

Introduction

Smart Move, LinkLiving Falkirk's peer education project, turned two in September 2007. Like any two year-old, the project has grown and developed at a fantastic rate and we have experienced both joys and challenges during its life so far.

The project was set up in response to repeatedly hearing young people say, **"I wish I'd known then what I know now"** and support workers complain that too many young people were getting tenancies easily but then struggling with rent arrears, having difficulties with neighbours and facing risks, because they didn't have a clue what they were taking on.

To help young people avoid these problems, we wanted the right kind of information and advice to reach them while they were weighing up their future options or about to move into their first tenancy. What better way to get the messages across than directly from those who had been there, done it and could talk from their own experiences? We decided to recruit, train and support young people who had been through the process of setting up and sustaining their tenancy, and who could speak to their peers in a credible way and be listened to.

Seeing the potential for engaging young people who would not normally become involved in volunteering, the Voluntary Action Fund provided us with a Volunteering Scotland Grant. We have also received great support in setting up and delivering the project from Falkirk Council and our parent company Link Group.

Since the first volunteers met in 2005, shy of each other and unsure of what they would be doing, to the moment this year when the team proudly took part in the Riding procession for the opening of the Scottish Parliament, the project has been on an incredible journey. Nearly 450 young people in the Falkirk area have taken part in Smart Move's workshops and the confidence and self esteem of our 11 volunteers has increased immeasurably.

Like any other two year-old, Smart Move is now testing the boundaries and wants to assert itself. The volunteers are coming up with more and more ideas geared towards making further improvements to the housing information advice that is available to young people.

I am very proud of what the project has achieved so far and look forward to its continuing growth.

Irene Blackburn
Smart Move Project Co-ordinator
LinkLiving Falkirk Service



The story so far

Smart Move's first six months were spent recruiting and training volunteers and developing the housing information and advice workshops. Since then, the team has delivered the workshops to over 440 young people in the Falkirk area.

'It's not all party, party, party!'

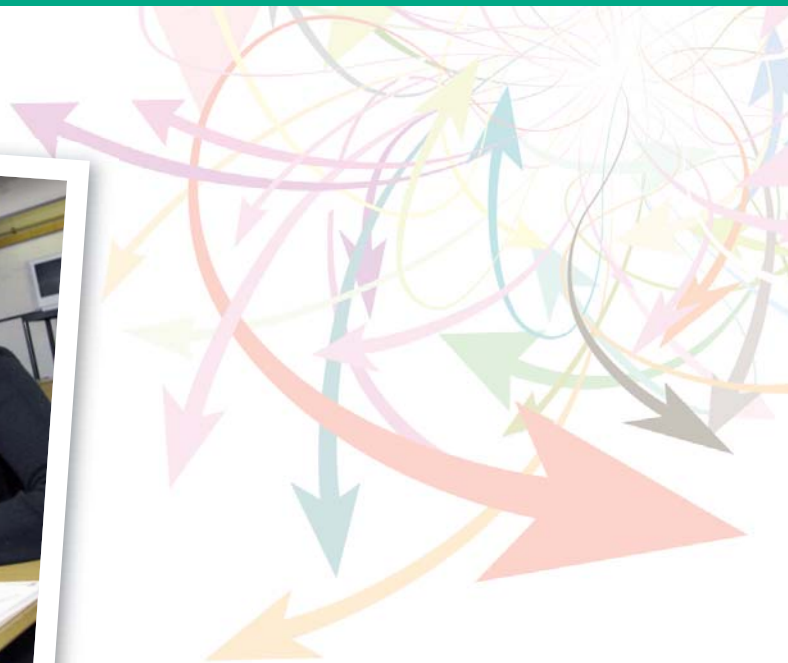
The sessions have been aimed at raising awareness of the responsibilities, pitfalls and pleasures of having a tenancy so that the young people attending are better informed and can make sensible choices about their future housing options.

Sessions have been delivered in five of the Falkirk area's eight local secondary schools, reaching around 340 pupils, aged 15 and 16.

