



Scottish Homelessness & Employability Toolkit

Developed by SHEN, the Scottish
Homelessness & Employability
Network

Clare Archibald, SHEN National Co-ordinator,
2011.

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Introduction

This homelessness and employability toolkit is designed to complement rather than replace existing employability toolkits (see www.employabilityinscotland.com for a range) and has been developed in recognition of the fact that people experiencing homelessness face additional barriers to employability. The toolkit focuses only on those aspects that are specific to homelessness and is intended to be both a starting point and evolutionary in nature, being added to and amended as practice and research develops on a local and national basis.

The complex nature of homelessness means that homeless people can be in contact with a diverse range of people who can impact on their journey to work. The toolkit is intended to maximise the opportunity for positive interventions by these workers.

Those such as:

Health professionals

Housing workers

Criminal justice workers

Jobcentre Plus staff

Specialist support workers

Community learning providers

Statutory agencies

All of whom can play an influential part in the holistic approach required to effectively develop the employability of someone recovering from homelessness. The toolkit has been designed to:

- Raise awareness of the specific barriers to employability faced by homeless people.
- Offer practice based solutions to these barriers.
- Reinforce the fact that service deliverers at all points of the journey to work spectrum can positively impact on a homeless persons' employability.

The toolkit encompasses the experience and practice of a range of agencies working across Scotland.

The toolkit is based on the notion of employability being **the journey to work** and not necessarily on gaining and sustaining employment itself, although this is obviously the ultimate, ideal goal. It is accepted that many homeless people are amongst those furthest from the labour market and that their marginalisation, additional barriers faced, and the circumstances of their homelessness and recovery may mean that the journey to work is one of small steps and not always one that follows a straightforward linear pattern. The emphasis throughout the toolkit is employability in the very broadest, all encompassing sense, for example, from engagement activities to get someone in

supported accommodation increasingly motivated and raised in self esteem at the start of the journey, to in work support once a person gets a job.

The toolkit is built around the premise that **all** people have the potential to experience the increased well-being, confidence and esteem that is proven to arise from work and/or positive engagement with the employability process. The kit is a small step in enabling **you** to support that process.

WHY?

The people behind the homeless label have a huge range of experience, skills and potential, and whilst many face several barriers and disadvantages, taking a holistic, person centred approach could help transform a person's health, wealth or well-being.

Additionally homeless people are disproportionately affected by past and emerging welfare reform in that a very high proportion are in receipt of Housing Benefit and of out of work and sickness related benefits. With migration to Employment Support Allowance and increased conditionality and the introduction of Universal Credit, the impetus to engage with employability processes will not be optional for many. It is even more crucial then that those involved at different parts of the journey are aware of specific issues, their potential influence and how to use it effectively.

Designing Services

In designing services that incorporate and promote a culture of employability for homeless people it is vital to:

- Involve and consult with service users at the planning stages – the people potentially using the service are invaluable in shaping it in a way that is more likely to deliver positive outcomes. For advice on how to do this you can access www.ghn.org.uk/shien
- Understand the different stages of the employability process and how the planned service fits with them. For example, if you are planning a pre-vocational element to your service have pathways to the next stage been mapped and links made with other service providers if necessary? The Right Deal for Homeless People developed by Off the Streets & into Work/Crisis maps out the preferred approach for homeless people, (<http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/right-deal.html>).
- A “small steps” approach is often required when working with homeless people due to the additional barriers often faced, whether in terms of additional support needs or systems in place. Planning and funding applications should take this into account, and a soft indicators model should be adopted where possible in order for progression/achievements to be meaningfully mapped and evaluated.

- Capacity should be built in to allow for the training and accreditation of staff. In a survey by Crisis (www.crisis.org.uk) the majority of homeless people said that the biggest barrier to accessing Employment, Education and Training opportunities was that they did not know who to get advice from. Train your staff up and promote their knowledge to your service users.
- Capacity should be built in to allow for the accreditation of learning undertaken by service users. This leads to tangible achievement, increased self-esteem and confidence and promotes a culture of continuous learning. It also builds helpful, formal links and understanding with the learning sector.
- Organisations should consider peer learning from agencies with established employability related provision and good practice. The Scottish Homelessness & Employability Network (www.shen-scotland.org) can facilitate learning exchanges where possible.
- Evaluation and review systems should be part of the planning process.
- Meeting the employability needs of homeless people requires a holistic approach and can therefore often necessitate partnership working. Design of services needs to take into account the network of required partners, and who will take responsibility for each part of the employability pathway.

