

CRASH HOUSES

*overnight
accommodation for
homeless young people*

A YOUTH ~ WORK APPROACH

FOREWORD

Thanks to the many individuals involved in CAP and its crash houses over the years, Manchester's initial response to the needs of young people in a housing crisis does include a particularly thoughtful and sensitive component, as described in this booklet. No doubt others will find in it encouragement and stimulation to try to reproduce the scheme, or something like it, in their own areas. Certainly there is a general need in every town, perhaps in every neighbourhood for the sort of personal, informal response to young people's housing emergencies offered by the crash house scheme. At the same time it is important to place the scheme in the wider context of young people and their housing and the necessary support services.

A purely voluntary approach to these issues will leave large areas of need unrecognised and untouched, because of the fortuitous nature of voluntary association. There is clearly a further need for such initiatives to be underpinned by a statutory recognition of the issues, with appropriate public policies and provision, through local authority housing departments, housing associations and perhaps housing cooperatives, and including the facilitation of these sorts of initiatives.

In particular, the emergency housing provided by the crash houses makes little sense if, on returning to Shades youth advice centre the next day, young people find they have merely delayed by one day their entry or return to the round of seedy board & lodgings, bed-sitters, regimented hostels, or rundown hard-to-live-in council flats. The crash houses should of course only be one element in a range of housing options for young people: long term/short term; independent/shared and furnished/unfurnished; with no or varying degrees of support.

If the same level of care and imagination evident in CAP's crash house work can be generally applied to this wider field, a decent housing strategy for young people would be much nearer to realisation.

Terry Martin
City Centre Project

One evening

8.50 Phone rings. It's Terry, can he bring two young men, around 17, for the night? No problem, I say, planning to dash to the late-night shop for some extra milk.

9.20 Terry arrives with the young people. Introductions, stops for a coffee and some chat. Use the back room, TV on but sound turned down. More drinks, plenty of sugar. They ask if its OK to smoke - in here but not in the kitchen. Another caretaker pops head around the door - hellos and going out for a pint, back later. Terry leaves soon after... I ask if they are hungry (looks it) but they say don't bother. I insist, "not my money ... go off soon anyway ..." etc. They submit but I'm sure they think I'm fussing. Seem to eat food OK, though. You can play some records, I say. No thanks, we've had a look at them, but there's a good film on the box later. So what's wrong with Joni Mitchell?

10.15 Clear plates and make some more drinks. Talk a bit about the house, where things are, and arrangements for tomorrow morning. They ask my age, am I married, why do I do this, which other caretakers do I like best ... I answer, thinking it curious that probably the places they have visited before asked them these questions. They met in a hostel. One's time limit came before the other's, and he had nowhere to go, so each day he would walk in 'to visit his mate', leave in the evening but sneak back in and sleep in the airing cupboard. But now both their time limits have expired. It's late now, so show them the sleeping bags and folding beds, and say unplug the TV when the film ends.

7.20 Feeling bright and efficient, wipe down kitchen, do last night's washing-up, get breakfast things ready, knock on their door and leave teas behind it. No sound.

8.00 Knock on door, wise-crack hoping they get subtle hint.

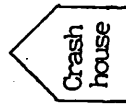
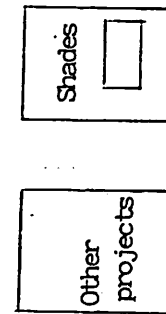
8.25 Not so subtle hint about breakfast quickly going cold. Hear feet shuffling towards bathroom, put kettle on again. Find out one cannot eat fried food because of 'gut rot' but likes cereals. We talk about plans for today, how the money will go, places in town for cheap food.

9.15 Check bus fares and directions back to Shades. Farewells.

THE SERVICE

The housing association

Youth Development Trust



CAP

the referral agency

the caretakers home

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks are principally due to past and current caretakers who have taken time to record their work and give their comments during the development of this booklet. It is hoped this booklet reflects the esteem held for their acceptance of homeless young people.

Similarly, we thank the workers and volunteers at Shades, and workers in the Family Housing Association (Manchester) for their contributions to the scheme and this booklet.

Our thanks are due for grants for the crash houses project from the Silver Jubilee Fund of the Royal Trusts, and the Housing Associations Charitable Trust.

For the funds to help produce this booklet, we have received a donation from Paul. Curno and speaker's fees from Wigan and Buckinghamshire councils.

Many people have seen working drafts of this booklet and given valuable comments and criticisms - too many people to mention completely, but we especially thank Andy Wiggans for his many and prompt insights.

But this booklet is not complete - we lack any comment from the consumers of our service, homeless young people themselves, because we seldom meet them again in less pressured circumstances, though the feedback we do have is favourable.

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"CRASH"

One of the main difficulties we found in publicising this project, and writing contributions for this booklet, is the very title of the scheme - crash houses.

These days it is a phrase which means very little to most people, and some young people imagine it as "some kind of dump".

It is obviously a historical reference, but we have yet to find a suitable replacement name. The term safe house has a particular meaning, on the continent, as a refuge for young people running away from care.

The names used here have been limited to crashpad and crash house. Rather than using derivations such as crasher, a crash - the phrases used are homeless young person and to stay for a night. In using these explanatory phrases, as we would in conversation with a homeless young person, it is possible to use the service without realising it is called a crash house.

CRASHPADS

CAP's crash houses project has its origins in the interesting idea of crashpads developed in the early 1970s by members of the self-styled "alternative" community which flourished at that time. In Manchester in 1971 a group of young people who shared a range of alternative ideas about society got together and established a small but extremely effective information centre called Magic - Manchester Alternative General Information Centre. Based in a small rundown terraced house in Rusholme - and entirely financed by weekly contributions from each of the volunteers involved in it - Magic provided an important focal point for alternative activities both political and social.

Its colourful, unconventional alternative image attracted to it large numbers of young people on the fringes of "straight" society. Many of these came from the student community but what was particularly interesting was the attraction of a place like Magic to large numbers of very isolated, often distressed, homeless young people. To its credit (and amidst often heated political arguments) Magic recognised its responsibilities to young people who had generally fallen through the safety nets of all the statutory agencies, and early in its life attempted to provide the first coherent network of crashpads for young people in the Greater Manchester area.

Crashpads created a system whereby individuals accept homeless young people into their homes for a night, and were particularly important in providing an alternative to the more formal kinds of provision for single homeless people generally. It helped to avoid young people being labelled as social casualties, and provided a warm homely atmosphere in which young people could relax and talk to a friendly person about why they had left home and what there plans were. A crashpad was immensely helpful in providing young people with a sympathetic contact, and in helping to clarify their situation. The host was able to outline the kinds of difficulties in getting accommodation. Some young people decided to go home, whilst others gained the assurance that although there were difficulties there were people who were willing to help them. When Magic sadly closed its doors in 1973 this crashpad network was inherited by the City Centre Project. (Shades) of the Youth Development Trust.

