

# Shelter

How registered social  
landlords can work  
with young people  
A good practice guide



working together



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First published in January 2006 by Shelter, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9HU

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Registered charity number 263710

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ISBN 1 903595 57-6

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# Foreword

Times have changed for organisations working in the field of social housing. They now offer far more services than simply a roof over people's head. Many factors are driving this change – the Government's focus on peaceful neighbourhoods and community cohesion, for example, and the higher aspirations of both tenants and housing providers. A key part of the wider role expected of RSLs is engaging with, and supporting, young people, both as community members, and present and future tenants.

Shelter and Harvest Housing Group – a large registered social landlord (RSL) based in the north west – decided to look at how RSLs can work well with young people. The result of their collaboration is this good practice guide, which includes the best ideas from Harvest and from other social housing providers. Harvest has already produced a Youth Investment Strategy and is engaging young people in a targeted way. Shelter strongly advocates the use of youth strategies in the housing sector, as a way of helping to prevent and alleviate youth homelessness.

As more and more young people find home-ownership beyond their reach, they will turn to social housing in greater

numbers. By getting involved with young people early in their lives, and maintaining a commitment to them as they grow and develop, RSLs will be helping to create neighbourhoods where people want to stay, as well as nurturing tenants who have the skills and knowledge to make the most of their communities.

The Vodafone UK Foundation is supporting Shelter's work with, and for, young people, enabling Shelter to provide them with the information they need, at the time that they need it. The Vodafone UK Foundation and Shelter are working together to tackle youth homelessness and exclusion in the long term.

This guide is an example of Shelter's work in supporting local authorities and organisations with policy ideas, good practice case studies and campaigns to support local initiatives.

It aims to be simple, practical and easy to use. We hope you will find it a valuable resource.



Adam Sampson  
Director

It is a common saying that 'children are our future': for us in the housing association movement this is literally true. The sector as a whole has an aging customer base matched by a sharp decline in the number of households with children renting from us. We therefore have a business interest as well as a wider social imperative to develop approaches that are both attractive to families and also help young people gain access to our properties.

Sadly, as a movement, we have been guilty in the past of taking a negative view of young people. Too often our first contact with them has been through antisocial behaviour proceedings or creating barriers to their access into our accommodation.

Our whole approach needs to change. This excellent publication, and the Harvest Housing Group's experience to date,

demonstrates there is another way. Positive engagement with young people: involving and including them, seeking their views and finding out about their aspirations, will pay dividends. This document gives numerous examples of good practice right across the housing association sector. It shows that our contact with young people can be a positive experience with a long-term future.

I can thoroughly recommend this publication, and hope you can join with us and embrace the principles behind it.



Geoff Melling  
Executive Director,  
Business and Service Development  
Harvest Housing Group

# Introduction

RSLs are now more deeply involved in community life than ever before. They understand that family-friendly neighbourhoods will attract people to an area, and make them want to stay. They know that a locality rich in activities and resources for young people will be likely to experience less antisocial behaviour and more youth attainment. And they understand the importance of young people being seen not as nuisances, but as potential tenants who will require information and support throughout the tenancy process.

To achieve such goals, it is crucial that tenants and local residents understand the contribution RSLs make to a community. They must be given the opportunity to participate in, engage in, and challenge the work of RSLs.

With this in mind, Harvest Housing Group decided to encourage the participation of young people in the organisation, and in their neighbourhoods. The aim was to help young people fulfil their potential, improve their image with other residents and tenants, and aid community cohesion. Harvest also wanted to find out about young people's housing needs and how it can help to meet them.

This document looks at the youth initiatives that Harvest is developing, within the wider context of how and when RSLs can work with young people. It presents good practice ideas from Harvest and from other RSLs, and focuses on the strategic thinking needed to include young people at all levels of the community.

Partnership working – be it with local authorities, community and voluntary groups, or local residents – is increasingly important for RSLs. So this guide also gives examples of how joint working can be achieved most effectively.

Housing associations that are also RSLs are regulated by the Housing Corporation, which has issued guidance on how a good RSL should be managed under Section 36 of the Housing Act 1996. Where appropriate, we have explained how the inclusion of aspects of a youth strategy would satisfy the requirements of this guidance.

# Creating a youth-friendly culture in RSLs

## Why work with young people?

There are many reasons why registered social landlords (RSLs) may want to work with young people who are either their tenants, the children of their tenants or resident in neighbourhoods where they have property. These include:

- making an area a desirable place to live and somewhere that families and individuals want to stay
- providing positive activities that may help combat antisocial behaviour
- raising the profile of the RSL among young people
- raising the skills level, self-confidence and self-esteem of young people
- helping to ensure community cohesion and social inclusion by making young people feel they have a stake in their neighbourhood.

It is not uncommon for young people to feel alienated from their neighbourhoods and communities. In the current climate, groups of young people 'hanging around' tend to be seen as intimidating, and police curfews and dress codes in shopping centres often target the innocent as well as those involved in antisocial behaviour. Most tabloid newspaper stories portray young people in a negative light – a sample analysis of media reports by Mori, commissioned by *Young People Now* magazine, found this to be true of 82 per cent of stories. Despite this, very few media reports contain quotes from young people themselves. In addition, increased traffic means the sight of children playing in the streets is not as familiar as it once was.

There is no real reason why children and young people shouldn't have a say in how their area is developed, but in practice they are not usually consulted. Therefore built environments very rarely meet the needs of this group.

In such circumstances RSLs face both challenges and opportunities in their work with young people.

## Developing a youth strategy

The development of a youth strategy is an essential starting point for any RSL wanting to work effectively with, and provide appropriately for, young people. The process of putting the strategy together is as important as the finished document. It will require the RSL to:

- identify and work with suitable partners
- work with, and build the capacity of, young people
- assess the needs of young people
- identify the issues affecting young people
- audit present youth provision
- demonstrate commitment to young people and their representatives
- identify gaps in services.

Completing the youth strategy is the beginning, not the end, of meaningful involvement with young people. It is important that the strategy is seen as a living document, known about by staff at all levels of the organisation and capable of being adjusted and updated. Young people and the individuals and groups that work with them should be made aware of the strategy and of how they can add to or revise it.

### **Example: Harvest's Youth Conference and Strategy**

In April 2004 Harvest's service development team organised a Youth Strategy Conference. This was the beginning of a process to develop a group-wide approach to young people, and a conscious attempt to reverse the stereotyping of young people as a nuisance element. The main aim of the conference was to help Harvest develop a coherent strategy for working with, and supporting, young people in neighbourhoods.

The work that Harvest hoped to do with young people was firmly grounded in the Government's current youth policy, as well as good practice examples from its own and other organisations. Speakers included representatives from Connexions and Weston Spirit – a charity that works with socially excluded young people – and case studies of successful interventions were discussed. The day concentrated on looking at how young people, parents and other partners, can be engaged and the practical ways in which Harvest could work with these groups. One of the outcomes of the conference was the decision to devise the Youth Investment Strategy.

### **Developing a youth investment strategy**

Creating a youth investment strategy is one way of ensuring that an RSL has a corporate commitment to making a youth strategy work. The strategy should outline the impact it will have on the whole organisation; it will include the resource implications for different departments although it is about goals and approach as much as financial investment. (A youth strategy can be aligned to the concepts, tools and methodologies that an RSL has already developed.)

