CLIF Impact Project

Community Learning and Socially Vulnerable Groups

Homeless and vulnerably housed people

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This briefing paper accompanies the CLIF Impact Report on Community Learning and Socially Vulnerable Groups, available at http://shop.niace.org.uk/clif-impact-vulnerable-groups.

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1. Introduction

The Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF) provided grant funding from the Skills Funding Agency for 96 community projects across England to run from September 2012 to July 2013. One of the primary objectives of CLIF was to generate robust evidence on the impact of community learning, in order to help strengthen the case at both national and local levels for sustainable and diverse funding for the sector in challenging economic times. NIACE was commissioned to manage the fund and as part of that role it supported projects to collect, analyse and report evidence on the difference their work made for learners, families, localities and delivery partners.

A series of six thematic reports demonstrating the contribution of community learning to key policy areas as evidenced by CLIF have been produced. One of these thematic reports focuses on socially vulnerable groups; in particular, older people; homeless and vulnerably housed people; people with learning difficulties and disabilities; and offenders and ex-offenders. This briefing paper provides additional information regarding the impacts of community learning on **homeless and vulnerably housed people**.

For detail about the evidence on which this briefing draws please see the main thematic report on socially vulnerable groups, available at http://shop.niace.org.uk/clif-impact-vulnerable-groups.

2. Key messages

2.1 Key messages for practitioners

- Socially vulnerable individuals face multiple barriers in relation to confidence and self-esteem, health, poverty, social inclusion, ability to live independently and many other areas. Learning and skills can transform the ability of individuals to manage the challenges they face and to aspire to a better future for themselves. But this will only happen if learning programmes are designed and delivered in a way that is **tailored and responsive** to the needs of learners and seen by them as **relevant and useful** to their real life requirements. A purely utilitarian focus on vocational skills and immediate employment outcomes will rarely achieve this.
- The most valuable outcomes for socially vulnerable groups, and those that will transform their lives and support them to progress in ways relevant to their personal circumstances, are those which permit them to **act independently** and **make their own choices**, coupled with the ability to benefit from enhanced social interaction.
- **Vulnerably housed and homeless** people can and do engage in learning, achieve and progress, but sustained and effective learning is most likely to be

delivered flexibly and informally in settings where they feel secure and understood.

2.2 Key messages for planners

- Working in **partnership** is the key to delivering excellent outcomes for all learners, but especially for the most vulnerable of these. Imaginative and creative partnerships involving agencies with a range of expertise and contacts with vulnerable people in all parts of the community bring about the best outcomes for learners where they work together to identify shared priorities for vulnerable groups and ways in which these can be addressed.

- Community learning partnerships should work in **collaboration with third sector organisations** which are in close contact with socially vulnerable groups. With each agency playing to its strengths, even small injections of funding will be seen to make a real difference to the lives of the most disadvantaged.

- Other key partners are likely to include:
  - adult learning providers from both public and private sectors
  - Skills Funding Agency
  - Jobcentre Plus
  - social care services
  - health and well-being boards
  - community safety partnerships
  - offender learning planning groups
  - homeless organisations
  - residential social landlords.

2.3 Key message for policy makers and funders

Consideration should be given at national level by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Skills Funding Agency to ensure that funding regimes do not militate against delivery models and learning providers which have been shown to be effective in meeting the needs of socially vulnerable groups, including those who are **homeless or vulnerably housed.**

3. Policy overview: Homeless and vulnerably housed people

In England, almost 8 million people live in social housing[1] and 43 per cent of these are defined as living in poverty.[2] During 2012/13, 53,540 people were newly classed

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[1] Department for Communities and Local Government (2013) English Housing Survey: headline report 2011-12.
[2] *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion*, Aldridge, H. *et al*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation / New Policy Institute, 2012

as homeless.[3] There are a number of key policy issues currently affecting homeless and vulnerably housed people which learning has the potential to help to address.

- Homeless people experience some of the poorest health in our communities. Without good health, it can be hard to leave homelessness behind. Research by Homeless Link indicates that eight in ten have one or more physical health needs, and seven in ten have at least one mental health problem.[4]

- Welfare reform is already having, and will continue to have, a significant impact on people who are homeless or in social housing. For working-age benefit claimants the new 'Universal Credit' (UC) is now being rolled out and has a range of implications. For example, the requirement for claims to be made online creates an urgent need to address the digital skills gap for many of the most vulnerable tenants and homeless people, while the payment of the housing element of UC to the tenant rather than the landlord means that people will need the budgeting skills to ensure that their housing costs are paid.[5]

- The skills levels of people who are homeless or vulnerably housed are often low and training and opportunities to develop skills are crucial in enabling people to recover from homelessness. It can help to rebuild their self-confidence, move away from negative behaviours, sustain tenancies and ultimately prepare for and make a success of employment. Evidence suggests that tailored learning and skills provision within housing and homelessness organisations can make a huge difference to tenants and clients.

