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# Focus Ireland

Evaluation of the Spokes Programme  
Executive Summary

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Everyone has a right to a place they can call home.





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Author: TSA Consultancy

Design: Colm Keller

Focus Ireland,  
9-12 High Street,  
Dublin 8  
Tel: 01 881 5900  
Fax: 01 881 5950  
Email: [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)  
Web: [www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie)

A copy of the full 'Evaluation of the Spokes Programme' report is available in electronic format by contacting Focus Ireland.

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# Acknowledgements

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The researchers would like to acknowledge the following:

\_ Firstly, and most importantly, we would like to thank the eleven customers in Spokes who participated in this evaluation. They freely gave of their time and shared their experiences with us. Their commitment to the evaluation and their openness during the interviews proved critical to its completion.

\_ We would also like to thank the staff at Spokes and Focus Ireland who worked with us on the research. We were facilitated and supported at all times by the staff in Spokes.

\_ All of those interviewed who work in homeless, education and training services, both statutory and voluntary organisations, who gave their time to be interviewed and who were so frank and constructive in their comments.

\_ Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support of Sinead McGinley, Research Officer, Focus Ireland, for her support and advice throughout the evaluation.

**Tanya Lalor and Gerard Doyle, TSA Consultancy**



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TSA Consultancy is Ireland's leading third sector advisory, research and consultancy service. TSA Consultancy provides strategic advice and research to the agencies whose role is to develop and build the third sector in Ireland. TSA Consultancy is also committed to working with locally based community projects at every stage, from idea to start up and development. TSA's team members come from a background of first-hand knowledge of communities working to create social enterprise and tackle disadvantage.

Tanya Lalor, TSA Consultant, has over 12 years experience working with third sector organisations that respond to social exclusion and disadvantage. Her experience includes project development, social research, business planning, monitoring and evaluation, and social auditing. Prior to working in TSA, Tanya worked in the Social Economy Unit in Tallaght, the first support unit for social enterprise in Ireland. Most recently, she has completed homeless needs analyses and strategies for Limerick City, Ballyfermot, Finglas and Ballymun.

Gerard Doyle, TSA Consultant, has over 16 years experience working in community development in a wide range of settings. Gerard has an in-depth knowledge of issues pertaining to social inclusion, and has experience in social research, including community consultations, project development, monitoring and evaluation. His experience of housing includes working as a full time volunteer worker with the Dublin Simon Community and with a voluntary housing association. Gerard has a particular interest in the potential the social economy can play in providing disadvantaged communities and communities of interest with a mechanism to address unemployment, gain assets for community use and stimulate economic activity.

The Spokes programme is an education, training and employment service provided by Focus Ireland since 2002 to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The aim of Spokes is to assist people to move on from homelessness by providing an alternative way of learning, through education and employment that is tailored to individuals needs. The number of people Spokes has worked with has consistently increased since the establishment of the programme – with 357 customers accessing the service in 2008 (this represents a 108% growth in the number of service users in just one year, i.e. 2007-2008).

Spokes provides support to people with low levels of educational attainment and typically negative experiences of formal education who, because of their chaotic lifestyle and housing issues, find it difficult to access mainstream labour market supports, even those directed at the long-term unemployed. The service recognises that training, education and employment can play a crucial role in tackling homelessness and ending social exclusion, and that for those most marginalised flexible responses which respond to complex needs are required.

TSA Consultancy was commissioned by Focus Ireland in 2009 to undertake an evaluation of Spokes, to consider how the programme is meeting its objectives and to assess the effectiveness of its model of service delivery. The evaluation of the Spokes programme found that the service provides a safe and secure environment for people who may be apprehensive about returning to education. The approach is informal and flexible, and succeeds in keeping the engagement of service users at different stages of personal education and training progression, and responding to their particular needs that may arise from homelessness. Spokes provides a range of supports from informal drop-in arrangements to FETAC Level 3 certification. A particular strength of Spokes is its capacity to underpin more formal FETAC course with life-skills and person development courses that break-down social isolation. While the evaluation recognises the strength of the informal development of Holistic Individual Education Plans in Spokes, it recommends greater reliance on written plans to set milestones and review progress.

Spokes' level of one-to-one support and the programme's flexibility to accommodate service users who have dropped out (due to changes in housing arrangements, health issues, court cases etc.) to re-enter courses are cited as unique elements in its success. Customers reported very positive experiences

and outcomes from the programme, but the evaluation found that there is a need for more effective capturing and tracking of progression beyond the programme to substantiate the positive impacts/outcomes of the service. In order for services like Spokes to provide the most effective progression route out of homelessness into training, education and employment, stronger collaborations with next stage agencies such as FAS or the VEC are required.

The success of Spokes has gone beyond its initial target group of young people. The evaluation report recommends a re-focusing on young people, a more effective recording of progression, and an exploration of the role that the social economy can play in providing employment to people who are experiencing homelessness.

There is clear evidence from customers and referring organisations consulted in the evaluation that Spokes has had a significant impact on service users' quality of life. One referral agency stated:

*"I've seen Spokes turn around the lives of customers"*

The homeless sector is experiencing a reconfiguration of services based on a 'housing first' model of service delivery, and this will have implications for training and education provision to those experiencing homelessness. There is an opportunity for Focus Ireland's new training, education and employment programme PETE (Preparing for Education, Training and Employment) to lead the process of greater collaboration between service providers in the community / voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as local development organisations and the Local Employment Services.

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## Introduction

The Spokes programme is an education, employment and training support programme for people over the age of 16 years, who are out of home, have had a history of homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness.

It was established in February 2002 by Focus Ireland in recognition of the critical role that access to education, training and employment can play in tackling homelessness. Young people in these circumstances typically have low levels of educational attainment, negative experiences of formal education and chaotic lifestyles that make it difficult for them to engage with mainstream labour market supports, even those targeted at the long-term unemployed.

It is located adjacent to Focus Ireland's supported housing project in George's Hill, Dublin 7.

The services that Spokes offers to its customers<sup>1</sup> include individual learning plans, FETAC accredited modules, literacy/numeracy tuition, adult education, social outings, arts/crafts courses, advice and information on employment, and CV and interview preparation.

This evaluation was commissioned by Focus Ireland in order to assess the effectiveness of the Spokes programme in achieving its stated aims and objectives, and to prepare recommendations to inform this type of intervention.

The evaluation was undertaken by TSA Consultancy, specialists in third sector project development, evaluation and social research.

## Objectives of Spokes

The aim of Spokes is to assist people to move on from homelessness, by providing an alternative way of learning, through education and employment that is tailored to individuals' needs.

It achieves its aim by providing a wide and varied education programme and it provides intensive support for customers to enable them to achieve their goals.

The stated objectives of Spokes are:

\_To develop an individual plan, in co-operation with the customer, based on an assessment of their skills, expectations and level of their skills, expectations and level of stability with regular review of their plan.

\_To provide education and training options, which will broaden the customer's experiences in an enjoyable manner.

\_To allow each customer to work at their own pace and in a style that suits them.

\_To develop the customer's communication skills.

\_To assess literacy and numeracy skills and provide individual and group compensatory education programmes.

\_To provide an introduction to the world of work, including IT skills, work experience, work practice and expectations.

\_To provide information and resource materials on education and training and work opportunities.

\_To facilitate customers to gain experience of and entry to training and work by encouraging regular participation and commitment.

\_To develop relationships with training and education institutes and employers to develop systems of experience and placement.

\_To advocate on the customer's behalf and provide support through placements, to trainers, employers and the individual.

\_To assist in the initial funding of the transition to employment on an individual needs basis.

\_To liaise with key workers in ensuring the contact's welfare and accommodation needs are met as needs are identified.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'customers' is used by Focus Ireland to describe individual clients that use the organisation's services.



### Services offered by Spokes

Services offered to customers include:

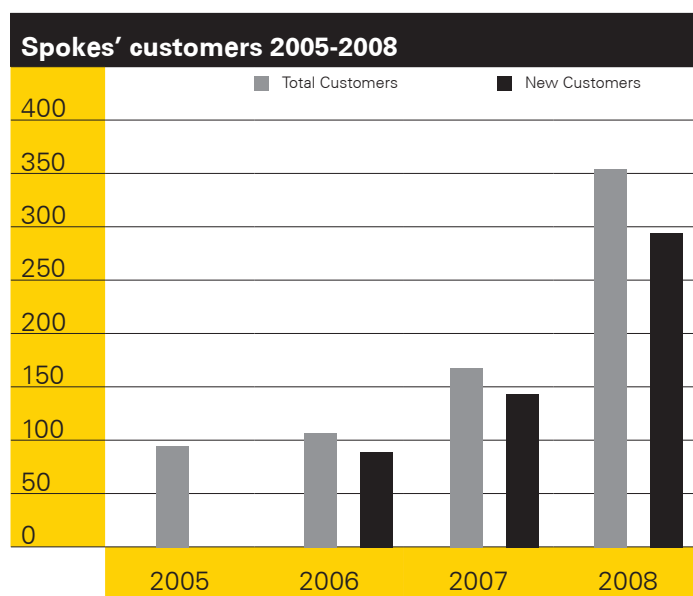
- \_ A drop-in service and computer use for sourcing information on employment, education and training opportunities.
- \_ Development of individual education and employment plans.
- \_ Regular users of Spokes are assigned a project worker who helps them to meet their educational, training or employment goals through the development of an individual plan.
- \_ One to one support with basic literacy and maths.
- \_ One to one support with FETAC modules.
- \_ FETAC (Level 3) accredited courses including Parenting, Health Related Fitness, Preparation for Work, Computers, Gardening, Self-advocacy, Arts & Design, Media studies, Graphic communication, Maths, Drama, and Photography.
- \_ Courses and activities that focus on the customers' life skills and social development, including health and other workshops, and summer projects.
- \_ Career advice and support, which includes referrals to external training courses, employment training, and support in developing CVs and completing college applications.

### Quantification of Spokes interventions and profile of customers

#### Number of Spokes customers

Spokes has recorded a steady increase in the number of individuals accessing it since 2005 (from which year data records are available), when 91 individuals accessed the project. In particular, after Spokes moved to its current premises in George's Hill in 2007, the service more than doubled its numbers of customers.

Data for 2008 reports that in that year, Spokes worked with 357 individuals, of which 108 were new customers. This is almost a four-fold increase on numbers since 2005. This information is presented in the graph below.



Each time the service interacts with a customer – whether it is a training session or providing advice – it is recorded as an intervention. A total of 4,475 interventions were recorded by Spokes for 2008. The majority of these (62%) were for 'drop-in', or unplanned, contacts (2,787 interventions), and 38% were for planned contacts<sup>2</sup> (1,688 interventions).

| Spokes Interventions 2008 |        |            |
|---------------------------|--------|------------|
|                           | Number | % of total |
| Planned contact           | 1,688  | 38%        |
| Unplanned contact         | 2,787  | 62%        |
| Total Interventions       | 4,475  |            |

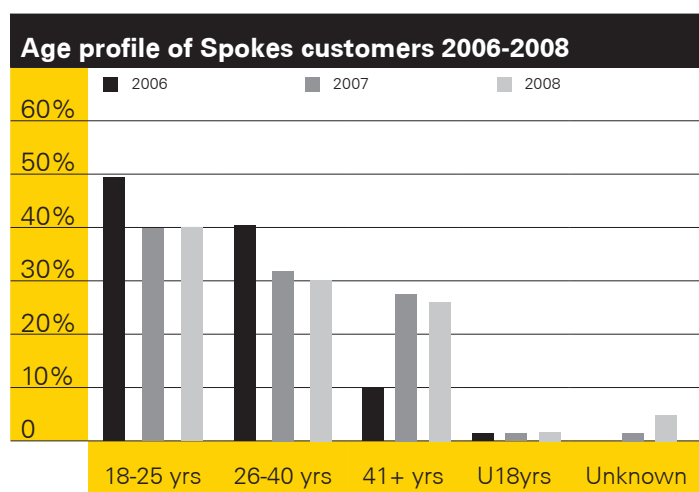
<sup>2</sup> Planned contacts correspond to structured interventions, such as FETAC course work, literacy tuition and individual mentoring sessions, while unplanned contacts correspond to drop-in interventions.

Most of the planned interventions comprised FETAC accredited modules (1,544 interventions), the remainder were interventions such as literacy tuition and individual mentoring sessions.

## Profile of users

### Age profile

Data drawn from Focus Ireland's customer database reports that the most frequently arising age category that Spokes works with is the 18-25 year age group (39% of individual customers).



### Gender

On average, male customers outnumber females by over two to one (and in 2008 71% of its customers were male). This reflects the gender profile of the homeless population in Dublin, as established in 'Counted In 2008'.

The dominant household type amongst customers is 'single', accounting for 85% of all customers in 2008.

### Education attainment

The education attainment of BTEI participants (105) in 2008 is presented in the table below (this represents only a sample of all Spokes customers). In 2008, 42% of this group attained primary level education only, with a further 34% having attained lower second level (or FETAC level 3) education only. This means that over three quarters of

the group (76%) had an educational attainment of lower second level or less.

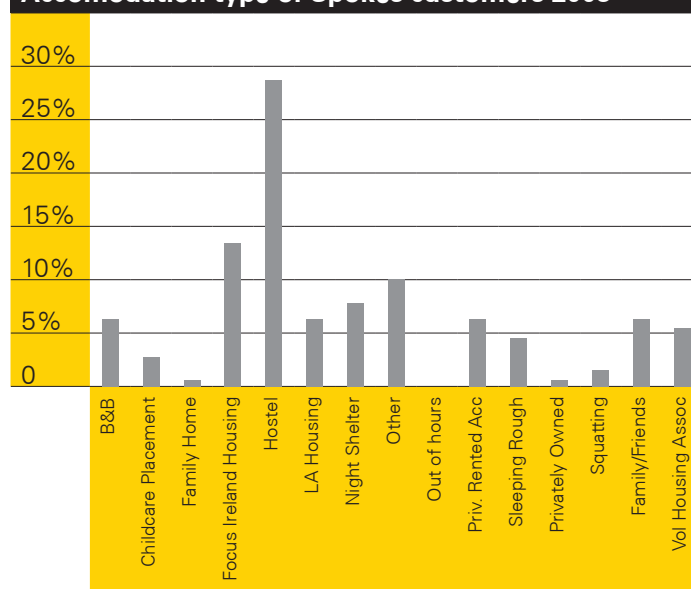
### Education attainment BTEI participants 2008

|                                    | No. | % of total |
|------------------------------------|-----|------------|
| Primary education only             | 44  | 42%        |
| Lower second level/FETAC level 3   | 34  | 34%        |
| Upper second level/FETAC level 4/5 | 22  | 19%        |
| FETAC level 6 or above             | 5   | 5%         |

### Accommodation

In 2008, hostel accommodation accounted for the most frequent type of accommodation accessed by Spokes customers, followed by Focus Ireland housing. The accommodation of customers is presented in the graph below.

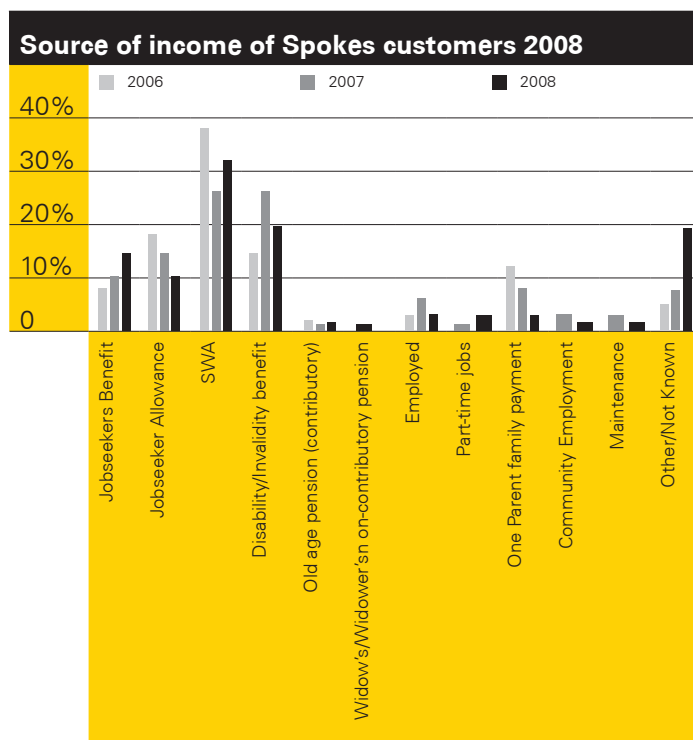
### Accommodation type of Spokes customers 2008



The data would suggest that those in Bed and Breakfast accommodation comprise a relatively low proportion of the Spokes customer base (6%) while accounting for a relatively high proportion of the homeless population in Dublin, as outlined in *'Counted In 2008'* (at 33%).

### Source of income

Some of the most frequent sources of income for Spokes customers are illustrated in the figure below.



The single most frequent source of income of customers was Supplementary Welfare Allowance (31% in 2008), followed by disability allowance/ benefit and invalidity benefit (19% in 2008). It should be noted that there was a high frequency of 'other/not known' sources of income identified.

In 2008, 30.5% of Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) participants<sup>3</sup> were in receipt of disability/ illness payments and an additional 29% were unemployed for more than three years.

<sup>3</sup> 105 customers of Spokes participated in the BTEI.

## Evaluation methodology

### Planning and developing an evaluation framework

An initial briefing and planning meeting took place between Focus Ireland, Spokes staff, and the evaluators. Following this meeting, an evaluation framework was devised. This set out indicators for each of the evaluation objectives, described the means of gathering evidence (including documentary research and consultations), and drafted interview schedules to be used throughout the evaluation.

During the planning phase for the evaluation, a list of relevant individuals and organisations to be consulted was drawn up. These included staff and management within Focus Ireland and external organisations.

The research phase of the evaluation commenced following sign-off of the evaluation framework.

### Documentary research

Quantitative data used in this report was generated through an analysis of Focus Ireland and Spokes data: the primary source of quantitative data was customer database records and project reports.

Documentary research also included project reviews, annual reports, strategic plans, and policies relating to employment, education and homelessness.<sup>4</sup> Data and case studies from the UK on good practice education, training and employment service provision targeting those homeless were also reviewed. These were drawn from the consultants' prior experience of the sector and from research undertaken by FEANTSA.<sup>5</sup>

### Consultations

The primary research method was qualitative, and consultations comprising semi-structured interviews were undertaken with customers of Spokes, staff and management of Spokes and Focus Ireland, and with external organisations that have a relationship with the service, or have a remit in the area. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Most were face to face interviews, but a small number of telephone interviews were undertaken. All interviews followed

<sup>4</sup> Including the Spokes induction pack; Spokes model of service delivery, 'The Way Home' National Homeless Strategy, 'The Key to the Door', Homeless Agency strategy, Focus Ireland's Strategic Plan, Homeless Agency's 'Evaluation of homeless services'.

<sup>5</sup> The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless.

the format of the interview schedules agreed during the evaluation planning stage.

#### Spokes' customers

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a sample of Spokes' customers. A total of 11 interviews took place with customers of Spokes, and all were held in George's Hill in the first quarter of 2009. The evaluators also gathered profile data of those interviewed, and a profile of those consulted was generated to compare with that of all Spokes' customers. It was found that both populations were similar (this profile and comparison is included in the appendices of the main report).

#### Focus Ireland staff

10 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with staff and management of Spokes and Focus Ireland, and these followed the format of interview schedules developed in the evaluation framework.

In addition, one service manager in Focus Ireland circulated evaluation questions internally within the service's staff team. These were discussed at a staff meeting, the feedback collated, and passed on to the evaluation team.

#### External consultations

Nine semi-structured interviews were undertaken with training and education organisations and with those organisations that have referral relationships with Spokes. These included FÁS, CDVEC (including the 'Foundations' Programme), Business in the Community's 'Ready for Work' Programme, and Cedar House.

The Homeless Agency and the Department of Social and Family Affairs were also consulted.

### **Summary of evaluation findings – Spokes model of delivery**

Spokes' model of service delivery prioritises a client-centred approach, and adopts a pathways approach, as follows:

#### \_ Referrals

#### \_ Assessment

#### \_ Drop-in

#### \_ Education

#### \_ Training and employment

#### \_ Referrals and onward progression

The evaluation considered how Spokes is achieving its objectives as well as the effectiveness of this model of delivery. The findings of the evaluation are summarised under each of these headings.

#### **Referrals**

Data in respect of referrals into Spokes for 2008 is available for 44% of new customers. These referrals came from Focus Ireland services (63% of all referrals), other voluntary homeless services (13.5%), self-referrals (6%), and emergency accommodation providers (5%).

The evaluation consulted referral organisations about their views of Spokes, how it meets the needs of their customers, and whether they would recommend any changes to the service. They reported very positive views of the impact that Spokes has had, with one commenting that:

*"I've seen Spokes turn around the lives of customers"*

Amongst the strengths of Spokes identified by services that refer to Spokes were:

- \_ The secure and safe environment that it provides for people who may be apprehensive about returning to education. This was complemented by the encouragement and support offered by staff members, which was a consistent theme arising in all consultations.
- \_ The informal and flexible, client-centred approach adopted by Spokes. The point was made that it could pitch courses at an appropriate level, based on the current requirements and learning needs of the

customer, and this was a factor in keeping customers engaged.

\_Spokes' understanding of homelessness makes it well placed to respond to the needs of customers.

\_Spokes is a good starting point for those returning to education, particularly because of its emphasis on confidence-building actions.

Training, education and employment placement providers do not make significant referrals to Spokes. This is consistent with the view that Spokes acts as an initial step in training and education. It could also reflect a view that there is some overlap between Spokes and other training and education services.

### Assessment

The evaluation found that formal and written 'holistic individual education plans'<sup>6</sup> are not widely undertaken, primarily owing to staff shortages, lack of space<sup>7</sup> and to a lesser extent, factors such as customers' reluctance to engage in a formal assessment and planning process, and customers not keeping appointments. In spite of this, staff report the informal assessment and planning process to be successful, given the relaxed manner in which they are undertaken which is believed to facilitate open and honest discussion with customers.

From the customers' perspective, the assessment process provides clarity and constitutes an effective planning process.

*"To see it written down and reflect on it is good – you may not realise what you have been doing until you see it back."*

For the project as a whole, not having written plans could undermine its ability to set milestones with customers and to review their progress. It also undermines Spokes' ability to quantify and document its impact on customers with funders and external bodies.

### Drop-in

'Drop-in' services include use of computers and the

internet, preparation for driving tests and one-to-one supports from staff. Spokes is the only service that provides drop-in of this kind in Dublin, and it is heavily subscribed by customers: in 2008, it accounted for 2,787 of all contacts with customers (62% of all interventions for that year). Drop-in services are offered on a five-day per week basis.

Drop-in is used as a way of engaging with customers, many of whom do not have the confidence to take part in structured learning activities when they first come in contact with the service. Customers spoke about the impact of this approach.

*"I had no confidence when I first came here...that is down to Spokes. I would not be even thinking about going to college if I didn't come here."*

In the view of staff and referring organisations, the drop-in aspect of the service facilitates return to training and education amongst those who have had negative experiences of formal education, and low educational attainment, all of which are important in building confidence.

*"Customers in Spokes are treated with acceptance, support, respect. These three things are important in building...confidence."*

According to customers consulted, the drop-in aspect of the service is very important. It facilitates social interaction, and peer support in addition to staff support and is very important in building confidence.

*"We all work at our own pace and we are all at different levels but we all help each other out"*

The one-to-one support is also an important factor in building confidence.

*"It was hard for me as I was always withdrawn...the one-to-one was very helpful"*

<sup>6</sup> According to project reports, a Holistic Education Plan process involves identifying a number of self-defined goals by the customer, as well as the steps necessary to achieve these goals.

<sup>7</sup> Space is required in order to ensure that an assessment can be undertaken on a confidential basis.

Drop-in services continue to be accessed by customers who have accessed mainstream training and education services. In these instances, they usually comprise personal support from staff and assistance with completing assignments as well as the use of computers.

### Education

Education comprises accredited and non-accredited education.

Non-accredited education includes life and personal skills development courses such as arts, music, relaxation, outdoor pursuits, health workshops, summer projects, and drop-in computer classes. These activities are not funded from mainstream sources, and have been supported by corporate sponsorship and Focus Ireland's fundraising activities.

