

A Better Deal for Young People...Sharing the UK Foyer Experience

Introduction

Foyer development in the UK

Foyers were brought into the UK in 1992 through a partnership between homelessness charity Shelter and Grand Metropolitan Brewery (now part of Diageo). They were developed as a response to a particular set of social conditions of the time. A recession in the UK economy was leading to high levels of youth unemployment and homelessness. Young people found themselves trapped in a no home - no job - no home cycle, and Foyers were developed as a way of providing access to both housing and employment and training support for young people who were struggling to make the transition to independent adulthood.

The UK Foyer Federation

The Foyer Federation was constituted at the same time as the first five Foyers. Its role in those early days was to promote the development of a UK-wide Foyer Network, and to ensure that Foyers were developed in a coherent and consistent manner. The Federation now supports a national network of more than 130 Foyers, the smallest a five-bed project in rural Cornwall, and the largest a 210-bed project in East London.

Foyers - a 'Quality Assured' approach

In January 1997 the Foyer Federation defined a Foyer in terms of three tests:

- Is the focus on helping disadvantaged young people aged 16-25, who are homeless, in housing need, or leaving care, achieve the transition from dependence to independence?
- Is it based on a holistic approach to the young person's needs, offering integrated access to, at a minimum, affordable accommodation, guidance and support, education or training and job searching facilities?
- Is the relationship with the young person based on a dynamic formal agreement as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to independence, commitment to which is a condition of continued residence in the Foyer ?

While these tests are used as the basis of the Foyer Accreditation System there are other important features of the Foyer philosophy in the UK:-

- i) accommodation should be affordable, safe and of a high standard;
- ii) action planning is used as a tool for achieving young people's aspirations;
- iii) the Foyer includes facilities for the wider community, thus bringing residents into contact with the outside world;
- iv) young people have the opportunity to become involved in the management of the Foyer or of Foyer services;
- v) the Foyer assists residents to move on into more permanent accommodation;
- vi) Foyers work in partnership with local employers to help residents complete their transition to economic independence, and with the government sector to promote 'joined up' service provision.

Development of accreditation

The introduction of Foyer Accreditation in 1997 was one of the most significant developments in the history of Foyers in the UK. Foyer Accreditation and the award of Accredited Foyer Status set out what is expected of both operational Foyers and those in the development phase. By doing so, it safeguarded the ethos of the Foyer model. The scheme was designed to reflect the impact of Foyers on their users, assist Foyers to review their current operation, and to help developing Foyers to become established against a 'quality' framework. In the words of Professor Tom Cannon, the first Chair of the scheme's independent Accreditation Panel, 'Accreditation gave Foyer developers something to aim for and funders something to look for'.

In 2005, Foyer Accreditation was revised into the FISH Accreditation Scheme, which mapped a series of service user 'promises' against a bank of recognised 'quality indicators' drawn into four distinct focuses: Foyer, Independence, Support, and Home. The scheme was approved by Government to provide a passport against its own regulatory framework.

FISH accreditation offers both a development framework for Foyers, with a process to validate the quality of services. These two distinct features are currently in the process of being decoupled, maintaining FISH as an ongoing development tool, but with a slimmer validation framework to recognise and award Foyer status. Looking into the future, the Federation has begun to introduce a radical new framework to identify, support and measure different 'transformational' solutions that help young people to develop the 'assets' required to achieve sustainable livelihoods. This framework adopts a whole systems approach applicable to service commissioners as well as providers, with the capacity to benchmark and capture best practice from the most inspirational services and programmes.

FISH is underpinned by a detailed framework tool that could be made available to help Australian partners bespoke it to their own regulation needs. This would involve the purchase of the rights to the Foyer Federation's intellectual capital together with consultancy support to enable it to be adapted appropriately by, for example, tailoring the quality indicators reflect the Australian context.

Foyers on the ground

Within the framework outlined above, Foyers are a hugely diverse range of projects, in terms of scale, location, reach and breadth of services. A Foyer can be a large newly-built project in an urban centre, a network of small accommodation units spread across countryside, an adaptation of an existing training and support project, a converted old people's home. The Foyer is essentially a **process** rather than a **place**. What defines the Foyer is not the accommodation itself but what happens inside it.

Young people entering a Foyer are expected to **actively engage in their own development and make a positive contribution** to their local community in exchange for services tailored to their needs. The nature of this exchange depends very much on the individual; where they have come from, the barriers they are facing, and their aspirations for the future. It often means picking up the threads of education, developing skills for independence, and encouraging greater resilience to overcome barriers. It can also mean rebuilding family relationships, overcoming mental health issues, or developing stronger confidence and self belief. Placing **young people at the heart** of this flexible 'deal', which in the case of Foyers is expressed through a formal contract (the 'dynamic formal agreement' of the three tests), gives them the tools they need to take responsibility for their future and helps secure lasting personal and social change.