- Over half of social housing tenants who are of working age are unemployed.[6] For homeless people, low levels of skills and qualifications create a significant barrier to employment. This has increased over the last 20 years as skills and qualifications have become progressively more important in recruitment and the competition for entry level jobs has increased. Research by Homeless Link, Crisis and St Mungo's indicates that the Work Programme is failing to engage with people who are the most excluded and furthest from the job market.[7]

[3] Department for Communities and Local Government (2013) Table 773: Homeless households accepted by local authorities, by priority need category
[4] Homeless Link (2012) *The Health and Wellbeing of People who are Homeless: Evidence from a National Audit*
[5] Chartered Institute of Housing (2012) *Making it fit: a guide to preparing for the social sector size criteria*
[6] Gardiner, L. and Simmonds, D. (2012) *Housing providers' approaches to tackling worklessness: Assessing value and impact*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion / HACT
[7] Homeless Link, Crisis, St Mungo's (2012) *The Programme's not Working! Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme*

4. The evidence from CLIF: Homeless and vulnerably housed people

4.1 Outcomes for learners

Eleven projects focused either exclusively or substantially on people who were homeless or vulnerably housed. The outcomes they attributed to CLIF involvement are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Number of homeless/vulnerably housed learners experiencing outcomes under each domain
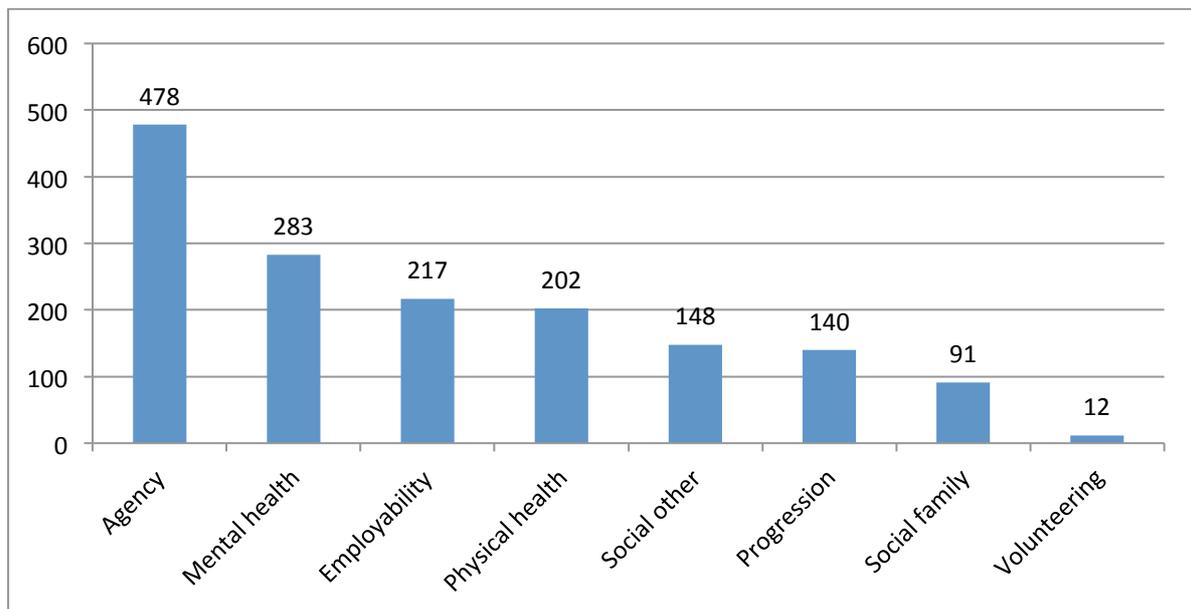
4.1.1 Greater personal agency

Increased confidence and self esteem was a significant outcome reported by almost all projects focusing on this target group. Increased ability to act independently and take responsibility for their lifestyle is likely to stand CLIF participants in good stead as the introduction of welfare reform will render those who struggle in this respect particularly vulnerable. CLIF learners demonstrated increased confidence in:

- managing their money and avoiding debt
- taking care of their own health and well-being
- managing their tenancy successfully
- carrying out home improvements
- undertaking new activities, previously daunting, and making transformational life changes

- engaging with professional agencies such as the Home Office, DWP and local authorities, as well as having increased knowledge of which agencies to turn to for support.