Barriers Relating to Homelessness

Those experiencing homelessness can face many challenges in developing employability skills and/or taking advantage of Employment, Education and Training opportunities.

- Compared to the housed population, homeless people have lower than average levels of literacy and qualifications.
- People experiencing homelessness are also more likely to have encountered stigmatisation and to have had negative experiences within educational settings or the workplace.
- The nature of support needs such as substance use can also mean that there is a correlated higher instance of criminal offending history. Previous convictions may prove to be significant barriers – advice can be sought from www.apexscotland.co.uk
- Homelessness impacts significantly on levels of self esteem and confidence, and motivation levels can subsequently be low with a greater fear of failure attached to starting the journey towards work.
- Situational factors such as the fear of losing accommodation again if benefits income is lost or altered can also be significant in determining a homeless person's engagement with the employability process.

- People living in temporary accommodation such as hostels or supported accommodation may also find that their living arrangements are not conducive to keeping regular hours or may find that the address is unofficially 'blacklisted' by potential employers.
- Peer influences in this context can also play a determining role in levels of engagement.
- Factors relating to mental or physical health may mean that engagement with processes is sporadic dependent upon mental or physical well-being. Homeless people have significantly higher instances of physical and mental health issues than housed equivalents and have a much reduced average mortality rate.
- Due to transient or chaotic histories homeless people may lack access to ID and personal documents that support past educational or work achievements and histories. They may also find it difficult to supply historical facts often required for form filling such as previous addresses, employers etc.
- Debts may be carried which will impact on the ability to realistically take up certain options.
- On a practical level people may not have an adequate supply of clothes or work related equipment to enable them to feel confident in engaging with the employability process.
- Homelessness is a traumatic, depressing and frustrating situation and can lead to or reinforce behaviours perceived as negative or anti-social.
- Lack of references can be an issue.
- Not enough 'clean' time can delay the journey to work.
- Lack of positive social networks as a result of homelessness can impact negatively on engagement with employability.

Creating a Culture of Employability

In supporting homeless people on their journey to work it's important to recognise that **anyone** working in any capacity with them can be a positive influence. Promoting and supporting employability for homeless people is not just the responsibility of specialist employability workers or services but should be an integral part of any homelessness services' culture. Creating a culture of employability is an important step in seeking to address the barriers to employability.

To create a **culture of employability** you can think about doing the following:

- If you are starting up a new project include employability in your strategic aims and service design, as this will establish the concept as a priority from the start, and will introduce it as a natural way of working for the staff team.
- Contact like projects to identify good practice in how they achieve employability outcomes, and arrange for staff exchanges/presentations/workshops with your staff teams.
- Raise employability awareness and related up-skilling of staff by ensuring that basic awareness training is available as a minimum. Contact www.shen-scotland.org to discuss homelessness and employability training.
- Incorporate employability in your business planning processes.

- Incorporate employability in your action planning and review processes. Regular reviews of employability assessments will embed the culture with both staff and service users.
- Ensure positive role modelling by staff in terms of core and soft skills.

Helping to Break the Barriers Down

Whilst there are some barriers such as the vagaries of the welfare benefits system that individual staff or indeed organisations can't make much impact on, there are numerous ways in which to help promote and support enhanced employability:

- Take into account peoples' fears and potential risk.
- Build and keep updated robust information resources and networks to support, inform and reassure your service users.
- Embed a culture of aspiration whereby assumptions about experience and expectations are not casually made but facts are identified through ongoing assessment and review.
- Build services around what actually appeals to service users by involving them as far as possible.
- Offering opportunities for positive, achievable outcomes, however small, can help build a culture of aspiration.
- Recognise and respect the right of service users to engage with processes at a pace that is right for them by offering tailored, flexible support.
- Up-skill staff in Motivational Interviewing and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques.
- Consider the individual needs of the service user when exploring options. Traditional learning routes may not always be the most appropriate. For some people learning in large groups or in colleges may be overwhelming or intimidating. Folio based learning could aid in this respect as

service users can build their evidence use of learning at their own pace. Consider delivering courses in a non college setting where possible and appropriate or having a graduated two centre approach, for example, initial learning off campus and later modules on campus.

