

The Informed

The newsletter for the residents of
Irish Centre Housing

Issue 13

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READY FOR WORK

Our first year of working with Business Action on Homelessness (BAOH) has proved to be a great success, which has recently resulted in two of our residents getting full time jobs. Launched in 1998, BAOH is a partnership between business, homeless agencies and the Government. The aim is to break the vicious cycle of 'no job, no home', through helping homeless people to find employment and achieve independent living.

The *Ready for Work Program*, has proved to be a big hit with residents and features work experience at its core. It offers practical support throughout different stages of the search for a job – and afterwards too.

Initially there is the *Ready to Go* two-day pre-work experience "confidence booster" to give clients an intro back into the world of work.

A two-week *Work Placement* gives the client some real work experience in a real work place (which can sometimes be extended to four weeks.)

Action Day is the Monday immediately after the placement ends and is designed to be a motivating experience to encourage clients to apply for permanent work.

CSN is a post-placement support evening for those who are still looking for a new job.

Job Coaching provides a six-month mentor to those in work – and those still searching – which provides extra support and understanding to aid the clients ability to sustain a job.

Meaningful Occupation Worker, Natasha Gray commented, "Not only have residents enjoyed their 2 week work placements, two residents have also been offered employment through their continued involvement with BAOH's Ready for Work program, which has proved to



Ayan Awale from Bethany House and Irene Damata from St Louise

be a big hit with residents. This proves that working in collaboration with external agencies brings positive outcomes for all those involved, so congratulations to all who have had a chance to become involved."

Real Achievements

Ayan Awale arrived at Bethany House in May last year. She enthusiastically attended all BAOH courses and volunteer programmes and now has a full time job on an NHS helpline. Her job started in March and in the first two weeks included some additional training. Her keyworker, Nicky Masters, says that, "She feels like she works to contribute to society and feels more fulfilled. She did not speak English when she arrived but now it is almost perfect. Ayan is an asylum seeker who has been granted the right to work ... and she is working. That's a very positive message."

18 year old Ayan is pleased with her progress, and declared that, "I received lots of help from Bethany House staff to get me started and the program has been really useful. I like my job."

Irene Damata, age 22, is a resident at St Louise and successfully completed the Ready for Work program. She has been at St Louise since November 2006 and was not working initially as

she was at college. Thanks to her dedication and hard work, in February 2007 she has got herself a job at Starbucks, which was where she had her work placement. She is also our first resident to be accepted into the Transitional Spaces Project (TSP) [see separate info below]. Irene has plenty to say on the subject, “The Ready for Work program has been the best thing ever; I was able to still claim my JSA (Job Seekers Allowance) whilst training for a job. I’m independent, I’m in control of myself, I’m an adult and I can save now! I would say to anyone reading this to *go for it*, to be as dedicated as you can and not to be scared. They look after you.”

She added, “The amazing thing about having a job is that you make friends and go out with them. I love the freedom ... and I no longer have to budget to buy clothes!”

Work Pays

One of the issues that hostel residents face is the loss of benefits when they start work. It is true that benefits will be reduced when work starts, but as long as residents work with their keyworker and advise the benefits agencies of any change to their circumstances there need not be an automatic loss of income. To help make the transition to employment easier, residents that have been receiving benefits continuously for 26 weeks before starting work are entitled to a 4-week full extension of their Housing Benefit (HB).

Transitional Spaces Project

Transitional Spaces Project is a pilot programme which is managed by Off the Streets and Into Work (OSW). The pilot will run from 2007-9, with funding of £2.6m from HM Treasury and the London Housing Foundation. The project will tackle the twin problems of ‘silt up’ and endemic unemployment in hostels and other forms of other supported accommodation, by providing an innovative model of coaching and financial support to help homeless individuals to find work and settled accommodation in the private rented sector.

To date at St Louise there have been four referrals which the resettlement worker *gate-keeps* and to date one resident has been assessed and accepted onto TSP. Referrals continue to be made by project workers who feel that they have residents who might get onto the program

One of ICH’s primary objectives for our hostel residents is to support them to develop their skills and motivation to move on to independent living. Becoming less dependent on benefits and more self-dependent by having a job is an outcome that ICH considers to be a great success.

The Informed asked ICH Rent Officer, Diane Pooley, to provide some examples of the financial impacts of working whilst receiving benefits and how much better off residents can be.

Example 1 – Weekly wage of £200 after tax (the money you take home) for St Louise resident age 25. This resident is still eligible for HB, but at a reduced rate so will need to pay a larger contribution towards their rent. Once this has been paid, their disposable income (the money you have left to spend on food, clothes and day to day living etc) will have increased by approximately £60 which is double the income available when claiming JSA.

Example 2 – Weekly wage of £150 after tax for a Townsend House resident age 20. Similar to example 1, after paying an increased contribution towards their rent, this resident would have almost £35 additional disposable income each week.

Diane asks us to point out that not correctly declaring income to the benefits agency is illegal. Since April 2006 residents are responsible for any overpayment that occurs and will need to pay this back themselves. If you move-on from ICH, the benefits agency has the means to track ex-residents for return of any overpayments. Failure to pay back money owed could result in a criminal record.

