



FEANTSA Employability Starter Kit

*How to Develop Employability Initiatives
in Homelessness Services*

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. It is the only major European network that focuses on homelessness at the European level.



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Introduction

Work and meaningful occupation are powerful but often underdeveloped tools to promote inclusion of people experiencing homelessness. This Starter Kit provides guidelines and information about enhancing employability and promoting employment of people experiencing homelessness. The main target audience is organisations that have little or no experience of providing employment-related services and initiatives to homeless people. In addition, this Starter Kit might be useful for employers who are working with people who are, or have recently been, homeless. The Starter Kit draws from expertise developed by the member organisations of FEANTSA who provide employment related services to people experiencing homelessness.

The title of the Starter Kit refers to “employability” rather than to employment because in some countries not-for-profit organisations are not permitted to provide employment services such as work placement or employment support to their users. Additionally, the legal framework allowing for supported employment doesn’t exist in all European countries. Therefore the focus of this guide remains on the “pre-employment” side of the recruitment cycle and concentrates primarily on supportive measures in skills development and enhancement, as well as on job search.

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How to use the Kit?

As the name “Starter Kit” suggests, this paper does not pretend to be an all-encompassing manual to be directly implemented by homeless services. It rather aims to raise awareness about the positive role that the employment-related activities can play for the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness. In the first place, the Starter Kit draws a link between employment and homelessness and provides

a checklist of issues that have to be considered before and during the development of the employability project. In the second part of the guide, examples of employment-related initiatives from different countries across Europe illustrate different kinds of services with this objective. References to the source and contact details are provided each time for the readers to get more detailed information.

1. Why are employment-related initiatives important in homeless services?

People experiencing homelessness are often confronted with multiple forms of exclusion in relation to housing, health, social networks and last but not least, employment. While some homeless people are in paid work, the majority tend to be either economically inactive or unemployed.¹ Many interventions of homelessness services focus on the social, health and housing situation of a person and not necessarily on employment. It can be argued that for most people there are more immediate needs to cater for before the issue of unemployment and economic activity can be tackled. FEANTSA's Employability Starter Kit will show that despite the need to respond to person's most pressing issues of a person first, there is considerable and currently underdeveloped potential for then engaging with and empowering homeless people through training, education and employment related activities from the early stage of the intervention.

Employability initiatives can have a very positive impact on a person's life and they support an individual in moving out of homelessness. The participation in employability initiatives can be particularly important and powerful for people who have been living in homelessness services for a considerable amount of time. Employment and work related activities can help a person to (re)gain self-confidence, make new contacts and become aware again of their own skills and competences. It can prevent people from falling into a vicious cycle where staying in a homeless hostel may create new support needs.

Participating in employability initiatives will also help people who have recently moved out of homelessness and continue to receive support in their home. It helps to prevent social isolation, which is one of the main reasons why people relapse into homelessness. There is evidence that service users who take part in employability initiatives are also more likely to reconnect with their family. Employment can have a positive impact on the financial situation of people experiencing homelessness. Sustainable employment provides a route for people to independent living.

1.1 Understanding employability

Some homeless people are able to find or sustain employment in the open labour market and only need support in securing adequate and affordable accommodation. However, for many people with long-term experience of homelessness, getting a job in the "open" labour market is not an (immediate) option. This is why FEANTSA's Employability Starter Kit uses the more flexible concept of employability. By employability, we mean the capacity of an individual to progress towards employment, stay in employment or change employment. This capacity is determined by a combination of factors, including external factors (e.g. the number of jobs available in the economy) as well as individual factors (e.g. skills levels and aspirations of a person).

Employability initiatives focus less on direct labour market outcomes and more on outcomes related to improvement of the quality of life of a person. They aim to improve personal skills and competences and support people in re-connecting with the labour market and working life in general. They include different forms of practical training, education and support, such as life skills training, meaningful occupation, volunteering, supported employment and work placements. European research has demonstrated the success of an "employability approach" for people experiencing homelessness as it focuses on the individual's needs and aspirations and provides multiple entry points for people to engage in work related activities².

1.2 What do homeless people say?

One of the reasons for preparing this guide is the demand from people who are homeless for support in finding and maintaining work. Research found that homeless people have a very positive attitude to work and would like to receive more support in the area of employability. FEANTSA Member Organisations that already provide employability services to homeless people carry out surveys among their users regarding their needs and expectations of employability initiatives with the following results:

1 FEANTSA European report 2007 "Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: Inclusion into and through employment for people who are homeless", [Download report](#)

2 Off the Streets and Into Work (OSW): European Research Study into Homelessness and Employment, 2007. (in 2010 the OSW merged with another British organisation – Crisis UK) [download report](#)





- In London, 77% of service users who responded to a questionnaire from an organisation Off the Streets and into Work (recently merged with the Crisis UK) wanted to work immediately, with 97% wanting to work in the future.
- In Glasgow, 213 (68%) out of 311 service users who participated in an employment survey expressed an aspiration to gain employment in the future.
- Results of a survey of participants taking part in employability schemes of UK member St Mungo's show that:
 - 4 in 5 felt they were learning new skills by being linked to the service
 - 4 in 5 felt their confidence and self-esteem has increased since linking into the service
 - 2 in 3 were convinced that their involvement would help them in finding employment
 - 1 in 2 said their housing situation had improved since coming into the service
 - 1 in 2 felt their health had improved.³
- A survey of homeless people in the Pomeranian Region in Poland shows that 42% consider finding a job as the most important tool to get out of homelessness. 56% of homeless people in the region want to take up a job immediately. 55% are interested in any type of job, 37% would only accept a supported work placement and 8% would only be interested in a job in the informal economy.
- In Hungary, a nation-wide survey among hostel users and rough sleepers carried out in 2010 showed that even though only 16% of people surveyed were at work at the time when the survey was conducted; more than 50% were actively looking for a job, 60% recently visited a job centre, and 80% expressed a wish to work in the near future. The research also showed that the percentage of those people experiencing homelessness who are willing to work and are actively looking for a job is higher in those places with a higher work intensity among the homeless population.

