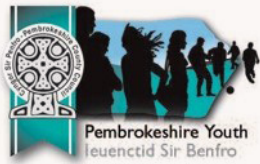


BEST PRACTICE BRIEFINGS: FURNITURE SCHEME

*This Best Practice Guide was co-written
with Pembrokeshire Youth Service*



The Furniture and Equipment Library is an innovative initiative which allows young people aged 16-25 to loan furniture and household items upon moving into independent housing for free, which hopes to prevent young people from becoming trapped by Buy-Now-Pay-Later schemes and high interest credit to furnish and equip their homes.

The importance of data-driven service development

The development of the scheme was driven by a data analysis exercise, which started with informing Pembrokeshire Youth Service on the reasons for youth homelessness presentations locally.

The data analysis found that, prior to the pandemic, the most common reason for youth homelessness in Pembrokeshire was debt and rent arrears. When Pembrokeshire Youth Service consulted young people on this topic they identified the main reason for accumulating high levels of debt, leading to the non-payment of rent, was due to the struggle in trying to furnish and equip their homes.

Whilst the Furniture and Equipment Library looks to in part address this by providing the essentials, this is combined with skills development programmes to ensure young people develop the understanding, knowledge and skills to avoid the debt trap in the future. Making access to the equipment dependent on participation in these skills development programmes addresses both elements.

The idea for the Furniture and Equipment Library was inspired by similar schemes implemented in the military for newly married soldiers.

Subsequently social landlords were consulted to find out how much furniture and equipment they dispose from abandoned properties that is usable/serviceable to assess the feasibility of the project.

Since the beginning of the scheme, the project has expanded and a further industrial unit has been rented to provide additional space for a range of new interventions including an upcycling scheme.

What does the scheme hope to achieve?

By developing emotional investment in their properties and discouraging high interest rate, unaffordable borrowing, the scheme hopes to avert tenancy failures and homelessness.

As the items are all donated, by both businesses and the wider community members, the scheme affords an opportunity to raise awareness of the issue of youth homelessness in the local community through advertising and attracting donations.

Location

The Furniture and Equipment Library is based in Pembroke and can be accessed by young people based in Pembrokeshire. It is run by Pembrokeshire Youth Service in partnership with the local community, including members of the public, social landlords and both private and third sector organisations who provide furniture and equipment for the scheme.

Implementation

To get access to the Furniture and Equipment Library young people are required to take part in a skills development programme run by Pembrokeshire Youth Service. The furniture and equipment are then loaned to young people, which allows them to turn their accommodation into homes as quickly as possible.

Over time young people are supported to replace the items with their own, however, there is no minimum or maximum time they can have the items for.

The project initially relied on social landlords for furniture donations, as they did not have the capacity to store the items themselves and required properties to be emptied quickly to ensure they maximised occupancy. This meant that many serviceable items used to end up at a landfill to ensure that a property could be let back quickly.

To collect the donations, Pembrokeshire Youth Service had to rely on staff from these organisations to deliver the items to them, as they did not have the capacity to collect items themselves on a large scale. However, this posed a barrier as some saw this process as too time consuming. In order to address this challenge, Pembrokeshire Youth Service made a fiscal argument about the financial savings and an environmental argument about establishing a sustainable model of circular economy which encouraged continuous donations.

Over time Pembrokeshire Youth Service were able to develop a 'buy-in' from the wider community representatives which has ensured a varied supply of goods and equipment which is sustainable and not solely reliant on any one organisation or group.

Results

Pembrokeshire Youth Service are now in a position to furnish and equip a young person's property on the day they sign their tenancy agreement. This is on the condition that the individual has engaged in their skills development programme prior. The young person is therefore provided with firm foundations on which to build and ease their transition to independent living. This helps avert many of the debt/eviction issues which have historically been so prevalent.

As of September 2022, 221 items have been loaned to 32 individuals to date.



The feedback from young people has been very positive. Here is one young person's experience of accessing the Furniture and Equipment Library:



I found the service really helpful, otherwise I would have been sat in an empty flat until I could afford to buy what I needed. The cost of getting all my own furniture would have been over £1000 at least. There were great options in the furniture library that I could choose from and it provided me with everything I needed, right from day one of moving in. Thank you very much.

— Youth Voice



Advice for other local authorities and organisations

Sustainability

Supporting a scheme like this is a 'win/win' for all those involved. It helps avert debt, evictions and homelessness. It is good for the environment, sustainable and ensures all sections of the community can play a proactive role in helping to address youth homelessness.

Collaboration

Collaborative working across different local authority departments, as well as statutory, third sector and commercial partnerships are vital, as is the need to involve individual members of the community.

More Information

At EYHC, we will offer any help or support for organisations to understand more about Pobl's Shared Accommodation scheme. If you'd like to get in touch please contact: billrowlands@llamau.org.uk

Or if you'd rather you can get in contact with the team directly through David Walker david.walker@pembrokeshire.gov.uk or Nick Hudd nick.hudd@pembrokeshire.gov.uk