Focusing more on working with young people does not necessarily mean starting from scratch. It is about tailoring already successful interventions to make them more relevant. It will mean identifying barriers that stop young people accessing an RSL's services, and developing ways to address these and any wider problems.

### **Applying the strategy**

To develop and increase its effectiveness in working with young people, an RSL must ensure its youth strategy is embedded within its company's ethos. This requires planning how the strategy is to be developed at all levels, and within all functions, of the organisation.

The following policies were adopted by Harvest to ensure its youth strategy was applied by all departments. They provide good guidelines for action to be taken by RSLs that want to be more youth friendly.

#### **Within individual departments**

##### **Lettings**

Policies that discriminate against young people in this department must be changed. An approach must be developed to increase lets to young people if there is an oversupply of one-bedroom properties. This may require additional support services for tenants.

##### **Development**

Should you be demolishing housing that could be adapted for young people? Consider refurbishing and redesigning housing instead. Under-occupation schemes, starter homes, development of core and cluster schemes, and building or supporting youth facilities may also need to be provided.

##### **Human resources**

Crucial considerations in this area include qualifications for working with children and young people, risk assessments and more flexible core working hours so people can work later for meetings, etc.

### **Example: Harvest Housing Group**

It was revealed at Harvest's Youth Strategy Conference that only five per cent of Harvest tenancies are held by people under 25. This figure seemed lower than might be expected, given that the organisation has a fairly large number of one-bedroom flats, and people in this age group are unlikely to have embarked on home-ownership. Several reasons were put forward to explain why young tenants were missing.

- The accommodation might not suit their needs.
- Training was not available to help young people learn more about becoming a tenant.
- Support was not provided in order to help young people sustain their tenancies.
- Inappropriate assumptions were possibly being made about young people – for example, that they would not make responsible tenants.

Using these findings as a basis, Harvest decided its Youth Investment Strategy should have the following objectives:

- a significant reduction in neighbour nuisance/antisocial behaviour
- an increased perception of community safety

- more supportive family environments for children and young people
- family- and young people-friendly neighbourhoods
- young people and parents taking an active role in the community
- well-used youth facilities in neighbourhoods
- young people being more valued by the rest of the community
- more one-bedroom flats let to young people
- people who start families wanting to stay in their neighbourhoods
- better educational, employment, and training opportunities for young people
- financial savings on neighbour nuisance should be spent on developing positive support interventions
- consistent, joined-up working on youth issues with mainstream and specialist agencies across areas and neighbourhoods
- a focus on young people throughout the business.

### **Training department**

Establish whether staff have any additional training needs relating to youth work. Young people and other members of the community may also need to be able to access training on running community groups, fundraising or mentoring.

### **Supported housing**

Consider how to ensure the needs of young people in the area are met.

### **Finance department**

Budgets could be re-allocated for youth activities. Savings made by preventing vandalism and neighbour nuisance could be channelled to these projects.

### **Planning department**

Specific objectives and Key Performance Indicators related to young people should be included within overall organisational plans.

### **General considerations for the organisation**

- Agree a general approach on neighbour nuisance policy – particularly how to develop a variety of responses to antisocial behaviour with an increased emphasis on prevention and support.
- Maximise young people's involvement with, and connection to, your youth strategy.
- Develop key links at corporate, regional, and local level with providers and regulators of specialist services, such as Connexions, youth services, Local Government Offices, Regional Assemblies and Sure Start.
- Consider developing flagship initiatives. For example, provide youth and family support/activity centres in all significant neighbourhoods or a youth advice/signposting service.
- 

### **Regional/area level**

#### **Audits**

- Carry out an annual area audit, including a record of issues, consultations and activities across the area or region.
- Audit any external funding or resources in kind (funds or workers contributed by other organisations including voluntary ones), and what additional benefits these bring to the region/area.
- Identify capacity gaps in youth working and subsequent specialist agency requirements.
- Develop a list of key agencies, including all main players and area-level initiatives.

#### **Planning**

Develop youth strategies specific to each area. This means ensuring that the general principles of your RSL's youth strategy are applied to an area's specific circumstances. Area-specific youth strategies could include:

- plans, activities and targets relating to young people for each area
- priorities for cross-neighbourhood activities
- prioritising localities for additional activity if they have a high incidence of antisocial behaviour thought to relate, at least partially, to young people
- specific youth initiatives organised across regional areas – for example, camping, DJ-ing, mountain-biking, or skateboarding projects
- key local authority targets
- flexibility in adapting and applying organisational initiatives
- links to relevant ongoing initiatives.

### **Approach**

Ensure a balance of approach. Each area should have a mix of different types of initiative – personal support, family support, group activities and engagement of young people in the community.

### **Within neighbourhoods**

#### **Audits**

- Conduct a youth audit – a survey of youth-related issues, activity, and provision in each neighbourhood, and how they link up.
- Construct a neighbourhood partner and initiative list. This list of all potential partners and ongoing external initiatives could highlight possible projects and areas for joint working.
- Audit any external funding or resources in kind, and what additional benefits these bring to the neighbourhood.

#### **Planning**

- Plans, activities, and targets relating to young people for each neighbourhood need to be set within the objectives of the overall youth strategy.
- Each neighbourhood should have specific targets and initiatives aimed at parental involvement and encouraging people to volunteer.

#### **Approach**

- Ensure a balance of approach and types of intervention.
- Engage young people – each neighbourhood should consider different ways to manage this.

Create a neighbourhood wish list. List three things that are currently not achievable in terms of resources or local conditions but that would have a significant impact.

### **What makes a neighbourhood family- and youth-friendly?**

Some ideas are:

- space set aside for the use of children and young people
- the views of children, young people and parents, being actively sought and listened to
- various activities being provided for young people, and money and resources set aside to make sure they happen
- advice and support for children and young people
- help for families when things go wrong
- a safe environment (for example, cycle paths and a lower speed limit)
- cleaner streets, well-kept open spaces and park wardens
- community volunteers of all ages running activities and groups
- clear pathways for young people into education, jobs, training and housing
- residents valuing and respecting each other
- a youth council or forum to speak up for young people.

# Working with the community

## Engaging with young people

Why and how an RSL will want to engage with young people will vary depending on whether they are tenants, potential tenants, children of tenants or members of the local community.

Neighbourhood children and young people may or may not belong to tenants' families, but an RSL will benefit from taking a holistic view towards youth provision, and making amenities and services available to the wider community.

## Consultation

It is essential that an RSL consults young people about services it plans to offer them. This will make the service both more effective and more appropriate. Young people can bring a unique viewpoint, in-depth local knowledge and plenty of creative energy to any project they are involved in. It's also important that they feel ownership of any initiative from an early stage.

Suggested guidelines for a consultation might include the following.

- Avoid tokenism – make sure any consultation is fully inclusive and accessible.
- Do not raise false expectations. Make sure young people understand what they can and can't influence.
- Ensure that young people are fully informed about the progress of any consultation they are involved in.
- Use existing pathways, such as schools and youth groups, to reach young people, but also try to engage those who are not involved with any kind of organisation.
- Decide how young people will benefit from being involved in the consultation. They are giving their time and energy and deserve something back. This may range from information and advice, to organised trips or vouchers.