These are regarded as very important interventions given the low educational attainment of Spokes' customers and negative experiences of school. They complement Spokes' emphasis on a gradual introduction to learning, and they enable customers to consider education from a new perspective. In this way, the non-accredited education acts as a route to formal and accredited education. According to one customer;

*"I have done stuff that I would never have thought of...I never thought that I would learn"*

Customers also spoke of how courses had been developed arising from their feedback and comments.

This introduction to a return to learning is accompanied by an ethos within the project that places a premium on a welcoming and unthreatening environment. A consistent theme arising in the evaluation – among customers and service providers alike – was the staff approach which prioritises support and encouragement of the customer.

*"Spokes...provides supports around where the customer is "at".*

Customers reported being nervous and apprehensive when first planning to engage with Spokes and believe

that the emotional and one-to-one support that they received was a very important aspect of the service.

Non-accredited education also facilitated peer-support and social interaction, which was also highly valued by customers, both in terms of building confidence and enabling education progression (particularly around computer use).

Service providers and referral organisations also saw the value of non-accredited education. Recommendations for continued development included:

\_An outreach service that could provide mentor support particularly for young men.

\_Anger management, parenting skills, conflict resolution are very relevant to the lives of those homeless (Spokes has developed courses in these areas).

Accredited education incorporates FETAC accredited modules, and funding for tutors to deliver these modules is provided by the Department of Education and Science (administered by the City of Dublin VEC), under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). In 2008, 105 people participated in BTEI (FETAC accredited) courses. Most of these were male (66%), and 76% of participants had an educational attainment of lower second level (with 42% having an educational attainment of primary level or less). Other characteristics of this group include being distanced from the labour market through disability or illness (30.5%) or long term unemployment (29% of participants have been unemployed for over three years).

In 2008, 101 modules were accredited and certificates were presented to 30 people.

The recognition of participants' success at accreditation ceremonies was considered to be very important by staff in Focus and referring organisations.

*"For some...the awards may be the only recognition of achievement...they are extremely important".*

An important aspect of the FETAC accredited courses is that customers' folders are submitted twice a year, which

enables those customers who have dropped out of the programme to re-submit. Unique to Spokes is the level of one-to-one support that customers receive when they return to re-submit after having dropped out. Spokes is designed around the likelihood of drop-out for many of its customers. Reasons for drop-out can include loss of accommodation, prison, and health issues. Customers who anticipated leaving the service for reasons outside of their control were conscious that they would return at a later stage and pick up where they left off.

*"I have a court case coming up and I think that I will get sent to prison but I will be able to come back and finish what I am doing".*

Organisations such as the CDVEC believe that a key strength of Spokes is its ability to undertake developmental work with customers, which complements the structured, class-based work. Moreover, Spokes' integration with other Focus Ireland services makes it well placed to bring the needs of customers to key workers and to address these needs.

#### **Training and employment information and advice**

Training and employment supports are provided by project staff in Spokes, and supports include job mentoring (accounting for 253 interventions in 2008) for customers.

It also includes other supports such as advice and information (515 interventions in 2008), personal programme supports such as writing letters and applications (100), assistance with job seeking (15), advocacy (46), accompaniment to appointments (21), planned customer contact (108) and phone contact with customers (180). Unplanned and drop-in support where advice is offered is also included under this heading and comprised 2,283 interventions in 2008.

Requests for support usually relate to training rather than employment. Customers that were interviewed prioritised training and education over employment, and had little expectations for accessing employment, particularly in light of the current economic climate. Other barriers to employment identified by customers were: not having stable accommodation, health related issues (including mental health issues), and age (perceptions of being too

old).

Staff feel that the data collection systems do not fully capture the nature of training and employment advice interventions. They also feel that this area of work is vulnerable to staff shortages, as it is primarily undertaken on a one-to-one basis, and loss of staff means that there is limited time for this type of support.

This is one area where greater collaboration between training and employment providers/ support organisations (for example, the Local Employment Services) could maximise scarce resources.

#### **Referrals and onward progression**

Data available for 2008 reports that over two-thirds of referrals were made to education, training and employment providers (67%), with the remainder being made to other supports (health, addiction, mental health supports, legal supports, etc.). Most of the onward referrals were made to education and training organisations, reflecting the view that customers prioritised education and training activities over employment, or that they experienced barriers around accessing employment.

Staff note that onward progression of customers can be hard to capture, as once a customer moves on from Spokes their progression and outcomes may not be possible to capture. Moreover, the absence of a formal and written holistic education planning process makes it difficult to demonstrate and capture progression within the service. The evaluation process also indicated limited collaboration between training, education and employment support programmes.

Nearly half of those consulted were attending Spokes at the same time as other training, education and employment guidance services (to which they had been referred by Spokes). These included community-based training and education programmes (e.g. CDVEC's Foundations and Dublin 8 services); pre-university access courses (one customer had already been accepted to Trinity College) and the 'Ready for Work' programme.

These customers were accessing formal (e.g. specific courses) or informal supports (drop-in, particularly around



using computers and completing assignments) in Spokes while attending other courses. In one case, staff liaised with the third level institution that a customer was attending when she had difficulties there. One customer made the point that support around attending mainstream, third level institutions is important for people who have experienced homelessness, as they could be older and isolated from their classmates.

*"Some of the lads are in their twenties and not really mature...they can be easily bullied. They would just be seen as a target if they are heading back to College... amongst young people who have just left school and they would sit in the corner."*

## Additional evaluation findings

### Summary of strengths

The strengths and unique features of Spokes identified by customers and service providers alike include:

- \_ Its flexibility of service delivery and capacity to support customers that may be at different stages of their personal progression as regards education and training. This enables the project to work with all presenting customers at their own pace, and at earlier stages of 'readiness' than other training and education providers.
- \_ Its expertise in capacity building, life-skills and confidence building measures amongst customers, through non-accredited and informal training. The commitment and expertise of staff members was regarded as a major contributory factor to these outcomes.
- \_ Its continued mentor support for customers, who despite having progressed onwards to other education programmes may require additional supports, is an important aspect of Spokes.
- \_ The social interaction between customers through social programmes and outings, and the drop-in service which facilitates peer support and which tackles isolation amongst those with limited social networks.
- \_ The approach of staff members and their understanding

of the issues around homelessness affecting customers was particularly emphasised by referring organisations as a key factor in the success of Spokes.

- \_ The location of Spokes within Focus Ireland and its support structure enables it to access and deliver holistic and broader supports (for example, housing, key working, etc.).
- \_ The opportunity to provide training and education outside of the day-to-day living environment was regarded as important for customers.
- \_ There are good opportunities for customer participation in all aspects of the programme, including content of programmes and activities. Customers reported very good opportunities for engagement, feedback and consultation, and reported a strong sense of ownership over the programme.
- \_ There is clear evidence from customers consulted, and from the experience of referring organisations, that Spokes has had significant impact on their quality of life.

### Summary of issues

- \_ It is acknowledged by Focus Ireland staff and other education and training providers that while flexible supports are favourable, there is a risk that they could potentially undermine a focus on progression, and that a balance has to be struck between soft, individualised supports and outcomes.
- \_ While supports are provided in a flexible manner, some service providers felt that this could potentially undermine a focus on progression.
- \_ The inability of staff to undertake written assessments of customers principally arising as a result of lack of space in the George's Hill premises and staff time can undermine the capturing of data on outcomes and progression of customers. The reliance on informal and verbal assessments can undermine the ability to establish clear milestones that can be reviewed.
- \_ There was some perceived overlap between services offered by Spokes and other providers, such as CDVEC Foundations and Local Employment Services. This was



articulated by staff of Focus Ireland, the VEC and other service providers consulted.

\_Spokes has evolved into a service which engages with people who might not ordinarily engage with training and education programmes, and focuses on progression towards education, training and ultimately employment opportunities. In terms of the programme's responsiveness to the needs of customers, the point was also made however that the role of Spokes in meeting the needs for structured activities to an individual's day was not the primary role of the service.

\_Spokes' location within the overall management structure of Focus Ireland has changed since it was established. As a result, its development has not taken place within a single department, and there is a view that it has no 'home' within the organisation, and that it would benefit from consistency of place within the organisation. This observation was made by several staff members within Focus Ireland as well as Spokes. It was also noted that its target group has shifted from primarily young people, to a much broader group. It was felt by some in Focus Ireland that there was a need to clarify its target group, rather than become a 'catch all' service.

### **The external environment**

The main report presents a number of external issues that are likely to have a bearing on the future development of Spokes. These are summarised below.

There will be a reconfiguration of homeless services in the medium - to long-term based on a 'housing first' model of service delivery, which will have implications for training and education provision to those experiencing homelessness.

The Homeless Agency is undertaking a mapping exercise of training, education and employment services for those experiencing homelessness. This is likely to have an impact on how some services are delivered, as well as lead to new linkages between services.

The development of the Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE) programme within Focus Ireland and its successful application to the Dormant Accounts Fund is timely in the context of these changes.

The opportunities for Focus Ireland, Spokes and the PETE programme are outlined in the report.

The report presents a number of case studies of interventions which focus on collaboration across services for integrated service delivery and employability. The findings of the evaluation point to the lack of labour market opportunities viewed by those consulted and the limited opportunities for the mainstream labour market to meet the needs of those who have been homeless.

A model of how the organisation could develop (incorporating Spokes and the PETE programme) is provided in the main report, based on the UK model of training, education and employment for homeless people 'Off the Streets and Into Work'.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations are made in light of the evaluation findings, changes anticipated in the sector, new developments in training, education and employment, and opportunities for Spokes and the PETE programme.

### **Spokes and its future within Focus Ireland**

#### **Recommendation No. 1**

This would be an optimum time to establish a clear 'vision' for how Focus Ireland will approach this dimension of its work in the future, including target groups and priorities. This should take into consideration the longer-term organisational objectives of Focus Ireland in delivering an education programme, as well as particular target groups it may seek to support in terms of education and training, and its intended role with regard to the new PETE programme.

A review should also consider the current objectives, which describe services rather than state aspirations for the project. A shorter set of objectives that are more goal-oriented should be devised.

## Quantifying outcomes and data collection

### Recommendation No. 2

It is recommended that data collection systems in the new PETE programme and Spokes should be developed in order to capture outputs, individual progression, and demonstrate the outcomes of the project.

Much of the work of the service involves confidence and capacity building measures, and data systems should capture this information through case studies, testimonials and other methods.

This will be particularly important for the PETE programme as it should be used by the project to communicate successes and challenges, and contribute to the development of the model for wider application in Ireland.

### Recommendation No. 3

A useful exercise for the new programme would be to use data collected to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the project. This could include estimating savings to the State as a result of individuals' participation in pre-education, education, training and employment supports. This would be useful in demonstrating impacts from a funding perspective and could assist in attracting support.

## Customer participation

### Recommendation No. 4

Customer participation should continue to be emphasised and supported, and in the context of the new PETE programme, could be formalised as progression routes for individuals (for example, around peer support, mentoring, etc).

### Recommendation No. 5

Consideration should be given to forming an advisory group of current and/ or former participants of Spokes (this could meet on an ad hoc or regular basis) to consider proposals and provide feedback on new actions, in order to access the expertise and insights of current and former service users. Participation on an advisory structure could in itself be progression for individuals participating in education and training interventions.

## Collaboration with other services and agencies

### Recommendation No. 6

The following collaborative actions are recommended:

- \_Continued collaboration around the development of the new (PETE) programme.
- \_There should be more formal communication and collaboration between education and employment service providers in the community/voluntary and statutory sectors (e.g. FAS, VEC etc.) as well as local development organisations<sup>8</sup> and the Local Employment Services. Systematic collaboration could take place around developing and delivering services, and sharing of resources (for example, access to space).
- \_Collaboration with mainstream and statutory services (and decision makers within these organisations) around development of practice, models and policy should be promoted.
- \_A collaborative 'skills audit' (undertaken to determine education and training needs of homeless customers) could be undertaken between service providers (as discussed in sections 5.3.4 and 5.5 in the main report).
- \_Focus Ireland does not have the sole remit for enhancing collaboration. However, the new PETE programme may provide an opportunity for the service to lead the process of greater collaboration between service providers. For example, this might take the form of an advisory or steering group which would look at promoting referrals, ensuring progression of clients across services, amongst other activities.

## Progression

### Recommendation No. 7

An overarching strategy for progression (including labour market progression) should be initiated. This should acknowledge the role of 'demand-side' labour market interventions, including the role of the social economy<sup>9</sup> in providing employment opportunities.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Local Area Based Partnerships.

<sup>9</sup> The social economy is that part of the economy, between the public sector and the private sector, that engages in economic activities to achieve social objectives, and usually functions through independent, democratic organisations.

**Recommendation No. 8**

Focus Ireland should explore the potential of the social economy sector as a means of providing long-term progression and employment opportunities for all of its customers (as is common practice in the UK and EU).

The social economy sector can be an important generator for employment for people with low skills or who are experiencing discrimination in the labour market (as presented by the case studies in section 6.2.1 in the main report).

**Recommendation No. 9**

Progression routes are planned in the PETE programme (for example opportunities for volunteering and collaboration with Volunteering Ireland). Opportunities for volunteering within Focus Ireland (and other homeless services) should also be explored. Volunteering could include mentor support or befriending, where appropriate. Peer support was evidenced in the Spokes programme. This was undertaken on an informal basis and was highly valued by those accessing and providing peer support, and it was found to enhance the learning environment.

**Funding and sustainability****Recommendation No. 10**

Focus Ireland should consider devising a proposal for accessing funding from the Department of Social and Family Affairs' Activation and Family Support Programme, which provides flexible supports for individuals distanced from the labour market. This type of funding could support the informal and non-accredited elements of Spokes, which would be consistent with the approach of the programme. Contact should be made with the Regional Manager in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and the local facilitator who has a role in determining funding.

**Recommendation No. 11**

Spokes and Focus Ireland, particularly through its new PETE service, are well placed to become a demonstration project for equality mainstreaming. The PETE project could support statutory agencies, such as FÁS and the VEC, to learn from the model and apply this learning to mainstream services, and should liaise with the Equality Authority in this regard.

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# Appendix 1: The Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE) Programme

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Focus Ireland's PETE (Preparation for Education, Training and Employment) programme was established in October 2009. The PETE programme was developed out of an identified need to address the gap in the training, education and employment pathway through homelessness into independent living.

In consultation with FAS, CDVEC and a number of emergency accommodation providers, Focus Ireland identified a need to develop its existing education programme, the Spokes programme, to provide assessments and support people experiencing homelessness by providing life skills training with the dual purpose to prepare people for independent living and to support readiness to access a training, education and employment pathway.

The premise of this development is that people currently experiencing prolonged, new or repeat homelessness face multiple barriers and disadvantage to accessing education, training and employment. Many people who experience homelessness are early school leavers or have had negative experiences of early learning, and while the motivation to progress may be strong, learning or work environments may present as threatening experiences.

Focus Ireland's PETE programme addresses the individual's barriers to accessing education, training and employment and supports the participant in achieving the first step on the training, education and employment pathway.

The PETE programme presents educational achievement as one option in blocking pathways to homelessness. Through the provision of a flexible education course, customers are facilitated to reach their potential and develop a positive self-concept and self-esteem. With improved self-esteem and educational qualifications, it is hoped that customers will have gained the skill, knowledge and abilities necessary for successful social integration and more effectively block re-entry to homelessness.

The PETE programme works on achieving these objectives by providing a wide and varied individualised education programme, which includes intensive support to participants as they aim to achieve their self-defined

goals. Education is both formal and non-formal, with the formal components accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

## Aim

To enable people who are resident in emergency homeless accommodation to gain the skills and confidence to access a pathway to mainstream training, education and employment and to evidence the need for a life-skills approach as a first step towards independent living.

## Target Group

- \_ Newly homeless.
- \_ Those experiencing long-term homelessness (i.e. for longer than six months).
- \_ People who are homeless who require support to gain life-skills and access to a Training, Education and Employment (TEE) pathway to mainstream services and independent living.

## Objectives

- \_ Provide a TEE assessment and access programme to emergency accommodation providers, to support case management activity where special TEE intervention is required.
- \_ Deliver individual and group personal development training and educational readiness programmes, on site in hostels or in the training and education facility in George's Hill.
- \_ To support individual participants to gain confidence and skills, and to progress on a TEE pathway to mainstream services and employment.
- \_ To work in cooperation with CDVEC, FAS, the Homeless Agency TEE network and emergency accommodation providers to ensure a seamless pathway to mainstream services and employment for participants.
- \_ To pilot the PETE programme in Dublin City and the

Greater Dublin Area and evidence a model of best practice.

- \_To work with the mainstream TEE providers to include a readiness for training, education and employment approach nationally as a first step to TEE for people experiencing homelessness.

## Participants

The programme is designed to offer the opportunity for participants to gain practical skills; interpersonal and social skills; increased personal confidence; and awareness of opportunities. Specifically the programme aims to impact positively on participants in the following areas:

- \_Self-esteem
- \_Ability to learn
- \_Ability to participate in structured activity
- \_Daily living skills
- \_Time-keeping and routine
- \_Communicating and relating
- \_Ability to speak for oneself
- \_Reflection on life aspirations and lifestyle choices
- \_Identifying work ambitions and aptitudes
- \_Motivating and planning for the future

The programme will support participants in achieving these skills by offering access to minor awards in areas such as: communications, numeracy, literacy and Information Technology.

## Referrals and onward progression

When a service user has reached their goals and is progressing on from PETE, project workers try to link them with appropriate onward referrals to community education centres or groups, further education and training, employment or supported employment where appropriate. This onward progression is co-ordinated with the onward progression support services within Focus Ireland, for example the Tenancy Support Services, case management services, and the HNA (Holistic Needs Assessment). PETE project workers support the customer in their progression and are available to accompany them to colleges for their registration or into their initial classes where appropriate.

## Training and employment

Along with the focus on educational achievement and progression, PETE provides information and advice on education, training and employment options, which may suit a service user's own skills and level of stability. Through PETE, service users are also linked in with the Business in the Community 'Ready for Work' programme where they are provided with opportunities for work placements and further job coaching.





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**Focus Ireland, Head Office**

9-12 High Street

Christchurch

Dublin 8

**T:** 01 881 5900

**F:** 01 881 5950

**E:** [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)

**[www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie)**



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# Focus Ireland

Evaluation of the Spokes Programme

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Everyone has a right to a place they can call home.





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Author: TSA Consultancy

Design: Colm Keller

Focus Ireland,  
9-12 High Street,  
Dublin 8  
Tel: 01 881 5900  
Fax: 01 881 5950  
Email: [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)  
Web: [www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie)

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# Acknowledgements

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The researchers would like to acknowledge the following:

- \_ Firstly, and most importantly, we would like to thank the eleven customers in Spokes who participated in this evaluation. They freely gave of their time and shared their experiences with us. Their commitment to the evaluation and their openness during the interviews proved critical to its completion.
- \_ We would also like to thank the staff at Spokes and Focus Ireland who worked with us on the research. We were facilitated and supported at all times by the staff in Spokes.
- \_ All of those interviewed who work in homeless, education and training services, both statutory and voluntary organisations, who gave their time to be interviewed and who were so frank and constructive in their comments.
- \_ Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support of Sinead McGinley, Research Officer, Focus Ireland, for her support and advice throughout the evaluation.

**Tanya Lalor and Gerard Doyle, TSA Consultancy**



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TSA Consultancy is Ireland's leading third sector advisory, research and consultancy service. TSA Consultancy provides strategic advice and research to the agencies whose role is to develop and build the third sector in Ireland. TSA Consultancy is also committed to working with locally based community projects at every stage, from idea to start up and development. TSA's team members come from a background of first-hand knowledge of communities working to create social enterprise and tackle disadvantage.

Tanya Lalor, TSA Consultant, has over 12 years experience working with third sector organisations that respond to social exclusion and disadvantage. Her experience includes project development, social research, business planning, monitoring and evaluation, and social auditing. Prior to working in TSA, Tanya worked in the Social Economy Unit in Tallaght, the first support unit for social enterprise in Ireland. Most recently, she has completed homeless needs analyses and strategies for Limerick City, Ballyfermot, Finglas and Ballymun.

Gerard Doyle, TSA Consultant, has over 16 years experience working in community development in a wide range of settings. Gerard has an in-depth knowledge of issues pertaining to social inclusion, and has experience in social research, including community consultations, project development, monitoring and evaluation. His experience of housing includes working as a full time volunteer worker with the Dublin Simon Community and with a voluntary housing association. Gerard has a particular interest in the potential the social economy can play in providing disadvantaged communities and communities of interest with a mechanism to address unemployment, gain assets for community use and stimulate economic activity.

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The Spokes programme is an education, training and employment service provided by Focus Ireland since 2002 to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The aim of Spokes is to assist people to move on from homelessness by providing an alternative way of learning, through education and employment that is tailored to individuals needs. The number of people Spokes has worked with has consistently increased since the establishment of the programme – with 357 customers accessing the service in 2008 (this represents a 108% growth in the number of service users in just one year, i.e. 2007-2008).

Spokes provides support to people with low levels of educational attainment and typically negative experiences of formal education who, because of their chaotic lifestyle and housing issues, find it difficult to access mainstream labour market supports, even those directed at the long-term unemployed. The service recognises that training, education and employment can play a crucial role in tackling homelessness and ending social exclusion, and that for those most marginalised flexible responses which respond to complex needs are required.

TSA Consultancy was commissioned by Focus Ireland in 2009 to undertake an evaluation of Spokes, to consider how the programme is meeting its objectives and to assess the effectiveness of its model of service delivery. The evaluation of the Spokes programme found that the service provides a safe and secure environment for people who may be apprehensive about returning to education. The approach is informal and flexible, and succeeds in keeping the engagement of service users at different stages of personal education and training progression, and responding to their particular needs that may arise from homelessness. Spokes provides a range of supports from informal drop-in arrangements to FETAC Level 3 certification. A particular strength of Spokes is its capacity to underpin more formal FETAC course with life-skills and person development courses that break-down social isolation. While the evaluation recognises the strength of the informal development of Holistic Individual Education Plans in Spokes, it recommends greater reliance on written plans to set milestones and review progress.

Spokes' level of one-to-one support and the programme's flexibility to accommodate service users who have dropped out (due to changes in housing arrangements,

health issues, court cases etc.) to re-enter courses are cited as unique elements in its success. Customers reported very positive experiences and outcomes from the programme, but the evaluation found that there is a need for more effective capturing and tracking of progression beyond the programme to substantiate the positive impacts/outcomes of the service. In order for services like Spokes to provide the most effective progression route out of homelessness into training, education and employment, stronger collaborations with next stage agencies such as FAS or the VEC are required.

The success of Spokes has gone beyond its initial target group of young people. The evaluation report recommends a re-focusing on young people, a more effective recording of progression, and an exploration of the role that the social economy can play in providing employment to people who are experiencing homelessness.

There is clear evidence from customers and referring organisations consulted in the evaluation that Spokes has had a significant impact on service users' quality of life. One referral agency stated:

*"I've seen Spokes turn around the lives of customers."*

The homeless sector is experiencing a reconfiguration of services based on a 'housing first' model of service delivery, and this will have implications for training and education provision to those experiencing homelessness. There is an opportunity for Focus Ireland's new training, education and employment programme PETE (Preparing for Education, Training and Employment) to lead the process of greater collaboration between service providers in the community / voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as local development organisations and the Local Employment Services.

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# 1. Introduction and evaluation methodology

8.

The Spokes programme is an education, employment and training support programme for people over the age of 16 years, who are out of home, have had a history of homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness.

It was established in February 2002 by Focus Ireland in recognition of the critical role that access to education, training and employment can play in tackling homelessness. Young people in these circumstances typically have low levels of educational attainment, negative experiences of formal education and chaotic lifestyles that make it difficult for them to engage with mainstream labour market supports, even those targeted at the long-term unemployed.

It is located adjacent to Focus Ireland's supported housing project in George's Hill, Dublin 7.

The services that Spokes offers to its customers<sup>1</sup> include individual learning plans, FETAC accredited modules, literacy/numeracy tuition, adult education, social outings, arts/crafts courses, advice and information on employment, and CV and interview preparation.

This evaluation was commissioned by Focus Ireland in order to assess the effectiveness of the Spokes programme in achieving its stated aims and objectives, and to prepare recommendations to inform this type of intervention.

