

Crisis Skylight Newcastle: A Place of Learning and Inspiration

Sally Cupitt, Charities Evaluation Services
June 2009

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.

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CES' mission is to strengthen the voluntary and community sector by developing its use of evaluation and quality systems. It supports thousands of voluntary and community organisations of all sizes every year. CES also work with funders and government organisations. It provides training, consultancy, technical support, advice and information, and external evaluations. These services are intended to help organisations become more effective by adopting appropriate quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation systems.

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Foreword

Crisis Skylight Newcastle first opened its doors in April 2007. Some two years on we wanted to look back and take stock and - crucially - get an independent look of how well it was going, what we were achieving and where we could do better in the future. We therefore commissioned the Charities Evaluation Service to undertake this evaluation of the centre and its services. The report details the findings from research undertaken with clients, staff and local agencies to explore the difference Crisis Skylight Newcastle is making as well as identify areas for development.

Reading the results I am delighted as Crisis' Chief Executive to read the overwhelming view is that the premises, services and staff are delivering positive outcomes for homeless and vulnerable people in Newcastle. Crisis is helping people to move into work and develop their skills. We are improving not only their housing situation but also their health, general wellbeing and social capital.

It is particularly gratifying to hear from other agencies working in the city that they believe the work we are doing is positive. But most importantly we welcome the positive accounts from our clients themselves of the benefits, sometimes life transforming, that they have gained from using the centre and the services, learning and activities Skylight offers.

But as well as looking at what Crisis Skylight Newcastle is currently achieving we also wanted the evaluation to highlight areas for improvement and make recommendations on how it can move forward in the future. In parallel to this piece of work we have also been reviewing how we monitor and evaluate all of Crisis' services and so we have introduced a new client-centred database which will give us a better understanding of the impact of our work and identify areas for development.

In addition to our Crisis Skylight learning centres in Newcastle and London, we have ambitious plans to develop new centres across the UK and we are working on our plans for the first of these new centres in Birmingham and Oxford with the support of Communities and Local Government and local partners. This evaluation will be invaluable in helping us learn from setting up the centre in Newcastle. But it will also allow us to reflect on what we have got right and ultimately why we did it – to help more homeless people transform their lives.

I am very grateful to all of our staff, volunteers, donors, supporters, partners and above all clients for their hard work in getting Crisis Skylight Newcastle to where it is today and we look forward to building on this in the months and years to come.

Leslie Morphy
Crisis Chief Executive

Executive summary

The evaluation

Crisis Skylight Newcastle (CSN) is a learning and activity centre where homeless and non homeless people take part in practical and creative courses together. Many of the activities lead to accredited qualifications. Additional support is offered to centre members by a team of progression coordinators.

Charities Evaluation Services carried out an evaluation of CSN between December 2008 and April 2009. The evaluation had two purposes; to collect information on outcomes for centre members, and to bring together learning from the set up of CSN as a new project. Data was obtained from desk research, Crisis monitoring data, interviews with 20 centre members, six interviews with Crisis staff and five interviews with external agencies in Newcastle.

Findings about the service, set up and delivery

Feedback on services from members and external agencies is excellent.

- CSN members (how Crisis describes its clients) were overwhelmingly positive about the service, with few suggestions for change. They liked the activities, the mix of people, the lack of trouble and the individualised nature of learning.
- Most members felt consulted and reported that they could say what they felt to staff. Several felt that communication could be improved about some issues.
- External agencies were very positive about services offered.

There are very positive benefits for CSN members in a range of outcome areas, due to both activities attended and support received.

- Between July 2008 and January 2009, 16 CSN members got accredited qualifications or modules, 17 got jobs and 11 went into training or further education.
- Many interviewees reported improved finances or housing situation as a result of CSN work.
- Many interviewees had made personally significant achievements in other areas as a result of being at CSN, including improved skills, taking part in performances or competitions and selling artwork.
- It is likely that CSN is contributing to the prevention of homelessness in some members through outcomes like improved social skills or improved mental health.
- There were significant social outcomes for members. Most interviewees said their social life and social interaction, both in and outside the centre, had improved as a result of coming to CSN.
- Several members said their physical health had improved. A number had reduced drink or drug use in part as a result of CSN support.
- The mental health of many interviewees had improved as a result of their work at CSN; most reported improvement in confidence and motivation.
- Some members felt they had no alternative to CSN. There was a sense of dependency in a few of them, but this may be part of a positive change process.

CSN members are very mixed from a wide range of homelessness circumstances and backgrounds and some have high support needs.

- CSN members come from a range of sources, with the biggest group (38% of those known) coming through word of mouth. Many also come from the voluntary sector (33% of those known) and statutory sectors (17% of those known).
- Many CSN members have housing needs. On referral, over 50% of members are in temporary accommodation and 9% are rough sleepers.
- CSN members are very mixed in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Almost a third are women. Almost 50% of members are non-British, and for over 30% English was not their first language.
- Many members have mental health problems, and it is likely that many also have drink and drug issues.

The CSN staff team is strong and well liked. Staffing levels have been an issue. Feedback on staff from members and external agencies is very positive.

- Two new posts of volunteer coordinator and senior tutor have brought particular benefits.
- Many courses are taught by sessional staff. These people bring variety to the schedule of courses and are valued by CSN staff and members. Recruitment of sessionals has been difficult. The quality of teaching by sessionals has also occasionally been an issue.
- CSN has involved volunteers in a range of innovative ways, and is set to involve them more in future. Support for volunteers, including policies and procedures for volunteering, have not always been sufficient but this is changing rapidly.
- Staffing levels have sometimes been an issue at CSN and this has resulted in reduced opening hours. Some staff and members are unhappy about this.
- Staffing levels at the café have resulted in a delay to the offering of formal accredited café training for members, although many have received informal training.
- The relationship with Crisis London has improved and is now good.

CSN fits well into the local context, although there have been a few difficulties.

- CSN fits well with local strategies for homelessness and education.
- CSN is complementary to existing services in the area. External agencies report a small amount of duplication but this is not thought to be a problem; indeed, some argue it is necessary to meet client needs.
- CSN is involved in a lot of partnership and interagency working, and is a visible presence at forums locally.
- The relationship with other agencies has mostly been very good. Four of the five external agencies interviewed were very positive about CSN, and said their organisations had benefitted from CSN being in Newcastle. The fifth had reservations but also cited positive points about CSN staff and activities.
- There have been some difficulties, particularly regarding competition, but these have been handled well by Crisis staff. Many of the fears about competition were unsubstantiated. Some fears remain, and there were a few concerns about Crisis marketing.

The set up of CSN went well. There have been learning points, many of which have been addressed.

- The development of the project was in keeping with the vision anticipated. This vision was well communicated internally and externally.
- The design specification and subsequent development of the building resulted in the development of excellent premises.
- Some difficulties led to the centre opening a few months later than expected. Yet the delay brought some benefits, including contributing to a sense of ownership and cohesion in the staff team, and more time to do outreach in the local area. However, the wait for the service to open led to loss of interest by some prospective members reached through early outreach.
- Initially there was a discrepancy between targets in funding bids and targets in the strategic plan, which caused problems for CSN staff. This has been dealt with.
- There was a lack of policies and procedures for CSN to use, and CSN staff sometimes found it difficult to get hold of information from Crisis London. CSN staff spent more time on policies and procedures than anticipated. However a Skylight manual that brings together learning from both London and Newcastle is now being developed.
- It was not possible for CSN to become a satellite of Crisis Skylight London for training accreditation; this caused more work for CSN than planned.
- The business model for the café changed in response to local needs. It would have been helpful to carry out market research to identify the most appropriate model at an earlier stage in development.
- External agencies were involved in the set up phase of CSN, primarily to keep them informed and ensure services were complementary. They appreciated this involvement. Two would have liked to have been involved more or earlier.

The building is well liked and mostly fit for purpose. Some early difficulties have been overcome.

- CSN staff and members and external agencies all liked the CSN building, describing it as positive and inspiring.
- The café premises are also attractive, but have not always met the requirements of the delivery model chosen.
- It had been planned to have minimal staff office space, but later more was found to be necessary.
- It had been planned not to have a members' tea area, but subsequently staff and members decided one was necessary. A tea area has since been created in the building that is adequate but has some problems.

Recommendations

The data indicated few recommendations for CSN. However, key suggestions included:

- Continue to focus on helping members move on.
- Consider ways to improve member involvement and communication with members.
- Reopen the centre on Sundays, as planned.

There was a range of learning points for Crisis when developing new Skylights in new locations. Key points included:

- Continue to involve external agencies when setting up a new project, as was done in Newcastle. Do so early and reassure them that Crisis wants to complement local services.
- Where possible, ensure there is a shared understanding between Crisis and external agencies of homelessness data used in Crisis marketing.
- When developing new premises, Crisis should consider carefully the pros and cons of: staff office space; hotdesking; members' tea area; private space for interviews.
- When setting up a new Skylight, Crisis should provide staff with as much support as possible, perhaps through secondment or buddying with CSN or Crisis Skylight London staff. They should also be provided with a toolkit of policies.
- The role of volunteer coordinator, and perhaps that of senior tutor, should be built in from the start. That of buildings manager should also be considered.
- When establishing a new café, research into the most appropriate business model locally should be undertaken before renovating the premises.

1 Introduction

1.1 Crisis Skylight Newcastle

Crisis Skylight Newcastle (CSN) started in April 2007, following the earlier successful set up of a Skylight project in East London. It is a learning and activity centre, where homeless and non homeless people can take part in practical and creative workshops together. There is a café next door, open to the public, where some members do training or voluntary work. CSN is aimed in particular at hidden homeless people.

The centre offers a wide range of activities, run by a combination of CSN staff, sessional workers and outside agencies. All of the activities are structured, but about half are accredited and lead to a qualification. The non-accredited courses tend to focus on engagement. There is an emphasis in all activities on achievement and progression towards a goal, be it a qualification or not. They have just got Matrix quality standards accreditation.

Progression coordinators engage and support learners outside of sessions. It is not possible to say exactly how many members are seen by the progression coordinators, but the progression coordinators report that the majority of members will see a progression coordinator at least once, although the level of contact varies considerably.

1.2 The evaluation

Following the success of the first two Skylights, Crisis wishes to extend this service to other cities. Charities Evaluation Services was commissioned by Crisis in 2008 to undertake an evaluation of CSN. The evaluation focuses on two things:

- outcomes for CSN members;
- learning from the set up of a new project.

1.2.1 Data sources

The evaluation was undertaken between November 2008 and April 2009. Data was obtained from five main sources:

- interviews with CSN members;
- interviews with Crisis staff;
- reviews of CSN monitoring data;
- desk research;
- informal observation of activities at CSN.

