



# Crisis SmartSkills Operations Manual

Delivering learning and skills alongside  
private rented sector access schemes

November 2009

**Crisis**

## **Crisis**

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help people to transform their lives.

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## Foreword

The SmartSkills project has changed lives and continues to change lives. Its network of dedicated workers strive to work with and support homeless people to help them overcome their personal problems and barriers in life and improve their skills and knowledge through learning. Coupled with the SmartMove project, which was set up to house and assist homeless people and help them make a success of independent living and become self-reliant, support is provided through a 'learning and skills approach'.

Crisis sowed the seed and realised the need not only for clothing, feeding and housing homeless people but to engage them in learning and developing their skills to enable them to re-join the world of work and re-integrate into society.

I feel very privileged to have been involved with the development of 'Learning Power' (later changed to Certificate in Self-Development through Learning City & Guilds 3071) an accredited qualification which enables organisations to develop a framework of education and learning opportunities based on the individual needs of their learners. I had absolutely no knowledge of homelessness before I put pen to paper and after meeting with different homeless groups and such dedicated workers I quickly felt very humbled to be amongst people with such a diverse range of skills and life experiences who were ready to commit to change.

I have been fortunate in my role as a moderator for the Certificate in Self-Development through Learning to meet not only such dedicated, talented and skilled staff but learners who have clearly made tremendous life changes and have developed a hunger for learning. The impressive portfolios of evidence demonstrate the abilities, skills and interests that have lain dormant over time. The support of dedicated workers who have recognised these have encouraged the learners to re-ignite their abilities, skills and interests and acknowledge that they have some 'worth' and can offer something to society.

The 'Crisis SmartSkills Operations Manual' is a comprehensive document taking the reader through an all-inclusive journey highlighting the potential of implementing a learning and skills programme that enables the learners to move out of homelessness, take control of their lives and their learning, live independently and eventually gain employment. An 'easy journey' is not guaranteed! To assist you on your journey additional information is at hand with the 'SmartSkills resource bank' providing a wealth of information, contact numbers and website links, so, use and enjoy!

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January 2009

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# 1. Introduction, history and context

## 1.1 Who is this guide for?

This guide is primarily intended for statutory and voluntary agencies that help homeless and vulnerable people to access accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS). In 2006, Crisis funded seven deposit schemes (all members of the Crisis SmartMove network of deposit schemes) to work with their clients to build their skills and confidence and to help them integrate into the local community.

This manual draws upon the experiences of the seven pilot schemes to illustrate the best practice developed. It is intended that this manual will inform statutory and voluntary agencies as to the possibilities and practical considerations involved in implementing a learning and skills programme alongside a PRS access scheme.

The 'SmartSkills' model, as implemented by the pilot schemes, involved at least one dedicated worker and led to an accredited City & Guilds qualification for the learners. However, it is intended that the lessons and principles summarised within this manual can be applied by agencies of any scope or size. Through the resource bank (available online at [www.crisis.org.uk/smartskills](http://www.crisis.org.uk/smartskills)) it also provides documents and policies that can be adapted and used by other agencies in their own work.

## 1.2 Terminology used in this document

The pilot project was entitled SmartSkills and this document gives an overview of the practices and experiences of those involved in delivering this project. It is referred to as SmartSkills throughout this document but agencies wishing to implement this model should contact Crisis if they wish to use this brand name.

The dedicated worker involved in delivering the SmartSkills programme is referred to as the 'SmartSkills worker' throughout, although job titles actually varied from one scheme to another.

Although this project was developed in tandem with members of the SmartMove network of deposit schemes, the model – or elements thereof – could be applied alongside any PRS access scheme, and 'PRS access scheme' is the terminology that is used throughout this guide.

Throughout the document service users are referred to as 'learners' – this is in recognition of their status as individuals actively engaged in improving their skills and knowledge through learning.

## 1.3 Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for solitary homeless people, working year round to help vulnerable and marginalised people get through the crisis of homelessness to fulfil their potential and transform their lives. We develop innovative services, which help homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills, re-join the world of work and reintegrate into society.

In 1967, 3000 people gathered in Hyde Park for a candlelit vigil to raise awareness of the plight of homeless people and Crisis was born. Five years later, a group of 20 people housed, clothed and fed homeless people during the Christmas week. This was the very first project run by Crisis.

Since then, Crisis has developed to meet the needs of the homeless population of the UK as they have changed over the years. Through the years of mass rough sleeping it provided the basics of food and clothing along with accommodation. It worked closely with the government's Rough Sleepers' Unit and other agencies to bring the number of people without a roof down from the thousands into the hundreds. Today, it works with single homeless people in a variety of situations, from those sleeping rough, to those in unsuitable forms of temporary accommodation.

For a more detailed version of Crisis' history, visit the website:  
<http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-history.html>

For information about Crisis' current services, please see the Crisis website at:  
<http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages//what-we-do.html>.

#### **1.4 The changing nature of homelessness**

When Crisis was set up, street homelessness was a significant problem and Crisis' services were focused on solving the crisis of physical poverty and in particular about finding a person a place to stay at night and dealing with immediate health, clothing and nutritional needs.

In 1998, the Government announced its intention of reducing rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002. Crisis and other homelessness agencies worked closely with the government and the target was achieved ahead of time.

However, there were and are still, large numbers of 'hidden homeless' people. The vast majority of whom are single people without dependent children living in hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, squats and derelict buildings and sleeping on the floors of friends and family. Crisis estimates that there are as many as 380,000 people who do not have a right to a permanent home in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, many of the people who had moved off the streets had not left homelessness behind for good. They were trapped in the 'revolving door' of the homelessness system.

Homelessness is caused not just by a shortage of affordable housing supply, but by the cumulative effect of a myriad of factors, such as mental health problems, relationship breakdown, substance misuse, poverty, having been in care, the armed forces and prison.

It became increasingly clear to Crisis and others that, whilst people now had

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<sup>1</sup> NPI & Crisis (2003), *How Many? How Much?* London.

somewhere to sleep in the main, many lacked the ability to leave homelessness behind for good. In particular, a lack of social support networks, skills and employment were identified as barriers to people trying to move on with their lives.

### **1.5 Homelessness and life skills**

Homelessness de-skills, de-motivates and isolates. People can become trapped in a spiral of decline – unemployment, addiction, poor health, particularly mental health and offending behaviour can become entrenched overtime.

Homeless people often have a range of needs in addition to their need for a home. These needs both contribute to and are exacerbated by homelessness. Lownsborough's Survival Skills: Using life skills to tackle social exclusion (2004) found evidence that learning and skills make a positive contribution to all of these aspects of homeless people's needs. As well as increasing the skills of homeless people and improving their employability, engagement in learning and skills activities can also improve mental health and reduce problematic substance misuse or offending. Engagement in learning and skills development helps to bring an end to homelessness in a number of ways:

- it builds confidence and self esteem – and through these the belief that positive change is possible
- it gives people structure, purpose and meaning in their lives – all of which are essential first steps to goal-setting and achievement
- it equips people with the skills necessary to interact successfully both in work and non-work settings –thereby increasing their chances of ending their social exclusion
- it tackles boredom and widens social networks – thereby helping individuals to leave behind negative past behaviours and peer influences
- it improves the ability to access and make use of services (like hospitals and advice from lawyers) – thereby increasing independence and ensuring that wider needs are more likely to be met
- it enables people to move on from specialist to mainstream provision of services and training, which means they will have the opportunity to learn the skills they need to get a job or to look after their accommodation
- it improves employability – and thereby the chance of ending financial exclusion. Many homeless people fear that they have neither the life skills (for instance money management, ability to deal with agencies, communication skills) nor vocational skills to successfully move into work.

### **1.6 Skills and employability of homeless people**

The range of skills, qualifications and employment history amongst homeless adults will vary greatly. It would be incorrect to assume that all homeless adults are low educational achievers. Equally, the challenge of helping homeless people succeed in education and employment should not be underestimated.

Most will have multiple labour market disadvantages. Almost all have extremely low employability. The main characteristics include:

- 6 in 10 have no qualifications or qualifications below NVQ Level 2
- over 80 per cent left school aged 16 or under
- just 15 per cent of homeless people are in employment of some description – 6 in 10 of those employed have been for less than one year
- over 50 per cent have been without work for over three years
- virtually all want to support themselves by having a job
- many have become very discouraged and want to avoid further rejection.

There is a strong appetite for education amongst homeless people, with six in ten wanting to take part. However, participation is low, with eight in ten not taking part in any type of education or training in the previous five years.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.7 Barriers and enablers to participation in learning and skills**

Research by Crisis and others has identified the key barriers and enablers to homeless adults taking part in education and moving into employment. These are listed below.