As an alternative to Salvation Army hostels, reception centres (now called resettlement units) and night shelters, the crashpad scheme clearly prevented many young people being drawn into the treadmill of homelessness which has done so much damage to so many of their peers. Many commented on the impact made by the willingness of people to open their homes and share hospitality and friendship at a time when they

felt particularly isolated and rejected. Twelve years later one young man from Glasgow still phones each month or so and describes his invitation to a crashpad as a turning point in his life.

However, the system had its limitations. Clearly, it depended entirely on the generosity of individuals to open up their homes and therefore its reliability could fluctuate considerably. Gradually crashpad hosts became overwhelmed by the demand and with the closure of Magic the number of crashpads available declined.

CAP - Community Action Projects

In 1971 some students in the Manchester university Community Action group decided to start some residential projects. They initially planned to buy properties on a mortgage, so formed a limited company and registered it as a charity - CAP. Eventually, the first projects were whole houses rented from private landlords and sublet to tenants within each project.

The membership of CAP is around two dozen people. There is no wish to expand, either to take on more projects unless others are ended, nor to employ paid workers. Officers are elected at the AGM and all members can attend the main 'committee' meetings. Projects requiring more attention also have their own support group.

The philosophy has been to develop and prove pilot projects, with the emphasis on what a voluntary group can do, rather than duplicating the style of work of many larger organisations. CAP started running group homes in this way, and ended that project after the social services department took on the idea.

Similarly, since 1974 CAP has run a bedsit scheme offering furnished accommodation, self-contained, permanent tenancies, with a sensitive level of support for homeless young people aged from 16 up; working with Family Housing Association (Manchester); written up in a book called, Beyond the Hostel. It is pleasing to see some public housing agencies also looking to provide furnished, self-contained accommodation for rent with sensitive support and housing management along these lines, for young and other people.

This is not to say that CAP has caused these initiatives within housing associations and housing departments of local authorities; but sometimes helped to win arguments by showing it can be made to work.

What will they make of crash houses ?

SHADES - The referral agency

City Centre Project of the Youth Development Trust

"Shades" is strictly speaking the informal name for the office of the City Centre Project, but the term is often used for the whole project. Shades works with young people who are experiencing accommodation problems. Shades offers a youth advice cum counselling service to young people. They call in to discuss and sort out things which concern them. Usually the young people are homeless and penniless and want advice, information and some help.

City Centre Project is mainstream funded by the City of Manchester. It has four paid workers (full-time) - two working in Shades, one outreach and one research and development worker. There are also between 12 and 15 part-time volunteer workers who largely run the evening sessions and do other things besides for the project.

The crash houses are an essential element of our work with young people. Without them, a young person and worker would have to choose between a number of unsatisfactory alternatives - to stay out on the streets all night; to try to find somebody else willing to put a young person up for the night; to try and find the money to book the young person into a hostel if possible; bed and breakfast; or a large, sub-standard hostel in town.

As the figures in this booklet show, the crash houses are rarely used to their full capacity. To some extent this is a reflection of Shades' policy of using them only when all else has failed - when at the end of the day the young person still does not have a roof over their head. Our criteria are that the crash houses should in some way improve a young person's prospects, even if only in the short term.

There are many strands to the working of the crash houses: the homeless young person, the caretakers,

CAP, Shades and the housing association. That represents a lot of people and for most of them their involvement is either voluntary or a fraction of their total job. So the running of the scheme is dependent on the goodwill, commitment and the ability of those involved to get on with each other.

Sometimes, perhaps almost inevitably, communication is not always what it should be, but things do usually get satisfactorily resolved. Shades contributes to the complexity of the communication channels by having the evening sessions run by volunteers. Inevitably there is some turnover in the volunteer group and varying degrees of experience and understanding of our youth work approach. And yet the whole system works very well.

Deciding whether a young person should be referred to a crash house is difficult. We are fortunate in working with caretakers who are sympathetic to our quandaries and who accept our decisions, perhaps gently sorting out any queries with Shades after the event. For instance, sometimes the volunteer or paid worker has wanted somebody to be referred who, in someone else's opinion has already used a crash house too many times. Yet the young person's circumstances may have changed and we feel it would be useful for the young person to stay another night in a crash house, have the benefit of the facilities and start afresh in the morning. Sometimes, though, mistakes are made and the volunteer or paid worker is not aware that this young person had stayed three times, two months ago. Similarly, it is often difficult, especially when you have only just met someone, to decide whether they may be referred or not. We recommend that workers ask themselves whether we would invite this person into our home for the night, as a means of arriving at a decision on whether to refer. In practice there are very, very few young people who are beyond the pale. People who are drunk or otherwise intoxicated and liable to be violent or threatening are not referred. To put this in context, since 1976 we know of only two instances where a young person has stolen some item from a crash house, and these were minor amounts.

The fact that the relationships are largely transient causes some frustration, perhaps particularly for the caretakers and volunteer workers. It is pleasing to know what happened to Jane? Did she go back to her parents or did she get that flat?

The crash houses are an important resource since they offer emergency accommodation to young women. Many of the limited and unsatisfactory options which are open to young men are closed to young women. We find most bed and breakfast places and hostels will not take women, especially single women.

Last year 15% of Shades users were women and 85% were men. But it appears to us that women do have accommodation problems equal to men: it's just that women are less likely to come forward, present their problems and grab the attention. Most of the provision is geared towards men's needs; most hostels are for men only. Women's homelessness remains largely invisible or concealed in intolerable situations. Just under half (45%) of the women who visited Shades last year were with their husband / boyfriend / children. The predominant majority of men came in by themselves. It seems that women's problems are not taken seriously unless someone else is involved.

Anne Pugh
City Centre Project

SHORT LIFE CRASH HOUSES

In 1976 CAP and the City Centre Project operated a pilot scheme to see if some of the qualities of the crashpad idea could be transposed into a service using short life property for emergency accommodation for young people. The proposal was based on discussions with Family Housing Association (Manchester) - FHA over the use of property from which the previous occupants had been moved and was then vacant awaiting renovation. Because of the problems of devising renovation schemes which fell within the appropriate financial limits (particularly as inflation increased costs) such houses were often vacant for some considerable time. In the meantime they were often severely vandalised, increasing the cost of subsequent renovation and providing a source of irritation and annoyance to neighbours. The housing association indicated that the use of such property for a crash houses project would also serve their interests.

CAP proposed to take on three houses and to offer them to small groups of volunteers (2 or 3) as living accommodation. In return the volunteers would pay a small amount which would cover rates, electricity and gas charges. The housing association allowed use either rent-free or at a peppercorn rent. In return for low cost accommodation the group would agree to put up a maximum of four young people on specified nights of the week. The use of three houses in rota provided a number of beds without requiring any group to accept young people every night. The young people were referred only through the information service operated by the City Centre Project, and only on a night-by-night basis.

