

**Recycling Lives has been formed to offer opportunities to some of the most disadvantaged and excluded members of society, those experiencing chronic worklessness and/or homelessness.**

### **Worklessness**

While employment rates in the UK have been on an upward trend since 1992, they have not been evenly distributed among the population. There are individuals who are long-term unemployed, despite living in a period of relatively high employment, and a rising number of individuals who are economically inactive and claiming inactive benefits. Geographical pockets of worklessness exist within relatively buoyant labour markets.

Worklessness is a term becoming more widely used when referring to the problem of long term unemployment and dependency on Government benefits. It is often used to differentiate with the term 'unemployment', which describes a person who "may not have a job this week" and whose jobless position would be considered temporary. Worklessness has a very different meaning: it refers to a phenomenon of total dependency on Government benefits and a self-belief of being "unemployable". Further, it quite frequently refers to those who have been disadvantaged, excluded, or subjected to a generation or more of family unemployment, so adopting the attitude of mind of low expectation: 'I never expect to have a job so why bother trying'.

Worklessness is defined as detachment from the formal labour market in particular areas, and among particular groups. Workless individuals include individuals who are unemployed and claiming unemployment benefits, individuals who are economically inactive and eligible for inactive benefits (who may or may not be claiming them), and individuals who are working exclusively in the informal economy (who may or may not be also claiming benefits).

There are a range of groups that are disadvantaged in the labour market and that have a higher risk of being workless and living in deprived areas. These include: lone parents, minority ethnic groups, disabled people, carers, older workers, workers in the informal economy, offenders and ex-offenders. Not all individuals within these groups are workless, but being a member of these groups can increase the risk of being workless. Worklessness can be characterised by multiple disadvantage, where people face more than one barrier to participating in the labour market. While some disadvantaged people should not have their chances of working written off as impossible, for others it may be counter-productive to be pushed toward job-seeking before they are ready.

Worklessness is regarded by many as one of the most important issues to be addressed as we approach the end of the first decade of the millennia in the UK. In addition to being one of the biggest drains on a Government purse it is perceived as a viral condition that promotes negativity and despondency, eroding the very fabric of a local community.

### **Homelessness**

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 a statutory requirement was placed upon Local Authorities to work with Central Government to devise effective long term strategies. After assessment in 2003 of local need, most Local Authorities in response put new Strategic Plans and Policies in place.

For the majority of people the term “homeless” is used to describe the person sleeping in a cardboard box on a city high street. However the vast majority are families or single people living in temporary and unsuitable accommodation either needing to rebuild relationships, flee violent domestic situations, recover from drug or alcohol abuse, are young people thrown out of the family home, or are people who have left an institutionalised life and seeking employment. A particularly vulnerable section of the community are those leaving prison, ex service personnel, hospitals, psychiatric placements, young people leaving care, all vulnerable to social exclusion and therefore homelessness.

The need is for a holistic approach, dealing with the causes of homelessness as much as homelessness itself. Homeless people, as well as being provided with temporary accommodation and advice on how to secure a more permanent home, should be encouraged into courses, apprenticeships and jobs. Investment in social enterprises is encouraged as a part of this overall strategy.

Homelessness in England rose by 18.4% over four years to March 2004. In the North-West region this figure was 42.8%, and in Lancashire the rate was even higher, at 47.3%. Preston’s response to the 2002 statutory review requirement is its document “Homeless Strategy 2003-2006, Going Forward”. Following extensive consultation the City set its strategy in a collaborative manner with a wide range of stakeholders including housing associations, statutory and voluntary agencies and Voluntary Sector colleagues. The report says “We view the voluntary sector as a key component in both advice giving and temporary accommodation provision and the Strategy draws heavily on their insight”. It also seeks to “Explore opportunities for additional multi-agency working;” and, “Encourage innovative provision for particular niche groups e.g. Emmaus Community Model which seeks to provide accommodation within a working (and financially self supporting) environment.”

The report predicted an increase in the future level of homelessness enquiries over the period 2003-2005 from 599 in 1998-1999, through 619 in 2002-2003, to 800+ in 2004-2005. In fact the number in 2004-2005 reached 1,056.

### **In Response: what Recycling Lives offers..**

**Recycling Lives will provide work and training opportunities to those seeking a new start, and comfortable en-suite residential accommodation for up to 29 of those suffering from homelessness. The residents:**

- Are admitted, assessed and allocated an independent mentor, who draws up a plan with a clear exit strategy
- Initially undertake housework within the community
- Undertake training, either desk-based or work-based
- Then undertake work in either the recycling workshop or fulfilling external contracts
- Are given opportunity to work within the 3rd floor Social Enterprises/SMEs to develop new skills
- Will receive a personal allowance while the charity meets all of their accommodation, food living and training costs

When, in the opinion of external and independent agencies and assessors, residents are considered ready for independent living and accommodation and full-time employment, their personalised exit strategy will be implemented. We hope that many will move on into independent living while maintaining their employment with Recycling Lives.

Residents will participate fully in the planning and decision-making processes for the smooth operation of the centre, taking responsibility and developing cognitive skills. Opportunities for enhanced management and administration skills will be available to those willing and showing aptitude.

Residents will be given opportunities to attract new skills and learning, which will then be applied in the execution of work. ICT training will be provided within this package. Work will be either in the Recycling Lives workshop/warehouse, offices, retail outlet or undertaking outreach work fulfilling off-site contractual obligations, or in one of the incubator units. Contracts will be sought with Preston City Council, Lancashire County Council, Housing Associations and others for litter-collection from highways, footpaths and cycle-ways, street cleaning, grounds maintenance and environmental projects, graffiti removal and other similar work. Recyclable material will be transported back to the Recycling Lives workshop.

The Third floor will provide flexible accommodation for between 15 and 20 social enterprise/micro-business enterprise units. In due course tenancy of the incubator units will rotate as the starter businesses grow. Potentially residents will be able to learn new skills and ultimately may take a full-time position in one of the social enterprise incubator units, or even develop their own social enterprise.

There will be routine and regular interface with each of the major Registered Social Landlords in the area and the local authorities in order to ensure the smoothest transition from residence in Recycling Lives.

Thus rotation will occur in both the first and second floor residential accommodation, and in the third floor social enterprises, constantly creating new opportunities for new residents to take occupation. It is not possible to say how long residents will remain reliant upon Recycling Lives for their accommodation and employment needs, and therefore how many people pass through the hands of Recycling Lives, since each individual case will be different. Experience suggests that the average “stay” in one of the residential units will be between 6 months and 12 months.

Recycling Lives will give Equal Opportunity to all including unemployed persons, ex-offenders and particularly those leaving prison, and those involved with the probationary service. Dual or Multiple Diagnosis will be co-ordinated as appropriate with clients of Drug Action Teams, Drug and Alcohol Action Teams, Alcohol and Substance Abuse Agencies, Social Services, Supporting People, Health Agencies and the Primary Care Trusts, Youth Offending Teams, Young Persons Centre, and a variety of Voluntary and Community Sector agencies. Co-ordination with Government’s Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative will seek to maximise funding and other initiatives.