The evaluation was undertaken by TSA Consultancy, specialists in third sector project development, evaluation and social research.

## 1.1 Evaluation aims and objectives

As stated in the Terms of Reference for this project, the objectives of the evaluation are to:

- \_ Provide a profile and history of Spokes.
- \_ Identify the views of customers, staff and key stakeholders on the effectiveness of the Spokes programme.

- \_ Assess how the programme is meeting national and local strategic objectives.
- \_ Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the service, and identify existing/ potential barriers that might prevent the progression of customers that are using the service out of homelessness.
- \_ Assess future funding opportunities/ issues for the project.
- \_ Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in meeting its objectives, and its successful outcomes (hard and soft outcomes).
- \_ Make recommendations on the future direction of the programme.

## 1.2 Evaluation methodology

### 1.2.1 Planning and developing an evaluation framework

An initial briefing and planning meeting took place between Focus Ireland, Spokes staff, and the evaluators. Following this meeting, an evaluation framework was devised. This set out indicators for each of the evaluation objectives, described the means of gathering evidence (including documentary research and consultations), and drafted interview schedules to be used throughout the evaluation.

During the planning phase for the evaluation, a list of relevant individuals and organisations to be consulted was drawn up. These included staff and management within Focus Ireland and external organisations.

The research phase of the evaluation commenced following sign-off of the evaluation framework.

### 1.2.2 Documentary research

Quantitative data used in this report was generated through an analysis of Focus Ireland and Spokes data: the primary source of quantitative data was customer database records and project reports.

Documentary research also included project reviews,

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'customers' is used by Focus Ireland to describe individual clients that use the organisation's services.



annual reports, strategic plans, and policies relating to employment, education and homelessness.<sup>2</sup> Data and case studies from the UK on good practice education, training and employment service provision targeting those homeless were also reviewed. These were drawn from the consultants' prior experience of the sector and from research undertaken by FEANTSA.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.3 Consultations

The primary research method was qualitative, and consultations comprising semi-structured interviews were undertaken with customers of Spokes, staff and management of Spokes and Focus Ireland, and with external organisations that have a relationship with the service, or have a remit in the area. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Most were face to face interviews, but a small number of telephone interviews were undertaken. All interviews followed the format of the interview schedules agreed during the evaluation planning stage.

#### Spokes' customers

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a sample of Spokes customers. A stratified random sample of participants was drawn so that the sample would reflect the profile of Spokes participants. All customers who were asked to participate in the evaluation agreed to be interviewed.

A total of 11 interviews took place with customers of Spokes, and all were held in George's Hill. Each participant agreed to have their interview taped. The main areas examined in the interviews included:

- \_ Customers' background and experiences of homelessness
- \_ Customers' involvement with Spokes
- \_ How Spokes achieved its objectives
- \_ How the project met their needs and any impact it had on their situation
- \_ Their future plans regarding training, education and

employment and whether they saw any barriers arising

#### \_Experiences of other training, education and employment providers

The evaluators also gathered profile data of those interviewed, and a profile of those consulted was generated to compare with the profile of all Spokes' customers. It was found that the profile of both populations was similar (this profile and comparison is included in the appendices).

Each participant was given a €20 Dunnes Stores Voucher in recognition of the time they gave to the evaluation process.

#### Focus Ireland staff

10 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with staff and management of Spokes and Focus Ireland, and these followed the format of interview schedules developed in the evaluation framework.

In addition, one service manager in Focus Ireland circulated evaluation questions internally within the service's staff team. These were discussed at a staff meeting, the feedback collated, and passed on to the evaluation team.

#### External consultations

Nine semi-structured interviews were undertaken with training and education organisations and with those organisations that have referral relationships with Spokes. These included FÁS, CDVEC (including the 'Foundations' Programme), Business in the Community's 'Ready for Work' Programme, and Cedar House.

The Homeless Agency and the Department of Social and Family Affairs were also consulted.

### 1.2.4 Analysis of data

Interview data was analysed using qualitative methods. The first stage of the data analysis involved a familiarisation with the interview notes and transcriptions by reading and re-reading them. The experiences and views of interviewees were reviewed to establish themes during analysis. Representations of the Spokes customers' views and experiences (in addition to those of

<sup>2</sup> Including the Spokes induction pack; Spokes model of service delivery, 'The Way Home' National Homeless Strategy, 'The Key to the Door', Homeless Agency strategy, Focus Ireland's Strategic Plan, Homeless Agency's 'Evaluation of homeless services'.

<sup>3</sup> The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless.

service providers and referral organisations) are supported by edited extracts or full quotes in the body of the report.

### 1.2.5 Ethical considerations

The following ethical considerations presented with regard to the consultations with Spokes' customers:

- \_The need to ensure that interviewees in no way felt under an obligation to participate in the evaluation, and that they fully consented to the process;
- \_The need to ensure that those who did wish to participate were comfortable with the process, that the interview process only explored issues of relevance to the evaluation, and that they could answer only those questions that they were comfortable with;
- \_The need to protect the anonymity of research participants;
- \_The need to ensure that participants could, at any stage prior to report write up, withdraw from the research process;
- \_The need to ensure that there is follow-up with participants regarding the findings of the evaluation.

TSA has experience in undertaking sensitive research where ethical issues arise and the research design process incorporated these ethical concerns as follows.

- \_An information leaflet was prepared prior to the interview, which detailed:
  - \_The purpose of the evaluation and interviews;
  - \_The types of questions that were to be asked in interviews;
  - \_The confidential nature of the information given;
  - \_What would happen to the information;
  - \_The right of each interviewee to withdraw from the process at any stage and their right not to answer any question that they were uncomfortable with.

- \_A consent form was drawn up, with Focus Ireland, and signed by each participant who was willing to take part in the interviews.

### 1.2.6 Format of evaluation report

The report provides a profile and history of Spokes, its services and customers (Section 2).

It then reports on the extent to which the project has achieved its objectives, based on the evaluations findings (Section 3). The section that follows examines Spokes in terms of its model of service delivery (Section 4).

The report then considers strategic issues and emerging themes arising in Spokes' external environment (Section 5).

Following this, the report provides an outline of some models of training, education and employment from the UK and Ireland. These are based on the consultants' experience in training, education and social enterprise models of good practice (Section 6).

A SWOT analysis undertaken by the consultants attempts to place Spokes in the context of external and internal issues (Section 7).

Finally, a series of recommendations are provided, drawn from the findings of the evaluation, the external environment and good practice (Section 8).

## 2. Profile and development of project

11.

### 2.1 Introduction

The Spokes programme is an education, employment and training support programme for people over the age of 16 years, who are out of home, have had a history of homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness.

The service was established in February 2002 and is part of Focus Ireland's services. It is located adjacent to the supported housing project in George's Hill, Dublin 7, and operates on a five day per week basis (Monday to Friday).

Supports offered to customers include individual learning plans, FETAC accredited modules, literacy/numeracy tuition, adult education, social outings, arts/crafts courses, advice and information on employment, and CV and interview preparation.

In this section a general profile of the service is provided, including a chronology of its development, a profile of services and a profile of customers that use the service.

#### 2.1.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of Spokes is to assist people to move on from homelessness by providing an alternative way of learning, through education and employment that is tailored to individuals needs.

It presents educational achievement and progression as a route out of homelessness, and achieves its aim by providing a wide and varied education programme. The service includes intensive support of customers, to enable them to achieve their goals. The stated objectives of Spokes are:

- \_ To develop an individual plan, in co-operation with the customer, based on an assessment of their skills, expectations and level of their skills, expectations and level of stability with regular review of their plan.
- \_ To provide education and training options which will broaden the customer's experiences in an enjoyable manner.
- \_ To allow each customer to work at their own pace and in a style that suits them.
- \_ To develop the customer's communication skills.

- \_ To assess literacy and numeracy skills and provide individual and group compensatory education programmes.
- \_ To provide an introduction to the world of work, including IT skills, work experience, work practice and expectations.
- \_ To provide information and resource materials on education and training and work opportunities.
- \_ To facilitate customers to gain experience of and entry to training and work by encouraging regular participation and commitment.
- \_ To develop relationships with training and education institutes and employers to develop systems of experience and placement.
- \_ To advocate on the customer's behalf and provide support through placements, to trainers, employers and the individual.
- \_ To assist in the initial funding of the transition to employment on an individual needs basis.
- \_ To liaise with key workers in ensuring the contact's welfare and accommodation needs are met as needs are identified.

### 2.2 Chronology and development of the service

#### 2.2.1 Initial years of the service

Spokes was first established in 2002 and was primarily targeted at young people. It sought to enable young people to move on from homelessness by engaging them in educational and personal development activities, and by facilitating them to access education, training and employment.

The project was located in John's Lane West, the same premises as the Extension Day Service<sup>4</sup> for young people, and most of its referrals came from this service.

4 Focus Ireland's Extension Day Service is a drop-in project for homeless people aged 16-25 years. It provides food, showers, laundry, recreational and storage facilities.

The number of people accessing Spokes is available from 2005 onwards. The data shows that in 2005, 91 individuals accessed Spokes' services. This increased to 171 in 2007 (see table opposite), at which point the project moved to new premises in George's Hill, Dublin 7.

### 2.2.2 Move to George's Hill and increase in capacity

In 2007, the project moved to a larger and dedicated premises in George's Hill<sup>5</sup>, Dublin 7 where it is currently located. This premises includes open space for drop-in and computer access, classroom space, and office space for staff. The project can also access additional meeting and class space in the adjoining Focus Ireland George's Hill facility.

In the same year, Spokes was successful in becoming a Further Education Training Accredited Certification (FETAC) accredited training centre (FETAC level 3, which is comparable to Junior Certificate in the National Framework of Qualifications). This allowed Spokes to secure funding from the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) for delivery of accredited training modules.

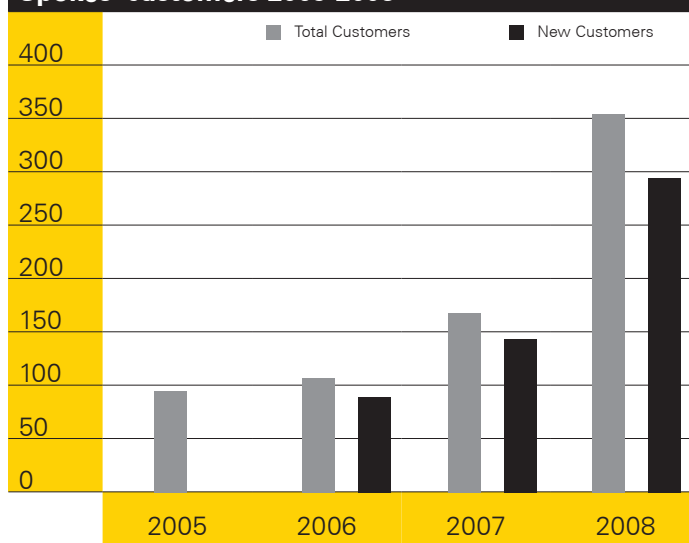
Both developments significantly increased the capacity of Spokes. In particular, the project was accessed by a greater number of older customers, and an increasing number of referrals from organisations other than Focus Ireland. The increase in customers between 2007 and 2008 alone was over 100%. This is reflected in the table and graph below, which present the increase in customers accessing the services between 2005 and 2008.

The annual increase in the capacity of Spokes has risen steadily since 2005 and sharply between 2007 and 2008. During this time, the number of customers doubled. This increase is illustrated below, which indicates an almost four-fold increase in capacity during this period.

### Increase in customers accessing Spokes services 2005-2008

| Year | No of customers <sup>6</sup> | % year on year change |
|------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005 | 91                           |                       |
| 2006 | 113 (80)                     | +24%                  |
| 2007 | 171 (136)                    | +51%                  |
| 2008 | 357 (284)                    | +108%                 |

### Spokes' customers 2005-2008



### 2.2.3 Current capacity

In May 2009, it was estimated that 40-50 individuals accessed Spokes each week (it was also estimated that most of these were accessing services several days per week)<sup>7</sup>. In addition to this, the George's Hill facility is large enough to enable the drop-in facility to remain open while courses are being held.

<sup>5</sup> The project is located on the same site as Focus Ireland's supported housing project in George's Hill.

<sup>6</sup> Number of new customers in parenthesis.

<sup>7</sup> A profile of Spokes' customers is outlined in section 2.6.

### 2.2.4 Staffing

The staffing of Spokes has increased since the project was established. In 2007 and 2008 the following staff members were employed:

- \_ One Team Leader, with the role of overseeing the daily management and administration of the programme
- \_ Three Project Workers
- \_ One Community Service Volunteer<sup>8</sup> (CSV).
- \_ One part-time FÁS Community Employment participant (19.5 hrs per week).

A Project Leader was recruited in 2004: the position was shared with the Schoolmate<sup>9</sup> programme, which came to an end in October 2007, when AIB funding for Schoolmate ceased.

#### Current staffing

As a result of a loss of funding between 2008 and 2009, there was a reduction of staffing levels, and by the end of May 2009 Spokes personnel comprised one team leader, one CSV worker and one Community Employment (CE) participant.

Tutors are also engaged by the service on a sessional basis to deliver the accredited Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) courses in the programme.

### 2.2.5 Current activities and services

Spokes delivers a flexible approach to learning and development, and provides a variety of opportunities into education and employment.

Services include the following:

- \_ A drop-in service and computer use for sourcing information on employment, education and training opportunities.
- \_ Development of individual education and employment

plans.

- \_ Regular users of Spokes are assigned a project worker who helps them to meet their educational, training or employment goals through the development of an individual plan.
- \_ One-to-one support with basic literacy and maths.
- \_ One-to-one support with FETAC modules.
- \_ FETAC (Level 3) accredited courses including Parenting, Health Related Fitness, Preparation for Work, Computers, Gardening, Self-advocacy, Arts & Design, Media studies, Graphic communication, Maths, Drama, and Photography.
- \_ Courses and activities that focus on customers' life skills and social development, including health and other workshops, and summer projects.
- \_ Career advice and support, which includes referrals to external training courses, employment training, and support in developing CVs and completing college applications.
- \_ Networking with community based programmes and training agencies to provide customers with progression options towards integration in their local communities.

Through the provision of a flexible education course, customers are facilitated to reach their potential and develop self-confidence and self-esteem. With improved self-esteem and educational qualifications, the project anticipates that customers will have gained the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary for successful social integration.

#### Opening hours

The opening hours of the service are 11.00-13.00 Monday to Friday and 14.00-16.00 Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday (16 hours per week). These hours have been in place since May 2009. Prior to May 2009, the service provided one hour more contact time with customers each morning - this change arose as a result of funding and the loss of one staff position.

8 This is a Graduate Recruitment Programme which has been running for over 15 years, offering opportunities to develop skills and expertise in the area of social and community work. It is particularly suited to Social Care Graduates (although not exclusive) interested in gaining experience prior to returning to complete the Masters in Social Science. The programme runs from September to August, and there are 11 placements available.

9 Schoolmate was a project supported by AIB with the aim of significantly improving the lives of Irish children most at risk of missing school through: a) hunger or lack of nutrition; b) being homeless; c) effects of drug / alcohol abuse. Schoolmate was delivered in partnership with three different charitable organisations. In Focus Ireland, it was carried out at two sites and included a homework club, an after-schools programme and a school link service.

## 2.3 Funding and support

Sources of funding and support accessed by Spokes have included:

- \_ Funding from the Local Drugs Task Force Initiative (from 2002-2007).
- \_ City of Dublin Youth Services Board, which has funded one project worker.
- \_ Department of Education (Back to Education Initiative Funding) administered through the CDVEC, which has funded tutor hours for FETAC accredited courses.
- \_ Some private sector funding, including Coca Cola Ireland (for summer programme activities), State Street Bank (for job readiness and horticulture programmes), and Blackrock Clinic (for health related workshops in the Extension).
- \_ FÁS provides support through the placement of a FÁS CE participant in Spokes.

The drop-in and informal elements of the service are funded through Focus Ireland's own fundraising department. It is estimated that approximately 80% of Spokes' funding is generated from Focus Ireland's fundraising activities.

## 2.4 Management and location within Focus Ireland

Spokes was originally located in the Youth Services department of Focus Ireland, as the service was linked to the Extension project. It is currently located within the Housing department of the organisation.

## 2.5 Numbers of interventions

Focus Ireland's bespoke customer database provides data on interventions provided by Spokes. Each time Spokes interacts with a customer, it is recorded as an 'intervention'. In this section, a profile of 2008 interventions is provided.

### 2.5.1 Planned and unplanned interventions

The database delineates interventions according to two categories: 'planned' and 'unplanned' customer contacts. Planned contacts correspond to structured interventions, such as FETAC course work, literacy tuition and individual mentoring sessions, while unplanned contacts correspond to drop-in interventions.

In 2008, a total of 4,475 interventions were recorded on the database. The majority of these were unplanned (drop-in) contacts, which comprised 62% of all interventions. FETAC accredited course interventions accounted for 1,544 interventions in 2008 (data on the outcomes of FETAC accredited courses is discussed in the section "Accredited education, including FETAC modules" on page 35).

| Spokes Interventions 2008 |        |            |
|---------------------------|--------|------------|
|                           | Number | % of total |
| Planned contact           | 1,688  | 38%        |
| Unplanned contact         | 2,787  | 62%        |
| Total Interventions       | 4,475  |            |

### 2.5.2 Interventions by age group

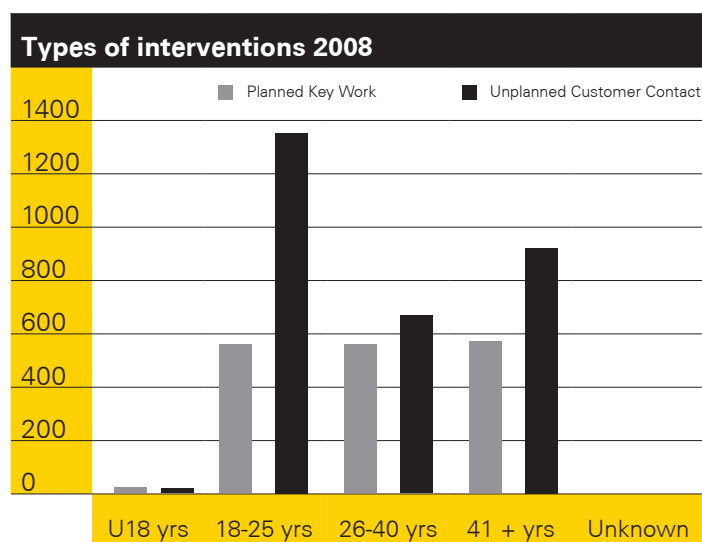
The age category 18-25 years received the largest number of planned and unplanned contacts in 2008, and this age group accounted for 39% of all contacts in the year. In terms of planned and unplanned contact, this age group accounted for 33% of all planned contact and a slightly higher proportion of all unplanned contact, at 42%.

The table and graph opposite present these interventions for the different age groups in 2008.

### Spokes Interventions 2008 by age category

| Age Group             | Planned contact | Unplanned contact | Total        | %           |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| U18 yrs               | 14              | 11                | 25           | < 1%        |
| 18-25 yrs             | 561             | 1,184             | 1,745        | 39%         |
| 26-40 yrs             | 559             | 698               | 1,257        | 28%         |
| 41 + yrs              | 550             | 886               | 1,436        | 32%         |
| Unknown               | 4               | 8                 | 12           | < 1%        |
| <b>All age groups</b> | <b>1,688</b>    | <b>2,787</b>      | <b>4,475</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Unplanned contact amongst the 18-25 year age group accounted for 67% of contacts with this group, which is a higher proportion than other age groups, indicating the relative popularity of this type of contact with the younger age group.



## 2.6 Profile of Spokes customers

As stated above in the section Section 2.2.2, between 2005<sup>10</sup> and 2008, there was an almost fourfold increase in the numbers of Spokes' customers. As at May 2009, staff estimated that between 40-50 individuals accessed the service each week (many of whom attended several days per week). Data is not available on the average length of stay for each visit.

In this section, a profile of Spokes' customers over the past three years is presented, based on an analysis of Focus Ireland's customer database. This profile is compared to the profile of households in Counted In 2008 where comparisons are possible.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.6.1 Numbers and gender of customers

#### Numbers

The table below presents the numbers of customers that have accessed Spokes since 2005. Taking 2005 as a baseline, the table charts the percentage year on year increase in customers.

In 2008, 357 customers accessed the service. Of these 284 (80%) were new customers to the service in that year. This represents an increase of 108% on the previous year, and an increase of 292% on the number of customers using the service since 2005.

#### Total number of Spokes Customers 2005-2008

| Year | No of customers <sup>12</sup> | % change |
|------|-------------------------------|----------|
| 2005 | 91                            |          |
| 2006 | 113 (80)                      | +24%     |
| 2007 | 171 (136)                     | +51%     |
| 2008 | 357 (284)                     | +108%    |

<sup>10</sup> Data is available from 2005 onwards.

<sup>11</sup> Counted In is a census survey of the whole population in homeless services carried out every three years by the Homeless Agency, and is part of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's tri-annual assessment of homelessness. The most recent survey was undertaken in March 2008, and identified 2,144 households (2,366 adults) in homeless services.

<sup>12</sup> The number of new customers is in parenthesis



### Gender

The gender profile of Spokes' customers has remained broadly consistent since 2006, with male participation over double that of females.

On average, in the three years for which data is available, 71% of participants have been male, and 29% female. This data is presented in the table below. This profile is consistent with the profile of the homeless population in Dublin identified in Counted In 2008 (whereby 68% of those identified were male, and 32% were female).

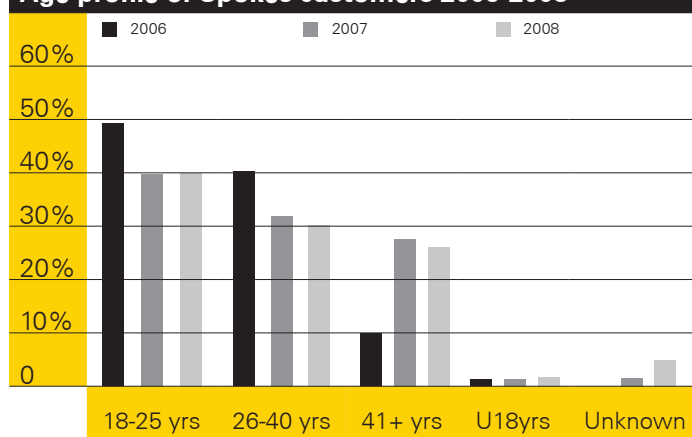
| Gender profile of Spokes Customers |      |      |      |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Year                               | 2008 | 2007 | 2006 |
| Female                             | 29%  | 31%  | 28%  |
| Male                               | 71%  | 69%  | 72%  |

### 2.6.2 Age profile of customers

The most frequent age category amongst Spokes' customers is the 18-25 years age group: in 2008, 39% of Spokes customers were aged 18-25 years; 30% were between the ages of 26-40 years; and 25% were 41 years of age or over. Since 2006, there has been an increase in the proportion of customers aged 41 years or older (from 10% to 25% of all customers). The proportion of customers from the other age groups has reduced in the same period.

The graph opposite presents the age profile of customers since 2006 in percentage terms.

Age profile of Spokes customers 2006-2008



### Comparison with the Dublin homeless population (Counted In 2008)

It is not possible to directly compare Spokes customers with the Counted In 2008 population, as the age categories used for both are slightly different. However a general comparison can be made which indicates that Spokes customers' age profile is younger than the general homeless population in Dublin (for example, 39% of Spokes customers are aged 18-25 years, and this same age group accounted for 16% of total Counted In 2008 respondents).

### 2.6.3 Accommodation profile of customers

Focus Ireland's customer database records the current accommodation of Spokes customers. However, it is not possible to establish definitively the proportion of customers homeless and those 'at risk' of homelessness.

