Exeter SmartMove punching above its weight

Extract from West Morning News, Tuesday, 13 November 2007

The story of one man’s return from the brink of homelessness and hopelessness illustrates vividly why one small Exeter charity is increasingly being considered a ‘life-saver’.

David Haycock, a 62-year-old former newspaper reporter and photographer says his life has been transformed in the recent months – from a chaotic and precarious existence on the verge of living rough on the street to a stable routine with the promise of better things to come.

It is thanks to Exeter SmartMove, which is run by the Exeter Homeless Action Group (EHAG), that people like Mr Haycock, who fell on hard times after his previous employer folded and he was made redundant, are rebuilding their lives in the face of an acute shortage of affordable and decent housing in the Westcountry.

SmartMove helps people who have been excluded from mainstream society, often through no fault of their own. The charity’s role is, on one hand, simple; it helps vulnerable people find somewhere to live by guaranteeing a rent deposit and overseeing their move. But in doing so – and it does so with great success as its official reports confirm – it faces a number of high and hard hurdles, which it is jumping, partly thanks to the clever thinking and dedication of its staff.

There are too few landlords in the private rented sector willing to let homes to people who receive state benefits, so SmartMove will vet potential tenants and landlords, help guarantee a deposit and then manage the moving process and any on-going problems.

An increasing number of canny Devon landlords have already realised that SmartMove could be the answer to some of their letting headaches; more than 40 in the Exeter area have already signed up, but hundreds more are needed. SmartMove cannot find homes for all the people on its waiting list.

Single mothers, childless couples, elderly people and people who had good jobs but fell on hard times – people like Mr Haycock – are all turning to SmartMove for help. Co-ordinator Gill Marsden said an increasing number faced housing crises, not least because of the spiralling cost of homes and the shortage of affordable rented accommodation.

SmartMove has helped 81 people find a home in the past 12 months and aims to help hundreds more in the coming year.

My Haycock said, “I don’t know what I would have done without them. There was nowhere for me to go. They helped me find a place and made it easy. This scheme is a Godsend.”

Where’s the party? Go to page 5 to find out.
Dear all

Welcome to the November edition of the SmartMove newsletter. Far from seeing things wind down for Christmas, things have been busy here at Crisis. This is partly due to having a full team in place, who most of you met at the conference in October. For those of you who didn’t meet everyone, the full team now consists of David Hewitt – SmartMove Project Manager, Bridget Young – SmartMove Project Co-ordinator, Rosemary Martin – Private Rented Sector Development Officer, and Diane Graham – Scottish Development Officer. As was also discussed at the conference, we will soon be rebranding the team to reflect the wider remit of work with rent deposit schemes that the team is doing – watch this space!

And talking of the conference, thanks again to everyone who attended and made it such a great event. You should all have the conference report by now, and please do let me know if you have any comments on or questions about the document. I think the conference really highlighted what fantastic work you are all doing, and how truly busy you all are. This has been reinforced by the project visits that we have been doing, and that we generally leave exhausted from all the information we receive. How do you do it?!

I look forward to visiting more of you in the New Year, when we roll out the rest of our project visits. Until then, I should like to take this opportunity to wish everyone an (early) Merry Christmas. Please do let us know what you will be up to over the festival period, and as always, get in touch if there’s anything you need.

Kind regards,

Bridget Young    Dave Hewitt

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Fax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Hewitt</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>020 7426 3866</td>
<td><a href="mailto:david.hewitt@crisis.org.uk">david.hewitt@crisis.org.uk</a></td>
<td>0844 251 0110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget Young</td>
<td>Project Co-ordinator</td>
<td>020 7426 3862</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bridget.young@crisis.org.uk">bridget.young@crisis.org.uk</a></td>
<td>0844 251 0110</td>
</tr>
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**Project news**

**Derby and Sheffield receive an unexpected donation**

Mr Chris Dornford-May, the Director at Trinity Manor Limited, and his business partners decided to donate a percentage of their profits to charity every month. Each partner would decide who they wanted to donate their part of the profits to, and Mr Dornford-May decided to focus on homelessness and mental health.

