

Working Together Toolkit

Guidance for homelessness services
developing relationships with DWP Jobcentres

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link, Minories House, 2-5 Minories, London EC3N 1BJ | 020 7840 4430
www.homeless.org.uk | Twitter: @Homelesslink | Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

© Homeless Link 2018. All rights reserved. Homeless Link is a charity no. 1089173 and a company no. 04313826.

Working Together Toolkit

Contents

Introduction	3
Deciding what action to take	3
Contacting your local Customer Services Operations Manager (CSOM)	4
Contacting your local Partnership Manager	4
Joint Working	6
Demonstrating local need	6
Aims and objectives.....	6
Explaining your service offer to the DWP.....	8
Developing local partnerships.....	10

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Sample Working Together homelessness presentation
- Appendix 2 Sample consent letter
- Appendix 3 DWP staff structure
- Appendix 4 DPA1 Form
- Appendix 5 Sample Working Together event agenda
- Appendix 6 Sample Working Together event feedback form

Produced by

The Innovation and Good Practice Team

Acknowledgements

With thanks to MHCLG, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), The Wallich, Crisis, SIFA Fireside, Shelter and Taunton Open Door.

Published

September 2018

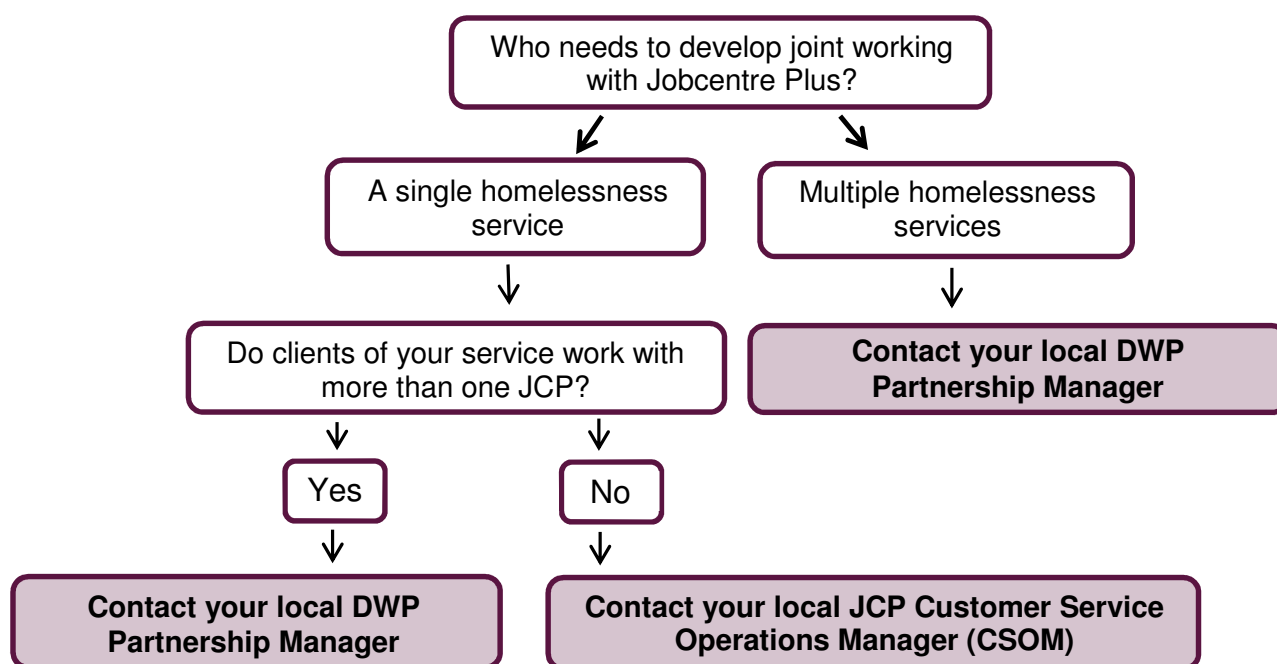
Introduction

Homeless Link's focus on improving relationships with Jobcentres followed publication of our 2013 report 'A High Cost to Pay'¹, which showed that sanctions were disproportionately affecting people experiencing homelessness. By working in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and local Jobcentre Plus (JCP), the homelessness sector can support clients effectively with their benefits claim, understand the conditionality of the claim and reduce the likelihood of sanctions.