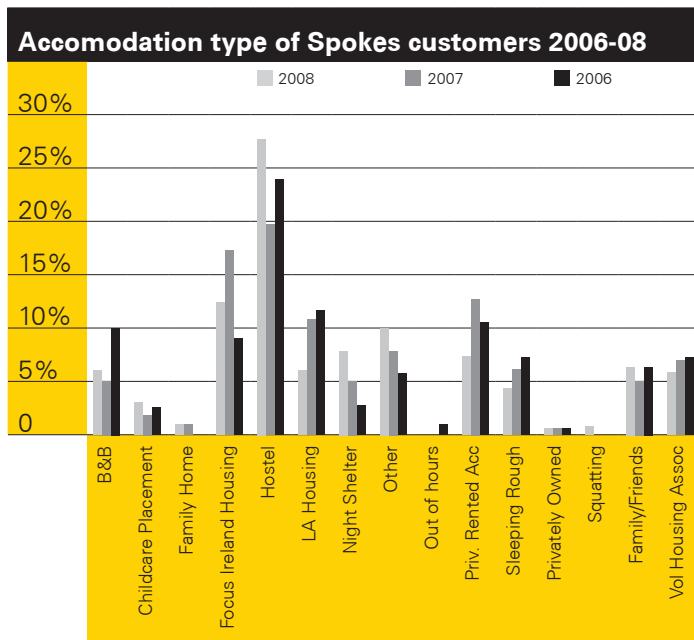
Over the period 2006-2008, the most frequently arising accommodation type was hostel accommodation, accounting for a total of 25% of customers (who provided information on their accommodation<sup>13</sup>). In 2008, this rose to 28% of Spokes' customers. The second most frequent accommodation type over the three year period was Focus Ireland housing (13% on average over the three years), and in 2008, this type also accounted for 13% of Spokes' customers.

<sup>13</sup> For a small number of customers, the accommodation type is 'unknown'. These have been removed from these calculations.



In 2008, the third most frequent accommodation<sup>14</sup> type was night shelter, accounting for 8% of all customers' accommodation arrangements. Night shelter and hostel accommodation could generally be defined as 'emergency accommodation', and together, these accounted for 36% of all customers in 2008.

The graph below illustrates the accommodation type of customers between 2006 and 2008.



#### Comparisons with the Dublin homeless population (Counted In 2008)

The accommodation categories are not comparable with those used in the Counted In 2008 survey, so it is not possible to compare the accommodation status of customers with the wider Dublin homeless population. Moreover, as Spokes supports those who are also at risk of homelessness, direct comparisons are not appropriate. Some comments can be made however:

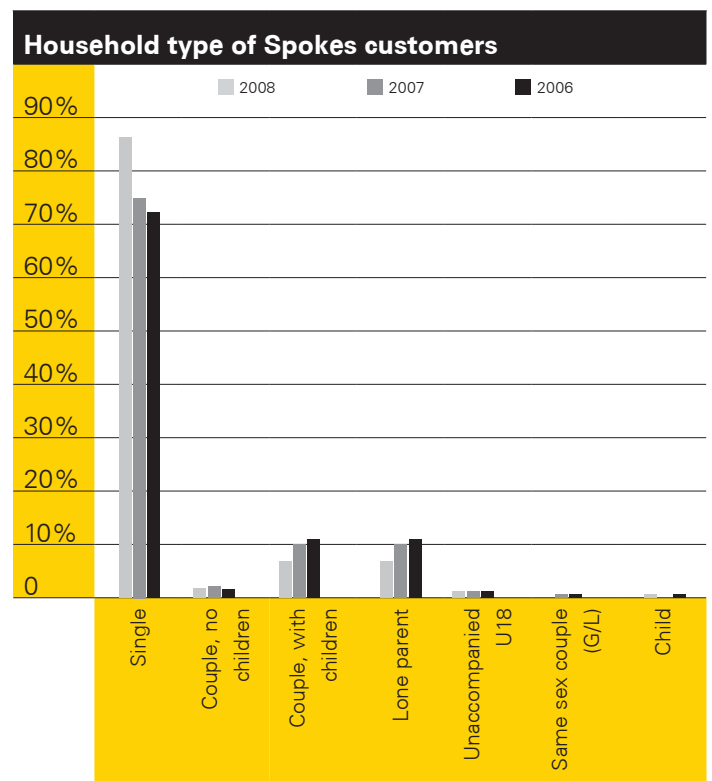
- \_ Those staying in private emergency (B&B) accommodation in Counted In accounted for 33% of those homeless, while the corresponding figure for Spokes service users was 6% in 2008.

- \_ The single largest category of accommodation for Spokes customers was 'hostel' (28%). A further 8% were accessing 'night shelter' accommodation. Therefore, over one third of those accessing services were in emergency accommodation in 2008. This compares with 26% of those recorded in Counted In.

- \_ 13% of Spokes customers were accommodated in Focus Ireland housing in 2008 – this could comprise long-term supported housing or transitional accommodation.

#### 2.6.4 Household type

Single households dominate the household profile of Spokes customers, and this household type has increased year on year to 2008, at which time 85% of customers were single.

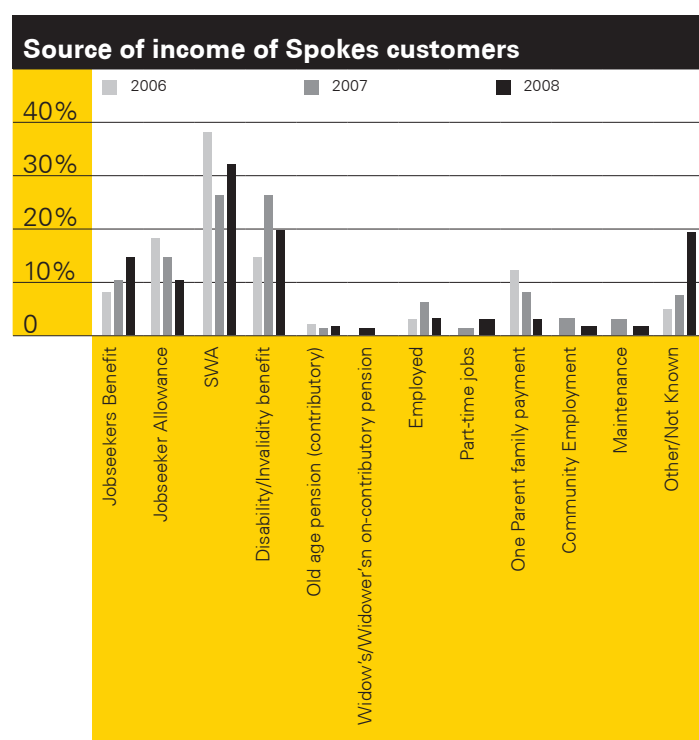


This profile is similar to Counted In 2008 data, whereby single households accounted for 67% of those surveyed.

<sup>14</sup> Excluding 'other' as a category, which accounted for 10% of customers' accommodation in 2008. This category encompasses a range of accommodation types.

### 2.6.5 Source of income

Some of the most frequent sources of income for Spokes customers are illustrated in the figure below.



The single most frequent source of income was Supplementary Welfare Allowance (31% in 2008), followed by disability allowance/ benefit and invalidity benefit (19% in 2008). It should be noted that there was a fairly high frequency of 'other/not known' sources of income identified.

When compared to the *Counted In 2008* data, there was a lower rate of Spokes customers accessing disability/ invalidity payments than the survey population (which recorded 40% of those surveyed accessing disability payments).

### 2.6.6 Education attainment

The education attainment of BTEI participants (105) in 2008 is available (this represents only a sample of all Spokes customers). In 2008, 42% of this group attained primary level education only, with a further 34% having attained lower second level (or FETAC level 3) education only. This means that over three quarters of the group (76%) had an educational attainment of lower second level or less. The data is presented in the table below.

| Education attainment BTEI participants 2008 |     |            |
|---|-----|------------|
|   | No. | % of total |
| Primary education only                      | 44  | 42%        |
| Lower second level/FETAC level 3 or equiv   | 34  | 34%        |
| Upper second level/FETAC level 4/5 or equiv | 22  | 19%        |
| FETAC level 6 or above                      | 5   | 5%         |

## 2.7 Summary

### 2.7.1 Quantification of interventions and customers

Spokes has recorded a steady increase in the number of individuals accessing the service, since 2005 (from which data records are available), when 91 individuals accessed the project. In particular, after Spokes moved to its current premises in George's Hill in 2007, the service more than doubled its numbers of customers.

Data for 2008 reports that in that year, Spokes worked with 357 individuals, of which 108 were new customers. This is almost a four-fold increase on numbers in 2005.

Data was analysed for the number and types of interventions undertaken by Spokes in 2008. A total of 4,475 interventions were recorded for 2008. The majority of these (62%) were for 'drop-in', or unplanned contacts (2,787 interventions), and 38% were for planned contacts (1,688 interventions).

Most of the planned interventions comprised FETAC accredited modules (1,544 interventions), with the

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remainder made up of interventions such as literacy tuition and individual mentoring sessions.

### **2.7.2 Profile of users**

The most frequently arising age category that the service works with is the 18-25 year age group (39% of individual customers).

On average, male customers outnumber females by over two to one (in 2008, 71% of its customers were male). This reflects the gender profile of the homeless population, as established in Counted In, 2008.

The dominant household type amongst customers is 'single', accounting for 85% of all customers in 2008.

Hostel accommodation accounted for the most frequent type of accommodation accessed by Spokes customers. The data would suggest that those in Bed and Breakfast accommodation comprise a relatively low proportion of the Spokes customer base (6%) while accounting for a relatively high proportion of the homeless population in Dublin, as outlined in Counted In, 2008 (at 33%).

## 3. Achievement of Spokes' objectives

20.

The objectives of Spokes are as follows:

- \_ To develop an individual plan, in co-operation with the customer, based on an assessment of their skills, expectations and level of their skills, expectations and level of stability with regular review of their plan.
- \_ To provide education and training options which will broaden the customer's experiences in an enjoyable manner.
- \_ To allow each customer to work at their own pace and in a style that suits them.
- \_ To develop the customer's communication skills.
- \_ To assess literacy and numeracy skills and provide individual and group compensatory education programmes.
- \_ To provide an introduction to the world of work, including IT skills, work experience, work practice and expectations.
- \_ To provide information and resource materials on education and training and work opportunities.
- \_ To facilitate customers to gain experience of and entry to training and work by encouraging regular participation and commitment.
- \_ To develop relationships with training and education institutes and employers to develop systems of experience and placement.
- \_ To advocate on the customer's behalf and provide support through placements, to trainers, employers and the individual.
- \_ To assist in the initial funding of the transition to employment on an individual needs basis.
- \_ To liaise with key workers in ensuring the contact's welfare and accommodation needs are met as needs are identified.

In this section of the evaluation, the achievement of Spokes' objectives is discussed on the basis of the findings of the consultations undertaken as well as documentary research.

A brief description of each of the objectives is provided followed by the views of those consulted about how effectively these objectives are being achieved.

### 3.1 To develop an individual plan, in co-operation with the customer

Individual planning can comprise three types of actions:

- \_ An assessment, carried out with each newly referred customer. This involves identification of education, training or employment needs and setting goals with the customer.
- \_ The development and review of a 'Holistic Education Plan', which would be documented and carried out with all regular customers.<sup>15</sup> It would also involve ongoing review of progress made, and each plan would be modified according to need. Such a plan would act as a motivational tool for the customer.
- \_ A third aspect to individual planning would involve a formal assessment for customers with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

According to Spokes' staff, informal and verbal discussions between staff and customers, rather than more formal and written 'holistic education plans', have been the norm. However, staff find that these verbal discussions have been very successful as a means of engaging customers with education plans, and with progressing referrals to other education programmes, services and community-based services. The discussions are undertaken in a relaxed manner and staff feel that this enables more open and honest discussion with customers about their history and future hopes and plans.

According to staff, the completion of written holistic education plans has been an ideal rather than practice, for the following reasons:

<sup>15</sup> According to project reports, a Holistic Education Plan process involves identifying a number of self defined goals by the customer, as well as the steps necessary to achieve these goals.

- \_ Lack of staff time to carry out the work on a one-to-one basis.
- \_ Lack of available staff to carry out one-to-one work.
- \_ The appointments made with customers which are not kept by customers.
- \_ Lack of space on the premises to undertake detailed written plans.
- \_ The fear of having to write or answer questions by the customers.

Staff also point to the fact that their knowledge of 'where people are at' aids the education planning process. In their view, it is the lack of documentation that is the biggest problem, as it means that the work is not being captured in Focus Ireland's customer database or statistics.

Not having written plans could also undermine the project's ability to set milestones with customers and review progress.

From the customers' perspective, they were very positive about the process of planning and understood that there was a clear planning process, even if this was not written. In a small number of cases, these were documented in writing.

*"Yes, when I first came, they sat down with me and wrote down everything and came back a few weeks later to see how things were. Every few weeks we go back over them."*

One customer stated that her individual plan had been documented and commented on the benefits of this.

*"Helpful and interesting. To see it written down and to reflect on it is good – you may not realise what you have been doing until you see it back."*

### 3.2 To provide education and training options in an enjoyable manner

This objective is about designing and delivering education and training programmes that attract individuals who have had difficult life and school experiences. According to Spokes' staff, common experiences amongst customers would include:

- \_ Not having attended school for any extended length of time.
- \_ Having had bad experiences of school and learning due to learning difficulties, personal issues, and difficulties with teachers.
- \_ Having lost confidence in their abilities due to homelessness and related factors.

#### 3.2.1 School experiences

According to project statistics (retrieved from the 2008 BTEI programme reports), 76% of BTEI participants (i.e. 80 out of a total of 105 individuals) had an educational attainment of lower secondary level or less, and 42% (44 individuals) had 'primary only' education.

Customers consulted in the evaluation process were asked about their experiences of school and how they viewed Spokes when first becoming involved. Four of those consulted (out of a total of 11 customers) had completed secondary school to leaving certificate level (36%), and three had not achieved any qualification at school (27%). Most had not completed secondary education for various reasons, including financial problems, having experienced homelessness at a young age, having moved to a different country, having a difficult family and home situation, and having experienced loss of parents at a young age.

The experience of the school system for many of those consulted was poor, with many having either experienced some form of bullying or being treated badly...*"as if I was stupid"*. However, two customers consulted had a positive experience of school, one stating that *"I didn't want to leave"*.

### 3.2.2 Approach of Spokes and views of customers

The service is conscious that many customers may associate 'education' with negative school experiences, and places an emphasis on providing a welcoming and unthreatening environment for all customers.

The approach and role of staff members is therefore very important, and a common theme arising through the entire evaluation was the quality and contribution of staff members to positive outcomes in the project. This was cited by customers and referring organisations alike.

*"Their communication with us is brilliant...It's not like a teacher...they talk to us and not like we are children...they work with us on all different levels, wherever we are...different clients come in with different needs and different levels of education."*

For customers as well as staff, the approach of Spokes was critical. One of the approaches that Spokes adopts is to engage people with drop-in services, and through this to engage the customer in education and training. Therefore the first introduction to the service is very important for the customer.

*"I didn't really know what I wanted...my key worker came down with me...I was really nervous."*

The non-accredited programmes and 'life skills' based interventions (e.g. workshops, personal development, photography, video, art, gardening, health and fitness and summer programmes) facilitate a gradual and non-threatening introduction to more formal, course-based activities.

*"I can't wait to come in, in the morning...you see what is going on and you can get involved in other courses."*

All of the customers were asked what they had sought from Spokes when they first engaged with the service.

Even those who now have very clear plans for their future education and had good experiences of previous education stated that they were initially nervous about coming to the service, and were just interested in seeing what was on offer. Most were referred to Spokes and just wanted to explore the options that might be open to them.

### 3.3 To allow each customer to work at their own pace and in a style that suits them

Some of the unique aspects of Spokes aimed at meeting this objective include:

- \_ Rolling intake for courses: there is no cut-off date for participation in courses.
- \_ All courses are accompanied by one-to-one support for customers from project workers. In spite of staffing cut-backs, one-to-one support is still offered and there has been no reduction in the number of courses or participants thus far.
- \_ Spokes' programmes are designed in the knowledge that drop-out is a possibility given the circumstances of customers. The service therefore attempts to provide as flexible a service as possible, in order to encourage retention, and to support return to the programme.
- \_ Modules can be submitted twice a year. This minimises pressure around deadlines and crucially, allows for breaks in study which can arise for a number of reasons such as health, prison, loss of accommodation. If initial submission deadlines are missed, individuals can continue to submit their work with continued support from the tutors and project workers.
- \_ The availability of supports and drop-in engagement provides a safe and supportive environment, which is geared at building the confidence of participants.

#### 3.3.1 Views of customers

The ease of return to programmes following breaks in participation was noted by customers. One customer spoke of an impending court case, and although he was anticipating a custodial sentence, he was planning his

return to complete his accredited programme:

*"I want a fresh start in life and get my junior certificate...and Spokes is helping me do that...I have a court case coming up and I think that I will get sent to prison but I will be able to come back and finish what I am doing."*

For others, peer support also helped them to work at their own pace, particularly with regard to IT and computers.

*"We all work at our own pace and we are all at different levels but we all help each other out, and we all know that I might know more about one thing but I'll need help from someone else in another...it all balances itself out."*

The individual staff support and reassurance about working at a comfortable pace was also mentioned.

*"They took their time with you and it was one-to-one...they moved at your pace...no one was telling you what to do."*

The style of engagement attempts to engage people gradually in training and education, in a supportive and welcoming environment.

*"They took their time with you and it was one-to-one...they moved at your pace...no one was telling you what to do."*

The style of engagement attempts to engage people gradually in training and education, in a supportive and welcoming environment.

*"I can't wait to come in the morning, and I would be sat at the computer but something else would be going on, like classes, that you could get involved in."*

### 3.4 To develop the customer's communication skills

Developing communication skills can relate to a number of activities ranging from building listening skills; confidence building to enable people to speak in groups or with others; observational and evaluation skills; interview skills and CV building; and ability to use communication technology (including IT skills). As such, this objective can overlap with other Spokes objectives.

In the consultation process with service providers, staff and customers, confidence building activities were considered to be important in building communication skills. Furthermore, confidence building was highlighted as a key aspect of the work of Spokes, and therefore it is given attention in this section.

According to the service, the customers' confidence levels can be low arising from a range of factors including: lack of education attainment and bad experiences of school, experiences of homelessness, and related issues (such as health, mental health and addiction issues).

Spokes sees confidence building and development of communication skills as taking place through an emphasis on interaction and engagement with the service. This is done through the following:

- \_Engagement of customers in planning the services.
- \_Feedback and discussion with customers on services and various other topics.
- \_Providing and accessing peer support, particularly around computers.

#### 3.4.1 Views of customers

Customers referred to the one-to-one and emotional support as being important in developing their self-confidence.

*"It was hard for me as I was always withdrawn, and I wouldn't like talking in groups ... the one-to-one was very helpful."*



One of the recurring themes in the customer consultations was their view that in Spokes there was never a sense that the customer was being judged:

*"The staff here are brilliant. They don't judge you. [Do you feel like you are sometimes judged?]. ... Yeah, sometimes the hostels do, and it is only when you get to know them, that that changes... Here, as soon as you walk through the door, you are accepted."*

The interaction with other customers in the project and peer support was another aspect in building confidence.

*"They do bring people out of their shell... they are getting used to being around crowds of people."*

*"My confidence has gone through the roof since coming here... I used to be very quiet and nervous, but now I am one of the jokers... we all help each other when we get stuck."*

*"There is great support here from everyone, it is like a family."*

Confidence building also occurs through the social outings and the summer project activities and in 2008, these activities accounted for 227 interventions. Some customers also made the point that social networks and friendships can be developed by attending the programme:

*"There's a whole social thing going on... you can make friends here if you want to... we keep in contact with people who have left... only today have I heard about [name of previous customer] and what she's at now."*

What is striking about Spokes is that the profile, age and background of customers is very different, and yet in spite of these differences, there would appear to be good supports amongst customers.

*"The support that staff give you is very important but it is also about doing courses with others and getting support that way.... we do courses with everyone using the service."*

One customer who was in recovery from addiction made the point that getting recognition from others who were not addicts was very important from a personal perspective.

*"I am a recovering addict... it means a lot to get recognition from others who are not addicts... you feel normal and valued."*

Another customer spoke about the impact of improved confidence on her since attending the service.

*"I had no confidence when I first came here. My key workers noticed a big difference over the time that I have been coming here... that is down to Spokes. I would not be even thinking about going to college if I didn't come here."*

### 3.4.2 Views of service providers

Service providers consulted echoed the sentiment of customers about the role of Spokes in building confidence.

*"Customers in Spokes are treated with acceptance, support, respect. These three things are very important in building the confidence of customers."*

Service providers made the point that the experience of Spokes in relation to homeless issues was one of the key factors distinguishing the service over other education providers. One service provider described a defensiveness amongst people (particularly young men) who have experienced homelessness, and the perceived need of some homeless young men to present a 'hard' and tough



image. “There are lots of trust issues with people who are homeless.” For these, Spokes’ ability to engage people in a group setting with peer support was very important and a key strength of the service.

*“They’re [the customers] able to network or look for help from somebody else in the same class .... they’re working together.”*

### 3.5 To assess literacy and numeracy skills and provide individual and group compensatory education programmes

Literacy tuition is provided on a one-to-one basis or on a group basis where required. However, the one-to-one tuition is the most preferred option for customers, owing to a reported embarrassment of customers about having literacy difficulties.

In 2008, one-to-one tutoring (in literacy and numeracy) accounted for 49 contacts in Spokes, and 53% of this work was with those who were 25 years or younger.<sup>16</sup>

Staff find, as a general rule, that initially literacy difficulties are often overestimated by the customer, and that the issue is more about literacy confidence rather than literacy difficulty. One staff member estimated that between 2-3 individuals were accessing literacy supports during the second week of May 2009.

Spokes refers to the Dublin Adult Literacy Centre (DALC) where customers can access supports. DALC tutors also meet and undertake assessments with customers in Spokes, so that when customers attend DALC they will have already met the tutor.

Customers consulted did not express any needs around literacy but some mentioned the need for a maths tutor (this was being accessed by Spokes).

### 3.6 To provide an introduction to the world of work, including IT skills, work experience, work practice and expectations

The activities of Spokes in relation to this objective include the following:

- \_ Structured classes which enable individuals to establish a routine.
- \_ Job ‘readiness’ and ‘preparation for work’ modules and supports, which have received some funding from State Street Bank.<sup>17</sup> Supports have included CV preparation, mentor support, and interview skills. Spokes has also undertaken outreach work in hostels.
- \_ The project refers individuals to the Business in the Community’s ‘Ready For Work’ programme (which provides training, work experience and further support to customers). According to the project, some former customers have gained part-time employment from this process. According to Ready For Work, Spokes referred nine people in 2008.
- \_ IT skills and a computer literacy course are delivered once a week as an add-on to the drop-in service which runs five days per week.
- \_ Customers also engage with the drop-in service to get assistance developing CVs, preparing for interviews, searching and applying for jobs.

According to staff, employment is often not an immediate priority for customers. Instead, accommodation or other issues relating to homelessness tend to be customers’ primary focus. As a result, education and training supports are more frequently sought by customers than employment supports.

#### 3.6.1 Views of customers

Customers consulted were interested in gaining qualifications, such as junior certificate and leaving certificate or third level education in College or University. Younger customers did not have many expectations around employment, particularly given the present economic circumstances.

<sup>16</sup> Combination of the under 18 years and 18-25 years age groups.

<sup>17</sup> A US bank that has supported Spokes under its corporate social responsibility activities.

*"I have got qualifications in construction....I have been focused on college, in getting qualifications so that when things [in the economy] get better....I will be able to get back to work."*

Older customers were aware of employment supports but were primarily focused on achieving education attainment.

*"It's there...but it's more for the young people....I don't have qualifications but I am doing my leaving certificate at the moment. I had to leave school early but I was quite bright at school. We used to be told we were stupid so it would be important for me to prove to myself that I can do it and am not stupid."*

Some customers identified particular barriers to employment. These included finding stable accommodation, health related issues (including mental health issues such as depression), and also age related difficulties: *"I'm in my late fifties...employment is not number one on the agenda."* One customer felt that the type of work that he wanted to do (welding) was not viable in the current economic climate. Another had participated in work experience in Marks and Spencer and found the experience to be a positive one, especially as he had experience working in the retail sector. For those interested in work, the absence of employment opportunities in the current economic climate focused their attention on education in the short to medium term.

### **3.7 To provide information and resource materials on education and training and work opportunities**

Spokes sees itself as the first step in accessing education, training and work and provides information and advice to customers on this basis.