This system had a number of advantages. It retained the friendliness and informality which had been such an important part of the crashpads and which were particularly crucial in gaining the confidence of young people and helping them over what is often a traumatic break with home. At the same time it was

carefully structured so that the system provided a generousity of those offering the facility nor over-burdening them to the extent which was unreasonable. It also allowed a more constructive use of the existing crashpads, since we were able to assure all concerned that the load was being spread between a number of houses and that nobody was likely to be left carrying the sole burden of providing emergency accommodation. With the assurance of dependable crash houses we were able to extend our previous service and take in many of the young people referred by agencies such a social services departments, who we had often rejected before in preference for young people who lacked any support.

In 1977 we applied to the Silver Jubilee Fund of the Royal Trust for a grant of £2800 to enable us to get this scheme under way. This application proved to be successful and although the cheque did not arrive until October 1978, we took a decision to run a pilot project in a large house in Moss Lane East, Moss Side. This proved not to be a successful venture. The house itself was an old, rambling, Victorian mansion which latterly had been converted for a variety of community uses. However, since the organisation running the facilities failed to obtain grant aid the house was vacated and we were offered the top floor to operate as a crash house. The size of the property and its increasing state of disrepair caused innumerable problems and effectively prevented the scheme getting off the ground. After two months, although a dozen or so young people had been offered temporary accommodation, we decided to close the scheme and await the offer of the kind of small terraced house we had originally envisaged the scheme operating from.

In the autumn of 1977 FHA (M) offered us such a house in Hartington Street, Moss Side, and we immediately moved in following the rehousing of the sitting tenants. A small number of volunteers quickly redecorated the house, undertook minor repairs (including the replastering of a ceiling) and set about obtaining secondhand

furniture. Ray Buckley, the first volunteer caretaker, moved in in September. After a very slow build up the house gradually became a well known resource to the Shades workers and referrals quickly increased during the summer of 1978. In July, Ray left to pursue a course of further studies, and Julian King took his place.

He wrote, "I look over the crash house in Hartington Street from May at the beginning of July. During the summer it was used regularly on the three nights allocated to me. In the period 5 July to 5 October, the crash house was used by 35 young people on 50 occasions. The specifications of only young people, and only on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays was kept to with few exceptions. No-one was allowed when it was thought they could have obtained somewhere to live - this is usually after three or four nights, however most people had found somewhere sooner.

"The only problems were in fact with the small number of older people who wished to return more often and who had to be refused. I think it is difficult to adapt this scheme to meet the needs of older people.

"Most of the young people have, however, been very grateful and a few have washed up and tidied after themselves. Now that winter has almost arrived the number of referrals is dropping. Looking back I can say I have gained a lot from looking after the house and have enjoyed it at times. But I must say that taking young people any more than three nights a week would be a definite strain, as would greater numbers of young people."

With the arrival in 1978 of the grant from the Royal Trusts, CAF opened two further crash houses in Langworthy Road, Moston; and in Arrow Street, Salford; in conjunction with FHA(M) and Irwell Valley Housing Association, and thereby provided a comprehensive seven days a week service.

Although the scheme used what was essentially shortlife housing, the associations indicated that they would hope to find further short term houses when current crash houses were required for renovation to start. Thus the scheme could operate by moving from one property to another and this was the case for some three years until 1981. Langworthy Road was replaced by a house in Lightbowne Road, Moston, and Arrow Street by a council terraced house in Great Western Street, Moss Side.

Tom Maher was a caretaker in Langworthy Road from September 1979. He wrote, "In June I answered an advertisement which I had come across in an alternative bookshop in Manchester's Oxford Road. It was brief, but very much to the point. CAP (the letters meant very little to me at the time, except perhaps to spell out an association with one's head) were looking for someone, perhaps a student with an interest in young people, to take charge of a house in north Manchester. This house would provide emergency overnight accommodation for homeless young people aged 16 to 25 years.

"In September, having spent the summer vacation away, I moved into the house, in a typically working class area of tightly compacted terraced houses. The area had been designated a Housing Action Area, and this house was one of many in the area which had been bought by the council or a housing association. In the course of time they would all be improved and modernised. I was informed from the outset that the house in which I was now living was likely to be renovated within a few months, possibly in December. Yet even at the time of writing (February 80), the scheme is still based in Langworthy Road. The date for improvement has now been rescheduled for August. When this does take place the housing association has agreed to provide another house, and the scheme will simply be transferred to a new location.

"Generally the house is in good condition, decoratively and structurally. However, there have been some minor problems. The condition of the roof has presented

us with our main headaches. Many of the slates on the roof are broken, others have been dislodged from their original positions. Recently heavy gales have contributed to a number of slates falling off the roof completely. The gaping holes which resulted allowed rain water to pour into the loft and eventually seep through a number of ceilings in the house. These problems have now been overcome, though occasionally, particularly in bad weather, the effects of poor roofing are still felt. I cite this experience because it is important to recognise that with property of this kind some problems do invariably result. We had always expected this and were prepared to take the good with the bad. We have been in the fortunate position of not having too many problems to contend with. When repairs have been needed the housing association has been quick to remedy the situation, with the costs being met by CAP itself.

"In return for my involvement and commitment to the scheme I receive furnished accommodation, rent free. This is particularly welcome to me because I am a student. I know only too well how difficult it is to find accommodation in Manchester, and when it has been found it usually proves to be expensive. Presently, I pay local rates (50% because CAP is a charity), and cover the cost of gas and electricity. The furniture provided by CAP was basic, yet covered all the necessary essentials. It was bought locally secondhand, but it was cheap and therefore kept costs down to a minimum. For the scheme itself, CAP has provided folding camp beds and sleeping bags.

This arrangement for rent-free accommodation is especially attractive to someone on a low income, such a part-time worker or student. Unfortunately, a caretaker who receives supplementary benefit finds no financial gain through this method. CAP usually pays the standing charge and installation fee for a telephone. Because the future of the house in Langworthy Road was always more uncertain than the other shortlife houses, it

was decided to rely on a public kiosk. As Tom says, "Perhaps my only grumble would be one relating to the raising of expectations about the installation of a telephone. However, that said, generally, the contact with Shades never suffered. Sometimes it proved inconvenient particularly during the winter months, or when the kiosk was out of order. Having a phone has a number of advantages, not least is that it enables greater contact with other caretakers and workers involved in the scheme."