The original 2014 Working Together events, delivered by Homeless Link in partnership with the DWP, aimed to improve joint working between homelessness organisations and the DWP on a local level. The success of these events demonstrated eagerness from both the homelessness sector and the DWP to work together to support mutual clients. The Working Together Toolkit aims to support more homelessness organisations to develop these local partnerships and effective joint working with the DWP/JCP at a local level.

Deciding what action to take

The first steps of developing joint working with the DWP in your local area should be determined by local need. Homelessness organisations work with people in housing need on a daily basis, however there may be reasons that homelessness may not be seen as a local issue by Jobcentre Plus staff. This could be due to clients not disclosing their housing situation or individual Jobcentres covering large geographical areas with many different clients. Providing evidence of local need and information on homelessness will help local Jobcentre to develop a better understanding of homelessness and its local context.



If no response is received from your local contacts, get in touch with your Local DWP Partnership Manager. A list of contacts for the national partnerships team are available online at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-partnerships/national-partnership-teams

¹ www.homeless.org.uk/connect/news/2013/sep/23/benefit-sanctions-hitting-homeless-people-hardest-0

Contacting your service's local Customer Service Operations Manager (CSOM)

CSOMs are based in Jobcentre Plus Districts and are responsible for overseeing the performance of Jobcentre Plus Offices. In some cases, a single CSOM may cover more than one Jobcentre office.

To find contact details for your local CSOM:

1. Find the address of your local Jobcentre Plus using Direct Gov's [Contact Jobcentre Plus](#) online Postcode search service. Alternatively [Totaljob.com](#) lists all Jobcentres by area.
2. Call 0845 604 3719 or 0345 604 3719 and ask to be put through to your local Jobcentre Plus, once connected to your local Jobcentre ask to speak with/for the contact details of the CSOM.
3. When initiating contact with your local CSOM you may wish to include the following information:
 - Your reasons for wanting to develop joint working locally
 - Your role
 - The services your organisation provides that move clients closer to the labour market and employment
 - The support needs of the clients you work with and the benefits they claim

Contacting your local DWP Partnership Manager

DWP Partnership Managers are responsible for managing and developing relationships and joint working with external stakeholders, employers and voluntary and community providers. In some areas the Partnership Managers may hold the title Relationship Manager, other areas may also have Social Justice Leads.

The DWP have divided the UK into four different areas: South of England, Central England & Wales, North of England and Scotland. Each of these areas contains several groups which are covered by a Group Partnership Manager. Each Group is then divided into Districts with individual District Managers. DWP districts may span several Local Authority areas and in some cases there may be several Partnership and Relationship Managers. For a table showing the staff structure of the DWP Partnerships Managers, please see the Appendices.

1. Contact your Group Partnership Manager and ask for contact details for your local District Partnership Manager. A list of national partnership manager contacts is available online: www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-partnerships
2. Contact your local Partnership Manager – you may wish to include the following information in your first communication:
 - Your reasons for wanting to develop joint working locally
 - Your role in the organisational grouping
 - Details of services the organisations in the grouping provide that move clients closer to the labour market and employment
 - The support needs of the clients your services work with and the benefits they claim

Case Study: Birmingham & Solihull

MHCLG figures for Birmingham show there are 2,058 homeless households in Birmingham as at March 2018, an increase from 1,556 in the previous year. Birmingham and Solihull DWP are principle partners supporting the Birmingham Prevention of Homelessness Strategy and are members of the Birmingham Prevention Homelessness Board. The considerable spike in homelessness in Birmingham has had an impact on our claimants' ability to maintain their benefits and adhere to Claimant Commitments.

The Birmingham Homelessness Prevention Board is a partnership that includes the DWP, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children's Trust, Crisis, SIFA Fireside, WMP, WMFS, Shelter, various Registered Social Landlords, Women's Aid and other third sector partners. The Prevention Board invited offers from members to support resolving the current crisis in homelessness and in working to design out homelessness. The offer from the DWP was to field three full time Work Coaches in co-locations across the city focused on supporting homeless families, young people experiencing homelessness and homeless single adults aged over 25.

The DWP are currently establishing the co-location premises with Crisis, Birmingham City Council, SIFA Fireside and Shelter. The outreach team will be co-located under MET and TFEA and integrated as part of the wider DWP Birmingham and Solihull District Outreach Team. The focus of this outreach support is to ensure that claimant's eligibility and access to benefits are facilitated at pace as they work through their 'employment journey'.