#### ***Personal barriers***

- poor health is identified as the single biggest barrier
- the longer someone is homeless the less likely they are to take part in education or training or seek employment
- lack of information and awareness about educational activities are major barriers to education and training
- lack of money for work clothes or study related equipment
- negative attitudes to education derived from:
  - a perceived lack of useful outcomes
  - a lack of relevance to people's lives
  - opposition to obligatory courses related to unemployment status
- anxiety arising from poor self-esteem, fear about interaction with other learners and being ashamed of poor basic skills

#### ***Service barriers***

- less than one-third of homelessness services provide education or training services and many are reported to discourage (whether actively or passively) participation
- there is little evidence of partnership between mainstream providers and homelessness services
- mainstream providers have reported difficulties working with the voluntary sector due to high staff turnover, lack of interest from frontline staff, and a lack of professionalism
- homelessness services argue that mainstream providers are often reluctant to work with disadvantaged groups who are least likely to achieve qualifications and work outcomes required by funders
- homeless people are mobile but services can be bound by local authority boundaries

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<sup>2</sup> Crisis (2006), *Homeless people and learning & skills: participation, barriers and progression*. London.

**Structural barriers**

- the 16 hour rule prevents people on housing benefit studying full time – nearly half of all housing benefit applicants possess no academic or vocational qualifications
- high service and rent costs can make employment unaffordable for many

In addition, employers often want to help but are wary of employing people who are or have been homeless.

**Enablers to education, training and employment**

- New Deal has worked ‘especially well’ when an experienced caseworker from a homelessness charity is able to provide ‘parallel support and advocacy on a continuing basis’
- greater awareness of the availability of education and training services would prompt earlier attendance
- ‘soft’ life skills are the foundations on which more complex skills can be learnt
- voluntary organisations achieve the highest satisfaction ratings (87 per cent) from homeless people in terms of satisfying their training / educational needs, compared to government training schemes (63 per cent)
- homeless people would be encouraged to take part if the following were provided:
  - financial incentives and help with travel costs
  - tutors who understand homeless people’s needs
  - courses linked to jobs
  - Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

## **2. Linking learning and skills to private rented sector access schemes**

### **2.1 Accessing the Private Rented Sector (PRS) for homeless and vulnerable people**

Stable and secure housing is the foundation of successful work with homeless and vulnerable people. It enables them to access support services and integrate into their local community. Commissioners and service users increasingly prefer ‘ordinary’ housing rather than hostels or purpose designed supported housing, but demand is such that it cannot be met by the social housing sector alone.

The PRS is not a panacea for the housing needs of all homeless and vulnerable people but it can provide an effective housing solution for many where appropriate safeguards are in place. By taking account of the needs and aspirations of both landlords and tenants, PRS schemes – such as deposit schemes – can ensure a successful and sustainable working relationship that is beneficial to both parties and which overcomes financial and other barriers.

Crisis’ involvement with PRS access schemes dates back to 1997, when it launched its best practice model deposit scheme ‘SmartMove’. Crisis SmartMove is delivered by a network of 28 partner organisations around the UK and has enabled over 10,000 people to access housing. Furthermore, in 2006 we were approached by the National Rent Deposit Forum and asked to take over the delivery of advice and guidance on operating deposit schemes. A good practice guide for deposit schemes, research into PRS access and supporting resources have been developed and are accessible via the Crisis website. A programme of events and training has also been established for those operating schemes. For further information and to access resources visit the Crisis-run private rented sector website at [www.privaterentedsector.org.uk](http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk) or e-mail Crisis at [smart.move@crisis.org.uk](mailto:smart.move@crisis.org.uk).

### **2.2 Crisis SmartSkills – learning and skills and the PRS**

Since 2006 Crisis has been working with seven of its partner SmartMove projects to pilot a person-centred approach to learning and skills alongside access to the PRS, entitled SmartSkills. This service was set up to enable people housed within the PRS to build their confidence and basic skills, integrate with the local community and access further training opportunities and employment where appropriate.

The SmartMove projects that piloted this new approach already provided assistance to help their clients combat the diverse range of problems that come with independent living – particularly for those not used to such an environment – in order to ensure that people housed through the scheme were able to maintain their tenancy and become self-reliant. A variety of approaches had been used including floating tenancy support, volunteer befriending and savings schemes. SmartSkills introduced a new focus on providing an explicit ‘learning and skills’ dimension to this work, within an accredited framework that provides learners with recognition of their achievements.

Many formerly homeless people lack some of the knowledge and skills required to make a success of independent living. These include:

- lacking lifeskills or social skills
- having low self-esteem and confidence
- no support system from family or friends
- having a weak employment history
- difficulties understanding rights and responsibilities as tenants
- having addiction issues
- poor physical health
- low incomes which are impossible to live on.

Different levels of support are currently offered to PRS tenants through a range of intermediary agencies. In some instances the support is of a very tangible, practical nature, which may include:

- helping to fill in forms and claim benefit
- budgeting and planning for the payment of bills
- practical things like finding furniture or planning and cooking meals
- finding and registering with a doctor
- getting information about what is going on in the local area
- finding out where to go for specialist advice
- finding things to do such as training, work and education or leisure activities.

Equally important support may be harder to quantify and may include:

- offering choice
- instilling a feeling of ownership of the accommodation
- offering emotional support
- helping tenants become more confident so that they can tackle difficulties better
- helping to define goals, to accept the past and to plan for the future.

Providing insufficient support can mean that the tenant runs into difficulties and may become homeless again. However, too much support can also reduce a person's self-esteem and encourage dependency. There is a clear need for a model that enables tenants to sustain their tenancies and manage their lives through building their capabilities, their self-esteem and self-reliance.

### **2.3 Benefits of adopting a learning and skills approach**

For the tenant it:

- improves techniques of self-assessment, presentation and maturity in dealing with others
- helps identify their own strengths and weaknesses
- clarifies their own future learning needs
- provides formal recognition of attainment
- builds independent living skills, self-esteem and increases the likelihood of sustained tenancies
- creates evidence of achievement from a wide variety of situations
- enables the growth and development of transferable skills to take forward.

For the delivery agency it:

- provides a structured framework for regular and constructive discussion between tenants and support workers
- helps to ensure quality training and the achievement of objectives
- offers development and training opportunities for support staff
- offers a respected route to formal recognition of achievement at all levels
- offers new potential funding streams
- motivates tenants.

As well as improving the basic skills necessary to sustain a tenancy, the programme aims to improve an individuals' ability to:

- navigate and use services
- identify aspirations
- access further education and training to progress their aims and ambitions
- gain and sustain employment
- participate in society
- be involved in their own solution, which is key to breaking the cycle of homelessness.

## 2.4 Underlying principles

Crisis SmartSkills has certain fundamental principles that cannot be altered and form the heart of the project; these are listed in the following table along with some examples of the practical methods of achieving the principles.

Principles	Practicalities – How to achieve the principles	
	What to do	What not to do
Open, welcoming and easy to access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcoming reception – staff, volunteers and architecture.</li> <li>• Engagement activities that are relevant to people's interests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require people to jump through hoops in order to be able to attend, e.g. filling in lots of forms etc.</li> <li>• Have bars on the windows.</li> <li>• Have obvious physical barriers between staff and learners.</li> </ul>
Focus on growth and self development, with progression as an aim for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff with specific responsibility for one-to-one progression work.</li> <li>• Staff who encourage and support learners to try new things and to identify new interests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Gatekeeping' learners and not encouraging them to try new opportunities or move on.</li> <li>• Assumptions about the maximum distance a learner could travel.</li> </ul>

Principles	Practicalities – How to achieve the principles	
	What to do	What not to do
Respect for everyone's journey, history and story	Open to all.	Make assumptions about learners' backgrounds.
Homeless people at the heart	Service user involvement in shaping the programme.	Learners' views not sought or considered.
Integration with the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External volunteering opportunities.</li> <li>• Make links with external agencies – including non-homeless agencies – who can provide learning opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No interaction with external agencies</li> <li>• Claiming sole responsibility for outcomes</li> </ul>
Learning occurs throughout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide definition of learning.</li> <li>• Course planning with clear learning aims.</li> </ul>	Only classroom style learning takes place
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer roles developed and maintained.</li> <li>• Volunteer training and management.</li> </ul>	No support and supervision for those involved in volunteering
Empowerment, engagement, energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff are motivated and participate actively.</li> <li>• Constructive noise encouraged.</li> </ul>	Policies developed to 'contain' or 'control' learners.
An end to isolation and exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take the project out into the wider community.</li> <li>• Recognise community activities as learning opportunities</li> </ul>	Learning only takes place on the organisation's own premises
Broader horizons and increased aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help to identify interests and goals, and support and encourage learners in pursuing them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrict the variety of opportunities.</li> <li>• Provide routes only into 'dead end' careers or low level further training.</li> </ul>

This list is not exhaustive but the table can form the basis of a useful exercise to do with staff teams. A facilitator can encourage staff to identify the principles that underpin SmartSkills, then to explore the practical ways that can bring them alive in the project on a day to day basis.

