

Sharing solutions

Working with A8 nationals in
homelessness services

Entitlements, information resources
and practical examples of work
in London

homeless
LINK

Frontline agencies in partnership

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Introduction

When the European Union expanded in May 2004 certain limitations were placed on the entitlements of citizens from eight out of ten of the Accession countries, i.e. Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Nationals from these so-called Accession 8 (A8) countries can come to the UK to work, but following concerns over 'welfare tourism', the UK government decided to limit their entitlements to social support and benefits. Much larger numbers than initially estimated have come to the UK looking for employment. Between May 2004 and March 2006 392,000 people applied to be registered on the government Worker Registration Scheme. Further these official figures are likely to be an underestimate of the numbers, since not all A8 nationals are obliged to, or choose to register.

The vast majority of those coming to the UK find work and manage to support themselves. The government reports that Accession workers help fill gaps in the labour market, support the provision of public services and place limited demands on the welfare system.¹ However, a minority appear to be encountering difficulties and find themselves homeless, unemployed and without recourse to public funds.

Many of Homeless Link's member agencies, especially in London, have reported an increase in the number of homeless clients from A8 countries. The influx of these clients has placed an additional strain on resources for many agencies. Homelessness organisations also find it difficult to support clients because of language barriers, uncertainties around entitlements or because of the difficulties in accessing accommodation for them. This guide attempts to clarify the rules regarding A8 nationals and to highlight some of the ways in which agencies in London have responded to this new client group.

Background information

When the Accession countries joined the European Union in May 2004, the existing member states were given the option of implementing transitional arrangements restricting the freedom of movement of workers from these countries for up to seven years. The measures were reviewed after two years (in 2006), and will be again after an additional three years (in 2009). In exceptional circumstances old member states are allowed to continue transitional measures for a further two years (until 2011), but after this Accession country nationals should have the same access to European labour markets as other EEA nationals.

¹ Home Office, DWP, Inland Revenue and DCLG (2006) *Accession Monitoring Report May 2004 - March 2006*, Joint Report, London

Transitional measures in the UK

When the European Union expanded in 2004 the UK decided not to restrict the free movement of workers, but did introduce a Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) to monitor the impact of EU enlargement on the UK labour market and control access to social entitlements. Social security legislation was amended to restrict access to certain means-tested benefits.

Which are the A8 countries?

The Accession 8 (A8) countries are the eight eastern and central European countries that acceded to the EU in May 2004, i.e. Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Cyprus and Malta also joined the EU at this time but nationals from these countries are not covered by the exceptions to entitlements applicable to A8 nationals.

Rules across the EU

In May 2004 the UK, Ireland and Sweden were the only European countries to allow A8 nationals free access to their job markets. Other European countries applied work permit systems under the transitional arrangements. The European Union allowed transitional measures for an initial period of two years, after which member states had to inform the European Commission of whether they intended to continue or amend their regulations as regards to free movement. The initial two-year period ended in April 2006 and some countries have decided to lift their restrictions. These include Greece, Finland, Portugal, and Spain. Further, France intends to lift restrictions gradually.²



You can access a 'Factsheet on transitional measures' through the European Union 'Your Europe' website:
<http://europa.eu.int/youreurope/nav/en/citizens/guides/neweucitizens/en.html>

Worker Registration Scheme (WRS)

Workers from the A8 countries must apply to the WRS within a month of commencing employment. There are some exceptions to this rule such as self-employed people and people who were working legally in the UK prior to May 2004. The WRS was implemented in response to concerns over 'welfare tourism' and aims to control A8 workers' access to certain welfare benefits and services and encourage participation in the formal economy. It also allows the government to monitor the numbers of A8 nationals entering the UK to work.

² A press release outlining changes can be downloaded from the European Union website at europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/06/176&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

 The Home Office web pages on the Worker Registration Scheme include general information on the WRS and downloadable information leaflets in A8 languages.

www.workingintheuk.gov.uk/working_in_the_uk/en/homepage/schemes_and_programmes/worker_registration.html

The right to reside

The Government were concerned about the potential impact on the benefits system of EU enlargement and hence decided to restrict access to benefits by introducing new legislation. The most important change was the introduction of the right to reside test. This test uses nationality and economic status to differentiate between those eligible to claim benefit and those who are not. Generally the rule is that to obtain the right to reside in the UK an A8 national must remain in registered employment for a continuous 12 months. Anyone who loses or leaves their job has 30 days to find alternative employment and re-register, for the employment to be seen as continuous.

Benefit entitlements

The Social Security (Habitual Residence) Amendment Regulations 2004 changed the entitlement to means-tested benefits.³ The regulations introduced a new requirement that a claimant must be able to demonstrate a 'right to reside' in the UK, in addition to the habitual residency test. An A8 worker who comes to the UK to work after 1 May 2004 can only have a right to reside if they are working and registered under the Worker Registration Scheme or they have completed the initial 12-month period as a registered worker in continuous employment.

During the initial 12-month period of registered employment, an A8 worker is entitled to Child Benefit and in-work benefits such as tax credits. If they have a low income, they may also be entitled to housing benefit and Council Tax benefit. After 12 months of continuous employment A8 nationals have the same entitlements as other EEA nationals.

The regulations mean that from 1 May 2004 all EEA and Swiss nationals who are economically inactive will only have a right to reside in the UK if they have sufficient resources to avoid being an unreasonable burden on the State.

Non-means-tested benefits are unaffected by these changes (e.g. statutory sick pay, statutory maternity pay, maternity allowance, and Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance).