Training, education and employment advice and support is provided formally, as part of planned interventions with customers, and informally, through drop-in support provided by staff in Spokes.

This objective overlaps with the 'training and employment (information and advice)' intervention in the Spokes model of service delivery, and is discussed in greater detail in "Section 4.6" on page 36.

### **3.8 To facilitate customers to gain experience of - and entry to - training and work by encouraging regular participation and commitment**

Spokes seeks to engage people in education and training initially through its drop-in service and through gradual engagement with the project. The project supports the individual into a routine, even if this routine and engagement is participation on one course per week. This flexible approach means that customers do not have minimum participation requirements.

*"It is OK that this routine starts slowly and is only one course a week, it builds with a pattern of behaviour that enables customers to commit to a course and follow through and achieve aims."*

There was also a confidence of Spokes' flexibility amongst organisations making referrals to Spokes. These organisations felt that all their customers, regardless of their capacity levels, could be facilitated in the service.

*"Spokes is facilitative...it provides supports around where the customer is 'at'. I don't think that any of my clients are 'not ready' for Spokes."*

Again, the staff approach around encouragement and supports to customers was referred to by service providers and customers alike.

*"People are being listened to...they are being heard...this is the most important thing."*

### 3.9 To develop relationships with training and education institutes and employers to develop systems of experience and placement

Spokes is one service along a continuum of education, training and employment services in the Dublin area. This objective relates to its relationship with other service providers.

Spokes is largely seen as a first step for customers who wish to return to training and education. Spokes sees participation in its programmes for the customer as a preparation for participation in community based or mainstream services.

Spokes would commonly refer customers to organisations which offer courses with higher accreditation than those available in Spokes, or which offer courses and programmes not available within Spokes. These organisations include:

- \_ CDVEC Foundations Programme (Level 4 and 5 FETAC).
- \_ CDVEC Dublin 8 Service (James' Street) particularly for computers FETAC level 5.
- \_ The 'Ready for Work' programme for work experience placement and support (Business in the Community).
- \_ MACRO Community Development Project for FETAC Level 4.
- \_ Other training and education providers, such as the Access course in Trinity College, Oznam House (St Vincent de Paul), Dublin Adult Literacy Services (DALC) and the Digital Hub in James' Street.
- \_ The project also has links with accommodation providers that deliver on-site training and education, and has itself delivered training and education around life skills in St Catherine's Foyer (cookery) and Cedar House (computers).

67% of referrals made by Spokes in 2008 were to education, training or pre-employment services. This accounts for 39 out of a total of 58 referrals (based on information available). See "Section 4.7" on page 37 for a

more detailed discussion on referrals and progression.

#### 3.9.1 Views of customers

Some customers will continue to engage with Spokes while accessing courses from other community-based or mainstream providers. For example, they can access drop-in, support in completing essays and assignments, or continue to engage in courses. Of the customers consulted as part of this evaluation, over one third (four) were currently accessing services from mainstream training providers.

Customers felt that this continued support of Spokes was important.

*"I will always come back to Spokes I love it so much...they told me that I can come back and continue being involved even when I am in college....if I can't find information on a topic that I need, they will help me find it...so that I won't become stressed."*

The types of supports people accessed were use of computers and assistance with assignments, or in one case, off-site support.

*"Because I came back here and I use the computers to do the assignments and if I have a hard time in college, they support...they have come over and have had meetings with the College."*

One customer explained why continued supports were needed after accessing education elsewhere:

*"Some of the lads are in their twenties and not really mature...they can be easily bullied. They would just be seen as a target if they are heading back to College...[they would just be] amongst young people who have just left school and they would sit in the corner."*

### 3.9.2 Preference for education over employment

As discussed above in *Section 3.6* there would appear to be a preference amongst customers for continued education and training rather than employment, and this is evidenced by a relatively low referral rate to the 'Ready for Work' programme in 2008 (nine customers). This was supported by customers' views, some of whom made the point that the current labour market means that they have little opportunity for accessing work at the present time.

### 3.10 To advocate on the customer's behalf and provide support through placements, to trainers, employers and the individual

Spokes has worked and advocated on customers behalf with colleges, community groups, training options, FÁS and any other service needed to support the customers. As stated above, Spokes also works closely with students attending college courses to support them in essay writing, study skills, and any other issues that would impact on their study. Spokes staff made the point that the unique nature of the service means that changes in behaviours and additional support needs can be identified quicker. Subsequently, they can make referrals to services to provide the support required for the customer.

*"If you are upset and you want to talk to staff, you can. Emotional support. One of the most important things that Spokes done."*

Spokes would aim to progress someone from the service after approximately 18 months – therefore they can have a relatively long engagement with customers, compared with other services.

### 3.11 To assist in the initial funding of the transition to employment on an individual needs basis

There is a small fund available for providing flexible and practical supports to customers, and is used only when an individual need arises. The need for these items should not present as a barrier to accessing employment, or

attending job interviews, etc.

Types of supports could include bus passes to travel when needed, advocacy and letters of support to Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) for Exceptional and Urgent Needs Payments. Supports such as college text books are also sought for customers (mainly through sponsorship from private individuals). In the case of emergencies, small funds held on-site could be used, for example, to pay for bus fares.

In April 2009, during the time the evaluation was being undertaken, it was estimated that three instances arose where bus fares and travel allowances were requested and provided.

The customer database reports that in 2008, practical supports were offered on 15 occasions by Spokes.

In addition to these supports, food and refreshments are provided on-site and people using the drop-in service can undertake the driving theory test.

The majority of the customers consulted were not aware of the existence of this emergency fund, and it is the intention of Spokes not to publicise its existence. Customers made the point that if they had a specific need for anything, they would feel confident about speaking to Spokes staff, and some noted that support had been given in the form of referrals to CWOs for other needs.

This was viewed as an important type of flexible support for people, and it is possible that local supports for such purposes could be accessed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, through a facilitator.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.12 To liaise with key workers in ensuring the customer's welfare and accommodation needs are met, as needs are identified

Spokes staff can liaise with the customer's key workers, when required and on condition that the customer gives consent. This was reported to happen quite frequently, and liaison would take place in relation to progress of the customer and their future plans for education and training.

<sup>18</sup> There is a network of 60 facilitators throughout the country in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Their role is to focus support on the needs of target groups who are distanced from the labour market, and enable them to access a range of services and supports available to them to enable them to move closer to the labour market.

Six of those consulted had key workers at present.

*"My key worker and Spokes staff ...have met with me to discuss going to college. I am going through a really tough court case at the moment and have received great support."*

The relationships that can develop between Spokes staff and customers were regarded as unique and were attributed to the following:

- \_ Spokes staff can have a longitudinal relationship with customers, spanning several weeks or months. The service can offer a continuity of support during times of transition, for example, when an individual is moving between services (and hence, may be changing key workers), or when an individual is changing accommodation.
- \_ Staff would sometimes see crisis situations arising during times of change in a customer's life, and it is often during these times that supports around an individual change. For example, if an individual moves from one accommodation provision to another, new key working provisions will often apply.
- \_ Supports offered in Spokes are not based on conditions of access to the service. Customers can confide with staff without fear of repercussion, or fears around loss of service, loss of accommodation, etc. Both staff and customers feel that this enables trusting and open relationships to develop, leading to positive outcomes.

*"We are not key workers but the [Spokes] worker may see the person more than their key worker and might be asked questions."*

For those customers who do not have a key worker, Spokes refers to the other Focus Ireland services (such as the Open Access Case Management Team), and can provide supports on an interim basis to people until they have a key worker. According to statistics for 2008, this support was offered on 38 occasions. One customer

consulted was receiving assistance from Spokes to access a key worker.

### 3.13 Summary and evaluation commentary

The Spokes programme is very positively viewed by service providers and customers, who acknowledge the impact that it has had on their lives, in terms of educational outcomes, confidence building measures and access to supports as required.

Some of the particularly valued aspects of the programme cited were:

- \_ Spokes delivers a flexible, customer-centred service. One example of this is the one-to-one support provided to customers. Spokes continues to provide one-to-one support to individuals who return to complete FETAC accredited courses, despite having previously disengaged from the course.
- \_ The approach of staff members and their understanding of the issues around homelessness affecting customers was particularly emphasised by referring organisations as a key factor in the success of Spokes.
- \_ Its flexibility of service delivery and capacity to support customers that may be at different stages of their personal progression as regards education and training. This enables the project to work with all presenting customers at their own pace, and at earlier stages of 'readiness' than other training and education providers.
- \_ The social interaction between customers through social programmes and outings, and the drop-in service facilitate peer support, build confidence, and tackle isolation amongst those with limited social networks.
- \_ Its expertise in capacity building, life-skills and confidence building measures amongst customers, through non-accredited and informal training. The commitment and expertise of staff members was regarded as a major contributory factor to these outcomes.
- \_ When required, one-to-one and mentor supports are

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provided to customers, even after they have accessed education and training programmes elsewhere. This helps to sustain their participation in further education.

\_ There are good opportunities for customer participation in all aspects of the programme, including content of programmes and activities. Customers reported very good opportunities for engagement, feedback, and consultation and reported a strong sense of ownership over the programme.

\_ There is clear evidence from customers consulted and from the experience of referring organisations that Spokes has had significant impact on their quality of life.

Holistic education planning with customers has primarily been undertaken on an informal rather than formal, written basis. The main reasons for this are lack of staff and time to carry out the work on a one-to-one basis, and lack of space on the premises (space is required for confidentiality reasons). While the informal planning process is highly rated, the lack of a written plan could undermine the project's ability to set milestones with customers and review progress.

Education and training activities were prioritised by consulted customers, and employment was less of a concern. This may be to do with their age, stage in education (focusing on gaining qualifications), current labour market conditions, and also the fact that Spokes is generally regarded as a first stage in education, training and employment. Finally, a general evaluation observation is that the objectives of Spokes are primarily focused on its activities rather than broader goals of the overall programme.

# 4. Spokes model of service delivery

31.

## 4.1 Introduction

According to the profile document 'Spokes model of service delivery 2008'

*"[The focus of the project] 'is ultimately on leading clients to further life-long learning in the community or mainstream services or into employment, depending on the needs of the client...The approach aims to be client centred at all times and provides for various levels of interaction and commitment by clients. The pathways approach within Focus Ireland is described in a linear fashion, but it recognises that clients may not follow a linear path but dip in and out of services."*

In this section, the interventions and stages that comprise the model of service delivery are considered, according to the following headings:

- \_Referrals
- \_Assessment
- \_Drop-in
- \_Education
- \_Training and employment
- \_Referrals and onward progression

## 4.2 Referrals

Spokes is accessible to all Focus Ireland and other organisations' customers, once they are referred by their key worker. According to the project, once Spokes moved from John's Lane West, it was no longer closely associated with the Extension project, and this meant that an increasing number of referrals came from other Focus Ireland and homeless services.

### 4.2.1 Data on referrals

The data available on referrals provides some information on referrals into the service in 2008. Full data is not available on referrals, and so the following should be taken as a sample of referrals (representing 44% of all new customers in 2008).

The largest source of referrals to Spokes came from Focus Ireland services, which accounted for 63% of all referrals in 2008. Focus Ireland services that made the most referrals to Spokes were:

- \_Focus Ireland Transitional Programme (accounting for 16.7% of all referrals).
- \_Focus Ireland Extension Project (accounting for 14.3% of all referrals).
- \_Focus Ireland Coffee Shop and Outreach services (each accounting for 10.3% of all referrals).

The second most frequent source of referrals to Spokes was voluntary (non-statutory) homeless services, which accounted for 13.5%.

Self-referrals accounted for 6%, and emergency accommodation providers accounted for 5% of referrals.

Other sources of referrals included local authority, community groups, and addiction services: each accounted for less than 5% of referrals.

### 4.2.2 Views of referral organisations

A small number of services that make referrals to Spokes were asked to comment on aspects of the practice that they would rate highly, as well as to comment on any changes that they would make to the service.

Responses noted the secure and safe environment that Spokes provides for service users; the informal and flexible approach of the service; and the encouraging and supportive approach of staff as key attributes of the service.



*"We would refer approximately 70% of our customers with education needs to Spokes... the advantage of referring to Spokes over other education providers is their understanding of the general issues pertaining to homelessness...The empathy and understanding is essential in keeping our customers engaged...they can pitch the courses at an appropriate level."*

Spokes is viewed as a good starting point for those who wish to return to training and education, particularly because of its emphasis on confidence-building.

*"We find that once people have started to participate it raises their confidence and starts a momentum...they often say 'I hope to do another one.'"*

One service commented on the impacts that Spokes has had on its customers:

*"I've seen Spokes turn around the lives of customers."*

Training, education and employment placement providers do not appear to make significant referrals to Spokes. This is consistent with a view amongst some service providers that Spokes is principally geared towards an initial stage of engagement in training and education.

Organisations such as CDVEC Foundations project would make referrals to Spokes when its own courses are full, when a customer is seeking a course that Spokes offers (and Foundations does not), or when additional provision is requested (i.e. classes for more days in the week). Business in the Community's 'Ready For Work' project made the point that it would refer to Spokes in cases where individuals may not be ready for participation in their project, but would probably refer primarily to Foundations rather than Spokes.

#### 4.2.3 Views of Spokes' customers

Customers who were consulted were asked about how they were referred to Spokes. Focus Ireland (principally the Coffee Shop, and also key workers in George's Hill housing) accounted for the majority of referrals. Customers were also referred from Cedar House, YMCA, Fr. Peter McVerry Trust, and the Night Bus.

One customer stated that she had been staying in a hostel for five months before she was made aware of Spokes – in her experience she felt that information may not have been passed on (internally) within accommodation units. Onward referrals and progression is discussed in *Section 4.7*.

*"The hostels have been told [by Spokes] but the information is not being passed on....lots of people I know in the same accommodation didn't know about it."*

#### 4.3 Assessment (and Holistic Individual Education Plans)

According to the 'Spokes model of service delivery':

*A brief initial assessment is conducted using information gathered from the customer and their key worker. This takes the form of an information exchange between customer and the assigned staff member. Immediate priorities are identified and realistic goals are set in response to the educational and development needs of the individual.*

*A Holistic Individual Education Plan (HEIP) development and review process is undertaken with customers who are regularly attending and there is an expectation that they partake in the process. The process aims to focus customers in on their ability to reach self-defined goals and creates an opportunity to set expectations and provide planned support as the customer takes the steps to meet their goals.*

*Formal education or employment assessments are only carried out for formal literacy or numeracy support where level of educational attainment is necessary in order to tailor sessions to the customers' educational need.*



Assessments carried out within Spokes are primarily informal and verbal assessments undertaken with customers, on first presentation and throughout their engagement.

The process of Holistic Individual Educational Planning has been discussed in *Section 3.1*. The lack of space and staff shortages militates against undertaking plans with customers on a formal and written basis.

Recent loss of funding and subsequent loss of staffing was seen to further undermine the ability to undertake Holistic Individual Education Planning going forward, and the impact of such changes on one-to-one support was already felt by customers.

Some staff also held the view that some customers are reluctant to engage in a written and structured planning process, and that such structure may be seen as at odds with Spokes' reputation as a flexible, welcoming space.

Customers who were consulted viewed the planning process as broadly very positive and useful, even if it is informal and undertaken on a verbal basis. One customer did note that the planning process was written. However this does seem to be the exception.

The lack of a formal planning process means that tracking and reviewing of individuals' progress is hard to quantify and clarify. It also undermines the ability of Spokes to quantify and document the impact it is having with customers with funders and external bodies.

## 4.4 Drop-in

According to the 'Spokes model of service delivery' profile document:

*Drop-in is 'in line with research which highlights the need for flexible service delivery which is cognisant of the realities of our clients' lives and delivered with professionalism and empathy to ensure client retention and commitment from them to subsequent personal development and progression opportunities'.*

Again, comments around the drop-in and flexible nature of service delivery have been made above in *Section 3*.

The drop-in service includes use of computers and the internet, preparation for driving tests, and support from staff. It allows relationships to be built and enables the individual to engage with the project in a flexible manner.

As such, drop-in is a tool used to encourage further engagement and to build confidence.

Spokes is the only education service that delivers drop-in of this kind in Dublin. The Foundations programme previously delivered a limited drop-in but the service found that drop-in can consume resources, because staff must be present regardless of the number of people accessing the service.

In Spokes, the drop-in aspect of the service is heavily subscribed by customers of the service, and in 2008, it accounted for 2,787 contacts<sup>19</sup> with customers (representing 62% of all contacts with customers for that year).

## 4.5 Education

Education services comprise both accredited and non-accredited education. Both are separate and equally important elements of the Spokes model and are discussed separately below.

### 4.5.1 Engagement work – life and personal skills development

Life and personal skills development is undertaken and assisted through non-accredited courses and activities such as arts, music, relaxation, outdoor pursuits, and drop-in computer classes. Health related workshops and summer project activities have been supported with private sector funding from the Blackrock Clinic and Coca Cola Ireland.

These interventions can support people to progress to more structured and accredited training courses. Non-accredited courses are also a means of engaging people in accredited training (as a first step).

<sup>19</sup> Recorded in Focus Ireland's customer database as 'unplanned contacts'.

This is an important aspect of Spokes' work, given the low education attainment of those who attend the service.<sup>20</sup> In addition to this, participants may have had a negative attitude towards school and life, and personal skills development offers a route to more formal education as well as building soft skills, such as team working, communication, assertiveness and timekeeping.

#### 4.5.2 Views of customers

Customers consulted in the evaluation had varying experiences of primary and secondary school. Some had very positive experiences of secondary school, but others either had left school very early as a result of displacement, homelessness, family circumstances, or had experienced bullying within the school system such that they had negative experiences of education. For these customers Spokes' informal training provides an opportunity to consider education with a new perspective.

*"I have done stuff here that I would never have thought of.... I never thought I would learn."*

Furthermore, many of the non-formal education programmes have been developed arising from the feedback and suggestions of customers, for example, courses on anger management. Customers noted the relevance of courses like childcare, parenting skills and anger management to their own experiences and felt that the approach in Spokes to non-formal education meant that courses offered were transferrable to their everyday life. In particular, the relevance of non-accredited and practical, employment related supports such as workshops in developing CVs and interviewing skills were cited.

*"They showed us how to do CVs. When you've been homeless, you may have gaps in your CVs and you are afraid to even apply for jobs in case this comes up. They have helped us to deal with that in CVs and interviews."*

#### 4.5.3 Views of service providers and staff

Those who refer to Spokes felt that the non-formal training programmes were a very useful means of engaging with people. Some of their suggestions going forward included:

- \_ Some courses could be run in block periods, as some customers would find this easier than adhering to a routine of 1-2 days per week over a long period of time.
- \_ As much advanced notice as possible of courses would help in building education into customers' care plans.
- \_ An outreach service which could provide mentor support, particularly for young men, as part of a general education programme, would be very useful.
- \_ Anger management, parenting skills, conflict resolution are very relevant to the lives and experiences of those homeless.
- \_ Some facilitated group work would be very useful.

Delivery of non-accredited courses has also taken place in accommodation providers such as Cedar House (computers) and St Catherine's Foyer (cooking). According to those consulted, feedback from participants was very positive and attendance rates were high. Cedar House would be keen to continue developing programmes in the hostel and have started its own social programmes. Staff in Spokes stated that delivery in the hostel environment worked well, but made the point that certain courses may require equipment which may not be present in the hostel environment (e.g. computers, printers and other IT hardware).

Moreover, the delivery of courses in premises also provides the opportunity for social interaction, which was highly valued by customers consulted.

Finally, staff made the point that while non-formal education programmes were extremely relevant, the lack of mainstream funding for their delivery meant that the service was restricted in the number of courses it could offer.

20 Data provides only the education attainment of those registered with BTEI for FETAC accreditation, and in 2008, over three-quarters (76%) had an educational attainment of lower secondary or less. Thus far, the corresponding figure for 2009 is 82%, and over one-third (34%) of 2009 BTEI customers have primary education only.

#### 4.5.4 Accredited education, including FETAC modules

The Spokes Programme became a registered learning site with FETAC in February 2002. In 2007 the programme was awarded FETAC quality assurance, allowing the programme to offer modules from FETAC level one through to FETAC level six<sup>21</sup>. Spokes has been providing accredited education to FETAC Level 3, comparable to the Junior Certificate, since 2007.

Funding for the delivery of modules (tutor hours) is provided by the Department of Education and Science (under the Back To Education Initiative) and administered by the City of Dublin VEC. The first full year of delivering BTEI FETAC accredited courses was 2008.

Data for 2008 reports that:

- \_ A total of 105 people participated on BTEI (FETAC accredited) courses in 2008.
- \_ 69 participants (66%) were male and 36 (34%) were female.
- \_ 76% had an educational attainment of lower second level<sup>22</sup> or less (with 42% having attained primary level education or less).

The data for 2008 profiles other characteristics of the BTEI participants. It should be noted that this profile is only for a sample of Spokes' customers. However, it does give an indication of the extent of disadvantage of Spokes' customers and therefore an indication of what their support needs might be:

- \_ 30.5% of BTEI participants (32 individuals) were in receipt of disability or illness payment.
- \_ An additional 29% of BTEI participants (30 individuals) were unemployed for more than three years.

Completion rates for 2008 tell us that:

- \_ 29 participants (28%) achieved accreditation within the year. A further 30 participants (29%) did not complete the programme in the year and were continuing the

programme into the subsequent year.<sup>23</sup>

- \_ The non-completion rate was 60 individuals (57%). Reasons given for this included the requirement to register all individuals as participants, even if they only attend one class in the course of the year.

In April 2009, an awards ceremony took place where 30 individuals were presented with awards. A total of 101 modules were certified. The awards are seen as a very important aspect of the accredited courses. This view was expressed by staff in Spokes, referral organisations and customers alike. One referring organisation made that following point:

*"For some participants, the awards may be the only recognition of achievement that someone homeless may receive...they are extremely important."*

Reports for the first six months of 2009 indicate that there are currently 44 individuals participating in BTEI FETAC modules.

One of the unique features of Spokes is that customers' folders are submitted for FETAC accreditation twice a year. This enables those who have broken their engagement with the project, for personal or other reasons (for example, health or addiction issues, breakdown of accommodation, prison) can re-submit their folders, and are provided with supports to do this when they re-engage with the service. While other services allow resubmission of work to FETAC, no other service provides the level of one-to-one support for this as Spokes.

The service is considering extending FETAC accredited courses to Levels 1 and 2 in 2009.

For the CDVEC, which funds tutor hours in the delivery of the FETAC modules for BTEI, the strength of Spokes lies in its ability to undertake developmental work with customers, which complements the work undertaken in structured classes (for example, through provision of drop-in and other supports). In addition to this, its integration with other supports (as part of the broader Focus Ireland structure) means it is well placed to bring the issues and

<sup>21</sup> FETAC awards are quality assured and are part of the national framework.

<sup>22</sup> I.e. Junior/ Intermediate Certificate or less. FETAC level 3 is equivalent to Junior Certificate.

<sup>23</sup> There is some overlap between these categories, as some customers completed modules within the year, and started others but did not complete them. Taken together and removing any overlap and double counting of individuals gives a completion/ part completion rate of 35 individuals.

needs of customers to the attention of key workers. The project also has the flexibility to respond to needs as they arise in a practical sense (for example, the delivery of summer projects could present logistical and staffing difficulties in other mainstream VEC services).

#### 4.6 Training and employment (information and advice)

Training, education and employment advice and support is provided both formally, as part of planned interventions with customers, and informally, through drop-in support provided by staff in Spokes. This includes referrals to education and employment providers and has been discussed above in *Section 3.6*.

##### 4.6.1 Delivery

In 2007 a dedicated career and job-mentoring worker position was piloted to identify young people's progression routes and to link them with appropriate work placements or education options. This was supported through private support and fundraising. Following a review of the pilot service, the career and job mentoring role was integrated into the roles of project workers.

Spokes also refers people to specialised career guidance support provided by the CDVEC, which was highly rated by customers.