Clean Success

Congratulations to Leila Marie Judith for successfully solving the problem of the missing vacuum cleaners at St Louise. The resident’s vacuum cleaners were often not available when they were required, causing a real inconvenience for residents. Leila, a St Louise Resident Rep, came up with the idea of giving every resident a vacuum cleaner card which they exchange temporarily for a vacuum cleaner. This new system is a very simple idea and it has been working well since January to the benefit of all.

Customer Focus

It is ICH's intention to continually improve our resident's satisfaction with the services we provide ... *we need your help to achieve this.* We have been holding a number of meetings to hear your views.

Last year, our residents told us that these were the Top 10 most important aspects of the service:

1. The building security
2. The building cleanliness
3. Being treated with dignity and respect
4. Feeling safe and secure
5. ICH understands your needs
6. ICH values and supports diversity of peoples backgrounds and lifestyles
7. Talking to the right person
8. Efficiency and friendliness of your keyworker / warden
9. Having your issues dealt with in a timely manner
10. The time it takes to respond to reported maintenance work in your flat / room.

At the meetings, residents, staff and managers focus on this Top 10 combined with the overall satisfaction levels and work together to identify ways to make these services better. Our goal is to finish each meeting with an achievable list of carefully targeted actions which should lead to an improvement in your satisfaction. Many of the meetings have already been held and have been very successful. Some of the actions are simple and need little explanation, others need some development. When the remaining meetings are completed all actions will be collated, an owner assigned and we will report back on progress in the autumn.

Many thanks to everyone who have assisted us with the project.



Developing solutions at St Louise

Spring Clean for Conway House TV rooms

The residents' TV rooms at Conway House are looking much smarter since project worker Barbara Oppon and some of the residents gave them some well deserved care and attention. They wanted to give the rooms a homely feel.

The project got underway on 21st March and so many residents turned up that there was not enough work for everyone to do. They were all so enthusiastic that the following day when Barbara came to work they were all there ready and waiting for her.

The rooms each received a fresh coat of paint, green for the wet room and blue for the dry room. Everyone built the flat pack bookcases together. Some of the guys initially didn't know how to go about this, but by the time they were on to the second bookcase they were assembling them with real confidence. Barbara confided, "One of the residents said 'this is the first time I have done a good days work in years'. It was a memorable moment, as his eyes lit up when he said it."

Many thanks to everyone who participated. Three residents in particular helped from beginning to end; they were Abdi Hamid Mohamed, Patrick Moore and Robert Burns. Darren Forde, Mark Riddell, Waleed Fahim, and Abdelrouf Eltayeb also helped. All participants were rewarded with Sainsbury vouchers. Additional thanks are extended to the late Paul Starling who donated to the blue room, one of the artworks he had produced.

And finally, *The Informed* has learned that Conway House Manager, Rob Marland, made a bet with Barbara that there would be paint on the floor when the work was completed and that he would offer her a public apology if he was proved wrong. Barbara is pleased to say that there is no paint on either floor. Over to you then Rob ...!

Paul Starling

We regret to report that Paul sadly passed away on 5th May. He will be missed by staff and fellow residents at Conway House. We offer our sympathy to his family and friends.

Erstwhile Housing Officer Returns

The Informed has the great pleasure to introduce our new Housing Officer, Mifa Howard. In her own words, Mifa introduces herself to you.



Mifa Howard

“The Erstwhile Housing Officer Returns’ is hardly the latest must read publication from Richard & Judy’s Bookclub, but hey at the very least spare us a couple of minutes. As you may know Tyrone Black moved to greener pastures (Conway House), and in January 2007 I took up the post of Housing Officer. The principal objective in this post is the efficient management of ICH’s self-contained accommodation for tenants in our general needs stock and St Eugene Court. Whilst the main objective is to maximise collection of rents and a fast turn-over in letting vacant properties, I also supervise the support we provide in Brent.

Our general needs tenants with support needs, access help and assistance from our partner agency, St Mungo’s – The Tenant Sustainment Team. The latter holds a weekly advice/coffee morning at our Head Office, as well as being in phone contact with the tenants. That said, I am also available to tenants when the need arises.

In order to ensure that housing management service is on the ball, I work closely with all ICH departments, in particular the Resettlement Officers, as well as close liaison with external agencies.

The bulk of the general needs properties are within a mile radius of our Head Office, so they are easily accessible on foot, clocking up zero carbon foot prints, in keeping with our aspiration to be environmentally conscious.

Been there, done it, (still waiting on the T-shirt) would be an apt motto when it comes to my working experiences. They range from being a nurse to an Airline Operations Superintendent (what a job title), with a housing and welfare rights “door-step” sandwich. This included an earlier spell at ICH at the turn of the millennium, when I wore quite a few different hats!”

Mifa

Note from Editor:

The Cambridge English Dictionary says that Erstwhile means Former.

MOW update

In October 2006, we reported on the new services initiated by our Meaningful Occupation Worker, Natasha Gray. Here is an update on some of the new activities that are on offer.