- Pre-vocational opportunities can be particularly relevant as the first access point and a motivating factor for the longer term process. Pre-vocational training or meaningful occupation can be embedded within projects with relatively low costs and in built flexibility. For example, a London hostel for formerly street homeless men with substance use issues achieved significant success in many areas with a programme of military fitness sessions. The hostel refurbishment programme in England focuses on redeveloped projects being Places of Change where positive life change occurs via enhanced employability, and plays an important part in the prevention agenda (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/placesofchange>).
- Take a holistic approach in assessment and action planning.
- Work in partnership with key agencies such as health, and specialist support services such as around mental health, offending and substance use.
- Build and nurture relationships with education providers, employers, community organisations and the wider local community and business community.
- Plan responses to challenge negative assumptions from potential employability providers.
- Undertake risk assessment and management processes specific to employability.
- Understand where your service fits into your local employability pipeline or pathway.
- Build service awareness of different learning styles and ease of access to opportunities.

- Consider the logistics of your service – do the timings of skills groups or learning activities positively match the needs of your desired participants? Can you vary the times, or offer different levels?
- Agreed single or common assessment tools are extremely useful in ensuring that pathways are clearly defined and supported by all involved.
- Consider work that can be undertaken to enhance social networks that can positively impact on employability. Contact www.scottishsocialnetworks.org for information, advice and training on how to do this effectively.
- The value of mentoring is increasingly being recognised in supporting homeless people. Contact www.scottishmentoring.co.uk for information, guidance and training.
- Ensure that there is good organisational, staff and service user understanding of the welfare system and any proposed or actual reform. Many areas have outreach benefits workers dedicated to working with homeless people and liaising with homelessness services. Design of services should include making contacts and setting up of agreements with the Department of Work and Pensions/Jobcentre Plus.
- Where formal specific service agreements aren't possible, service design should include emphasis on generic knowledge of welfare benefits, rights and responsibilities. Some services benefit by having a named link person or specialist who then cascades information updates and training.
- Homelessness organisations are also increasingly running trainee programmes for service users and proactively recruiting formerly homeless people as employees all of which can enhance positive role modelling and experiential understanding of the barriers and how to overcome them. (www.mungos.org, www.thamesreach.org.uk).

The Basic Do's

DO:

- Respect the life experience and potential of each individual.
- Embrace employability not just as a concept but as the human right to develop and participate.
- Acknowledge additional barriers without making assumptions.
- Build a positive relationship with the individual, find out what interests and motivates them, what their hopes and aspirations are and what they consider their past achievements to be.
- Be a positive role model.
- Be clear about expectations and consequences but allow for lapses and the need to try again or in a different way.
- Remember your own journey to work and reflect on what impacted on this.
- Embrace partnership working. Ask your clients/service users permission to be in contact with other professionals to ensure a holistic, joined up approach.

- Be honest and realistic about aspirations whilst maintaining positivity and encouragement
- Consider someone's housing situation and any potential impact before giving employability advice.
- Be open-minded to potential without making assumptions or prejudging abilities or interests.
- Tailor plans to individuals and avoid a one size fits all approach.
- Encourage positive risk taking.
- Be aware of how lack of confidence and self esteem can impact on engagement.
- Be realistic about your own expectations, and don't expect a textbook journey from A to B.
- Focus on refining soft outcomes measurement systems rather than being swayed by the need for hard outcomes for funding purposes.
- Prepare and use planned positive responses to challenge stigma and preconceptions.
- Take into account individual needs and where service users are at, or and be encouraging whilst not underplaying or avoiding exploring potential pitfalls.
- Do think that you can make a positive difference even if you don't have employability in your job title – you can.