*"The career guidance [service], I was there just yesterday – it is brilliant."*

##### 4.6.2 Data on interventions

In 2008, 253 specific interventions around job mentoring and work are recorded in Focus Ireland's customer database. The nature of this support is flexible, and one customer commented on the support she received:

*"They helped me look for places to do [voluntary work experience]...have helped with my CV, rang places, looked up internet for projects, left messages...they did everything they could to support me.."*

Training and employment information and advice also spans a range of other, flexible supports, as outlined in the table below, which is drawn from the customer database for 2008.

| No.   | Type of action              | Examples  |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|
| 15    | Assistance with job seeking | Bus passes for interviews                                     |
| 108   | Planned customer contact    | Follow with customer  |
| 180   | Phone contact with customer |   |
| 515   | Advice and information      | Basic advice re. training or education                        |
| 100   | Personal programme supports | Assistance with writing letters/ applications                 |
| 21    | Accompanied to appointment  | Training and education related appointments                   |
| 2,283 | Basic social contact        | This includes drop-in with supports provided including advice |
| 46    | Advocacy                    | Liaison with support workers                                  |

##### 4.6.3 Views of staff

Staff make the point that the customer database is not amenable to capturing the full range of interventions that come under this heading.

It is also one of the areas which staff and customers feel is vulnerable to the loss of staffing in the project, and the lack of time for one-to-one support was mentioned by both staff and customers in the evaluation process.

In the context of a lack of resources and greater emphasis on inter-agency collaboration, engagement with other service providers such as the Local Employment Services could be pursued.

## 4.7 Referrals and onward progression

An extract from the 'Spokes model of service delivery' notes that:

*"When a customer reaches their goals and is moving on from Spokes, project workers work with the customers to identify secure and appropriate onward referrals to community education centres or groups, further education and training or employment. This onward progression is coordinated along with... services with Focus Ireland...Project workers support customers throughout the referral process and in their progression and remain available to the customers for ongoing support when appropriate."*

Referrals are made by Spokes to a plethora of support, training, education and employment advisory services, career guidance, and other services.

### 4.7.1 Data from 2008

According to the customer database, in 2008 67% of referrals from Spokes were made to education, training and employment related services and the remaining 33% to other support services (including health, addiction, mental health supports, legal supports and other supports within Focus Ireland).

According to Spokes staff, some of the referrals are not captured in the data because the supports and advice given is on a one-to-one and verbal basis, and not always as part of a structured intervention. The 2008 data records 58 onward referrals, of which 39 were made to education/training or employment providers. These are detailed in the table opposite.

| Count     | Referrals from Spokes (2008)          | Examples  |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 6         | Pre-employment support                | Citizens Advice, careers advice, etc.   |
| 18        | Referral to adult education programme | Structured courses (e.g. 10-20 week courses); PLC courses; Digital Hub training |
| 13        | Education and training service        | Community education providers, CDVEC Foundations.                               |
| 1         | Employment services                   | Obair or Local Employment Services  |
| 1         | FÁS                                   |   |
| 19        | Non education/training/employment     | Addiction / health/legal/ other Focus Ireland                                   |
| <b>58</b> |                                       |   |

The table above indicates that most referrals are made to education and training services with fewer referrals to employment related services. According to the 'Ready For Work' project, nine people were referred to their programme in 2008.

### 4.7.2 Views of customers

Customers were asked about other training and education services that they were accessing or had accessed. Four were currently accessing training and education outside of Spokes, and had been referred to these services by Spokes. Another customer was accessing career guidance support from the VEC, again referred by Spokes. Some individuals had accessed more than one education/training programme.

However, customers who had progressed to other programmes continued to engage with Spokes, either on a formal or an informal/drop-in basis. For these customers,

this support was very important in sustaining their participation on their programmes.

Three customers consulted had clear plans for progression onto university courses. One customer was preparing for a pre-college course and another was participating on an access course for Trinity College (and was already accepted onto a degree course there). One customer was interested in accessing volunteering opportunities within Spokes or other services, particularly in the area of maths tutoring.

The remainder of the customers were completing programmes within Spokes: one customer was awaiting sentencing arising from a court case and was anticipating a custodial sentence; another was planning to complete second level qualifications; another had engaged with the Ready For Work programme and had identified plans for working in the retail sector, where he had prior experience.

One customer had an interest in engaging with a welding course, but stated that he did not have access to a course without paying fees (Dublin Institute of Technology).

For some customers, the existence of Spokes as a structured programme during the day was very important, even if they were not engaging in programmed courses at the time. All engaged with the programme several days per week, and some attended each day. For these customers, the structure to their day that Spokes provided was one of the main reasons for their attendance. Two of the customers had some mental health concerns, which along with age (in one instance) was a significant issue impacting on opportunities for progressing to employment.

#### 4.7.3 Views of staff and service providers

According to staff, progression of customers is hard to track for the following reasons:

— Once a customer accesses a course or service outside of Spokes, their progression and outcomes may not be known as they may not necessarily continue to engage with Spokes.

— The absence of a written holistic education planning

process makes it difficult to capture, in written form, progression within the service.

Some other barriers to referral and progression identified from the consultations were:

— Progression from FETAC Level 3 to Level 4 is a very significant jump for customers, according to the CDVEC. The CDVEC believes there is a need for a bridging programme between the two levels. The Foundations project notes that engagement in its service is - in itself - a progression route for Spokes participants (even for those remaining within Level 3 accreditation courses) as Foundations is a community based, mainstream education and training service.

— In general, people who have experienced homelessness with mental health difficulties find it hard to progress to employment (this was identified by customers and service providers). This is reiterated by the profile of 2008 BTEI participants ((as outlined in Section 4.5.4)) which would indicate that they are distanced from the labour market. The National Learning Network<sup>24</sup> was identified in consultations as a possible model to engage with, around progression to the labour market.<sup>25</sup>

There would appear to be limited collaboration between training and education providers. This can lead to different perceptions across homeless (and training and education) services as to what different programmes offer. These issues are not specific to Spokes and refer to the broader context (which is further discussed in Section 5.3.4).

### 4.8 Elements of good practice and evaluation commentary

The consultation process identified the following elements of good practice within Spokes:

— The flexibility of supports and programmes offered by Spokes is regarded by those consulted as a positive aspect of the service and the needs of the customer. This enables the project to work with all presenting customers at a pace that suits them, and to engage at

<sup>24</sup> The National Learning Network (formerly National Training and Development Institute) is part of the Rehab group, and provides training in over 50 purpose built training and employment units nationwide catering for over 4,500 students. Its objective is to assist people at a disadvantage in the labour market to learn the skills they need to build lasting careers in jobs that reflect their interests and abilities. This is achieved through a brand of training, education, employment access and enterprise development. The majority of National Learning Network's student body is made up of people with disabilities.

<sup>25</sup> The role of the social economy as a means of enabling progression to the labour market is discussed in section 6 of this report.



earlier stages of 'readiness' than other services.

- \_ The approach by staff demonstrates a keen understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness, and the project adopts a developmental approach in working with customers.
- \_ The expertise of individual staff members and their approach and commitment was cited as a major contributory factor to building confidence and self-esteem of customers.
- \_ There are good opportunities for participation of customers in all aspects of the programme, including content of non-accredited and accredited programmes and activities. Customers report very good opportunities for engagement, feedback and consultation in all aspects of the programme, and report a strong sense of ownership over particular elements.
- \_ Spokes provides informal opportunities for customers to provide peer support particularly through drop-in and in computer classes. The mix of customers and varying levels of skills would appear to contribute to this peer support.
- \_ There is clear evidence from the views of customers consulted that Spokes has had significant impacts on the quality of the lives of customers.

## 4.9 Issues

The consultation process also identified a range of other issues within the programme:

- \_ While supports are provided in a flexible manner, some service providers felt that this could potentially undermine a focus on progression.
- \_ The inability of staff to undertake written assessments of customers principally arising as a result of lack of space and staff time can undermine the capturing of data on outcomes and progression of customers. The reliance on informal and verbal assessments can undermine the ability to establish clear milestones that can be reviewed.
- \_ There was some perceived overlap between services

offered by Spokes and other providers, such as CDVEC Foundations and Local Employment Services. This perception arose within Focus Ireland services and with other training and education providers.

- \_ Spokes has evolved into a service which engages with people who might not ordinarily engage with training and education programmes focused on progression towards education, training and ultimately employment opportunities. While this could be seen as a strength of the service, in terms of its responsiveness to the needs of customers, the point was also made that the role of Spokes in meeting the needs for structured activities to an individual's day was not the primary role of the service.
- \_ Spokes' location within the overall management structure of Focus Ireland has changed since it was established. As a result, its target group has shifted from primarily young people, to a much broader group. It was felt by some in Focus Ireland that there was a need to clarify its target group, rather than become a 'catch all' service.
- \_ A series of revised aims and objectives could establish clarity around target groups and expected outcomes for participants.
- \_ However, any changes in target groups for Spokes would need to take into consideration ethical issues for customers, in the context of withdrawal of services, especially for those who have mental health issues.

## 5.0 The external environment – policy and practice

40.

### 5.1 Introduction

In this section, an outline of national and local policies and practice issues with regard to homelessness and employability are outlined.

### 5.2 The policy context: training and employability measures

#### 5.2.1 National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2007-2012

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy<sup>26</sup> (NAPS) is the government's plan to reduce and prevent poverty. The strategy defines poverty as follows:

*"People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participation in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society (Ending Child Poverty, 2005: p23).<sup>27</sup>"*

The New Anti-Poverty Strategy places considerable emphasis on the provision of services and activation of people who are distant from the labour market as a means of addressing social exclusion. The overall poverty goal is to 'to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016'. The strategy is set out according to the life-cycle approach outlined in the National Economic Social Council report on the Developmental Welfare State. In relation to employability, the plan states that:

*"Groups outside the workforce and people in low-paid employment need additional supports to enhance their employability. It is important that a balance between flexibility and security is achieved. This involves a smooth transition between jobs, with minimal absence from the workforce; the ability to continuously develop skills and competencies through lifelong learning and up-skilling."*

*Employment has proven to be a major factor for people exiting poverty and also influences quality of life and social well-being.*

#### **Under the NAPS Goal 5: Employment and Participation**

*Introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment. The target is to support 50,000 such people, including lone parents and the long-term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 2016.*

Under its planned services in relation to employment and employability, NAPS identifies a range of target groups on the margins of the labour market including people with disabilities, lone parents, Travellers and prisoners. However people experiencing homelessness are not highlighted as a focus for action.

There is a strong commitment within the plan on building adult literacy, a key barrier to employment for many people who are homeless. An additional 7,000 places will be provided by Vocational Education Committees for this purpose. Further investment is also to be provided for the Back to Education initiative, which has been accessed by users of homeless services for second chance education, including those participating in Spokes. A further 2,000 places will be provided via this initiative. The only other commitments in relation to addressing homelessness within the plan relate to development of the new national strategy, the greater involvement of the community and voluntary sector in this regard, and elimination of long-term occupancy of emergency homeless services.

#### **5.2.2 National Employment Action Plan and National Reform Programmes**

The Irish National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) included a commitment to more systematic engagement with the unemployed. The core priority was a preventative strategy, focused on early and systematic intervention with unemployed people, re-integrating them into the labour market as quickly as possible by providing them

26 Office for Social Inclusion (2007) 'National Action for Social Inclusion 2007-2016' Dublin: Government Publications  
27 Combat Poverty Agency (2005) 'Ending Child Poverty: policy statement on child poverty' Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency



with the necessary skills. The National Reform Programme has superseded the NEAP, and it is operated by FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs, whereby a referral process is undertaken with clients within three months of presenting to social welfare offices. In 2007, of those referred for interview under this process, 2% were unable to progress to training or employment, i.e. *'not progression ready'*.<sup>28</sup>

Work has been ongoing to extend the preventive process to other groups such as lone parents and those with disabilities. The strategy states that consideration will be given to specialist support for these groups *'with due regard to the special needs of those groups'*.<sup>29</sup>

The aim of the Department of Social and Family Affairs' Employment Support Services (ESS) is to assist unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, lone parents, and sickness related welfare recipients to return to the active labour market either by taking up employment or becoming self-employed. This is achieved through the Back to Education and Back to Work Allowance Schemes, the Technical Assistance and Training Grants and the PRSI Exemption Scheme.

#### Activation Measures

The Activation<sup>30</sup> and Family Support Programme (AFSP) allocates funding for programmes to assist individuals and families to enhance their employability through education, training and personal development opportunities. It is an amalgamation of the Family Services Project and Special Projects funds in operation up to December 2007.

The fund is administered by local facilitators and is used to provide enhanced support to small groups of customers with complex needs in the form of training and developmental opportunities.

Types of activities funded include:

- \_ Personal development/capacity building training;
- \_ Strengthening parenting skills;

\_ Support services for families;

\_ Educational and Training opportunities to enhance their potential.

The Activation and Family Support Programme provides flexible funding to non-mainstream activities, and is complementary to FÁS or VEC funding.

There is a budget of €6million for the entire country. According to the Department of Social and Family Affairs' Employment Support Services, as of July 2009, applications were still being accepted for 'activation programmes'.

#### **5.2.3 The Equality Authority: Equality Mainstreaming Unit**

The Equality Mainstreaming Unit in the Equality Authority is one of the initiatives set up under the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013.<sup>31</sup>

The main objective of the Equality Mainstreaming Unit is to contribute to addressing labour market gaps in Ireland for specific groups that are experiencing barriers to participation and employment. The programme consists of measures that seek to improve labour market access and participation of groups experiencing inequality across the nine grounds covered by the Equality legislation.<sup>32</sup> The Equality Mainstreaming Unit is based in the Equality Authority.

#### The objectives of the Equality Mainstreaming Unit

The specific objective of this unit is to facilitate and support institutional change within providers of vocational education and training, labour market programmes and within small and medium enterprises by strengthening their capacity to combat discrimination, to promote equality and to accommodate diversity.

The Equality Mainstreaming Unit's work is organised across four strands of specific activity:

- \_ Support packages for equality mainstreaming approaches to providers of vocational education and training and labour market programmes.

<sup>28</sup> Department of an Taoiseach (2008) 'Lisbon Agenda- Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs- Ireland National Reform Plan 2008-2010

<sup>29</sup> Department of an Taoiseach (2008) 'Lisbon Agenda- Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs- Ireland National Reform Plan 2008-2010

<sup>30</sup> 'Activation' is a term used to describe moving people of working age from a social welfare payment into employment. Since the late 1990s the key Government policy for supporting unemployed people into employment, training and education has focused on National Reform Programme (NRP) process whereby social welfare offices refer people to FÁS after a specific period of time, currently three months.

<sup>31</sup> The Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI OP) 2007-2013 is a €1.360 billion plan that addresses Ireland's labour market and human capital development needs for the period 2007-2013.

<sup>32</sup> The nine grounds are gender, marital status, family status, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, race and membership of the Traveller community.

- \_ Consultancy support to support small to medium enterprises in promoting planned and systematic approaches to workplace equality.
- \_ Support for the development of sectoral approaches/projects to promote workplace equality.
- \_ The development of research and resource materials.

### 5.3 The policy context: homelessness

National and local policy emphasises the elimination of long-term homelessness, and the support of homeless people into long-term housing as soon as possible. In this section an overview of relevant policy measures, and their relevance to Spokes, is given.

#### 5.3.1 The Way Home – A national strategy to address adult homelessness 2008-2013

The Government's current strategy on homelessness, 'The Way Home' was launched in August 2008. Its vision states that:

*From 2010, long term homelessness (i.e. the occupation of emergency accommodation for longer than 6 months) and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated throughout Ireland. The risk of a person becoming homeless will be minimised through effective preventative policies and services. When it does occur homelessness will be short term and people who are homeless will be assisted into appropriate long term housing.*

Projects that are identified in the strategy for funding include:

*Projects or services that link homeless people or people at risk of homelessness with education/training activities that enhance their skills, qualifications and employment potential (2008:61).*

As regards the implementation of the strategy, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has developed an implementation plan for the strategy in conjunction with the Cross Department Team on Homelessness with input from the National Homelessness Consultative Committee.

With regard to training and education, the Implementation Plan outlines the following actions:

#### **Priority Action 1.1 – Education, training and work**

*Development of national guidance on delivery of educational, training and work opportunities for people who are homeless.*

##### Constituent / supporting measures

*Homeless people to continue to be a target group for the Back to Education Initiative (in 2007, 101 homeless people took part in this programme).*

*Homeless people should be encouraged to participate in other Adult and Further Education Programmes, including the Adult Literacy and Community Education programme.*

*Continue roll out of the action plan for educational inclusion, 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, 2005 – 2010', which focuses on addressing the needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities.*

*FÁS will contribute to an inter-agency approach to ensure appropriate referrals to specific skills training and employment programmes, thereby incorporating the necessary supports to remove barriers to access and participation in training and the labour market. Piloting of this approach, initially in Dublin, with a view to national roll out.*

*Maintain investment by training, education agencies (e.g. VECs) to address needs of homeless people and to maintain the interagency approach to ensure appropriate referrals and supports for homeless people to access a wide range of FÁS programmes.*

### 5.3.2 The Homeless Agency and Housing First

A policy of 'housing first' offers homeless individuals (especially those with psychiatric or addiction related difficulties) the opportunity to move directly into long-term and social housing accommodation without having to step through emergency and transitional accommodation. It invests directly in the individual and allows them the scope and support to move almost directly into independent living. It allows them the scope to succeed – and to fail – without the judgment that condemns them to an endless cycle of rough sleeping and emergency accommodation.

The Homeless Agency's 'Evaluation of homeless services'<sup>33</sup> published in December 2008, describes the housing first approach:

*Housing first is an approach to ending homelessness that has been developed in the USA, which involves assisting homeless people to move into permanent housing as quickly as possible and providing appropriate support services to them in their homes. This is in contrast to the traditional route through emergency accommodation, transitional housing, and then into long-term housing. The crucial difference between the two approaches is that the traditional route requires people to be 'housing ready' by the time they move into long-term housing; whilst the housing first approach involves short-term stabilisation followed quickly by a move into long-term housing, with the provision of appropriate home based services to help tenants maintain their tenancy and develop their independence and autonomy.*

*The UK's National Alliance to End Homeless (2008) states that housing first programmes have a number of common elements:*

\_ There is a focus on helping individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing as quickly as possible and the housing is not time-limited.

\_ A variety of services are delivered primarily following a housing placement to promote housing stability and individual well-being.

\_ Such services are time-limited or long-term depending on individual need.

\_ Housing is not contingent on compliance with services – instead, participants must comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with the services and supports that are necessary to help them do so successfully

The evaluation found that 69% of those accessing homeless services would be suitable for housing in private or social housing accommodation with varying degrees of support. The evaluation acknowledged that too few people were moving from emergency accommodation to transitional housing – and from homeless service accommodation to mainstream supported housing. It recommended the full adoption of a 'Housing First' approach.

The Evaluation of Homeless Services also calls for a reconfiguration of homeless and housing services to ensure the necessary provision of services at a local level. This recommendation has been adopted.

#### Implications for service delivery and training and education provision

According to the Homeless Agency, the effects of this policy reorientation will include a change in the configuration of services, and that within a period of one year, changes will be evident. It is likely that the implications of a housing first policy would include:

\_ Supports will be required to 'wrap around' the individual, rather than the individual fitting with existing supports.

\_ The role of the key worker or the 'housing support officer' is likely to change, as referrals to a range of organisations will become a very important part of the support work.

\_ The location of customers will be more dispersed as people access their own accommodation. This is likely

33 Homeless Agency (2008): Evaluation of Homeless Services: 2008 Series. Dublin: Homeless Agency. The evaluation series was commissioned by the Homeless Agency and was carried out by Simon Brooke and Associates. Available online: <http://www.homelessagency.ie/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?nodeguid=148c2b14-65f1-4e17-996b-43b4c4ad9637>

to have implications for the delivery of services, such as Outreach, as fewer customers will be in single locations.

\_ There will be an increased emphasis on accessing services within the community, and on integration of the individual back into the community. Many people who have experienced homelessness have fractured or limited personal networks and experience isolation. In some cases, the closest relationships can be with professional workers. Rebuilding networks as well as confidence can be supported through mentoring and befriending programmes.

\_ The successful establishment of a housing first policy will effectively lead to the end of transitional housing programmes. Those who would be supported within a transitional context will still require these supports (for example, life skills development), but it is not yet clear how these supports will be delivered or by whom. Some of those consulted believe that some can be provided by housing support workers, but other capacity building measures, for example, group-based facilitation work, could be undertaken by education and training organisations.

\_ The consultation process indicated that the availability of FETAC accreditation (all levels up to Level 3) could be a useful tool to deliver supports such as life skills and capacity building supports, which might have formed part of a transitional housing programme to date.

### 5.3.3 Homeless Agency: training, education and employment actions

One of the Preventative actions in the Homeless Agency's 'A Key to the Door: Action Plan on Homelessness (2007-2010)', is:

*The Homeless Agency Partnership in consultation with the Department of Enterprise and Trade, FÁS, Department of Education, CDVEC, Business in the Community and other bodies will develop a strategy for implementing targeted training, education and employment initiatives for people experiencing homelessness.*

As part of this work, progress is being made on a plan for greater engagement between homeless services and FÁS to enable more appropriate referrals to the different FÁS services. This would take place through the establishment of a single point of contact within FÁS and this position would direct homeless services to different FÁS services and interventions. In addition to this, briefing sessions would take place - homeless services would brief FÁS staff around care and case management approaches and FÁS would brief homeless services around services that are available. Secondly, an inter-agency referral protocol is to be put in place for homeless customers (protocols are already in place for ex-offenders with probation services and the Linkage programme<sup>34</sup> and FÁS).

The Homeless Agency has established a Training, Education and Employment Network which brings together key stakeholders to discuss ways in which barriers to employment for people who are homeless can be addressed. Members of the network include FÁS, Dublin City Council, the HSE, the VEC, a higher education college and homeless service providers involved in training initiatives, including Spokes.

### 5.3.4 The Homeless Agency's Training, Education and Employment Network

The Training, Education and Employment Network was established over three years ago in the Homeless Agency, with a broad remit to share and exchange information and practice amongst training and education service providers.

Amongst the issues that arose in the network were: untimely, inappropriate, or too few referrals, and there was a view that there was not sufficient clarity about the remit and scope of training and education services in meeting the needs of service users.

It was established that appropriate referrals could be made if there was clarity around the resources, ability and level of motivation an individual required in order to effectively engage with a training and education programme. Similarly, clarity was required on the capacity of services to engage with individuals with different support needs, or those at varying stages of 'readiness'. Arising from this a mapping exercise was undertaken,

<sup>34</sup> The Linkage programme is a joint initiative of Business in the Community and the Probation Service. The project's objective is to create mutually beneficial links between employers and ex-offenders and seeks to create opportunities for work experience and job placement, and apprenticeships for ex-offenders.

which was facilitated by the Homeless Agency. The core elements of this exercise are:

- \_ Establishing of a series of indicators of 'readiness'<sup>35</sup> on the part of the individual for various training and education interventions.
- \_ Training and education services have been asked to map their services, according to a continuum of readiness (where 0 means that services can engage with individuals with a minimum level of 'readiness'<sup>36</sup>)
- \_ Training and education services have been asked to identify, from the series of readiness indicators, which ones are required by service users to participate on their programmes.

The mapping exercise is currently a work in progress but the outcomes will be:

- \_ A chart which will map training and education service providers. Each individual service will be mapped according to the level or scale of readiness required of the individual for participation.<sup>37</sup>
- \_ The chart will also map services in terms of activities such as education, training, vocational training, specialist services (such as rehabilitation), employment services, amongst others.
- \_ In charting services on a single, visual map, the relationship (and any possible duplication) across individual services will be clear. Further, gaps in service provision will be clearly identified.
- \_ In addition to the chart map, services will list the 'indicators of readiness' required for participation in their courses and activities. This will also enable gaps in services to be identified.

This exercise will establish clarity around requirements of individuals for participation on programmes, as well as the capacity of services to engage with individuals. It should provide a useful framework for identifying roles of services and gaps in service provision.

This is an important development, as there appears to be different perceptions about what different training, education and employment services provide. The mapping exercise involves an element of reflection within services about their own services and the stage at which they can engage with people who are homeless.

This framework is a first stage in identifying gaps and provision in training, education and employment services. It is also proposed that a general skills audit of those in homeless services would identify the broader needs of those who are experiencing homelessness.

## 5.4 Focus Ireland Dormant Accounts Fund

An application was made by Focus Ireland to the Dormant Accounts Fund under the fund's category 'Funding to support Homeless People' in November 2008. The application was made for a Preparation for Education, Training and Employment programme (PETE).