The long term aim of this work is that a legacy is built of skilling up partner organisations to support homeless claimants navigate access to benefits and maintaining compliance. The DWP work aims to embed a partnership and case conferencing approach, and for support workers in homelessness organisations to grasp how to build action plans that integrate with DWP Claimant Commitments.

The Homeless Outreach Work Coaches build relationships with both job centres and DWP Service Centre colleagues and support the integration of local partner contacts within our Job Centre Complex Needs Plans. This includes building strong relationships with our partners and our Homeless Special Point of Contacts (SPOCs), Drug and Alcohol SPOCs, Midland Engine Team and Troubled Families Employment Advisers.

Joint Working

Once you have established who to contact and arranged a meeting you will need to consider what your aims and objectives are for the meeting, how you will demonstrate local need and which services your organisation offers that align with the objectives of the DWP.

Demonstrating local need

When meeting with your DWP contact it is important to be able to explain homelessness, its causes and consequences, and to gather and use data to demonstrate the issue of homelessness in your area. While homelessness organisations see clients in housing need on a daily basis, you may wish to gather information to illustrate overall local need. Evidence could be gathered from:

- The data your service collects – for information on data collection please see Homeless Link's Demonstrating Your Impact resources:
www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/show-your-impact
- Local rough sleeper counts and estimates figures
www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping
www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleeping-explore-data
- Homeless Link's Annual Review Data
www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england
- Client case studies/stories
- Homeless Link's Working Together Presentation (Appendix 1)

Aims and Objectives

When developing joint working with Jobcentre Plus it is important to remember that resources are allocated to JCP within each District differently, dependent on local need. The following actions were suggested by representatives of both JCP and homelessness organisations during previous Working Together Events and may be useful when thinking about the aims and objectives of your meeting. Not all of the actions will be suitable or applicable to your area.

- Arranging reciprocal visits
- Ensuring that homelessness and rough sleeping is taken into account at the start of developing claimant commitments
- Developing single point of contact within local JCP and homelessness services
- Holding regular meetings between JCP/DWP and homelessness agencies
- Creating a steering/task and finish group to develop joint working between DWP/JCP and homelessness agencies
- Build partnership to share updates and/or changes to Universal Credit
- Developing a joint working protocol between JCP/DWP and homelessness agencies
- Updating the JCP's District Provision Tool with details of local homelessness agencies (a database of information accessible by Work Coaches designed to raise awareness of local provision, opportunities and support for claimants. Each district has its own District Provision Tool)

Homeless Link

- Promoting the use of the JCP/DWP easement of conditionality for claimants who are newly homeless www.homeless.org.uk/connect/news/2014/jun/30/welcome-change-to-help-homeless-people-seeking-work
- 3-way meetings/case conferences with JCP Work Coaches, Support Worker and individual clients
- Co-locating DWP staff within local services such as Local Authority, homelessness day centres, advice centres and other places that provide support to people experiencing homelessness
- Attend partners' staff meetings
- Work shadowing
- Developing staff as 'benefits champions' in homelessness services
- JCP/DWP staff attending client meetings (e.g. residents' meetings/forums)
- Developing and attending mutual training sessions
- Applications to the Flexible Support Fund
- Homelessness agencies sharing support plans with JCP/DWP
- Providing supporting letter to clients when they set up new claims detailing their support needs and the services they are accessing (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).

Case Study: Telford

DWP Partnership Managers have been working closely with other agencies in the Telford to address issues relating to homelessness and rough sleeping. As an issue, homelessness had been continually raised at other strategic groups within Shropshire, such as Welfare Reform Groups, drug treatment provider meetings, mental health commissioning meetings and other joint meetings between the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies.

The DWP Manager identified key stakeholder groups to involve in a regular partnership meeting, which included temporary accommodation providers, the local homelessness outreach service, specialist accommodation providers for single men, women and young adults and the local authority. Several joint partnership events were held to promote help and support of people experiencing homelessness, in relation to the DWP. The involvement of local authorities has also increased since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018.

As a result of these meetings, the Partnership Manager was able to secure Homelessness Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) within all Jobcentres and shared these details with Shropshire Housing Options team and other interested partners. DWP have also delivered bespoke Universal Credit Live & Full Service Training events to the aforementioned partners. The Partnership Manager has also continued to raise awareness of the Easements and flexibilities that can be put in place to support homeless people along with support offered to all vulnerable and disadvantaged customer groups. All partner information and contacts from the partnership meeting have been shared with JCP Work Coaches, which can in turn be shared with customers during interviews at the Job Centre.