1.2.2 Interviews with members

Interviews with 21 members were undertaken. Twenty were with current members of CSN. An additional, unplanned interview was undertaken with a former member of Crisis Skylight London who had just arrived in Newcastle, for the sake of comparison. All member interviewees were given a £10 voucher for their time. Interviews were done face to face and took on average 45 minutes.

The 20 interviewees were aged between 18 and 60. There were three women and seventeen men. Some had just started at the centre, some had been there from the beginning; on average they had been attending CSN for 10 months. The centre has no ex-members as they are not taken off the lists when they move on. Seven had been, or were currently, CSN volunteers.

For two interviewees, English was not their first language. At least¹ seven had mental health problems, and at least eight had drink or drug issues. Half had their own tenancy, six were in supported housing and four were with family or friends (or sofa-surfing).

The member interview schedule is in appendix one.

1.2.3 Interviews with Crisis staff

Six face-to-face staff interviews were undertaken. The interviews were:

- two interviews with the manager of CSN
- one group interview with three of the progression coordinators
- one interview with the deputy manager (at the time this person was also managing the tutors, and therefore represented the tutors in this interview)
- one interview with café staff
- an informal phone interview with the Crisis head of innovations, who was responsible for the initial development work in Newcastle.

1.2.4 Interviews with external agencies

Five phone interviews with external agencies were undertaken, including the local council and other local service providers.

1.2.5 Understanding this report

There are some issues to be aware of when reading this report.

The interviews

Despite a range of advertising methods, it was harder to recruit members for interviews than had been anticipated, so we interviewed everyone who expressed an interest. This meant we were not able to sample within a larger group to ensure as wide a range of interviewees as possible.

The available monitoring data will not allow an accurate comparison of the group of interviewees with CSN members as a whole. However, they are broadly similar in terms of age range, housing need, drug and mental health issues. The interviewee group contained slightly less women and people from ethnic minorities than the whole population of members.

When the member interviews are reported on, the figures refer to the 20 interviews with current CSN members. The interviews were semi-structured. Some questions were asked of all interviewees, but other themes and were brought up by respondents.

¹ Respondents were not asked about personal issues per se, but some chose to disclose them when discussing outcomes.

This means that when it is reported, for example, that ‘two interviewees appreciated the individualised nature of CSN courses’, it doesn’t mean that 18 said it was not, unless otherwise stated.

CSN monitoring data

Crisis nationally recognised that across its services, whilst it was collecting a great deal of information on clients, this was often duplicated and inconsistently recorded. Information was stored in various ways and shared on an ad hoc basis. There was a strong desire for a system which collected enough information to be able to determine the quality and performance of individual services, while at the same time reducing the overall content of information collected.

Crisis therefore has undertaken a comprehensive review of all its monitoring and evaluation systems and developed a single client-centred monitoring and evaluation framework. This framework takes the client as the centre of all Crisis’ activities, and follows each individual’s journey through Crisis’ services, tracking their participation and progress, support given and outcomes achieved. A database, which supports the new framework, has been introduced in stages over the last year. The intention is that the system will be fully operational for the start of Crisis’ next operational year in July 2009.

2 The service and where it works

It is not intended to give a comprehensive description of the service in this report. This section gives details of the demographics and needs of members using the centre. Partnership working and the local context are also discussed.

2.1 About CSN members

The data in this section is drawn from CSN monitoring data unless otherwise stated.

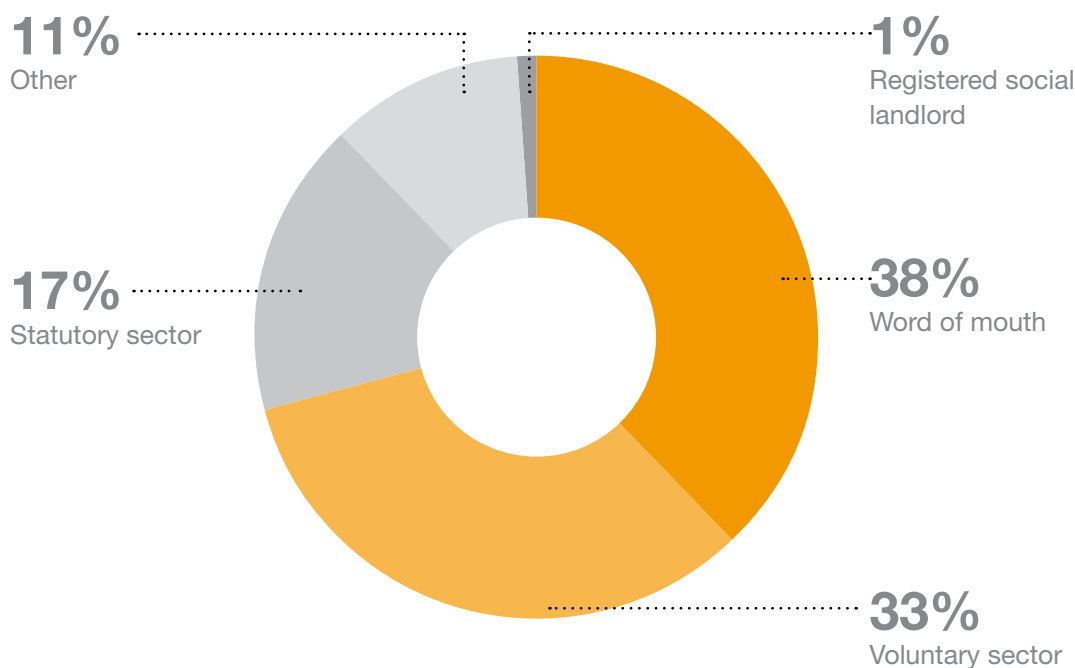
2.1.1 Referral routes for members

The numbers of members at CSN are increasing. In 2007/8 they had 477 new members; in 2009/9 they had 640.

CSN members² come from a range of sources, as seen in chart 1 below. Between August 2007 and November 2008, 700 new referrals were taken at CSN, an average of 44 per month. Of these, referral routes were known for 541 people. Of these, the largest number, 201, came through word of mouth; 180 came from the voluntary sector and 93 from statutory sources.

CSN is drawing in some members who do not access other homelessness services. Ten interviewees were using few or no other services related to homelessness or education. Seven described using a number of other services.

Chart 1: CSN members' referral sources (where known)



2 As with Skylight in London, CSN describes its clients or users as members. Crisis reports that this is in part to give them a sense of belonging, ownership and equality rather than just being known as 'clients'. It is also how the people who attend Crisis' Skylight centres like to be referred to.

2.1.2 Participation levels

Between July 2008 and January 2009, on average 132 individual members participated in an activity at CSN every month. This monthly figure hides significant individual differences; some people will come only once a month and others will come daily. Classes are usually for up to 10 people (ESOL classes are often larger), with on average about 5-6 people attending.

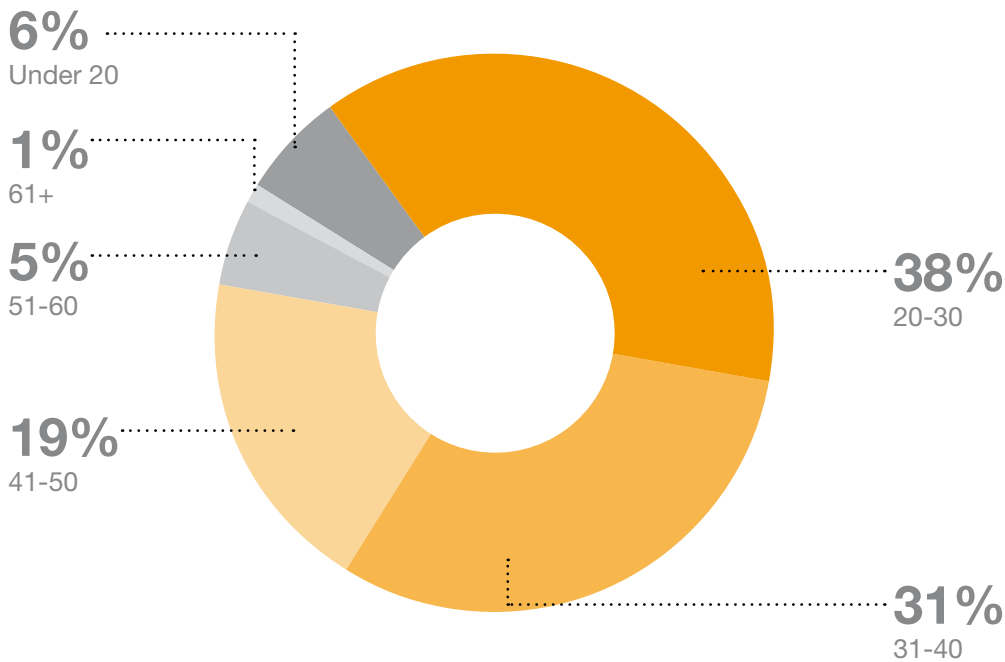
2.1.3 Demographics

CSN members are mixed in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Of the 268 new members between July and November 2008, almost a third (31%, 84) were women and just over two-thirds (69%, 184) were men. The reason for the relatively high number of women is unknown but may reflect the approach of the service (for example, they run some women-only sessions) or its strong links with other services that target women.

For the 260 for whom their age was known, the majority (88%) were aged between 20 and 50. See chart 2 below for a detailed breakdown of members' ages.

Of the 264 for whom nationalities were known, 52% (173) were British, 19% (51) were African, 11% (30) were from Europe and the Middle East. The remainder were from Asia (3%; 7) or the Americas (1%; 3).