Looking now at how young people were treated in the crash house, Tom continues, "On arrival at the house the young people are made to feel at home. The atmosphere in the house is warm, friendly, and relaxed. The young people receive a hot meal on arrival, and for many this is particularly welcome. Similarly, on their departure they are given a substantial breakfast which will set them up for the day ahead. The costs involved in providing these meals are reimbursed by Shades. No intensive work is undertaken with young people, such a counselling, though it may be warranted. I always felt that it was important to concentrate on things other than the young person's immediate plight. However, should the person draw attention to his or her situation, then the caretaker should be prepared to respond, as we did in many cases. Some young people arrived at the house physically and emotionally exhausted: some will quickly fall asleep on arriving at the house. Again in this situation one has to remain sensitive to the needs of the young person."

"Over four months, 20 young people have stayed at the crash house in Moston. Five of these have been girls, three of them have been accompanied by their boyfriends. The average age has been 21, the oldest being 30 and the youngest 17. (In 1979) all with the exception of four have come from outside the City of Manchester area. In the majority of these cases they have come to Manchester in the hope of finding employment. In the cases of locally based people the reason for their homelessness has usually been domestic."

"The difficulties they face are immense. But perhaps more so to outsiders. In addition to their unemployment and lack of accommodation, they have the attendant problems of getting money from the DHSS without a fixed address. They usually have deeper problems to contend with - the loneliness, the difficulties in making friends, and for some the general feelings of inadequacy brought about through past failures."

The running of a crash house is eventful and sometimes stressful for caretakers too. Dave Charlton and Ginny Castle were in Arrow Street from 1979, eventually until 1981. As Dave noted, "The network of terraced houses between Great Clowes Street and the back door of Strangeways prison had almost disappeared by the time we arrived. The T-junction of some 30 houses in Arrow Street and Trafalgar Street were the only ones remaining for several blocks. These token few were saved from demolition by the efforts of a local housing group; a change of heart about the suitability of the terrace for modern living and a disenchantment with highrise flats."

"Specific to Arrow Street was the early morning chorus of massed dumper trucks migrating to and fro underneath the front bedroom window every 7 am, punctuated by the occasional rumbling caterpillar tracked crane. The new houses being built on three sides produced wall-to-wall mud on the streets in winter and dust enough to warrant a public health inspector in the summer."

"The house had no fireplace and no main light in the living room but unlike many the roof was watertight and we had very little trouble with damp. The house was furnished by several trips to Community Transport with £100, including a cooker and fridge. During the ensuing months a favourite game was keeping an ear sensitively cocked for a faint hiss signalling a water leak followed by a manic lifting of the floorboards. After four or five bursts for a change we had a gas leak which required the pipes to be replaced at £50. The disturbance from this triggered other

water leaks but by now the water board emergency service was jettisoned in favour of the judicious application of the hammer.

"On Sundays this sequence was disturbed by an 8 am blast of E Presley from nextdoor's front room radiogram while cooking breakfast in the back. A neighbour threw his lighter through our bedroom window trying to wake his wife next door and was too ashamed to retrieve it. A massive warehouse fire at the end of the street had eight engines pumping all the way from town. When the fair arrived on wasteground at the back a man asked if he could plug in his caravan and swears blind he isn't going to run the dodgems off it. Nextdoors neighbour's son is clandestinely home from detention centre and breaks down our back door and nicks cassette, camera, radio and torch. Police arrive in the mould of Starskey and Hutch. They find the loot stuffed up his chimney. Local handimen remove piping from vacant home nextdoor and precipitate water through our lounge ceiling."

As with Langworthy Road, Arrow Street was used for longer than the expected six months. "The house was offered to CAP by Irwell Valley Housing Association whilst in limbo, as the status of the area regarding improvement grants was uncertain. This limbo was offered to us in six month periods which extended in batches to a total of two years. After we left the house it was completely gutted within three days."

The house in Lightbowne Road was closed as a crash house when the electrical lighting and water heating circuits fused through the perished insulation, and the caretakers left soon afterwards. The house in Great Western Street was returned to the council when they had to sell it.

Overall the use of shortlife property for this scheme proved successful. We were always able to attract caretakers to live in the houses - usually students

whose housing needs were for cheap accommodation for twelve months or so - and young people found the accommodation homely and acceptable. The drawbacks were the high levels of repairs needed and the uncertainty about the time for which the houses would actually be available. Also, some people in CAP had doubts about continuing with shortlife properties, and so when these houses closed they were replaced with fully improved and modernised houses for occupation on a long term basis.

FHA - Family Housing Association

Family Housing Association (Manchester) has managed five crash houses since the project was first proposed to us in 1976. Originally the scheme was intended as much to benefit the association as CAP and young people. At that time we were buying large numbers of properties which had to be modernised before they could be let permanently to families. Sometimes they were in fairly good condition when they were purchased, but they were soon vandalised if they were left empty for any length of time. Due to the lengthy procedures needed to get the houses into contract, some of them were empty for two or three years and they soon became derelict leading to complaints about vermin, fires, etc and involving the association in a great deal of expense in keeping them secure. The advantage of letting CAP make use of the houses was that they could be let on a license which allowed the association to get vacant possession within a month so that building work could start. CAP was also responsible for all the repairs and decoration of the houses.

The first three houses, one in Moss Side and two in Moston, were licensed to CAP for a rent of £1 a year. The caretakers were responsible for the general and water rates, gas, electricity and other outgoings. Expenses tended to be very low and the first caretakers, usually students, had a fairly good deal at least financially in that they had reasonable accommodation compared with what was available in the private market for very low costs.

Unfortunately the first house in Moss Side did not have a very auspicious start because after CAP had given notice and moved out, the house was broken into and a fire started which did considerable damage. Undaunted FHA(M) leased two further pre-improved (short-life) houses in Moston, both in traditional working class streets. Initially we were worried about the reaction of the neighbours to the project. If they asked, neighbours were told that the houses were being

rented to students who would look after them until they were improved. None of the neighbours ever complained about young people staying or even seemed to be aware that the house was anything other than an ordinary shared house. With hindsight, this is not unexpected given that the intention is that the caretakers invite the young people into their own home and do not regard the house as a hostel or a special project.

Later on, as procedures between the association and the lending authorities improved, pre-improved houses became scarcer - in some cases houses were going into contract within a few months of being purchased. The move from pre-improved to fair rent accommodation happened almost by chance. CAP had some time previously approached FHA(M) for a property which could be used to rehouse ex-psychiatric patients. The association had a five bedroom house in Old Trafford, and when the project for ex-psychiatric patients was ended, CAP decided to use the house then being offered as a permanent crash house. The major disadvantage of using fair rent accommodation is that the costs tend to be higher for the caretakers. They share the full rent plus rates and other outgoings, and although compared with the rents in the private sector costs are relatively low, it is not as attractive as the tiny rent of the previous scheme. The average weekly rent for the two caretakers sharing the house in Cheetham is just over £8 a week. Both current houses are fully improved and have partial central heating and the association, not CAP, now has full responsibility for repairs.

