

SOSTRIS STAGE TWO: AGENCY REPORT

It's just a big step: an East London foyer for young people

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From just going to school, and then from doing nothing all day having everything, to look after yourself. It's just a big step.

Introduction

Underpinning this report is an assumption that there have been significant changes recently in the *traditional* links between the family, school and work, and as a result of these changes young people can be perceived as a group at risk.

Young People in Britain and the rest of Europe feel trapped in a "protracted limbo" between childhood and adulthood, unable to take on responsibilities. Job insecurity and longer periods of education and training mean they find it hard to envisage a settled family life, according to a study of 18 to 30-year-olds. (Barrie Clement, The Independent, 2/12/98:11)

To explore this assumption the report focuses on a particular Foyer which has emerged and developed in East London since 1996, and provides housing and other services for 210 young people. The Foyer is an interesting project, not simply because of its attempts to support young people perceived at risk, but also because it is richly coloured by the political and economic climate of its time - a climate of tendering, funding bids, and of multi-agency approaches. The prevailing climate is particularly evident in the Foyer's ongoing attempts to create a cluster of integrated services: a café, a general training suite, a drop-in advice service, a radio project training facility, and offices for an outreach agency.

This cluster of integrated services is the Foyer's attempt to enable young people identified as at risk to locate stable jobs and homes. The data collected indicates a number of interesting themes behind the intentions and objectives of clustering these services together:

- How young people's culture is understood.
- The place of families in policy thinking.
- The perceived need for physical and symbolic boundaries for the safety and containment of young people.
- The meaning given to 'young people'.

The report's description of the project is contextualised within these themes, which, it is hoped, will resonate with readers interested in issues surrounding youth, risk, and social exclusion. It is also a 'snapshot' depiction of a newly emergent form of welfare organisation just two years into its full functioning. Striking for such an early stage of development is the determination and rapidity with which a number of structural problems are being tackled at executive board

¹ This commissioned report has been subject to editing by the research manager.

level, and by the managers and staff, bringing major changes even in the six weeks within which interviews were conducted, and certainly within the six months of research contact. To understand how the themes emerged, and the provisional nature of the report, it is important to turn briefly to some of methodological implications behind the fieldwork.

1. Some Initial Thoughts on the Fieldwork

The fieldwork was a process of data collection that used a mixed method approach, which included observations, participant observation and archive document analysis. But one single method was privileged above the rest; the biographical interview method. This method provides an opportunity for the interviewees, through their own narratives, arguments and descriptions, to explore and unpack their own understanding of the Foyer project. Twelve such interviews were carried out; eleven with staff and one with a tenant. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and a half. Though the time allowed for collection and analyses of this data was limited, it is worth briefly exploring some of the issues which emerge in relation to the method.

I started the fieldwork with no clearly *planned* frame of reference. In fact I had been encouraged to let any possible themes or structures emerge directly from the data itself. Initially this freedom left me feeling separate and isolated from the project I was evaluating. But, as each interview took place, I found myself becoming increasingly *located* in a subject/object dichotomy relationship with the project. For my own part, however, as the data collection proceeded I became increasingly aware of the way the emergence of theories and the process of analysis were mentally mediated by my own existing experiences and theories.

The report offers a few thoughts only on what are the preliminary findings. The voices of some of the Foyer staff and one of its tenants will be used throughout. These accounts were drawn directly from the interview transcripts, and are anonymised where possible (but would probably be recognisable to anyone close to the project). In some cases they are abridged for ease of reading. All throw interesting light on a project devoted to providing services for young people.

2. The Development of the Foyer

The British Foyer movement started in the early 1990s. The instigator of the movement, Sheila McKechnie, director of the British housing charity Shelter, saw in the French Foyer movement the provision of safe and supportive accommodation for young workers, a form of provision that had none of the negative connotations inherent in Britain's hostel system. The British Foyer system, when adapted to include integral training facilities, would offer a model which might counter the negative trend in British social policy towards young people. In order to develop this provision of training and housing, McKechnie teamed up with the Grand Metropolitan Community Services (GMCS) (a major contributor to training) and between them they created the British Foyer Federation.

Youth homelessness should be tackled in centres that offer young people accommodation and training, according to the Foyer Federation, which was launched yesterday...The

federation will co-ordinate the development of Foyers. Grand Met is providing office space in its former brewery in Brick Lane, East London, and putting up £300,000 over three years. (John Williams, Financial Times, 30/6/92)

By 1992 GMCS and Shelter had managed to attract a number of valuable allies for their project. These included charities particularly interested in youth homelessness, for example Centrepoint and the Youth Homelessness Group. They had also developed partnerships with a number of Housing Association who were funded by the Housing Corporation, one the Government's favoured management organisations. By the 1990s housing associations were establishing themselves as a major alternative to local government as providers of social housing stock. It would seem that the Foyer Movement offered a natural and interesting alternative to the type of housing stock they could already provide.