Foyers are developed by Registered Social Landlords - mainly Housing Associations - in response to an identified local need for youth housing provision. They are sometimes commissioned by Local Government, and often capital funding is available from the Government to develop the building. Revenue is provided through a combination of rents and a funding stream from the Department for Communities and Local Government called Supporting People. For further information about the commissioning and funding environment for Foyers in the UK please see Annex 1.

A key part of the development process is the securing of **revenue streams and partnerships** to establish a 'whole systems' approach that support holistically the

needs of young people. This can include Information, Advice and Guidance services, Health, Business and Enterprise services, ICT. The most successful Foyers act as ‘community hubs’, drawing in local people (not just young people) to use the services the Foyer has to offer. For this reason, as well as for reasons of mobility, it is important that the Foyer is located on an accessible high street, with good access to **public transport and public infrastructure**.

Each Foyer has its own Board or Management Committee constituted from local stakeholders. Individuals from the local public, private/commercial and voluntary sectors form the Committee. This helps to ensure that appropriate strategic links to local public services, community services for young people, and employers are made.

All Foyers change as they develop. The resources that each is able to draw in rise and fall over time. For this reason, it is important that they are developed with flexibility in mind, in terms of tenure type and accommodation offer. It is important from the outset, therefore, that value for money and return on investment arguments are taken into consideration from the outset, and the service model should be able to demonstrate both value for money and a positive return on investment. Considerations of scale may play a role here, as do questions of the skill base of the Foyer leadership. The Foyer manager must be entrepreneurial and source creative and imaginative revenue streams, and have a sophisticated understanding of the issues at stake.

Foyers and the future

15 years of experience of supporting the development of Foyers tells us that the needs of young people are becoming increasingly complex. Crime and anti-social behaviour, poor health and well-being, low educational achievement and aspiration, rising debt and declining social mobility are as much a concern for young people now as street homelessness was in the 1990s. Evidence suggests a society struggling to cope with economic and cultural change and its implications for young people. We do not seem to be able to equip our young people with the skills and resources they need to face the challenge of growing up in a complex and changing society.

We believe the holistic ‘foyer’ approach has much to offer this group of young people and should not be constrained within a particular type of supported housing. We are increasingly focusing on ways in which the model can be adapted and used to create a strong asset base among a wider group of vulnerable young people, enabling them to build the resilience they need to meet the challenges of the future.

For over a decade, the Foyer Federation has helped turn young people's experiences of disadvantage into solutions that support their transition into adult independence. We develop transformational programmes and campaigns that fill gaps in community services and inspire policy and decision makers to make a more effective investment in young people. Successful examples range from supported housing, training and employment projects, to homeless prevention initiatives, transitional learning and health programmes, to a university bursary scheme and campaigns for welfare reform. The direct experience of vulnerable young people and those working with them helps inform our understanding of the barriers facing young people and develop new approaches to overcome them. The success of our approaches can be demonstrated both in the UK and overseas.

We are supported by a network of partners who help us to test new approaches and to replicate what works in order to influence the lives of the many other young people experiencing disadvantage. These partners include housing associations, training and development providers, charitable trusts, research organisations, employers and social entrepreneurs. Their diversity enables us to take a lead in shaping and campaigning for solutions which are truly holistic.

Annex 1: Funding Arrangements for Foyers in the UK

Foyers are developed in the main by **Housing Associations**. The decision to develop a Foyer is based on research in a particular location into the need for housing provision for vulnerable young people. Foyers can also be **commissioned** by Local Authorities in response to a need identified by them. In some recent cases the Local Authority has commissioned the capital development and the provision of the support service under two separate tendering exercises, which threatens to jeopardise the ability of providers to offer a holistic service to the young people in the Foyer.

Funding for **capital** development of Foyers can be applied for from the **Housing Corporation**, the UK body responsible for the development and oversight of social housing. In some cases where provision is commissioned by a **Local Authority** the Authority may contribute towards the capital costs as well. Frequently, the developer of the Foyer, usually a **Housing Association**, has to contribute to the capital costs as well.

The **revenue** for Foyers comes from a similarly diverse range of sources. Chief amongst these is the **rent** charged to tenants. If the tenants are employed or a Higher Education student they are due to pay the rent themselves. If unemployed and in Further Education for less than 16 hours a week they qualify for Housing Benefit, paid for by the **Department for Work and Pensions**. Funding for the housing support (keyworking) comes from a revenue stream called **Supporting People**. Supporting People funds housing support for the elderly, those with learning disabilities and vulnerable young people. Each Local Authority has a Supporting People team and receives a funding allocation broadly based on identified local need from the **Department for Communities and Local Government**.

A wide range of other sources of revenue supports the education, employment and training work. Some of this may come from statutory sources, such as a contract with a local **Job Centre Plus** to provide employment services to vulnerable young people in the local community, or a partnership with a **Further Education college** to provide qualifications in personal development, literacy, numeracy, and 'functional lifeskills'. Foyers can also house primary care services funded by the Department of Health through the local **Primary Care Trust**. Other sources are funds from **local agencies, benefactors and trusts** that are concerned with helping young people.