Many young people who need to make decisions about their housing options have already left the education system, so Smart Move also reaches beyond schools. So far, the peer educators have held workshops with:

- Four groups of Prince's Trust volunteers
- A group of teenage girls using a local Barnardo's service
- A group of young people using the Careers Service
- A group of young men preparing for release from Polmont Young Offenders Institution





House About Me

Early on in the project, the peer educators took part in the launch of Falkirk's Council's House About Me housing education pack for schools. The volunteers gave presentations about the pack to teachers at the launch event, a bit of daunting prospect given some of the teachers had been the volunteers' teachers when they were at school! But the teachers were impressed and many arranged Smart Move sessions for their classes following the launch.



'I wish I'd known then what I know now...'

A DVD called "I wish I'd known then what I know now" has also been produced, featuring the peer educators telling their own stories. The film is being shown during the Smart Move sessions to help inform young people about homelessness and the pitfalls of having your own tenancy. A copy is enclosed with this booklet.

"I am glad that I have had the opportunity to give help and support back to the community."

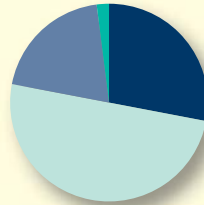
The impact of the Smart Move sessions

At the end of every Smart Move session, participants and staff are asked to fill out an evaluation form. The feedback received shows that most young people enjoy the sessions, engage with the peer educators and learn new information that could help them make the right choices about their future housing options. Staff members have also responded positively to Smart Move.

Feedback from young people who took part

Did you find the sessions useful?

- 28% – very useful
- 20% – fairly useful
- 50% – useful
- 2% – not useful



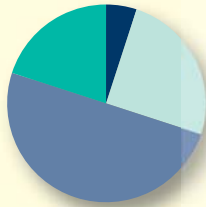
New information young people said they learned included:

- 'How to find out about benefits'
- 'How hard it might be to live alone'
- 'A better understanding of living expenses'
- 'How much money is actually needed for your home'
- 'That you are able to claim benefits to help you with your housing'



Would you now know where to go and get help if necessary?

- 20% – very confident
- 25% – fairly confident
- 50% – confident
- 5% – not confident

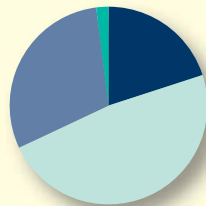


Some of the young people said:

- 'I now know where to go for advice'
- 'I would know where to go if I needed somewhere to stay'
- 'I now know where the Job Centre is.'

Was it helpful that the session was delivered by young peer educator instead of a support worker?

- 30% – very helpful
- 20% – fairly helpful
- 48% – helpful
- 2% – wasn't helpful



Some young people said they now know:

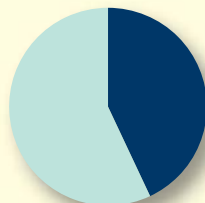
- 'About the advantages and disadvantages of leaving home'
- 'That council houses don't come fully furnished'
- 'How hard it is to keep to a low budget when furnishing a house with necessities'
- 'How expensive things are to buy for your house'



Feedback from teachers and staff

How useful was the session?

- 57% – very useful
- 43% – useful



Some staff said:

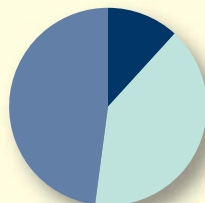
'The sessions were too short'

'I felt that more than one session would have been better'



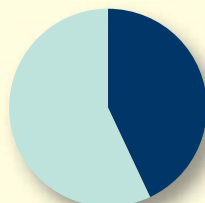
How engaged were the young people with the topic?

- 57% – very engaged
- 14% – fairly engaged
- 48% – engaged



How helpful was it that the session was delivered by peer educators?

- 57% – very helpful
- 43% – helpful



Comments received included:

'The sessions were well planned, and it was a good opportunity for pupil involvement'

'The students really related to the peer educators, they were very good – telling it like it is. The students appreciated this and the experiences of the peer educators resonated with our students.'

Caroline's story

I've had my own tenancy for six years, and to be honest I wish I was back at my parents'. But when you're young all you can think about is having parties and doing what you want when you want, and that's when the debts start, and I know through experience.

I first became homeless at the age of 16 because my mum and then my gran both kicked me out because they were fed up with my behaviour, my attitude and the constant running away from home. I got in contact with my social worker and she found me a bed-sit, and that's when it all started. I got in with the wrong crowd and started drinking and taking drugs. A month later I abandoned my tenancy and went through to Glasgow with my then boyfriend. Six months later we decided we weren't working out and I came back to Falkirk. Back to square one for me – no money, no job, no house. I decided to swallow my pride and go see my mum, she let me stay with her on one condition: I followed her rules. A few months later I got the tenancy I'm in now.