³ United Kingdom National Report for the FEANTSA Annual Theme 2007: Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: Inclusion into and through employment for people who are homeless, p. 22. download report

2. Getting started

STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING AND CONTEXT SETTING

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It is important to start with a thorough reflection on the aims and objectives of an employability initiative. An organisation which is planning to develop its work in the area of employability should give time to discussing questions such as:

- What would be the added value of an employability initiative?
- What do we expect to be the outcome?
- Who would be the target group for our initiative?
- How does an employability initiative fit into the overall structure of our service?
- What would be the impact of the initiative on our ways of working? Would we need to change anything?
- What are the risks?

This reflection should involve all stakeholders, including service users (for more details see below –“Involving service users throughout the process”), staff and management.

Parallel to this internal analysis, you should find out what types of employability initiatives and employment opportunities that could be interesting for people experiencing homelessness already exist in your area. There is no point in developing an employability service where one or several already operate and with which you could cooperate!

STEP 2: DECIDING ON A STRATEGY

Based on the mapping exercise described below you should conceive a strategy for your organisation to develop its work in the area of employability. This strategy could entail development of employability projects inside the already existing services - a “smaller” model which is easier to implement. Alternatively, your organisation can choose to develop specific employability services for your users, either within your organisation or outside of it thus settling for a “bigger model”. The two models are described in the section below.

SMALLER MODEL: Developing employability projects within your services

Not all organisations will be able to invest significant resources into development of fully-fledged employability interventions. However, even with a number of smaller steps in relation to employability, it is possible to bring about positive changes in the lives of homeless people.

→ Provide information about training and employment

A first step is to make sure that your service provides information about opportunities for training, supported employment and employment for your service users. This information should be based on a thorough mapping exercise of the possibilities that exist in your region for people to become active and engage in employability initiatives. It might be useful to redraft the already available information brochures in order to make sure that the language is easy to understand and accessible to your service users.

→ Dedicate a Staff Member for Employability Support

Providing support in relation to employability should be part of a job description of at least one of your staff. Make sure that this person actually has the necessary time and skills to deliver this support. If currently no staff member is in possession of the required skills, you should try to provide relevant training to people in this area.

→ Reserve space

Make sure that your service has a quiet and pleasant space with chairs and tables that encourages people to sit down and write applications, prepare job interviews or study. The necessary office material, such as pens and paper, should be provided free of charge. Maybe there is a local office supplier who is willing to donate some paper and pens to your service?

→ Provide sufficient and adequate ICT facilities (and ICT training)

Access to a computer and the Internet should be available to all service users. Where possible, you should make sure that a member of staff is available to provide ICT guidance also to those people who are less familiar with using word processing programmes, e-mail and the Internet.





→ Involve service users in the daily activities of a service

There are many possible ways of actively involving service users in the daily activities of a hostel. People might be interested in setting up or taking care of the garden, helping in the kitchen or even keeping the premises clean. This meaningful occupation helps to empower people and enable them to develop skills needed to find employment. However, it is crucial that people understand that participation in these activities is voluntary. Nobody should feel obliged to participate in these activities or feel that non-participation might lead to negative consequences!

BIGGER MODEL: Setting up your own Employability Service

If your organisation is in possession of sufficient resources, you might want to consider developing fully-fledged employability project(s), with a clearly defined strategy, goals and outcomes. This means taking a step further from mainstreaming the employability in the smaller model described above and may consist either of establishing a project within your own service or outside of it – in a form of an independent initiative. Listed below are the steps to be taken in order to make it happen. Some of the steps are additionally illustrated with an example of a relevant initiative already in place.

→ Assess the needs and aspirations of people

A holistic assessment of the needs and aspirations of a homeless person is absolutely crucial if you want your inclusion strategy to be effective. It is necessary that this assessment looks at the overall living situation of an individual and does not only cover the areas in which your service is currently working and where you can actually provide support. A needs assessment has to look at a person's history of housing, health, abuse, addiction, criminal record. The assessment should include questions regarding the aspirations of a person. The focus needs to be on where the person would like to go from here and not what you think the best solution is for the person. However, you should always respect if a person does not want to answer a question or provide more detailed information. In storing information and data make sure that you comply with data protection legislation in your country.

The PETE Programme Assessment Form, Ireland

FOCUS Ireland, a FEANTSA member based in Dublin, has been operating a **Programme for the Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE)** offering a preliminary education and training approach that enables people in emergency accommodation to gain skills and confidence necessary to take the first steps in accessing the existing pathways to mainstream training, education and employment. Skills gained during the courses are formally recognised by the national Vocational Education Committee.

