

GoWell is a collaborative partnership between the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, the University of Glasgow and the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, sponsored by Glasgow Housing Association, the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde.

The graphic consists of two stylized human figures. The larger figure on the left is teal and contains the title text. The smaller figure on the right is grey and contains the date. Both figures are simplified, showing only the head and torso.

**ENVIRONMENTAL
EMPLOYABILITY
PROGRAMME
EVALUATION**

December 2008

GoWell is a planned ten-year research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It commenced in February 2006 and has a number of different research components. This paper is part of a series of Briefing Papers which the GoWell team has developed in order to summarise key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the research. Further information on the GoWell Programme and the full series of Briefing Papers is available from the GoWell website at: www.gowellonline.com



INTRODUCTION

The Community Janitors or 'Environmental Employability Programme' as it is officially known is a combined employability and environmental maintenance programme. It aims to help local unemployed residents into employment through paid training, with participants undertaking a range of environmental maintenance jobs coupled with skills and qualification development and support to move into employment. At the same time it provides an environmental service to Glasgow Housing Association's (GHA) local housing organisations (LHOs) helping them respond to and manage local maintenance issues and needs. The programme commenced in June 2006 and is continuing throughout 2008/09.

At the time of the evaluation, the programme operated across Glasgow in 35 LHO neighbourhoods representing 78% of GHA's 70,000 housing units. It is delivered through the five Local Regeneration Agencies (LRAs) and forms part of GHA's Wider Action Programme which goes beyond housing management and investment in addressing community regeneration. Trainees are employed for a maximum of 26 weeks and supervised and supported by a team of supervisors. The programme is based on a model originally developed by Castlemilk Tenants' Housing Association LHO.

An evaluation of the programme was conducted by Hexagon Research and Consulting in collaboration with the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit¹. This evaluation is one of the GoWell nested studies which are shorter-term studies of specific initiatives aimed at addressing particular aspects of community need that are taking place alongside the housing improvements. As the Community Janitors programme is addressing both employability and environmental issues it is of key interest to GoWell. The Wave¹ GoWell Community Health and Wellbeing survey found high unemployment figures in the study areas and found that environmental issues were a concern for many residents^{2,3}. The evaluation considered outcomes from the commencement of the programme to end March 2008. The full report is available on the GoWell website (www.gowellonline.com). Overall the evaluation is very positive and this paper provides a summary of the main findings.



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Three main objectives of the programme were to:

1. Improve employability of the Community Janitor trainees through the provision of paid training places, support to move into employment and the development of skills and qualifications. The study aimed to provide 253 training places and support 160 trainees into further employment.
2. Provide an enhanced or additional environment maintenance service alongside mainstream services.
3. Provide an additional and flexible tool for the LHOs to manage the neighbourhood and respond to tenants' concerns and needs, and so contribute to the improvement of tenant-LHO relationships.





METHODS

The evaluation of the programme focussed on the first two objectives: increasing employability and improving the environment. To assess employability, information was collected on development of skills, qualifications gained, numbers who moved into further employment, education and training opportunities and other outcomes related to improvements in self-esteem and confidence, quality of life, and health and wellbeing. Assessment of environmental improvement included the number and type of tasks performed, the appearance and quality of the local environment and tenant satisfaction.

Data was collected by reviewing task and employment monitoring data, trainee interviews and focus groups, tenant surveys and focus groups and interviews with LHO staff and LRA supervisors and co-ordinators.

Monitoring data was collected in various ways including weekly worksheets returned by the LRAs to the LHOs and then reported to GHA, quarterly training and employment reports submitted to GHA, a task monitoring database and photographic evidence of the impact of the tasks.

Two tenant surveys were conducted. A baseline survey in June 2007 from which 1,938 completed questionnaires were received, and a follow-up survey in March 2008 which received 1,897 returns. Focus groups were also held with tenants across six LHOs.



RESULTS

In terms of employment outcomes, the targets originally set were not only met but significantly exceeded. The target number of 253 training places to be delivered by March 2008 was exceeded by 37%, with 346 places provided; and the target of 160 trainees moving onto employment was exceeded by 32%, with 205 trainees getting jobs.

Of the 346 trainees, 98% were male and 2% female. In terms of the age range of the trainees, most were in the 25-44 age range: 26% 16-24, 56% 25-44, and 18% aged 45-65.

Recruitment to the programme was done through the LRAs referring clients to the programme and through publicising it to tenants through LHO newsletters etc. Both routes generated interest and potential trainees were interviewed as they would be if applying for a job.

A high proportion of trainees and those who moved into employment were previously economically inactive or unemployed (almost half for over a year) and some were on incapacity/sickness benefit. The programme was therefore successful in reaching people who had been out of employment for some time.

