



glasgow homelessness network

# **Shelter Tenancy Sustainment Conference:** The Role of Social Networks

Claire Frew

**Glasgow Homelessness Network**

31<sup>st</sup> January 2008

# The Importance of Social Networks

The existence of social capital/social networks has been empirically linked to:

- Improved child development and adolescent well-being (youth homelessness)
- Increased mental health (strong links between homelessness and mental ill health)
- Lower violent crime rates (links between prison discharge and homelessness)
- Lower susceptibility to depression and loneliness (loneliness and isolation as major factors in tenancy breakdown and repeat homelessness)



# Social Networks and Tenancy Sustainment

- Tenancy sustainment is all about a person feeling 'at home' in their permanent accommodation
- The groundwork for this needs to be done at all stages of the homelessness process
- "Relieving isolation is not something additional that can be done once the urgent practical questions of having somewhere to live or needing detox or drug rehabilitation have been dealt with. On the contrary a resilient and trusting group of friends and family members at one's side is an important bulwark against, and a method of combating, vulnerability and homelessness."

(Lemos & Crane, 2002)



# Impact of homelessness upon social networks

Homelessness Task Force (2002):

“... many people who have experienced homelessness will have lost, or be deprived of, their social networks of families, friendships or work. The circumstances and trauma of homelessness frequently lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness before and after resettlement. Ensuing depression and mental health problems are common. There is overwhelming evidence demonstrating that isolation and loneliness are major factors in resettlement breakdown.”



# Prevention, Alleviation, Crisis Response

- Where does social networks fit?
- Part of needs assessment at initial presentation?
- Part of care/support plan?
- Visitors policies in accommodation projects
- ICT/Digital Inclusion
- Links to employability
- Offer of permanent accommodation



# Back to Tenancy Sustainment

- Building upon needs assessments and support plans, a person's current social networks should be one of the factors to consider in deciding where a person wishes to resettle
- Support plans for when someone moves into permanent accommodation should include whether support is required to maintain current social networks or what steps need to be taken to build new ones



# **Befriending, Mentoring and Mediation**

- specifically recognised by the HTF
- Befriending – building social skills
- Mentoring – linked to employability and is goal focused
- Mediation – focus on rebuilding past relationships

# What's happening in Glasgow

- GHN carried out research into social networks and homelessness (the cup with no handle)
- Identified gaps in 'specialist' services but also recognised a role for generic homelessness staff
- Setting up of new befriending service specifically of people affected by homelessness as part of rent deposit scheme

## What else is happening in Glasgow

- GHN recently piloted a social networks training course with toolkit for staff
- Aimed at all staff within homelessness (e.g. caseworkers, housing support workers, supported accommodation workers, housing officers)
- Provided theory and background on importance of social networks but aimed at identifying practical steps staff can take (small or large!)