³ *Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 1232: The Social Security (Habitual Residence) Amendment Regulations 2004* www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2004/20041232.htm

A8 nationals who are already in receipt of unemployment benefit in another member state can have it paid in the UK if they obtain Form E303 from their own country and meet the UK entitlement conditions. A8 nationals who are self-employed will be entitled to Incapacity Benefit provided they have paid sufficient National Insurance (NI) contributions.⁴

 Further information is available through the following websites:

- The DCLG's basic guidance for statutory services on eligibility for housing benefit and homelessness assistance.
www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1152973
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) webpage on Extra rules for people coming from abroad:
www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent/benefits/extra_rules_abroad.asp
- HM Revenue and Customs website on National Insurance for people coming to the UK:
www.hmrc.gov.uk/nic/work/ni-uk.htm
- The ALG's Housing Benefit Training Project resource pages:
www.alg.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=17424&cat=2299

Social housing

The government has also imposed restrictions on the access to social housing. EEA nationals who do not have the right to reside in the UK are not eligible for council housing. This policy was successfully challenged in the courts under rules relating to people subject to immigration control. However, the government closed this loophole in April 2006 by strengthening the regulations covering EEA nationals' access to social housing.⁵

Health care entitlements

Any person living lawfully in the UK on a settled basis will be entitled to free primary medical services. Lawful residence in the UK rather than UK nationality, payment of UK taxes and National Insurance contributions are the main qualifying criteria for receiving free GP treatment. The same rules apply whether someone is from an EEA country or non-EEA country. On that basis, anyone is free to approach a GP practice near to where they live and request acceptance as a patient. Practices are free to decide which patients they accept on their lists of NHS patients and may use their discretion to

⁴ EURES, *The European Job Mobility Portal*, <http://europa.eu.int/eures/>

⁵ DCLG News release, *Government strengthens regulations covering EEA Nationals and access to social housing*, DCLG News Release 2006/0090, 18 April 2006, www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1002882&PressNoticeID=2145

accept overseas visitors as: either registered NHS patients or, with their consent, as patients on a private, fee-paying basis.

When registering, GPs may request some proof that the prospective patient intends to stay in the UK for a settled period. GPs have discretion as to what type of documentation is required for registration but as a guide, any form of lawful documentation that states or proves that the overseas visitor intends to stay in the UK for a settled period is fine, e.g. letter from employer, visa papers, utility bills etc.

Mental health and detox services are available upon referral by a GP if the treatment is deemed to be clinically necessary. The same rules regarding entitlement to GP services apply to the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).



For further information visit the 'Overseas visitors' section of the Department of Health website.
www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/International/OverseasVisitors/fs/en

How can services respond to the needs of A8 clients?

Given the limitation placed on A8 nationals' entitlement to public funds, it can be difficult for agencies to know what support to offer homeless A8 clients, who present at their services. The traditional routes off the streets may not be accessible to A8 nationals who are not entitled to housing benefits. There may be other barriers to working with this client group such as language difficulties, cultural differences and limitations of existing resources. Moreover, A8 nationals may present with different support needs to traditional clients.

In the spring of 2006 Homeless Link conducted a survey of day centres, night shelters and outreach teams in London to identify the extent to which they were working with A8 nationals and what their experience of working with this client group had been. This research highlighted a number of barriers to working with A8 nationals experienced by homelessness agencies, but it also brought out many good examples of how agencies can seek to overcome these barriers. The following section will look at some of these issues and highlight examples of the practice that have been developed.

Identifying needs

The influx of a new client group can be bewildering for a service. Traditional services offered may not be appropriate or geared to the needs of this new client group. Language and cultural differences can make it difficult to assess whether this is the case. Engaging with users and giving them the opportunity to highlight their needs ensures that individuals feel

listened to and gives the agency better information on which to base their service delivery.



The Salvation Army's Westminster Centre at Rochester Row is a small day centre in central London that has been seeing increasing numbers of A8 nationals in the last two years. When A8 nationals started to attend the centre the staff felt that it was difficult to make sense of the needs and wants of this new client group. Little was known of the expectations of clients in coming to the service and limited English language among many clients made it difficult to communicate. In response, the day centre manager organised a series of feedback meetings with A8 clients, which provided a forum for clients to express their concerns and needs, and for staff to ask questions about their expectations.

The day centre was set up as a meeting room with pens and papers, a head table, and drinks and biscuits. Interpreters from the Federation of Poles facilitated communication. The format gave clients a voice in a structured way. The meeting format was easily recognisable to clients who sat down, listened to the chair and took turns in asking and responding to questions. Through this process members of staff were able to identify the needs of clients; what they had been expecting when coming to the UK; and get a better understanding of the problems they were encountering. Clients emphasised issues around housing and employment and highlighted individual problems such as having their money or belongings stolen and having been conned by bogus agencies in Poland that they thought would provide for them in the UK. An issue for many was bewilderment at being in an unexpected environment and they were keen to stress their differences from traditional homeless clients.

Out of the information gathered through these meetings the centre was able to formulate a policy of what to tell people and how to deal with them when they accessed the centre. For example, it became an important part of the service not only to inform clients about the reality of life in the UK, and the limited support available to them, but also to offer emotional support and giving clients space to express their shock.

Another way to find out more about the cultural background of a new client group is to engage with existing cultural organisations or community groups. This does not necessarily reflect the experiences of individual clients, but is a good way of understanding the context within which a broader group may choose to come to the UK. It also helps staff understand what the differences are in for example social service, health and voluntary sector provision in clients' home countries.

➔ In west London there is an established Polish community and a Polish cultural centre, not far from the Broadway day centre. The manager of the day centre linked up with the cultural centre, and a representative came down for a question and answers session with staff. This gave staff an opportunity to get a better understanding of the political and cultural backgrounds of their Polish clients, and ask questions about issues of concern or uncertainties. One thing that came to light was that clients may be unfamiliar with the process of looking for a job, since traditionally jobs in London are not advertised and appointed in the same way as they are elsewhere in the UK.

Cultural misunderstandings

Knowledge of a client's background reduces the risk of cultural misunderstandings. It is important not to jump to conclusions and to discuss inappropriate behaviour with clients. By using staff and/or volunteers with similar backgrounds to clients - e.g. from same countries, cultural groups or with experience of homelessness, the risk of misunderstandings is reduced. Translating house rules or having them explained to clients in their own language helps defining the parameters within which they can operate.

Language difficulties/lack of access to translators

One of the main issues that were highlighted by agencies in Homeless Link's research was the language barriers faced with some clients. Organisations did not necessarily have ready access to translators, which made communication with clients difficult. When faced with language barriers it can be difficult to gather even basic data about a client and to assess their support needs.

London agencies had responded to this difficulty in a number of ways. Some agencies had been able to use local authority translation services.

➔ The CRI Camden outreach team have been using Camden Council's interpretation service. An interpreter, who speaks Russian and Polish, comes out with the outreach team and helps with assessments. The team has to pay for the provision out of their budget, but the service is useful, as the interpreter is used to working with vulnerable clients (does interpretation for social services etc.).

Others have linked in with local community groups that have helped to find volunteer translators, who come into services to help out with communication. Many agencies have included language skills as a desirable feature in new job descriptions, while others have specifically employed workers with A8 language skills to support the work with this new client group.