Both houses are rented to CAP under the normal terms of our tenancy agreement. CAP then has a separate license with each of the caretakers, which not only incorporates the conditions of the tenancy, but also regulates the running of the crash houses scheme. The only major management problem has been concerned with the payment of rent. As one housing officer said when asked for her comments on the scheme.

"I haven't noticed any problems with the way the house is used, but I wish they'd pay the rent regularly".

The association has tended to offer properties which have special lettings difficulties. The house in Old Trafford is in a terrace where FHA(M) owns a number of similar houses. Although the houses are suitable for large families, it was thought advisable to keep the child density down, and so it was to the advantage of the association to have a group of adults using the house. The house in Cheetham was difficult to let for different reasons. It is in an area where there are a number of problems which make the houses unpopular with waiting list applicants. These include environmental problems of derelict houses, fly tipping, rubbish in rear entries, the reputation of part of the area as a red light district and antagonism to the large number of Asian families living in the area.

This is not to say that associations or local authorities should only consider using 'difficult to let' properties or even properties with special letting needs. The crash house scheme as it has been run provides a valuable service virtually run on a shoestring. The scheme offers reasonable accommodation, but more importantly it is done in a manner acceptable to young people avoiding the stigma of a hostel or bed and breakfast.

It can also be completely integrated into the local community without attracting attention. Besides normal management services of rent collection and maintenance, there is no additional input from the association or local authority. The scheme does rely very much on the goodwill and commitment of the caretakers and perhaps they should be offered more attractive properties in return for their contribution.

Maureen Simpson
Family Housing Association (Manchester)

LONG TERM CRASH HOUSES

In the summer of 1981 we were attracted by the offer by FHA(M) of a long term house in Old Trafford, modernised and expected to last for 30 years, intended for a large family. FHA(M) welcomed the idea of a group of younger people sharing the house as caretakers as a way of adding variety to a street of large houses dominated by a number of families with many children.

Then, when the crash house in Great Western Street closed in 1982, FHA(M) offered a replacement modernised house in Cheetham.

Currently the crash houses project is based in these two properties, covering Sunday to Thursday each week with Shades opening the following day to assist a homeless young person.

Keith Davies, a caretaker in the Cheetham house, writes, "We see the house as primarily our home and stress to young people that they are welcome in the same way we would welcome friends. Thus they are encouraged to use the house as they wish. Their actions vary considerably. Some sit in front of the television, others have a bath, others play records etc. Others talk quite freely about their experiences, what they intend to do in the future. As caretakers we can only offer limited advice. The essential role of the caretaker is to provide a breathing space in which the young people are welcomed into a friendly atmosphere and given as much support as they require.

"We have found that the number of young people staying fluctuates quite dramatically. Quiet periods are to be expected and are met sometimes with relief and sometimes with frustration.

"There is always a risk when you invite strangers into your home. Apart from the theft of one radio we have found that young people have been very appreciative of the hospitality offered. It is to the credit of Shades, the young people and the crash

house system that incidents like this happen so infrequently.

"There is also a risk that a young person may come back to the house without going through the referral agency. This has happened only once and the person concerned was invited to stay after consultation with a worker from Shades. Situations like this are obviously solved by the people concerned - the caretakers. The stay is for one night at a time but this rule is not inflexible and caretakers can use their initiative. We have on occasions asked some young people to come back if, for example, they are to get accommodation within a few days.

"I have been living in this crash house for almost a year. The house itself is a three bedroom terraced house, structurally sound but at first in need of redecoration. This was carried out by a group of young men on a Macro training scheme. CAP forwarded a grant of £100 which paid for basic furniture and carpets purchased from a local organisation which sells cheap furniture to groups working in the community. On top of this CAP has paid for the installation of a telephone and subsequent standing charges, plus the insurance on the house. There have been some difficulties in obtaining insurance, and previously some companies have not been told about the crash house project. The practicalities of setting up a house continue, and thanks to further CAP grants the house is in good working order with all the necessary furniture installed."

The house in Old Trafford is larger, with three storeys and up to five bedrooms. At the time of writing there are four caretakers living there, previously five. The following comments are initially collective, and then individual caretakers comment on various themes; from Sue Battersby, Barbara Cadge, Dave Charlton and Simon Towse.

"This describes our practical management of the crash house, and then expands on this, drawing from our

own personal experience. The present basis for it's operation is a renovated, older style house, rented on a permanent basis from a housing association through CAP, the parent organisation. It is primarily our home. Living arrangements and internal problems, separate from those arising directly from the service, are sorted out on a joint, communal basis.

"We are lucky enough to have two rooms on the ground floor - a living room and a small room with a television, so are able to use these rooms for young people, thereby allowing some privacy for others in the rest of the house.

"For the nights when young people are expected - and we can take up to three at once - a simple rota system has been devised. It has been found to be both convenient and useful to have at least two people available at these times. This means that in turn, each member of the house takes full charge and responsibility for a night, with a back-up available, acting both as a safeguard against trouble, and on a more practical level, to help out, fetch extra food etc when so required. In our house we arrange for a male and female to work together, recognising the needs of some young girls to talk about more personal problems with other women.

"The 9 pm phone call from Shades allows for some individual freedom in the household, rather than having to be available for indeterminate times during the evening. The telephone calls are an important point of contact with the referring workers, where any appropriate information on a young person may be given, as well as providing easy access to discuss any other problems arising.

"A Shades paid or volunteer worker usually accompanies the young person to the house, introducing them to the household. Arrangements are made for the following day - appointments, return to Shades, etc - and then the young person can settle down and share the evening with the caretaker, watching television or often just

talking. In its simplicity, the idea is to treat them as any other friend in our home, offering food and drink, a space for relaxation, and a sympathetic ear, if that is called for.

"Due to the very nature of their circumstances, these young people are often tired, dirty and dishevelled, and may well be debilitated and suffering minor physical ailments. Such simple things as a bath, hairwash, access to washing clothes, and even simple dressings for blisters and cuts, thus become very welcome. The young person is then free to go to bed in his or her time. We use camp beds and sleeping bags, which seem adequate, and are also unobtrusive when not in use. After an early morning call and cup of tea, we then provide a full and sustaining breakfast. Depending on the arrangements made previously, directions, bus routes and fares are sorted out, and the young person leaves us with well wishes for the day to come.

"We have considered our function in terms of simple, even banal practicalities. But it cannot be denied that problems do exist for us. Luckily, they are few and far between, and most contingencies have already been planned. For the most part, the system works well and smoothly, with the caretakers coping with the invasion of space, time and privacy inherent in such a system - which is not always an easy thing.

"The referral agency successfully sifts out problems of alcohol and drug abuse, and indeed, takes the attitude in choosing which young person can be referred, on whether they would invite them into their own home. Hence we have been spared possible violent or police problems. However, with respect to this, we are still aware of the potential risk in taking people 'of the streets'.