## Example: West Kent Extra Youth Bank

West Kent Extra is a community charity that has taken on the community development work of West Kent Housing Association. In 2005 it decided to develop a Youth Bank, which it could consult on neighbourhood issues and improvements. It recruited 85 young people aged 11 to 18 who live in West Kent housing communities to take part.

Youth Bank members have the opportunity to participate in a monthly draw for £25 worth of vouchers, and every time they are involved in a survey or consultation they earn £5 in vouchers. Joining is a matter of filling in a simple application form, and members can get involved by attending meetings, completing postal surveys, or by using text or email.

The first Youth Bank consultation was a Community Safety Survey. Members had previously identified community and personal safety as one of their main areas of concern. Questionnaires on the subject were sent out to all Youth Bank members, and 63 returned completed forms – a 74 per cent response rate.

One of the questions asked in the survey covered what could make young people more safe and secure in their area. This was an important topic, as 45 per cent of the young people surveyed felt either 'very or rather unsafe' when walking in their own area after dark.

The top three changes suggested were:

- better and more lighting on estates
- more supervised activities and places for young people to go
- more CCTV on streets and estates.

West Kent Extra recognises that the changes suggested require local authorities and RSLs to act together. It is now working proactively to ensure the Youth Bank members' ideas and suggestions are taken further.

### Activities

Working on projects and activities with young people can bring about many benefits, not only for participants but also for the wider community and for RSLs. Possible benefits are:

- better community cohesion
- less antisocial behaviour
- stronger local networks and partnerships
- an improved local environment
- a better attitude towards young people among other community members and organisations
- improved skills and self-esteem among young people.

### Example: Harvest Youth Week Activities

Harvest felt that National Youth Week (1–7 November 2004) was an ideal springboard to illustrate the group's new emphasis on youth-related initiatives and interventions. Each Neighbourhood Regeneration Officer (NRO) was encouraged to run a youth event in the area where they worked. (See 'Tools for the task' section for more on NROs.)

The overall theme of the youth week was Best of Health, and the officers focused on health-promoting activities. Events organised included:

- a girls' healthy eating and well-being evening
- a fruit and veg stall
- a five-a-side football match
- a mini Olympics and giant trampoline event
- a trip to a local aquatics centre
- a photo project about the local area
- a mini taster sports session.

Take-up of the activities was very good, and some of the children and young people involved expressed interest in more long-term projects.

These included the setting up of a youth forum and development of regular sports sessions.

### **Example: Dream Scheme (Wyre Housing Association)**

The Dream Scheme is an innovative project, developed by Wyre Housing Association, which is making a positive difference in neighbourhoods. Aimed at young people aged between eight and 16, it promotes social inclusion, improves intergenerational links, and reduces juvenile nuisance. It works by rewarding the community-spirited young people with points they can use towards their choice of trips such as tenpin bowling, paintballing, and days out at attractions like Alton Towers.

The Dream Scheme project was first established over two years ago in West View, in Fleetwood. Since then five more schemes have been launched across Wyre, with similar schemes in Blackpool and Preston and others to follow.

'Dream Schemers' are involved in tasks such as gardening and shopping for older people, fundraising, and learning new skills such as IT, first aid, cooking, and arts and crafts. The schemes have already gained much 'street credibility' among the 120 young people involved, and this pioneering project has been recognised as a positive project by the Audit Commission.

### **Longer-term provision**

Any short-term work that is done with young people may well lead to more lasting projects being set up. Once they have become engaged through one-off activities, there is often both the scope and the desire for something more sustainable to be put into place.

But RSLs may also set up projects that are meant to last and provide continuity from the outset.

### **Example: Manchester & District Housing Association Youth Bank**

This differs from the West Kent Extra Youth Bank. Its purpose is to allow young people access to grants to develop specific community projects.

In partnership with Regen, a regeneration agency, and using Single Regeneration Budget funds, M&D has provided a pot of money to which groups can apply to get various activities off the ground. So far, grants have been given for the booking of community space, sports activities and equipment and for days out. Any youth organisation within the M&D area is able to apply for funds, and the intention is to give young people the opportunity to spend money to achieve their ideas, and to learn about finance and budgeting.

The Youth Bank will be an ongoing resource for youth organisations, enabling them to realise small projects that they might otherwise struggle to fund.

### **Environmental projects**

Biased media coverage and common preconceptions mean young people tend to be stereotyped as unconcerned about their local environment, or even actively engaged in damaging it. On the other hand, children and young people are rarely consulted about their local area, and often find their needs are not met.

A positive way of bridging this gap, as well as improving the way a neighbourhood looks, is to work with young people on some sort of environmental project. This could range from a small-scale activity such as a litter-clearing day, to a major capital project – for example, renovating or creating a park or open space. Possible benefits include:

- improving the physical appearance of the neighbourhood
- engaging children and young people in decision-making and practical work
- making the local area more child- and youth-friendly
- ensuring that young people are viewed in a more positive way
- providing an opportunity for all ages to work together.

#### **Example: Morningside Estate Project**

Sanctuary Housing Association is the major landlord on Morningside Estate, situated in Hackney, London. Worried about problems on the estate, the residents' committee approached Sanctuary and Groundwork East London to help develop youth provision. (Groundwork is a national network of charitable trusts, working locally with partner agencies to improve both the environment and people's lives.)

Capital funding for the project was brought in by Groundwork and matched by Sanctuary. The main aim of the project was to 'put young people on the map as a positive influence and not a problem'.

Young people were initially engaged through sports activities and consultation exercises. Problems highlighted included:

- poor play provision and few youth activities
- under-use of the community hall, particularly by younger people
- the poor condition of the community hall garden
- absence of play equipment in the former play area; poor surfacing in football cage
- no forums for young people to become involved in decision-making
- territorial issues – for example, young people from one part of an estate forcing others out of their area
- evidence of vandalism, graffiti, burnt-out cars, gangs and 'joyriding'.

Working together, Sanctuary, Groundwork, local residents, and young people devised ways of addressing these problems. A youth facility, supported by volunteer residents, was set up in the community hall. The gardens were landscaped, with young people helping to plant them with shrubs and trees. Children worked with a local artist to produce a mural on the wall around the garden.

Other improvements included a major play installation designed by young residents and a basketball facility. The project was completed in 2003 and is viewed as a success by residents of all ages.

## Engaging with parents and other partners

The key to working successfully with young people in a locality is to create and support successful partnerships.

While young people themselves will be an essential component of any partnership, parents, other residents, schools, youth and community organisations, the health service and the local authority, can also be involved.

### Parents and families

Although as children grow up, their peer group becomes more influential, their families are still very important to them. By supporting and involving families, RSLs will be building and strengthening links with young people.

Often parents will initially become involved in tenant or community groups as a way of improving life for their own children. This can have beneficial effects for all children living in a particular locality, as activities and projects are initiated and environmental improvements made.

In order to attract parental involvement, a housing association needs to be seen as family-friendly. Ways of ensuring this include:

- providing or paying for childcare so that parents can get involved in tenant groups or associations
- providing training and practical help to parents wanting to set up activities
- providing premises where groups can meet
- helping to fund initiatives, or being able to signpost sources of funding
- trying to ensure a high percentage of stories about young people in the media represent them in a positive light.

Although Parentline Plus, a charity helpline, reports more calls from parents of teenagers than from any other group, they are at present poorly catered for.