The most common jobs that trainees moved into were environmental (gardener, grounds worker), road sweeper, labourer and construction. Other jobs included car valet, trainee bus driver and whisky bond production worker. The evaluation reports that many of the trainees moved into full time employment as a direct result of the training they received as a community janitor and are earning above the minimum wage.

In terms of environmental outcomes, 48,849 tasks were completed between June 2006 and March 2008. The most common tasks were de-littering, sweeping paths, weeding, grass cutting, hedge trimming and uplifting bulky items. Improvements to the local environment were identified by all the stakeholder groups involved in the evaluation.



RESULTS

Findings from interviews with the trainees, the employers, the LHOs and tenant surveys and group interviews are presented below.

Trainees

Trainees were very positive about their involvement in the programme and saw it as a good way of getting back into work, particularly identifying the practical work experience to be a real benefit.

“It’s easier to apply for a job when you are in employment. This provides a good way back into employment for people that have been out of work for some time.”

“The fact that you are working helps you get a job. It helps you with your confidence.”

Trainees also felt that the job itself was worthwhile and appreciated by the local community which boosted their confidence and self-esteem.

“There’s a lot of pride in this job to be honest with you.”

“Feedback is that a lot of people appreciate what we’re doing; it’s good for the community. It helps to see people making an effort to get the place tidied up. I’m surprised at the amount of people that say ‘you’re doing a good job boys’.”

“I have really enjoyed coming to my work. It’s been hard but it’s also been good fun. This is a great bunch of guys and working with them has increased my confidence and made me want to get stuck into the work.”

They valued the support and encouragement received in job searching.

“They didn’t just say ‘here’s a job, you should be applying for it’. They would say ‘you can do this’ and help you fill out the application and whatever else you needed. I felt they cared rather than just ticking boxes in forms.”

“I am sure I wouldn’t have got an interview if it hadn’t been for the support I was given. They helped me prepare my application and clearly state my relevant experience. It really increased my confidence. Left on my own, I probably wouldn’t have even bothered applying.”



EEP Co-ordinators and supervisors

Co-ordinators and supervisors employed by the LRAs were very positive about the programme's achievements in terms of both the employment and environmental outcomes. Many supervisors highlighted the importance of the significant support given to the trainees in terms of moving into and staying in employment. Another important aspect identified was the good working relationship developed between the LHOs and LRAs, especially given the fact this contact and joint working was previously limited.

“This is very much seen as a joint project and the LHO has a strong sense of ownership over the project. They know we get work done for them that would otherwise not be done and we have been able to respond positively to any requests they have made.”

The 'job experience' and 'on the job training' were recognised by the co-ordinators, supervisors and trainees themselves as the most effective aspect of the programme in helping them move into employment as it helps to get them back into the work ethos.

“Many of these guys have been out of work for a long time. This helps them get back into the way of work. It teaches them what's expected in terms of getting up in the morning and making sure you are on time for work.”

The clear focus on and ongoing support to move into further employment such as weekly job searches, writing a CV, filling out application forms and mock interviews was recognised as one of the most positive features of the programme and helped it be seen as a *“stepping stone rather than an end in itself or something to keep the Job Centre happy”*.

LHOs

The response from the LHOs was very positive with consensus that the community janitors were a valuable asset. All of the LHOs felt that the programme helped them address many of the environmental problems identified by tenants and so helped improve their relationship with their tenants. This resulted in staff receiving positive feedback which in turn led to increased morale.

“Yes, definitely there has been an improvement. There isn't as much litter, the place looks tidier, there are no weeds and bushes have been cut back.”

“It looks better. It's cleaner. I would say there's maybe a wee bit more faith from the tenants.”

“They [LHO staff] are pleased with the scheme; it is a tool to get things done. It makes them feel better because for once they are getting a bit of praise from tenants.”

In some areas, the LHOs felt the improved appearance of the area encouraged some tenants to maintain their own environment such as their gardens. Many felt that the programme also made the area more attractive for new tenants and helped reduce the turnaround time for letting vacant properties. Many of the LHOs also mentioned the strengthening of their relationship with the LRAs as a positive outcome.

All of the LHOs wanted to see the programme continue, develop and expand.



RESULTS

Tenants

General awareness of the programme among tenants was low but this did vary from area to area. Overall it had increased slightly from 28% at the baseline (June 07) to 37% at the follow-up survey (March 08).

“I read about them in ‘The Key’ but I haven’t seen them here yet.”

“I saw the guys out cutting grass this morning. I heard of them first through the LHO newsletter but now I see them on a regular basis.”

Those tenants that were aware of the programme and had seen the community janitors working in their area were very positive about them, with over three-quarters rating their work as either very or fairly good, and over two-thirds agreeing their work had improved the area’s appearance.

“These guys have made an awful lot of difference to the area. And it helps people to take pride in how their area looks. It gives you more hope that things are getting better.”

