direct contact with hard-to-reach groups who face a high risk of homelessness.

They will make sure young people are aware of services and sources of help they wouldn't normally access. By signposting them to housing and homelessness advice services that they can use at any time in the future, the project will help prevent young people suffering from homelessness as young adults.

Peer support

The contact peer educators make with young people will just be a start. Any young people who have immediate problems, or who encounter problems later, will be able to receive direct help and advice in small peer-support groups. These will make them aware of the alternatives to running away, by signposting them to other organisations – such as family support or anti-bullying projects – that can intervene positively in their lives.

'Young people who have been homeless themselves have a credibility going into a school or young offender unit that a teacher or homelessness worker simply can't aspire to.'

Project organiser, Ali Hendley

Compelling communication

We will use multimedia and drama to create compelling ways of communicating the facts about homelessness. Our peer educators will make films for DVD that we will use to reach still wider audiences. And young people will be able to get in touch with us at any point later on by email or text message.



'If we'd had this peer education thing when we were at school, I don't think any of us would be homeless. You'd know where to go and what to do.'

Formerly homeless teenager

What we hope to achieve over three years...

- prevent young people from becoming homeless
- direct young people who are leaving home to services that can help them plan the move
- improve the job prospects of peer educators through training and experience
- ensure a better understanding of the needs of homeless teenagers among statutory and voluntary organisations
- create a well-tested and evaluated model of peer support for others to use.

...and how

- 6,000 young people will be educated on housing and homelessness, and will be directed to advice and support services
- 120 of these will receive peer support to help them with school, family or other problems that can lead to homelessness
- 20 peer educators will have the chance to study for a BTEC or NVQ in peer education.

Working with young offenders to prevent homelessness reduces the risk of them re-offending.