RSLs can work with the parents of older young people (ie those past childhood) by setting up support groups for parents of teenagers. RSLs can also play an important part in programmes such as Sure Start, which aims to give a good foundation in life to young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

### Schools

Many RSLs are now realising the importance of working with local schools. Schools provide an important focus for neighbourhoods, especially as more and more expand into wrap-around care, offering more care out of core hours. As a Harvest NRO says: 'We realise that good schools are a reason why people want to live in certain areas, or choose to stay there. We need to be building better and stronger links.'

RSLs may choose to support school life by funding sports tournaments, or even sponsoring items such as football kits. In addition to this, they can take an active role in raising housing and homelessness issues with students.

### **Example: West Kent Extra**

In February and March 2005, with the help of a 'Swanley People First' Community Chest government grant, West Kent Extra was able to deliver Housing and Homelessness Awareness Training to secondary schools in two local areas.

The training sessions were delivered through the schools' PSHE lessons, targeting Years 10 and 11, which represent an age range of predominantly 14- to 16-year-olds. The main aim of the programme was to help young people start thinking through the issues around leaving home and also the effects of being homeless. Sessions were based on a Shelter resource called *Housemate*, different versions of which are available for primary and secondary school students. At the end of the programme each participating school was given a *Housemate* training pack in order to continue work with the students.

Sessions included:

- assessing housing needs, hopes and expectations
- looking at the causes of homelessness
- thinking about leaving home
- exploring the skills needed to live independently.

The main purpose of the training was to assist in homelessness prevention. However, it also highlighted important issues for RSLs and other housing providers. For example, 40 per cent of the young people involved looked towards local authorities or RSLs to be the providers of their first independent accommodation. This is obviously significant in terms of informing future plans and strategies.

Other ways RSLs can build links with schools include:

- initiating a peer education programme – for example asking young homeless people to support those in similar circumstances
- offering work experience placements
- sponsoring housing information packs
- making staff available for talks, or to run discussions
- working with pupils on projects such as a housing-themed CD or video.

Schools are often at the centre of community life, and there are many potential benefits for RSLs that work with them. These include access to school premises for meetings, the opportunity to reach parents through school communications such as newsletters and being 'in the loop' about current thinking around education. Obviously schools differ as widely as the neighbourhoods they serve, and RSLs will need to approach them with an open agenda and sensitivity to their needs and aspirations.

### **Youth and community organisations**

Even the most remote area will have some kind of youth and/or community activity. Organisations will range from nationally known ones like the Guides to small voluntary groups run by local people. They may be statutorily funded, such as the Youth Service; be a charity; or be funded by grants or donations.

The benefits of working in partnership with well-established groups are enormous. They will have established relationships with young people, which RSLs can tap into. They will also have knowledge and experience, both of the wider neighbourhood and of smaller, more marginalised communities, to draw on. Their

techniques for engaging and working with young people can be used and learned from.

All Harvest NROs conduct a youth activity audit of their areas, in order to find out what's going on locally and to focus on likely partners. Conducting a similar survey will mean that you're not reinventing the wheel and can spot gaps and opportunities. Likely opportunities for joint work can be focused on and resources targeted accordingly.

### **Example: Harvest and the Villa Project**

The Villa Project was initiated by a Manchester resident, and its original focus was on football. But it also aims to encourage social responsibility, citizenship skills and inclusion. Young people were soon using Villa on a regular basis, with numbers ranging from 120 to 200. Villa now runs in several different areas and has been diversified by several RSLs to include regular social groups, litter-clearing and environmental improvement, and trips out. It now has funding from the government-funded Community Foundation for Greater Manchester.

Harvest became involved with the project from an early stage: a group called The Grove Club runs in the Grosvenor Street area of Manchester, using a garage as its premises. It is run by a local tenant, who is advised and supported by the area NRO. There is also a Villa Project in the Bridgehall area, and again the NRO plays a supportive and advisory role.

On the Partington estate, the Harvest NRO saw an opportunity for another partnership with Villa. An unoccupied flat in a derelict block was turned into a meeting space for local young people. The flat is known as 'Da P'ton Pen' and caters mainly for the 13 to 21 age group,

although younger children sometimes attend earlier in the evenings. About 15 to 25 young people (the majority of whom are male) attend each session. The project is open two evenings a week, and opening times have been arranged to fit in with local Children's Society activities. It is staffed by the local NRO and volunteers from the Villa Project.

Users have made up their own rules for the Pen, which include 'no alcohol' and 'no bullying', and use it mainly as a place to chill out, play pool or a playstation, and listen to music.

The Pen also serves as a tribute to three young people from Partington who died in 2004, with one of the walls in the flat being a graffiti project dedicated to their memory.

Young people themselves were instrumental in helping to set up the Pen, and deciding what the space would be used for. They didn't want the finished flat to look 'too nice', fearing that would make it a target for vandals. They list 'having our own space' and 'not having to hang around outside' as two of the best things about the Pen. As the local NRO comments: 'It doesn't seem like much, but they are quite happy to come here and play a bit of pool or listen to music.'

There have been a number of positive spin-offs from the core activities at the Pen. These have included:

- residents and parents being recruited as volunteers
- young people gaining sports accreditations
- tenants donating the prize money for their Taking a Stand Award to the Pen
- a park being developed on a nearby patch of ground.

### **Checklist for working with other organisations**

- Undertake a youth and community audit – and don't miss out smaller groups.
- Find out what other organisations are doing and what their future plans are.
- Look for gaps and opportunities.
- Be prepared to provide leadership on a project.
- Consider whether you can provide or source funding.
- Decide what your organisation can bring to a partnership, such as time, experience, premises, etc.
- Assign areas of responsibility and stick to them.
- Make sure you are all working to consistent guidelines and aims.
- Take time to agree monitoring and evaluation strategies.

# Tools for the task

To engage effectively with the communities they serve, especially young people, RSLs need to develop a range of tools and interventions. These will help to ensure projects and services are: consistent, effective, responsive and community focused. It may be useful to bring these tools together in the form of a toolkit, as Harvest has done, describing it as a ‘mixture of strategy, theory, “how to do it”, working methodology and specific interventions’. Harvest’s kit includes the following tools.

## **Neighbourhood Indicators**

Neighbourhood Indicators are the facts and figures that help an RSL build up a picture of an area. They are commonly based on housing management performance (eg voids, rent arrears, tenancy turnover) and socio-economic data (eg house prices, employment, crime rates). Using this approach, a simple traffic light classification system has been developed, which denotes neighbourhoods as red, amber or green.

- Red represents a neighbourhood that is experiencing significant difficulties and decline.
- Amber is either a neighbourhood that is starting to experience some problems and could potentially move into the red zone, or one that has experienced significant problems but is starting to improve.
- Green is a neighbourhood that is functioning well and has few significant problems.

Harvest is seeking to enhance the picture that Neighbourhood Indicators give about youth activity and needs. This will mean including information on, for example, youth offending statistics and young people’s educational attainment. Also important will be neighbour nuisance and antisocial behaviour statistics. Potentially, neighbourhoods could have a separate youth Red, Amber or Green, classification, which would mean that resources could be targeted accordingly.

## **ISSUE model**

This is a model that Harvest has developed for use in all of its work, and acts as a kick-starting mechanism when considering new initiatives. The acronym stands for Infrastructure, Services, Safety, Upkeep and Economy – five areas that must be taken into account when deciding on the best way forward.