Workers and volunteers with language skills are able to translate important documents, signs and other information, so that these can be given to clients, even when the worker or volunteer is not available. This also limits clients' ability to feign ignorance about house rules and regulations.

➔ At Broadway day centre they have introduced signs in multiple languages and their staff have learnt simple words like 'please', 'thank you' and 'good morning' to create a more welcoming atmosphere.

Even if you are unable to translate information yourself there may be information already available, which you can access and distribute among your clients. The Home Office web pages on the Worker Registration Scheme, for example, have booklets on the 'Rights and Responsibilities of Nationals from the New Member States from 1 May 2004' available in all A8 languages. These can be downloaded and printed for A8 clients. The booklets include information on entitlements, registration and workers' rights.

➔ Margo is seconded from Jobcentre Plus to Westminster Council to do outreach work with A8 nationals in day centres. Poles are her largest client group, so to facilitate communication she has had her appointment card translated into Polish and she advertises the services in both English and Polish. She uses volunteer translators where these are available. However, Margo has also taken to learning Polish herself, so that she can ask for clients' date of birth, profession, where they are from, what work they want to do, what education they have and for other background information in basic Polish.

📞 Some services have used Language line (www.languageline.co.uk), which is a telephone based interpreting service. They offer special rates for voluntary organisations.

It is also possible to use clients who speak better English as translators. This works well when general information is provided. However, if you are working with vulnerable clients, and trying to assess their support needs, it may not be appropriate to use peer translators, as clients may be unwilling to admit certain information in front of their peers. This is also an issue when translators from community groups are used. Professional, independent translators are often more suitable, if there are resources to use these. Even if your service is not able to provide this, related services may be able to do this. In one west London day centre, where a local GP runs a regular surgery, the PCT pays for a translator for the GP's sessions.

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes are very useful for A8 clients with limited English. However, given that clients may be actively looking for work and without resources to stay around and commit to a longer course, a focus on basic English for work is useful. If possible it is also good to be able to offer classes out of working hours for those clients who are working, but not yet earning enough to get off the streets.

➔ The Passage has offered courses in basic communication skills, with in-house trainers. The courses are free and run by one of the Sisters of Charity, linked to the centre. The Sisters of Charity is an international order and many of the sisters have spent time in Poland. This means that they have knowledge of the culture and often speak some of the language. Therefore, clients often seem to find it easier to talk to them.

Dealing with lack of referral routes

One of the biggest difficulties faced by agencies working with A8 nationals is the lack of referral routes available to them. Most A8 nationals, that come to homelessness services in London, have not completed the statutory requirements to become entitled to benefits, and generally have no recourse to public funds. This means that the traditional pathways off the streets, e.g. local hostel provision, may not be available to them. Agencies may therefore have to rethink the services that they offer, and perhaps develop new ways of working.

➔ The focus of the Cardinal Hume Centre Drop-in had traditionally been getting young people off the streets and into accommodation. With an increase in A8 nationals the organisation had to rework its agenda. The project recognised that street homeless young A8 nationals were still its clients, even if staff were unable to refer them to accommodation services. Instead, work with A8 nationals puts an emphasis on supporting clients through other services available at the centre, e.g. referring them to the job-broking service, the careers advisor, in-house ESOL/ICT courses and the centre's GP surgery.

Clients who do not have the resources to pay for their own accommodation and who are not entitled to housing benefit will require innovative solutions. Some agencies have focussed on finding people work with linked accommodation. There can be some difficulties with this type of accommodation. If a client has difficulties with their employer they may be more vulnerable to exploitation and less able to report complaints since losing their job would also leave them homeless. However, tied employment and accommodation can still be a positive first step to get people off the streets. Some services have linked in with existing night shelters where they can refer clients. Organisations that are not funded through housing benefits may be able to offer some of their spaces to A8 nationals. In London,

however, the demand for these places far exceeds supply and therefore it is a solution for only a limited number of clients.

Working together with other agencies in your area is useful. Other agencies may have developed different ways of working with clients, or have knowledge about entitlements in a specific area. Praxis, which is based in Tower Hamlets organised a meeting of local agencies to discuss working with A8 nationals. The meeting provided an opportunity for agencies to share experiences and ways of working. It helped to make organisations aware of what services other agencies could or could not offer and facilitated future referrals. Similarly, in Westminster the Cardinal Hume Centre brought together agencies from across London and representatives from the police and local authority to discuss ways forward and share ideas and information. If you have had a difficult case this type of meeting can also provide an opportunity to discuss solutions and compare notes with other organisations.

It is worthwhile checking with clients if they have any contacts or friends that they may be able to stay with and to offer access to telephones, and/or travel support, for them to get in touch. Looking up cheap private accommodation, such as backpackers hostels, and having lists of these available to give to clients may also be useful.

If you are seeing a general increase in the numbers of rough sleepers from A8 countries, who you cannot support, it is important to raise this with Local Authority representatives, other providers and funders. Only when an issue of unmet demand is highlighted will statutory bodies be likely to consider a response. Also make sure that you pass your concerns on to representative bodies like Homeless Link, who can highlight these issues on a national level. Affecting change is a long and arduous process, but ensuring that increased information is available to decision-makers is crucial to alter policies.

Lack of knowledge of entitlements

A lack of understanding of entitlements can be an issue for staff and clients alike. It is worth noting that sometimes clients are denied services incorrectly. By being as clear as possible about client entitlements you can support clients to get the services they have a right to.

Broadway day centre found that local GPs were refusing to register A8 clients. They contacted the Primary Care Trust to get clarity on clients' entitlement to services and were told that this should not be happening. All GPs can take on A8 clients without a permanent address as temporary clients. The centre can contact the PCT if GPs say that they are full or refuse to accept temporary clients.

Developing links with local advice and support services can also be useful. When challenging Local Authority housing decisions, for example, clients will need to be linked into legal services.


➔ Praxis has worked with a Latvian man who worked in the UK prior to May 2004, left the country, and returned to the UK to find work after Accession. Praxis supported him to register on the WRS when he found employment. However, after six months of work he developed mental health problems, suffered from depression and started drinking heavily. He was referred to mental health services and spent three months in a local mental health unit. When discharged he had no housing or access to benefits. Praxis liaised with a lawyer who managed to argue that the local authority may be responsible for the client on the basis of his vulnerability, which led to the Local Authority temporarily housing him. Praxis also helped him access some small grants for food and necessities. When the local authority ended the temporary accommodation following a court ruling, Praxis linked the client into local homeless centres where he could go for meals and other support. As he is currently homeless, Praxis now serves as a contact point for the client. He comes into the service once a week for advice, through which his lawyer and the local authority can contact him.