## Case Study 1

Dave started drinking when he was 11 years old. His drinking got progressively worse over the years and reached a peak when he lost his girlfriend and became redundant after 10 years of work for an electronics company. These two events caused him a huge amount of stress and contributed to him becoming homeless. When he was homeless he was always on edge, and to numb the pain of his situation he drank himself into oblivion.

Dave first found out about SmartMove in August 2006 when he sought help at a drug and alcohol agency. Finding accommodation was vital to his recovery process. Dave's housing worker soon mentioned the SmartSkills project and he was happy to start attending the course.

Participating in SmartSkills was a huge stepping stone for Dave, and allowed him to move on to do other courses. He has since managed to attend college, gaining a certificate in computer maintenance. This helped to instil a lot of confidence in Dave and he is now ready to progress onto another course.

Dave's relationships with family members have improved and they now include him in social gatherings and activities. Dave's dream has always been to go to Australia, which is where his mother comes from and where he still has relatives. Dave is contemplating doing either a higher level computer course or a plumbing course to enable him to get paid work eventually and fulfil his dream.

## 3. Planning and preparation

### 3.1 Staffing and resources

Staffing levels are in part likely to be dependent on funding. However, the SmartSkills pilots each had a dedicated worker with primary responsibility for supporting a portfolio of learners, facilitating their learning programmes and ensuring that evidence is gathered in the correct manner to gain accreditation. It would be difficult to deliver the full programme as described in this guide without dedicated staffing, however it may be possible to incorporate elements of the learning and skills approach within existing staff structures.

As is often the case, the real key to success in delivering a programme of this nature lies in the quality of the staff employed to work with learners. For many organisations forays into delivering aspects of learning and skills for their clients are new, and require expertise that may not currently exist within the organisation. The following have been identified as the key skills required to successfully deliver the project:

- experience of working with excluded and vulnerable people
- experience of providing training, advice and guidance to vulnerable people
- a passion for learning and enjoyment of creativity and innovation
- knowledge of the issues surrounding homelessness
- ability to negotiate effectively and experience of advocating on behalf of other people
- highly developed communication and interpersonal skills (verbal and written)
- ability to establish effective interpersonal relationships at all levels with a wide range of people
- experience of liaising with other agencies.

In addition to staffing and related costs, it is worth considering the provision of a budget to cover the following:

- learner travel expenses
- books and materials
- external trips
- external room bookings
- buying in trainers with specific disciplines.

### 3.2 Organisational structure

The homeless sector is increasingly required to understand and support the wider needs of its client group in recognition that the issues that affect them are wider than simply housing. As homeless organisations expand their remit to address the holistic needs of their clients it is vital that they retain a sense of common purpose and unity. The objective of the SmartSkills worker role is to improve tenancy sustainment and to help people move away from homelessness permanently, so the functions are complementary.

It is essential that the SmartSkills worker is effectively integrated into the wider organisation. In order to maximise the benefits of linking learning and skills programmes with the PRS, this role should be integrated into the team responsible for

delivering the PRS access scheme. This will enable information sharing between those responsible for access to housing and the SmartSkills worker, flagging up problems (and successes) of which the others may otherwise be unaware.

In order to achieve successful integration, the following should be in place:

- robust line management and supervision structures to ensure that those tasked with delivering learning and skills have the necessary support
- team meetings should be a chance to gain buy-in from the organisations staff, and to increase understanding of the ‘what, why and how’ of SmartSkills. A regular update on their work should be a standard agenda item and the SmartSkills worker may deliver a presentation on their work
- team structures. It is vital that someone coming into a new role has peers and an established structure within which to work. In the case of SmartSkills, the worker employed to deliver learning and skills generally works alongside the PRS scheme staff
- learning and skills should be an integral part of an organisation’s strategic direction, requiring commitment at a high level with resources dedicated to developing this side of the organisation’s work, rather than a funding-led add on
- internal referral procedures should be established
- information sharing protocols to help identify clients who are engaging with different services within the same organisation and to regularly share information on progress and issues arising
- PRS access scheme workers should be encouraged to view completed or partially completed portfolios to ensure they understand the practicalities of delivering the programme, as well as the overall objectives
- shadowing in both directions should be considered.

As the role is likely to be quite different from those of others, it is possible for the SmartSkills worker to feel isolated. It is recommended that the SmartSkills worker is line managed by the same staff member as the PRS access team to make explicit the link between their roles. It is recommended that everyone on the team should be able to describe the role and activity of the SmartSkills work, both to prospective learners and external agencies.

Regular supervision should take place on a monthly basis and should provide a chance to review lesson plans and to look at each current learner and their progress. This is also an opportunity for the worker to share problems. Maintaining the workers enthusiasm throughout delivery of the programme is essential if they are to be able to provide the learners with the encouragement and support needed to ensure successful completion of the programme. Supervision should also focus on the personal development of the SmartSkills worker. In order to deliver City & Guilds qualifications (see [www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com)) the worker must undertake at least 30 hours of Continuing Professional Development each year, which can take the form of any development activities (i.e. training, shadowing, peer observation and mentoring, feedback and guidance).

### 3.3 Building partnerships

SmartSkills relies on close working relationships with a wide range of partners, as no one organisation will be able to meet the learning requirements and interests of the broad spectrum of learners.

Local education providers and homeless agencies should be contacted in the first instance, in order to explain the SmartSkills programme and also to elicit information on:

- structured courses that may be appropriate
- activities that learners may be able to participate in
- volunteering opportunities.

Your initial identification of agencies may take place on a brainstorming basis, with the agencies identified then able to identify additional ones you may have missed. Sector knowledge is often personal and talking to as many agencies as possible will enable you to build up a full directory of potential resources for your learners.

It is also useful to think beyond the more conventional providers, as value is added through activities that may be valuable to the learner but fall outside the remit of voluntary sector providers – i.e. tours of local museums/galleries/radio stations/football stadiums, local gym activities and book clubs.

Once an organisation has been identified as a prospective partner, the SmartSkills worker should make direct contact with them to explain the programme. This should take the form of an initial phone call to establish a named point of contact, followed by written information, and a proposed meeting to discuss how the programme works in practice.

Key hints and tips:

- join any local education forums
- use personal contacts
- identify named contacts that you can get to ‘buy-in’ to the vision of the project, these people will be invaluable as ambassadors of the work within their own organisations and in helping with identifying other possible partners
- getting ‘buy-in’ at senior level can help ensure that those at the operational levels fulfil obligations, and it gives a route for feedback for both issues that arise and successes
- learners interests will lead to new links having to be forged if the programme is to provide individually tailored learning experiences
- building up a directory of leaflets can be an effective way of communicating the range of opportunities available to learners and may prompt particular areas of interest. The directory – and your personal information – should be updated regularly as funding and courses on offer change. It is important to keep abreast of these changes
- involving key people from external partners in the project’s steering group can help to gain ‘buy-in’ and open up further opportunities
- links are often beneficial to other service providers, many of whom have targets around ‘hard-to-reach groups’ that you can help them achieve
- ensure that you get feedback on the learner’s experiences with external providers

and offer relevant support

- the internet, Citizens Advice Bureau and other homelessness organisations will be able to help.

### **3.4 Delivering accredited qualifications**

Crisis SmartSkills is a person-centred learning programme which aims to help homeless and formerly homeless people to move-on in their lives by helping them to improve their basic skills, confidence and aspirations. The programme delivery and the content is flexible in order to suit the diverse individuals that will participate.

The main focus of the programme should always be that it helps individual participants to move forward in their lives and by using an accredited qualification:

- provides formal recognition of attainment
- creates evidence of achievement that the learner can take forward
- can act as a route back into more mainstream education
- gives a formal structure to the programme
- helps to ensure quality standards
- gives the programme legitimacy in the eyes of prospective learners and other service providers
- offers potential for new funding streams to be accessed.

In order to offer a City & Guilds (C&G) accredited qualification it will be necessary to identify an education provider with C&G centre approval. They must either have the relevant qualification approval to deliver the programme, or be prepared to apply for qualification approval. The two qualifications that have been used in the delivery of SmartSkills (described below) are both based on building a portfolio of evidence that relates to the learning an individual learner has undertaken while participating in the programme.

The actual delivery of the programme requires partnership working. The homeless sector agency is responsible for delivering and/or facilitating the learning activities and compiling the portfolio of evidence to the correct quality standards. The C&G approved centre will be responsible for registering the learners and the quality assurance of the programme. When the portfolio of evidence has successfully been assessed, internally verified and externally verified the centre will be able to claim certification.