Harvest related this framework to young people as follows.

### **Infrastructure**

This refers to the physical capacity of a neighbourhood to support a range of activities and services. RSLs need to focus on the availability of specialist youth services, and how youth-friendly the general facilities and amenities are.

### **Safety**

This category refers to the perception, and actual level of, safety and security in a neighbourhood. This will include interventions to minimise antisocial behaviour, but also a greater emphasis on how young people feel – whether they feel safe in their own neighbourhood; what measures can be taken to ensure they do.

### **Services**

This area looks at all the services provided in a neighbourhood – their availability, accessibility and quality. For young people, RSLs could concentrate on advice and support services as well as more general services such as health and education. The provision of supported housing is also to be considered under this heading.

### **Upkeep**

This is a fairly general category, concerned with how neighbourhoods look. It includes dealing with dereliction and vandalism, but also RSLs should consider how attempts to improve the appearance of an area can restrict young people's movement. The provision of more attractive places for young people to meet – teen shelters, for example – should be considered under this heading.

### **Economy**

This refers to the level of economic activity and income in a neighbourhood. For young people, the focus should be on the transition from school to employment or further education. What work can be done before school-leaving age? How can school leavers connect up with support services and advice? Are there any other barriers they face?

Although the ISSUE framework provides a broad parameter in which to set up youth interventions, it is important to recognise that it is only a springboard. These further points need to be considered.

- Effective work with excluded young people requires a high level of joined-up working, often between diverse providers.
- Who should do what can be a grey area – beware of creating gaps.
- Plan for this work to be labour intensive, and involve non-traditional methods of working, such as outreach.
- However, with creative thinking, some youth initiatives can be developed at relatively low cost.
- Young people can be difficult to engage – be prepared to be imaginative and flexible.
- Don't just focus on young people who are seen as 'problems' – cater for all young people in a neighbourhood.
- Young people can have issues with low self-esteem and dislocation from families and/or communities. These difficult issues must be sensitively addressed.
- Working with young people is a specialised field, and knowledge about the types and effectiveness of different approaches is low in the housing sector. We need to seek out, and listen to, experienced partners.

### **LIFE model**

The LIFE model is a simple tool used to identify the most suitable role for an RSL in different initiatives. Harvest began using this model in its neighbourhood regeneration work in January 2003.

The four distinct roles that the model identifies are: Lead, Influence, Follow and Exit. An RSL can start at the Lead stage, and then follow each stage through, until the project is either handed over to another agency or group or comes to an end. Or it can use the model to decide which role it should adopt while the project is operating.

#### **Lead**

Projects may or may not be initiated by the housing association, but it takes on the main role and provides strong leadership.

#### **Influence**

Working in partnership, the RSL has a strong influence over how a project develops.

#### **Follow**

The RSL may provide time and resources, but the project is led by other organisations.

#### **Exit**

An RSL may leave a project because the project has come to a natural end, or because other groups (eg community members) have taken over running it.

### **PESC model**

Another useful tool is the PESC model. The acronym PESC stands for Personal, Environmental, Social and Community, which relates to the four key categories of youth interventions that Harvest operates. It helps RSLs ensure they are considering different approaches to working with young people and the community. The model can be used to assess what type of work is needed in an area in order to create a balanced approach.

In a neighbourhood with few services, an RSL may need to consider all four ways of working. However, in areas where there are other agencies supporting young people, an RSL can use this model to identify gaps and decide which approaches to use.

**Personal development:** These are interventions aimed at helping a young person to develop, such as mentoring, Connexions, youth services.

**Environmental:** Within the PESC framework, this relates to providing a young person with a supportive and nurturing environment in which to develop. Interventions may include family support, or a reduction in the street violence perpetrated against young people.

**Social development:** This refers to interventions that are aimed at helping young people interact together positively and be comfortable in a group. These may be team games, group activities, social activities, etc. Projects may include a youth café, or five-a-side football team.

**Community engagement:** This is about initiatives designed to promote positive interactions with the wider community, and developing a feeling of belonging and mutual respect. Examples include having young people as junior wardens, or helping out with older people's gardens.

### Neighbourhood Regeneration Officers

In order to work more proactively in neighbourhoods, Harvest created the role of the NRO. An NRO's role is to concentrate on wider neighbourhood issues and work with the community and other agencies to positively influence what goes on in communities. Harvest recognised that many previous attempts to develop neighbourhood working had failed because 'agreement on targets and joined up working at a senior level were not combined with dedicated staff on the ground whose job was to make this a reality'.

Harvest NROs usually have a background as either housing officers, or, more rarely, youth and community workers. This gives them an insight into both the challenges and opportunities of neighbourhood work. They participate in training when they first undertake the NRO role and ongoing training is seen as an essential part of the job. They work closely with the rest of the organisation, including Customer Support Officers, with whom their roles sometimes overlap.

Their role involves:

- having in-depth knowledge of neighbourhoods
- making key contacts with other organisations
- building up relationships with tenants and other community members
- identifying key partnerships
- working up project plans
- devising and carrying out neighbourhood initiatives
- making connections between projects
- writing regular reports and record-keeping.

While NROs sometimes initiate and provide the funding for projects and activities, their role is much more about harnessing existing opportunities. They may do this by providing publicity to tenants and other community members about what is already going on in the neighbourhood, or by facilitating local meetings and groups.

#### Example: *Link* newsletter

Each Harvest area produces a regular edition of *Link*, which is tailored to individual neighbourhoods. It is produced in colour and a copy is delivered to each local household. As well as information about Harvest, it includes news about local groups such as credit unions and youth organisations, and details about what's going on in the community. *Link* encourages contributions from local residents in the form of letters and articles. Feedback from the community about *Link* has been very good.

### Customer Influencing Panels

Every area that Harvest works in either has, or is developing, a Customer Influencing Panel. These panels function in a similar way to a tenant committee, but the intention is to make membership wider and more diverse. Members also have more power to develop ideas aimed at improving their neighbourhood, and are instrumental in looking at ways of creatively engaging local residents.

Panels are a way for NROs to engage with the community, develop interventions, and achieve increased involvement and sustainability.

### **Example: Old Trafford area Customer Influencing Panel**

In 2003 the NRO for Old Trafford began to develop a panel. A conscious decision was made to ensure the Old Trafford membership was reflective of the community it served. This was in line with Harvest's belief that: 'Traditionally, tenant committees had not been fully representative of ethnic minority members and, consequently, priorities for such committees were not always akin to the wishes of the community.'

Harvest sponsored a stall at the annual Party in the Park, a community event that promotes cultural celebrations. Visitors to the stall were asked to suggest three priorities for the community, and volunteers were canvassed for membership of the panel. Priorities identified were community cohesion, crime, safety, and activities for young people. From this event the panel was formed, and now consists of 10 members ranging from Harvest tenants to owner-occupiers. They come from varying cultural backgrounds and span a wide age range.

The panel acts as a sounding board for Harvest staff on local issues, and is also able to plan initiatives and contribute to projects. It recently chose to support the elderly in the community by holding an afternoon tea and dance event. Members have also agreed to act as 'mystery shoppers', gauging the level of response from staff to customers whose first language isn't English.

