Keys to the Future

An independent evaluation of Shelter’s Children’s Services
Gloucestershire service interim report

Shelter
Acknowledgements
The evaluation team would like to thank everyone who gave their time to participate in this evaluation and made invaluable contributions: Peer Educators, the Peer Education Support Workers and Multimedia Worker, the management and administrative staff at Shelter, schools that allowed our observation of peer education sessions, young people in sessions, and teachers who took part in the online survey.

Cover photograph by Sophie Laslett. Other photographs by Nick David and Sophie Laslett,

To protect the identity of Shelter clients, names have been changed and models have been used in photographs.

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Introduction

This report has been produced as part of an independent evaluation of the Keys to the Future (KTTF) programme commissioned by Shelter, specifically covering the Gloucestershire Peer Education Service. It presents the findings of qualitative research conducted over the past year with the Peer Education staff team, young people (both Peer Educators and recipients of peer education) and stakeholders (teachers). It aims to provide an overview of the achievements of the Peer Education Service over the past year and, as such, contributes to an evaluation summary report that covers all of the Keys to the Future services.
Aims and interventions

Aims
The Gloucestershire Peer Education Service aims to ensure that young people are educated on homelessness and bad housing, and that young people who are already touched by these issues receive immediate support. The service recruits, trains and supports young people who have experienced homelessness, and/or a housing need, to become Peer Educators and to provide a programme of homelessness prevention education and awareness-raising in schools, colleges and other youth settings.

Interventions
The Peer Education team has developed an effective process of reflective practice that has enabled the refinement and refocussing of the sorts of services/interventions the service provides during this year. The team is about to be reconfigured, and one of the Peer Education Support Workers (PESWs) will take on a Team Leader role.

Peer education
There has been a move towards providing two-session interventions, particularly in the schools where their young people may have a higher risk of becoming homeless. Through consultation, delivery has been refocussed to higher-risk groups such as care leavers, young carers, excluded young people, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and young offenders.
A successful bid to the Children and Young People’s Directorate, in association with the ASTRA (Alternative Solutions To Running Away) project based in Gloucester, has resulted in the recruitment of a new part-time staff member to work with children and young people (of 11 to 19 years) using peer education to raise awareness of the risks of running away. The Peer Education Service is aiming to recruit some younger (under-16s) Peer Educators to be involved in multimedia work and to support the preventative agenda by talking about homelessness with young people at an earlier age.

Drama

The Peer Education Service worked with students from Gloucester University and Peer Educators to produce a Forum Theatre piece exploring youth homelessness. Designed to promote discussion and initiate change, Forum Theatre presents a ‘bad version of events’ – in this case, a young person becomes homeless – and then the audience is invited to change the outcome for the young person by stepping into the narrative with a different action or strategy.

The volunteer student actors received a peer education session then developed a narrative for the Forum Theatre piece, testing the content with Peer Educators to ensure its authenticity. The play was performed to Keys to the Future stakeholders and invited guests in Gloucestershire, including other voluntary sector agencies, and the performance successfully engaged them. It was then delivered to schools in the first week of the Autumn term (seven performances) and the feedback is reported to be ‘excellent’. An internal evaluation report is being produced.

The use of drama as an extension of Peer Educator stories has also been trialled. A pilot three-session intervention with a whole Year 9 group at a school in Stroud was reviewed for this evaluation. Eighty-nine 13- to 14-year-olds, in three classes, took part in a peer education session followed by two drama sessions exploring Peer Educators’ stories. See ‘Impact and outcomes’ section (page 13) for feedback on this pilot.

Peer support

Pilot peer-support group sessions have been held at a Pupil Referral Unit in Cheltenham, using Peer Educators, and with young people in a Youth Centre in Tewkesbury where a PESW used ‘guided conversation’. The service also held a larger-scale workshop event with a whole Year 10 group in a secondary school in Stroud, during which young people drew on what they had learnt in the session to ‘advise’ a homeless young person (see photo). The approach to this has been to develop peer support as a module of peer education. Peer Educators retell their stories, highlighting the opportunities they could have taken to receive support and the impact it might have made on their experiences to do so. This is reinforced by activities designed to identify formal and informal support-givers, including specialist and statutory services and young people themselves.

A film illustrating how support might be offered was created to complement these sessions. The team is reviewing the effectiveness of these pilot sessions before offering more peer support.