Mr Dornford-May had previously worked as a mental health nurse, and had come across the interlinking issues of homelessness and mental health. He had heard about Crisis through his work in the health profession. After searching through Crisis’ website, he came across the SmartMove project, which fit the bill of helping homeless people access accommodation and providing various support services to help them sustain their tenancies. It also fit with his current property business, as it seemed appropriate that “now they were at the top of the property ladder, it seemed fit to help people at the bottom of the property ladder”.

Mr Dornford-May decided that he wanted to meet with the Derby and Sheffield SmartMove schemes, as Derby is close to where he is currently based and Sheffield is where his wife is originally from. After successful meetings with the two schemes in September 2007, each scheme now receives a monthly cheque representing 2.5% of Trinity Manor Limited’s profits.

Derby SmartMove has so far used the money to increase their bond pot in their new scheme, and Sheffield SmartMove has used the money to purchase a computer specifically dedicated for client use, where clients can do job searches and write up CVs.

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**Worcester’s landlord training**

Earlier this year, Worcester City Council approached the SmartMove team at Worcester Housing and Benefits Advice Centre (WHABAC) and asked them to deliver training to landlords getting licenses for Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO).

The council would provide landlords who were registering to get licenses, but Worcester SmartMove was paid to provide general good practice training for landlords.

So far, three evening training sessions have been delivered to just under 30 landlords onsite at WHABAC’s offices. Paula Rayner, of the Worcester SmartMove team, is the principal lead on the presentations, with David George and Jackie Kearney, also of the SmartMove team, being on hand chat to landlords and answer questions on subjects such as Housing Benefit.

Paula primarily delivers the training via a PowerPoint presentation. A range of topics about being a landlord are covered, including recruiting tenants, providing a safe environment for tenants, HMO rules and regulations and evictions. The team have also adapted a landlord manual that had already been developed by the Accreditation Network UK (ANUK) and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) that landlords can take away after the training.

The training is a great opportunity for landlords to network with each other, and for SmartMove to recruit landlords to the scheme. They now have a policy whereby if landlords want any further advice or support following the training, they first have to sign up as a registered landlord with Worcester SmartMove.

For more information contact Paula Rayner at paula.rayner@whabac.org.uk
Landlords for Excellence in Sheffield

Also on the landlord training front, a Landlord for Excellence course is being run by the Sheffield Hallam University. This is a free, accredited, 10-week course which is sponsored by the Sheffield City Council and also gives landlords membership to the Responsible Landlords scheme. Tertia Sonka, Landlord Liaison Worker at Sheffield SmartMove, feels that this is a great opportunity for landlords as it gives them access to a landlord network and a good quality mark, and is the only thing of its kind in Sheffield.

Tertia advertises the course to landlords through her Landlords Newsletter, and has received good feedback from SmartMove landlords who have attended.

Calderdale’s Investors in Volunteers quality mark

As was mentioned at the recent SmartMove conference in October, a big congratulations to Calderdale SmartMove for achieving their Investing in Volunteers quality mark.

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. The Standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering.

The Standard is managed locally by the lead volunteer development agency of each individual country of the UK, which are:

- Volunteering England
- Volunteer Development Agency in Northern Ireland
- Volunteer Development Scotland
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action

In a recent assessment report, Calderdale SmartMove more than met each of the indicators laid out in the Investing in Volunteers report. These indicators include an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers; committing appropriate resources to working with volunteers; involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community; and taking into account the varying support needs of volunteers.

For more information on the Investing in Volunteering quality standard, please go to www.investinginvolunteering.org.uk and to find out more about Calderdale’s volunteering programme, have a look at the SmartMove conference report for October 2007 or contact Jill Norman at jill@calderdalesmartmove.org.uk.

Good Practice: Partnership Working

Barnet SmartMove are part of the Barnet Supporting People’s Foundation Project which sees them working with Turning Point, Barnet Drug & Alcohol Services and Probation Services, and working with drug and alcohol users and ex-offenders. The project has information-sharing protocols set up with these partner agencies, and they have regular and case-by-case meetings. One of these regular meetings is with probation services and the police regarding prolific and priority offenders, who often record lack of housing as a reason for re-offending.