In addition to the panels, Harvest also utilised a menu of other customer-influencing mechanisms. These include:

- video diaries
- fun days
- open discussions
- day trips
- posters
- kids' committees/youth forums
- community radio
- topic/skills-based training courses
- estate walkabouts – which include NROs and representatives from other organisations such as the police
- focus groups
- block representatives
- estate agreements
- community consultation
- mentoring.

# Young people as tenants

Young people's housing needs vary enormously. There is a major difference between the needs of someone who is able to plan a move with the support of parents and family, and one who leaves home suddenly because of violence, family breakdown or estrangement.

Young people do not usually have unrealistic demands as to the type of housing they want. There have been many surveys looking at this issue over the past 20 years. A recent one, conducted by Centrepoint in Durham in 2005, showed that young people require housing that is:

- in small-scale developments
- within established neighbourhoods
- for all ages and household types
- near to informal networks – friends, family and services
- affordable to rent, with low running costs.

RSLs provide an important source of affordable housing for people on low incomes. However, there may be factors that create barriers for young people applying, such as families with children being given higher priority, and some landlords refusing to offer tenancies to under-18s or imposing local residence criteria.

## Legal position

Many landlords are confused over the legal situation regarding letting property to minors because they cannot legally hold a tenancy. There is also a commonly held belief that they cannot be bound by a contract, and therefore cannot be taken to court for rent arrears. This means landlords frequently insist on guarantors for this age group, making it difficult for them to secure longer-term accommodation.

## Tenancies for minors

*'Although it is problematic, tenancies can legally be granted to 16- and 17-year-olds. However, this is not widely recognised amongst housing staff.'*

Cowan and Dearden

Minors and Tenancies – Stinging Nettles and Dock Leaves

*Journal of Housing Law (2) 1999*

The legislation governing the granting of tenancies to minors is the Law of Property Act 1925. The Act states that a tenancy of residential property is a legal estate in land, and that a minor cannot hold a legal estate. However, this does not mean that young people cannot be housed in self-contained accommodation. If a landlord attempts to grant a tenancy to a minor, it effectively means the landlord will be holding the tenancy in trust for them, and that the 'tenant' is actually a licensee.

The licensee will be regarded as having the same rights as a tenant if they have exclusive right of occupation of the premises. These licences automatically mature to a tenancy when the young person reaches the age of 18.

The Law Commission has also suggested that an 'equitable tenancy' could be used up to the age of 18. The 16- to 17-year-old is liable for rent and other general tenancy conditions. The advantage is that landlords can treat minors in the same way as adult tenants, with no uncertainty as to the legal status of the agreement. When a couple, one over 18 and the other a minor, wish to rent a property as joint tenants the older person would hold the tenancy in trust for their partner or flatmate, rather than the landlord having to do so.

Both individuals would be liable for the rent. There has been some debate over whether it is feasible for a landlord to hold tenancies in trust for their 'tenants'. This was clarified

to some extent by case law in 1998, when a court ruling held that a minor who had succeeded to a tenancy could remain in the property while their landlord, Kingston-upon-Thames LBC, held it in trust for them until they reached the age of majority.

### **Court action and guarantors**

Many landlords assume that because under-18s cannot hold a tenancy they cannot be held liable for rent. This has led to many local authorities and RSLs insisting on young people having guarantors. However, this is not necessary, because minors can be held contractually liable when the contract is for the provision of something that is a basic necessity of life – eg food, clothing or shelter.

Therefore, if a young person fails to pay the rent or to comply with any other condition of occupation, the landlord can take the property back through possession proceedings, within the same legal framework used for all tenants.

The only difference is that if it becomes necessary to take proceedings against a minor, the court must apply for a *guardian ad litem* to act on their behalf. This can be a parent or social worker, but if neither of these are an option, it will be the district judge of the county court in which proceedings are brought. A *guardian ad litem* will not be liable for any legal costs unless resulting from personal negligence or misconduct, nor can they be held responsible for actions by the minor.

### **Example: New Leaf**

New Leaf Supporting Independence will consider applicants under 18 years of age. While it recognises the legal difficulties around offering tenancies to this group, the association (part of Places for People group) remains committed to housing young people between the ages of 16 and 18, providing they can supply details of someone who can act as their 'litigation friend'.

This can be anyone who is a responsible adult, eg a parent, family member, or someone from an organisation such as social services, Barnardo's, NCH, Action for Children, or Citizens Advice. This person will act as an advocate for them and to protect the young person's legal interests if court action becomes necessary while they are still under 18. There is no financial risk to the individual and the role is different to that of a rent guarantor.

The verification stage of the application process enables the association to determine if it would be able to assist with housing and whether or not the applicant can manage a tenancy with or without support.

Offering tenancies to young people came about partly because the association had an oversupply of one-bedroom properties it was struggling to let. This scheme helped to turn around an estate.

### **Lettings policies**

Housing Corporation Code 3.5.5 states that RSLs should be 'using lettings policies that are fair and reflect the diversity of their client groups'. The guidance goes further by suggesting lettings policies should be 'flexible, non-discriminatory and responsive to demand, while contributing to the need to be inclusive and the need to ensure sustainable communities' (Guidance 3.6.a).

Many RSLs impose a minimum age for registering for housing and exclude minors from applying. In the context of legislation discussed concerning tenancies for minors, it would make sense for these restrictions to be lifted, and for associations to draw up criteria for assessing the housing and support needs of each individual applicant. This would mean that tenants of any age who require support could be allocated property that is suitable to their needs.

This is further supported by guidance from the Housing Corporation (Regulatory Circular 07/04), which states that blanket bans, including those of age restrictions, should not be used and expects 'efforts [to be] made to resolve any possible ineligibility'.

### **Choice-based letting schemes**

Choice-based letting (CBL) is a method of allocating social housing introduced in 2001/02. A local authority advertises available properties, and individuals bid for suitable tenancies in the area they would like to live. If more than one person bids, it will usually go to the person who has been waiting the longest, with some people having special priority.

There are concerns raised that such a scheme can act against the interest of vulnerable people who are in most need and who are forced to bid for low-demand properties. Very often this can be because they are not given the necessary support with the bidding process. RSLs need to take steps to make sure that young people, especially care leavers and those who have been homeless, are not at a disadvantage.

Where RSLs participate in letting schemes such as CBL and under-occupation schemes, the Housing Corporation expects them, in any joint protocols with local authorities, to ensure that there is the necessary provision to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, and to ensure that support is available to enable individuals to exercise choice.

### **Local lettings policies**

Landlords who have an oversupply of a particular type of property – for example, two-bedroom or three-bedroom terraces – could explore different ways to use it. This could be by under-letting, and housing young couples or groups of two or three young people. Alternatively, RSLs could work with a managing agent to develop small-scale supported housing for young parents, dispersed foyer-style housing, or emergency housing for families.

If there is a surplus of one-bedroom properties, which would be suitable for young people, a review of standard lettings policies may be beneficial. Young people could be given increased priority for one-bedroom flats and if not already doing so, the RSL could accept applicants aged 16 and 17. It could also consider developing floating support or cluster schemes for young people.

### **Example: The Step Scheme – CDS Housing**

A surplus of two- and three-bedroom terraces in an area of Liverpool led to the development of the Steps Scheme. A local lettings policy had to be agreed for the area, because the houses were to be underlet and only available to young people. The scheme, offering furnished or part-furnished properties, also attempted to copy the flexibility of the private rented sector by allowing for individuals to move out of a property if they no longer wished to share with that group, and into another with other friends or with their partner. Remaining tenants were responsible for finding a replacement.