There are information guides on entitlements produced by several government departments, both in English and in the languages of A8 countries. Some of these are listed above in the background information section. Some organisations also offer training for staff in benefits for European nationals.⁶ It may also be useful to liaise with local advice agencies, who may have further knowledge.

➔ Part of the role of day centres has been informing people of their rights and the standards they ought to expect in employment. Ignorance can leave clients open to exploitation, such as poor pay and lack of entitlements. The Salvation Army - Rochester Row provides advice about national minimum wage entitlements. If clients agree they report employers who pay less than the minimum wage to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

🖱️ **Information on national minimum wage can be found on the DTI's TIGER website. Anyone wishing to make a complaint can call 0845 6000 678. Lines are open Monday to Friday, between 8am and 6pm www.tiger.gov.uk/nmw/index.htm**

⁶ Homeless Link is in the process of developing a training course on A8 entitlements. Training on benefits and entitlements is also offered by the Chartered Institute of Housing and LASA.


 The rules and regulations relating to A8 nationals are complex. These documents may be useful if you are advising A8 nationals. All these resources can be accessed through Homeless Link's website: www.homeless.org.uk/inyourarea/london/policy/a8/resources

The Home Office has produced an information booklet called *Rights and responsibilities of nationals of the new member states from May 2004*, which covers coming to the UK, the Worker Registration Scheme and gives contact details for useful organisations. Available in all the A8 languages and can be downloaded from the Home Office website and its Working in the UK pages.

www.workingintheuk.gov.uk/working_in_the_uk/en/homepage/schemes_and_programmes/worker_registration.html

The European team at Jobcentre Plus (EURES) has created a short information leaflet with information on working in the UK. It includes links to useful websites to look for jobs, find cheap accommodation and to access education.

The European Job Mobility Portal is an EU website clarifying the regulations and practicalities of living and working within the European Union. Country specific information on coming to the UK is available in all European languages. The Language scroll bar can be used to change languages and you can get information about entitlements for specific nationalities through the free movement tab. <http://europa.eu.int/eures/>

 Praxis is a support service for migrants in East London, which offers advice and orientation. It has been funded by the local authority to develop a welcome pack for new arrivals that explains how to access services in the borough. The pack has been translated into several different languages and offers information on transportation, benefits, legal advice, housing, health services, employment, education, emergency services, money, cultural services and activities and leisure. Praxis is currently developing a CD-Rom version of the pack which will be available in local schools, libraries, health centres and other advice centres and services.

Employment support

Given that A8 nationals can enter the UK freely to work, but often do not have recourse to public funds unless they are working, support in finding employment has been one of the most important services offered to this client group. In some cases services have developed a specialised service, whereas others have allowed access to, or amended, existing employment

schemes. A number of initiatives have been developed across London, ranging from one off events, to regular job surgeries.



In Westminster the local authority has funded a secondment for a Jobcentre Plus worker to do outreach in several day centres in the borough. Margo Baxter holds sessions helping homeless A8 nationals into work in three day centres in central London. She holds sessions four days a week and spends one day on administration. Each client gets a 30 minute appointment. As a Jobcentre Plus employee Margo has access to the Jobcentre Plus network and all job opportunities listed through the Jobcentre. She has also developed links with employers who do not necessarily use Jobcentre Plus services, but are willing to take on clients, e.g. agencies that fill construction vacancies. Following an interview in the *Times*, she placed an ad in the newspaper aimed at employers and has had several responses from companies willing to take on clients.

She attempts to be realistic with clients. If she feels that she is not able to help a client she encourages them to contact their embassy about support to return home.

The service is holistic, although the focus is on getting clients employed. She has access to fast track processing of national insurance numbers and can get them processed within a week. If clients have difficulties with services (e.g. other Jobcentre Plus services, processing of NI numbers) she advocates on their behalf. She writes applications and CVs for clients and letters of introduction to employers explaining the position of the client and any special circumstances. If available Margo organises clothes for interviews, work boots and hard hats for construction work. She links clients into ESOL courses, especially where their English is limited, and provides support around translating their qualifications.

Margo keeps records of all activities with her clients. When they first access the service, clients sign a declaration allowing their information to be shared, so that she can enter their details in the job centre system, and keep track of the employment searches she has supported them with.

Margo encourages those who are on the streets or in squats to seek safer, permanent accommodation as soon as they are able to. She has built up relationships with night shelters, where she refers particularly vulnerable clients if spaces are available. Where possible, she would look for employment with accommodation attached e.g. catering or hospital jobs.

Building up positive relationships with employers is key. Several employers who have taken on clients go on to contact her about opportunities in the future. It is therefore important to ensure that employment opportunities are suited to clients and that they feel happy about the employment. Margo stresses the impact of abandonment of employment on her reputation and her ability to

support others into employment. She encourages clients to contact her if there are any difficulties and would liaise with the employer on the client's behalf. She also encourages clients who get employed to let her know if other opportunities arise with the employer and to recommend that they contact her. When liaising with employers she stresses clients' 'willingness to relocate' rather than their homelessness.

Clients are also actively involved in their own job search. Margo demonstrates how to look for opportunities through the internet or newspapers, recommends jobsites relevant to their interests, and encourages clients to bring back proof of their job searches to their next appointment. The focus is on working together towards a common goal rather than the client being a passive recipient of support.

She encourages clients to help each other. If someone has received a pair of work boots that enabled them to work, she encourages them to give them back once they are able to buy their own, so that they can benefit others. Alternatively, she may encourage a donation to day centre to benefit clients in the future.

Initiatives linking in with existing job services can be very useful but they may not be available in all areas, or not able to meet demands. Many services have developed their own initiatives to complement outreach work, or to offer support where such services are not available.

