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Rebuilding Lives: Training and employment

Policy and Practice briefing
January 2016

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Rebuilding Lives is the largest UK study to have examined the experiences of homeless people who have been rehoused through planned resettlement programmes, and the only study to have followed up formerly homeless people for five years after they were rehoused.

Five years after being resettled, many participants had made considerable progress in rebuilding their lives. They were settled in their accommodation, had created a home, and some were involved in education, training programmes or had attained employment. For several, family and social relationships had improved and some young people had started their own family. Many remained vulnerable, however, and required long-term or intermittent support in order to sustain a tenancy and prevent further homelessness.

This briefing focuses on the participants' experiences of training and employment. It proposes a number of recommendations for managers and staff involved in designing and delivering job-skills training for vulnerable people, and for staff who work with homeless and formerly homeless people.

Key findings:

- Since being resettled, the number of young people involved in education, training or employment (ETE) gradually increased. After five years, very few people aged in their forties and fifties were working.
- Many participants identified employment as the most important factor in terms of enhancing their quality of life and providing hope for the future.
- Some participants worked casually or under 'zero-hours' contracts – their working hours were irregular, their income was low, and this contributed to their financial difficulties.
- Many participants who were not working or engaged in other ETE activities tended to have enduring and complex problems.
- Some participants attended the Work Programme but infrequently, and perceived this as a requirement to receive their social security benefit rather than as a stepping stone to employment.



About Rebuilding Lives

Rebuilding Lives is a study of the longer-term outcomes for formerly homeless people who were resettled into independent housing in London, Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire. Building on an earlier study (FOR-HOME) which investigated the experiences of 400 formerly homeless people during the first 18 months post-resettlement, Rebuilding Lives attempted to contact after five years those participants who were housed and interviewed at 18 months. Of the potential 297 participants, 237 were interviewed (224 were housed and 13 were homeless); 17 were contacted but declined an interview; 14 had died or were in prison; and 29 could not be traced. Interviews took place in 2013-14.

The Rebuilding Lives study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Social Care Research, and was carried out by Maureen Crane, Louise Joly and Jill Manthorpe, from the Social Care Workforce Research Unit at the Policy Institute at King's College London. It was undertaken in collaboration with five homelessness sector organisations: Centrepoin, Framework Housing Association, St Anne's Community Services, St Mungo's, and Thames Reach. Photo courtesy of St Mungo's.

About the Policy Institute at King's

The Policy Institute at King's College London acts as a hub, linking insightful research with rapid, relevant policy analysis to stimulate debate, inform and shape policy agendas. Building on King's central London location at the heart of the global policy conversation, our vision is to enable the translation of academic research into policy and practice by facilitating engagement between academic, business and policy communities around current and future policy needs, both in the UK and globally. We combine the academic excellence of King's with the connectedness of a think tank and the professionalism of a consultancy.

About the Social Care Workforce Research Unit

The Social Care Workforce Research Unit (SCWRU) at King's College London is funded by the Department of Health Policy Research Programme and a range of other funders to undertake research on adult social care and its interfaces with housing and health sectors and complex challenges facing contemporary societies.

The Homelessness Research Programme is based within SCWRU. It includes studies of: the causes of homelessness; the problems and needs of homeless and formerly homeless people; transitions through and exits from homelessness; and evaluations of services for homeless people. The programme also has a role in influencing the development of policies and services to prevent and alleviate homelessness. More information can be found online at:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/scwru/res/hrp/index.aspx>

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Findings and what needs to happen

Participation in education, training and employment

Since being resettled, the number of participants involved in ETE had gradually increased. At five years:

- ♦ **43%** were involved in one or more ETE activities, compared to **28%** when first resettled.
- ♦ **14%** were in full-time employment, and another **13%** were working part-time or employed casually.
- ♦ **9%** were attending a ‘welfare-to-work’ training programme; **7%** were doing voluntary work; and **7%** were attending an educational or vocational course.
- ♦ Young people were more likely to be involved in ETE activities – **65%** aged in their twenties were involved in ETE, including **53%** who were working.
- ♦ Since being resettled, few people aged in their forties and fifties had moved into work. Only about one-third in these age groups were involved in any ETE activity.

The importance of employment

Many participants identified employment as the most important factor in terms of enhancing their quality of life and providing hope for the future. They believed that having a stable and secure job which offered opportunities was crucial in assisting them to achieve financial stability and move forward with their lives.

Help to get into employment or training or to obtain more secure employment was the most common unmet need reported by the participants.

‘Working keeps me out of trouble and stops me craving for alcohol ... Have a routine when working – eating, bathing, working. More pride and energy. Feel better about myself. After a day’s hard work I feel satisfied.’

The participants identified various ways that they had benefited from involvement in ETE:

- ♦ Acquired knowledge, skills and qualifications.
- ♦ Financial benefits for many who were working.
- ♦ Social benefits – interacting with other people; communication skills improved; made new friends.
- ♦ Psychological benefits – improved confidence and self-worth; provides a structure and purpose in life.