Employability Support

Despite the multitude of barriers, many people who have experienced homelessness **do** engage positively with employability opportunities in education, employment or training. As with any change the initial stages can be crucial in determining the longer term success. Many transitions to education, training and employment break down because of:

- **Financial problems** as a result of coming off benefits to take up work or study. It is crucial that financial forecasting is included in the employability plan, and that up to date and accurate welfare rights advice is received (www.cpag.org.uk/scotland) and incorporated. It is important that the ability to repay any outstanding debts when working is taking into account when forecasting finances.
- **Lack of social networks**. Taking up work or study may mean a move away from existing networks. Many educational establishments and some workplaces run buddy or mentoring schemes, and it make sense to establish if these are available as part of the planning process.
- **Limited access to necessary tools/equipment/clothing**. Lack of funds to buy all the necessary equipment to carry out the job or to buy clothes that are appropriate can make a successful transition less likely. In addition to accessing any grants or loans from the DWP, www.funderfinder.org.uk can be used to explore other funding options to cover such costs.

- **Expectations not being realistic.** It is important to be encouraging of the person's transition whilst being honest about the difficulties that may be faced. Working with them to highlight potentially difficult areas and coping strategies can help prevent fallout from education, training or employment.
- **Inappropriate housing.** A person's housing situation may not match what they are doing. For example, someone living in a chaotic environment may find it difficult to get up for early shifts if there has been lots of noise and activity during the night in their shared accommodation. Again, work with the person to establish the risks and look at whether other employability options or housing are possible or a better fit with their overall plan.
- **Support needs.** Relapses relating to physical or mental health or substance use may impact on a person's ability to sustain their education, employment or training. The potential for lapse or relapse should be planned for. Many colleges and employers will have welfare officers or access to occupational health support. Advocacy or mediation services will also be of use in some instances.
- **Confidence & self-esteem.** Homelessness significantly impacts on confidence and self-esteem. People may have significant fears and doubts when taking up employability opportunities, and it is important to acknowledge these and look at ways of offering practical and emotional support.
- **Exit strategy.** It may be that the course or job is simply not the right thing at the right time. It is important, therefore, to have plans in place that capture any positives from the experience and minimise any further barriers being created.

Homelessness, Employability & Young People

When working with young homeless people bear in mind that:

- Although they can be grouped together as “young” they are still individuals.
- A young person will have the added disadvantage of having less time to have built up prior experience and references.
- Positive interventions and employability support for this age group can work to prevent future homelessness.
- Young person specific options should be available where appropriate.
- The benefits system is less financially favourable to young people.
- Family dynamics or relationships or previous social networks may impact on a young person's ability to engage with employability processes, or to take up options in a certain location.
- Peer mentoring can enhance employability and provide positive role modelling.

Homelessness, Employability & Substance Users (Former, recovering & continuing)

When working on employability with homeless people who have used or continue to use drugs or alcohol it is worth bearing the following in mind:

- Offering different options appropriate for the different stages that people are at is important. For example, if you facilitate employability activities that have clear boundaries around participants not being under the influence of substances then consider offering other activities that allow for people who have been drinking or using to engage.
- People who have experienced both homelessness and a dependency issue may be doubly stigmatised or negatively perceived when attempting to move towards the labour market. Building confidence and self esteem in the individual and positive perception by others may be a longer process than for someone who has no addiction history.
- Offending history may pose a considerable barrier in accessing volunteering or work placement opportunities due to the disclosures system. Advice on positively addressing the presentation of convictions can be gained from www.apexscotland.org.uk
- Certain volunteering, or work placements or employment opportunities require a certain amount of “clean time”. This needs to be factored into employability plans.

- If treatment is ongoing and, for example, the individual needs to be able to pick up their methadone script then this needs to be factored into the employability plan.
- Someone who has a previous or ongoing dependency issue is likely to have or require involvement from a range of agencies from the fields of substance use, criminal justice, health and housing. It is important to obtain agreement to co-ordinate a joined up, holistic employability support package.
- Those recovering from substance use may be particularly vulnerable in terms of limited access to social networks if moving away from previous networks has been a necessary part of the recovery process. This may impact on engagement with employability or conversely could be used as a motivating factor in engagement if meaningfully included in their plan.
- Targeted recruitment of, or in house apprenticeships for, those who have recovered from substance use is becoming more common in the field of substance use service delivery. For more information see www.sdf.org.uk