These strong cross-working relationships not only mean that some of the most difficult-to-house clients are successfully helped, but that the project is kept in the loop with regards to the clients’ circumstances. The project is currently hoping to work with partner agencies to set up a support plan for clients.
Crisis news

Youth volunteering event

As part of a special youth volunteering project, a team of young homeless people from Crisis organised an exclusive open-mic, live music night at the Crisis Skylight Café on 8 November 2007.

Brian (25), is one of the young people involved with the project who has been homeless for the last eight years. Before the event he said, “we hope it’s going to be a good night and that the event might raise awareness of the Crisis Skylight Café. Our aim is to challenge stereotypes of homeless people.”

The evening was a resounding success, with a great turnout, fantastic music and glowing reviews from those who came along.

The Crisis Youth Volunteering Programme offers young people (18-25) the opportunity to work as a team to organise and put on events, exploring issues around homelessness. This also provides the opportunity for them to work towards a recognised qualification, supporting their progression into employment or further education.

A team of these volunteers have been working hard over the last few months to organise this event.

Crisis Cook Book

Twenty-eight internationally renowned chefs have come together to create the Crisis Cook Book, a collection of 84 of their favourite recipes. The recipes are then followed by 10 short wine essays on how to maximise your enjoyment of wine written by acclaimed wine writer Jancis Robinson.

The Crisis Cook Book will be on sale at Marks & Spencer and via Amazon stores from 26 November. It costs £5 with £3 from each copy going to Crisis.

Nicholas Lander, editor of The Crisis Cook Book, said, “For the past 18 years I have had the good fortune to be the restaurant correspondent of The Financial Times which has brought me into close contact with some of the best chefs in the world. Their expertise and generosity form the basis of this book.”

Crisis Consequences

Beth Ditto, The Enemy, Pearl Lowe, Paul Weller, Supergrass, Graham Coxon, New Young Pony Club, Drew McConnell, Andy Rourke and Ed Harcourt join Crisis to fight homelessness. They are working alongside Crisis Member Musicians Stephane Girard, Roberto Medina & Paul Webb.

Uniting the great and the good of indie rock, Crisis is pioneering a track/gig combo with a twist, all based around the game ‘Consequences’. Each artist is helping to build a track, layer on layer, without hearing what has come before.

The release of this record for sale will coincide with a large gig featuring many of the same artists in early March 2008. For more information go to www.crisis.org.uk
External news

What are Local Area Agreements?

A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a three-year agreement between central government (represented by the regional government office), the Local Authority and its partners in an area (working through the local strategic partnership) to improve public services.

Local Area Agreements complement but do not replace local strategies such as Sustainable Community Strategies. They also result in some local funding streams being pooled through an area based grant and others will continue to be paid directly to local authorities e.g. homelessness grant and Supporting People.

LAAs are a central tenet of the move to devolve responsibility to local authorities to respond to local needs rather than being driven by national targets by central government.

For more information go to www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/briefings/policyandinfo/issues/laacurrent

Welfare to Work Handbook

The third edition of the Welfare to Work Handbook has incorporated the Disability and Carers Handbook. This new Handbook is an invaluable reference guide for everyone involved in welfare to work. Its comprehensive coverage details benefit entitlements, financial support in and out of work, learning and training provision, and all the Government’s employment programmes from the New Deals to the latest pilots. For more information or to order go to www.cesi.org.uk

Scotland’s Budget and Spending Review

The Scottish Government’s spending plans for the next three years were outlined to MSPs in the Parliament earlier this month.

Cabinet Secretary for Finance John Swinney said it was a budget for growth and prosperity.

Its key commitments are: The reduction - and for many the removal - of business rates affecting 150,000 small business premises; Reduced rail journey times between our major cities; An ambitious programme to tackle climate change; Resources to freeze the Council Tax.

For more information go to www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2007/11/14081839

Government has overlooked private rented sector, says BPF

In its consultation response to Housing Green Paper, the British Property Federation acknowledges the impetus in policy, but claims that by not acknowledging the role of a private rented sector, ministers have overlooked the only short term solution to the housing crisis.