Chart 2: CSN members' ages

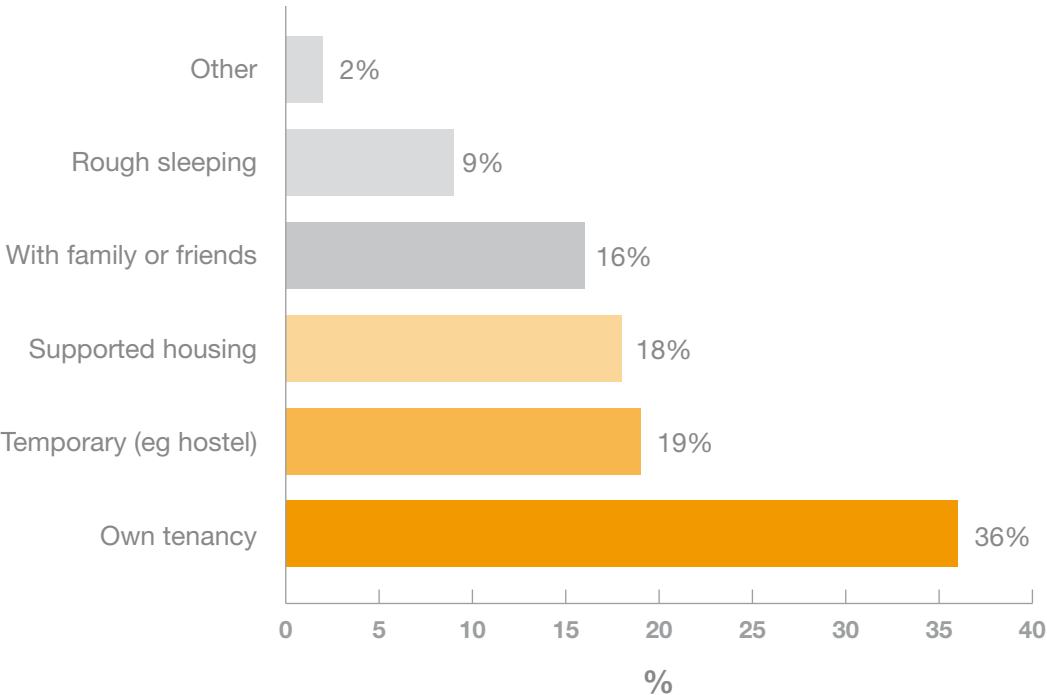


2.1.4 Member needs

In terms of living situation, CSN is also working with a wide range of users. Between July and November 2008, living situation at referral was recorded for 244 of the 268 new members. Of the 244, just over a third (36%, 88) were in their own tenancy and a just over a third (37%, 90) in supported housing, hostels, B&B, or other temporary accommodation. More details on living situation can be seen in chart 3 overleaf. Of the 254 for whom first language was known, 69% (174) spoke English. Twenty eight other languages were recorded, with Tigrinyan (9%; 23) and Farsi (4%, 11) being the most common. The high number of people with English as a second language is likely to be due, at least in part, to the ESOL classes run by CSN. Unlike some services, these are open to anyone, regardless of how long they have been in the country.

During the period July – November 2008, 80 of the 268 new members were asked about their health issues. Of these 27 (34%) mentioned a mental health issue. This figure cannot be said to be representative of all members, as the question wasn't routinely asked. Members may not have disclosed any issues or conversely it may have been asked more often where CSN staff felt there might be a mental health problem. However, the figure is indicative of the levels of mental health need in CSN members.

Chart 3: CSN members' living situation on referral



2.2 The local context

Deprivation in Newcastle has reduced over the last five years but is still considerable, with many households dependent on benefits. According to Newcastle City Council, about 6,000 people in the area require supported housing or are at risk of homelessness. This includes rough sleepers, people in supported accommodation and people on low incomes at risk of losing their accommodation.³

At the same time, there has been a reduction in affordable housing since 2003, including a 65% reduction in council lettings since 2001,⁴ and 5000 less social housing units since 2003.⁵ The area also has a very high student population, leading to more competition for rented accommodation. Demand for council homelessness and prevention services has increased by 35% since 2003/4.⁶

There are a range of services for homeless people in Newcastle. There are five day or night centres, a range of accommodation providers and services offering outreach and advice. There are also 17 employment-related schemes provided by supported housing providers in the city.⁷

2.2.1 Strategic issues

CSN has a strong relationship with Newcastle City Council housing department. CSN staff also attend Newcastle City Council's monthly Homelessness Forum and are part of other voluntary sector networks, for example the local Council for Voluntary Services.

One external agency commented that the visibility of CSN management at local forums and initiatives is really helpful. He reflected that they have 'put themselves at the table' in an open, helpful way, in a spirit of partnership. They have got involved in key schemes that decision-makers see as important in the solution to homelessness, like the rough sleeping count. He argued that if staff hadn't got so involved, CSN would not have been as accepted as it is.

The same agency felt that CSN staff had a good profile locally. However, he felt that this could be even better. He felt that CSN staff should always be 'at the top of the list of organisations people must speak to about new initiatives', but that this was not always the case.

2.2.2 Fit with local strategies

There is a good fit with the aims of CSN and Newcastle City Council's homelessness strategy 2008 – 2013. The latter has an emphasis on partnership and prevention and also makes links between employment and ending homelessness. Newcastle City Council's strategy states that 'long term opportunities for change' are one of the challenges in ending homelessness, adding that:

3 Newcastle City Council (2008), *Newcastle Homelessness Review Summary*.

4 Ibid.

5 Newcastle City Council (2008), *Newcastle Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*.

6 Ibid.

7 Newcastle City Council (2008), *Newcastle Homelessness Review Summary*.

'It is a national and local priority to address long term worklessness and create opportunities for people to change their lives and be fully included in society. We need to strongly align the housing and employment agendas' (p. 28).

Newcastle City Council staff confirm that the fit is also good with other Newcastle City Council strategies, for example in terms of provision of education, increasing employment and reducing benefit claimant rates.

In setting up CSN, development staff did tailor project plans where needed to increase local relevance. However, the fit with Newcastle City Council strategies is, to a certain extent, a happy coincidence, with CSN arriving at a time of change and innovation within Newcastle City Council.

CSN management report wanting to be better linked in to the basic skills agenda. They have explored getting tutors from local colleges to do sessions at CSN, but CSN is currently unable to meet college targets in the usual way regarding number of people completing each course (where colleges receive Learning and Skills Council funding, 10 learners must complete each course). CSN is therefore thinking about developing a new model to enable them to meet the criteria but in less traditional ways.

2.2.3 Fit with other services

All five external agencies interviewed felt that the work of CSN fitted with the work of others, both in education and homelessness, with four saying the work was complementary.

Three felt there was some duplication of services, but added that this was small and not a problem. Two of these argued strongly that there were enough clients locally to warrant a range of choices; both felt that some duplication was necessary to enable services to meet client needs. The agency most similar to CSN explained that the two organisations had limited duplication by working out complementary programmes.

2.2.4 Partnership working

CSN is very involved in partnership work and has multiple links with other agencies. CSN staff have regular meetings with outside organisations, and there is cross-referring of clients. Some of the courses delivered at CSN are done by other organisations. The following are examples of interagency work undertaken by CSN.

CSN has built links with NECA (Newcastle East Council for Addiction) so staff in both organisations feel confident to cross refer. NECA use the CSN centre for meeting clients too, to help them try to reach more clients and make themselves more accessible.

To enable CSN to receive referrals from statutory mental health services, CSN staff had to get police checks – something they had initially not planned to do. However, flexibility in this has been important to maintaining this important referral route.

Tomorrow's People rent office space at CSN, and the two organisations jointly run a job club at CSN once a week. They complement each other's work well; Tomorrow's People brings job search skills, CSN's progression coordinators are able to provide support to members with additional needs.

One member interviewed, John,⁸ talked about how his progression coordinator had worked with other agencies. The support worker from John's housing association and one of the CSN progression coordinators were both involved in drawing up a person centred plan with and for John. The progression coordinator has also met with John's chaplain.

One respondent argued that the challenge now for CSN is to see how it can work more with other services to help provide a holistic service to people. For example, if a CSN member has a support plan in their hostel, this respondent argued that CSN staff should always be actively involved in this.

2.2.5 Benefits to external agencies and the sector

Four of the agencies interviewed commented that CSN was promoting good practice. For example, three noted that CSN was helpfully promoting good practice in homelessness work, either in terms of inclusion or linking education to solutions to homelessness.

Two commented that CSN was '*a benchmark for quality of provision*' that might get others to '*raise their game*'. One explained that '*it stands as a landmark of what we can do*'.

Access to new clients

For one agency, their joint work with CSN was enabling the external agency to access new clients, people who would not normally have accessed their services.

Positive association

Four of the interviewees reported positive effects of an association with Crisis. One agency is not voluntary sector, and reported that links with a voluntary sector organisation makes them more approachable. The other three felt that the presence of a national provider, with good connections, was helpful to attract money and attention to the area.

The Newcastle City Council respondent was particularly positive about maintaining relationships: '*we want them to stay, we want them to consolidate, we want to support them. It's been great... [we feel] honoured and pleased that it came to Newcastle*'.

⁸ All names changed for anonymity.

3 Outcomes for members

There is good evidence that CSN is bringing about significant outcomes for its members, in a range of outcome areas. These include helping members to get jobs or accommodation and move into further education or training. CSN is also likely to be contributing to the prevention of homelessness through outcomes like improved social skills and improved mental health. The outcomes have been achieved through courses attended and support from progression coordinators and other staff.

This section is based on data from two sources; 20 members interviewed in February 2009, and CSN monitoring data from the previous six months. It is therefore a snapshot of some of the outcomes achieved and the benefits members got from CSN staff, services and activities. It is therefore not a summary of all the outcomes CSN has achieved.

3.1 Employment and education

Many homeless people have little or no educational qualifications, and participate in education and training much less than the rest of the population.⁹ Through its informal learning activities, CSN is helping some of its members get into work, voluntary work, education or training.

3.1.1 Qualifications

CSN monitoring statistics show that between July 2008 and January 2009, 16 members got a certificate or module accreditation.

Two interviewees said they had got accredited qualifications since arriving at CSN and nine reported currently working towards a qualification. Two had been given cash to help them attend interviews or college courses.

3.1.2 Jobs

Between July 2008 and January 2009, 17 members of CSN found work; two of these had moved on from the café. Although only one interviewee was in paid work, many of the others talked about what they were doing to get job ready or set up their own business. Many were keen to work or do voluntary work.

One interviewee is now a full time CSN café volunteer. He has also had temporary work, which CSN staff set up for him. Another three were hoping to set up their own business, one reporting that CSN had helped him improve his business planning skills, another being allowed to do photocopying at the centre to help him set up his business.

One external agency interviewee reported that some of their clients who had used CSN had gone on to find work.

9 Opinion Leader Research (2006), *Homeless people and learning and skills: participation, barriers and progression*. Crisis, London.

One interviewee, Emil,¹⁰ was currently in paid work. Although he had got this job himself, he explained that CSN staff had helped him learn about many of the practicalities. Emil comes from another country and says there was a lot of paperwork for him to sort out. CSN also showed him a range of places to look for work; before Emil came to CSN he only knew the job centre. Emil reports that because of the help he received from his progression coordinator, he could now do it for himself next time, and is finding that he is also able to share his knowledge with others.

3.1.3 Job skills

Four interviewees felt that coming to CSN had made them more organised, or more able to turn up to appointments or more punctual. Five of the others talked about the work they had done on getting job ready, with help from CSN.