The process of looking for a job may be a new experience for some clients. Processes such as searching for job opportunities, filling in application forms, and doing interviews is something that certain clients are unfamiliar with. It is therefore important not to assume that people will know how to access a Jobcentre, look for a job, fill in applications or go to an interview. Even the most basic things might have to be explained. Clients may also be unfamiliar with rules and regulations in the UK, or the types of qualifications required for certain types of work. Some agencies have, for example, reported that clients find it difficult to understand why English language is a requirement for construction work, as they would have to be able to sit a health and safety exam. They often believe that language is not a requirement for manual labour. The role of service providers can therefore sometimes be to clarify how the UK employment market works to ensure that clients do not waste their time applying for jobs which they are unqualified to do.



At the Passage day centre one client from Lithuania spent over a week waiting for someone to offer him a job. Once it was explained to him that jobs are something you have to look for, rather than something that is offered, he started using the internet to look for job opportunities. However, he spent the following two weeks looking for jobs on a website offering secretarial opportunities, despite the fact that he had a background in working on oil rigs. Important support work therefore involved assessing job

requirements and guiding the client to appropriate resources. At the Passage they have an internet suite where clients can get free access to search for jobs. The centre's own site offers link to useful job sites to provide clients with a starting point for any searches. Members of staff help with job searches, CV preparation and offer basic pointers about interviews and how to relate to employers.

Some services have not only offered support with job searches and CV support but have liaised with employers directly. Employers have been invited to attend services to meet and interview clients on the spot.

When offering this support to clients it is important to be careful around the employers that you choose work with. There is a danger that unscrupulous employers, who do not fully comply with employment regulations (such as paying the minimum wage and health and safety standards), could try to prey on clients' vulnerability. Individuals who have limited language skills, lack of knowledge about the UK system, and no recourse to public funds, may be less likely to challenge unlawful working practices. If they report their employer, they would risk losing their only source of income and cannot rely on the state to support them. This could make them more at risk of exploitation and employers may try and target services working with clients in this situation to recruit employees.


Homelessness agencies are often not in a position to monitor or evaluate the working practices of employers who approach them with offers of employment for their clients. Yet it is likely that clients will expect that homeless agencies only link them to legitimate employers. Working with known employers, and encouraging clients to report any difficulties they experience back to your agency, can be important safeguards. If you are linking clients with employers directly it is also important to make clients aware of their employment rights, so that they can report irregularities.

➔ In the employment advice centre at Broadway day centre volunteer interpreters from the nearby Polish centre come in twice a week. Employment agencies and employers also come into the centre to do interviews on site. The NHS in Colchester employed 10 clients from the centre this way, and offered cheap accommodation as part of the benefits package associated with the jobs offered.


Volunteers and workers in the employment advice centre provide help with creating CVs and there is access to computers and the internet. Advisors would discuss with the client what is accessible and realistic, e.g. look at the possibility of less skilled live-in jobs, at least as a first step on the ladder.

On a practical note, services can offer help in filling in tax returns, applying for National Insurance (NI) numbers, explaining the Worker Registration Scheme and how to pay the NI stamp. Many clients are also unaware of

entitlements such as sick pay and the minimum wage, and providing this type of information will limit the scope for exploitative employers.

 The TUC has developed a guide called 'Working in the UK: Your rights at work', which is available in all A8 languages. Further, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the TUC have published a safety leaflet, 'Your health, your safety: A guide for workers', which is available in Czech, Slovak and Polish. Both leaflets can be downloaded from the TUC website:
www.tuc.org.uk/international/index.cfm?mins=288

Although employment support tends to be a key need for A8 nationals any events and services developed can benefit other clients as well.

 The Salvation Army's Rochester Row day centre held a job fair with a range of employers, organised in partnership with the outreach Jobcentre Plus worker who attends the centre. Although the fair was focussed on helping A8 nationals, many other homeless people attended, including people on benefits wishing to move into employment. This kind of event can therefore be used to cater to a wider client group.

In total 180 individuals attended the fair. A form was prepared in advance, and completed for all attendees, collecting data on employment needs, background information and current situation (e.g. whether the person was a rough sleeper). This not only helped direct clients to appropriate support on the day, but also provided the centre with a good profile of the needs of clients to inform future work. For example, the type of employment people were looking for could be used to ensure that prospective employers the centre and outreach worker link up with in the future have the opportunities clients want. Jobcentre Plus workers attended on the day, which meant that all attendees could be linked into a Jobcentre, and find out more about how to use centres to find work.


The organisers of the job fair are considering a second event building on the experience of the first. They are hoping to hold this in a larger venue that can more easily accommodate the large numbers attending the fair. This way they will be able to invite a wider range of employers and other agencies working with the client group. Venues with breakout rooms can be useful to allow for presentations and one to one work/interviews.

The invite to the fair was disseminated widely using contact lists and e-mail groups of local and regional agencies, e.g. Homeless Link's mailing lists. Many agencies brought along groups of clients looking for work. Whilst this was welcomed, it is worth considering the capacity of a venue when an event is free and open to all. You can ask agencies who are thinking about bringing clients to let you know, to give you an idea of the numbers to expect.


Organising a job fair on this scale involves a lot of work and co-ordination. It is important to ensure that you have enough members of staff on the day to direct people and ensure their details are recorded. Given the demands on staff time this type of event may be difficult to repeat on a regular basis and may be more suitable to hold as a one-off, annual or bi-annual event. If you work in partnership with other organisations in your area you may be able to hold it more regularly, but it is important to have a person responsible for co-ordinating work if many agencies are involved.

Services can also offer important support beyond job searching. Support for travel to job interviews is important to many clients. Many would not be able to travel without assistance. To manage resources it is useful to have specific requirements to give assistance (e.g. letter from employer or Jobcentre Plus confirming time and place of interview), and to set up procedures to give out travel tickets rather than cash.

Some clients may be skilled or semi-skilled workers, but their qualifications from back home are difficult to understand for British employers. This leads many to take jobs they may be overqualified for and to not fully use their skills.


 The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC) can 'translate' overseas qualifications by establishing the UK equivalents to clients' qualifications. NARIC is a branch of the DfES and the only official provider on the comparability of international qualifications. Full information about the services they offer is available on their website: www.naric.org.uk

Many individuals who find work on building sites will be required to provide their own steel capped boots and hard hats, or have the cost of these deducted from their salaries. This could be a significant burden for someone who has limited resources. One agency in central London linked up with a local building firm, which donated hard hats to the service. The workers in the projects also encouraged donations of hard hats and boots from former clients.