For more information go to www.bpf.org.uk
Training & Events

Crisis regional updates

The regional update meetings for deposit schemes will take place on December 11th in London and December 14th in Wales.

They will provide a forum for deposit schemes to share their successes, problems they are facing and any new developments at their scheme. Crisis will share information on their current work to support schemes including their forthcoming Good Practice Guide and research being undertaken to demonstrate the financial and social value of deposit schemes. Both meetings will hear from speakers on Local Housing Allowance. The London update will hear from a speaker from the Furniture Re-Use Network on Starter Packs. The Welsh Update will hear from a member of the Welsh Assembly Government who financially support the development of deposit schemes in Wales.

For more information or to book contact Rosemary Martin at rosemary.martin@crisis.org.uk

Introduction to welfare benefits

The Chartered Institute of Housing is delivering this open access course that will give delegates an appreciation of the social security benefits under-acclaimed and how different benefits interact with one another. Includes Income Support and Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) among others, and is designed for anyone who needs a detailed awareness of individual benefits or needs to advise tenants.

Courses will be run in Manchester and London in January 2008 and Birmingham in May 2008. For more information to go www.cih.org

Monitoring & Evaluation training in Scotland

Diane Graham (Scottish Development Officer) is currently working on arranging a bespoke training course on monitoring and evaluation for Scottish rent deposit schemes.

The aim is that all schemes throughout Scotland can start to work towards shared agreed outcomes. Needs that have been identified include the need to measure the impact of a scheme’s work and set out what impact the scheme hopes to have.

This will be captured in a one day training course & more information to follow at the beginning of December.

Homelessness Prevention Conferences

Shelter will be hosting a number of regional Homelessness Prevention conferences in early 2008. The conferences will examine the benefits of sustainable homelessness prevention, and engage key stakeholders in discussions on how this can be achieved. They will also explore early intervention, access to housing stock, and putting strategy into practice. Conferences will be held in Liverpool, Birmingham and Guildford from January 2008.

For more information or to book go to www.shelter.org.uk
Crisis statement

Urban Village appeal withdrawn

Statement from Leslie Morphy, Crisis Chief Executive

I wanted to get in touch at the earliest opportunity to inform you that we and our partners Genesis Housing Group, English Partnerships, Mildmay Mission Hospital and Shoreditch Tabernacle Baptist Church have decided to withdraw our appeal of the decision by Tower Hamlets Council not to grant planning permission for the proposed regeneration of the Mildmay Hospital site in Shoreditch.

As you will recall, our proposals included a much needed new hospital, church, primary health centre and over 370 affordable homes. We took the decision to go to appeal because of our strong belief in the social objectives of the proposals, the continued strong support of a whole range of organisations and most significantly because the planning application had received a positive recommendation from Tower Hamlets planning officers.

Following consideration of all parties’ evidence for the Appeal and given the very subjective nature of the issues, including the design quality and impact on the local conservation area, our QC has advised us that our chance of a successful outcome is now significantly lower than before. We cannot ignore this advice, nor would it be right for us to incur further costs relating to the appeal.

As I am sure you will appreciate, we are all very disappointed that our plans have ended in this way. The development was the result of a unique collaboration of individuals and organisations across the voluntary, local, commercial and financial sectors who believed the scheme would bring significant benefits to the local community and build on the excellent work already undertaken by the Church and Hospital. As you will see from the attached statement, which we have agreed to issue jointly with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, an alternative scheme will be developed safeguarding the future of the church and hospital and we will continue to support their work.

At the heart of our proposals was the new Crisis supportive housing model, an approach inspired by the highly successful US experience of supportive housing. Our approach combines affordable housing for low income workers and formerly homeless people with client centred, holistic support and vocational services. These enable those with a long history of homelessness to overcome the multiple problems they face and live more stable and productive lives within a mixed and supportive community.

Whilst we regret that we will not be able to realise our plans on the Mildmay site, we remain fully committed to the development of the model across the UK. There is already strong support for this new way of working and we plan to identify new opportunities both in London and elsewhere in the coming months.