Participants who were engaged in ETE by the time that they were resettled were more likely to be engaged in ETE five years post-resettlement. They were also more likely than those not involved in ETE to believe that they were achieving positive things, and were less likely to report low morale and depression.

‘I feel elated sometimes doing voluntary work. Able to interact with other people. Renewed my interest in gardening and now I’ve enrolled on a [specialist] gardening course’.

What needs to happen

Wherever possible, homeless people should be involved in ETE activities before they are resettled. Hostels and other services for homeless people should be closely linked to employment and training provision.

More effective ways need to be developed by tenancy support and housing support workers to encourage formerly homeless people to take part in education, training, volunteering or employment once they have settled in independent accommodation. This should be done in collaboration with specialist training and work preparation schemes – who need to be committed to working with homelessness services.

Specialist help around training and employment

Many homeless and formerly homeless people have problems and disadvantages that create barriers to them accessing training and employment opportunities. Many of the Rebuilding Lives participants who were not working or engaged in other ETE activities tended to have complex problems and needs – many had long histories of homelessness, few qualifications or job skills, long periods of unemployment, and mental health or substance misuse problems:

- ♦ **73%** had mental health problems
- ♦ **38%** had alcohol problems and **42%** drug problems
- ♦ **34%** had never worked or been mostly unemployed
- ♦ many lacked the confidence and self-belief that they could cope with employment.

The Work Programme

Twenty nine participants attended the government's Work Programme during the 12 months prior to their five-year interview. However, only three people (10%) had subsequently gained employment.

The majority who were still involved in the Work Programme when interviewed were aged in their forties and fifties, and had complex problems and needs (described above). Some were attending just once or twice a month, and perceived this as a requirement to receive their social security benefit rather than as a stepping stone towards employment.



'I'm worried that I could be in a job for a couple of months and then depression hits me. I can't go back on the building sites because of my health so I need a total change of career. Not sure what I could do – I've only worked on building sites and not used to anything else.'

'I left home when I was young and my whole adult life has revolved around homelessness, drinking and drugs. I've never had a normal life or a normal job. I get panic attacks and am worried about being around people. I avoid things that take me out of my comfort zone.'

What needs to happen

More specialist job-skills training and job placement services with support should be available to prepare vulnerable people for entry into employment. Ongoing support should be available to vulnerable people once they have started a job, training course or similar.

Staff in the DWP and its partner agencies should consider reviewing the situation of people aged in their late fifties and early sixties who attend the Work Programme, but have enduring and complex needs and little realistic prospect of gaining employment. Discussions should take place about whether DWP advisers in collaboration with tenancy support workers should channel their efforts into trying to engage this group in purposeful but potentially less stressful activities, such as volunteering programmes, rather than in trying to prepare them for work.

The insecurity of casual work and zero-hours contracts

Many participants were keen to work, but finding a steady job with sufficient hours was not easy. Some worked casually or under 'zero-hours' contracts – their working hours were irregular, their income was low, and this contributed to financial difficulties (see Policy and Practice briefing: Finances and welfare benefits). Most would have preferred to work more hours but these were unavailable.

Although zero-hours contracts may offer flexibility to both employers and workers and may suit the circumstances of some people, such insecure hours can be problematic for those who have no other source of income and are trying to re-establish themselves and live independently after a period of homelessness.

Among the participants who were employed casually or under zero-hours contracts:

- Their median weekly income (£124) was considerably lower than that of those employed full-time or part-time (£277 and £184 respectively).
- Their median weekly income was lower than that of those who were unemployed once rent and council tax payments made by participants were deducted, as those unemployed were more likely to receive housing and council tax subsidies.
- They had considerably higher median debts than other participants (£1,500, compared to £675 for those working full-time and £400 for those unemployed).
- Several experienced problems with their social security benefits and Housing Benefit claims when they started a job or the work ended.

The full report, *Rebuilding Lives: Formerly homeless people's experiences of independent living and their longer-term outcomes*, is available online at:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/res/hrp/hrp-studies/rebuilding.aspx>

Other Policy and Practice briefings on: Finances and welfare benefits; Housing matters; and Mental health matters are also available online at the same link

'I was on a zero-hours contract and only got a few hours work. I did not know when I was going to get called for work ... when the shop was busy I would get six or seven days' work, but when it was quiet I would get just two or three days. I had to leave as I was getting less and less work, and could not afford to pay my rent. I was only on the minimum wage and sometimes I would not work for a whole week.'

'Since I've started work I'm getting more and more into debt ... I'm no better working than when I was on JSA as I now have to pay full council tax and more towards my rent ... I have a zero-hours contract and only get paid for the hours I do. This week there is no work for me ... If I don't get work for a month what do I do?'

What needs to happen

Assistance should be given to formerly homeless people by Jobcentre staff and other employment resources to help them access jobs with regular hours that meet their needs, rather than being reliant on casual employment or zero-hours contracts.

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