The evaluation of Spokes was undertaken shortly after this application was made. During the write up of this evaluation, Focus Ireland was informed that its application was successful, and the programme started in late 2009.

PETE will be delivered across emergency accommodation providers in Dublin, on a pilot basis (with the potential to extend on a national basis).

The purpose of the programme is to assist those in emergency accommodation to access mainstream and formal training, education and employment programmes, by providing pre-education supports, such as capacity building and life-skills training.

This proposal has the following elements to it:

- \_ Initial assessment of training, education and employment needs and development of a training, education and

<sup>35</sup> Indicators of readiness are grouped according to the areas of a) personal and practical skills (e.g. motivation, resilience, self esteem and confidence); b) communication skills (e.g. interview skills and CV building, listen actively); c) problem solving and decision making skills (e.g. ability to keep routine, ability to plan); d) Intra-personal skills (e.g. ability to reflect and evaluate own process); e) Interpersonal skills (e.g. ability to advocate on own behalf). These are underpinned by external factors and core issues such as accommodation, welfare payments, family issues, mental health issues

<sup>36</sup> An example of an individual at this stage of the continuum is a 'person entering homeless service provision who presents with complex needs including active addiction, unstable mental health issues, and who is unable/no capacity to sustain a commitment (even short term)'.

<sup>37</sup> Each provider may deliver a range of services (in the case of Spokes, this could include drop-in services, structured classes, workshops, social activities) and each service may have a different location on the continuum of readiness.

employment pathway, in collaboration with those in emergency accommodation and their key workers.

\_Provision of life-skills training, individual and group personal development training and supports to people, as required, to enable engagement in formal training and education, as well as to assist in preparation for independent living.

\_Provision of these services in emergency accommodation providers across Dublin, as well as in George's Hill.

\_To work with mainstream training, education and employment providers in order to ensure a seamless pathway to mainstream employment and training.

as it will be well placed to establish needs. This could take a number of forms: in the first instance, around the roll-out of the model, as well as at a higher level within organisations, around future training and education services, mainstreaming and other services.

It is also proposed that PETE could examine the framework being developed by the Homeless Agency for mapping homeless services as a basis for identifying 'indicators of readiness'.

Finally, the Homeless Agency believes that a skills audit would be required to establish what 'indicators of readiness' require support. The PETE programme would be well placed to lead this process.

## 5.5 Evaluation commentary and findings

A Housing First approach has the potential to provide very positive outcomes for those homeless. It will change the way homeless services are configured, and significant change is anticipated in the coming year. This will impact on all services, including training, education and life skills programmes.

The PETE programme is well placed to respond to current and emerging needs as this policy progresses, as it proposes to establish clear pathways through existing services for people in emergency accommodation, based on needs identified.

The PETE programme will have implications for Spokes. In the first instance, it is likely that services provided by Spokes that overlap with mainstream education and training providers will have less of an emphasis going forward. The role of Spokes could be to deliver life-skills and capacity building interventions for customers as part of the new programme. Therefore significant changes are possible in terms of the services that Spokes delivers, where those services are delivered, and also the target group that it works with.

Aside from its impact on Spokes, it is proposed that the PETE programme could act as a driver for greater collaboration between training and education providers



## 6. Research and models of training, education and employment

47.

### 6.1 Barriers to participation in education, training and employment

A significant body of research exists on barriers to participation in education, training and employment for those who are homeless and distanced from the labour market.

One such piece of work, undertaken by Work Research Co-operative, devises a typology of barriers, which is summarised in the table below. The relevance of this typology to those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, is also presented in this table, drawn from *Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions: Inclusion Into and Through Employment For People Who are Homeless in Europe, National Report for Ireland*, prepared for FEANTSA by the Simon Communities of Ireland.

| Type of barrier        | Example   | Implications for those homeless <sup>38</sup>   |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Contextual barriers    | Contextual barriers include prevailing labour market conditions and trends, the policy stance towards issues such as social exclusion, equality and educational disadvantage and the mix of programmes available as well as their target populations. Examples of this category of barriers include:<br><br>_Decline in unskilled employment.<br><br>_Increased emphasis on qualifications. | Lack of job opportunities relevant to the skills and circumstances of those homeless.<br><br>Employment policies towards people who are homelessness..  |
| Institutional Barriers | Institutional barriers concern factors relating to the image, ethos, administration and practices of education and training providers. Examples include:<br><br>_Inappropriate location and timing of programmes.<br><br>_Lack of relevant personal supports.   | Opening hours and accessibility of services.<br><br>Access to internet, telephone, etc.<br><br>Lack of flexibility in delivering supports to the needs of the individual.<br><br>Gaps in service provision. |

<sup>38</sup> Some of the examples are drawn from *Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions: Inclusion Into and Through Employment For People Who are Homeless in Europe, National Report for Ireland*, July 2007, prepared for FEANTSA by the Simon Communities of Ireland.

|                                  |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Informational barriers           | The third set of barriers concerns information about education and training opportunities and related issues such as information on the relationship between education/ training and outcomes, such as securing employment. Examples could include:<br><br>_Paucity of outreach measures to build up relationships with 'hard-to-reach' groups. | Clarity around the role of training and education as a progression.<br><br>Lack of awareness of programmes on offer.<br><br>Literacy and numeracy difficulties as a barrier to participation in existing programmes.  |
| Situational barriers             | Time, family commitments, childcare commitments, costs of participation.  | Transport, loss of benefits (benefits trap), housing status, health status, gender issues (such as childcare, or domestic violence).  |
| Personal/ dispositional barriers | Age, gender, demographics, educational attainment, motivational factors, attitudinal factors.   | Transient, unstable 'chaotic' lifestyles, Lack of 'core' life skills, Problems with debt, Poor financial skills, Lack of communication skills, Long term distance from the reality of the labour market, Lack of social and work networks, Family related problems, Experience of domestic violence, Criminal record, Lack of work experience, Behaviour issue, Hygiene issues, Disempowerment. |

FEANTSA's Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions: Inclusion Into and Through Employment For People Who are Homeless in Europe report identified the type of services in existence for those homeless across Europe:

- \_Advice and counselling – the most common service.
- \_Supported employment – very common either in the mainstream labour market or in the social economy.
- \_Vocational training and education – often mainstream but in some countries also specialised.
- \_Life-skills training and meaningful occupation – the research notes the importance of this type of intervention, as it encourages customers to move from non-engagement to engagement.
- \_In-work support – identified as crucial in order to help job

retention, but often under-developed.

Arising from the research, the report makes a number of recommendations:

- \_Recognise the right to work and to participate in a meaningful occupation for people who are homeless (and take into account the multiple barriers affecting those who are homeless).
- \_Focus on improving employability and skills.
- \_Provide a holistic support framework.
- \_Adopt a personalised approach.
- \_Create real incentives for people to gain employment and ensure adequate levels of income.



- \_ Abolish sanctions for people experiencing homelessness.
- \_ Promote the effective cooperation of all relevant stakeholders.
- \_ Establish a multi-annual funding programme for employment services for those who are homeless.
- \_ Promote the effective participation of service users.
- \_ Ensure access to clear and consistent information on rights, entitlements and existing support services.
- \_ Ensure geographical distribution of services and access to transport.
- \_ Support the role of the social economy as a transitional labour market.
- \_ Develop indicators that measure soft outcomes of interventions.
- \_ Establish homeless data collection systems that look at the employment profiles of people.
- \_ Promote research in the area of employment and homelessness.

## 6.2 Case studies of interventions

A number of case studies of interventions are presented below. The case studies focus on collaboration across services for integrated service delivery and employability. The findings of the evaluation point to the lack of labour market opportunities viewed by those consulted and the limited opportunities for the mainstream labour market to meet the needs of those who have been homeless.<sup>39</sup>

### 6.2.1 Social enterprise as a route to labour market participation

Existing progression routes to labour market participation focus on supply-side labour market interventions. These focus on improving the skills and confidence of individuals in order to enhance their opportunities for securing employment, sustaining that employment and progressing

onto higher quality jobs. Research in the UK<sup>40</sup> has recommended a twin-track approach and also engaging in demand-side interventions which increase demand for labour through job creation measures and subsidies, placement services and incentives for employers to recruit people who may be marginalised.

Throughout the EU, social enterprises<sup>41</sup> make a positive impact on thousands of communities experiencing disadvantage. FEANTSA notes that employment in the social economy<sup>42</sup> sector is one means of progression for those who are homeless. Social enterprises impact on communities experiencing disadvantage in the following ways:

- \_ Generating employment for residents living in the community
- \_ Providing training opportunities tied to work experience
- \_ Tackling disadvantage and poverty in areas where the state has not been effective, and
- \_ Providing services that neither the state nor the private sector is willing to provide.

In an Irish urban context, social enterprises have predominately been limited to the provision of employment opportunities in areas with high unemployment. As a demand-side intervention, social enterprise activity can provide opportunities for labour market engagement when the mainstream labour market is not doing so. The case studies on the following page outline UK based initiatives, two of which specifically relate to employment opportunities for those homeless.

<sup>39</sup> A short summary of case studies is presented in this section. Greater detail is provided in the appendices.

<sup>40</sup> McGregor et al (1996) 'Social Inclusion, urban regeneration and economic reintegration' Urban Studies V32, no.10 (Dec 1996)

<sup>41</sup> Social enterprises can be defined as not-for profit businesses with social objectives as part of the businesses' mission and activities.

<sup>42</sup> Defined as that part of the economy, not part of the public or private sector, which engages in economic activities to achieve social benefits, and which usually comprises democratic, independent organisations.

### Fifteen

*Fifteen is one of the UK's most famous social enterprises, as a result of Channel 4's TV show 'Jamie's Kitchen' which was broadcast in 2002.<sup>43</sup> The programme followed celebrity chef Jamie Oliver as he established a restaurant which would provide a training programme for disadvantaged young people interested in becoming chefs.*

### Fifteen's mission

*Fifteen Foundation exists to inspire disadvantaged young people – those who are homeless, unemployed, or are overcoming drug or alcohol problems - to believe that they can create for themselves great careers in the restaurant industry.*

*Fifteen's philosophy is to learn within the actual work environment, from experts in the field.*

*Many of the 16 to 24 year olds accepted by the Fifteen Foundation have criminal backgrounds or have suffered from addictions or homelessness, but those who prove themselves passionate about food, as well as being committed and hard-working enough, are given a year-long work placement at the restaurant.*

*Every year new trainees start the course, which includes college learning and work experience as well as trips to farms, vineyards and fisheries. Those who graduate are sent off around the world on work placements or to open their own restaurants and they often pass on the opportunities granted to them, by hiring disadvantaged youths as staff.*

*The restaurant has spin-offs in Amsterdam, Cornwall and Melbourne and the foundation intends to establish in other cities. As a not-for-profit enterprise, surplus income is reinvested into the business.*

### Sunderland Home Care Associates

*Sunderland Home Care Associates offers a high quality range of home care packages and care services for people in the Sunderland area.*

*Sunderland Home Care Associates prides itself on providing well-trained and motivated professional carer support. Sunderland Home Care Associates employs more than 200 staff delivering over 4,000 hours of care per week. All of them are committed to helping others. Their mission includes the following statement:*

*We put our success down to one thing; a strong focus on people. We refuse to 'cut corners' and the welfare of clients and staff are at the heart of our mission.*

*The organisation has a number of major contracts with Sunderland Social Services, the University of Sunderland and Sunderland Colleges and their work is widely recognised as leading the field in care services.*

*Staff members get a vital role in the decision-making process as they own a share in the company. This means that profits are spent on providing a better service or towards rewarding the staff. The unique structure means that staff members have the opportunity to take part in democratic general meetings every other month and help set budgets, pay and conditions.<sup>44</sup>*

<sup>43</sup> [www.fifteen.net](http://www.fifteen.net)

<sup>44</sup> [www.sunderlandhomecare.co.uk](http://www.sunderlandhomecare.co.uk)

### Thames Reach | GROW project

*Thames Reach helps homeless and vulnerable people to live in decent homes, build supportive relationships and lead fulfilling lives. It is a London-based charity with an ultimate goal of ending street homelessness.*

*The GROW (Giving Real Opportunities for Work) project<sup>45</sup> is Thames Reach's major three-year initiative designed to:*

- \_ Increase employment of people with a personal experience of homelessness
- \_ Encourage other homelessness organisations to do likewise
- \_ Thames Reach anticipates that a large number of jobs could become available for people who have:
  - \_ First-hand knowledge and experience of homelessness and the use of homeless services
  - \_ Sorted out their own lives to the point where they are able to help others
  - \_ Immense value as influential and positive role models for current service users

*By employing homeless people Thames Reach intends to:*

- \_ Improve the quality of the services provided by benefiting from former homeless people's expertise and enthusiasm
- \_ Raise the standards of the organisation
- \_ Address the discrimination homeless people face in the employment market
- \_ Ensure current and former homeless people are fully integrated in the organisation at all levels.

*The benefits for service user employees include increased self-worth, self confidence, hope and a route away from the difficult aspects of daily life, a meaningful job with high levels of satisfaction and personal and professional rewards.*

## **6.2.2 Case studies of integrated service delivery and cross agency collaborations**

### Bridge to Workplace

*The Bridge-to-Workplace<sup>46</sup> is an initiative that covers Finglas, Cabra and Ballymun. Its aims are:*

- \_ To provide unemployed men and women in the agreed areas who are clients of the HSE's Rehabilitation Integration Service (RIS) and the Local Employment Services Network (LESN) with a quality work experience opportunity and skills framework to access and maintain participation.
- \_ To create a forum whereby the HSE's RIS, LESN and FÁS can work cooperatively and collaboratively together to holistically meet the needs of people with substance misuse issues, specifically illicit drug use (alcohol may feature as a secondary issue).

*Since its inception in August 2005, 74 clients have accessed the service. The majority of these are male, completely drug-free and have not completed second level education. 39 of these have gained work placements. Following an independent evaluation, the project was approved for mainstream funding.*

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/user-employment/national-grow-programme/>

<sup>46</sup> [http://www.localemploymentservices.ie/html/Bridgetowork\\_report.pdf](http://www.localemploymentservices.ie/html/Bridgetowork_report.pdf)

### Ballymun Job Centre (BJC)

*The BJC was founded in 1986 in response to unemployment in Ballymun.<sup>47</sup> It is a community organisation, with a co-operative structure and charitable status. It employs over 30 people, the majority of whom are from Ballymun. It delivers the LES services in the Ballymun area, including the following:*

- \_ Provision of a registration service, which provides an initial assessment of the client's needs and general advice referral to one of the support services.*
- \_ Placement Service, which develops links and contacts with employers in the Dublin area, and supports interview preparation, updating CVs, etc.*
- \_ Gateway Service 15-17 year olds, is a guidance service for young early school leavers with one-to-one mediation, guidance and structured programmes. It encourages participants to return to education. It also works with parents, schools and youth services.*
- \_ Workmate Mediation Service, which supports particular groups of job seekers who require more intensive support. It has a strong outreach aspect to it.*
- \_ Career Assessment and guidance has supported clients to appreciate their own skills and abilities and overcome barriers to the world of work. It also assists job seekers and job changers.*
- \_ Link to schools: the service works with and supports local schools (School Retention Programme).*
- \_ The 'Bridge-to-Workplace programme'<sup>48</sup> supports ex-drug users in recovery to gain new skills and work placements, and it works closely with employers.*
- \_ Training and Education Development. The BJC delivers programmes in partnership with the CDVEC, such as literacy services and a jobs club for clients who are nearly job ready.*

*The project has developed close working relationships with youth and community organisations as well as state agencies. For example, it has developed close working relationships with FÁS and education providers to secure training and education that moves individuals closer to the labour market. The service has credibility within the community, and is located in the heart of the community.*

<sup>47</sup> [www.bmunjob.ie](http://www.bmunjob.ie)

<sup>48</sup> A funded programme involving a number of stakeholders including Local Drug Task Forces, Finglas Calbra LES, and Ballymun Job Centre.

### 6.3 Model of delivery: Off the Streets and Into Work: The Right Deal for Homeless People

#### Background

The Right Deal is the result of a programme 'Tackling Multiple Disadvantage in London by Improving Employability (TMD London)' which ran from 2004 to 2007, and which targeted individuals facing multiple disadvantage in the labour market who were homeless, at risk of homelessness, in temporary accommodation or had been recently resettled.

Led by OSW (Off the Streets and into Work) in partnership with a range of housing and homeless organisations, including FEANTSA, the project tested a number of methods to support individuals to improve their employability. Subsequently, the partnership has developed a model.<sup>49</sup>

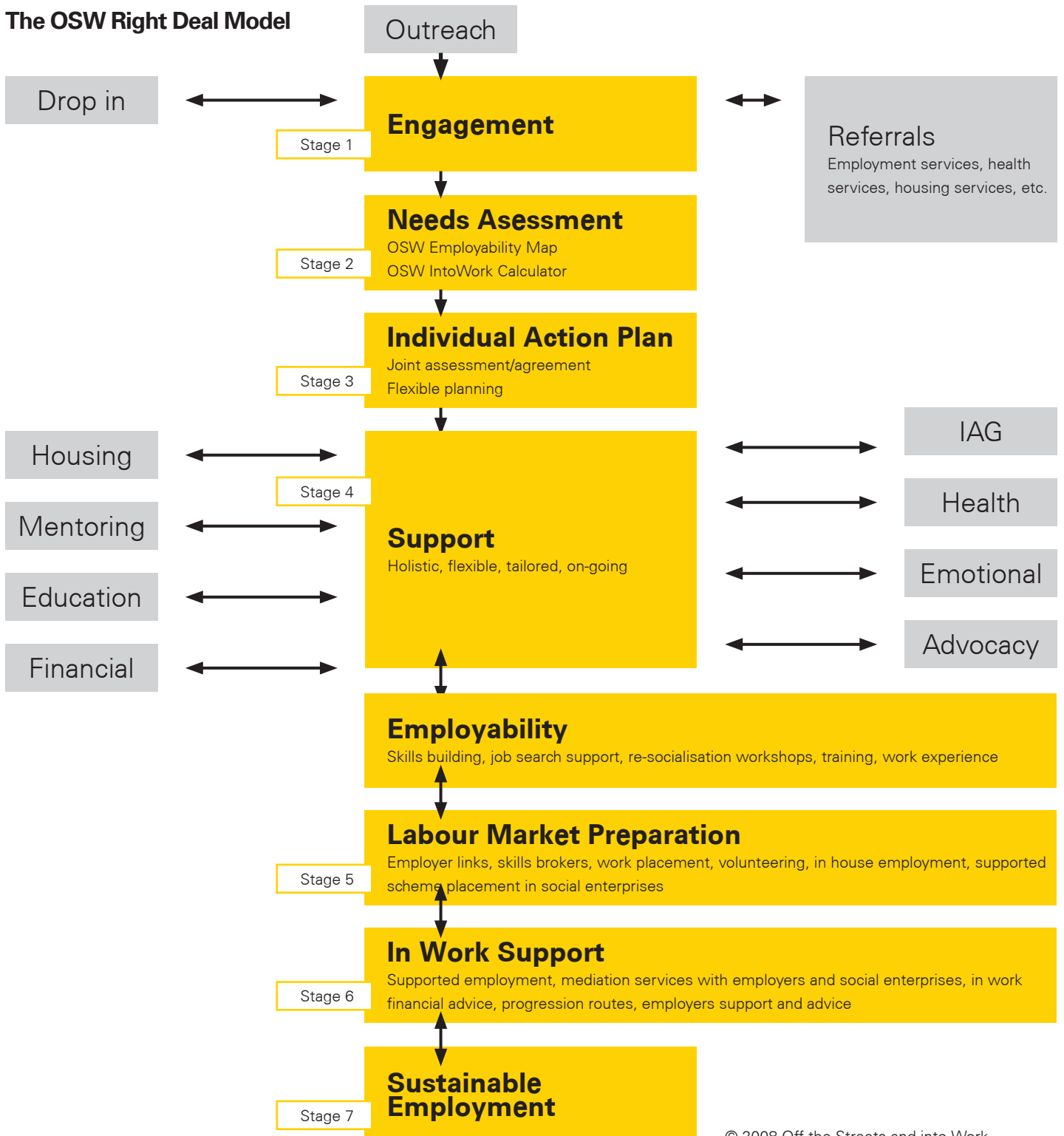
The following principals underpin its approach:

- \_ A holistic approach
- \_ Coordination between services
- \_ Increased flexibility
- \_ Sufficient time and resources
- \_ Different routes in order to meet individual needs
- \_ Personal advisor/case management approach
- \_ Increasing incentives
- \_ Providing ongoing support for sustainability
- \_ Providing clear information, including transitional and in-work benefits
- \_ Development of a clear policy framework
- \_ Longer-term funding and targets that support progressions and referrals

The project has developed a seven stage model (pictured on the following page), the key principles of which are discussed below. The stages in the model have informed the development of the PETE model.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.osw.org.uk/services/rightdeal.asp>

## The OSW Right Deal Model



In this section, an exploration of how the model applies to Spokes or PETE is presented.

The programme should be regarded as a progression route towards personal development, further education, work-based training and employment in the private sector or a social enterprise. However, although every effort should be made to progress individuals to employment, some individuals may not be in a position to re-enter the labour market or participate in third level education. As citizens they deserve every support and assistance to be in a position to lead more fulfilled lives. In this context other progression routes such as volunteering, mentoring or continued engagement in meaningful occupation may apply.

**Stage 1- Engagement** entails outreach work to hostels to make contact with homeless individuals with a view to them engaging with the programme. For people who are living in supported housing or private rented accommodation, referrals could be accepted from social workers, tenancy support workers/resettlement workers, and medical professionals. This would increase the likelihood of making contact with individuals with mental health issues (who could be considered to be most distanced from the labour market). The model also acknowledges the role of drop-in as a means of engagement. In the context of the new PETE programme, Spokes drop-in is complementary and should continue to be delivered.

**Stage 2** - Once individuals feel comfortable with attending the programme (which could be promoted by offering participants the option of participating in leisure/personal development initiatives) participants' needs can be assessed – by a skilled worker – to determine what education and employment options they would be interested in pursuing. In the context of the new PETE programme, individual planning would comprise this aspect of the work by the Spokes project worker, and this would be undertaken in collaboration with the participant's key worker rather than within Spokes as currently configured.

**Stage 3** - Once an individual has a plan in place, a relevant core education programme would be delivered. This would strive to ensure that an individual's literacy

and numeracy skills were of a sufficient level to enable progression onto further education. Throughout this stage, individuals would need to receive mentoring and intensive support which would mitigate the likelihood of participants leaving the programme. Depending on the needs identified, an individual may be referred to Spokes or other education services, for example CDVEC's Foundations programme. In this case, clarity around the unique elements of services and their ability to engage with people (on the basis of 'indicators of readiness', for example) will be required. The framework and mapping exercise being developed by the Homeless Agency should be of relevance here.

**Stage 4 – Support and employability** entails providing employability support in addition to 'holistic supports' and links to the case management process. This relationship is a key part of the PETE programme and the effectiveness of this will be maximised by the 'housing first' policy, as situational barriers to participation, such as lack of housing, will be undermined. It should also be noted that the PETE programme and education provision would enhance the effectiveness of 'housing first' by sustaining housing. This stage would consist of a set of activities aimed at developing and reinforcing new types of skills (from soft skills such as communication and social skills, to punctuality, time management, meeting deadlines, learning how to write a CV, and performing at job interviews) and in providing support. While these services are very well provided within Spokes, with limited resources at the disposal of the programme, securing the expertise and resources of mainstream employability providers (most notably FÁS and LES) will be important in the short and long term. Furthermore, it is likely that a 'housing first' policy will mean that customers are more likely to be dispersed on a wider geographic basis, necessitating greater links with localised services. Other supports such as mentor support and befriending would be pursued. The views and responses of customers to flexible supports provided by Spokes and their impact should inform the nature and delivery of supports. Additional resources could be sought through the Department of Social and Family Affairs 'Activation' funding programmes as mentioned in Section 5.2.2

**Stage 5 – Labour market preparation** involves preparing individuals to be able to sustain employment

through participating in work experience. Existing programmes such as 'Ready For Work' or the National Learning Network could play a role here in providing work experience. The PETE programme also emphasises the role of volunteering in this context. With the significant increase in unemployment, research also points to an increasing role that social enterprise will play in the provision of valuable work experience. It is in this context that consideration could be given to whether opportunities exist within Focus Ireland (existing or new projects) and other organisations for 'in house' work experience and, for a limited number of people, sustainable employment. In addition, continued efforts through programmes like the 'Ready for Work' or other programmes as outlined in the case studies should enable access to large employers so that participants can gain work experience.