 A young man had found work in the catering industry through the outreach job service in the Salvation Army - Rochester Row. He had a pair of work boots which he no longer needed, given the nature of his new employment, and passed the boots on to the day centre to give to someone else who needed them.

If clients are sleeping rough or staying in squats, offering them somewhere safe to store luggage and valuables whilst they look for work, and/or before they have accrued enough money to get their own place, can be very useful.

Access to phones is a useful support offered by some day centres to allow clients to keep in touch with family or potential employers. Mobile phones are also useful for clients. These can sometimes be bought cheaply from charity shops.

 VoiceMail4All is a free service provided by St Mungo's on behalf of Tech4all. They offer a free 0208 voicemail number to anyone who does not have a permanent place to stay and who does not have their own telephone number. You can use the voicemail number to help you find a job, hear from family and friends, keep in touch with support workers, or look for more permanent housing.
www.voicemail4all.org.uk

One issue that many homelessness services highlight is the difficulty for some A8 nationals to register for a bank account. This can hamper access to employment where a bank account is required to pay salaries. For others it means unnecessary outlays on cashing cheques and contributes to financial difficulties.

 At the Passage day centre they have set up a scheme in association with Barclay's Bank to offer clients a basic bank account. The Chief Executive of Barclay's volunteered at the centre and had breakfast with the clients who stressed difficulties of not having a bank account (e.g. being paid cash in hand or by cheque where you are charged for cashing it, being unable to get proper employment). The CEO went back to the local branch and asked staff to look into the issue. They concluded that they would be able to offer support to get basic cash cards. Other banks do have these basic cash cards as well, but basic accounts are not well promoted at branch level. There is a limit with what you can do with this type of account. You can put a direct debit on them (although the day centre encourages clients not to) but you cannot borrow large sums.

Barclay's have insisted that the centre has known clients for one month. Key workers refer clients to the service and the service is open to all. The day centre has a worker dedicated to offering financial support and supporting the banking scheme. The worker is a former Barclay's employee, and thus has knowledge of internal structure of the bank and its processes. To apply a basic form is filled out with the client and the centre offers a guarantee. The guarantee is in essence an 'introduction certificate' that states that the agency believes the applicant is who they say they are.

For many clients it is not the bank account they need, but money advice to deal with issues such as debt. The worker is limited in the advice he can offer, as you need a certain level of insurance to provide certain financial advice. He cannot sell products, but could help someone through the process of registering as bankrupt. He will also write letters on someone's behalf to creditors to explain a

client's situation, i.e. this person is living on £56 a week and hence will have difficulties repaying certain debts. He can also recover funds from dormant accounts and deal with tax rebates.

Following the accession in May 2004 the centre saw increased numbers of A8 nationals. Barclay's responded well do this client group and will for example look an up address in the client's home country if the client does not have one in the UK.

Training opportunities

English language training is offered by many London homelessness services. In some cases A8 nationals access existing training, which had been developed for other client groups; in others specialist courses have been developed for work. ESOL for work is generally the most popular, and sessions are often run by volunteers. Given that many clients are looking for work, or may already be in employment, it is useful to offer English language Other services have looked into developing health and safety training for construction and cleaning work.

At the Passage day centre they offer training towards CIS qualifications, which are used in the construction sector. The service was originally developed at the behest of the hostel. The day centre bought the CIS health and safety software, which helps you prepare for some of the CIS exams, from the Office of National Statistics. The CIS qualification also has a maths component for electricians, which the centre is trying to develop training for. This was originally considered to be easily developed, as basic numeracy classes were already being delivered at the centre. However, the maths is more complex and involves trigonometry. The centre is therefore working with a local college to get a more advanced tutor. This will help all clients who are interested in moving into construction work, not just A8 nationals.

Even if you, as a provider, are not in a position to offer training yourself; it is worthwhile finding out what is available in your local area, so that you can signpost clients to training opportunities. Local colleges and community centres may offer cheap or free English language classes and other qualifications. In some agencies local colleges do outreach work and offer courses directly in homelessness services. Often these courses help mainstream clients, by encouraging them to take up follow-on courses in the colleges themselves.

Dealing with unrealistic expectations

Many new arrivals come into the country unprepared, and with unrealistic expectations of how easy it will be to find work and affordable accommodation. It is important to make timely interventions to stop them

becoming established on the homelessness circuit. Services should help them engage in meaningful occupation, rather than encourage dependence.

A lack of understanding of the UK system is a general problem. As we have seen clients may be misinformed about their entitlements and how the job market works. They may also be expecting life in the UK to be quite different. Worker hostels are no longer a prominent feature in the UK but in many Eastern European countries these still exist and clients may be expecting cheap accommodation to be available.

Be as clear as possible about entitlements and opportunities for A8 nationals, so that you can explain these to clients. Give consistent messages. If different people hear different things there could be difficulties when they compare notes. Unrealistic expectations can arise from one person accessing a night shelter telling someone else and then the 'word on the streets' is that there are these places where you can stay.

➤ At Rochester Row they had a Czech client who wanted a list of places to stay for free. He got quite verbally aggressive and demanded a list from staff. He had heard of cold weather shelters and believed the centre was withholding accommodation. Clients sometimes feel that there may be accommodation, access to which is controlled by day centres and which they only offer to those they deem deserving. It only takes a few people to spend a night in a church shelter and the news spreads that there are places that you can be directly referred to from day centres.

Give people space to be frustrated. If they thought it would be easy to find a job, cheap accommodation etc., and they find themselves destitute; this is a traumatic thing. Anger is not about you, but a response to the difficulty of the situation they are in.

➤ The Cardinal Hume Centre Drop-in has encountered frustrations from A8 clients who see 'traditional' clients being referred to hostel and night shelters. A8 nationals do not understand housing referral procedures in the UK and may feel that they are being deliberately excluded from services by homelessness agencies. It can take time and effort to explain that the agency themselves do not wish to discriminate, but that the UK benefits system restricts their entitlements.