In the framework of the PETE Programme, the skills, resources and expectations of each participating service user are being thoroughly evaluated and recorded by a Key Worker on the basis of a specially designed Assessment Form. The forms contain questions regarding the past educational and employment history, learning difficulties, results of previous assessments, but also personal interests and preferences regarding the training and the future occupation. The role of this assessment is to identify, next to the formal skills also the non-formal ones as well as potential barriers to undertaking a full-time job (due to addiction, mental health issues, learning difficulties etc.) in the view of finding a suitable solution and appropriate level of support for the service user⁴.

→ Develop an Individualised Action Plan and offer Ongoing Support

It is important to develop an action plan together with the service user that spells out what they plan to do and the timeframe they plan to achieve it in. The action plan should be firmly based on the assessment of needs and aspirations described above. It should describe the employability initiatives a person will take part in, as well as the types and levels of support the person will receive in other areas, such as housing, detoxification etc. In particular for people with multiple needs and long-term experience of homelessness, the participation in an employability initiative will depend on the quality of support in other areas. But also people who have found a job and are living independently might need in-work support (e.g. support in managing their budget). There is evidence that for many people this kind of support is crucial for sustaining the employment. The action plan should be regularly referred to and revised periodically in line with progress.

⁴ You can download PETE Form http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Working_Groups/Employment/2011/PETE%20assessment%20of%20needs_Example_Ireland.doc.

The Overførstergården is a homeless shelter near Copenhagen, which has developed a 3 year **Integrated Active Inclusion Project**, together with the local authority, financed by the Danish Social Ministry. Their approach consists of 4 key steps: 1) Assessing together with the homeless person the problems leading to exclusion. 2) Making holistic, individual action plans, in cooperation with the relevant partners – local authority, but also social housing companies, enterprises, health care institutions etc. 3) Implementing the plan in a coherent fashion, providing adjustments and follow up until the homeless person is well established in a sustainable job, home and a functioning, social network. 4) Mainstreaming methods in the organisation of the shelter and the local authority. The project has succeeded in helping homeless people to have easier, faster access to housing and proper health care, get their rights to benefits and services more respected and better access to jobs and training. The local authority also gives homeless people a higher priority and better support⁵.

→ Provide multiple and flexible services

Depending on current living situation and aspirations, people will require different forms of employability support, ranging from low-threshold services to support in finding a job in the open labour market. Even though it might not be possible for your service to provide all kinds of employability support immediately, you should really try to provide a variety of options and flexibly adapt schemes to your different target groups. Be conscious not to favour a specific type of employability initiative that will indirectly exclude a specific group of people from participating. The objective should be to support every individual to the highest possible level of employment. Again, the focus should be on skills, competencies and aspirations of the individual. Employability initiatives must adapt creatively to the needs of the service users and not vice versa.

Housing & Work Project

In Amsterdam four organizations cooperate in the Housing & Work project. Two shelter organizations, the Amsterdam Street Paper and an employment re-integration organisation work together to reintegrate homeless people into housing and a paid job. Only motivated homeless people with legal status and older than 18 years can qualify for this project. The first phase of the project consists of finding suitable housing, dealing with paperwork and debts and finding a trainee job. This phase usually takes four months. The four partners are, together with the homeless person, responsible for delivering housing, debt regulation, and a temporary reintegration job (for six months). The purpose of this job is to gain work experience. After six months they are posted in a work placement sponsored by the city of Amsterdam⁶.

→ Adapt working time and contracts in a flexible way

Tailoring employability services to the needs and aspirations of homeless services users is not only about the type of initiative people take part in. Where your organisation is directly employing service users, it is often necessary to adapt the working time and contracts in a flexible way. Equally, the type of contracts signed with the service users will depend on a different employability initiative. In some countries it is possible to offer full time/part time employment contracts for service users, e.g. if people are employed by a social enterprise connected to the homeless service. This form of employment is usually publicly subsidised. Remember that you will be able to offer will depend on the specific legal framework of your country.

Handwerk/ Kunst/ Entwicklung from Vienna

Handwerk/ Kunst/ Entwicklung (HKE) is a project by CARITAS Vienna for unemployed men and women from the of 19 – 35 with no or low experience on the job market and a variety of social problems who can be employed and trained up to 12 hours a week. HKE employs persons who lack skills necessary to be employed on the primary labour market and who would otherwise fall out the job market completely. Under supervision of skilled workers the participants are fabricating bags, wastebaskets and other goods. These goods are sold in the CARITAS store in Vienna⁷.

5 For more information go to http://www.overfoerstergaarden.dk/overfoerstergaarden_eng/index.htm

6 For more information go to http://www.feantsa.org/files/Employment_annual_theme/Annual_theme_documents/National%20reports/Netherlands_empl_report_2007.pdf

7 For more information see <http://www.caritaswien.at/9306.htm>





→ **Account for the possibility of failure in the course of the process and allow for a lot of time**

Many people experiencing homelessness might need several attempts in order to engage with an employability service in a sustainable way. Dropping out of an initiative should not necessarily be regarded as something negative but as potentially normal step in a longer process. This perspective allows all parties to reassess the situation and discover potential mismatches between the needs and aspirations of the service user and the employability service provided. It is important to offer an alternative opportunity for the person, even if it is for the n^{th} time. In line with your available funding, you should give people lots of time and allow them to make progress at their own pace.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS

Few organisations will be able to offer a wide variety of in-house employability initiatives for service users, particularly if these go beyond low-threshold services such as meaningful occupation and life skills training. The success of an integrated model of inclusion into the labour market will usually depend on the establishment of good cooperation links with a wide range of partners. Co-operation requires an effective linking up of specialised (homeless) services and mainstream services.