3.1.4 Progress into further education

Between July 2008 and January 2009, thirteen CSN members progressed into further education (FE) or further training, four of these from the cafe. As most of the interviewees were still using CSN, none of them had progressed in this way, although seven had plans to go into FE in the future. For one of these, the support of their progression coordinator had been important in getting her back into education; she starts university course soon. Another described how their progression coordinator had helped him with his UCAS form, and done mock interviews with him.

3.1.5 Skills

Many of the interviewees talked about the new skills they had learnt as valuable in themselves, not necessarily as a route to a job. Five talked about their new skills in various arts, and six talked – some with pride – about new computer skills.

One interviewee described the personal significance of her new computer skills to her. Nadifa¹¹ is an asylum seeker, and her children are still in her home country. When she first arrived at CSN, Nadifa says that *'at first I hid from computers. I had a computer at home [in her home country], but I didn't use it... they taught me here how it's useful for life. Now I like it too much – I want one at home!'* Nadifa explained that CSN had taught her how to send emails in her first language, and she can now communicate regularly with her children.

For one member, CSN was giving him renewed confidence in existing skills. This person was already qualified in his chosen career, but he had lost confidence.

The two interviewees who had done ESOL courses explained that the English they had learnt was vital for enabling them to deal with all the relevant external agencies, regarding things like immigration, housing and jobs.

¹⁰ All names changed for anonymity.

¹¹ All names changed for anonymity.

3.2 Personal finances and housing

Despite being primarily focused on developing skills CSN is helping some of its members improve their financial or housing situations.

3.2.1 Finances

A few interviewees reported needing help with their finances. Three reported having had help from CSN staff that got them benefits and/or sorted out bill payment.

Three interviewees reported having debt problems. One reduced his debt himself, but felt that CSN had supported him in this. Another explained that the free food at CSN (donated Prêt sandwiches) has helped him reduce his debt. The last reported still being in debt but that CSN were helping him to start to tackle it.

3.2.2 Housing

Between July 2008 and January 2009, 22 CSN members improved their housing situation.

Of the 20 interviewees, ten had their own tenancy (usually council or housing association, and one renting), some very long term and predating any involvement in CSN. However, of the 10 with their own tenancies, four had got these more recently and at least in part due to CSN staff help. Another reported that his long-term tenancy had been in danger, but CSN staff had helped him keep it.

It is worth noting that six of the seven interviewees who said they had mental health problems also had their own tenancies, some long term. It is worth noting that six of the seven interviewees who said they had mental health problems also had their own tenancies, some long term. It is likely that people with mental health problems, whilst they have accommodation, are coming to CSN as the activities are helping them to maintain and improve their mental health and well being.

Seven interviewees were in hostels or supported housing; of these, two reported that CSN had helped them get this accommodation. Two other interviewees had received help from CSN on housing applications and were awaiting results.

3.3 Social outcomes

Taking part in educational activities can bring about important social outcomes for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness.¹² This evaluation found significant social outcomes for members of CSN.

3.3.1 Social life

The social aspect of CSN is important to many of its members. Thirteen interviewees said they had made friends at the centre, many of whom were seeing them outside CSN. One explained that when he had come to CSN last Christmas day, it had been 'the first Christmas I wasn't alone'. Another explained how CSN had helped:

'The staff give you hugs when you are really down. It has changed how I behave with other people. I feel more peaceful. I never felt like this before. Before I felt frightened, vulnerable, sad and lonely. There was no one to turn to'.

For five interviewees, coming to CSN had improved their social life outside of the centre. For some this was about improved confidence, for another it was about having more to talk about. This interviewee explained that his friends said he was happier and more positive since coming to CSN. Four interviewees said that CSN had helped them improve how they interacted with other people.

3.3.2 Mutual support between members

CSN staff encourage members to support other members, particularly within sessions. Eleven interviewees said that they had given and/or received support from other members. For example, one had used another members' business plan as a template for his own. A few others had given help with English or encouraged others in their art. Two interviewees commented on how good it was to see others progress.

It is significant that six interviewees spontaneously described CSN as like a 'family'. A further two described it as like home or said they felt at home. One member, an asylum seeker, explained that:

'Crisis is a kind of family for me.... When I [first] came here I was very sad and bored at home. [Now] when I come here I [feel like] I am amongst my family and in my country'.

¹² J. Luby and J. Welch (2006), *Missed opportunities: The case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people*. Crisis, London

3.4 Health

There is good evidence that being in work is good for physical health, and mental health and wellbeing.¹³ The relationship between meaningful occupation and good mental health is well established (for example SEU 2004¹⁴). CSN members report improved mental and physical health as a result of the activities they do and support they receive at CSN.

3.4.1 Mental health

Sixteen interviewees said that CSN had improved their mental health, in the broad sense of the phrase. For five of these it was simply about relaxing and ‘chilling out’; and for a further two it was about keeping positive and happier in the face of difficulties.

However, seven others described how help from CSN had helped them deal with more serious mental distress. One explained that they had felt very low before coming to CSN, but ‘when I started coming it literally revolutionised my life’. Another explained that there is a huge change in the way she feels about herself. She is much calmer and does not ‘rant and rave’ the way she used to in ‘displaced anger’. She feels that Skylight was crucial in that.

One interviewee had a breakdown last year. Despite this, he reports still coming to CSN, which he found helped him get through this bad period. He explained that he would go into a class feeling ‘edgy, nervy and depressed’ but by the time the class had finished he felt much better.

3.4.2 Drink and drugs

Seven interviewees reported reduced drink and/or drug taking over the past few years. For six of these CSN had a part to play in that. For some, CSN staff had just offered support while the member reduced their intake, either on their own or with the support of another agency. But for two, CSN staff had directly offered support around drinking – one reported that his progression coordinator went to meetings about alcohol use with him.

3.4.3 Physical health

Six interviewees reported recent improvements in physical health; for five of these this was at least in part due to the physical exercise they were doing at CSN.

13 Gordon Waddell, A Kim Burton (2006) *Is Work Good for Your Health and Well-being?* TSO, London.

14 Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Mental Health and Social Exclusion: Social Exclusion Unit Report*. ODPM, London.

3.5 General well-being

3.5.1 How members feel about themselves

Nine interviewees said that coming to CSN had improved their confidence and/or self esteem. One explained how much he thought he had changed since coming to CSN:

'Skylight is a starting point for going through life repair. I have come on in leaps and bounds. This place is absolutely fantastic. I would recommend it to anyone with learning difficulties.'

Ten interviewees talked of feeling more motivated or hopeful about the future. Of these, eight reported that CSN was at least in part responsible for the change. For most of these, their progression coordinator had helped motivate them. For some, having something to do in the day was vital: 'I look forward to getting up in the morning... before I was thinking every day was the same'.

For some interviewees, self belief was an important part of re-engagement in education. Four mentioned that they were less scared of failing, or had learnt that they were good at something. One explained that *'I know I can do things instead of saying I can't... I couldn't do art in school, but they've [CSN tutors] taught me I can do it'*.

3.5.2 Sense of achievement

The ethos of CSN activities is that they should all lead towards something. Many interviewees talked with pleasure or pride about things they had achieved that were not qualifications:

- Two had done singing performances. One explained that working towards performances gave him a 'massive buzz'.
- Four had pieces of art or jewellery displayed in CSN and three of these had sold things.
- One had done presentations to staff on mental health issues.
- Three had participated in a football competition, which had 'really boosted morale' and left the participants 'buzzing'.
- Four talked of the certificates they had won in CSN awards, and a fifth had been awarded a substantial amount of money as part of a Crisis Changing Lives Award.
- One talked about collecting donations for Crisis on the streets at Christmas; he said asking for money from the public was hard but 'character forming'.

3.5.3 Using time positively

For ten interviewees, the activities they attended at CSN were vital in terms of getting them out of the house and giving them something to do. One explained that CSN was giving members *'something to get out of bed for in the morning...if I wasn't here I'd just be wandering round, going into shops'*.

For some this was about staving off boredom and depression, but for others this had other significance. One said that being at CSN kept him out of trouble; for another, being at CSN gave very welcome distraction from multiple problems. Another reported that before he started at CSN he was just watching TV and going to bed. Since then he has only gone to bed twice during the day, which was an important change for him.

One particular interviewee, David,¹⁵ described with great enthusiasm his achievements since coming to CSN. When he first came to CSN about a year ago he was homeless and only recently off heroin. He felt very low, with no direction. 'At the time I was not motivated at all but they changed me. They didn't judge. They helped me believe in myself'. He started coming to CSN every day.

David has tried a range of activities he would not have considered before, many of which he found helpful. He has sold some jewellery he made and taken part in the football competition. He also helped write the first edition of the members' newsletter, and reported feeling overwhelmed when he saw it, with a sense of 'we did this'. David had also taken part in the gardening project that grew a lot of fruit and vegetables which they brought back to the centre. *'It is amazing that we have grown things with love which are eaten by homeless people'*. Recently, David got a certificate for outstanding achievements from Crisis, presented by the Head of CSN. He commented that this award had been very important to him.

There have been setbacks. He was a volunteer for a while at CSN which he really liked. However, this ended badly after an incident with another member; David was barred for 28 days. However, he reports that CSN staff handled this well and supported him through this. He felt it was an achievement for him not to 'relapse' during this time.

CSN staff helped him find a tenancy, and sort out his benefits and utility bills. David plans to go to college soon. He says that *'It was a long road but I am now there. But I wouldn't be there without Skylight. They have changed my life around'*.

3.5.4 Trying new things

Ten interviewees talked about how they were progressing through different activities, trying different things, or things new to them. For several of these people, they explained that CSN staff had actively encouraged them to get involved in new things.

15 All names changed for anonymity.

3.6 CSN's role in members' lives

Seven interviewees felt they would have no alternatives if CSN was not available to them; many said they would just be sitting at home. One of these who had been to multiple services explained that *'I'd more or less exhausted everything else'*. A further six said there were other services they could go to, but five of these didn't like the alternatives or felt they weren't appropriate for them. One explained that had she not been able to come to CSN, she might have tried voluntary work, but was not then ready. She needed to come to CSN first: *'It was only when I was here that I started feeling human again'*.

Almost all interviewees said they wanted to continue coming to CSN, even if they got a job or on to a course; two wanted CSN to be open for more hours generally. One of these remarked that *'if Skylight was open at night I'd be here'*.

This may indicate a slight dependency in some members. However, there may be alternative explanations. The centre has not been open for a long time, and some members may need a period of immersion in CSN before being able to move on. Crisis Skylight London has also found that members who are moving on typically go through a transition period, during which they still engage with Skylight. One Crisis staff member commented that over time *'the number of visits naturally diminishes and the connection appropriately fades'*.¹⁶

¹⁶ Personal communication, Crisis research team.