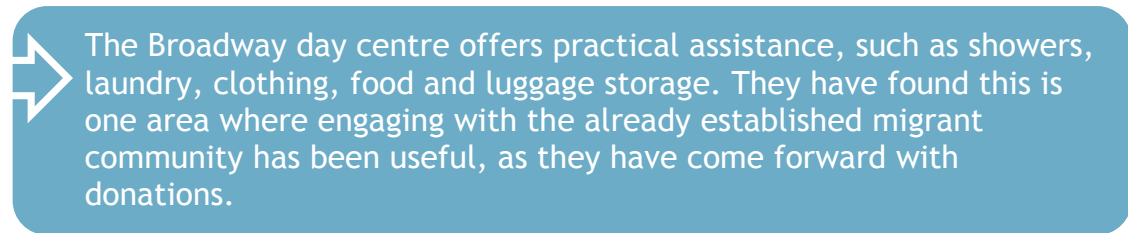
Dealing with lack of resources

Lack of resources and funding are problems for many homelessness agencies. It may be possible to apply for funding for specialist workers or initiatives through trusts or government grants. Some support schemes for migrants have been funded through the government's Invest to Save scheme and the Ethnic Minorities Innovation Fund (EMIF). It may be worthwhile to

put in joint applications with other agencies or the local authority. In Westminster, for example, a project, coordinated by the Local Authority, pays for an interpreter that works both in a local day centre and with the police. It also includes funding for a secondment for a Jobcentre Plus worker to do outreach work in several day centres in the borough, and for an immigration officer to work with rough sleepers with complex immigration statuses.

Certain services may be limited by their funding in who they can work with, e.g. limitations on working with clients without recourse to public funds. If you see an increase in a particular client group that you feel you are unable to support it is important to keep records of who is using services, of specific cases etc. Only if you inform stakeholders of changes in client groups and support needs are they likely to even consider revising the constraints they place on funding. Keeping up the dialogue with stakeholders is the only way of gaining support for working with new groups of clients.

Some services have made contact with representatives of established national communities, e.g. established Polish cultural groups, and asked for donations or help recruiting volunteers. Publicity among the community, e.g. through Polish newspapers, have led to donations in kind from local Polish businesses and individuals volunteering at centres.

 The Broadway day centre offers practical assistance, such as showers, laundry, clothing, food and luggage storage. They have found this is one area where engaging with the already established migrant community has been useful, as they have come forward with donations.


However, an over reliance on volunteers can be limiting. It can sometimes be difficult to retain volunteers. Many come into the services because they have Polish qualifications in a related field, and need experience of working in the UK. Once they have gained some experience; they move on. This places greater demands on staff and managers to offer support and inductions to new volunteers, and to dedicate time to recruiting others.

Offering specialist services, that support A8 nationals, can potentially lead to greater numbers accessing services as word spreads. To manage resources and demand, it can therefore be useful to set aside specific times and sessions for certain groups, so that services are not constantly overrun. This way service managers can ensure that they cater to a range of needs, and that other vulnerable groups are not ignored.

Health support


Anyone living on the streets has a higher risk of developing health complaints. If they are unaware of how to access health services they may be reluctant to seek help. Many homelessness centres have GPs or nurses


that do outreach. However, it is also important to try and link clients to GPs. Any person living lawfully in the UK on a settled basis will be entitled to free primary medical services. Lawful residence in the UK rather than UK nationality, payment of UK taxes and National Insurance contributions is the main qualifying criterion for receiving free GP treatment.


 The Department of Health (DH) has produced a set of leaflets that offer an *Introduction to the National Health Service*⁷ in a variety of languages including Polish, which explain the basic processes of registering, making appointments etc.

It can be accessed through the DH website www.dh.gov.uk

In terms of mental health A8 clients may sometimes be unwilling to disclose any issues. Mental health services in their home countries are often less developed than in the UK, with a focus on institutionalisation, which may be feared by clients. Language difficulties can also make assessment difficult. If you are concerned about a client, you should contact your local mental health services.

 Broadway has found that it is important to make clear to clients what the GP will not prescribe e.g. methadone and nicotine replacement therapy (which has a high street value). If it is clinically necessary detox is accessible for A8 clients, but rehab is generally not. If you encounter difficulties in accessing detox for A8 clients it may be worth pointing out the additional costs of not providing the service.

 It is also worth noting that in some areas there are Alcoholics Anonymous meetings held in A8 languages. Go to the AA meetings search engine at: service.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk and type in the relevant language to find out whether there is a provision near you.

 Médecins du Monde UK's Project:London is an advocacy project that provides information, advice and practical assistance to vulnerable people, to help them access NHS and other services. In order to reach the most hard-to-reach groups, Project:London's volunteer teams provide basic health care until clients reach mainstream services. They currently offer two afternoon sessions a week at Praxis advice service for migrants, but are looking to expand to two other centres in the area, working with homeless people and vulnerable women involved in prostitution. A doctor, nurse and two support workers provide information, advice and practical assistance on how to access mainstream health services as well as basic medical services.

Dealing with conflict with traditional client groups

Some services have experienced increased resentment from traditional client groups towards A8 nationals. Conflict can often be difficult to deal with. In some services they have introduced joint social activities such as football tournaments. Keeping communication channels open is important, as is allowing clients' space to express concerns.

➤ To deal with discrimination from other groups regular open meetings are held at Broadway Cay Centre that raise issues and concerns. Solutions are sought from clients, e.g. through feedback to EU clients, with a chance for discussion.

Diversion to home countries

Some clients may be better placed returning home than staying in the UK, especially if they are unlikely to find employment. However, it can sometimes be difficult to convince clients to return home, because they do not want to admit to family back home that they have been unsuccessful.

➤ A Lithuanian man was using a central London day centre, and staff had tried to encourage him to return home. However, the man was reluctant to return, as he felt that he would be perceived negatively because he had not managed in the UK. He had been employed, but the job was temporary and finished after three weeks. He expressed concern that his family back home would not understand why he was no longer employed, and felt ashamed to tell them. He stated that in back home you do not lose a job unless you have done something wrong.

Several agencies have offered support with return travel to home countries. It is important that any such scheme is monitored carefully, so that it is not just viewed as a cheap way of returning home for a holiday, and that it targets clients in genuine need. Outreach teams may be well placed to make such judgements if they make repeated contact with clients on the streets.

➤ The CRI Camden outreach team offers diversion back to their home country to people on the streets. They explain to clients that there are limited opportunities for support in the UK, and that they would be better placed to return home. Clients do not always want to return home and it can be difficult to express this to them; however, by being clear about their options, and the limits of the service offered, the team have managed to get between 60 and 80 per cent of the people worked with to return home. Diversion back to country of

origin is funded through the SPOT purchase funding budget, as is the interpreter.