In June 1992 the Housing Corporation decided to build three new Foyers starting from a national competition organised by Shelter and the Architectural Foundation. This competition marks the point at which the Foyer project in East London was born.

The East Thames Housing Group (ETHG), then known as the East London Housing Association, submitted their proposal to develop a Foyer within the given two month period. Rather than exploring the challenges involved their competition proposal, opportunistically put together as an attractive and well produced document, seems to have presented the Foyer as a perfect commodity ready to be bought. This commodity was not simply a self-contained accommodation and training facility, but also comprised a package of integrated facilities to supplement and complement local agencies. As the ETHG proposal stated: 'The Foyer will provide both in-house training and access to new and existing training opportunities through partnership with training providers, funding bodies, advice agencies and employers.' ETHG presented their Foyer as a unique scheme aimed at assisting young people in the East London area. They claimed that such a project would be ideally situated in Stratford. 'As well as a vastly improved shopping area, traffic flow arrangements, office provision and leisure and cultural facilities, the City Challenge funds² will open up a whole range of training opportunities...All this growth and development activity will be taking place in an area of roughly two square miles. **The Foyer for Newham** would be placed right in the heart of this area' (ibid.).

The document states that ETHG had gathered around them a large and diverse consortium of potential sponsors and stakeholders, representing commercial, financial and social concerns, which seemed well able to meet the needs of creating and supporting a Foyer.

ETHG's Foyer proposal came second in the competition, and seems to have been instrumental in the Housing Corporation decision to provide substantial funding to set the project up. At this point ETHG, the key player in the proposed Foyer, had no experience of the type of commodity they had marketed. The intentions and objectives had not been the result of development work within the local community. Rather the project would have to learn on its feet, to learn how to co-ordinate and run a brand new, and untested form of social housing with its many proposed partnerships and activities.

The transition from an *idealised* commodity existing on paper to an independent project appears to have been an ongoing juddering and halting affair. For instance, from 1992 until

² City Challenge funds were a central plank of inner city regeneration in the 1990s.

March 1995, the Foyer did not have its own bank account, nor did it have legal status. Only during 1995, before the completion of the accommodation block and the Support Bank (the café, the Radio Project and the network of support services housed in a separate building to the accommodation block), did the Foyer start to develop its *own* staff base. It was only by the summer of 1996, with the appointment of the Foyer's own Director, that the project effectively moved into its current state of semi-independence from ETHG. This protracted transition was due to a lack of initial development and caused an instability that only began to be settled in 1998.

3. Intentions: Young People, Employment and the Family

McKechnie, in setting up the conditions for the Foyer Federation, effectively indicated a void in existing social provision. While the ETHG, like others, saw this void as an opportunity and rushed to fill it, it also seems that the intentions behind the Foyer in East London were complex and somewhat underdeveloped. They relate to changes in the job market, the place of family in policy thinking, the social position of young people, and finally, young people and education. These were all issues which the staff who took over the running of the project were obliged to address.

3.1 Changes in the Job Market

Over the last thirty years the lives of Britain's young people have changed notably, particularly in the transition from education into employment. This is partly because, since the 1980s and the early 1990s, employers appear to have become increasingly intent on maximising short-term profits. As a consequence they no longer rely on internal staff training to meet their changing staffing needs. Rather both public and private sector employers have tended to compete reactively on the open market for suitably qualified staff. This has shifted the responsibility for development from the employer, placing it squarely on the shoulders of individual employees. This trend has had a dramatic effect on the lives of young people.

Today, for young people, there is an increased dependency on educational credentials when competing in the job market. Unlike previous generations, who would have made the same transition relatively quickly and smoothly, young people now have to assess how to negotiate the transition from education into employment. This process is not without risks for young people, who may not necessarily find it possible to think in long-term and strategic ways:

Interviewer: you also said that you're having a difficult time at school can you em tell me what was happening at school?

Tenant: I well I just moved here and em em I reckon I picked a er a bad group of the people to hang about with as it goes, and em just started off and now I got kicked out of school for having a fight, em, because of the teachers were actually worried about if I was gonna go back to the boy, so they actually just kicked me out (unclear) sent me to em I was doing a four week training course. I finished that off ... and then I was working em a little bit ... but then nothing just happened for a long while.

So, even if this tenant could make a correct assessment of how to approach the transition, the form the transition actually takes depends on a variety of factors outside her/his control, which then affect future events:

Interviewer: ...can you tell me more about the time when you were rowing with your parents?