Building up these partnerships will require time. Not all might be convinced of the added value of a partnership with a homelessness organisation immediately. However, there are many examples of effective partnerships between different organisations, public employment and social services as well as private employers and trade unions.

→ **Private sector**

A number of countries do not have a developed sector of work integration social enterprises (WISE) or even other forms of subsidised employment for disadvantaged people. In these countries, homeless services either have to try and provide some forms of employability initiative in house or find external partners. Some private companies offer short term work placements to people experiencing homelessness as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility. It might be useful to contact potential employers and present them your ideas. A first step is often already to raise greater awareness of the skills and competencies that homeless people have to offer.

Business in the Community

In Ireland and the UK, “Business in the Community” is an initiative that encourages private companies to address social issues. The Ready for Work Programme works specifically with people experiencing homelessness. The programme is delivered in 23 towns and cities across the UK. It offers homeless people or those at risk of homelessness the opportunity to improve their job prospects through pre-employment training, work experience placements with leading UK employers and one-to-one job coaching with business volunteers. In November 2010, the 2000th Ready for Work graduate was supported into employment. Business in the Community recognises employment as a key route out of offending behaviour. Next to this project, the BITC also runs an ongoing Campaign on Work Inclusion which highlights the best interventions that business can make to enhance the opportunities for those with multiple barriers to work to gain and sustain employment⁸.

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→ **Public sector**

Subsidised employment opportunities often exist at municipality level. Many cities employ long-term unemployed people in park maintenance or cleaning services. Some cities have specific programmes for the reintegration of homeless people through work. The municipality is also one of the obvious funding providers for your employability initiative or might support you in establishing links with WISE or other potential private employers.

→ **Public and private employment agencies**

Professional recruitment agencies might help to create a relay between potential employers and employees. Public employment offices can be an important partner for you. They might know about specific schemes or help you to get in contact with potential employers. In some countries, there are specific employment offices for disadvantaged people that your service could work with. If this does not exist already, you could offer your experience in the area of homelessness in order to develop such a specialised service in cooperation with the employment office.

8 For more information see <http://www.bitc.org.uk/community/employability/homelessness/>

JOB IMPULSE Urban Occupation Initiative

For more than 19 years now persons receiving social benefits are employed part time (25 hours/week) by the city of Linz, Austria or associated institutions. The aim of this initiative is integration into the primary labour market. Thus a variety of individual support is offered to the clients such as personal assistance, special trainings, social work, support with housing etc. Where necessary, also therapeutic measures are put in place, as for instance assistance with drug or alcohol addiction or mental health problems. Between 1990 and 2006 altogether 1111 persons took part in this initiative. In 2006 102 persons took up employment with JOB IMPULSE. At the same time 82 contracts ran out: 22 participants were integrated successfully into the primary job market. 35 persons could change the unemployment scheme having reached the necessary requirements for unemployment insurance. The others began education, are with the military service, in maternity leave, have moved abroad or were able to retire⁹.

→ Your network

Your network of contacts is a good resource if you want to develop employability initiatives. There might be opportunities to work or do volunteering in one of your partner organisations, for example. Many service users will prefer to work or do volunteering in a different service to the one they are using themselves. Think about creating a kind of “umbrella organisation”. It doesn’t have to be big or very formal. Just contact other local organisations that deal with homelessness and meet with them.

Job Centres in Budapest

In Budapest, the Shelter Foundation and BMSZKI in co-operation with the Labour Centre established two Job Centres in two different locations of the city, which particularly promote the employment of homeless people. With this initiative they have created a pilot program which can serve as a good practice for other homeless service providers to improve their employment services. The staff members of the Job Centres are former social workers, now knowing and taking into account the barriers to employment for homeless people, they can provide more adapted services than mainstream labour market services do.

Job-search model of the Job Centres:

- Job-search – by structured processing of advertisements, job offers of Labour Centres, Internet search
- Counselling
- Link with staff network in the field of addiction, employment, housing and residential homes
- Job seeking training – individual and group support
- Job discovery- making contacts with employers
- Contact with the personal social worker¹⁰

STEP 4: FUNDING EMPLOYABILITY INITIATIVES

Adequate funding is a pre-condition for the success of an employability initiative. Many organisations will need to start with a small scale project or even divert funding from its own resources in order to start an activity. The most important funding opportunities for employability initiatives run by not-for-profit organisations are available at the national level, usually allocated by the local authorities. At the European level, the European Social Fund (see below) is one of the best known funding programmes for employability initiatives, however it might be difficult in particular for smaller and less experienced organisations to compete for funding and deal with relatively high administrative burdens. Participation in ESF requires resources to cover part of the project costs according to the co-financing principle of the structural funds. The sections below look at funding possibilities at different levels in more detail.