4 Learning from set up and delivery

Crisis Skylight Newcastle opened to members in April 2007. Skylight Newcastle café opened in July 2007.

4.1 Starting the project

4.1.1 Initial development work

In 2004 an external researcher looked at a range of cities across the north of the UK as potential sites for a new Skylight. On the basis of the findings, Newcastle was chosen from a shortlist. A Crisis staff member was then seconded for a year to do the development work, funded by Lloyds TSB. Development work went well and included:

- Fundraising.
- Developing local relationships. This involved meeting with relevant people and keeping them informed about the project, and working with them to try to ensure that services were complementary and there was a fit with local strategies.
- Finding premises for CSN. Funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, under the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme, was secured for the premises.
- Getting planning permission, and getting the design for the premises done.
- Consultation with Crisis Skylight London staff and users of Newcastle homelessness services.
- Some preliminary work on staffing structures and job descriptions, and recruiting the head of CSN.

Learning from development

The head of CSN reports that, in retrospect, it would also have been useful to have had a buildings manager at the beginning. This role could have brought together both building management and administration. Much of the buildings management role was done, at least initially, by the head of CSN but this was very time consuming.

The development work overran slightly, primarily due to issues with the building and funding its development, and the development worker had to finish their involvement very soon after the head of CSN was in post. This added to the pressure on the head of CSN.

The head of CSN also reflects that she would have liked to involve service users more in the development of the premises.

4.1.2 Involvement of other agencies in set up

All five external agencies interviewed for this evaluation had been involved in the initial research and pre-set up period. For the three other service providers this was primarily about keeping them informed and building relationships; all reported that this was appreciated and was about the right level of involvement for them. The other two respondents, Newcastle City Council and Homeless Link, had been more involved in sharing advice, support and contacts.

Most respondents were very positive about the development staff and the initial phases of CSN coming to Newcastle, and felt that Crisis should do similar things when they expand to different areas. However, there were some areas of difficulty and suggestions for improvement.

Suggestions for improvement

The council respondent would like to have had earlier involvement during the research into Newcastle, and recommends this for future Skylight projects. He reported that there had initially been an issue with Crisis using data that conflicted with Newcastle City Council's understanding of the local situation, and that this might have had the potential to alienate the local authority.

This respondent would also have liked to have more involvement in, and understanding of, the revenue side of CSN, not just capital. He felt that he might have been able to help Crisis identify revenue opportunities. He is very keen for CSN to stay in Newcastle and would like to help make them as sustainable as possible.

Relationship with external agencies

Several respondents - both CSN staff and external agencies - reported that there had been a few difficulties with other agencies when Crisis first came to Newcastle. This may be in part because Crisis is a national organisation, of which there are few with a presence in Newcastle. One external agency felt that:

'when they first came in I was very sceptical... it think anybody will be... when what is conceived to be a large London organisation parachutes into one of the parochial regions they are going to face backlash'.

External agencies, including the one quoted above, gave a lot of praise to the Crisis staff involved in set up, particularly in terms of allaying the fears of other agencies. Several respondents noted that getting external agencies to visit CSN was very helpful, and it was suggested that prior to the setting up of a new Skylight, local agencies might be invited to visit Skylight Newcastle or London.

One external agency felt that CSN management might have done a little more building of relationships in the early days; the head of CSN also reflected this might be the case. The external agency felt that the manager had been unable to do this in large part due to the time-consuming issues of building management. This respondent added that while taking on someone without the 'baggage' of a substantial homelessness background was a good move, this may have meant the manager had to do more to build relationships.

That CSN came with much of its revenue funding already in place, and did not access Supporting People or other statutory funds was very helpful. It was also noted by external agencies that many of the fears about competition were unsubstantiated. However, two respondents felt that there were still issues to be addressed in terms of competition between CSN and other agencies. One local agency felt that, for them,

the question of whether CSN were in Newcastle 'to complement or compete' was still not resolved, and that as the recession hits, competition may be increased.

4.1.3 Opening CSN's doors to the public

The head of CSN has been in post since September 2006, and the initial staff team of 15 people from January 2007. The centre opened slightly late, in April 2007.

The staff team were therefore unexpectedly in place before the centre opened. This brought difficulties and benefits. Staff interviewees described this period as 'exhausting but positive', and a 'massive learning curve'. There was a sense of everyone mucking in to get the centre ready, and that staff were so closely involved in this set up phase led to a strong sense of ownership. It also contributed to the strength and cohesion of the staff team – they had time to get to know one another.

However, the uncertainties of this period, including the lack of office space, phone lines or heating were not always easy for staff. One staff member left early on in part due to these difficulties, but it is significant that all the rest of the original staff members are still at CSN.

The delay meant staff were able to spend more time on outreach, getting out in Newcastle and telling people about their work. This was a change from the initial plans. However, some of the momentum and interest created by this work was lost as prospective members had to wait a long time for the centre to open.

Two member interviewees had attended CSN at the beginning; one has attended continuously since then and the other left soon after. The latter reports that initially he 'got cheesed off' waiting for the bike maintenance classes and drifted away from the centre. He came back recently and restarted classes, and has attended almost daily ever since, commenting that they have now 'got their act together'.

4.2 The premises

4.2.1 The building

The CSN building, City House, was bought by Crisis in an area just starting to redevelop. As such it is near both areas of deprivation and development. It is also very near some hostels. Unlike Crisis London, Crisis owns City House, and some outside organisations rent rooms within the centre. The premises are bright and clean and feel positive. Staff were proud of the building.

Most of the member interviewees liked the building. One spoke for many in saying *'It's a lovely building, easy to find, near the city centre, clean, not dowdy. With first impressions you think straightaway it is nice. Everything is viewable'*. Two felt the building was too small, especially for ESOL classes, which can get quite big. Another felt that the layout was confusing.

Most felt that the building was centrally located and easy to find, but two disagreed. It is, of course, hard to please everyone. For some, the proximity to their hostels was handy; for another, having hostels nearby was uncomfortable as there were people there he did not want to see.

External agencies interviewed for this evaluation were all very positive about the building. One described it as beautiful, attractive, big, inspiring, and the best of any social welfare organisation in Newcastle, 'by quite a way'.

Access to the rooms

Members can only access activity rooms with a tutor. Several of the interviewees commented that this level of access was fine. Two felt this was restrictive, with one explaining that he would like more open access to the computers.

4.2.2 Staff office space

Initially it was planned that the building would have limited office space, with just one small room for staff. It was anticipated that a small amount of work would need to be done away from members but that mostly staff and members would be fully integrated.

However, the staff team was too big. Although in theory only six staff were in at a time, there were often more, so there was not enough space in the small room. Also, some administration staff didn't need to be fully integrated with members.

Staff were also planning to hotdesk. Although many still like this in principle - it is transparent and reduces paper use - this proved difficult at times. Managers found doing confidential work tricky as all the computers were open-access. Staff had to log out every time they left their desk, and adjust chairs every time they got a new desk. While small, these tasks were time consuming.

By the time it became clear that they needed more space, there was only one available room in the building. This is a top floor office which, although suitable, is too large for their needs and away from members. However, this is primarily used by administration staff and managers; the tutors and progression coordinators tend to use the small office and are therefore still accessible to members.

4.2.3 Private space

The ethos of the CSN building is that it should be transparent; most of the rooms have large windows. This does mean that there is little space for individual work with clients, which the progression coordinators find problematic at times. They have one interview room, but it has large windows onto the corridor. The progression coordinators have a screened off area in another room, but it is not very private.

One member commented that it was sometimes hard to focus when meeting with progression coordinators due to frequent interruptions from other members.

4.2.4 Members' tea area

London and Newcastle Skylights have tried different models regarding member tea areas and this has resulted in useful learning. Crisis Skylight London had found that their members' tea areas could be problematic – it was used by some members who chose not to engage with the activities and occasionally there was trouble there. Also, Skylight is not a drop in. For these reasons, Crisis chose not to have a tea area for members when CSN was set up.

But staff and members have found that they need a tea area. Members need somewhere to go if they stay all day, or even for breaks within sessions. Many cannot afford to go to a café, and some may not be in accommodation that allows them to make their own sandwiches. So an area in the basement was converted, and some members have formed a group intending to decorate it. There is still sometimes an issue with members coming in to the tea area and not engaging with activities.

Members had mixed views about the tea area. Three liked, or didn't mind, that access to it was limited to stop people 'abusing it' or using it to sleep. However another two found this too controlling and inaccessible, and another said the basement was too far away for short breaks. Three would like more facilities, for example a coffee machine or space to make food.

4.3 Staffing

The staff team now numbers 22 people (approximately 16 full time equivalents) and appears committed, enthusiastic and cohesive. They have a wide range of skills and come from a variety and mix of backgrounds including health, housing, probation services, and education.

Recent additions to the team include a senior tutor and a volunteer coordinator. These new roles appear to be bringing important benefits to CSN, and staff commented that both these roles would have been useful from the beginning.

4.3.1 Sessional staff

At the time of writing, of the 48 activity sessions put on every week at CSN, about 60% of activities are run by Crisis Skylight staff and 30% sessional tutors. Volunteers and external organisations run the remainder of sessions. The number of sessional staff fluctuates, as contracts are usually only for a term, but currently there are about 5-10.

Having sessional staff brings a lot of benefits. They bring a variety of skills that could not be expected in a small staff team. That they are not on permanent contracts means the curriculum at the centre can be changed frequently.

However, the use of sessional staff has not always been easy for CSN. The range of activities they can put on is heavily dependent on the sessionals available. Recruitment is an issue, being costly and time-consuming. They have tried a range of methods, including email adverts, local press and word of mouth. The budget for recruitment was very small, but even when an advert was paid for (piggy-backed onto an advert for a staff member) the response was low. Staff at CSN have had some success in getting sessional staff by creating and maintaining relationships with local colleges, who have put them in touch with potential tutors.

The hourly wage for CSN sessional staff is average. Sessional tutors need to be paid extra to come in for meetings, or to do any of the administration associated with course accreditation. CSN staff reflect that there may not be many people who want temporary work.

There was concern from CSN staff that there has occasionally been an issue with the quality of some of the teaching. Several staff felt that tutor recruitment needed to be more rigorous, with the interview including a demonstration of practical skills. It was also felt by some staff that tutors ought to have a formal teaching qualification at least for the accredited courses, if not all.

CSN expect they will continue to need sessionals to bring in specialism and variety. However, they are also looking at the possibility of less sessional and more paid staff.

4.3.2 Volunteers

Volunteers have always been involved at CSN, undertaking a range of roles from basic administration to running or supporting activities. However, this was not always supported as well as it could have been, as staff were initially doing the work of volunteer coordinator alongside their other roles. In particular it was felt by one staff

member that they were not able to support member-volunteers adequately. Crisis London is currently developing volunteering policies and procedures for them to use.