The C&G centre thus has a key role to play in supporting the SmartSkills worker in compiling the portfolio in the correct format and to the correct standard. In order to identify local C&G centres who may be able to provide accreditation click on the link below:

[http://www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-28BFF87AEA909A0E/cgonline/hs.xsl/11156.html?search\\_term=3071](http://www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-28BFF87AEA909A0E/cgonline/hs.xsl/11156.html?search_term=3071)

Simply type your postcode into the 'find a centre' box on the left hand side of the qualification page. All centres that offer the qualification, within a 50mile radius of the postcode you entered, will be listed along with any contact information C&G hold for them.

Effective support from the Internal Verifier will be essential in ensuring that the worker has confidence in compiling portfolios with the learners. An initial meeting should be set up to ensure that both worker and Internal Verifier are clear as to the expectations upon them and the support that each can provide to the other.

In a first meeting with the C&G centre, you should emphasise you can:

- help them to engage with hard to reach groups
- help them to achieve their targets if they already have a contract to deliver Certificate in Self-development Through Learning (Learning Power)
- help them access new funding streams and expand their portfolio of qualifications offered
- show they are working in partnership with the voluntary sector to provide qualifications to vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, there are key questions that you must ask of them:

- Who will the Internal Verifier be for the programme?
- How much support will the centre provide in delivering the programme?
- Are there any best practice sharing forums?
- Are there any training events you can access?
- What information do they require about the staff involved in delivery?
- What information do they require about the facilities used by your organisation?
- Are there any particular requirements with regards to the format of the portfolios and the evidence therein?
- Are there any restrictions as to when people can register, or who can register? Similarly, are there any restrictions with regards to when people can complete their portfolios?
- How long will it take from submission of a completed portfolio to certification? It can be frustrating for learners if there is a long gap between completion and receiving their award
- Will it be possible to pull down funding towards delivery of the programme? See the section on Learning & Skills funding, page 18.

### **3.5 Profile of Achievement (City & Guilds vocational qualification 3791)**

SmartSkills was initially set up using the City & Guilds Profile of Achievement (PoA) award as a way to provide structure to the programme and to provide formal recognition of completion of the programme.

The overall aim of PoA is to provide a method of assessing and reporting a learner's progress throughout a period of learning and to provide a clearly understandable record of achievement at the end. This award is custom-built to meet the needs of each candidate. It can recognise skills and achievements at any level. It is designed to be used where the skills and achievements are not recognised by other qualifications, or where they are specific to a particular learner. People can use it as a form of CV to record progress and achievement for present or future employers.

It is still possible to operate the PoA award, however, as the award is not part of the

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), many education providers have begun phasing it out in favour of the Certificate in Self-Development through Learning (see below), which is set at specific levels but retains the PoA's flexibility and was designed specifically for use with vulnerable client groups.

For further information on PoA visit the City & Guilds website: [www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D9A05199-48148259/cgonline/hs.xsl/11706.html](http://www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D9A05199-48148259/cgonline/hs.xsl/11706.html).

### **3.6 Certificate in Self-Development through Learning (C&G vocational qualification 3071)**

The majority of SmartSkills projects now use the Certificate in Self-Development through Learning qualification. This qualification – commonly referred to as ‘Learning Power’ – has been designed to provide a framework within which education and learning opportunities can be offered to people who are vulnerable and experiencing instability in their lives. This may include people who are vulnerable because they are: homeless; involved with substance misuse; children leaving care; ex-offenders and young offenders amongst others.

The units are intended to provide a structured programme within which to focus their work. They offer learning outcomes with clear guidance on how each outcome should be achieved and suggestions for different types of evidence which can be produced to show how the learning outcome has been met.

The framework is made up of a variety of units and modules under the headings of ‘me’, ‘my space’, and ‘what I do’. These have been designed to focus on the individual needs of people who are vulnerable and to capture their capacity to learn and develop.

The aim of the Certificate in Self-Development through Learning is to provide a framework for education and learning opportunities to people who are vulnerable and experiencing instability in their lives. It has been developed from the ‘Outside In’ award, which was established by the Learning and Skills Council’s Homelessness Sector Pilot. While each of the modules (from which learners choose those they wish to complete) has specific learning objectives attached to it, the way in which the learner achieves and evidences their learning is extremely broad and can involve formal or informal learning (see Chapter five: Delivering learning).

The framework has four levels with each level defined by the circumstances and behaviours of the learner linked to an educational level of achievement:

**Entry Level 1:** the learner is in unsafe and disorderly circumstances, which need to be stabilised.

**Entry Level 2:** the learner wishes for an improvement in circumstances and is ready to try and move forward

**Entry Level 3:** the learner is in a stable and recovered home situation and is building the capacity to move forward.

**Level 1:** the learner is confidently moving into a sustainable independent way of life.

The Centre Handbook for Certificate in Self-Development through Learning, along with a Frequently Asked Questions document and details of the modules that make up the qualification, can be downloaded from the C&G website: [www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D9A05199-48148259/cgonline/hs.xsl/11156.html](http://www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D9A05199-48148259/cgonline/hs.xsl/11156.html).

### **3.7 Learning and skills funding**

In addition to charitable funding via the world of grants, trusts, donations and statutory sources, projects delivering learning outcomes can sometimes draw down funding from specialist bodies.

In England, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds. LSC funding for the Certificate in Self-Development through Learning qualification can be drawn down by the C&G centre responsible for registration, assessment, internal verification and certification, and a proportion of this funding is specifically allocated to the agency responsible for delivering the learning programme (in recognition that voluntary sector agencies will often be responsible for the delivery). The LSC website can be found at [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk).

In Scotland, colleges should contact the Scottish Further Education Funding Council, at [www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk). Training providers should contact Scottish Enterprise at [www.scottish-enterprise.com](http://www.scottish-enterprise.com) or one of the Local Enterprise Companies.

For Wales, centres should contact the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS), part of the Welsh Assembly Government at [www.learning.wales.gov.uk](http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk).

In Northern Ireland, funding information for all types of qualifications, may be obtained from the Department for Employment and Learning at [www.delni.gov.uk](http://www.delni.gov.uk)

## 4. Promotion and engagement

### 4.1 When is SmartSkills appropriate?

It is important that the SmartSkills worker is closely linked in with the PRS access service and that they are able to introduce the concept to learners at an early stage in the housing process. For some clients it may be something they only feel able to consider once their housing situation has been resolved, but for others the activities involved in sourcing a property, such as completing Housing Benefit forms and signing a tenancy agreement, can be a valuable learning experience which produces accompanying evidence that can go towards their portfolio.

Immediate engagement with learning and skills may help clients to focus and maintain motivation to resolve their housing situation, but the choice as to when to engage with the programme must always be the learner's. Referral to the SmartSkills programme can take place at any point during a client's engagement with the PRS scheme. This could occur at the initial interview, when they move into their property, or following the conclusion of floating support in their tenancy.

### 4.2 Promoting SmartSkills to prospective learners

Upon launching the programme it should be advertised to all existing tenants, many of whom may have sustained tenancies but still lack the basic skills that would prevent repeat homelessness occurring should their circumstances change. Existing tenants may also be looking for a new challenge, or ways to get back into training or work, but not know where to start.

Promotional leaflets and posters should be prominent within the offices of the PRS access scheme and a leaflet should be handed out with any standard information provided to those approaching the PRS access scheme. Examples of activities undertaken can be useful to gain interest – it is worthwhile developing a display or reference book containing photos of the kinds of activities that take place (i.e. meals cooked, day trips undertaken, photos of learners engaged with activities) and all prospective learners should receive a SmartSkills leaflet at the same point that they do all of the information that comes with the PRS access scheme.

Visible classes taking place in the vicinity of the PRS access scheme, or other services offered, can be another way of eliciting learner interest where possible. The scheme can also be promoted through other homeless sector agencies (i.e. hostels) with referrals working in reverse, from SmartSkills worker to PRS access scheme.

A sample completed portfolio or individual modules could be developed (but anonymous). It is important to emphasise that this is just an example and their own portfolio will look very different as it will be based on their particular interests and needs. Include quotes from previous learners and case histories as applicable.

### 4.3 Referrals from PRS access scheme

SmartSkills should be closely aligned with the PRS access scheme team in order to ensure appropriate referrals and information sharing takes place between them. In effect they are part of the same team with the PRS access scheme workers helping people to overcome the structural barriers to accessing accommodation (i.e. lack of savings, Housing Benefit administration) whereas the SmartSkills worker helps people overcome personal barriers (i.e. low basic skills, lack of self-esteem) that might lead their tenancy to fail and to repeat homelessness occurring.

The organisational structure and physical location of the staff should reflect this overlap. Most learners will initially come into contact with the scheme through the PRS access scheme, so PRS access staff should be fully able to explain the SmartSkills programme and its benefits and, crucially, should be able to do so with enthusiasm.