The team does have a few funded beds in a hostel in the area, which they can use flexibly for short periods of time. The provision offers a place to stay temporarily for one to two people, or potentially three people if the clients know each other. This accommodation would be offered for three to four days while clients wait to return home and tickets and documents are sorted out etc.

Individual experiences

Like most clients, A8 nationals often have a range of support needs, and it is important that services try to respond to as wide a range of needs as possible. The following case study illustrates how an agency might support a client from destitution to independence.

➔ JJ is a 44-year old Polish man. He arrived in London in May 2004, and was among the first newcomers to have arrived in the UK from the new Accession 8 countries. He is married with three children, and his family, which he supports financially, is still in Poland. When JJ first arrived into the UK he was virtually destitute. He did not have enough money to secure a room for long, no job and very limited English. Thus, despite being quite a highly skilled worker, JJ had trouble finding a job and ended up on the streets.

Rochester Row offered him information with regard to his status in the UK, i.e. advice about eligibility for public funds, the Worker Registration Scheme, National Insurance numbers etc. They were able to offer practical support with clothing, food and shower facilities. He also stayed in the centre's emergency cold weather shelter when the nights became extremely cold and the centre provided him with blankets and a sleeping bag when needed.

Before long JJ started to attend ESOL classes at the centre, and his English language skills improved considerably. He also attended drop-ins, film nights and had private chats with the Chaplin. Margo Baxter, the Jobcentre Plus outreach worker, who offers her services at the centre, helped JJ to create a good quality CV and apply for a job in the construction industry, which eventually resulted in JJ landing a permanent job. The centre was at this point able to provide him with a pair of steel capped boots, a hardhat and a reflective vest, which are compulsory on construction sites.

Along with this Rochester Row was able to provide JJ with emotional support and respite from the streets. The centre also allowed him to make phone calls home and provided paper and stamps for letters to maintain his family relationships.

Eventually JJ was able to afford private housing and is now off the streets. JJ no longer needs the centre's services, but he still drops by

regularly to have a chat with the staff. He has also helped the centre by making small donations of books of stamps to 'pay back' for the support he was given.

It is important that workers are as flexible as possible and support clients in as wide a way as possible. Even workers who specialise in particular type of advice, e.g. employment, may have to provide additional support, as the case study of A illustrates.



A is a 43 year old woman from the Czech Republic. She has been in the UK for seven months, and has been working sporadically. When she first got in touch with the employment service, she had been working for an employer who only paid her £2 an hour. She is currently living in a squat and together with her friend, who is also Czech. They have been sharing a room with two other women. Twenty-five to 30 people live in the squat and it is very cold.

A recently had an accident when running across a road, and had to spend nine days in hospital and had to have surgery on her leg. She is now walking with crutches. She speaks limited English and is looking for basic manual work although back in the Czech republic she worked in a job centre helping others to find work. Her injury, which her doctors say will take two months to heal, makes it harder for her to do manual labour. When she had the accident her purse was stolen and she lost her passport. One of the day centres she accessed did have a facility to safely store her passport, but she was carrying it with her because she was actively looking for work, and employers would ask her to prove her nationality.

A and her friend had found out about a cleaning job which they brought to Margo, the Jobcentre plus outreach worker, to have a look at. Margo concluded that the employment was unsuitable, as the employer was asking for qualifications that the women did not possess. Instead, Margo got A and her friend an interview with a laundry service, where she would hopefully be able to work without moving too much on her bad leg. She also arranged beds for a few nights in a shelter, so that they would be able to move out of the squat.

Both women had applied for a NI number, but although A's friend had been accepted A had been denied. A was unsure why this was the case. Margo looked her up on the Jobcentre Plus intranet, which told her that A's appointment had been cancelled. She got in touch with the service who had processed the application on A's behalf to have the NI organised. She also encouraged A to go to the police to report her stolen passport so that, with the crime reference number, she would be able to apply for a new passport at her embassy. In the meantime she let the potential employer know what had happened, and that she had a copy of the passport in her records, which she would be able to provide.



P a young man in his twenties, first came to the Broadway's Day Centre in the spring of 2005. In Poland, his situation had been characterized by high unemployment, low pay, and lack of training opportunities. He traveled to Britain, like many new arrivals, with little money, no job or a place to stay. P was initially staying in a squat, and soon found himself sleeping in a disused garage. Through the networks of Polish people on the streets in a similar situation, he came to the Broadway's day centre at Market Lane, West London.

His appearance increasingly resembled that of a long-term rough sleeper; his clothes were in a poor condition; he was becoming increasingly low in spirit; and there were concerns that his health was starting to deteriorate. When we asked about the possibility of returning home on the free coach, he responded 'there is nothing there for me and sleeping rough in London is better than being back in Poland'.

Through a specialist website that recruits Polish workers, Broadway's Vocational Guidance Team contacted a Construction Company in Oxford who were looking for workers for renovation work. P had some building and labouring experience, and unlike many of Broadway's Polish clients, he was also fluent in English, which acted greatly in his favour. They arranged for the employer to come to Market Lane to meet P and another client. One of the most important things for Broadway's VG team to establish with the employer is if they provide accommodation. In this case, it was agreed that initially the workers could stay in the houses they are working in, and the employer would arrange fairly quickly with a local landlord to offer permanent bed-sit accommodation.

The employer was happy with both workers and Broadway's VG team helped arrange the travel arrangements, purchase of tickets, and necessary ID for the clients to take. The centre also ensured that both clients understood how to receive their national insurance numbers from the local jobcentre, when they started work. Since the clients left, follow up phone calls to the employer indicated that he was happy with both builders, and that they were settling in well in Oxford. The employer put a weeks' supply of food in the house when the clients arrived to start work, and gave them both a sub to support the start of their employment. With the VG team to act as negotiator with the agency and employer on the clients' behalf, Broadway was able to support them to find work and move on to a more independent life.

Homeless Link is the national membership organisation for frontline homelessness agencies in England. Our mission is to be a catalyst that will help to bring an end to homelessness.

Our two goals are to:

- raise standards in the services that support homeless people and tackle homelessness
- influence the development of policy, strategy and investment at all levels of government.

Homeless Link's member organisations provide services through: hostels, day centres, outreach and resettlement agencies, housing advice centres, youth projects, health projects, welfare rights groups, regional and sub-regional homelessness networks, refuges, drug and alcohol services and church groups.



Frontline agencies in partnership

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