The scheme was a small-scale initiative, and ran successfully for about five years. One Steps Scheme tenant says: 'It's good to have a comfortable house with no worries of pressure from landlords.' The project no longer operates, mainly due to the problems remaining tenants had in replacing tenants who had left.

# Housing and support options

Young people, particularly care leavers and those who have been homeless, can be the most vulnerable and marginalised in the community. This has been recognised by the Housing Corporation, which in its guidance suggests vulnerable people are 'provided with appropriate responsive housing services', and that 'support and care arrangements (including liaison with other agencies) are in place, where appropriate', (Housing Corporation Guidance 3.5.f).

Most young people can manage living independently if they have the support of their families – although most would benefit from some practical help at the start of their tenancy. However, vulnerable young people and those who cannot rely on friends or family may need more planning and long-term support. Providing the right type of service can make the difference between the success or failure of a tenancy.

## Supported housing

Most RSLs have supported housing schemes within their housing stock – either managed directly by them, or by a specialist managing agent. Whoever provides the service, there are a variety of different models of supported housing that cater for different needs, including emergency accommodation, small medium-stay hostels, second-stage housing, semi-independence units, lodging schemes, foyers and floating support schemes.

Ideally, all areas should have a range of provision to meet the needs of young people, and RSLs should strive to make this a reality, either by developing their own supported housing, or by working with partners.

## Pointers/ideas for supported housing

When developing supported housing, RSLs could consider the following.

- The way this is developed will depend on the nature of the area and the level of need – for example, emergency housing in rural areas would be of more benefit if dispersed, and not just one hostel in the main town.
- Form partnerships with non-traditional partners, such as local youth services, to deliver floating support schemes. This can be particularly useful in rural areas, where a local youth centre could support one or two young people in a village – thus taking the service out to the community, without having to open more satellite offices or have housing support staff always on the road.
- Shared housing is not a solution for everyone, but, despite being 'out of fashion', small-scale hostels can be an effective way to provide intensive support to young people.
- Floating support schemes, delivered by multi-disciplinary teams, can be a cost-effective way of providing flexible support to people with complex or high support needs across a wide area.

### Example: Wyre Housing Association

Wyre Housing Association, in partnership with Bay Housing Association, provides accommodation with support for young people with chaotic lifestyles living in Blackpool. A further partnership with Stonham Housing Association provides accommodation for teenage mothers in Chorley.

- Lodging and night stop schemes can be a good way of providing emergency or supported housing in rural areas, because they can house young people near to their own networks and do not need to be in a large urban centre to get heads on the beds. However, they should not be the only provision available in an area, as lodging with another household isn't suitable for everyone.
- Large hostels or developments cannot adequately cater for people with high support needs.
- User involvement is the key to effective resettlement and housing support work – the skills and confidence young people gain through user involvement initiatives are the same as those needed to make a success of living in your own place.
- Supportive housing is a new concept from the US, where a range of support services within housing developments are available to residents and the wider community. This would be a natural extension of the work RSLs could be doing with young people in the community.

#### **Example: CDS**

CDS, a member of Plus Housing Group, provides a generic support service to 47 tenants. This is short-term support to enable people to maintain their tenancies and their independence. There is no charge and the service remains with them until they no longer need it. The individual can be a tenant of any RSL or local authority. The service helps individuals get affordable furniture and household equipment, improve their life skills and maximise income. They also receive advice on training and employment opportunities, signposting to health services and specialist support services, and help with accessing local social and support networks.

#### **Furnished tenancies**

Offering young people the option of a furnished or partially furnished property can increase the chances of a tenancy succeeding. Just the provision of carpets, curtains, and white goods can make a big difference to someone moving into their first tenancy. Furnished and part-furnished properties can also increase lettings in otherwise difficult-to-let areas.

In most cases, tenants lease furniture from their landlord and pay for this as part of their rent charge. Some young people may have some furniture already, so it is a good idea to have a system whereby new tenants can select the pieces of furniture they need and individual items can be returned to the landlord as and when the tenant buys their own. This means that young tenants on low incomes can move into a property immediately and feel comfortable there, but can also make it feel more like their own space by gradually buying their own things.

#### **Young tenants' starter pack**

A tenants' starter pack could be given to young people, with additional information to that provided for other tenants. It could include:

- tenants' handbook
- information on benefits entitlement
- contact details of other support agencies
- information on local services such as doctors, hospitals, dentists, cheap suppliers of white goods
- information on getting utilities connected and methods of bill payment
- youth organisations and activities in the area.

### **Pre-tenancy courses**

For tenants who do not require a great deal of support, but who may need some preparation for moving into their own place, a pre-tenancy course can reduce the likelihood of problems arising. If organised for groups of new tenants, the courses can also be a way to bring people together to offer each other support. They can include sessions on tenants' rights and responsibilities, and increase young people's understanding of policies and tenancy conditions. They can also cover issues such as communication skills, confidence-building, training and employment opportunities, and signposting to support agencies.

Although courses will usually include sessions such as those already mentioned, it is important for them to allow for some flexibility and be responsive to the needs of the person or group.

Another benefit of running pre-tenancy courses is that individuals with higher support needs may be identified, and additional support can be offered. Ideally, courses should be a mixture of formal and informal sessions, outdoor/indoor and residential.

### **Example: East Potential, a pre-tenancy course for a foyer**

Foyer provider East Potential has developed the UK's first pre-foyer assessment centre, which accommodates young people for up to five weeks to determine the suitability of the foyer programme for the young person. It acts as a gatekeeper for East Potential's foyers. The assessment centre consists of diagnostic testing (basic skills and dyslexia), key work sessions (general housekeeping, health and lifestyle, career aspirations and housing aspirations) and life skills sessions (testing awareness, understanding and ability to live with minimal support).

The centre will also investigate the young person's past where appropriate. The young person leaves with a full support plan before moving into one of the foyers.

### **Example: Stonham Housing Association**

Stonham Housing Association originally set up pre-tenancy training for people who have experienced difficulties maintaining a tenancy in the past. This now includes young people taking on first tenancies and existing tenants with failing tenancies. It is a five-week modular training course, each module lasting two hours and covering budgeting, dealing with neighbour issues, rights and responsibilities, personal safety and shopping.

Individuals who complete the course receive a certificate and a Home Starter Pack donated by B&Q, which includes various items needed for setting up a new home. Individuals also get a tenancy support pack based on the training they have completed. New tenancies are then monitored at three monthly intervals and referred for additional support if needed.

### **Example: Broadway**

Broadway established its Your Move to provide resettlement courses, training and good practice information in March 2000. Broadway will work in partnership with other organisations to develop and deliver pre-tenancy training for homeless people. It has also developed an *It's your own home* handbook, now in its fourth edition. This is a practical, user-friendly guide for people moving into their own independent accommodation. It covers issues from receiving an offer to settling in, providing information and advice on the key issues people face. It covers the responsibilities and conditions of a tenancy, budgeting, utility supplies, furniture, repairs, basic DIY and home security.

### **Mentors and peer support**

RSLs could consider developing mentoring and peer support schemes within neighbourhoods. Young people moving into a property could be introduced to another young tenant who has lived in their own place for some time. They would act as an informal adviser and sounding-board for any problems the new tenant has. It would be an important source of support for someone who is new to the neighbourhood, introducing them to other people and identifying between any facilities for young people.