The PRS access scheme worker should enquire as to initial interest and – where appropriate – either introduce the SmartSkills worker or ask the prospective learner whether it would be okay for the SmartSkills worker to contact them by phone at a later date.

If a client shows an interest, the SmartSkills worker should then follow up with a phone call within one week to:

- explain who they are
- explain that they were referred by the PRS access scheme worker
- explain the project giving examples of the activities that might be involved while emphasising the flexibility and openness and that it will be based on the learners interests
- explain that it is an accredited programme
- enquire as to whether the prospective learner is still interested
- try and arrange a face-to-face meeting in an informal setting (i.e. a local coffee shop, or home visit).

Emphasise that:

- this does not involve going ‘back to school’ – they will gain a qualification based on activities undertaken in the real world based on their interests
- while the learner may not have control over some aspects of their life, they can take control of their own learning and doing so can help them to move forwards.

The accredited nature of the qualification helps establish credibility, but the qualification (and associated paperwork) should only be introduced at a later stage.

### 4.4 Eligibility

SmartSkills was designed to work alongside Crisis best practice model PRS access scheme, SmartMove. The SmartMove eligibility criteria are as follows:

- homeless or threatened with homelessness
- on a low income or in receipt of benefits
- 18 or over
- a single person or a couple without children
- not owed a statutory duty by the Local Authority

- no recourse to other housing options.

In addition, SmartSkills learners must:

- be engaged with the PRS access scheme, whether looking for accommodation, or already in a tenancy
- willing to commit to a learning programme
- willing to commit to attending all agreed sessions in a timely fashion, unless prior notification has been received
- willing to commit to being drink and drug free when attending sessions.

#### **4.5 Induction**

Once a learner has signed up to the programme, the next stage will be an assessment of their current level of educational attainment, along with any particular strengths and weaknesses. This should be an informal process, and particularly key is the art of identifying the interests of the learners. These interests will form the basis of the first activities undertaken.

Don't go through the whole programme at once as this can be overwhelming for learners. It is preferable to start by assessing their current level of educational attainment

Learners will have to complete five modules, whether PoA or Certificate in Self-development through Learning. Initially one or two modules should be identified based on the interests of the learner, and activities should be agreed that will help them to progress towards completion.

#### **4.6 First meetings**

Initial meetings between the SmartSkills worker and the learner should focus on identifying the learner's interests and priorities. The first meeting should be an informal discussion focussing on what the learner wants to do. Those involved in delivering the project have found it advantageous to meet externally, possibly over a coffee, as it is less intimidating and can lead to a more open dialogue.

Rather than going through a specific set of questions, this meeting should take the form of a general discussion about their interests, what they hope to do and where they'd like to be over the next months and years. This should also be an opportunity for the prospective learner to ask questions about the programme and they should be encouraged to do so. It is useful to be able to give examples of activities that others have participated in, and visual tools (such as photographs of various activities) are useful in getting across to learners the active nature of the programme.

Emphasise the flexibility of the programme. Learners will have diverse interests and the SmartSkills worker should be willing to be creative to ensure that the activities that learners participate in relate to their interests.

The qualification and paperwork should be referred to, but not introduced until the second or third meeting. Explain how the evidence will work to allay fears over

excessive paperwork and show that the work will be done together. Workers should emphasise that:

- you will complete the portfolio together
- evidence need not be written (i.e. photographs, print outs)
- you will write up statements relating to things they've done.

In order to get engagement from the outset, you should identify an initial activity that is related to the learner's interests or priorities. Some examples may include:

- outings connected to their areas of interests such as local radio stations, museums, galleries, sports stadiums
- activities relating to their priorities, such as activities to help them paying their bills, searching for a property, dealing with benefit forms
- group activities that will enable them to meet new people while building their skills, such as cooking or gardening as a group

Emphasise that while the learner may not have control in some aspects of their lives, their learning is something that is in their control.

#### **4.7 Mental and emotional well being**

Homelessness can affect a person's mental and emotional well being. In some instances it may lead someone to feel more determined, resilient, independent and self-motivated to progress. In many instances, however, it can lead to either short or long term deterioration in someone's mental and emotional well being. Common responses to homelessness are:

- depression
- low self-esteem
- confusion
- low confidence
- paranoia
- anxiety
- delusion
- poor concentration.

If a learner is affected by any of the above it may be necessary to offer the learner more support in all stages of the programme. Learners may need support to:

- identify clear and achievable goals
- explore past and present experiences with sensitivity
- agree a realistic action plan
- provide sufficient support and encouragement
- monitor progress in a non threatening way.

There may be times when a learner seeking advice and guidance presents with much higher mental health support needs than the SmartSkills worker feels able to cope with (e.g. personality disorder, bi polar, self harming, suicidal tendencies, acute paranoia or clinical depression). In these situations it may be more appropriate to either refer to, or work along side, a specialist mental health service provider to ensure that the most appropriate support for this learner is provided.

## Case Study 2

Ronnie was born in Hartlepool and did not have the easiest childhood. After working in various labour roles, Ronnie got married and moved to London. He and his wife had five children, though they lost one child when it was a week old. The marriage did not work out and after the divorce Ronnie looked after and raised the children.

As the children grew up and moved on, Ronnie became ill and depressed. He was scared to sign up for benefits because he'd always had trouble reading and writing, and the lack of assistance soon meant that he had no resources. Ronnie moved from place to place, and ended up sleeping rough in Victoria.

Ronnie decided he wanted to leave London and go back to the North East, and he got help getting into a hostel in Middlesbrough. It seemed okay to have a roof, but the hostel was "noisy, with banging, people knocking on my door in the early hours of the morning, residents drinking". It was here that Ronnie found out about Teesside SmartMove.

Ronnie initially got involved in Healthy Living courses at SmartMove and also applied to SmartMove to help him get accommodation in the private rented sector. He started doing SmartSkills, and has done computer skills, Tai Chi and nature walks, among other activities. Through SmartMove he managed to get into shared accommodation in the private rented sector, and will soon be moving his own place. He's due to start a Landscape Gardening course at college, but hopes to remain involved with SmartMove and SmartSkills and is already doing some volunteering with the organisation. Ronnie finds it good to socialise with other people who are trying to change their lives and says that his children are really proud of him now. He says that things like SmartMove and SmartSkills should've been around in the 70s and that if they had, things for him would've been different.

## 5. Delivering learning

People learn in a variety of different ways and a variety of different settings. A key principle of the SmartSkills programme is that the approach to learning is based upon the individuals involved and what works best for them. SmartSkills workers allow their learners to shape the direction and the nature of their learning programme. Learning may take place:

- in one-to-one sessions involving the SmartSkills worker and the learner
- in group sessions with the SmartSkills worker and other learners
- in the learner's personal life – any relevant experiences can be captured and evidenced as part of the learner's portfolio
- through external learning providers, often facilitated by the SmartSkills worker
- through the learner's experiences while volunteering.

This section of the manual looks at some of the considerations that should come into effect when applying these different learning approaches.

### 5.1 Delivering one-to-one learning

One-to-one sessions will form the cornerstone of the SmartSkills programme. The key to the success of the programme is the relationship between the worker and learner, which must be open, honest and supportive. These sessions may take place in the office, at the learner's home or at an alternative external venue. Organisations must have a lone working policy in place if members of staff are visiting learners externally, and this must be adhered to.

Advantages of one-to-one sessions are:

- opportunities to build the relationship between worker and learner
- learners are often more likely to be open and honest when not in a group setting
- specific level and interests can be tailored
- it can be more appropriate to challenge the learner in this setting
- good for reviewing progress thus far, and reinforcing positive developments
- easier for learners to open up about what is going on in their lives
- provides opportunities for discussing individual interests
- the learner can feel nurtured when the attention is solely on them.

Key qualities for the SmartSkills worker when involved in one-to-one sessions with clients are:

- positive manner – which starts with a warm greeting
- taking a genuine interest in the learner and their interests – this can be shown by remembering things they have mentioned in previous sessions and picking up on their interests
- focusing on positives and progress made – steer learners away from negative thoughts (i.e. I'm rubbish at that)
- positive attitude towards the qualification the learner is working toward
- willingness to make time for the learner – they shouldn't feel that they are ever an imposition
- letting the learner set the pace

- continually involve the learner in planning the future direction and content of their programme
- flexibility – the SmartSkills worker must be willing to adapt as learners' goals and direction may change over the course of the programme
- showing belief in the learner – believing in them and their ability to progress, and wanting them to go further

It will not be possible – or desirable – for the SmartSkills worker to impart all of the knowledge that learners will require. Other approaches to learning should be discussed, planned and reviewed in the one-to-one sessions though.