A volunteer coordinator started at CSN in October 2008. Already staff feel this is making a big difference, drawing in substantial numbers of volunteers and bringing about a corresponding reduction in workload for the rest of the team. He is considering introducing volunteer project managers who could take on specific tasks.

Innovation

CSN have tried a wide range of ways, some of them innovative, to get more volunteers at the centre.

Two ex-members of CSN have been sessional staff; this was inclusive and offered both progression opportunities for individuals and role models for the members as a whole. However, there were difficulties with reliability and high sickness levels. CSN would like to repeat this in future, but would like to be able to offer increased support to these members.

One interesting area was the involvement of staff from local job centres as volunteers at CSN. The progression coordinators noted that CSN members and job centre staff could benefit from learning more about each other. The head of CSN approached contacts at the Department of Work and Pensions, and about 30 job centre staff volunteered at CSN over a few months. Staff report that the job centre staff learnt about CSN members and their needs, and CSN members became less negative about job centre staff.

Recently CSN have started working with student volunteers. Two art students run art classes; they want to get teaching experience. And some drama students are working with members to put on a production; this helps the students fulfil their course requirements.

4.3.3 Staffing levels and capacity

Staffing levels have been an issue at CSN. Lack of staff capacity, particularly in covering reception, was central to the decision to reduce centre opening hours.

The original target was ambitious, with the centre opening 9.30am-7.30pm, seven days per week. However, several things coincided to mean the centre hours needed to be reduced. There was a temporary reduction in reception staff. CSN also found they couldn't operate the full opening hours because there were not enough tutors and progression coordinators. Progression coordinators also didn't always feel safe in the centre on their own at weekends. So the hours were reduced Monday - Saturday and the centre now shuts on Sundays. This effectively concentrates their resources in fewer days. They do, however, plan to reopen on Sunday in the future.

Members were not consulted in the decision to reduce opening hours, in part because there were no alternatives to consult on. They were informed of the change in the members' forum. However, the head of CSN reflects that they could have involved them more.

Five members said the opening hours at CSN were fine for them. However, eight said they would like the centre to be open again on Sundays, with one saying they were ‘furious’ about the change. Four were concerned about the late opening on some days, with one explaining that *‘by 2[pm] the day is almost over... sometimes I cannot wait for it to open’*.

4.3.4 Feedback on staff

From members

Almost all member interviewees were very positive about staff at all levels and all teams in CSN, including the café. Four mentioned that staff treated them ‘like human beings’ or had the ‘human touch’. One said she liked the overall approach of the staff team:

‘They do not play power games. Everything is on an equal basis. When you feel valued and respected, that’s a lovely feeling. When you are given respect, you give respect back’.

One member felt that CSN staff were proactive: ‘It is really important that if you have any problems staff will work it out. They are there for you. They don’t just leave you in a corner and ignore you’.

Many interviewees had good things to say about the tutors, with many different tutors (including all the staff tutors) being singled out for praise. One liked their ability to ‘control bad behaviour’; another felt that the tutors had a lot of patience. Another explained that ‘the tutors are really relaxed and very friendly and they really want to help you’. The only negative comment was that some tutors were a ‘bit clinical’, but the interviewee in question was not able to explain what this meant.

There was praise for all the progression coordinators. Two interviewees noted that different progression coordinators have different strengths, and appreciated having a range of skills and workers to go to. It was clear that most of the interviewees had a ‘favourite’ progression coordinator, one who they chose to go to more often. One interviewee felt that staff too had favourite members, but no other interviewees mentioned this.

From external agencies

External agencies, where they felt able to comment on staff, were very positive, describing the team as ‘enthusiastic’, ‘committed’ and having a ‘wealth of knowledge’. One agency that rents office space at CSN explained that:

‘they have certainly extended the warmth to our client group...we have people who have finished our courses and they are still popping in to see us but they are also popping in to see the café staff and the reception staff and they feel part of the bigger family and its really good to see’.

4.4 Advertising

4.4.1 Outreach and access

Outreach sessions have been very helpful in bringing in new members. CSN stopped doing outreach for the first six months of 2008, but found that outreach is important to keep new members coming to the centre. Since July 2008 they have had, on average, three outreach sessions or interagency meetings per month, with responsibility for these split across the whole staff team.

CSN is open access and this was valued by several external agencies. One said that 'you wouldn't be afraid to refer anyone over', and added that some other homelessness services may have a stigma attached to them that was absent with CSN. Another respondent liked the opportunities that CSN offers for mixing between homeless people and others, for example students and volunteers.

Eight of the interviewees mentioned that they had heard about CSN from people they knew; another five had heard about it through another agency. One described how a worker from another agency had physically brought her to CSN. She explained that this assistance had been vital to her accessing the centre: *'if he didn't bring me here I couldn't find it... in UK people use maps; in [my country] we don't'*.

Two external agencies felt that perhaps CSN could do more to encourage the hardest to reach by eliminating some of the access barriers. For example, bussing people in from other services and/or outreach taster sessions. One of these acknowledged that this was the joint responsibility of CSN and other agencies. CSN is already considering this.

4.4.2 Crisis marketing

One external agency felt that there was anxiety locally amongst other service providers because *'Crisis have a huge marketing team behind them, and other, smaller local charities haven't got this'*.

A recent Crisis marketing campaign in the north east was commented on by two of the external agencies, who contested the figures used in the campaign. One was quite angry and felt the marketing campaign should not have been done. This respondent felt that Crisis was presenting itself as the regional face of homelessness, which they felt was inappropriate.

4.5 Managing CSN

4.5.1 Targets

Initially, the targets in the funding bids and business plan didn't always tally, so it was confusing for CSN staff; it took a few months to sort this out. Now the targets stem from the five-year strategic plan and things are much clearer.

4.5.2 Policies and procedures

Few existing policies and procedures were available to CSN staff initially. Those that were available were primarily relating to human resources, and some were out of date. This caused them some difficulties, and more time was spent on developing these during set up than anticipated. In response to this a new manual of policies is currently being developed.

4.5.3 Accreditation process at the centre

The accreditation process was much more difficult than had been anticipated. This led to a very long delay in the setting up of accredited training.

It had been assumed that CSN could become a satellite of Crisis Skylight London for the purposes of accreditation. However, this was not possible. The practicalities of being a satellite were very complex and the examining bodies themselves recommended that CSN set itself up as a centre in its own right. In addition, CSN found that many of the tutors they recruited were familiar with local accreditation bodies. As a result, CSN did all their own accreditation locally, which was much more time consuming than originally planned.

4.5.4 Relationship between CSN and Crisis London

Overall, CSN staff report that the relationship between CSN and Crisis London is now good. Many CSN staff report feeling 'connected' with Crisis London and explain that there is now a two-way process of learning.

However, the relationship between a central office and a satellite service can be tricky for any organisation. Some CSN staff report difficulties initially when information was not always available. There was a suggestion from some that perhaps Crisis London wanted to give CSN their freedom. In part this was welcomed, but some felt perhaps more support and guidance initially might have been helpful.

Some of the logistics of being a satellite were time consuming. For example, initially, all finance had to go through Crisis London – CSN didn't have a bank account for several months. Some CSN staff members reported that it was difficult to get hold of important information from Crisis Skylight London, for example policies and procedures, or information about accreditation.

One CSN staff member felt that sometimes it was hard to keep the relationship going. *'Crisis [London] doesn't deliberately exclude but sometimes we feel excluded...out of sight out of mind'*. However, this person also felt that it's a dual responsibility to include and be included.

4.5.5 Learning from the work of progression coordinators

The progression coordinators provide the front-line support for members. They work with them both to address needs and to draw up a progression plan of how they wish to use and benefit from CSN and link them appropriately into other services.

The progression coordinators have chosen to have a shared case load, which appears to be a real strength. When there was an internal discussion about the possibility of individual case loads progression coordinators argued for a shared case load on the following basis:

- They do different shifts and one of them is part time.
- The progression coordinators have different skills which gives members choice.
- They wanted shared targets so as to not be competitive.
- It is hard to say who 'owns' an outcome, in terms of meeting targets.

One of the progression coordinators reflected that having a key worker is common in the homelessness sector. While they didn't think this was a conscious factor in their decision to have a shared case load, not having a key worker may help to further emphasise the difference between CSN and other agencies.

Making the most of limited resources

The progression coordinators report that they are considering new ways of delivering their work, to maximise on their resources. They are discussing the possibility of offering groupwork for some issues. They are also considering the balance between administration and one-to-one work; they usually respond to members' needs immediately, but this can mean administration can be hard to fit in. They may move towards set times during which they are available to members.

4.6 The café

The café is an integral part of both Skylight London and Newcastle and so has been considered here. It was not possible, however, to consider it in depth as a social enterprise which both trains clients and trades. A separate and more specific evaluation around this would be helpful.

Business income has grown steadily since opening, and the cafe has established a good regular customer base.

4.6.1 The café business model

The café premises are attractive, light and airy. However, the space was converted assuming the business model would be the same as in London, but the model changed to fit local needs. At CSN there is less passing trade. People generally plan to go there, so there is more cooked food. That CSN changed the model so quickly when needed was cited as evidence of good practice by one of the external agencies interviewed.

Café staff also report that more storage space would be helpful – this would give them more flexibility as to the services they offer. For example, if they wished to open in the evenings, they would need more storage space for food.

External help

To help with the initial difficulties with premises and the café model, CSN bought in a consultant, mostly externally funded. They helped CSN draw up a new business plan and some ideas for changes to make things easier. On reflection, while this was very helpful, the head of CSN wonders if, instead of getting the consultancy help with running the business, they could have got someone in separately to do the training side.

4.6.2 Staffing the cafe

The café manager started in April 2007 and the assistant manager in June. Initially there were just the two staff plus one volunteer. Since then more staff have been taken on and they have a long-term volunteer.

Several café staff have spent some time at Crisis Skylight London, and report that this was very helpful. One would have liked more time there.

Café staff report that there was some initial lack of clarity about who was to do what in the café. There was some misunderstanding as to whether centre staff would be able to help with the café administration; there was more administration for the café than anticipated.

4.6.3 Learning from managing the service

The café is now doing well. Café customers were initially mostly staff, but are now primarily general public, and a few members do come in.

Opening

The café opening was staggered; for example, in the first week they opened 10am-12pm, then the next week they did breakfast only. After while they opened for breakfast and lunch. Café staff reported this approach was very helpful.

Training at the café

As with the Café in Skylight London it was intended that the café would have a dual function as a business and provide accredited training as well, but staff found that managing the balance between these was difficult with only two staff. However, according to café staff, informal training has been offered to about 50 volunteers and trainees over the last two years (some for a day, some long term).