Multimedia resources

Films about housing options have been produced, as DVDs, covering topics such as emergency accommodation, supported housing, and tenancy in the private rented sector. Some of the Peer Educator stories have also been filmed. These are Gloucestershire-specific resources that reinforce the activities and discussion points explored in a peer education session. The films were market-tested with young people, and reviewed for levels of understanding of the desired key messages, before the final cuts were made. A number of the films can be viewed on Shelter’s website.¹

¹ See Shelter website: http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_services_directory/england/south_west_england/gloucestershire/shelter_-_gloucestershire_housing_aid_centre/shelter_peer_education_service
Programme reach

The Peer Education Service provides a county-wide service across Gloucestershire, covering six district council areas. This can be a challenge for two PESWs, but the workers take responsibility for three districts each and have consciously attempted to ensure delivery in every area of the county.

Chart 1 shows a reasonably equitable distribution of peer education sessions across the county, with more sessions being delivered in two of the more rural districts. The Forest of Dean and other rural districts are identified by the PESWs as priority areas, because they are more isolated from homelessness advice and services based in the bigger towns. Gloucestershire is a non-unitary authority made up of six separate districts with unique identities and different statutory and voluntary services infrastructures. This means it is not possible to adopt a single approach to developing the service and explains the differing levels of opportunity across the county.
Chart 2: June 2007 to August 2009²

Chart 2 shows that Quarter 4, the Spring-term period, has been particularly busy over the past two years. The sharp increase from the beginning of 2009 could also reflect the agreement with the Big Lottery Fund that enabled the service to count children and young people who attend more than one session as individual instances. This was approved towards the end of Quarter 3 in 2008/09.

² Figures to August 2009 from Peer Education database
³ Graph produced by Shelter
Chart 3 shows that the average group size for young people accessing peer education sessions in Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury was 27, as would be expected of class sizes in secondary school. There was delivery to smaller groups in these areas, for instance in youth work settings, but overall these figures provide evidence of delivery in schools. The figures for Cheltenham and Cotswold are a little different, in Cheltenham the average group size appears to be 11 and in Cotswold it appears to be 46. The context for delivery in these areas would help to understand these differences – for instance, there is a Pupil Referral Unit in Cheltenham where the service has delivered and this is likely to have been with a smaller group size. The Peer Education Service has also provided delivery in special schools, colleges and youth centres where group sizes would be different.

The work in the Pupil Referral Unit provides evidence of the Peer Education Service targeting its services towards young people at higher risk of homelessness. The Unit supports young people who are excluded from school, some of whom are in foster care, and other ‘looked after’ young people. The PESWs have also been working with district councils and housing providers to try to identify schools across the county with clusters of young people who subsequently present as homeless, so that those schools can be targeted for more intensive preventative peer education sessions. PESWs have completed consulations with ‘looked after’ young people and young carers, and are currently preparing resources to deliver highly tailored peer education sessions to these at risk groups.

The Peer Education Service has already refined its offer so that schools with pupils who may be at a higher risk of making an unplanned move from the family home can receive a package of interventions including a number of peer education sessions, peer support group work and resources including DVDs and information on local support providers.

Chart 3: June 2007 to August 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of young people receiving peer education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bath and NE Somerset</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheltenham</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotswold</td>
<td>1352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest of Dean</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroud</td>
<td>1411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tewkesbury</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total no. 5,646

Schools whose pupils are at a lower risk of becoming homeless are offered an awareness-raising peer education session. The service has refined its offer to these schools too by asking them to specify their needs – for instance, should the session focus on staying safe or living independently, and tailoring the delivery of peer education sessions to meet those needs, rather than offering a ‘one size fits all’ service. Following each session, Shelter Z-cards, detailing how young people might access more information about their housing rights and where to get more information from, are distributed alongside district-specific support agency information.

The PESW team has worked with schools to highlight curriculum opportunities within the National Curriculum that peer education could further complement and, at the moment, this sits within the Citizenship Programme of Study for Key Stage 4.

In the period June 2007 to August 2009, the Peer Education Service received initial interest from 69 young people from across the county to participate as Peer Educators. The majority of Peer Educators have been recruited in Gloucester where there is more supported housing accommodation for homeless young people, and where recruitment by word of mouth between homeless young people has been successful.
Peer Educators’ engagement with the service tends to be quite fluid. As homeless young people, their lives can sometimes be chaotic and their circumstances can change frequently and very quickly. The PESWs recognise these factors and have developed the service to accommodate, with understanding, the fluctuations in Peer Educator engagement. At least one Peer Educator has described the service as offering an anchor of stability in uncertain times. Peer Educators can choose to take a break for a while, a ‘sabbatical’, if they have other priorities to deal with, and then are welcome to come back when they are ready. This flexibility demonstrates good volunteer support from the PESWs, but it also indicates how difficult it can be for the team in trying to put teams together to deliver sessions across the county when Peer Educators drop out for a while.