⁹ For more information see <http://www.linz.at/services/kapitelAll.asp?uk=Jobimpuls&kap=Gesellschaft+und+Soziales&nr=16>

¹⁰ For more information see http://www.feantsa.org/files/Employment_annual_theme/Annual_theme_documents/National%20reports/Hungary_employment_report_2007_EN.pdf





Pomeranian Forum for Ending Homelessness

11 years ago in the Polish region of Pomerania, local NGO leaders started to meet from time to time, just to talk about their work and problems. It was very helpful and managed to keep cooperation stronger. With time their meetings became more regular and the list of invited organisations grew (NGOs, but also the local municipality, local university etc). After 10 years this initiative became so big and structured, that an official “umbrella organisation” called Pomeranian Forum for Ending Homelessness was created (with over 30 members), which helps to solve problems of local partners, support cooperation between them, and help with negotiations between them and other institutions¹¹.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

For many organisations, the most accessible funding possibilities exist at national, regional or local levels. Funding available for not-for-profit organisations willing to provide employment-related services is usually managed by appropriate local authorities, it can sometimes be also administered by public employment agencies. There are also possibilities to raise funding from private sponsors, companies, foundations and churches.

In **Poland**, organisations working with homeless people have been able to fund employability initiatives for homeless people by applying for a number of grants that were not directly linked to homelessness or even employment. Their advice is to be creative and go beyond the understanding of homelessness as merely a social challenge.

- A Bicycle Service Point run by homeless people can be funded through a Local Sport Fund
- If you find an abandoned, old building you can try to set up a small hostel or restaurant run by homeless people and funded through the Local or National Heritage and Monuments Funds
- It is possible to set up a “Cleaning and Recycling Workshop” for homeless people funded through the Local Ecological and Environmental Funds
- You can try to fund all Social Economy initiatives from all possible funds for small and medium enterprises, or other funds aimed at activating the local market and economy.

EUROPEAN FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Note that not all initiatives can be resourced with the help of European funding and that the allocation of this funding happens generally through very competitive tendering procedures.

→ European Social Fund (ESF)

The European Social Fund is part of the European Structural Funds. It is the main European funding instrument aiming at promoting high levels of employment, fighting discrimination and promoting social cohesion, in particular in areas that are economically less advanced.

ESF funding is not being distributed directly at the EU level but at national or regional levels. The implementation of the ESF is carried out by ESF national or regional Managing Authorities. The EU Member States, in consultation with relevant actors define their specific priority areas and actions for seven-year funding periods. Every year, around 10 million euros are spent through the ESF in different Member States¹². Currently, the European institutions are engaged in discussions regarding the priorities of the ESF under the new funding period of 2014-2020.

There is also a number of programmes directly managed by the European Commission. Before applying for European Commission funding, you should be aware that it will be difficult to directly receive funding for the provision of employability services. However, it might be possible to secure funding for staff training and the exchange of interesting practice between different countries or the testing of an innovative approach. European projects also usually require the existence of a wide network of partners in different countries. This is why it is often better to already start developing a partnership and an idea for a project together that can then be adapted to specific calls for proposals that are being published.

→ Lifelong Learning Programme¹³

With a budget of nearly €7 billion for 2007 to 2013, the programme funds a range of actions including exchanges, study visits and networking activities. Projects are intended not only for individual students and learners, but also for teachers, trainers and all others involved in education and training. There are several sub-programmes that are potentially interesting for projects in relation to education and training of people experiencing homelessness, such as the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the Grundtvig programme.

11 For more information see <http://www.pfwb.org.pl/kim-jestesmy/lang/en>

12 To view the general leaflet go to http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/docs/esf_leaflet_en.pdf, information about ESF in the different Member States is available under http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/members/index_en.htm

13 Lifelong Learning Programme web page: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm

→ Leonardo da Vinci programme¹⁴

The Leonardo da Vinci programme is part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. It funds a range of actions, notably cross-border mobility initiatives; co-operation projects to develop and spread innovation; and thematic networks. The potential beneficiaries are similarly wide – from trainees in initial vocational training, to people already in the labour market, as well as VET professionals and private or public organisations active in this field.

→ Grundtvig Programme¹⁵

Grundtvig aims to provide adults with ways to improve their knowledge and skills, keeping them mentally fit and potentially more employable. It not only covers students in adult education, but also the teachers, trainers, education staff and facilities that provide these services. These include relevant associations, counselling organisations, information services, policy-making bodies and others involved in lifelong learning and adult education at local, regional and national levels, such as NGOs, enterprises, voluntary groups and research centres.

→ URBACT programme¹⁶

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. The partners in the project can only be cities but NGOs might be involved as local partners. A number of projects in the current funding round focus on Active Inclusion and the integration of people furthest from the labour market into employment¹⁷.

14 Leonardo da Vinci Programme web page: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc82_en.htm

15 Grundtvig Programme web page: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86_en.htm

16 URBACT web page: <http://urbact.eu/en/homepage-2/>

17 An overview about the latest available grants from the European Commission is also available http://ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/grants_en.htm





3. Examples of Employability Services

3.1 Life-skills Training

Life skills describe the knowledge, experience and skills necessary to live independently. Life skills training aims to promote self-sufficiency and help people re-establish the skills they need to live independently, to sustain a tenancy and to settle into their community. It also aims to develop the service user's communication skills, build self-esteem and confidence to live independently. The target group for life-skills training are usually people with long term experience of homelessness/rough sleeping who have developed survival strategies that are not easily adaptable to living and working in mainstream society.

St Mungo's Independent Living Training

This training programme aims to prepare service users for independent living and to provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to have control over their own lives.