"One cause of unease has been the difficulty in obtaining insurance for personal items for those living in the house, an unease generated by our obvious vulnerability

to abuse. A rather time-consuming, tiring and frustrating round of at least twelve insurance companies, revealed only two who were prepared to take us on, and one of these was beyond our limited financial range. Refusals were on the grounds of the area in which we live, and of the communal nature of the house."

Some frustrations with the service

"On the part of a small number of young people, there is an unfortunate tendency for the crash houses, and the caretakers to be seen as a soft option when seeking a bed for the night. Due to the way in which the Shades' evening sessions are organised with different paid and volunteer workers on each night, the same people are sometimes referred to the house four or five times in a relatively short space of time.

"For the caretakers this can be a frustrating experience. When somebody has already stayed a few times, it is tempting to feel that you are being taken advantage of, and that you are going over old ground is both boring and unproductive.

"An allied frustration occurs when people who have previously stayed with us turn up on the doorstep, when the Shades advice centre is closed. So far, the problem has been resolved by discussion amongst ourselves, and in the majority of cases, the person has been allowed to stay the night. On a personal basis, it is rather frustrating to have to alter personal plans at such short notice to spend the evening with the person.

"Unfortunately, the people that turn up on the doorstep also tend to be those who have previously been referred by Shades a number of times. At such times, patience tends to wear a little thin."

The variety of young people who might stay

"The diverse nature of our guests often calls for flexibility of nature and approach. Consider the situation of several young people, unknown to each other, staying with us overnight. One person often dominates the conversation, and yet you can see another, quiet in the corner, withdrawn, silent and far away. How can you draw them in, and give them that space to share their worries, without pressure or embarrassment?

"The opposite side was the rather disconcerting experience of a young man who did not want to speak, except to ask for food! His privacy had to be respected, but there remained a nagging doubt that many troubles were present, and that a different approach may be more welcome.

"One group where what we offer is of most use is with those leaving home for the first time. The 'wide eyed and legless' approach often applies here. As an instance, we had two brothers, aged 16 and 17 years, who came to us having been thrown out of home, literally just up the road from us. Not being aware of the circumstances, we could offer very little in terms of practical advice, barring sympathetic noises about their predicament. What we could do was to gently nudge them into realising how complicated surviving independently in this city was likely to be.

"They returned to us a few days later, still cracking brotherly jokes, but a little more subdued. They explained they had been put in a boarding house - only to be awakened at 3 am, by a man who told them to 'clear' off, as it was his room, and then flung them out. The landlord had thought the man would be away over the weekend, and double booked the room. If they had been stronger, older or more violent the outcome could have been much more complex. However, they were able to bounce back to us, while sorting out the door address, possessions etc without being seriously at risk - at least for a day or two.

"They had lots of energy, they had each other to relate to, and leaving home was still an adventure. We can only hope it remained so."

One particular instance

"One couple we put up were very unusual in that they slipped through the net on two counts - age and drug usage. Shades had only had telephone contact with them before they were referred to our home. The man was in his late 30s or early 40s, and the woman in her early 30s. The man, a registered heroin addict, was on a daily dose of Methadone, as replacement and maintenance therapy.

"In reality, the couple were anxious and gentle, and no trouble at all to us. But we did feel the need to discuss them with Shades because of the anomalies of age and drug usage.

"Since the formal referral, the couple have made informal contact with us four times. The man twice - only to use the phone - and on two evenings, when they had been thrown out of their accommodation, and had nowhere to stay. On both these last two occasions we were 'off duty', Shades were shut, and because of the ages, the only alternative known to us (wrongly, as it turned out) was the night shelter. After discussion between ourselves, we decided to let them stay, and as before, they were no trouble. We did feel some anxiety on one of the evenings, because the man had not had his daily dose of Methadone, and was obviously suffering. We did stress to them that we were not meeting their needs, and to date we have not had any further contact."

Working with girls and young women

"As mentioned earlier, we try to work in 'mixed doubles'. The usefulness of this approach is witnessed by an instance where a young woman and man, unknown to each other, stayed with us overnight. After a couple of hours, when it came to settling down for the night, the girl became rather distressed and tearful, but was reluctant to discuss things with the (male) caretaker present, asking if there was a woman in the house.

"As it turned out, two recent occurrences had happened to seriously disturb her - an attempted rape and a break through the window of the room in which she was sleeping. Not surprisingly, this left her scared of sleeping alone, and literally terrified of men. Her fears could not be allayed by simple discussion and reassurance about the household, and she actually ended up sleeping on the floor in one of the women's rooms."

LIMITATIONS OF THE CARETAKER ROLE

This was written by Tom Maher, a shortlife crash house caretaker but the issues and mixed feelings are substantially the same for a caretaker in a longer term house.

"The role we play in this whole affair is somewhat ill-defined, and it is something we have to resolve ourselves. Initially it was difficult for me. Did we have any role to play at all other than providing the accommodation? We felt we had, but we did not want to interfere with the work from Shades. That young people are in the house for so short a period of time, and that they do not arrive until late, to my mind precludes any further work. I think caretakers should be careful not to duplicate or interfere with the work that Shades is doing with the young people we see. However, we see our role as being complimentary to that of the paid workers, in that we too are in a position to provide support, lend a sympathetic ear, and act as an interested friend. But inevitably all this is limited by the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves. Many of the young people are quite shy people who do not find talking or entering into trust an easy exercise. Lack of confidence makes it easy for them to withdraw into their shyness and isolation. Added to this they come along to the house confused and anxious, fearful of meeting strange people and responding to a strange environment.

"The difficulties associated with identity and role do not preoccupy us, however. The primary aim of the scheme is to provide emergency accommodation for young people in need. The good standard accommodation and facilities which we offer are an alternative to the more recognised hostel accommodation, such as the night shelter or a Salvation Army hostel, which exist in and around Manchester city centre. These hostels are totally inappropriate for people. The conditions in them are poor and overcrowded, and the experience of using them can be a distressing one. Indeed many of the hostels have a minimum age limit

of twenty five. Many of the young people at Langworthy Road have related tales of sleeping rough in the city centre rather than spend a night in hostel accommodation.

"In these circumstances the young people have all shown appreciation of the little we have been able to do for them. The comfortable bed in a warm and pleasant surrounding, and the security which this affords. The hot drink and accompanying meal which relieves the hunger which has developed throughout the day and sustains them through the next. The opportunity to sit down and chat with someone who is willing to listen and understand. This is all we offer, a house with hospitality.

"The problems which confront the single homeless youngster are immense in a city like Manchester, but I do not suggest they are peculiar to Manchester. I sometimes feel that perhaps we, as a group, could do more to publicise the difficulties which these young people face. It is not something that the caretakers can do, but I feel that CAP and Shades, together with the experience which caretakers have, can perhaps influence other agencies in the area in bringing people's notice to the issues involved. I see the problem stemming largely from a social and economic background. In practical terms, therefore, it is often difficult to see how one can help many of the young people passing through the house; at times a great feeling of helplessness can overcome the caretaker."