I got a support worker from Linkliving and got back on my feet with a lot of help, and that's why I decided to join Smart Move. It's been a great experience for me, it's really taught me a lot and I have gained some awards like the MV Award – which you get for volunteering your time – and Youth Achievement award, where you have to keep a portfolio of evidence of all the challenges you set yourself. This will hopefully help me get a job or go back to college.

When I started working for Smart Move I wasn't sure what stuff we would be doing. Since then I have been involved in all sorts of stuff like staff training, conference work, delivering workshops at schools and other youth groups like the Prince's Trust and the Young Offenders in Polmont. I have taken part in lots of other training sessions like first aid, equality and diversity, presentations, supervisions and drug awareness to mention a few.

Doing this job has been fantastic, the best thing ever (apart from having my son). I am currently starting full-time at LinkLiving through Project Scotland which I am really looking forward to. I've got everything sorted now with all my debt and stuff. And I have this job and my son to keep me busy. If we had Smart Move when I decided to get my flat and knew then what I know now, I would definitely be back at my parents'.... and I hope that the young people that I speak to will listen to my advice.



The Smart Move volunteers

Supported by a Volunteering Scotland grant from the Voluntary Action Fund, Smart Move has sought to engage as volunteers young people who have experienced homelessness – a group that may not normally have access to or engage in volunteering.

As well as working to tackle youth homelessness, the project has been geared towards providing development opportunities for the volunteers themselves, helping them to:

- Learn new skills
- Increase their confidence and self esteem
- Increase their employability, ability to do other voluntary work and/or ability to access further education and training
- Have fun and meet new people

The 11 volunteers recruited to date have had the opportunity to complete six sessions of induction training covering a range of topics such as volunteering; peer education; equal opportunities; communication skills; and building relationships.

Seven of these volunteers carried on to deliver peer education sessions, with ongoing opportunities for training in areas including developing peer education sessions; presentation skills; self esteem; and equality and diversity.

The volunteers have regular one-to-one support and supervision meetings with the project co-ordinator, while a weekly group meeting and occasional team building events provide peer support, planning opportunities and some fun.

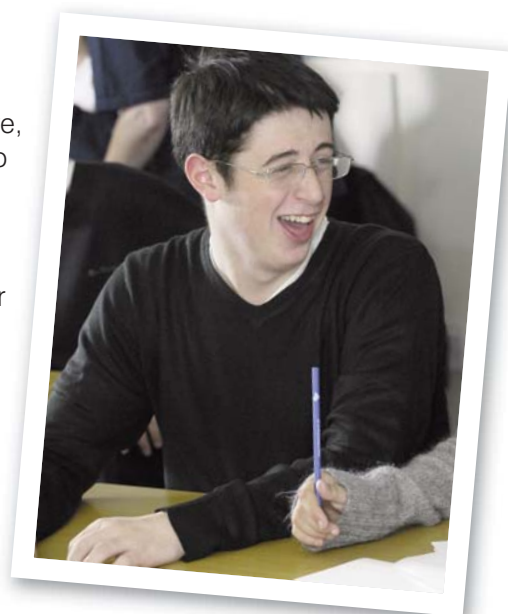
“Confidence helps me talk to others and participate in events. Helps get me out of the house as well.”

"it has improved my SELF ESTEEM and SELF WORTH. it also gets me out of the 'flat' and think about my future."

Tangible achievements for the volunteers include:

- Six volunteers receiving Millennium Volunteer Awards for giving from 50 to 200 hours of their time to the project
- Two volunteers achieving Silver Youth Achievement awards
- One volunteer being named as Falkirk's runner up Young Volunteer of the Year
- Speaking at a number of conferences, including Link Group's staff conference and AGM
- Taking part in a number of media interviews
- Being invited to take part in the Riding procession at the June 2007 opening of the Scottish Parliament

Feedback from the volunteers has also been important. In a recent survey asking the volunteers about their experience of Smart Move, they said they were satisfied with their access to and the quality of training, support, award schemes and social activities. Importantly, the volunteers reported that their involvement in Smart Move has greatly helped to increase their confidence, self esteem and motivation. The volunteers also believe that their ability to access further education or paid employment has increased as a result of their participation in the project.