The programme focuses on three main areas:

- Financial skills - dealing with bills, managing money, budgeting, managing debt
- Social skills/personal development - assertiveness, dealing with neighbours, managing change, healthy eating, looking after yourself, employment issues
- Tenancy skills - benefits, furnishing, tenancy issues, viewing

The programme also includes specific sessions dealing with interview skills, communication, rights training, health awareness etc. The programme uses teaching tools like brainstorming, case studies, small group work and quizzes to reinforce learning, which may be tailored to particular needs. The work is organised in groups of 3 - 10 people. Extra help is provided for those with English as a second language. Much of the work is about encouraging and motivating service - and bringing an element of fun¹⁸.

PACE Training for Employment Project, Dublin

PACE is an education and training project dealing with up to 24 individuals at any one time that are experiencing homelessness and have recently been released from prison. By the end of 2007 this number increased to 40 places. The project offers a wide range of education and training options focusing on coping with life after prison and preparation for progression into employment or further education or training opportunities. The project works in partnership with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that the trainees are getting the best package of programmes possible. The project has established an Open Learning Centre and offers vocational and educational guidance, counselling, mediation and placement services and personal development training. This can focus on anger management, coping with life after prison or addiction support. The project also links closely with a transitional accommodation project, with many participants residing in provided location¹⁹.

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3.2 Meaningful Occupation

Meaningful occupation helps a person to reintegrate into a wider community through finding something purposeful to do. The main aims are to (re-)build personal self-confidence and self-esteem. The activity is usually unpaid, although it might make a social or economic contribution. Possible examples of meaningful occupations within the homelessness sector are: photography, sports, art, crafts, gardening or computing. Meaningful occupation schemes can be very beneficial for all service users. In particular for people with multiple needs for whom employment as such will not be an option in the near future, meaningful occupation can be a first step to become active again and engage with other people.

Piazza Grande's Homeless World Cup

Participating in the arts or in sports activities can empower people experiencing homelessness by supporting the development of skills and self confidence. Piazza Grande organized in 2009 Homeless World Cup in football, which took place in Milan. Homeless people were also active in the organization of the event, the outcomes of which demonstrated the empowering effect that participation in such an event can have for the participants²⁰.

¹⁸ For more information see <http://www.mungos.org.uk/>

¹⁹ For more information see <http://feantsa.horus.be/code/EN/pg.asp?Page=1036>

²⁰ For more information see <http://www.piazzagrande.it/>

3.3 Voluntary Activity

Volunteering is understood here as non-remunerated voluntary activity which entails giving time, effort and talent to a specific need or cause without being paid for it. Volunteering is always based on free choice of a person and cannot be compulsory. Many homeless services involve their users in working in their facilities assisting the staff in their daily duties, however this work is not always officially recognised and offered on the basis of a voluntary work contract. The experiences from FEANTSA members show that in order for volunteering to become a part of the pathway to employment, it should be formally recognised, which offers a possibility to evaluate the persons' progress but also to provide the volunteering users with the sense of ownership and control over their work and responsibility for the quality of their work. The integration of service users into the staff team may require a significant change in the organisational structure, existing procedures and policies. These processes must support the new employees while at the same time maintaining the high quality of the service delivery.

Tyneside Cyrenians: Pathways to Employment

The UK-based organisation Tyneside Cyrenians have been trying to redress the problem of limited access to open labour market for homeless people by providing skills training and development opportunities 'on the spot' by offering volunteering positions to the service users. They offer a variety of volunteering opportunities including horticulture, catering, warehouse, delivery work, administration as well as in the core business within the hostel setting and daily outreach work. In all of those settings the users are encouraged to apply for paid work when an opportunity arises. The volunteering opportunities are accompanied by measures aimed at enhancing professional skills like literacy and numeracy skills, health and safety qualifications, catering courses, construction courses²¹.

3.4 Work placements

Short term work placements in a real working environment can be a first step into employment for people who are long-term unemployed. The possibility to train and develop new skills in the non-threatening environment can be best

opportunity for people with the experience of homelessness to regain independence. Such work placements can be of temporary or longer term nature, but their aim is to increase the employability of people and therefore they should be provided together with monitoring and support in order to follow the progress of persons towards that goal.

In the UK, Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) ran a work placement scheme which provided homeless individuals with the opportunity to experience working in a 'real' office environment, with tasks and responsibilities they could expect if they were employed as an Administrative Assistants. The scheme ran from January 2006 to August 2007 and provided six placements, each lasting three months. This work placement programme has enabled OSW to actively advocate a model which moves individuals towards employment. It has provided good practice, which was disseminated through a guide, to encourage and campaign for other homelessness organisations to develop their own in-house work placement scheme for those with multiple disadvantages²².

3.5 Vocational Training

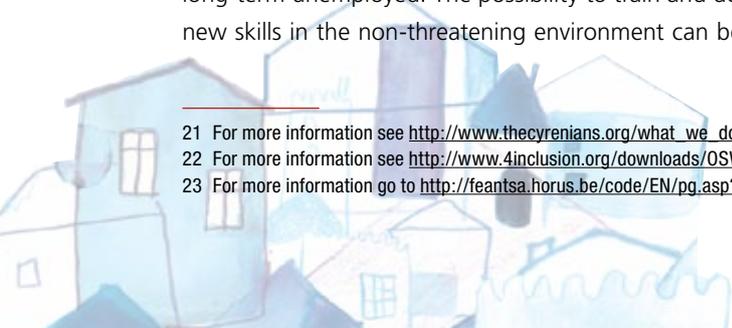
It might be possible for your service to offer training or co-operate with training institutions that will qualify your service users for a specific job function (e.g. typing, data entry) or profession (e.g. nurse, carpenter). It is important that the skills obtained during this training are formally recognised by the appropriate accreditation body.