Homelessness, Employability & Armed Forces Veterans

Homelessness is recognised as a risk for armed forces veterans due to a range of factors. Veterans who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, may also face additional barriers in terms of addressing employability needs and accessing employability opportunities. When supporting or advising it is helpful to remember that:

- When leaving the armed forces a veteran loses their in service support network, which can impact on their levels of confidence, motivation and emotional well-being.
- They may have service related physical or emotional issues which could hamper their engagement with employability options. Due to the nature of their experiences it may be difficult for them to discuss or communicate the impact of this meaningfully with civilian services and staff.
- Due to the nature of life in the services they may be lacking in basic life-skills.
- The unique nature of armed forces life may mean that it is especially difficult for veterans to establish rapport with employability advisors who do not understand their experience and subsequent skills levels and expectations.

- Veterans are less likely to appeal decisions or challenge assumptions due to the hierarchical culture that they have been immersed in. It is important to allow opportunity to check that agreement with plans is genuine and not an automatic response to a situation that may be falsely perceived as not open to negotiation.

In order to maximise the opportunities to engage veterans who are homeless with employability opportunities, a range of specialist agencies can be accessed for advice and support. For **employability** these are:

Veterans Scotland – www.veteranscotland.co.uk

Poppyscotland – www.poppyscotland.org.uk

Career Transition Partnership – www.ctp.org.uk

Regular Forces Employment Agency – www.rfea.org.uk

Officers Association Scotland – www.oascotland.org.uk

It may also be the case that there are welfare or other issues that need to be addressed in order to progress employability. **The following agencies offer forces specific welfare support:**

SSAFA – www.ssafa.org.uk

Poppyscotland – www.poppyscotland.org.uk

Veterans Scotland – www.veteransscotland.co.uk

Veterans Agency – www.veteransagency.org.uk

Medical support can be accessed via:

Combat Stress – www.combatstress.org.uk

BLESMA – www.blesma.org

Veterans Agency – www.veteransagency.org.uk

Forces specific housing support from:

Veterans Scotland – www.veteransscotland.co.uk

Scottish Veterans Residences – www.svronline.org

Scottish Veterans Garden City Association – www.housesforheroes.org.uk

Haig Housing Trust – www.haighousingtrust.org.uk

Veterans Agency – www.veteransagency.org.uk

Homelessness, Employability & Mental Well-Being

Homelessness is a traumatic experience that can arise from or precipitate emotional or mental health issues. In addressing employability needs and plans it is important to take any factors relating to mental health into account. The interplay between substance use and mental health issues should also be considered. In addition to the barriers already discussed, those experiencing mental health problems may:

- Face increased stigmatisation.
- Be more socially isolated.
- Have side effects from medication that may impact on their ability to engage with certain employability opportunities, or which negatively affect confidence and motivation.
- May require a flexible approach in terms of attendance etc in order to continue with therapeutic interventions.

Homelessness, Employability & Ex-Offenders

For those people who are homeless and end up in the criminal justice system or who become homeless as a consequence of being in prison or offending behaviour, there are additional barriers in relation to employability. Some issues are that:

- There may be gaps in employment history, and a lack of current references.
- There may have been a loss of social networks as a result of convictions or custodial sentences.
- Convictions and/or custodial sentences may significantly impact on self esteem and/or motivation levels.
- The barriers are significantly increased for those on higher tariffs such as Life Licences, Registered Sex Offenders and Schedule One due to restricted opportunities, disclosures and supervision requirements.
- Some individuals will be restricted in the types of employment that they are able to take up due to the nature of their offences – it may not be possible, for example, for someone convicted of fraud to take up a job that involves financial responsibility. There may also be restrictions relating to geographical areas or locations.

Homelessness, Employability & Jobcentre Plus

Many people are dependent upon state benefits for income whilst recovering from homelessness, and as such have a lot of interaction with Jobcentre Plus. SHEN works closely with Jobcentre Plus to highlight any issues specific to homelessness and Jobcentre Plus are always keen to improve the experience for their customers.