## 5.2 Group sessions

Learning activities that take place in a group setting can be advantageous in a number of ways:

- requires learners to interact with each other, building social skills and improving confidence
- helps learners to build new social networks, many may have moved away – or may be looking to move away – from old networks
- learners can support and assist each other and can help to keep each other motivated
- maximises use of worker time as they are reaching a number of learners at once
- can foster discussion and debate – group members learn from each others' experiences
- improves communication skills

Social interaction and friendship are vital components of a healthy emotional life, and some learners may initially struggle with the skills necessary to establish such relationships. While the voluntary sector cannot 'force people to become friends' it can facilitate the development of such relationships by providing an atmosphere in which people feel respected and able to share their views with each other. It is generally easier for learners to get to know each other in small groups, which also helps to avoid cliques.

Group learning may not always be appropriate and it will be necessary to supplement group sessions with one-to-one learning. Problems with group learning include:

- learning can be too generic – learners may have different interests and may also be at different levels in their learning. When looking at the subject area to be covered, consider whether this is most appropriate delivered in a group or individually
- disruptive influences can cause frustration and disengagement among other members of the group. The establishment of ground rules (see below) can help, but it may be necessary to consider working with disruptive influences on an individual basis to prevent them from negatively affecting the group environment
- cliques can form amongst members (particularly in larger groups), this can be avoided with exercises that encourage people to interact with group members they wouldn't normally engage with
- some personalities may dominate group sessions and the SmartSkills worker

should be mindful that all group members should have the opportunity to participate in discussions.

Relationships will not develop overnight, however establishing some early ground rules will help avoid confrontations or feelings of insecurity that may otherwise hinder the progress of both the individuals and the group. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's The Standards We Expect project came up with the following set of ground rules for meetings involving service users (to view more resources visit [www.standardsweexpect.org/reports.cfm](http://www.standardsweexpect.org/reports.cfm)):

- Respect what each person needs to join in the meeting
- Respect and value that everyone is different and will think differently about things. We are happy that everyone is different and thinks differently
- Listen to each other
- Only one person speak at a time
- When you speak you need to say your name and to raise your hand or do whatever you can to let others know you are the speaker
- Do not interrupt speaker. If you need to, ask the chair-person
- Use plain and simple English. Do not talk for too long, and talk slowly. We understand that for some people with some impairment it might be necessary for them to speak for a longer time and that is OK
- If you don't understand what someone is saying, please ask them to repeat it or explain it. You are probably not the only person who doesn't understand
- Be aware that covering your mouth when speaking might make it difficult for people to read your lips or hear what you say
- Use words in full, as opposed to acronyms
- Respect each other's personal space
- During the meeting we will make every effort to keep to agreed timings
- In any reports or discussions after the event do not use people's names when personal things have been discussed, for example when people talk about something that has happened to them in confidence
- Be polite; don't be rude to each other. If you disagree about something concentrate on the thing you are talking about not the person involved
- If you disagree with something someone says say so either during that meeting or during the next meeting. Do not argue about it outside of the meeting
- If you want to leave the room for any reason that is OK
- Switch off mobile phones
- Make every effort to turn up on time
- If you have any concerns about the Ground Rules not being respected please speak to the Chair of the meeting.

### 5.3 Informal learning

Learning is not constrained to formal settings and it is worth considering with learners the variety of activities that they undertake over the course of a week and how these might relate (or be made to relate) to the modules that they are completing. Some of the most powerful learning – and the most powerful evidence of learning – may come from these experiences. Helping learners to reflect on them is a key role for the SmartSkills worker. The following scenarios are just some of the scenarios that learners may consider:

- communicating with friends and families
- communicating with their landlord
- communicating with other service providers
- household budgeting and shopping
- taking care of their personal health and hygiene
- engaging in activities and hobbies
- preparing and cooking meals
- reading
- research on the internet
- watching documentaries.

Encouraging learners to think about their personal lives and how they can pursue their goals outside formalised learning environments is an incredibly powerful way of bringing the programme to life. Similarly, all review sessions (see below) should reflect not only on formalised learning, but where learning has been applied (or where it could have been applied) in the learner's life.

#### 5.4 Other learning providers

SmartSkills workers should build an extensive knowledge of learning programmes available in the local area through other providers (see page 13 on building partnerships). As the programme of learning must be built around the individual interests of the learners it is likely that areas of interest will often fall outside the knowledge of the SmartSkills worker. At such times it is beneficial to be able to help learners to access learning opportunities elsewhere. Evidence should then be gathered and included within the learner's portfolio. Enabling learners to access external learning opportunities has the following benefits:

- allows access to specialist classes and knowledge areas that match individual interests
- maximises use of worker time as they can concentrate on particular areas of delivery and ongoing support through the programme rather than delivering every aspect
- requires learners to interact with others, building social skills and improving confidence
- operating in a non-homeless environment can help to reduce stigma
- additional qualifications gained through external courses will provide additional recognition of achievement, add to the learner's CV and help with motivation.

Obviously many courses will not be designed with a homeless or vulnerable client group in mind and the SmartSkills worker should first assess the suitability of the learning provider. Aspects of the programme that may affect its suitability include:

- Cost – either for the course itself, or for materials/clothes
- Location – is it accessible via public transport (again, this may have a cost implication)?
- Atmosphere – many learners have negative feelings towards traditional classroom environments. Will the setting act as an impediment to the learner?
- Level and pace of learning – is the course pitched at an appropriate level? Will your learner be able to keep up with the rest of the class?
- How clear/helpful are they in dealing with enquiries?

- Help available – additional assistance may be required, is there anyone that will be able to provide additional help if needed? It is, however, worth recognising that in some cases the learner may not want to be ‘treated differently’
- Commitment involved – what happens if they miss a class?
- Over what period does the course run?
- Testing – is there an exam, or written course work to be produced?

Make sure you know what will be required of your learner, and that both you and they are confident that this will be achievable. A bad referral can set learners back and can also cause them to lose faith in you.

The SmartSkills worker should make initial contact with external agencies they are thinking of referring learners to in order to check their appropriateness. It is important to explain where the worker is from, the project and also the client group. Ask them what SmartSkills learners need to do in order to get involved and what support may be available to them. If learners will be attending sessions externally, the worker should visit to assess the suitability of the facilities and the provider’s ability to meet the learners’ needs.

The appropriateness of the course will depend not only on the course itself but on the individual looking to attend. There is no hard and fast rule when making this judgement, but the worker’s understanding of their learners needs should be used as a basis to inform this decision. If you are unsure as to whether something may be a problem, ask the learner what they think and have an open discussion about it.

Depending on the learners’ needs, the worker may feel it necessary to attend the first session with them, or ensure that they are welcomed by a prepared member of staff. However, the learner may not want to be singled out, in which case it may be more appropriate to simply support them before and after attendance. In these cases you will also want the learner to report back on the experience and to collate materials for evidence (see page 29 on evidence) rather than obtaining a witness statement from the tutor.

## 5.5 Learning through volunteering

Volunteering, whether within the organisation delivering SmartSkills or through an external placement, can be a great way of building the skills and confidence of learners and produces valuable evidence for their learning portfolio. Taking part in voluntary work is a good way of getting used to part or full time work, obtaining references and clarifying which area of work learners might wish to move into, and will also build evidence towards accreditation. Some of the benefits include:

- improved employability
- feeling of empowerment
- satisfaction of giving something back
- engaging with and meeting new people
- improved existing skills and learning new skills.

When setting up volunteering roles within your own organisation, the following guidelines apply:

- involve learners in the design of the volunteering programme
- create clear and defined roles within the organisation – clear role descriptions will ensure clarity for all service users and staff
- offer placements for a set period of time (e.g. three or six months) – this allows service users to focus but also allows the organisation to fully plan the work load for the set period
- offer a clear and structured recruitment process – recruitment should be semi-formal and include an interview and feedback session which will be practice for future interviews
- ensure volunteer training is in place. This should concentrate on the personal development of volunteers and relate to the role - i.e. Microsoft Office training if working in an admin role
- option for accreditation – accredited volunteering programmes will add to the volunteering experience and enhance the opportunities of progression after completion of placement
- ensure support mechanisms are in place for programme
- all volunteers should have a named supervisor who they meet one to one on a monthly basis.
- the supervisor should set work and progression goals at the start and monitor progress during one to one sessions.

## 5.6 Programmes in the community

One of the key aims of SmartSkills is to help formerly homeless people to integrate with the local community. This section outlines some of the ways that this can be done and some of the most important relationships to build. SmartSkills should proactively involve its learners in community engagement.

Examples of ways that the programmes at SmartSkills can be extended out of the building and into the wider community are shown below:

- projects in the local area, with training and workshops happening outside the building
- groups of learners could develop opportunities for the sale of products in the area
- performers participating in local festivals
- artists displaying art work at local cafes, restaurants and businesses.