Kirsty's story

After leaving school half way through my 6th year with no qualifications, I got a night shift job at the local petrol station, became involved with a bad crowd, moved into a private flat and bought everything I wanted for it on tick.



Before I knew what had happened I had occurred a huge debt and due to my behaviour and spiralling addiction to drink and drugs, my family disowned me. Then only three months down the line I lost my job and couldn't afford the private let anymore. With no one to turn to I would spend a night here there and everywhere, sleeping on friends' sofas and floors.

My nana however allowed me to stay on a Saturday night and sometimes would give me a Sunday dinner. However even at this point all I could think about was WHERE I COULD GET MY NEXT LITRE OF VODKA!!

Then my papa became very ill and my grandparents agreed to take me in, but only after I agreed to stop the drinking and drugs. I accepted their offer and started to take control of my life. I applied for a council flat and moved out on my own. I found it very hard to cope, but did manage to stay away from the bad crowd and kept them away from my flat.

It was then that I self-referred to LinkLiving and was lucky enough to be allocated a support worker from the Falkirk Service. My support worker helped me to work out a plan to pay off my debts I had run up, helped me to budget my money, phone for repairs to my house, deal with the likes of Scottish Power and helped me to fill in forms and also taught me some basic cooking tips. I can now say I can make homemade soup and things like that.

My support worker also helped me deal with the issues surrounding my family, friends and my pregnancy. We also did a mini map and I kept it on my fridge door. A mini map is a way to prioritise your aims and goals and helps you think about your ambitions however big or small.

My support worker suggested that I volunteer at LinkLiving for the peer education project. I didn't know what was involved, but went along to find out for myself. Since that day I have never looked back.

I met Irene the co-ordinator and the other peer educators and together we completed a six week induction programme. We have also done other training such as first aid, drug awareness, self esteem, anger management, how to get the best out of supervision and presentation skills.

I never thought I would be able to go into schools and stand in front of classes and give a presentation or ever make a DVD that will be played in front of an audience or the fact that I would ever facilitate a session or workshop to workers like I did at Stirling University or be interviewed for the Glasgow Herald, but I have. I have even met the Queen!!!

I own everything I am in becoming a volunteer at LinkLiving Smart Move. It has helped give me direction with my life and may also offer a way to get work in the future. Smart Move has supported me with child care for my nine-month-old son Devon.

I feel that being involved has greatly increased my confidence and raised my self-esteem. I am now looking forward to a full time volunteer placement with Project Scotland at LinkLiving and hope that I will eventually have a career working with young people, either as a support worker or a youth worker.



Looking to the future...

Having achieved such a lot in the first two years, Smart Move's peer education volunteers want to go on developing the project and some exciting ideas are already being put in motion.

Smart Move has recently been accepted as a Project Scotland Partner to offer full time volunteering placements to young people aged 16–25 and two of the current peer educators who are ready to commit to full-time working have taken up placements. They will play a big part in the project's development, providing invaluable information, based on their own experiences, about the kind of information and advice that is made available to other young people and ideas about how it should be delivered.

We were also delighted to receive the Investors in Volunteers award at the beginning of 2008.



One of the ideas the volunteers are keen to develop is a drop-in for young people, where peer educators would be on hand to give housing information and advice. They also want to develop skills programmes in the Falkirk area for young people who have been made homeless and for those who have just moved into their first tenancy. Each programme would be tailored towards providing the right kind of support and information to the needs of the young person, whatever their circumstances.

The peer educators have begun looking at new ways of getting information out to young people, which will compliment their workshops and DVD. One idea is to develop a web site giving clear information and advice in an easy to access format, to help young people think through the process of independent living.

Within the next year, Smart Move hopes to agree a rolling programme of workshops with all secondary schools in the Falkirk area, meaning housing and homelessness will be firmly on the curriculum for all 4th 5th and 6th years. The project will also build on its good work with organisations such as the Prince's Trust and Barnardo's and will continue to deliver sessions at Polmont Young Offenders Institution, delivering a rolling programme of workshops to the young men on the release programme.

Over the next year we hope to build a strong team of peer educators, helping us keep up with the demand of work. The current volunteers are looking forward to helping with recruitment and delivering the induction training.