One project reported:

The women at the refuge have become savvy shoppers. I noticed women buying supermarket own brand items. The women are able to visualise where each penny is spent. Women have a better understanding of managing money and choices around money. Made of Money: Supporting vulnerable women to rebuild their finances

Several projects reported improved communication skills, including in relation to legal and financial matters. One project reported that 211 socially isolated individuals improved their sense of self-worth and social connectedness and were thus able to increase their involvement in community life and engagement in community activism.

R attended a workshop jointly organised with our local Unite community organiser. She helped to organise this session and invited a number of her friends and family to a meeting about the bedroom tax demonstrations in Leeds, and what the tax meant to Bradford. She was able to bring six members of her community together to participate in this discussion. Northern Lines

Another project was able to demonstrate how involvement in the co-development and delivery of a course on tenancy management brought about impressive transformational changes for 40 learners in relation to lifestyle, autonomy and reduced social isolation as well as achieving a 100 per cent record of successfully sustaining previously fragile tenancies.

One learner cites the topics "paying bills, reading meters, moving in check list, housing benefit changes" and says "I learned a lot about how benefits will change in the near future". Another client says that they have learned to "always read a tenancy agreement before you sign" and found the session to be "very good – now I feel more confident when dealing with landlords." Finding a Property and Maintaining a Successful Tenancy

4.1.2 Improved mental and physical health

Improving the health of people who are homeless or vulnerably housed is central to the goal of reducing health inequalities. The evidence from CLIF projects indicated a number of positive outcomes in relation to mental health including:

- improved mental well being
- increased ability to manage mental health
- reduced anxiety and stress, including about financial matters.

This resulted from a greater understanding of factors affecting their situation and the confidence to implement strategies to make positive progress with plans for the future and to take control of their own lives. Typical quotes include:

I have used the confidence build to distance from negative beings around me. Cardboard Citizens

I am getting to know me again. I am no longer hidden among the shadows of the streets or the corners of the room. Creative Edge

I am really proud that I have kept my depression at bay. I don't need a specialist at the moment and that makes me feel great. Our Local Eating Place

One project reported that regular and meaningful integration with people outside their normal social circle engendered a greater sense of self-worth in project participants. The learner quoted below indicates how co-creating and co-delivering the learning programme was particularly successful in terms of offering a sense of achievement and that the skills gained provided a sense of empowerment and control.

I have much more confidence now and it's as if I have taken control. Today I had to teach on the course and it felt really good. Finding a Property and Maintaining a Successful Tenancy

Other projects reported physical health benefits for learners including:

- increased ability to manage physical health as a result of a better understanding of the impact of diet and exercise
- increased physical activity in the form of organised walks and gardening
- improved diet.

I enjoyed this project; I didn't have a volunteering goal but had a health goal. The 2.5 mile walk to attend helped me to achieve a healthier lifestyle. Moving into Health

4.1.3 Improved employment prospects

Over half of social housing tenants who are of working age are unemployed. CLIF projects reported evidence of how they had brought learners closer to the labour market by helping them to move into employment, self-employment or work placement in a range of different spheres including:

- gardening
- house maintenance
- retail
- car maintenance

- postal delivery
- catering.

Examples include the following:

John, a rough sleeper from July 2012 to January 2013, has successfully moved on to both further training and employment as a result of the project. John says "It's too easy to just vegetate and let your days slip by like I see others around me doing and that's not me, I like to be doing stuff". He will shortly be joining a Garden Design course to further improve his skillset in this area and he has taken on several ongoing gardening jobs through contacts he has made on the gardening project. Do It Yourself

Some learners have applied for posts with One Vision Housing as general maintenance operatives and labourers. Some learners have been invited to apply for trainee maintenance operative positions with One Vision Housing as a result of attending the course. One learner has been carrying out paid self employed work making and fitting back gates for friends and neighbours in the local community. Taking Pride in Your Home

Projects report that developing transferable skills in communication, research and IT has increased learners' confidence and motivation to seek employment and many are engaged in the job application process whilst others have already secured interviews. In some cases the evidence of such increased aspiration and motivation is considerable. In one project 79 learners visited the job club on three or more occasions whilst in another 173 learners completed an NOCN award in job search including interview skills and CV writing. One project reports:

In the months this learner has been supported by the project, his level of English and computer literacy skills have improved dramatically. When he first arrived, he was barely able to type his own name on the computer. Now with only limited guidance and support, he is able to make job applications online using the Universal Jobmatch system or send his CV to potential employers via email at the weekly job club. Employment through Refurbishment, Maintenance and Retrofit

4.1.4 Progression into further learning

Projects report instances of learners moving on to further learning in subjects as diverse as:

- film making
- social care
- music
- sports coaching
- construction and maintenance

- creative writing
- food technology.