In Ireland, a variety of training and education initiatives are provided by different homeless organisations and agencies. These include: The PETE programme run by Focus Ireland which provides accredited training programmes in IT, photography, maths, preparation to work and childcare. There are also one-to-one classes focusing on Computers, maths and English. Two initiatives of Cork Simon Community: The Parks and Gardens Work Scheme, which offers a wide range of certified training, including Amenity Horticulture and Meitheal Mara, a partnership with a community maritime boat building organisation²³.

21 For more information see http://www.thecyrenians.org/what_we_do/progression

22 For more information see http://www.4inclusion.org/downloads/OSW_Work_Placement_Guide.pdf

23 For more information go to <http://feantsa.horus.be/code/EN/pg.asp?Page=1036>





3.6 Job Search Support

Job search training aims to provide people with support in identifying appropriate employability initiatives for them and finding a job in the open labour market. Job search support might include CV writing, searching vacancies on the Internet, self-presentation skills and mock interviews.

In **Hungary**, the Shelter Foundation in Budapest and BMSZKI in cooperation with the Public Employment Agency have established two Job Centres for people experiencing homelessness. The staff members consist of specially trained social workers. The job centre offers specific job search, individual counselling and job search training for people who are homeless. In addition, the job centre tries to establish contacts with potential employers and has close links with related support services in the area of housing, employment and addiction. This initiative has helped a significant number of people into employment and could serve as a model for other homeless services²⁴.

3.7 Occupational experience within Homelessness Services

There might also be possibilities to offer employment for qualified service users within homeless services. People who have experienced homelessness might facilitate the contact with service users and encourage them not to give up and believe in their skills and competencies. On the other hand, homeless services may also offer employment opportunities in the social enterprises which aim at enhancing employability of unskilled homeless people or those who lost their skills. The job experience in those supported employment schemes aims at improving people's chances of integrating with the mainstream labour market.

The organisation Thames Reach in **the UK** has employed service users both through specifically targeted measures, such as traineeships, and by making it easier for people to compete for all jobs across the organisation. Thames Reach decided that all jobs across the organisation would be open to current or former service users and actively encouraged them to apply for these vacancies. In addition, Thames Reach set up a traineeship scheme for service users that were interested in working in the organisation but lacked some of the specialist knowledge required (e.g. writing support plans)²⁵.

In **Italy**, supported employment might be part of the employability process, and it might be organised within homeless organisations and in social cooperatives. Participants in these supported employment schemes receive a cash benefit (*borsa lavoro* = work scholarship) usually granted out of government subsidies. Work scholarships are not taxed and there are no pension or social security contributions with it. The amount of the "work scholarships" varies between 100 and 500 euros per month. The idea is to help people who are roofless and houseless to acquire the necessary skills to enter the mainstream labour market. It is, however, link to polarised effects: on one side, it's often not possible for the people to "move on" and the *borsa lavoro* risks becoming the sole income for participants; on the other side, when succeeding, it represents a stepping stone that might lead to a regular employment contract with the so called "Type B cooperatives", which aim to help people who are disadvantaged into work, including people who are roofless and houseless²⁶.

²⁴ For more information go to http://www.feantsa.org/files/Employment_annual_theme/Annual_theme_documents/National%20reports/Hungary_empl_report_2007_EN.pdf

²⁵ For more information go to <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/>

²⁶ For more information go to http://feantsa.horus.be/files/Employment_annual_theme/Annual_theme_documents/National%20reports/Italy_empl_report_2007_EN.pdf

4. Things to consider throughout the process

4.1 Involve service users

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In order to empower service users and ensure that your employability initiatives are in line with the needs and aspirations of people, it is vital to involve service user throughout the process, including the planning, implementation and evaluation phase. More resources can be found on FEANTSA website in the heading *Developing participation structures within homeless organisations*²⁷.

Planning: One way to involve service users in the planning of your initiative is to organise focus groups. During a focus group meeting, you present your ideas and ask people to comment on them and make their own proposals. Focus groups might also help you to identify specific skills and competencies amongst service users that might enable you to develop an employability initiative in a specific area, e.g. car repair. If possible, focus groups should be animated by trained peer facilitators. You should always provide feedback to service users how their proposals were taken into account and why some proposals might not have been integrated.

Implementation: One example of involving service users is peer working. Service users that have previously participated in an initiative could for instance become tutors for the newcomers. There are numerous other ways to involve service users in the implementation of an employability initiative. For more information, see the FEANTSA [Participation Toolkit](#).

Evaluation: The satisfaction of service users should constitute and integral part of your evaluation methods. Peer interviews might facilitate the collection of feedback. Experience shows that service users are more likely to raise issues of concern if they are talking with peers.

Improving Residents' Involvement in the UK

In October 2004 the UK-based organisations, Groundswell and St Mungo's began a project to increase the level of resident involvement in all aspects of the organisation. Groundswell's mission is to support homeless people in finding their own solutions, supporting a network of self-help groups around the country that are run by and involve homeless people. Groundswell's approach has ensured that residents have taken a lead in this process, beginning by auditing the current levels of involvement through a peer research project and throughout the planning and implementation process. All training and facilitation has been conducted by people with personal experience of homelessness²⁸.