Not all young people who have expressed an interest go on to become Peer Educators. The following chart shows the different levels of engagement Peer Educators can have with the service, and indicates the rigorous process of induction and training for Peer Educators before they are ready to deliver to other young people.

The Peer Education Service does record the gender and year group of young people accessing peer education sessions, but it is not currently recording the ethnic grouping of either Peer Educators or young people accessing sessions. The service is able to use schools’ Census information to obtain a breakdown of gender and ethnicity in individual year groups in schools. This information was used to inform the ‘Runaways’ bid to the Children and Young People’s Directorate and could also be used to provide a more detailed profile about the recipients of peer education sessions. This would mean PESWs and Peer Educators would not have to use up valuable contact time in collecting additional monitoring information from recipients.
Impact and outcomes

The Keys to the Future Peer Education Service is having an impact at a number of levels. Primarily, it seeks to make a difference for young people in Gloucestershire, raising awareness of homelessness, the implications of leaving home, and where to go for help with housing needs.

It is very difficult to measure the impact of a preventative education service, and particularly so in Gloucestershire where data on young people presenting as homeless is not yet consistently collected or collated across the six districts. This is beginning to be done, but the initial data available is incomplete and covers only the first two quarters of 2008/09, and this does not provide enough information to usefully inform the evaluation at this point. Keys to the Future is working with partners, to identify areas with clusters of young people registering with housing providers as a way of targeting its services and becoming more effective at preventing young people’s homelessness.

Secondly, the service also recruits, trains and supports young homeless people to share the stories of their experiences of homelessness, enabling them to achieve volunteering awards and nationally recognised qualifications.

Indirectly, the service also raises the awareness of teachers and other professionals working with young people about homelessness and how it can be hidden – for instance, by ‘sofa surfing’. It provides them with information and resources to support the young people they work with, who may be at risk of becoming homeless.
Previously, PESWs have supported Peer Educators to engage at a strategic level – for example, inputting to consultation on choice-based lettings for a district housing department. However, most of the strategic engagement and influencing work for the service is undertaken by the Project Manager, and the inclusion of peer education in the most recent Homelessness Strategies for all six districts in Gloucestershire provides evidence of the success of this work.

**Young people**

All young people that receive a peer education session are invited to complete a feedback form. The first page of the form is completed at the beginning of a session to try to determine young people’s existing levels of knowledge about homelessness; and the second page is completed at the end, to identify the key messages they have taken from the session. Generally, young people come away from sessions being clear that Connexions is a first point of call for help with a housing need, and feeling moved or engaged by the Peer Educators’ stories.

In June 2009, an online survey was sent to 30 schools that have hosted the Peer Education Service. Twelve responses were received, a 40 per cent return which provides a robust sample. Teachers were asked to comment on the delivery of peer education sessions (see ‘Stakeholder perspectives’ section, page 17) and the impact they had for young people. One commented:

‘Very valuable sessions, many stereotypes removed, and their understanding of issues relating to homelessness was significantly improved.’

**The key messages that teachers thought had been retained by young people were:**
- homelessness can happen to anyone
- the choices young people make have wide implications
- help is available – Connexions, Shelter
- there are different ways of being homeless
- young people leave home for lots of different reasons.

All teachers who responded to the survey felt the main impact of the sessions was that young people know where to go for help with housing issues. See chart (below) for their overall assessment.

**Chart 6: Teacher assessment of the impact of peer education session(s) on young people in the group/class**

![Chart showing the impact of peer education sessions on young people.](chart6.png)

No. responses: 12

The Keys to the Future team tried different approaches to the delivery of peer education and, in 2008/09, decided to try both multiple sessions with the same groups to reinforce the key messages, and to introduce drama as a tool for engaging young people and bringing Peer Educators’ stories to life. Case study 1 presents the outcomes of a pilot intervention that combined both of these elements.
Peer Educators

The majority of the young people recruited as Peer Educators fall under the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) category. As a result of volunteering as a Peer Educator, a number of young people have gone on to full-time employment, further education or an additional volunteering activity. Nine young people have achieved a BTEC in Peer Education qualification to date, and five have achieved a V-Involve award for volunteering.
**Case study 2: Peer Educator, Rachel**

**Keys to the Future engagement**

Rachel was living in supported housing when she heard about the Peer Education Service from another resident. During her training to become a Peer Educator, she observed other Peer Educators in action before telling her own story to a class of young people in a school. She said: ‘Doing the first delivery was so scary, there was lots of tension beforehand… but you get a big buzz from it afterwards.’