Older neighbours could also act as mentors if there are not sufficient numbers of young people in the area able or willing to do it. This approach would have the additional benefit of improving relationships between generations, as those mentoring or befriending young tenants would gain an insight into some of the problems young people face and get to know them on an individual basis. Similarly, young people would develop an understanding of the concerns of other residents in the area.

Schemes of this type are an excellent use of resources – with support from an RSL, residents' groups could co-ordinate the service, with mentors each supporting two or three new tenants, and a Housing Officer supporting the mentors. As their confidence grows, recipients of the service could then become mentors.

*'If only someone had told me how hard it would be to live away from home – but it would have had to be someone like me.'*

Resident of Bradford Foyer  
Safe Moves Toolkit  
The Foyer Federation

### **Young person's tenancy support worker**

A dedicated young person's tenancy support worker employed by an RSL would provide practical support over and above that normally expected of a Housing Officer. They would visit more frequently, offering advice on benefits issues and utilities for example.

### **Example: Tranmere Together, a neighbourhood pathfinder initiative**

This is a partnership between Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and Maritime and Riverside housing associations. The two RSLs jointly funded a project manager and work closely on a wide range of regeneration activities. The project operated a local lettings policy to ensure rehabilitated properties were let to people who had a connection to the area. Prospective tenants are involved throughout the development process and are able to choose their own kitchen and bathroom fixtures and fittings. Practical support is provided on the day of handover, with a Housing Officer available throughout the day to provide information on appliances, local services and what to do in case of emergency.

A starter pack is given to all tenants, including items such as tea, coffee, milk, sugar, mugs, dishcloth, tea towels, toilet roll, and washing-up liquid.

### **Example: The Steps Scheme – CDS Housing**

The Steps Scheme (outlined earlier) offered shared furnished accommodation to groups of friends wishing to live together and provided a flexible and responsive housing management service. Steps provided more practical support when tenants were moving in than for mainstream tenancies, but was not intended to rehouse young people with support needs or be part of a resettlement programme.

The Housing Officer attached to the scheme was the main point of contact for the tenants from the start. They would spend the whole day with new tenants when they moved in to ensure that the furniture arrived, carpets were fitted and utilities connected. They also ensured that each tenant filled in their benefit forms correctly.

Feedback from tenants showed that this particular aspect of the service was really important. One tenant says: 'We had plenty of help the day we moved in, nearly everything was done for us. The Housing Officer was brilliant, helping me with the benefit office – really patient, and I don't think I'd have sorted it myself.'

As mentioned previously, the Steps Scheme no longer operates.

# Conclusion

It's not within the scope of this guide to showcase all the good practice that RSLs are involved in to engage and support young people. Its aim is, rather, to show some of the methods by which RSLs can encourage young people to become involved in their local communities; and how RSLs can continue to support them as tenants or potential tenants.

Engaging young people as tenants is perhaps most relevant in light of recent research that shows a record 23 per cent of people can no longer afford to purchase a home without financial assistance. This assistance usually comes from parents and grandparents who are owner-occupiers.

The research underlines worries that young people are being priced out of the housing market and that social housing, despite the huge shortfall in many areas, may be the only financially sustainable option available.

RSLs will be playing a wider role in the future in meeting the needs and aspirations of young people. New skills and innovative ways of working will need to be utilised in order to provide an appropriate and person-centred service in a changing world. Hopefully, input from RSLs will help to promote peaceful neighbourhoods where communities and individuals can fulfil their potential.

# About Harvest Housing Group

Harvest Housing Group is a group of housing associations and companies that provide over 15,000 affordable, high-quality homes across more than 150 neighbourhoods throughout the north west and beyond. With properties in urban and rural areas, it manages both large neighbourhoods and small pockets 'pepper potted' in numerous neighbourhoods. Harvest's unique way of working delivers group-wide resources at a truly local level, whether this is to its own homes, to other businesses or its partners.

The Group consists of seven separate organisations:

- Harvest – parent body and service provider, whose remit includes strategic direction, corporate services, finance, business and service development, and Harvest Response – the shared service centre
- Frontis – developing market rent, key worker and other new housing products across the country. Frontis is responsible for the housing and neighbourhood service in Warrington
- Outlook – the one-stop shop for the house-building industry. Outlook works with house builders across the country, marketing affordable new homes for sale and rent
- Derwent & Solway HA – delivering housing and neighbourhood services in Cumbria
- Eaves Brook – delivering housing and neighbourhood services in Lancashire
- Manchester & District HA – delivering housing and neighbourhood services in Greater Manchester, Cheshire and High Peak
- Partington – delivering housing and neighbourhood services in Partington.

Harvest's vision underpinning its work is: *'Turning homes and neighbourhoods into places where people want to live and choose to stay.'* It believes that registered social landlords must adapt in order to survive, and that they need to make a difference in the communities where they work. Harvest recognises that young people make a valuable contribution to their neighbourhoods and has thus devised various ways of working with this group. It wants to focus on young people as active members of its communities and as young tenants. The Group also recognises that social exclusion and disaffection are a problem, and that all young people need help and support in order to fulfil their potential.

# Reading list and useful websites

The following is a list of published material intended for your further reading, offering you more insight into the projects and developments mentioned in this guide and providing some background information. You can locate this material by visiting the appropriate publisher's website, included in the list of useful websites across the page.

## Published material

**Developing a Youth Strategy: Harvest Youth Conference,**  
Harvest Housing Group, 2004

**Harvest Annual Report, 2004,**  
Harvest Housing Group, 2004

**Harvest Annual Report, 2005,**  
Harvest Housing Group, 2005

**Harvest Neighbourhood Toolkit,**  
Harvest Housing Group (still awaiting publication through their website at the time of going to press)

**Housing and homelessness awareness 2005,** a West Kent Extra training programme with young people from schools in Swanley, Field and Rowell, West Kent Extra, 2005

**iN business for neighbourhoods: one year on,** National Housing Federation, 2004

**Safe moves for young people toolkit,** Foyer Federation, 2004

**The Big Picture: Young People and Housing Associations,**  
Housing Corporation, 2002

**The Regulatory Code and Guidance,**  
Housing Corporation, 2005

**Young people and housing association housing, sector study 5,** Housing Corporation, 2000

**Young tenants – a special case? sector study 18,** Housing Corporation, 2002

## Websites

[www.cdshousing.org.uk](http://www.cdshousing.org.uk)

[www.east-potential.org.uk](http://www.east-potential.org.uk)

[www.foyer.net](http://www.foyer.net)

[www.harvesthousing.org.uk](http://www.harvesthousing.org.uk)

[www.housingcorp.gov.uk](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk)

[www.housing.org.uk](http://www.housing.org.uk)  
(National Housing Federation website)

[www.itsyourmove.org.uk](http://www.itsyourmove.org.uk)

[www.placesforpeople.co.uk/newleaf](http://www.placesforpeople.co.uk/newleaf)

[www.regenda.co.uk/wyre](http://www.regenda.co.uk/wyre)

[www.sanctuary-housing.co.uk](http://www.sanctuary-housing.co.uk)

[www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

[www.stonham.org.uk](http://www.stonham.org.uk)

[www.westkent.org.uk](http://www.westkent.org.uk)

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