CARETAKERS FEELINGS ABOUT SUPPORT

There has been no regular system of support meetings for the caretakers in the crash houses, but instead, networks of personal friendships overlapping CAP and Shades in which sometimes the pressures of running a house are discussed.

This may reflect the emphasis given to a crash house being primarily someone's home. The number of caretakers in a house partly depends on its size. A house may have a couple as caretakers, or a larger group of either friends who have known each other beforehand, or a group of people new to each other. The support must be sensitive to these different arrangements. There are straightforward aspects of running a house - "business items" such as expenses which can be dealt with easily. But these will be other areas which may be intrusive, such as the "atmosphere" within the house created by caretakers, and the usual frictions of living in a shared house.

It is important not to under-estimate what the caretakers do. On one level it is a very ordinary and natural gesture, putting someone up on the sofa for the night, such as after a party or for a visiting friend. But the extra elements in the background are; to do it repeatedly, for strangers, who have little or nothing else being offered to them, and to regularly use your home as a commitment to other people in greater need without being overwhelmed. Caretakers may have ambivalent feelings about their work, as Tom Maher indicates earlier. Caretakers have not wanted a formal support group, so support from people in other CAP projects has sometimes been difficult to sustain.

For feedback, Shades is contacted to find what has happened to someone who has stayed. As the referral agency with full-time workers they are in frequent contact with each house. Both CAP and Shades recognise that the separation of referral and support is beneficial to the service being provided and the people involved.

NEW GROUPS

It is important for a group to set aims and limitations, to agree to stop when they are reached, and to recognise their achievements in doing so. We think this crash houses project could be usefully copied elsewhere, in particular by voluntary groups in areas with few or no facilities.

Such a group is likely to be small, consisting of people already in contact with young people. They may be youth workers, training supervisors, college staff; careers, housing or probation officers; community or social workers, church members. Such people are likely to be already committed with other groups and activities.

They will probably share a strong dissatisfaction with the little or nothing that can be offered to a homeless young person. There may be a list of bed and breakfasts in town, or a hostel in some larger town or city a distance away; but even then there are still difficulties - will a place be there tonight, will they take someone without money, will they take an unemployed young person. Are you happy sending a young person to such an establishment or may it damage them. Would a young person want to go so far away from their local area to a hostel or shelter which, they feel, is worse than roughing it for a day or two in a shed or car in the hope of sorting something out with friends?

One of the main advantages of the crash houses scheme is that it should be abundantly clear to the outside world where things stop - that it is for one night, and referring to emergency accommodation does not satisfy all the housing needs of a homeless young person, and what will you be doing with them tomorrow?

The resources are also already available in any populated area. The local authority and housing associations could be asked to provide such a project with modernised houses at no rent or rates and with a repairs commitment;

a youth centre open in the evening and daytime could be the referral point (as recognised in the report of the DHSS working party on 'young homelessness in 1976'); housing and social services departments could assist with decent furniture from their suppliers and vacated properties; the funding for running costs would be comparatively tiny to a local authority - the main cost being full-time workers at the referral centre who can also offer support and follow-up involvement with homeless young people.

When approaching statutory agencies for resources, as well as funding and facilities, we have found it important that they show a recognition of the work being done by allowing time for their staff to contribute their skills without the agency expecting votes on some committee or x% of the referrals.

A new group will have a daunting number of paths* to discuss and choose: their objectives, methods, structures, and working style.

What are the objectives of the group? To prove a need, to provide a longterm service, to campaign, to enhance existing provision, to test a new pilot idea, to push the council for better provision.

What methods and resources will the group seek to use? A meeting with the council, a better list of addresses, a rights information booklet for young people, a teenage nightshelter, an empty hall on offer, a derelict house awaiting redevelopment, a staffed hostel.

The group will usually have to form within a structure - becoming an advisory body, a charity, a company, a friendly society, a charitable trust, a project of another organisation.

How should a group organise its work? Seeking funding for paid workers, recruiting volunteers, or using unemployed trainees for the building work and fundraising for the costs of materials - could we get a discount

from that paint company? This may seem deprecatory, but such groups can easily become overwhelmed and disheartened. The delays start, the number of people coming to meetings diminishes, and the workload has taken on a momentum of its own.

It is important that any such group should fully research these choices and their consequences. Too often, it seems, a new residential project is started in the belief that 'anyone sensible' can make it work. It will be a local initiative, and there may be a reluctance to consider that lessons have been learnt, sometimes bitterly, by people in other areas. Existing projects and residential workers should consider publicising their lessons more, and in a critical fashion. Emphasis should be on making contact with allied groups and workers, either by visits or inviting them as guests. This booklet cannot provide all the answers to these issues, but we underline the need to research and discuss the designs and experiences of other groups, as well as ours.

We want crash houses to be added to the list of considerations because we feel this scheme has particular, unique strengths. It allows the group to concentrate on creating the network of people and houses to operate the scheme, monitor its use, and begin to tackle the areas which arise after a stay in emergency accommodation - help and advice, permanent housing, and support through the same agencies used by the rest of us, in the community.

Establishment costs per house

3/4 beds	£75	
Blankets	40	
Sheet sleeping bags	10	
Pillows	10	
Heater	10	
Installation of phone	50	
Secondhand cooker	10	
General furnishings	<u>25</u>	£230

Runnings costs per house

Insurance: people	15	
contents	10	
Laundry	50	
Coffee etc	25	
Phone rental	30	
Contingency, repairs	<u>100</u>	<u>230</u> £460

For three houses	£1380
CAP administration	<u>20</u>
	<u>1400</u>

ACCOUNTS FOR THE LATEST YEAR - 1982

Income

Interest	£90.
Rates refund	<u>54</u>
	<u>144</u>

Expenditure

Rent and rates	£ 16
Telephone	243
Depreciation	250
Administration	25
Repairs and renewals	361
Insurance	58
Welfare	32
Gas	<u>21</u>
	<u>1006</u>