**Development**

Rachel felt her story got better over time. She described how she began to tell it rather than read it, and she was able to adapt it slightly for different audiences:

‘If it was younger children, I could wrap [some of the hard things] in bubble wrap… for sixth form I could make it more scary, in a way... and relate it to Uni, tenancies, loans etc.’

Rachel discussed her delivery beforehand with Peer Education Support Workers (PESWs), to plan the most appropriate approach. Varying the delivery helped to maintain her enthusiasm for volunteering with Keys to the Future. The PESW who supported Rachel felt she was a natural team leader within the Peer Educator team.

**Outcomes**

Rachel felt she was more confident from working with the Peer Education Service and her PESW agreed: ‘Rachel has become more focussed and confident, and has become more diplomatic.’

Rachel described how she is better able to talk about her feelings and can see things from another person’s point of view – she considered that this has helped her to move back home with her mother. She has achieved a BTEC qualification in Peer Education and a V-Involve award – ‘Good on the CV!’, she says. Rachel feels the difference the Keys to the Future service has made for her is that she has been able to open up about her experiences of homelessness and pass on her knowledge to other young people:

‘Being able to reach even one person (and give them information) would make me happy.’

Rachel has moved on from the Peer Education Service now. She has an apprenticeship with on-the-job training and no longer has time to volunteer, although she still shares her experiences of Keys to the Future with other people and is happy to promote the service.

The three Peer Educator volunteers who have been interviewed for the evaluation this year have all stated that a key motivator and reward for them, in being involved with the Peer Education Service, is being able to let other young people know that there is help available if they become homeless and that leaving home is not a choice to be taken lightly. They described the rigour of the induction process before they could go out and tell their stories, commenting in particular on the diversity, confidentiality (‘[KTTF]’re big on this!’) and child-safeguarding elements of the training, and how it made them think about their own beliefs and experience. When in public, Peer Educators take their role of representing Shelter seriously. One described how she modified her behaviour when being a Peer Educator – for instance, by not swearing: ‘It was strange at first, but you get used to it’. Volunteers express a sense of ‘being responsible’ as Peer Educators, which has had a positive impact on their self-esteem and this effect has also been observed by their Peer Education Support Workers.
Case study 3: Peer Educator, Sara
Impact of continuing homelessness for Peer Educators

Sara has been volunteering with the Peer Education service for almost two years. Her personal circumstances have changed a great deal during that time:

Sara described how the Peer Education service provided some stability for her during this period of uncertainty and change: ‘Having it there was like a bit of normalness’. She felt the sessions she delivered were a ‘lifeline’. She did as many as possible because the vouchers Keys to the Future provided as incentives for Peer Educators were ‘a big help – I could buy shopping and my contribution [to the person she was staying with at the time] was covered for the week’.

Sara also described how she could include her changing circumstances in peer education sessions, amending her story and asking students to guess ‘where am I living now?’ The immediacy of her changing circumstances made her story more powerful for young people. Her Peer Education Support Worker noted how Sara being homeless made the organisation of her peer education deliveries difficult, ‘not impossible, but difficult’, and this demonstrates the flexibility of the service to be inclusive of young people even when they are in crisis.

Teachers

All teachers who observe peer education sessions are invited to complete an evaluation form to identify the key messages they think have been communicated and to comment on the overall delivery of the sessions. Generally, these forms show that the peer education sessions are delivering consistent messages about where young people can go for help, if they find themselves homeless, and that there are different kinds of homelessness, including hidden homelessness like ‘sofa surfing’.

Teachers report having their own awareness of homelessness issues raised by the peer education sessions. Most teachers find the Peer Educators' stories to be a powerful element of the session, although there are some inevitable differences in the style and skills of Peer Educators in communicating their stories, and these have been identified in teacher feedback. PESWs work with Peer Educators to reflect on, and respond to, feedback from teachers and young people.

Most teachers who completed the online survey for the evaluation had follow-up discussions with students after the peer education sessions and reviewed the key messages.
Impact for teachers

Teachers were asked if they had learnt anything themselves from the Keys to the Future peer education session(s) they had observed. These are the comments received:

‘Hearing the experiences of the Peer Educators was incredibly helpful. It dispels stereotypes and gives staff facts to inform students with.’