Other outcomes from the wider partnership include a Homelessness Workshop for DWP staff, and a streamlined referrals processes e.g. telephone call with warm handover with customer while they are in the office and all partner information being added to the District Provision Tool.

Homeless Link

In the long term, relationships with partner organisations in Telford have grown closer. All DWP staff and partner staff colleagues are aware of what each of us is able to offer in the way of support to customers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless as well as those who are in specialist accommodation with the above organisations. Ultimately the improved communication between services has resulted in customers receiving a better service.

Case Study: Brighton

Following Homeless Link and the DWPs 2014 Sussex Working Together event, a Task and Finish Group was set up to take actions forward. Members of the group included the DWP Social Justice Partnership Manager for Brighton and Hove, Homeless Link, Brighton and Hove City Council, and local hostels and supported housing providers.

The first action agreed by the group was to improve the flow of communication between JCP staff and homeless providers in order to support clients more effectively and reduce the number of sanctions. The group decided to pilot using the DWP vulnerability marker form (Appendix 4: DPA1 Form) and support letter (Appendix 2: Brighton and Hove Support Letter) across five hostels in the city, initially for six weeks. There was also a commitment from the DWP to put in place a named JCP Homeless Champion, single point of contact at each Jobcentre.

Having a named JCP Homeless Champion at each Jobcentre helps to provide continuity in approach and response, and to build the skills and knowledge of both JCP and homelessness sector staff through training, joint team meetings and regular communication. Hopefully the Champions also help to raise awareness of homelessness amongst other JCP/DWP staff, and their providers.

Sussex and Surrey DWP agreed to share their internal vulnerability marker form with hostels in order to identify vulnerable claimants on their labour market system. Support staff and clients filled in this form and the accompanying letter which details the issues for the client, gives contact details of the support worker, outlines any work related activity they are engaged in, gives client consent to share information, and for the worker to be contacted on their behalf. The vulnerability marker alerts Work Coaches to the client's support needs and allows for some flexibility in work related activity for JSA and ESA Work Related Activity Group claimants. It should mean that a client's support needs are taken into account and considered before a client is referred for any sanction action. The vulnerability marker also means that work related activity undertaken within specialised services or homeless services can be included in the clients Claimant Commitment.

Explaining your service offer to the DWP

Jobcentre Plus staff will be interested in finding out more about the activities and support your service offers to give claimants the best chance of finding work or moving closer to the labour market, as these can be included in the activities listed in their Claimant Commitment. Having received training on coaching methodologies and behavioural insight techniques Work Coaches will work with claimants to understand what work they can do and set out the requirements/steps the claimant needs to take to find work.

Homeless Link

The activities JCP are interested in may include:

- Job Clubs/employment support
- CV writing
- Volunteering and work experience opportunities
- Support with computer literacy
- ESOL
- Accredited courses
- Skills to get people closer to the labour market e.g. time management, team working, life skills
- Joint training opportunities
- Support with debt and money management

Case Study: The Wallich, Wrexham

The Ty-Croeso Crisis Café was created as a service to support vulnerable customers who currently access support and are at risk of homelessness, substance misuse or further offending and could benefit from accessing professional support around their mental health. Ty-Croeso invited JCP to support the Crisis Café and work in partnership with the NHS, local drug intervention services, the local authority and North Wales Police to provide support and guidance whilst further enhancing their professional relationships to support users.

JCP were keen to be involved and recognised there were stumbling blocks due to levels of trust and what seems to be a fragmented service. This partnership meeting was an opportunity to make positive changes and offer a joined up service. The DWP became key players in this new collaborative approach enabling issues to be quickly resolved and soon built up an excellent level of trust. These vulnerable customers had previously been reluctant to access JCP services as they were distrusting of the DWP but they became so comfortable with the JCP staff that they began dropping into the JCP for their support as well as seeing them in the Crisis Café. Clients who received a positive service were also bringing their friends along for advice and being peer advocates.

JCP set up Special Point of Contacts (SPOCs) to aid processing, decision making and avoiding sanctions. They also supported customers who were not claiming to access benefits and therefore helping them move towards securing accommodation. Partnership working between the charity and JCP work coaches has also enabled support workers to spend more time focusing on other aspects of client's lives rather than spending hours on the telephone to DWP benefit call centres across the UK.

