UK Housing Awards 2011
Outstanding Achievement in Housing – Wales: Finalist

Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, North Wales Housing, Cartrefi Conwy, The Bus Stop Project, Youth Homelessness Outreach Project: Going It Alone

Summary

‘Going it alone?’ is a bilingual, young person friendly resource on independent living. It provides essential information on what a young person needs to consider before making the move to independent living, and signposts expert agencies in their area for further information and guidance. Throughout the resource, the emphasis is on a planned, supported move into independence, and encourages young people to fully consider all their options and the realities of ‘Going it Alone’. The resource consists of a comprehensive leaflet,
a signposting card and, currently being developed, a free ‘app’ for mobile phones.

‘Going it alone’ is a partnership project between The Bus Stop Project, Youth Homeless Outreach Project, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, North Wales Housing and Cartrefi Conwy.

What did you set out to achieve?

The Bus Stop Project, an information service for young people in Conwy, identified that they did not have any information, aimed at young people, which provided practical advice on independent living. Conducting some initial research online, they were unable to find anything that they felt suitable to use on board the project, plenty of information was available on many of the issues of independent living, but none of it was all together, in a format they could give out and talk through with young people accessing their service.

Following further research, the partnership was inspired by the Shelter Cymru report 'In the know but not in education? - Early housing advice interventions with young people excluded from mainstream education', which recommended “organisations should develop new collaborations in order to bring specialist housing and homelessness advice to young people who would currently be missed through existing interventions”. The report also recommended addressing the following issues: lack of awareness of difficulties when living independently, lack of awareness of housing options, housing rights and homelessness, insufficient independent living skills, lack of awareness of where to go for housing advice, and relationship breakdown.

The partnership now had a clear goal: to develop a tool which would raise a young person's awareness of the realities of independent living, and provide practical information on housing options, tenancies, budgeting, and most importantly, who they should contact in their local area that could help them if things were going wrong. The target audience for the project would young people (14-25) who may be considering living independently, and in particular, those young people highlighted in the Shelter Cymru report as most at risk, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

How were these aims and objectives met?

To reach as many young people as possible, in particular those who were (NEET), the resource needed to be relevant to young people, provide the right information, and presented in a format that was accessible and effective. To achieve this, the Partnership understood it was crucial to involve a wide cross section of young people in the development of the project, including those that were hard to reach. The key to the success of the project was in its extensive consultation methods.

- Consultation on the Bus Stop Project – the Bus Stop Project consulted
with young people throughout Conwy on their understanding of housing issues and their opinions on different styles and designs of a variety of leaflets. This provided extensive information enabling the development of a prototype, incorporating all the young peoples’ suggestions.

- Consultation with NEET groups – Through existing Youth Homeless Outreach projects for young people who are NEET or have experienced homelessness, those traditionally hard to reach were able to contribute to the leaflet. From the benefit of these young peoples’ experiences, the leaflet accurately reflected the issues young people face and addressed fundamental issues.

- Youth Information Festival – The partnership took the prototype to mass consultation. The event brought together young people from across the county and relevant partnership agencies. 125 young people and 29 agencies attended the event. The partnership consulted with 90 young people on the prototype leaflet, providing hugely significant feedback on the style, content and effectiveness of the leaflet.

- Consultation with expert partners – Following editing to incorporate the opinions and needs of all the young people consulted, the partnership circulated the draft leaflet and signposting card to a wide range of expert agencies and partners for final consultation, ensuring accuracy and full representation of available services in the area.

What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

Having overcome the obstacle of ensuring proper representation of young local peoples needs and opinions, the Partnership then had to address how to ensure that the resource reached as many of its target audience as possible. Shelter Cymru’s report ‘In the know but not in education’ evaluated a number of delivery methods for their effectiveness. The partnership, on these recommendations decided the most effective methods of delivering the resource to young people would be through:

- School and College sessions run by the Bus Stop Project and the Youth Homeless Outreach Worker
- The Bus Stop Project as a youth information service
- Promotion by partnership agencies in contact with young people
- A Peer Education Programme.

The partnership also had conflicting concerns with the amount of information to give in the leaflet. During the consultation with expert partners, a number of comments suggested going into more specific detail in certain areas, for example about benefit entitlements. Whilst the partnership wanted to give a comprehensive guide to all the potential issues surrounding independent living, it wanted to avoid giving information that would date quickly, and more importantly, the leaflets aim was to raise awareness on the realities of
independent living and then direct young people to local expert agencies for in-depth advice.

The Partnership consulted extensively on the project, it involved as many young people and as many agencies as possible. It considered and took on board every comment and suggestion made, but ultimately, to represent the young people who had contributed so significantly to the project, particularly those of who have experienced difficulties of independent living, the Partnership felt that it must hold the opinions and needs of the young people as paramount.

How was the success of the project measured?

The results below are excerpts from our project evaluations’ and clearly confirm we achieved our objectives’: to develop a constructive, relevant resource for young people on independent living.