Visits and outings can open people up to new experiences and stimulate new interests. They also help maintain enthusiasm and show that an interest is being taken in them. Involving learners in planning any trips allows them to take responsibility and shows that their interests are being incorporated. This not only builds motivation and a sense that the programme is ‘for them’ but provides valuable evidence that can be incorporated into their portfolio.

## 6. Supporting learners through the programme

### 6.1 Maintaining enthusiasm and learner retention

Completing either the Certificate in Self-development Through Learning qualification or the Profile of Achievement is a time consuming business with most learners taking between three and six months to complete the qualification (obviously depending on personal circumstances).

For learners to maintain enthusiasm and continue engaging:

- Success must be appropriately recognised and – where applicable – rewarded. This may mean simply congratulating someone on a good piece of work, enrolling them in an external accredited course, or helping them to apply for future courses
- Regular reviews should be used as an opportunity to reflect on progress made which may require some prompting from the worker, particularly where confidence and self-esteem are low
- As a rapport builds up a learner is likely to reveal more about themselves. The worker should always be alert for potential areas of interest that might form the focus of further learning and development, and help to keep the learner motivated
- They should set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound) so that learners can easily monitor progress
- Encouragement is key – learners regularly report that much of the value of going through the programme and central to their achievements was having someone that believed in them
- Show patience and tolerance throughout
- The programme must be fun – to keep people coming back they need to feel they are making progress, but also need to enjoy the programme, so humour and a sense of fun is important
- Seek the learners' views and show they are valued throughout their involvement in the programme – this can mean informally asking for feedback at the end of a session, or running a workshop based around getting feedback on the course so far at the half way stage.

The very nature of the client group is such that there will be times when other issues in their lives may obstruct their progress. In such instances it is advisable:

- To show flexibility and a willingness to put the planned programme to one side to talk through issues arising. This may initially slow down the rate of learning but will result in a closer relationship, higher retention rates and may lead to new interests or learning opportunities being identified.
- Where learners fail to turn up for agreed meetings they should be contacted to find out the reason why.
- Where relevant it may be appropriate to direct the learner to consider the progress they have made in their lives recently, reflecting on achievements and activities.
- Persistent non-attendance should not be tolerated but all participants should be invited to return to the course when they feel more able and, where possible, to drop in for a chat as they may need it.

## 6.2 Evidencing progress

A wide variety of evidence types can be used as part of a learner's portfolio. This should be emphasised to learners from the outset so they can see that achieving the qualification is based on them acquiring new skills and knowledge and is not a purely written exercise. Forms of evidence that may be used include:

- photos with captions explaining the activity taking place
- letters to people – formal and informal
- memos
- notes
- draft work
- illustrations/drawings
- hand outs/posters
- evaluations of experiences on courses
- electronic print outs
- newspapers
- booklets & leaflets that illustrate what learner has done
- witness statements from external tutors/supervisors/peers
- recorded discussions – written and/or audio
- something the learner has made or a photo of them making it
- to do list/shopping list/flip chart
- receipts – shopping/outings/tickets/meals
- print outs from the internet
- learners reports on experience
- worksheets completed
- in fact, the list is endless - don't throw anything away!

## 6.3 Overcoming financial barriers

One of the major obstacles to learner achievement will be financial barriers and the SmartSkills worker will want to familiarise themselves with grants and financial awards that the client can access. Learners may struggle with:

- travel expenses
- learning materials
- course fees for external courses
- work clothes and specialist clothing for courses
- tools
- money to cover shortfalls in general life that may prevent learners from being able to focus and/or concentrate.

Crisis made small funds available (£50 per learner) to enable schemes to assist with some of these costs and found that even small amounts of money could make a big difference to learner's engagement. They also show a willingness to invest in the learner and their progress, which can be encouraging and foster a sense of self-worth. SmartSkills workers also accessed additional funding sources on behalf of their clients.

### ***Possible sources of funding***

Crisis Changing Lives awards – Formerly homeless people can apply for up to £2,500

to help them towards their vocational goals. See <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-changing-lives.html> for more details.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can help clients with maximising their income, and also advise on what grants and loans may be available to them. For the local CAB details visit <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice.htm#searchbox>

If you are looking for funding for an individual, then do explore the 3,500 or so trusts listed at [www.grantsforindividuals.org.uk](http://www.grantsforindividuals.org.uk). You will need to subscribe to this resource, but it is possible to trial it first.

There is also [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk) which offers information at no charge on all benefits and grants available to individuals from both statutory and voluntary organisations. Finally a very good book is: *A Guide to Grants for Individuals in Need* – by Gemma Lynch, Rebecca Ryland & Alan French, published by: Directory of Social Change (you can get this book from the DSC website at [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk)).

Involving learners in the process of applying for grants can be a learning activity in its own right, and evidence can be incorporated into their portfolio for accreditation.

### Case Study 3

Sarah left home at 16 because of the constant battles with her mother. For the next six years she flitted between jobs, managed to scrape through college whilst addicted to cocaine, speed and marijuana. Sarah's mum always bailed her out and welcomed her home with open arms. However, it was whilst living back home with mum that things got really bad.

Sarah spent some time in jail and got introduced to hard drugs. She would spend hundreds of pounds a week bingeing, committing crimes and getting arrested. Every time the police picked her up they'd go to her mum's house and turn the place upside down. Sarah's mum and my step-dad went to live in Dorset, but she decided to stay in London. Sarah ended up homeless with no job, no money, addictions coming out of her ears and another court case hanging over her.

Sarah found out about Barnet SmartMove when attending drug and alcohol counselling. Her life began to turn around after she was helped to find and move into a studio flat. Sarah started participating in SmartSkills and was made to feel as though she wasn't a waster going nowhere but had so many options available to her. Sarah says that SmartSkills has "re-awakened the thirst for knowledge and interest in learning that I had as a child and now thanks to much encouragement, advice and support I'm investing in my future and gaining another qualification at college, which I'm so excited about.

My relationship with my mum and step dad is fantastic now. They're happy and I think they finally have something to feel proud about me, which is great."

## 7. Measuring progress

### 7.1 Reviews

Both of the accredited qualifications used to give the SmartSkills programme a coherent framework require regular reviews of a client's progress. These sessions should not, however, be led by the requirements of the paper forms (see the resource bank at [www.crisis.org.uk/smartskills](http://www.crisis.org.uk/smartskills) but should rather take the form of a 'good chat' led by the learner and their experiences, reflections and developing interests.

It is vital that the SmartSkills worker listens and gives good feedback to show that they are listening. New priorities and interests may become apparent and the worker should react to these, highlighting to learners that they can alter their plans and take their learning in new directions. This may involve changing the modules they are working on, but is vital in giving learners control over their learning.

Although informal reviews should occur at the end of each session, formalised reviews should take place every four to six weeks, and should focus on the following questions:

- How are you doing?
- What have you learned? This is a very difficult question for learners especially if they have had no experience of reflecting and analysing and being critical of themselves. You may get shrugged shoulders and a verbal response along the lines of 'nothing'. It may be that the worker will need to elicit the learning from 'how are you doing?' and ask something like 'Tell me something new you have done since we last met' or 'last time we meet you said you were going to find out where (for example) the local Citizens Advice Bureau is'
- What have you liked most and least? 'Is there anything that you enjoyed doing – something that gave you a real 'buzz' 'Is there something you didn't like doing or felt didn't go so well for you' – this would still keep it formalised but with questions to give the learner a little more to think about and perhaps realise that something they had done was actually 'learning'. The SmartSkills worker needs to be skilled at identifying the learning that has taken place. This is a talent that can be built up over time, particularly through discussion with other learning providers.

It will occasionally be necessary to put the paperwork to one side to offer more direct emotional support if it is apparent that there are issues relating to the learners personal life that would make it detrimental to stick to the narrow review format. Doing so increases the likelihood of continuing involvement, increases the learner's sense of self-worth (as someone is taking an interest and offering support), and may also help identify new areas to address within the programme.

### 7.2 Measuring outcomes

Outcomes refer to the difference that the project has made to the lives of those it is set up to help. It is vital that schemes are set up with a clear vision of the outcomes it intends to bring about and systems to effectively measure them. Some outcomes may be dictated by funders while others will be for internal use. They should measure the efficacy of the scheme, help to identify gaps in your service provision, highlight areas

for improvement and enable you to more effectively benchmark your performance against others within the sector.

Monitoring is an essential component of providing a quality service; it provides the basis to answer the question ‘are we meeting the real needs of people who use our service?’

Your outcomes should be clear and focused because:

- you need to know what you are trying to change before you can evaluate to see if you have made a difference
- the people who use your services will know what they can expect to gain from working with you
- many funders now want to know the outcomes of services they fund. They want to know what difference their money makes and how it helps target groups have a better life.