“I think Sighthill has changed for the better and the improvements in the landscaping not only look better but it feels safer as well.”

Tenants were also aware of and very positive about the employability aspect of the programme.

“It’s lads that have been unemployed and have been taken on to the project. It’s a great idea – it gets them started and hopefully on into a permanent job. And it helps to tackle big problems in this area.”

Despite these positive findings, overall tenant concerns around some of the issues that the community janitors are trying to address such as graffiti, vandalism, litter, communal areas and open space remain. However, the areas covered by the community janitors programme have higher incidences of these types of tenant concerns. This indicates that the community janitors are targeting the appropriate areas but the problems are acknowledged as significant, and it will require a long-term partnership approach to tackle them.

Some residents expressed concern about the impact the programme could make given the scale of the task but suggested that spending a concentrated amount of time in an area could help and may also increase awareness.

“I was told that the Janitors cover Pollok, Mosspark, Govan and Parkview. Now, Mosspark alone is a massive place. I can’t see how a squad of five guys is going to make much difference by spending a day or two in each place. If it’s going to work, they need to have the squad here for a longer time and with the work properly supervised.”

“If they have to spread their time between here and three or four other areas, it would make sense to spend at least one or two weeks solid in an area and really make an impact. The tenants would also get more of a chance to see them around and be able to speak to them about the main problems that they should be tackling. That would make a real difference.”



RESULTS

There was some confusion over the role of the community janitors, particularly in relation to the mainstream services provided by the Council and others. It was suggested that this should be clarified and community janitors should wear distinctive uniforms to allow them to be identified and differentiated from Council workers.

Some residents felt that individual tenants should be made to take more responsibility for their own area.

“It’s the people who stay in the houses who should be told to clean up the mess they make. The LHO should enforce the tenancy agreement more vigorously and throw people out who don’t abide by the rules.”

“The Housing [the LHO] should be out telling tenants to look after their gardens properly. I just think the Housing are too soft on the trouble makers and it brings the whole area down for all of us.”



DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

An important part of the evaluation was to reflect on practice and respond to and report findings along the way. Through this the various stakeholders suggested ways to improve the programme. These included better links with employers – both public and private sector – in order to increase job opportunities; increasing training, possibly accredited, and in areas where there are known skills shortages; widening of the tasks undertaken (which may require more training and equipment) and increasing tenant awareness, including clarifying the role of the community janitors.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

The evaluation largely attributes the successful employability outcomes to the fact that the programme addresses the individual needs of the trainees, with a focus on moving into employment and making job searching part of the process – tailored to when each individual is ready, and not at the end of the programme. In terms of the environmental outcomes the key aspect highlighted was the ‘local, responsive and flexible model of service delivery’. Mainstream services tend to be carried out by different teams which can be difficult to deliver in an integrated and co-ordinated way. The community janitors carry out all the jobs - e.g. pick up litter, cut grass, and then sweep up etc., so the end result is an improvement to the ‘overall’ appearance of the area and not just one aspect of it.

The evaluation reflects outcomes to March 2008. Building on the success of the programme, funding was secured to continue the programme in 2008/09 and it was expanded to a further 10 LHOs in October 2008. Evaluation and assessment of trainee outcomes and partnership working is ongoing and contributing to the development of the programme model. Discussions with funding partners are ongoing with regard to 2009/10.

For further information on the funding model or operational issues please contact GHA’s Regeneration Team on 0800 479 7979.

REFERENCES

1. Hexagon Research and Consulting in collaboration with the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Glasgow (2008). *Environmental Employability Programme: Final Evaluation Report*. Hexagon Research and Consulting, MRC SPHSU, July 2008.
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This paper has been produced on behalf of the GoWell team.
The current GoWell team is as follows:

Sheila Beck (*Ecological Monitoring Team*)
Lyndal Bond (*Principal Investigator*)
Jennie Coyle (*Communications Manager*)
Fiona Crawford (*Ecological Monitoring Team*)
Elizabeth Fenwick (*Health Economist*)
Ade Kearns (*Principal Investigator*)
Louise Lawson (*Researcher*)

Rebecca Lenagh-Snow (*Administrator*)
Phil Mason (*Researcher*)
Chloe McAdam (*Researcher*)
Elena Sautkina (*Researcher*)
Carol Tannahill (*Principal Investigator*)
Hilary Thomson (*Neighbourhood Audits*)
David Walsh (*Ecological Monitoring Team*)

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CONTACT DETAILS

For further information, please contact:

*Dr Lyndal Bond,
Associate Director,
MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit,
4 Lilybank Gardens,
Glasgow, G12 8RZ.*

Email: lyndal@sphsu.mrc.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)141 357 7527

Web: www.gowellonline.com