**Stages 6 and 7 – Continued in-work support and sustainable employment.** In these stages, supports are offered to both employers as well as those in employment. Again, it should be acknowledge that some customers may have difficulties in accessing mainstream employment, and exploration of intermediate labour market mechanisms (such as CE schemes, etc), social enterprise opportunities as well as volunteering opportunities should take place. Mentoring schemes and peer support opportunities could also be explored. Other issues that may arise in this stage are disincentives to participation, such as 'benefits traps' and other barriers to engaging in the labour market.

Key requirements that would contribute to the programme's success include:

- \_ Securing the active support from mainstream training and education state agencies and working on a collaborative basis.
- \_ Exploring routes to employment and participation in the labour market, including private sector work (private sector representative organisations) and supportive large private employers to document practices that promote employment in the private sector.
- \_ Developing social enterprises that could serve jointly as intermediate labour market mechanisms and provide sustainable employment (see case studies section).



The SWOT analysis considers both the internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) environment of Spokes.

It draws from the key points made in the consultations and good practice elements of service delivery.

| Strengths   | Weaknesses  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Very flexible service provision and ability to adapt to needs.</li> <li>_ Ability to engage with people at early stages of 'readiness'.</li> <li>_ Location within Focus Ireland and its broader support structure enables it to access and deliver holistic and broader supports (housing, etc.).</li> <li>_ Very high satisfaction rating amongst customers.</li> <li>_ Highly regarded amongst homeless service providers.</li> <li>_ Staff commitment and approach is repeatedly cited as a key strength.</li> <li>_ Flexibility in service delivery and 'developmental' approach rated highly by funders (CDVEC).</li> <li>_ Successful application to Dormant Accounts Fund for PETE programme.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ The programme has too many objectives, and objectives are activity based. It would benefit from a review of objectives and vision.</li> <li>_ The future position and role within Focus Ireland is not clear. It does not have a 'home' within the broader organisation.</li> <li>_ Staff morale somewhat affected by uncertainty around future.</li> <li>_ Potential overlap between services (e.g., Foundations).</li> <li>_ Database / data collection systems do not facilitate collection of comprehensive data.</li> </ul> |
| Opportunities   | Threats   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Has ability to adapt to new demands and needs of the homeless sector (Housing First).</li> <li>_ Improved clarity around wider training and education services and their role via Homeless Agency mapping exercise should allow identification of gaps in services.</li> <li>_ Opportunities to develop new areas (befriending, mentoring, peer support, group work).</li> <li>_ Activation programmes (Dept of Social and Family Affairs) may constitute a funding source for the project.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Lack of mainstream funding and uncertainty around future funding.</li> <li>_ Lack of collaboration between training providers in general could lead to overlap.</li> </ul>   |

In this section, recommendations are made in the context of changes taking place within Focus Ireland (specifically the successful application to the Dormant Accounts Fund for the PETE programme), external environment changes (such as the 'mapping exercise' undertaken by the Homeless Agency, the medium and longer term implications of a 'Housing First' policy) and good practice service delivery.

Recommendations are made in relation to Spokes but also in relation to broader education and training themes that arose in the consultation process. Of course, some of these may extend beyond the intended remit of Focus Ireland, and they are presented to stimulate discussion as to how the new programme and Focus Ireland could act as a driver with other organisations considering these themes.

### 8.1 Spokes and its future within Focus Ireland

#### 8.1.1 Key finding and conclusion

Spokes is currently located within the 'housing services' department of Focus Ireland. It is not clear at this point where it will be located within the organisation in the future, and it has been suggested that it may revert back to the Youth Services or case management department. The successful outcome of the Dormant Account Application will obviously have a bearing on its future role, as well as its relationship with the PETE programme.

The lack of certainty around the future of the programme has impacted on the staff, who have faced personal uncertainty in their positions and who in some ways feel that the service has not had a 'home' within the broader organisation. There is also a risk that the expertise of the staff will not result in institutional learning, if Spokes is moved from department to department within the organisation.

The uncertainty around the project has in many ways been inevitable, given its lack of mainstream funding. Furthermore, mainstream funding is not likely to be available for many of the unique aspects of the project (non-accredited education, drop-in services and flexible supports delivery). It has been argued that the aspect of the programme that is funded (BTEI) has a degree of

overlap with other services, although it has also been argued that the supports that are offered in conjunction with BTEI make it unique.

#### 8.1.2 Recommendation No. 1

This would be an optimum time to establish a clear 'vision' for how Focus Ireland will approach this dimension of its work in the future, including target groups and priorities. This should take into consideration the longer-term organisational objectives of Focus Ireland in delivering an education programme, as well as particular target groups it may seek to support in terms of education and training, as well as its intended role with regard to the new PETE programme. A review should also consider the current objectives, which describe services rather than state aspirations for the project. A shorter set of objectives that are more goal-oriented should be devised.

In this context it is worth reiterating some of the strengths and unique features of Spokes which were valued by customers and external services alike:

- \_ Its flexibility of service delivery and capacity to support customers that may be at different stages of their personal progression as regards education and training.
- \_ Its expertise in capacity building, life-skills and confidence building measures amongst customers, through non-accredited and informal training.
- \_ Its continued mentor support for customers who, despite having progressed onwards to other education programmes, may require additional supports.
- \_ The social interaction between customers through social programmes and outings, which facilitate peer support.
- \_ The drop-in service is well subscribed and positively rated.
- \_ The approach of staff members which was particularly emphasised by referring organisations as a key factor in the success of Spokes.
- \_ The opportunity to provide training and education outside of the day-to-day living environment was regarded as important.

## 8.2 Quantifying outcomes and data collection

### 8.2.1 Key finding and conclusion

The evaluation has found that quantification of outcomes is inhibited by a number of factors. These include the often informal nature of supports offered, the lack of space and time for staff to complete formal assessments with customers, and the separate reporting system for the BTEI aspect of the programme. Staff also note that the data collection systems are not comprehensive and do not adequately capture the work done by the programme. In addition to this, staffing numbers have recently dropped, reducing time available to complete data collection systems. However, a better data collection and recording system could improve tracking of individuals' progress and needs.

### 8.2.2 Recommendation No. 2

It is recommended that data collection systems in the new PETE programme and Spokes be developed in order to capture outputs, individual progression, and to demonstrate the outcomes of the project.

Much of the work of the service involves confidence and capacity building measures, and data systems should capture this information through case studies, testimonials and other methods.

This will be particularly important for the PETE programme as it should be used by the project to communicate successes and challenges and contribute to the development of the model for wider application in Ireland.

### 8.2.3 Recommendation No. 3

A useful exercise for the new programme would be to use data collected to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the project. This could include estimating savings to the State as a result of individuals' participation in pre-education, education, training and employment supports. This would be useful in demonstrating impacts from a funding perspective and also could assist in attracting support.

## 8.3 Customer participation

### 8.3.1 Key finding and conclusion

There is evidence of good customer participation arising from the evaluation of Spokes and customers reported being very satisfied with their level of participation in the programme. This took many forms, including opportunities to determine activities, development of a customer charter, engaging in peer support, opportunities for feedback and identification of needs and courses.

### 8.3.2 Recommendation No. 4

Customer participation should continue to be emphasised and supported, and in the context of the new PETE programme, could be formalised as progression routes for individuals (for example, around peer support, mentoring, etc).

### 8.3.3 Recommendation No. 5

Consideration should be given to forming an advisory group of current and/ or former participants of Spokes (this could meet on an ad hoc or regular basis) to consider proposals and provide feedback on new actions, in order to access the expertise and insights of current and former participants. Participation on an advisory structure could in itself be progression for individuals participating in education/ training interventions.

## 8.4 Collaboration with other services and agencies

### 8.4.1 Key finding and conclusion

Collaboration between training, education and employment services (including those working with those homeless and mainstream providers) has been limited to date. Protocols for referrals are being developed by organisations such as FÁS as well as changes in delivery and outreach of their services.

Collaboration between services was noted in the consultations as a particular need, given the current limit to resources and changes in the configuration of services.

#### 8.4.2 Recommendation No. 6

The following collaborative actions are recommended:

- \_ Continued collaboration around the development of the new (PETE) programme.
- \_ There should be more formal communication and collaboration between education and employment service providers in the community/voluntary and statutory sectors (e.g. FAS, VEC etc.) as well as local development organisations<sup>50</sup> and the Local Employment Services. Systematic collaboration could take place around developing and delivering services, and sharing of resources (for example, access to space).
- \_ Collaboration with mainstream and statutory services (and decision makers within these organisations) around development of practice, models and policy should be promoted.
- \_ A collaborative 'skills audit' (undertaken to determine education and training needs of homeless customers) could be undertaken between service providers (as discussed in Sections 5.3.4 and 5.5).
- \_ Focus Ireland does not have the sole remit for enhancing collaboration. However, the new PETE programme may provide an opportunity for the service to lead the process of greater collaboration between service providers. For example, this might take the form of an advisory or steering group which would look at promoting referrals, ensuring progression of clients across services, amongst other activities.

### 8.5 Progression

#### 8.5.1 Key finding and conclusion

The findings suggest that a lot of people attending Spokes are focused on education and training, rather than labour market progression. There are many drivers for this, but one is the current labour market conditions, and some participants feel that there are no current opportunities for them to access the labour market. Moreover, research indicates that those with experience of homelessness can be adversely affected by discrimination and other barriers to participation.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Local Area Based Partnerships.

#### 8.5.2 Recommendation No. 7

An overarching strategy for progression (including labour market progression) should be initiated. This should acknowledge the role of 'demand-side' labour market interventions, including the role of the social economy in providing employment opportunities.

#### 8.5.3 Recommendation No. 8

Focus Ireland should explore the potential of the social economy sector<sup>51</sup> as a means of providing long-term progression and employment opportunities for all of its customers (as is common practice in the UK and EU). The social economy sector can be an important generator for employment for people with low skills or who are experiencing discrimination in the labour market (as presented by the case studies in Section 6.2.1).

#### 8.5.4 Recommendation No. 9

Progression routes are planned in the PETE programme (for example opportunities for volunteering and collaboration with Volunteering Ireland). Opportunities for volunteering within Focus Ireland (and other homeless services) should also be explored. Volunteering could include mentor support or befriending, where appropriate. Peer support was evidenced in the Spokes programme. This was undertaken on an informal basis and was highly valued by those accessing and providing peer support, and it enhanced the learning environment.

### 8.6 Funding and sustainability

#### 8.6.1 Key finding and conclusion

There has been uncertainty around funding sources for Spokes, and it is estimated that 80% of its funding is generated from Focus Ireland's fundraising activities. Furthermore, access to corporate sector funding may be difficult to secure in the current economic climate.

#### 8.6.2 Recommendation No. 10

Focus Ireland should consider devising a proposal for accessing funding from the Department of Social and Family Affairs' Activation and Family Support Programme, which provides flexible supports for individuals distanced from the labour market. This type of funding could support the informal and non-accredited elements of

<sup>51</sup> The social economy is that part of the economy, between the public sector and the private sector, that engages in economic activities to achieve social objectives, and usually functions through independent, democratic organisations.

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Spokes, which would be consistent with the approach of the programme. Contact should be made with the Regional Manager in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and with the local facilitators who have a role in determining funding.

### **8.6.3 Recommendation No. 11**

Spokes and Focus Ireland, particularly through its new PETE service, are well placed to become a demonstration project for equality mainstreaming. The PETE project and Spokes could support statutory agencies, such as FÁS and the VEC, to learn from the model and to apply this learning to mainstream services, and should liaise with the Equality Authority in this regard.

Those consulted in the research

1. Therese Towey, Acting Team Leader, Spokes, Focus Ireland
2. Stephanie Warner, former Spokes project worker and currently tutor in Spokes, Focus Ireland
3. Tanya Harpur, CSV worker, Spokes, Focus Ireland
4. Pamela Darcy, CE Participant, Spokes, Focus Ireland
5. Helen Geoghegan, CDVEC
6. Clare Schofield, CDVEC Foundations Project
7. James Quinn, CDVEC Foundations Project
8. Alice Lucey, Project Leader, Coffee Shop, Focus Ireland
9. Paul Kelly, Project Leader, Focus Ireland
10. Sinead McGinley, Research Officer, Focus Ireland
11. Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy, Life President, Focus Ireland
12. John O'Hare, Project Leader, Open Access Case Management, Focus Ireland
13. Orla Barry, Director of Services, Focus Ireland
14. Ann Gilton, Manager, FÁS Social Inclusion Unit
15. Siobhan Moore, Employment Services, FÁS
16. Patricia Bourke, Learning and Performance Coordinator, Homeless Agency
17. Anna Greenhalgh, Ready for Work, Business in the Community
18. Eamonn Perkins, Cedar House
19. Marcella Twomey, Employment Services Officer, FÁS Employment Services
20. Department of Social and Family Affairs

21. 11 customers of Spokes

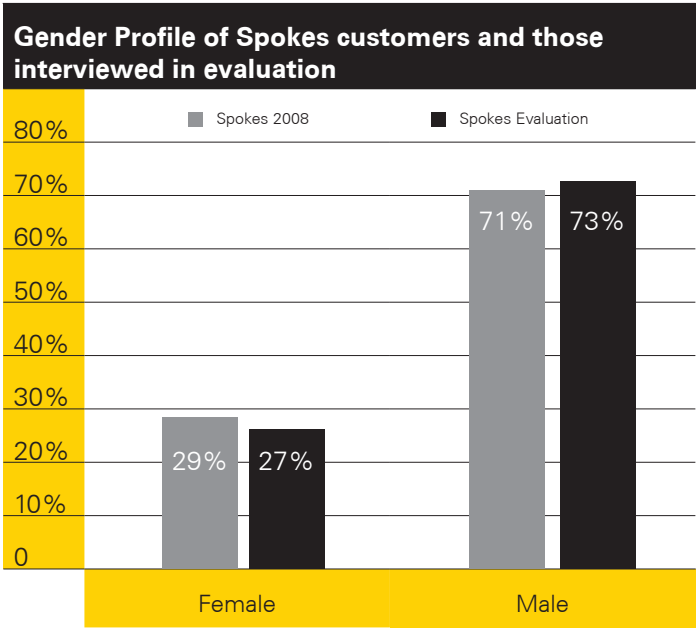
Profile of customers consulted and Spokes customers

The 11 customers that were interviewed were either accessing drop-in services, structured programmes or had previously participated in structured programmes in Spokes, but were still accessing occasional supports.

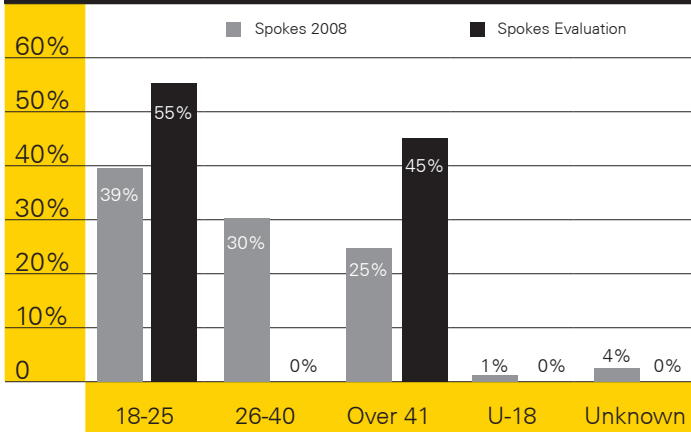
An attempt was made to consult with a sample of customers that would reflect the overall profile of those accessing Spokes.

The consultations were undertaken on four separate occasions, and following each phase, a profile of those consulted was examined to establish whether those consulted were broadly representative of the profile of Spokes customers, in terms of age, gender, household profile and accommodation type.

The profile of those consulted was monitored to ensure that the sample was representative. The graphs below compare the profile of those consulted in the evaluation process to the general profile of Spokes customers in 2008.

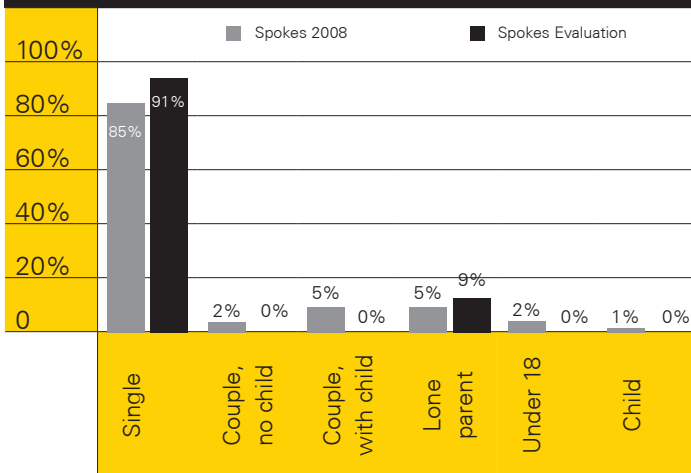


**Age Group Spokes customers 2008 and those interviewed in evaluation**



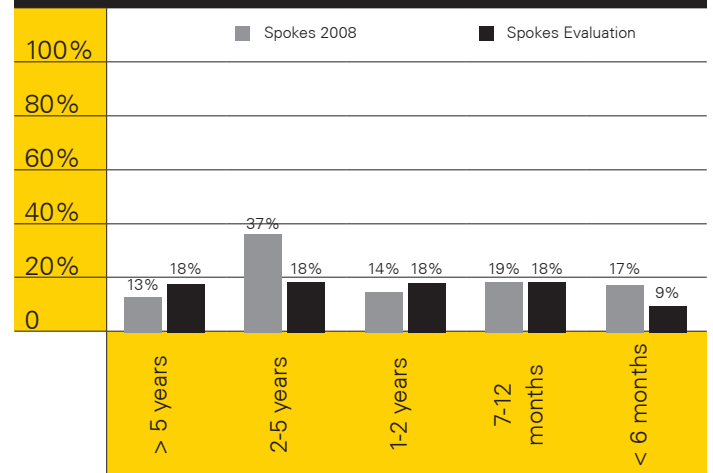
While no one consulted in the evaluation group were aged between 26-40 years, a significant proportion of those interviewed were just below this age group (i.e. five participants were aged between 23-25 years) so this was felt to correspond closely to this age group.

**Household profile Spokes customers 2008 and those interviewed in evaluation**



The graph below gives an indication of the length of time that people who were interviewed had been homeless. However, some people in spite of having been homeless for a long period of time in the past, were not presently homeless.

**Length of time homeless Spokes customers 2008 and those interviewed in evaluation**



## Homeless specific training, education and employment programmes referred to in report

### Foundations project

The Foundations Project is run by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) and was established in 2000. Foundations is an education programme for people currently homeless, those formerly homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

CDVEC works in partnership with homeless services and other agencies to offer educational support to homeless people, many of whom are accommodated in city-centre B&Bs. The project is based in Parnell Square and programmes are run on-site or in hostels, B&Bs, day services and CDVEC education centres. Project workers visit B&Bs and hostels to offer the services of the project.

Services include:

- \_ Education programmes for those in homeless centres and B&Bs
- \_ Adult education guidance and information services, and referrals to education and training services
- \_ After-school and youth clubs
- \_ Playgroups

The Foundations Project offers programmes for adults and children. Programmes cater for single people and family groups and are run on weekdays, weekends and evenings.

Courses for adults include:

- \_ Beginners and intermediate computers
- \_ Digital photography
- \_ Tai Chi
- \_ Mediation
- \_ Art
- \_ Introduction to the internet
- \_ Social studies
- \_ Preparation for work
- \_ Beginners guitar
- \_ Communications
- \_ Life skills
- \_ Motivation and self esteem
- \_ Skin care/ nutrition
- \_ Men/ women's groups

Children's programmes include:

- \_ Play Sessions (in the Parish Centre on Manor St., Dublin 7).
- \_ An after-school service where children can meet outside normal school activity. This includes a six week summer club (based in Tilly's, Sean McDermott St.).
- \_ An outreach book club for children living in emergency accommodation.

Adult programmes include a Health & Fitness course, which runs three times a week and includes two sessions in the gym. There is also an Open Learning Computer Room, where people can work towards computer certification at FETAC Level 3 or 4. Level 4 corresponds to the ECDL.

### **Ready for Work scheme**

Ready for Work is a three-week supported work experience in a leading Irish business, with follow-up support. It has been in existence since 2002.

A division of 'business in the community', it is supported by the Homeless Agency, IBEC, FAS, Department of Social and Family Affairs, and sponsored by Anglo Irish Bank, Marks and Spencer, KPMG, Brown Thomas, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Jury's Doyle Hotel group.

Ready for Work is run three times per year. There are three aspects to the programme:

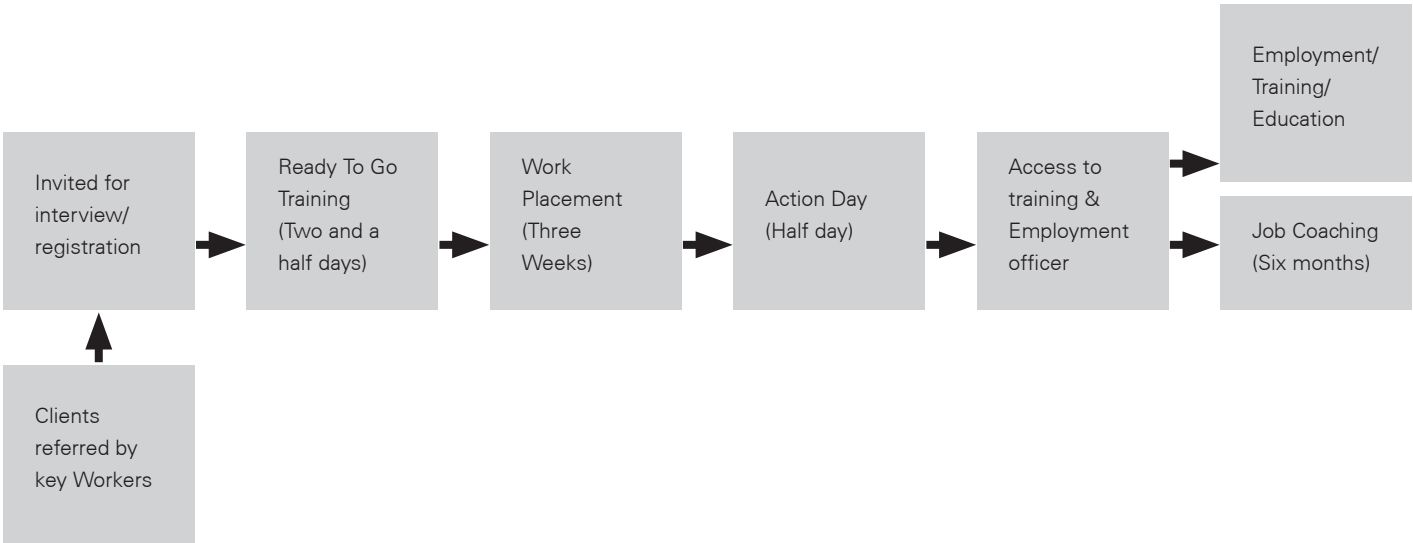
1. Ready to Go Training: Two days of pre-employment training to prepare for going back to the workplace and to build confidence.
2. Ready for Work Placement: A three-week work placement designed to give a 'stepping-stone' back into work. It builds confidence, improves skills and enables candidates to gain experience to add to their CVs and to leave with a good reference.
3. Follow-up support to keep motivation high and to give candidates every opportunity to secure work:

\_Action Day – Straight after the placement, candidates come back together with the trainers to go over their experience, agree an action plan to go forward and receive certificates and a reference. Employment agencies and businesses may attend that day.

\_Support from Training & Employment Officer/ Job Coaches - a TEO and a volunteer Job Coach from a business offer ongoing support after the work placement, providing guidance and motivation during the job search and onwards into employment.



The Ready for Work model



Source: Ready for Work information leaflet





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**Focus Ireland, Head Office**

9-12 High Street

Christchurch

Dublin 8

**T:** 01 881 5900

**F:** 01 881 5950

**E:** [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)

**[www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie)**



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