Board of Homeless People in Poland

Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting Out of Homelessness (PFWB) and Saint Brother Albert's Aid Society from Poland organise Boards of Homeless People. Usually it is based on open and regular meetings, where the most active homeless people discuss among each other their participation in the project. They give advice and feedback regarding services. It is a very good tool to understand each other and to find the right way to answer the service users' needs. Empowerment should be used only for creating better solutions, for people from both sides²⁹.

4.2 Train your staff

Many homeless services will not have staff members who have been specially trained in the area of employment. When developing your initiative, you should see if there are ways to reserve funding for the recruitment of specialised staff or for the training of your existing staff. At European level there are a number of programmes that aim to facilitate skills development and the exchange of good practice in training and education between different countries (see e.g. Leonardo programme).

²⁷ Documents available at <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=816>

²⁸ For more information see http://www.feantsa.org/files/Participation/Good%20Practice%20Compendium/st_mungos_strategy_2005.pdf

²⁹ For more information (in Polish) see <http://www.pfwb.org.pl/pomorska-rada-osob-bezdomnych/>





4.3 Debt management and financial stability

Homeless people experience many barriers to employment, both of the external and personal nature; many related in particular to debt problems. In many countries, housing benefits are designed in a way in which once a person receiving them engages in paid employment, the allocations are withdrawn and the majority of the salary automatically goes towards repaying the debt. It is therefore crucial for the employability service to provide debt management training and support for a person to be involved in such an initiative. This can be organised in a form of counselling, support in budget management or help in opening a bank account.

4.4 Measure your success

A regular evaluation should be part of your employability initiative. In some countries, there will be very specific requirements for evaluations. Some funding authorities might also ask for a cost-benefit analysis. Your evaluation should look both at hard as well as soft outcomes. When working with multiply disadvantaged groups, it is difficult to measure “success” merely in terms of the number of successful participants for instance. In addition, there should be an assessment of the satisfaction of participants, and outcomes in terms of improvement of the quality of life and general well being of people. The results of the evaluation should be used to improve your service over the years.

The Outcomes Star

The Outcomes Star™ is a tool for supporting and measuring change when working with vulnerable people. It is widely used and adapted to different client groups and settings, including homelessness, mental health, employment etc. An Outcomes Star reading is taken by the worker and service user at or near the beginning of their time with the project. Using the ladders or other scale descriptions, they identify together where on their ladder of change the service user is for each outcome area. Each step on the ladder is associated with a numerical score so at the end of the process the scores can be plotted onto the service user's Star. The process is then repeated at regular intervals (every three, six or 12 months depending on the project) to track progress. The data can be used to track the progress of an individual service user, to measure the outcomes achieved by a whole project and to benchmark with a national average for similar projects and client groups³⁰.

³⁰ The Outcomes Star can be downloaded for free <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/about-the-outcomes-star/>

5. Potential barriers to developing employability services

In many countries, homeless services have traditionally focused on providing accommodation services as well as health and social support to homeless people. As homelessness is often regarded as a transitional experience, the employment of service users has been regarded as of secondary importance. Some of the barriers to innovation are so deeply ingrained in our attitudes that they may be taken for granted. To help to overcome these barriers it might be useful to draw attention to some of them:

→ Lack of funding

As a consequence, funding for homeless services is usually provided for housing or social support. In many though not in all countries, there is little direct funding available for employment related support. Many homeless services currently only provide very basic forms of employment related support, such as CV writing and job search support³¹. Closely linked to the question of funding is the one of human resources – availability of staff members specifically trained to provide support around employability.

→ Changing ways of working

Integrating employability initiatives into existing structures of service provision might also involve considerable organisational changes and new ways of partnership working. Introducing these changes requires effective leadership of management as well as time and commitment of everybody involved.

→ Blocking the progress of homeless people

Some homeless services might fear that employability initiatives prolong the stay of people in emergency or transitional homeless services instead of helping people to move on towards regaining independence, stable living conditions and improving their quality of life. However, evidence shows the empowering effect of engaging people in gaining or enhancing their skills through employability and employment projects.

→ An unfavourable economic context

A high unemployment rate among the general population and limited job opportunities, in particular for low-skilled workers, might also be a disincentive for services to develop their work in this area. Service providers might fear the risk of creating expectations amongst service users that would be impossible to meet due to the difficult economic context.

→ Making work pay

Complex and intransparent benefit structures might also be a disincentive for people experiencing homelessness to seek employment because they are afraid that this will have a negative impact on their overall income – namely falling into the “benefits trap”.

In spite of those barriers, FEANTSA's Employability Starter Kit aims to demonstrate that - even in an unfavourable political and economic context - it is useful and possible to launch an investigation of the role of employment for the inclusion of people who are homeless as well as possible ways to develop employability initiatives in homeless services.

31 FEANTSA European Report 2007: Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: Inclusion into and through employment for people who are homeless. http://www.feantsa.org/files/Employment_annual_theme/Annual_theme_documents/European_Report/European_Report_FEANTSA_employment07_EN_final.pdf





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- monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in employment, social solidarity and gender equality policy areas;
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- relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large.

For more information see:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html

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