



# Activity Agreements Opportunities for All

## Overcoming Barriers: Activity Agreement support for young people affected by homelessness

### Context

Young people affected by homelessness can be some of the hardest to reach. When they are referred for an Activity Agreement many are in an extremely vulnerable position, coping with the practical chaos and emotional turmoil that very often accompanies homelessness. Engaging with and sustaining participation from young people in such circumstances can be a challenge. In addition, for some young people, the rural geography of the Argyll and Bute area can pose an additional barrier to accessing services and opportunities.

Argyll and Bute Council has developed a strong partnership with a local voluntary agency, to overcome some of the barriers to participation for young people affected by homelessness.

### Key elements

HELP (Argyll and Bute) Limited are a housing, employment and life skills project for 16 to 25 year olds in Dunoon and Rothesay, who are either homeless, in threat of homelessness or coming out of care. The service is a key partner in the development of Activity Agreements in Argyll and Bute.

As a referral agency, HELP ensures that young people affected by homelessness are aware of and able to access Activity Agreements. Janet MacKellar, Project Manager says *"We are sometimes the only service young people are engaging with, so, for us, it's vital that we can provide that link into Activity Agreements"*.

In addition, for over a year now, staff from the service have been undertaking the Trusted Professional role for young people affected by homelessness in the Bute and Cowal area. These workers are experienced in engaging with young people affected by homelessness and are often already working with individuals prior to the Activity Agreement. This arrangement ensures that young people receive continuity of support to deal with their housing issues – better enabling them to focus on developing their employability skills and increasing the chances that they will complete their Activity Agreement.

The Activity Agreement Co-ordinator and the HELP Trusted Professionals work closely together, each utilising their own knowledge and skills to meet the needs of young people, occasionally co-working the Trusted Professional role in particularly complex cases.

Young people are also able to undertake some of their Activity Agreement activities through HELP, which runs a range of employability and life skills courses and groups. This overcomes some of the barriers young people might face to participation – locally available learning in an environment where they feel safe and confident.

HELP is closely involved in the local community and, as such, their Trusted Professionals are able to link young people in to local opportunities for progression. In addition, the service helps homeless young people to integrate with the local community, especially vital in smaller towns, through activities which have included intergenerational bowls and volunteering. Young people on an Activity Agreement have been able to access a range of volunteering opportunities as part of and after their Activity Agreement through the project; this has included an environmental improvement project at a local sheltered housing complex in partnership with a local social landlord, and with a local environmental group in a small village outside of town. This is currently being further developed through the introduction of Saltire Award certification and the National Youth Achievement Award to recognise and enable young people to record the skills, learning and experience gained through their volunteering.

### Impact

Through the strong partnership with HELP, Activity Agreements in Argyll and Bute are accessible to and engage vulnerable young people affected by homelessness. The Trusted Professional role carried out by HELP gives young people the housing support to help them focus on and complete their Activity Agreement. It has also greatly increased the capacity of Activity Agreements to support young people elsewhere in Argyll and Bute, (through CLD Youth Workers), and to be able to better meet the needs of individuals. For example, the increased pool of Trusted Professionals, of both genders, has allowed Activity Agreements to respond to individual need for gender-specific workers.

Accessing existing activities through the Help Project enables young people to attend more locally based activities than might otherwise have been possible and to participate in an environment where they feel comfortable and with staff who can provide appropriate support. In addition, the Project has enabled Activity Agreement young people to access local opportunities for progression and to participate in their community. This has allowed Activity Agreements in Argyll and Bute to make best use of resources, avoiding duplication of services and to provide the support to enable some of the most vulnerable young people to get the most from their Activity Agreement offer.

For more information about Activity Agreements in Argyll & Bute contact Debbie Paterson, Argyll and Bute Council [debbie.paterson@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:debbie.paterson@argyll-bute.gov.uk)

For more information about HELP (Argyll and Bute) Limited, contact: Janet K MacKellar. E: [janet@helppltd.org.uk](mailto:janet@helppltd.org.uk)