As a result of this partnership, clients experiencing homelessness are now happier to seek out support from JCP as working together has broken down those negative connotations that Job Centre advisors are dismissive and unwilling to help. Records have also shown that this has also reduced the number of individuals presenting at the local job centre.

Developing Local Partnerships

For a group of organisations, or an organisation with multiple services, developing an event that brings together local JCP staff and homelessness services can kick-start partnership working in your area. Events can be used to dispel myths, understand perspectives and priorities, and develop actions for staff of both JCP and homelessness organisations to take forward.

Case Study: Liverpool City Region and Homeless Link

In the spring of 2017, Homeless Link organised a Liverpool City Region Community of Practice for frontline workers from homelessness services. At this meeting delegates prioritised welfare reforms as a key issue which would affect the people they were working with and they wanted to find out more about.

After a number of discussions around what changes were coming in and how they applied to people who were homeless, it was suggested to apply the learning from this DWP Working Together Toolkit and have a joint session with Work Coaches to help share perspectives and build relationships. Homeless Regional Partnership Staff used the gov.uk website to make contact with the local DWP District Manager who immediately showed interest in Work Coaches together with frontline workers, and also brought in 'front of house' staff members from the local City Centre Job Centre who had a lot of experience with homeless clients. Together, they set up a half-day event for 30 frontline workers and 30 Work Coaches from across the region.

The session was held in October 2018, and also included people with lived experience sharing their experience of homelessness and the welfare system. Contrary to expectations, the event was extremely positive and myths were busted and attendees able to learn about the context to each other's work. The major piece of feedback was that "we could have gone all day sharing our experiences".

A number of immediate outcomes came out of the session, including identification of 'Single Points of Contact' for homelessness in each Job Centre, local Job Centres and housing projects linking up to attend each other's team meetings, and a joint training session around Trauma Informed Care provided by Homeless Link.

The demand for opportunities to build relationships with each other was such that DWP and Homeless Link Partnership Managers agreed to start a specific DWP Homelessness Forum for Liverpool. With the Shankly Hotel in Central Liverpool offering free space, the first Forum session was held in early 2018, giving attendees the opportunity to "find out about services I knew nothing about".

Following the Forum event, a 'strategy for preventing homelessness' via Job Centre staff interactions with vulnerable people was developed, with Homeless Link organising a consultation with local partners. This eventually led to an Action Group being formed to support the DWP in implementing the ideas discussed at the aforementioned events. While most of these focused on local initiatives and implementation, there were also some key policy points made which were passed up to the national DWP policy team.

Homeless Link

Who to invite

Events should be organised in partnership with the DWP to ensure attendance from JCP staff. A mixture of frontline staff and management from homelessness services, alongside Work Coaches and management from JCP will ensure that barriers are fully understood throughout organisations and that agreed actions can be taken forward.

Agenda

It is important to give an equal amount of time on the agenda for both homelessness organisations and the DWP to ensure there is a balance of information for all delegates. You may wish to include time for presentations, discussion, networking and client stories in your agenda (Appendix 5).

Discussion

Including facilitated discussions in your event will ensure delegates have time to digest information, network with colleagues and plan their actions going forward. Giving delegates a form in which to document their agreed actions will allow follow-up at a later date (Appendix 6).

Presentations

Presentations from both the DWP and homelessness services will ensure that delegates understand one another's priorities and current services. It is important to share presentations prior to the event to co-ordinate your messages and encourage joint working (Appendix 1).

Client involvement

Involving clients in both the planning and delivery of your event will focus delegates on their common ground and ensure the event is relevant to the clients both parties are supporting. Prior to the event, people with lived experience should be consulted on the main issues they are experiencing with the Job Centre, these can then be incorporated into presentations and discussions with DWP colleagues. For guidance on how to co-produce your event see: www.homeless.org.uk/co-production-toolkit

Client stories about their experience of homelessness and claiming benefits form a powerful and unifying part of the event and can be delivered in a number of ways:

- Clients speaking about their experiences
- Written accounts read out by clients or a staff member on their behalf
- Q&A between a member of staff and clients, with questions being discussed and prepared with clients before the event
- Videos and recordings

Funding

Events can be hosted at little or no cost by being held at local JCP or homelessness services, but some costs may be incurred e.g. staff time, catering, client expenses. Organisations can consider applying to the DWP's Flexible Support Fund for support with administration and organisation, venue, refreshments and follow-up costs. Contact your local DWP Partnership Manager for advice on applying to the Flexible Support Fund.