Projects also cite evidence of increased motivation and confidence to continue to learn new skills as detailed in individual learning action plans. In some cases the numbers involved are substantial. For example, one project has 30 learners enrolled on courses due to start in October with a further 83 on the waiting list. Other examples include the following:

The learner has already progressed onto the second level DIY course and has applied to join the One Vision Housing multi skill training programme that will lead to a full time employment position. She has also completed a Positive Parenting course and is starting a Safeguarding course. She says "This has been very life changing for me and my family, and I would recommend this course to anyone". Taking Pride in Your Home

Learning the guitar provided another motivation for improving his IT and literacy skills. He learnt how to search for songs online; cut and paste them into a Word document; formatting skills; and saving and printing. He has started writing songs and this has helped him improve his literacy. "Learning to play the guitar has given me a lot of confidence. I feel I can do things again. Now I just want to write songs and play my music." Homeless Learning Club

As I met people from different parts of the globe with different perspectives I also sharpened my own English skills which had faded over time, having fallen out with the education system a few years previously. This brings me to the most positive thing anybody has done for me in a long time in helping me successfully apply to begin college full-time in September, which was a big step for me given my distrust in all forms of education. Creative Edge

4.1.5 Improved social relations

Social isolation is a major issue for this client group so the group ethos developed in many of the projects made an enormous contribution to overcoming this. Key outcomes reported by CLIF projects include:

- learners felt more supported through increased positive relationships;
- projects provided a positive social forum where a varied group of people could come together to support each other educationally and socially;
- decreased association with negative social contacts;
- less reliance on external agencies;
- increased contact with more diverse groups in terms of gender, culture, faith and ethnicity.

One project engaged 181 people in cross-community walking tours followed by a critical dialogue on issues that afflict communities in conflict.

When asked how his life had changed since joining the project, Learner A said, "It's all good. I have learnt how to live back more with normal people. I've made some good friends drumming, and visited places I've never been before. As far as the writing and English is concerned, that teacher is the only person in the world who could have got me doing it!" Creative Edge

It has helped to communicate with others and understand their experiences. Made of Money

I'm here all the time! Everyone is brilliant; we all have problems and we talk about it. It's like a counselling session. I have made lots of friends who care, they support you and have similar problems and experiences. I feel comfortable with everybody. If necessary we would stick up for each other like a family would. We always listen to each other for support, information and feedback and you never see any disputes or conflict. Communicating with people here has helped with communication with my family. Finding a Property and Maintaining a Successful Tenancy

In those instances where learners had contact with their families, there are numerous examples of positive outcomes. For example:

I can sit down and talk to people now, and my family have noticed an improvement in me. Finding a Property and Maintaining a Successful Tenancy

On the two projects where learners developed skills in home maintenance they reported being better able to take care of their home and family and that this had received very positive feedback from family members. On another project which focused on community cooking there is evidence of how improved cooking skills helped to strengthen family bonds and to improve family routine. In yet another project 129 learners undertook a family relationship therapeutic module and reported an improved understanding of, and assertiveness in, resolving family disputes. The project reported as follows:

Another powerful aspect of this programme was a comparison of family life from [learners'] own childhoods and today. They found new technologies, economic pressures, and changing social dynamics as major factors in the lives of their children. This recognition of pressures for their children and the conflicts of tradition versus modernity, religion versus secularism etc was a serious eye opener. Many commented on how little they understood of the new 'ways' and the contradictions of home life versus their children's lives in the outside world. Recognising these challenges most hoped to spend more time with their children and to limit the pressures of culture / religion – rather to make these 'experiences' they could enjoy

as a family rather than something to be rigidly adhered to and forced upon the child.
Northern Lines

4.2   Outcomes for volunteers

CLIF project participants undertook volunteering roles including:

- gardening
- home maintenance
- supporting those recovering from substance abuse
- acting as food champions.