Accredited training will start in the café in the near future; there are some members waiting to start and they hope to train about 10 per year. Café staff have put together their own in-house training to help trainees prepare themselves and to complement the accredited training programme.

The café manager at CSN reflects that offering a wide range of food types has in turn offered wider training opportunities for trainees. Crisis recognises, however, that ensuring the café does provide concrete training opportunities and outcomes is an area that needs a real focus and emphasis.

4.6.4 Member feedback on the café

Half of the interviewees said they had used the café at least once. A few go there quite regularly. Two people commented that the food was good, another two that the service was good.

It appears that some members may not understand the purpose of the café, which needs to function primarily as a business with training opportunities. Four felt it was too expensive, with another two commenting that they didn't use it because they couldn't afford it. While some suggested discounts for members or cheaper prices, at least one felt that making it more accessible to members might be off putting for the public. One member felt that the café was at odds with the values of Crisis and didn't fit the centre as a whole.

4.7 Direct client work: Feedback on services

4.7.1 Members' satisfaction with the service in general

The interviewees were overwhelmingly positive about CSN as a whole; they really enjoyed attending the centre. The following quotes are illustrative of those interviewees who were particularly positive:

'I was going around with a chip on my shoulder and Crisis has taken it off. You get smiles. You get happiness. It starts with the receptionist and works its way through the building'.

'I just think it's an excellent project and there should be more of them in other parts of the country. Crisis is a very good organisation. I can't thank them enough'.

The lack of 'trouble' at CSN was important to some members, and few 'incidents' were mentioned in the interviews. Two interviewees felt that theft was a problem at CSN, and one of these wanted more security systems. No other members commented on theft.

CSN compared with other services

Several members felt that CSN was different from other services - 'coming here is a change, a breath of fresh air'. Others remarked that they appreciated the structure, or liked having a more 'controlled environment,' or felt that it was an 'academic establishment'. One also commented that class sizes at college were too big to enable students to get help from tutors.

Several liked the fact that CSN is not a drop-in. One explained that *'I would say you have to be prepared to work. It is not a drop-in centre. It is a training centre'*. This is not to say that they felt drop-ins were not useful - several were accessing drop-in services as well at CSN - rather that CSN provided something different.

Availability of food

Initially no food was available at the centre and some members, especially those in hostels with early dinner times, were leaving early. However for the last six months Prêt a Manger has been donating sandwiches and CSN staff report that more members are staying all day as a result. Several members commented in interview how much they appreciated this.

It is recognised that a balance needs to be struck so that any such donated food encourages people to stay who are already at the centre and engaging, rather than being a draw in its own right.

4.7.2 Member feedback on activities

Members were broadly very positive about the courses and activities they attended, both in terms of content and teaching. Two specifically mentioned liking the variety on offer, although another added that they would like more variety at the weekends.

Two interviewees appreciated the individualised nature of CSN courses. One explained that:

'It's a starting point. You come in and everything can be structured around you. Art, reading, everything is built around you. You don't get just standard courses'

Members were split about the level of structure at CSN. Two specifically said they liked the emphasis on punctuality and regular attendance. Another would like it to be freer. A few commented that course content was becoming too structured and focused on qualifications.

At least one had been accompanied to meetings by CSN staff. This respondent explained that *'if I go somewhere I feel better if [the progression coordinator] is with me. The ... accent is difficult to understand, particularly when there are two of them talking together'*.

The mix of people

Interviewees were very positive about the mix of people at CSN, with seventeen specifically commenting that they liked the diversity. Aspects they appreciated were the mix in ages, gender, cultures, experience and knowledge, and the mix of different abilities within one class. One, who had helped out with an ESOL class said it was *'Unbelievable. Made me cry. The smile on their faces when they had achieved something made me feel I had achieved. You don't see a divide between us'*.

One said the mix had made him more broadminded. Two specifically commented that CSN was not a prejudiced or racist place to be. One of these explained that *'I like it if people have prejudices that they leave them at the door'*.

Suggestions for change

A few members noted that sometimes there were not enough people in some activities for them to run successfully. On the other hand another two felt that, for more popular activities, class sizes could be too big to get enough support from tutors.

Several members were not happy about changes, either in terms of timetable, or tutors. A couple mentioned that tutors not turning up had been a problem occasionally.

Three interviewees said they would like more outings. One recalled a trip he had particularly enjoyed: *'A lot of people really truly miss it. We took people who had never seen the sea. We caught fish with our hands. People couldn't believe it'*.

Members suggested options for new classes, including:

- plumbing, plastering, joinery and tiling
- help with setting up a business
- cooking
- history
- gymnastics.

4.7.3 Member involvement and consultation

CSN members are currently offered two formal routes to give feedback, a suggestions box and a monthly members' forum. At the forum, all the month's suggestions from the box are read out and responded to either on the spot or at a later forum. The forum is organised by staff and formally minuted. Member involvement and consultation is generally working well at CSN: most members reported feeling consulted and able to say what they think to staff. Several interviewees were actively involved in 'giving something back' to Crisis.

Giving something back

A number of interviewees described how they had got involved at CSN. One explained the importance of this to him: *'It is nice to give a little back. That is new to me. I used to always take'*. Examples given by members of the ways they were involved included:

- Three talked about fundraising, with one doing a 13 mile bike ride on behalf of CSN.
- Three had been publicising CSN through word of mouth.
- Several were involved in writing a members' newsletter.
- One had been involved in a group planning to decorate the tea area.
- One was translating the member handbook into another language.

Consultation and involvement

Feedback from staff

While some staff were proud of the user involvement at CSN, there was also recognition from others that it could improve even further. For example, one staff member would like to see ex-members recruited as staff, another would like a formal strategy and policy for user involvement. There are plans to improve user involvement at CSN as part of developing a wider cross-organisational strategy of user involvement at Crisis.

Feedback from members

Three-quarters of the members interviewed explicitly reported feeling able to say what they felt to staff; two said they could not. Of the latter, one said that they were worried about confidentiality. This person also said they didn't feel consulted at CSN; they were the only person to report this.

Over half of the interviewees said they had been to the members' forum, nine of these fairly regularly. Five said they thought they were working well, but four were more critical, arguing that ideas were not always followed up or that minutes didn't always represent what was said.

Two said they had used the suggestions box, and three reported having made suggestions about changes to the programme that were subsequently taken on.

Communication could be improved with members. Six said there were times that they hadn't had all the information they needed to understand what was going on, for example why courses were not running, why some courses were women only and what had happened to follow-up certain member's suggestions

In addition, two wanted to have more information – either in the form of ID badges or photos making up a ‘rogues gallery’ – identifying staff and volunteers at CSN.

4.7.4 External agency feedback

The external agencies interviewed were unable to comment in detail on the activities at CSN, but were broadly very positive about them. In particular they liked the range of activities on offer, many of which were not available elsewhere. One said they were ‘broadening customers’ horizons’. Two mentioned that courses were sometimes cancelled, and although they recognised this was occasionally inevitable, and that CSN staff were themselves disappointed if this happened, they felt that consistency was important.

One agency particularly liked the focus at CSN on achieving something tangible, be it a qualification, a piece of art that could be put up on the walls and/or sold, or getting a bike at the end of a bike maintenance course. They described these ‘tangible results from practical engagement’ as something that marked CSN out as different from many other providers.

One respondent felt that CSN staff offering sessions in other services was ‘a really, really good move’. He would like to see more of this.

4.8 The development of new Skylights: suggestions from staff and external agencies

Staff and respondents from other agencies were asked to give their advice to Crisis about the development of new Skylights in new locations.

It must be noted that while many of these suggestions are for things to be done differently to the Newcastle set up, many are also of things that were done well in Newcastle and should be repeated. Some recommendations were made for things that have already been taken on board (eg, developing a manual of policies) and these have not been included.

4.8.1 Suggestions from other agencies

- As happened in Newcastle, involve external agencies in the set up phase, as early as possible and at least as much as was done in Newcastle – perhaps more. Show people what the model is going to be and establish that Skylight is not there to compete but to complement. One suggested demonstrating that in Newcastle, the arrival of CSN has not lead to the shutting of other day centres.
- Reassure those in existing Skylight areas that Crisis intends to stay. An external agency in Newcastle commented on the risks of overexpansion, and was worried that Crisis will spread themselves and their funding too thin – ‘will there be less jam for Newcastle?’
- Bring external agencies to Newcastle and London to see the existing Skylights
- When expanding, continue to focus on the quality of services.

4.8.2 Suggestions from staff

CSN staff made a range of suggestions for the development of new Skylights, in the following areas:

- set up
- the café
- staff support
- services.

Set up

Consider whether the new centre manager might be recruited earlier to enable them to take on a little more of the development role during set up, to assist with local relationship building.

- Develop closer working relationships with all the parties involved in the development of the building, for example the quantity surveyors. Development staff commented that these relationships were close with many of the relevant parties but not all.
- Clarity would be helpful about what does need to be the same in the centres - like a franchise - and what does not.
- For the new centre, the accreditation process could be at least partly underway before the staff are in place. However, it was acknowledged this may be problematic if it then lacks the local knowledge as to what is needed.

Staffing and staff support

- One staff member said they would have liked a buddy system with London, a named point of contact, with different people for different areas of work. Use of technology like Skype could facilitate this.
- Staff from Crisis Skylight London or CSN could be seconded to the new projects, where resources permitted.
- Staff from the new projects should spend time at Crisis Skylight London/CSN as part of their induction; some CSN staff reflected that the one day they had spent at Crisis Skylight London was very helpful but not enough.
- Build in the volunteer coordinator role from the start.
- Consider how the buildings management role could be carried out, but by a staff member other than the centre manager.

The café

- Check with public health early on about the number of toilets required for the space – otherwise this may limit the maximum number of customers.
- Do more local market research before deciding on the model of business.

Services

- Do a lot of work in the beginning to find out what is available locally. There was some background research done at CSN, but some staff felt there could have been more and noted that it dates very quickly.
- Ask potential clients (eg at larger hostels) what they want to be involved in.
- Balance accredited and non accredited learning.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for CSN

CSN is a strong project with good outcomes. It is well liked by its members and by external agencies. There are therefore few recommendations for CSN as a result of the findings of this evaluation, and those made here should not detract from the excellent work done by the project. However, CSN should consider the following.

CSN should:

- continue to focus on helping members move on;
- include a demonstration of practical skills when interviewing prospective sessional tutors;
- look into ways communication might be improved with members, especially around changes to the curriculum or tutors and about the purpose of the café;
- ensure that the Members' Forum continues to be minuted accurately and that ideas are followed up on.