Outcomes usually begin with words or phrases that show you want to change something like, improve, reduce, develop, decrease, expand, sustain.

### **7.3 SmartSkills outcome measures**

Crisis measured the effectiveness of the SmartSkills programme using the following measures:

- numbers participating
- modules completed
- other qualifications completed
- numbers completing the programme (achieving either the C&G Profile of Achievement or Certificate in Learning Development Programme)
- numbers entering volunteering
- numbers going on to further education/training
- numbers entering employment

In order to collect this information a simple spreadsheet was developed. As the SmartSkills projects worked with relatively small numbers of clients intensively over a period of time, it was possible to collect this information without the use of powerful databases, by simply giving each client a row detailing their achievements against each of these measures. The final results were collated to provide numerical values of total outcome results. It would be relatively simple to develop a simple database to carry out the same function.

### **7.4 Collecting case histories**

Statistics can be used to paint a generalised picture of your client group and illustrate general achievements and outcomes. However, they are not necessarily the best way of conveying a sense of the changes and improvements that a project has facilitated in things like improved motivation, increased self worth and increased life skills. A programme like SmartSkills – which is, by its nature, individually tailored – is particularly well suited to being described through the stories of individual participants who have benefited from engaging with the service.

### **Why?**

Collecting case histories is good practice; they are useful to:

- illustrate the realities of achieving 'outcomes' to funders and local statutory agencies
- illustrate the realities of what it means to be homeless to the media, to funders, and to the strategic planners
- illustrate the successes that your project is having in helping people change their lives – this can help motivate staff, volunteers and donors
- give an opportunity for the stories and voices of homeless and formerly homeless people to be heard.

### **Writing it up**

Case studies are people's stories. They should be based as much as possible on the words that people use to describe their own stories. An ideal format for producing the information should include:

- date and place of interview
- name and age – indicate whether or not the person's real name has been used
- key theme
- quotes – five/six quotes which contain essential information about how a person feels or felt in key situations
- story – information about a person's background, current situation and future plans/aspirations and how the person felt at each particular stage of their engagement.

The interview should be more like a conversation than a barrage of questions. It should enable someone to tell their own story rather than push people towards telling you something that fits what you want them to say. Think more Parkinson than researcher. However, it is useful to be prepared with prompt questions, both general and specific to the person being interviewed.

### **Suggested question areas:**

- person's name and age – can be an anonymous study
- person's background (where they came from, what their family situation is)
- reasons for becoming homeless
- feelings during homelessness and now
- how the project has helped them to turn their life around
- what a typical day had been like before coming to the project compared to now
- what changes have there been in outlook; motivation, sense of self worth, independence etc.
- legal, mental health, drink or drug problems
- access to a General Practitioner and other health care services
- experience of the hostel system or other homelessness projects
- help from a particular individual – a key worker/volunteer that has made a difference
- significant 'turning points' in their life (when things got better or worse)
- current contact with family and social networks that existed before homelessness
- future plans
- feelings about the future (positive or negative outlook).
- perceived barriers to escaping their situation.

Individuals should be asked to read through and sign a copy of their case study and should receive an explanation as to how it will be used.

## 8. Exit and progression

### 8.1 Reward and recognition

Informal recognition of achievement should be an ongoing process throughout the programme and more formal recognition is facilitated by the review process which should encourage the learner to focus on their achievements and their progress. This helps motivate clients and builds confidence and self-esteem, as well as helping to counter the negative thoughts that learners with low self-esteem may experience.

Completion of the programme obviously offers an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the achievements of learners and give them a boost as they look to move forwards. At the final review, the SmartSkills worker should take the time to go back through the learner's portfolio of evidence to show them the progress they have made. Graduation ceremonies were arranged by SmartSkills projects, which gave learners a sense of being valued.

Key to successful ceremonies were:

- allowing learners to invite family and friends
- official certificates (preferably framed)
- book tokens or other appropriate rewards
- a sense that time and effort had been devoted to arranging the event
- buffet and drinks served
- external speakers made presentations.

Such events are also a great opportunity to advertise the programme to new and prospective learners, as well as other stakeholders, i.e. staff, other homelessness/ learning agencies, trustees, funders.

### 8.2 Progression

It is vitally important that learners – having completed the SmartSkills programme and received their qualification – are able to take forward their learning. Helping learners to make positive use of their time is a key part of the SmartSkills programme and the worker should try and ensure that this will continue beyond the conclusion of the programme.

The exact nature of a learner's progression route post-SmartSkills will depend wholly upon the individual. Over the course of a learner's engagement with the programme, the SmartSkills worker will be identifying their interests and aspirations. As the learner approaches the end of the programme this information will help identify possible progression routes.

What can be difficult is achieving progress when it is not clear what that progress is going to look like and what is going to be required in order to achieve that particular progression goal. In order to identify what needs to be achieved before the appropriate steps can be planned for, it will be necessary to assess where the learner currently is in relation to their goal.

Failure to assess the situation, identify a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound) goal and plan an appropriate course of action can lead to failure. Indeed it is often poor planning that accounts for people not being able to progress. There are of course other things which can affect people's abilities to progress, but these can usually be overcome so long as they are identified as threats at the early stages of assessment.

Issues to look at when considering progression options should include:

- security of housing situation
- financial means of support (e.g. Nil income, Job Seekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Employment)
- living costs (rent, travel, maintenance, college fees, weekly shopping)
- qualifications and supporting certificates
- documentation/evidence of work history
- literacy and numeracy skills
- rights to work, study and live indefinitely in the UK
- physical well being.

Each of the above factors can have a major part to play in identifying the most appropriate progression path for the learner, and what actions need to be taken in order to overcome any major obstacles that stand in their way. Other, more complex, barriers to progression are considered below.

### **8.3 Commitment to further study**

Some goals require further study. The type, amount, level and duration of study required will vary from course to course. There are short intensive courses delivered over 12 weeks and courses that last up to two years which require weekly attendance over the full period.

It is always helpful to ensure that the learner is fully aware of the commitment required for the course and that they are honest with themselves about their ability to meet the commitment level required.

### **8.4 Style of learning**

There are courses which concentrate on practical skills and other courses which are more theoretical in content. There are courses which are evaluated in terms of the portfolios students produce and others which lead towards specific exams. There are courses which involve a work placement and others which are much more academic. There are courses which are vocationally orientated and others which have very limited vocational content.

Whatever courses a learner considers of interest to them, it is always helpful to ensure that the learner is honest with themselves about how well it suits them (experience should obviously be drawn upon from the SmartSkills programme) and then look to apply for the course that best suits them.

## 8.5 Attitude (towards travelling, work/life balance etc)

Although a learner may seek support to progress, it is important to remember that every learner has their own set of ideas, values, and expectations. The SmartSkills worker should always guard against advising learners as to what they think is best for them. The learner may not see the need to gain further qualifications or seek full time employment; they may wish to pursue non-accredited courses and look for part-time work.

To ensure that the learner is empowered to decide on what is the best course of action for them to take, it is advisable for advice workers to:

- ensure that the learner feels in control
- ask open questions that give the learner freedom to think and articulate their views
- allow the learner time to express their goals without interruption
- assist the learner to evaluate the 'SMARTness' of their goals themselves
- avoid making any assumptions as to what the learner can and can't do
- facilitate careful consideration of all available options
- ensure the learner decides on what is the best course of action to take
- gain the learner's authorisation for any follow up action that needs to be taken.

## 8.6 Entering employment

Employment is perhaps the key way in which formerly homeless people can become independent, and can have both financial and personal benefits for people. For many SmartSkills learners this will be the ultimate goal and – as the SmartSkills worker builds the learning programme around their individual interests – this will be a focus throughout the programme.

In terms of employment outcomes, Crisis recommends an emphasis on sustainable employment. An 'any job will do' approach to people who have experienced social exclusion is likely to perpetuate labour market failure.

Clients will be looking to access work while either housed within, or sourcing accommodation within, the private rented sector. The affordability of their accommodation and how this will effect their benefit entitlements will be an obvious concern. There is a range of in-work benefits that people are entitled to when they move into employment. Jobcentre Plus can provide a 'better off in work' calculation that allows individuals to see what they would be entitled to if they moved into employment, and how much more money they would have in comparison with claiming welfare benefits. They can also consider how Housing Benefit entitlements would change. Many homeless people find that these calculations reassure them about moving into employment.

Off the Street and into Work has developed a calculator to help people calculate how moving into work will effect their overall income level: [www.osw.org.uk/calculator/intro.asp](http://www.osw.org.uk/calculator/intro.asp). Even where the initial financial benefits of entering employment are limited, people may benefit from a sense of social inclusion, improved dignity, confidence and self worth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> OSW (2006), *The costs and benefits of formal work for homeless people*. London: OSW.





## Get in touch

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