‘The number of places available locally. The significant number of ‘hidden homeless’ in society.’

‘Use of Connexions. Fear involved in being on the streets and use of drugs to cope.’

‘About local provision available.’

‘A young person is willing to share the lessons they have learnt and move forward – a great role model.’
Stakeholder perspectives

Overall, the findings of the survey provide positive feedback on the Peer Education Service. All of the teachers responding to the schools survey that had observed a peer education session (10 in number) agreed that the Peer Educators and PESWs worked together as a team with a good balance of input. They also all agreed that the teams are able to pitch delivery appropriately for the year groups. Three respondents noted that, to some extent, the quality of the sessions depended on which Peer Educators were delivering and how the classes were behaving on any given day.

Teachers were asked to assess the different elements of a peer education session and the findings were that Peer Educators’ stories, the Question and Answer section, and the statement of key messages in a session were felt to be ‘strong’ elements. Responses about games, information sheets and multimedia tools, such as DVDs, were more mixed, but that is probably because they are the more optional elements of a session and it is unlikely that schools will have experienced them all.
One teacher, interviewed for the evaluation, who provided the school link with Keys to the Future for peer education sessions, found some of the games and activities used to raise the awareness of young people about what ‘was and was not homelessness’ to be very effective – ‘That was quite a surprise for some young people’ – and she commented that during the follow up discussion about the implications of being homeless (for instance, receiving no post), she ‘could hear the pennies dropping’.

Chart 8: Feedback from teachers who observed peer education sessions

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All survey respondents (12 in number) considered peer education to be an effective method of imparting ‘life choice’ messages to young people, and they would all recommend peer education to their colleagues. One professional provided feedback directly to the Peer Education Service, illustrating this point:

‘[KTTF] have been a great service to the students. Homelessness and housing issues are a continuing problem for many young people and [KTTF] are able to educate and challenge stereotypes in a really positive way. Bringing Peer Educators, other young people who have experienced homelessness, in to share their experiences has allowed students to hear real-life examples of the problems and solutions they might face. I am confident that, now or in the future, a young person would be better able to plan their move or find the best help should they become homeless.’

Student link worker, Gloucestershire

Teachers would be interested in a teachers’ pack of follow-up activities for reinforcement of key messages, and they think a follow-up session a year later would be a good idea ‘as long as it built on the prior learning and was not just a revisit of earlier material’.
Lessons learnt

The Peer Education Service has learnt, by listening to feedback from the schools who have received delivery, that there is a desire for more information about pathways towards independence for young people, whether making planned moves to independent living or leaving home to go to college or university. Schools would like more input on the details of transition, such as negotiating tenancy agreements, financial budgeting and avoiding eviction. There is a county-wide forum on financial capability for young people that would support development of this strand of work.

During this pilot phase of the service, the team has realised that there are a number of interventions and services available for young people who are homeless and ‘in dire straits’. However, for young people who are just beginning to realise there might be difficulties at home that could provide the impetus for them to leave, there is not much support currently available. Keys to the Future is working with the county-wide Young People’s Housing Support Group to develop family support and mediation to tackle family difficulties and prevent the potential homelessness of young people. The provision of advice and support on pathways to living independently, including a reality check on the responsibilities of maintaining a household, by the Peer Education Service, would be a complementary preventative strand to help young people find opportunities to stay at home.
The Peer Education Service invested in developing drama this year, including Forum Theatre, and this has been enthusiastically received by schools and stakeholders. However, the organisation of drama workshops and performances requires a great deal of time and project management, therefore the service is reviewing how it can make best use of drama more effectively in the future, as one of a package of elements the Peer Education Service offers to schools and other agencies working with young people.

The service has explored a number of options for delivering peer support during the pilot phase. It has been difficult to find a configuration of service that will provide effective support to young people at risk of becoming homeless, while providing effective support and supervision to Peer Educators if they should deliver it. The development of peer support as an extension of peer education could provide the basis of some longitudinal research to measure the effectiveness of this chosen approach by, for instance, following a group of young people over a period of time to see if these more intensive interventions inform their future decision-making about housing choices.
Until there’s a home for everyone

We are one of the richest countries in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter helps more than 170,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of bad housing by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

Our website gets more than 100,000 visits a month; visit shelter.org.uk to join our campaign, find housing advice, or make a donation.

We need your help to continue our work. Please support us.