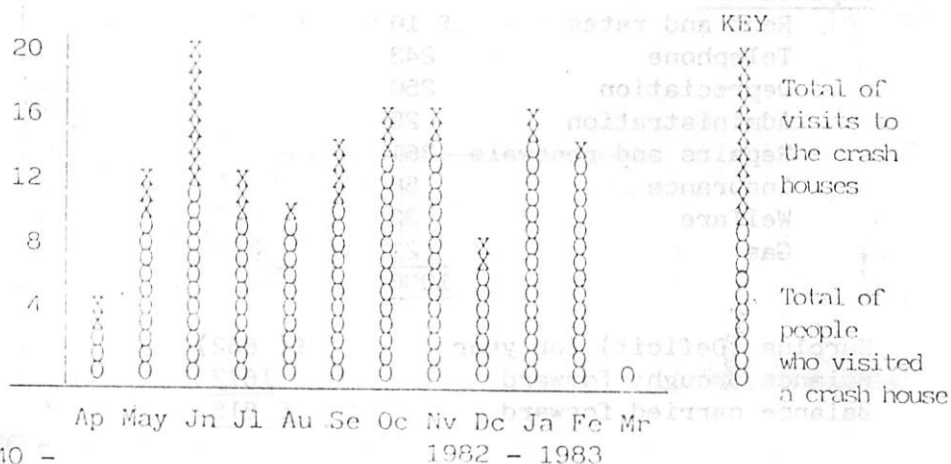
Surplus (Deficit) for year	£(862)
Balance brought forward	<u>1677</u>
Balance carried forward	<u>£ 815</u>

FIGURES ON USAGE

Year	Number of young people who stayed overnight	Total number of nights stayed
1980-1	158	135
1981-2	103	139
1982-3	130	158

In the last year, of the 130 young people 34 were women (26%) and 96 were men (74%). The young women stayed 39 times, the young men 119 times. For people coming into the Shades office, 15% were women and 85% were men. This indicates the importance of the crash houses as provision for young women when there is little else available. In fact, in the very rare event of there being more people in Shades during an evening in need of the crash house than there is space for, Shades has a prioritisation policy of single women first, then couples, then single men on the basis of the relative availability of other accommodation for these groups.

In 1981-2, at different intervals one of the crash houses was closed due to the results of needing to close a shortlife house - the crash house service was badly missed. As the graph shows, in March and April the figures are particularly low because of the uncertainties of Shades' annual funding review which causes the project to prepare for closure each year. Shades also closes over the Christmas holiday.



RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS

CAP	- Community Action Projects	47 Upper Lloyd St Moss Side Manchester M14 4HY
Shades	- City Centre Project	48 Copperas St City Centre Manchester M4 1HS
FHA(M)	- Family Housing Association	Warwickgate House Warwick Road Manchester M16 ODD
Char	- the national campaign for single homeless people	27 John Adam St London WC2N 6HX 01 839 6185
Shelter	- Homebase project - for young people leaving care	157 Waterloo Rd London SE1 01 633 9377
NAYC	- national association of youth clubs	Keswick House 30 Peacock Lane Leicester LE1 5NY
Naypic	- national association of young people in care	c/o Bradford CVS 9 Southbrook Terrace Bradford BD7 1AD 0274 22772
NFHA	- national federation of housing associations	30 Southampton St London WC2 01 240 2771

RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Published by the City Centre Project, Shades
Available from above, free to young people using
Shades, £1 to organisations and bulk discounts

An important work for anyone involved in youth advice work. This guide concentrates on being young and homeless, but also follows this with extensive local details on further education, shopping cooking and budgeting, benefits and so on. This is a useful model for local groups and youth workers planning to publicise local information for young people to use.

BEYOND THE HOSTEL

Published by CAP
Available from NAYC, £2-95 inc p&p

"For the rest of this chapter we propose to look at some of the factors which influence the success or failure of a scheme, drawing upon our experience of Bowker Street and Egerton Road. From this it will be clear that much depends upon the physical layout of the house and the facilities it provides. The essential basis for a successful scheme is well maintained, attractive, self-contained accommodation. Given this foundation, it is essential to look carefully at other issues such a mix of tenants, management, caretaker's role and support. We begin, however, with the influence of the building itself upon the development of a scheme."

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THE SURVIVORS

A study of homeless young newcomers to London
and the responses made to them
D Brandon K Wells C Francis E Ramsay
Published by Routledge & Kegan Paul
39 Store Street, London WC1
Available from publishers, £6-50

"Journalists usually came to us with answers rather than questions and we often felt we were intruding between the storyline and the notepad. One reporter for instance asked a string of questions beginning 'Wouldn't you say that ... ?' After thirty minutes of refusing to endorse her views, she replied: 'You're not being very helpful, are you ?' In her subsequent article she attributed the views we did not endorse to 'a social worker'."

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VOLUNTEER'S HANDBOOK

Published by the City Centre Project, Shades
Available from above, 75p and bulk discounts

This extensive guide is for current and prospective volunteers who work at Shades on evening sessions. This is important for any group wishing to explore using crash houses, giving the details of referral policies and practices.

A PLACE OF MY OWN

Anne Masterson
Published by GMYA/NAYC Homelessness Project
Available from NAYC, £1-90 inc p&p

"As a youth worker I saw that my skills lay in building and developing relationships with young people. Although in my previous job I had been aware of some young people who had or were about to leave home, pressure of time or lack of knowledge meant I was forced to refer them to a specialist agency outside the area. In the Homelessness Project I saw the opportunity to spend more time with a specific group of young people, looking at ways in which, as a youth worker, I could help them through the situation. My feelings were summed up in a paper written prior to the Project being set up:

"The emphasis throughout the Project would be to identify young people about to enter the homelessness treadmill and to attempt to prevent their aspirations and ambitions from turning sour."

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AWAY FROM THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

Andy Wiggins
Published by GMYA/NAYC Homelessness Project
Available from NAYC, £1-90 inc p&p

"The structure of such informal networks, then, is complex and they are not always benign. Some communities seem better able to develop and sustain them than others. There will be times, therefore when one's immediate friends and relatives will be unable to offer support and the homeless young person will turn to an outside agency for help. Cut off, perhaps at first only temporary, from his/her parental home the young person is usually very unwilling to surrender the promise of support available locally in return for an offer of hostel accommodation in a remote district."

ANOTHER EVENING

It is 8.45 pm Saturday: not one of the three nights the house is on duty, and you are deciding whether or not to go out. On answering the phone, you find someone from a local political party saying they have heard you are a hostel, and they would like to send two people round.

You explain that the house is not on duty, that it is our home, and that we only take referrals through one agency. The man says can't you put them up just for tonight - they are totally reliable.

You explain that the house has been on duty three nights in the week, that you are about to go out, and there is no-one else in the house to consult. What if something was stolen out of other people's rooms whilst they were away - would he be responsible?

"Well ... mumble, mumble ... no, but they are totally reliable, and they are really stuck." They are 16 to 18 years old and have just arrived looking for work.

"So why don't you put them up for a couple of days then?"

"Oh ... well ... couldn't do that ... would have to consult my family first."

"What about our family/group then - they are all out so I cannot consult them."

"Ah ... well ... yes ..."

Eventually, I give him a list of hostels, boarding houses, etc, and tell him to ring again in half an hour if no luck.

Of course he does, and they do come over, and they are reliable, and it is just a Saturday night anyway,

... but ...

**75p including postage
from, CAP
47 Upper Lloyd St
Moss Side
Manchester
M14 4HY**