Jobcentre Plus staff work in a very busy, ever changing and often challenging environment and are not always able to be fully aware of the specific nature of, and needs relating to homelessness as it relates to employability. In supporting people who are homeless it is important therefore to:

- Establish links with your local Jobcentre Plus, explaining your project and the specific needs of your clients.
- Obtain client consent to speak with Jobcentre Plus on their behalf.
- Accompany clients to reviews and other significant interviews where possible, and as flagged up as appropriate in the employability action plan.
- Suggest to clients that they make their Jobcentre Plus advisor aware of their housing status prior to signing up to agreements. Jobcentre Plus staff will not always know that their customer is homeless or insecurely housed and will not ask as standard. It is, therefore, important to make them aware of all issues that will affect or be affected by employability related actions.

- Encourage and support clients to flag up any literacy issues with Jobcentre Plus staff before signing anything.

Homeless Persons Guide for Jobcentre Plus Staff

Whilst many have very positive experiences, other people experiencing homelessness find the benefits system and the services that administer benefits 'confusing', 'intimidating', 'judgemental', 'incompetent' and 'inconsistent'. In compiling this guide a range of homeless service users from around the country were asked what they considered to be the most important points for Jobcentre Plus staff when interacting with people who are currently homeless in order to prevent these negative attributes being applied. The guide will help avoid the situation of one person who said "I have experienced less stress going to court than going to the job centre".

- A friendly welcome and smile is always a good start to an appointment.
- Listening to what a person has to say and not making assumptions or judgements is the key to building a positive relationship.
- Being homeless dramatically affects self esteem and this can be compounded if a homeless person feels that they are being looked down upon when claiming their entitlements or if they are viewed as "scroungers".

- Although a homeless person has claimed benefits for a significant period this does not necessarily mean that they understand the system – it may never have been explained in the first place or may not have been explained in a way that was meaningful or accessible to them. Other factors such as stress or support needs may have inhibited them from taking the information in. It is important to clarify understanding.
- It is important to people that they are met with the same attitude whether with an accompanying support worker or on their own.
- It can be frustrating when inconsistent advice is given or different decisions made by different staff. Lack of consistency can make people lose faith in the system and trigger or reinforce negative behaviours.
- It would be helpful if there was recognition that staff mistakes can impact hugely on someone's emotional and financial well-being. It is accepted that people make mistakes but acknowledging them with an apology and commitment to right them will also make them easier to handle – respectful communication is the key.
- It would make a big difference if staff really listened to concerns. Even although they can't change the system they can show some empathy. "We know that they're busy and have targets but this is our lives".
- Having someone believe in you and encourage in you a positive way can make a huge difference.

- It would be useful if all staff received homelessness awareness training as it's maybe not always apparent how difficult the benefits trap can be, particularly for those in supported accommodation. Training in basic mental health & substance use awareness would also help.
- Jobcentre Plus staff should make sure that they take into account any supervision requirements that those with offending histories may have, as these legal requirements may impact on job searches and ability to attend appointments. Staff can always check arrangements with the customer's supervising officer.



Practice Examples

The practice examples in the accompanying folder reflect just some of the positive interventions and service designs that can promote and enhance the employability of those experiencing homelessness. They are intended to stimulate ideas, and offer positive examples of the range of work that can be utilised by individual workers and organisations. If you would like to make contact with any of the organisations featured to find out about what they are doing in more detail, and would like input regarding this or if you have a practice example that you would like to have featured then you can contact Clare on 0131 337 8243 or email clare@scsh.org.uk to discuss.

Acknowledgements

This toolkit has been developed in conjunction with a huge range of agencies from across Scotland which has provided insight and case study examples. Special thanks for their extra input go to:

The residents and staff of the Arch Resettlement Centre in Glasgow

The young people and staff at Quarriers

Service users and staff from Turning Point Scotland

Scottish Veterans Residences

Jobcentre Plus

SAMH

SACRO

If you have any additional information or insights that you think this toolkit would benefit from then please contact Clare@scsh.org.uk. SHEN has also produced a film which complements this document.

Contact

Clare Archibald,
National Co-ordinator,
SHEN,
C/O Scottish Council for Single Homeless,
Suite B,
Stanhope House,
12 Stanhope Place,
Edinburgh,
EH12 5HH
Tel: 0131 337 8243
Email: clare@scsh.org.uk
www.shen-scotland.org