For more information relating to this toolkit please contact Homeless Link's Innovation and Good Practice Team.

Case Study: Leeds Social Justice (DWP) and Leeds LA

Following the introduction of Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA), the Duty to refer, and also the identification of a slight increase in rough sleepers in Leeds, the DWP District Manager requested the possibility of the Social Justice team having some input in reducing homelessness. This request was built on the back of excellent relations that were already held between DWP, the LA & local organisations. Therefore a partnership meeting was arranged to brainstorm how this could be achieved. The objective was to reduce rough sleeping by offering a joined up approach between services working with this vulnerable client group. A shared objective was agreed at the meeting that early prevention to homelessness was key in reducing the amount of rough sleepers in Leeds.

Through a partnership between the local authority and the DWP, two members of staff from the local authority were seconded to work alongside the Social Justice team (who are a team of Community Work Coaches (CWC) that are based in various homelessness hubs across the city). These staff would work on a caseload of customer referrals from JCP sites in Leeds, with the intention of addressing problems around homelessness and rough sleeping. Due to a data sharing protocol, and signed customer consent, staff from both services were able to overcome any data sharing issues as customers presented in person.

Through a personalised service, the partnership has learnt that those presenting at JCP often have multiple and competing needs, for which homelessness may not be their primary concern. The CWCs therefore aim to provide necessary support, coaching, signposting until the point when all barriers are removed and there is a level of sustainability about their housing situation.

This service has also been aligned in order for DWP prison coaches to be able to access housing support when people are released from custody. Using this wrap-around service, once housing stability has been secured, the DWP and the local authority can work together to help with training and skills, employment skills, and budgeting advice.

As a result of this secondment agreement, not only have both services developed a clearer understanding of their objectives, but permanent roles are now being developed within the Social Justice team to be able to deliver a lasting service.

Case Study: Taunton Open Door

Since 2014, Taunton Job Centre have worked closely in partnership with Taunton Open Door day centre and other local agencies on a range of initiatives supporting those at risk of homelessness in the city.

Initially, Taunton Jobcentre Plus were aware of Taunton Open Door day centre as some claimants used the centre as a 'care of' address but knew little about the support and services they provided. Taunton JCP had been working with Avon and Somerset Police's IMPACT project and were informed that Open Door had been donated outdated computer equipment. Attending a client case conference alongside the police, a Jobcentre Work Coach was given a tour of Open Door's facilities. Following

requests for new computers, a Flexible Support Fund grant of £5000 was awarded for new equipment and the renovation of the computer suite.

This increase in digital access meant attending work club sessions at Open Door was built into local client's Claimant Commitment. Jobcentre staff also provided Open Door staff with training and guidance on the Claimant Commitment which helped when supporting clients and preventing sanctions.

Jobcentre staff also visited Taunton Open Door and answered questions from clients on both JSA and ESA in a safe and familiar environment. These visits contribute to the building of closer relationships and beginning of breaking down barriers and negative stereotypes from both clients and Work Coaches. Jobcentre staff no longer see Open Door as a last resort but as a place where people can get the support they need.

The partnership and strong relationship with Open Door continues today. Over the last few years, Taunton Jobcentre has held numerous office fundraising events for the organisation. All new staff that join Taunton Jobcentre are taken to Open Door as part of their induction to know the staff there and to establish those links. Furthermore, clients from Open Door were invited to the DWP offices for full employability sessions, including mock interviews by some local employers – from which a number were given job opportunities. All employers commented that this event and speaking directly to our homeless customers helped to dispel so many myths they held.

Following on from this, a local bank - as part of their community outreach work - has now funded the salary for Open Door to appoint a new Advice, Guidance and Support Services Coordinator. This role is now in post and the existing relationship between DWP and Open Door has been important, particularly with the introduction of Universal Credit. DWP have coached the Coordinator to use the UC digital service in order for her to coach her volunteers, and there are regular discussions on any issues regarding UC and Open Door users so that things get sorted quickly. Our Service Improvement Leads for Universal Credit are in regular contact with Open Door to inform them about any changes to the system that may impact their service users.

Homeless Link



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless or who live with multiple and complex support needs. We work to improve services and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
Minorities House, 2-5 Minorities
London EC3N 1BJ

020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

© Homeless Link 2018. All rights reserved.
Homeless Link is a charity no. 1089173 and
a company no. 04313826.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

© Homeless Link 2014. All rights reserved.
Homeless Link is a charity no. 1089173 and
a company no. 04313826.