Youth Information Festival Consultation Results

- 81% of young people asked if the leaflet was easy to read answered: “yes, could easily read the whole leaflet”
- 90% of young people asked if the language used was easy to understand answered: “Yes, I understand all the words in the leaflet”
- 62% of young people asked about the amount of information answered: “There is the right amount of information”
- 80% of young people asked about the layout answered: “I like it” and included comments such as “Fun, innovative and eye catching”, “Easy to find your way around” and “It tells you what you need to know in order”.
- 82% of young people asked about the graphics answered: “I like them” and included comments such as “Makes it more appealing to our age”, I found the use of the darkened pictures interesting as they allow anybody to claim ownership and relate to the information”, and “They are relevant”.
- 73% of young people asked how helpful / useful they found the leaflet answered: “Very, it has given me lots of information I wouldn’t have known before”.
- 93% of young people asked if there was anything else that should be included answered: “I think you have covered everything”.

Going It Alone Leaflet Launch Evaluation

“Each person who attended the event and completed an evaluation form thinks that the leaflet and associated card is a good idea, and the leaflet has been very well received by all. From the evaluation forms, we can see that 100% of delegates who attended the launch feel that the leaflet will be a useful tool within their organisation.”

“The comments received were extremely positive, with delegates commenting on the previous lack of information that the leaflet and card fills. It was noted that the partnership work carried out to produce the leaflet was extremely
effective, and an example of good practice for all organisations. The consensus was the leaflet would be invaluable in providing support through information to young people who are thinking of, or already are, living independently. A number of delegates hoped both the project and partnership work conducted will encourage organisations across Wales to develop similar projects”.

What were the key positive outcomes?

**Partnership Working**: There is significant evidence from the feedback received, that one of the key areas of the projects credibility and success, was in its partnership working. The bringing together of expert local agencies to produce the leaflet has ensured the resource is accurate, relevant to its target audience and accessible. The project has developed extremely positive and effective working links with partnership agencies, significantly raising awareness of resources available in Conwy.

**Effective Consultation**: Through extensive, genuine consultation, the partnership produced a resource truly representative of the needs of a wide cross section of young local people. By using a variety of different methods to consult, young people, in particular those who are NEET, or have experienced homelessness, have been able to raise awareness of the issues they have faced, ensuring other young people will now receive relevant information previously unavailable.

**Accessible Formats**: The bilingual leaflet provides comprehensive practical advice in a format easy to understand. The leaflet is easily replicated as it was deliberately designed ‘non-area specific’, enabling other areas to also use the resource, who could then adapt the signposting card containing contact details of relevant local agencies to reflect the services in their specific area. The resource will also soon be available as a bilingual ‘app’ for mobile telephones, where young people will be able to download the resource free and access at any time.

**Ongoing Promotion**: The project has directly resulted in the development of a peer education programme and the North Wales Community Education Forum. The Peer Education Programme will enable young people who have experienced issues with independent living, to train and qualify as Peer Educators and work alongside the Youth Homeless Outreach Worker to deliver the ‘Going it Alone’ message to young people in Schools, Colleges, Pupil Referrals Units, and Youth Groups.

How does your project help address either a current challenge, faced by many providers, or meet a current priority in your part of the UK?

The devastating, far-reaching affects of youth homelessness is not only a major issue within Wales, but throughout the UK. Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion, and can have an overwhelming
impact on a young person. Without proper knowledge and skills to live independently, a young person is at serious risk of becoming homeless.

As a preventative measure, the Peer Education method of delivering the ‘Going it Alone’ resource to under 18’s, will raise the awareness early on of the issues surrounding independent living. For those thinking about/ currently living independently, or experiencing housing issues, the resource provides practical advice and guidance on all aspects, and directs the young person to the proper agencies for further help.

The Welsh Assembly Governments ‘Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales’ 2009, and subsequently Conwy County Borough Councils’ ‘Homelessness in Conwy – A Strategic Direction’ 2011 state the following should be put into practice: “Prevention work beginning as early as possible, including education work with all young people, to help them understand the risks of homelessness and how they can be avoided.”

Welsh Housing Quarterly in February 2011 recommended the following as a good practice approach to preventing Youth Homelessness, “Information and advice may need to be provided in different ways to young people, whether through material specifically aimed at this group or by the delivery of specialist services”.

The Partnership believes that the ‘Going it Alone’ resource and consequent Peer Education Scheme absolutely responds to these recommendations.

Is your project influencing the way other providers work, will it help deliver improvements beyond those immediately involved?

Below is a quote from Rhian Jones, Education Coordinator for Shelter Cymru and author of ‘In the know but not in education? - Early housing advice interventions with young people excluded from mainstream education’, on the wider reaching effectiveness of the Going it Alone resource. “Shelter’s Education Coordinator works closely with a range of partners to ensure that young people across Wales gain access to high quality and consistent information about the transition into independent living” – WHQ Feb 2011

“Shelter Cymru’s Education Service is proud to support the Going it Alone initiative as it is an excellent example of how leaving home education should be delivered in Wales. The project complements Housemate, the all-Wales education resources, by offering targeted and local information that can be replicated in other areas in Wales.

The rationale for Going it Alone is based on young people’s own perceptions of their housing information needs and the depth and quality of consultation on the booklet is highly commendable. Shelter Cymru's Education Service will be producing a leaving home education guide for organisations and Local Authorities across Wales during summer 2011 and will promote Going it Alone as an example of exceptional good practice.
We look forward to joining the North Wales Education Forum in autumn this year. This has come about as a direct result of the Going it Alone initiative and will influence a broad range of stakeholders across North Wales who have the potential to inform thousands of young people about housing issues and independent living. Going it Alone is also represented on the Welsh Government's all-Wales Education Advisory Group.”