Bite Size Tasters – ICH residents can now participate in St Mungo’s *bite size* programme. They are currently running a number of varied courses which recently included a gardening taster at Wisely Gardens which is run by the Royal Horticultural Society in Surrey. Another taster which was also held at the end of January was singing for women-only which proved popular with St Louise residents. Since then there have been 2 DJ bite size workshops. Most bite size courses are held at St Mungo’s Bridge Training Centre in Ladbroke Grove. Please see notice boards for further info or speak with your key worker for referrals.

Conway House Community Gardening Project (CHCGP) – December proved to be a fruitful month when the Boulevard Community Grant Scheme awarded us £3000 to develop and design the Conway House garden. The project seeks to involve volunteers from the local church and the local primary school, as well as residents and staff. So far Natasha has helped residents to kick-start the project with the trip to R.H.S Gardens at Wisley in Surrey to help give residents some inspiration in designing their garden. Since this trip we have had a further 2 meetings which has involved deciding on a garden design, plans will then be distributed

around the hostel giving all residents a chance to comment on the design.

Information Advice and Guidance from City Lit – Residents will have a chance to take part in group workshops. Please see hostel notice boards for further info.

Capital Arts – Events have included Ice-skating to frame decoration. Anyone interested in CA’s workshops or tours of London art galleries and museums please see timetables in hostels or speak to the Link Worker in your scheme.

Cardboard Citizens Drama Workshops - Cardboard Citizens’ LDA Opportunities Fund application was successful. The four strategic partners in their application were Irish Centre Housing, Centrepoint, Look Ahead and St Mungo’s. This means they are able to offer FREE performing arts workshops in hostels from May 2007 (for 2 years). Meetings will be held shortly to agree a programme of performing arts activities.

Business Action on Homelessness, Ready For Work – Details provided in our front page article.

Spinning Around ... and Around

On 21st February a party of ten residents plus staff from Bethany House went to the Tate Modern to see the Carsten Höller exhibition, before it closed on 15th April. It was a glorious winter day and they approached the museum from the north bank of the Thames and walked across the Millennium Bridge before having lunch.

The exhibition was an installation of tubular sculptural slides made of perspex and steel ... something quite space-age and reminiscent of



Carsten Höller exhibition

The Jetsons. The slides start at different floors of the museum and end up on the ground. You don’t have to ride the slides to appreciate the art ... but it does help! “They’re just like crazy helter skelters!”

Not solely content with the thrills of contemporary art, on the 29th March Bethany House residents headed off to Chessington World of Adventures. They travelled up by train directly to Chessington South Station from Waterloo and spent an exhilarating day at the zoo and on all the rides that were on offer. From



A moment of calm between rides

improving coordination skills on the dodgems, to enhancing reflexes with a burst of adrenaline on the Dragon’s Fury – everyone had a most enjoyable day. “We were luckily enough to go the week before half term and so the park was basically ours to hurtle round,” said Tessa Look, Lifeskills Worker who organised both trips. “The Vampire with it’s Flight of Fright proved to be a real favourite and the group took all the seats on a number of occasions – with your legs dangling down into ‘Transylvania’ the screams could be heard for miles!”

The trip was also a chance for residents to form new friendships with other residents they had not met before, although on the way home there was less chatting and more sleeping had by a group of exhausted adventurers.



All smiles at the start of the ride

Social Inclusion Progress

Brendan McConville, ICH's Dion funded Social Inclusion Worker, works with isolated or vulnerable, mostly Irish clients. These include ICH residents and residents from other housing associations such as Cara and Novas' Arlington House.



Snacking between meals

Featured here are the first in series of trips for the summer season. Brendan hopes to run around two events a month with other partner agencies. He says, "The purpose of the trips is to provide a contrast to the day-to-day hostel life by providing a positive change in environment away from the norm. They need something to break monotony."

On 19th April, ten residents from Conway House and Arlington House went on a canal boat from Camden to Little Venice. A pub lunch was enjoyed in Little Venice before climbing aboard for an afternoon barge trip. It wasn't just an opportunity to put their feet up though, as the residents assisted the crew in opening and closing the canal locks.

"They enjoyed being on water and seeing London from a different perspective. There



Enjoying the water.



Hugging trees in Biggleswade

were two boat trips last year and they are proving to be a great success with more planned later in the year," added Brendan.

Biggleswade Bird of Prey Centre was the next stop on 23rd April. As with the barge trip, the group were assisted by Substance Misuse Worker, Tyrone Black, who not only encouraged Conway House clients to participate but also carefully drove them up the A1 ... and even brought them back again!

There were two set falconry displays to be seen, but just as impressive was the walk around the stunning Swiss Gardens. Residents commented that, "Just to be out of the city and get some country air was a great benefit."

A very positive thing that Brendan told *The Informed* was that some of the residents on these trips had not had a day out in years. The trips are proving really beneficial and we'll report on some of the others in later editions.

Home Contents Insurance

The National Housing Federation has announced a new home contents insurance package. **My Home Contents Insurance** has many different ways to pay and payments can be as low as £1.67 per fortnight up to £4.20 (depending on your postcode and age.) Leaflets will be available to you soon providing some additional details. However, if you would like to receive an information pack, please call: **0845 337 2463.**