In all cases projects report that volunteers have increased their self-esteem by giving back to the community. For example, 12 disengaged homeless people have seen real benefits from their gardening placements which have offered them increased interaction with the community; those social housing residents who have been able to assist neighbours with home repairs and improvements report a noticeable boost to their confidence and sense of purpose.

Projects also report that volunteers have gained skills which will assist in seeking employment. The following quotes provide two examples of this:

Volunteering with Cardboard Citizens has helped me feel valued and useful. It has reopened my drive to find work and I have started volunteering elsewhere as well.
Cardboard Citizens

Volunteering at the Creative Edge workshops has given me invaluable experience working with vulnerable adults... The workshops have given me chance to develop my teaching skills, and will hopefully stand me in good stead when seeking employment in this sector. Creative Edge

4.3   Outcomes for communities

A number of projects reported outcomes for communities, the most common of which was forging stronger links between different community groups. Other projects reported specific and significant outcomes, examples of which were:

- overcoming tensions between different groups and achieving a much greater degree of mutual understanding and collective action;
- a reduction in anti-social behaviour on the part of the homeless and rootless community of a city centre;
- the creation of a more pleasant local environment by volunteers engaged in gardening activity in social housing estates.

4.4 Outcomes for lead and partner organisations

Outcomes for lead or partner organisations reported by projects include:

- more extensive and effective partnership working which has resulted in better referral mechanisms and structured progression pathways for learners;
- increased ability to meet organisational objectives which include embedding learning in the lives of homeless people and enabling social housing tenants to look after and improve the fabric of their homes;
- new and more effective ways of working;
- a more capable workforce better able to help service users;
- improved staff morale as a result of seeing what a tangible difference they can make to the lives of the disadvantaged local community.

5. Case studies

5.1 Case study: Finding a Property and Maintaining a Successful Tenancy

Since I started learning, my family have noticed a difference in me. I am learning to pay attention more and, because I am learning like my teenage daughters are, I can share some experiences with them. It brings us together. In class we have bonded well as a group. Some of the members are still having life issues but I prefer to keep my problems to myself. I enjoy the course and some of the skills I have learned I can see would be useful in the future. I'm also more confident with people now and am gradually making friends outside SmartMove. The staff and clients here are lovely people. I don't worry so much about asking questions in class as we are all in the same situation. We often help each other.

When I first came, I suffered from anxiety but these days I go home with a smile on my face because of what I have achieved. I feel to have a purpose when I am learning and it also helps as it makes me have a routine, a structure to my days. I used to be scared of going back into the big wide world and focussed all my efforts on my children. Now I have lots more confidence and I am even speaking to the whole group tomorrow – a scary challenge! At one time I hated who I was and was disappointed in myself. Now I <u>know</u> I can do things. I used to leave my partner to do everything before. I want to learn to do everything myself now. I feel as if I'm a bit of an expert now and can sometimes tell my partner what to do! I still need confidence on the phone though. I'm working on this as it would be useful for getting a job.

I thought of myself as thick when I first came here. The course has motivated me to learn and use my brain. I have surprised myself sometimes as to what I can do. I would like to move on from here eventually, once I have got my life in balance. I

would love to do literacy courses to improve my writing skills and get a job that I really enjoy.

5.2   Case study: Homeless Learning Club

This learner had serious substance use problems. He was drinking very heavily. He had no experience of adult learning and had left school without any qualifications. He was in his early 40s. He had worked in restaurants and bars mainly as a kitchen porter but was unemployed when he first engaged with the project. He asked about doing a Food Hygiene Certificate. It was suggested that he attend a new course that led to becoming a chef. He said he was interested and went along. It inspired him and he returned to complete the first part of the training. He stopped drinking. He passed the interview and was invited onto the second part which consisted of two days working in a restaurant and two in college. It was a difficult journey. Just as he was about to finish he started drinking again. But with support from hostel staff, Pathways staff and people from the training course he completed it and gave up drinking again. He has not returned to drinking since.

He has found work in a restaurant as a commis chef. He began volunteering for St. Mungo's helping other residents with cooking on a budget. He has drawn up a programme for helping clients in hostels with learning how to cook. He is currently talking to various companies with the hope of finding a sponsor so he can deliver this course to homeless people living in hostels across London.

It was such a lucky thing. I asked for one thing and got offered another. But it worked out. My plan now is to help others. If you live in a hostel, you haven't got much money for food. I want to show people that they can eat well on a little money. It's about how much they want to spend on food.