

Afternoon Workshop 2 - Engaging with Homeless Families

Facilitators - Alison Wren and Roz Plant of Shelter Scotland

Alison is a state-registered Art Therapist who works as a Child Support Worker for Shelter Families Project, Edinburgh. The Child Support Workers at the Project use their therapeutic qualifications as a means of engaging with homeless families with complex needs.

Alison has worked for Shelter since March 2008 and continues to work in a sessional capacity for The Rock Trust, an Edinburgh organisation working with homeless and vulnerable 16-25yr olds. Her past work experience includes time in palliative care, a child and family centre, NHS counselling services, a family mediation organisation and facilitating experiential Art Therapy workshops for NIGAT (Northern Ireland Group for Art as Therapy).

She is interested in working with disenfranchised groups of people, and enjoys using a person-centred ethos to enable clients, where possible, to explore and make use of their own resources.

Roz is a Single Homeless Person Support Worker with the Dumfriesshire Housing Support Project which is based in Dumfries. She has worked with the project since it was first established in January 2003, when it provided a service to single homeless people only. The project expanded in April 2006 to include the Families Support Project. The two projects work closely together to provide support to children, families, couples and single people affected by homelessness. This is especially useful when working with households where couples have separated and need to be housed separately whilst also trying to minimise the emotional impact on all concerned.

Roz has a wealth of experience of working people aged from 16-80 whose support needs are wide and varied but believes that helping service users to attain emotional stability and a sense of worth is the underpinning key to tenancy sustainment.

Prior to her work with Shelter she was a Day Services Officer with Dumfries & Galloway Social Services working with adults with learning disabilities and other issues including physical disability and mental health problems.

Workshop

The workshop focussed on the work undertaken by Shelter Scotland in their Families Projects across Scotland. This included an overview of the types of interventions that worked, and a particular focus on how the various projects navigate the difficult early encounters with new families where trust and acceptance have still to be established. In particular, Alison outlined her experiences of using art materials to simply yet effectively break down initial barriers. By giving modelling materials to new client families, conversations seemed easier to begin, and the life of the families opened up to enable the project workers to get a feel for how families interacted and to gain an initial impression of what sort of issues might exist within the family household where support could be offered.

The workshop had a wide ranging conversation about how best to support vulnerable families and the role that Shelter Scotland has in this innovative approach to family support.