CSN should consider:

- reopening the service on Sundays, and whether it would be possible to offer more variety of activity at weekends;
- ways to open earlier on the days with a 2 pm start;
- putting on more outings;
- where possible, taking on members' suggestions for new classes from this evaluation;
- providing a greater range of ways for members to say what they think to CSN staff;
- how to address any issues of theft within the building;
- providing private space for progression coordinators to meet with members, when appropriate.

There are two learning points for CSN about evaluation:

- It was not possible within the scope of this evaluation to cover the café in depth. Crisis should consider an evaluation of the café as a social business in its own right, drawing lessons as appropriate from the different set-ups in London and Newcastle.
- The monitoring data available for this evaluation doesn't quite do justice to the considerable achievements of CSN. A new monitoring and evaluation framework and database has been developed over the last year for Crisis services as whole. This offers CSN staff the opportunity to collect consistent and important data on its work and clients, particularly outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations for Crisis when developing new Skylights

When developing Skylights in other parts of the country, Crisis should learn from the considerable good practice at CSN, as well as the few recommendations made to CSN above. In addition, there are a number of learning points to consider.

In its work with other agencies, Crisis should:

- Continue to involve external agencies in new areas in the set up phase, as was done in Newcastle, but do so as early as possible and at least as much as was done in Newcastle.
- Consider earlier involvement of the local council in new areas.
- Where possible, show external agencies what the model is going to be, perhaps by offering visits to CSN or Crisis Skylight London.
- Continue to reassure external agencies that Skylight is not there to compete with but to complement local services. It might be helpful to demonstrate that some of the fears of external agencies in Newcastle were unsubstantiated. In fact, many have benefitted from Crisis's involvement in the area.
- Reassure those in existing Skylight areas that Crisis intends to stay.
- Where possible, ensure there is a shared understanding between Crisis and external agencies of homelessness data used in Crisis marketing.

When developing a new Skylight building, Crisis should:

- Consider ways to involve service users more in the development of the premises: perhaps members from Crisis Skylight London or CSN might be involved in this.
- Ensure there are close working relationships with all the parties involved in the development of the building, for example the quantity surveyors.
- Consider the pros and cons of hotdesking and staff office space, given the CSN experience.
- While maintaining the ethos of visibility within a building, consider how staff might have private space for meeting with members when needed.
- Continue to consider ways to make the members' tea area both safe and comfortable but not a place that encourages lack of engagement.

When setting up new Skylight projects, Crisis should:

- Consider how much of the training accreditation paperwork might be done before the new centre staff are in place.
- Provide new centres with clarity about what does need to be the same in the centres - like a franchise - and what does not.
- Continue to use outreach as an effective way to get members to a new centre.

When setting up a new Skylight café, Crisis should:

- Where possible, undertake earlier research into the most appropriate model locally for the café, to establish this before any conversion of premises. The amount of storage space required for the model should also be clarified.
- Check with public health early on about the number of toilets required for the space.
- Consider adequate café staffing to allow for both running the business and accreditation.
- Get CSN or Crisis Skylight London café staff involved in the café design, as happened with Newcastle.

When staffing a new Skylight, Crisis should:

- Consider recruiting the centre manager earlier on in the process, to enable them to share more of the relationship building with development staff.
- Consider ways to ensure that new staff feel fully integrated with Crisis as a whole.
- Consider ways to involve CSN or Crisis Skylight London staff in supporting new centre staff. For example through secondments or a buddy system.
- Staff at the new projects should spend time at Crisis Skylight London/CSN as part of their induction. If possible, this should be for longer than a day.
- Consider building in the volunteer coordinator role from the start, and perhaps that of the senior tutor.
- If the new centre is likely to have a significant buildings management role, consider how that role might be taken on within the staff team from the start, perhaps within a specialised senior administration post.
- Set opening hours realistically with regard to the staffing levels, to avoid disappointing members later on.
- Consider carefully the balance between sessional and paid staff and the pros and cons of each.

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Appendix 1: CSN member interview schedule

1.1 Services used at Skylight

- How long have you been coming to Skylight? When did you start? Have you been coming all the time since then?
- Why did you come to skylight initially?
- What do you do here?
- How often do you come?
- Are you doing different things now than when you started? How? (if relevant) Was it good to try a range of things?
- Did someone at Skylight suggest to you to do these activities?
- Has the way you attend the centre changed? How do you find it, having set times and appointments to turn up to – is that easy for you? (Was it always easy?/has that been a change for you?)
- Do you see one of the progression coordinators? (Aka Inclusive learning officers, or ILOs) Why/why not? If yes, what do you do with them?

1.2 What you think of Skylight

- How would you describe Skylight?
- Is Skylight different from other services in Newcastle? If yes, how?
- Does the Skylight building make a difference to you at all? Why/why not? How about the location? How could it be better, if at all?
- What do you think of:
 - The classes/activities you go to?
 - What do you think of the mix of people in the classes?
 - (If relevant) What the progression coordinators do? What was the most important thing the progression coordinators have done for you?
 - (if relevant) volunteering here?
 - The café?
 - Any other things you do here?
- Is anything else good about Skylight? Can you give examples?
- What is less good about Skylight? Can you give examples of things that have been less good?
- Is there anything you would change about Skylight, if you could?
- What is it about the way staff here work with you that is important?
- Do you feel able to say what you think to skylight staff?
- Have you ever attended the member's forum? What was that like?
- Do you feel the Skylight staff consult you about what happens here? Can you give an example of this? Have they acted on things you or other members have suggested?

1.3 Other services used in Newcastle

- Do you use any other services in Newcastle for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness? Or for education and training?
- If Skylight wasn't here, is there anywhere else you could go for these kinds of activities?

1.4 Changes made

- Have things changed for you since you started coming to Skylight? How? Prompt and explore as necessary (points in italics for reference only):
 - *for each change, after it is described, ask what caused that change? Was that about you, or Skylight, or another organisation, or some other change in circumstances? (tailor each one so doesn't sound too repetitive or mechanical)*

Education and training

- Have you learnt new things or new skills?
- Have you got any qualifications since coming here? (*what?*)
- Have you started working, placements or volunteering, or doing any further training? (whether these are sustained, etc.)

Social stuff

- Do you feel differently about yourself? (*sense of purpose, reduced boredom, hope, self esteem, confidence, motivation, aspiration*)
- Do you do anything socially that you didn't do before? (*friends, social skills, integration with non-homeless people*)
- Have other members here supported you? Or have you supported them at all?
- Lifestyle and services
- Have you started to use other services or things in the community since you came here? (*especially mainstream health, reduction in need for support, involvement in community activities, including volunteering, etc.*)
- Has anything changed about your lifestyle? (*eg drugs*)
- Has anything changed about your mental or physical health?
- Has anything changed about your money situation? (*eg, debt, benefits*)
- Has anything changed about your housing situation? (*type or how long sustained*)

1.5 The future

- Do you have any plans for the next year or two? What's next for you? (If time: how long have you been planning that? Did you have these plans before you came to Skylight?)
- Will you continue coming to Skylight? How long for, do you think?

1.6 Ending

- Is there anything else you would like to say to me about the project?
- Thank you very much for your time.
- We're going to write a report about Skylight. Part of my report may contain a case study about you, but your name will not be mentioned, and any details that may identify you will be changed. Is that okay?

Appendix 2: CSN courses and activities

Acoustic Guitar

Members learn how to read music, play tunes and strum songs, both individually and as a group. Guitar session members have enjoyed performing to a public audience as well as attending a guitar concert at the Sage Gateshead, both of which were amazing experiences.

Art with Gary

'Art with Gary' offers an opportunity to develop people's artistic skills and explore their creativity in a relaxed, supported studio environment.

Art with Ian

Art with Ian is an opportunity for members to enjoy Drawing and Painting and to make pictures that interest them.

Consumer Credit Counselling Service Finance / Debt Advice

CCCS is an independent charity that provides advice and practical help with money issues. Whether members have debts, would like support with budgeting, or anything else to do with finances, they are welcome to this monthly drop-in session.

C&G Visual Techniques Level 1: Developing Sketchbooks

'Developing Sketchbooks' offers members the opportunity to develop a broad range of drawing and painting skills including line, tone, colour, pattern and texture. The course includes guidance on using sketchbooks creatively as a means of recording, storing and developing ideas, and on following a design brief.

C&G Visual Techniques Level 1: Drawing and Painting

This course offers members the chance to improve your drawing and painting skills. The course gives learners an opportunity to explore skills, techniques and ideas in painting and drawing in a supportive atmosphere.

Digital Photography

For members with an interest in photography and who would like to learn how to use a digital camera.

Driving Theory

The purpose of the session is to give learners the confidence and knowledge to sit the official DSA Theory Test. Having attended an introductory class about the different components of the actual test, members take part in self-directed study including working through mock exams, hazard perception clips, and videos.

ESOL

English for Speakers of Other Languages. ESOL at Crisis teaches you how to survive in English.

Football

This session offers members a chance to improve their football skills.

IT Drop-In

Members can practice the skills they have learned in the more formal sessions, check their emails, or use the internet, with support available.

Job Club

Job Club is a session for anyone who is interested in getting back to work, voluntary work, or further training. There is a programme of interactive and fun group sessions, on themes such as CV writing, letter writing, interview skills, and vocational profiling. Members also receive 1:1 help and guidance, or just come and use the facilities for job search activities. Computers, the internet, jobs papers, relevant books, telephone, and free post are made available for your use.

Learning Power

Learning Power is a City and Guilds Course suitable for those wishing to develop a range of skills. Members develop a portfolio of evidence, keep a log of progress and attend regular reviews. Members must work on 5 units, including 'Me and My Learning' to complete the qualification. You can study at Entry Level 3 or Level 1.

Meditation

This is a session where members can expect to be guided into a deep relaxed state, working with the tutor to address any symptoms of stress.

New CLAIT

This is a level 1 course for learners who wish to gain a well-recognised certificate for using computers.

OCR IT

For learners who are new to using a computer and the Internet, or for learners wanting to brush up on their I.T. skills with practical use of computers. Members study word processing, spreadsheets, charts, Internet and email through practical activities.

Sculpture

The Sculpture Workshop is a chance to meet new people, work on group activities and self-motivated projects. It gives students the opportunity to learn and participate in a range of different sculpting techniques, giving them a chance to develop your own three-dimensional work.

Streetwise Live

This sessions allow people to explore their voices – to learn, sing and enjoy. It also gives members the opportunities to perform at various venues in the UK, and abroad.

Yoga (Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga)

Based on the traditional style of Ashtanga Vinyasa, this course will help you to focus on breathing and postures. Members concentrate on balance, strength and flexibility.



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