Tenant: em it was just constant bickering all the time I just just complained about everything if if I never (unclear) I started arguing about that and then my temper started getting worse as well little bit, that's what she [his mother] really got the hump with the temper, and she just had enough one day and just said that's it can't have it no more, and then, like, my attitude changed and well, just bored all the time, just having no work, just thinking my life was going nowhere, just getting the hump more and more, the hump every day, and then I just just was out on my ear with nothing

3.2 The place of the family in policy thinking

Interestingly, during the 1980s, within policy thinking the *family* increasingly replaced the identification of young people as a group. Today it seems that the family has become the British government's preferred framework for positioning, and mechanism for managing, the welfare of this group with regard to housing, health and so on. From the fieldwork it appears that outside a family context the position of young people becomes increasingly unclear. The introduction of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in October 1996 is an interesting indicator of the importance of the family in policy decisions.

The JSA reform, replacing the previous unemployment benefit system, requires each unemployed individual to develop her/his own career plan, which is meant to actively lead the person out of unemployment. As with the job market generally, any outcomes are the responsibility of the unemployed individual. But, if the unemployed person is under 24 years old, the 'reform' also implicitly expects some of the responsibility to be taken on by the family, since the under-24s have had their benefits reduced by £10 per week.

Tenant: but when I was unemployed with nothing, just forty pounds every, every, eighty pound a fortnight, that was it was hard, it is still hard now, but you you get to cope with your money, how much money you basically get each week and you don't have no fun you don't can't go out, and eighty pound every two weeks you go out, and you have no food for one week the them two weeks that you've got no money. So you just don't go out and you just gotta wait til you get a decent job finish college however long it lasts college lasts two years you won't go out for two years. As soon as the em the first bit of like nice bit of money comes in like (unclear) birthday, that's when you go out partying and that, but it's quite hard being unemployed, and living on your own.

The purpose of this reform is to encourage young people to stay at home, and/or to take on low-waged employment. Thus family support becomes crucial for negotiating the transition from school to independent adulthood. But for some people the family is not an available resource.

Interviewer: can you remember a particular occasion when there when there was a violent row

Tenant: em no, only when I just got em really angry and I kicked the hole in the door, that's, that's about the most em violent it's been, there's not really been no proper punch ups or nothing, just couple of pushes and that, but nothing major that's about the most most major thing when I put my foot through the door.

Interviewer: *can you tell me about the time when she said you couldn't live there*

Tenant: *when when she finally said em, em, "I think it's time that you moved on I just can't live with you no more". I had tears in my eyes, and she had tears in her eyes as well, it was, no I think it was hard for her to say, but it had to be done and it's worked out for the best now, me and my mum are perfect together now .*

The family as a mechanism for social management is problematic here. In the above case, 'family' would be a euphemism for a particular parent; the tenant never mentions the father. In fact the family is not a uniform grouping, nor is it necessarily a network of support. It is the mother who is held responsible for managing the safety, education, health care, and economic well-being of the young person, not the 'family'. In other words, she is the person on whom government places responsibility for supporting this young person during transition. For young people who have to leave home, reforms like the JSA have effectively reduced their chances of entering meaningful post-compulsory education. Thus government thinking has increased vulnerability to social exclusion.

But this is not the whole picture. The government is currently promoting education and training for all unemployed young people.

*Britain urgently needs to put in place a new contract between society and young people...to help young people find a sure footing in the adult world, but with tough penalties for those who refuse the opportunity and fail to fulfil their side of the bargain. (Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle, promoting their book *The Blair Revolution - Can New Labour Deliver?* Guardian 27/2/96)*

In July 1997 the new Labour government introduced its Welfare to Work initiative, designed to get 250,000 18-24 year olds into work. By April 1998 they had set aside £3.15 billion for their 'New Deal' programmes. This programme offered unemployed young people one of four alternatives:

- The first was to take up a job with an employer. A firm which participated would be subsidised, per individual, by £60 per week for up to six months. A further £750 would be provided to fund each participant through a day a week's structured learning programme which would lead to a vocational qualification.
- The second choice offered to young people without basic educational credentials was the opportunity to remain on benefits for up to six months in order to study or train.
- The third choice was to take up a six months voluntary sector work experience place. This would include a day a week education or training. For a six-month placement, a fee of £3,200 would be paid to the voluntary organisation involved, and each trainee would be given a grant of £400.
- In the fourth option, the employability of young people would be addressed through participation in community projects. Those young people taking this option would also be given a grant of £400 to top up their benefits.

Any young person who refused all four options without good cause would lose their benefit for two weeks. If they continued to refuse to join the scheme their claim would be sent to adjudication. This could result in benefits being stopped for a further four-week period. Yet, as one of the staff explained, for some young people the options offered by New Deal were not appropriate:

Erm and a lot of our tenants they don't fit into those four options ...Lots of our tenants are going out and getting a small part-time job and signing off J S A, which means they can study what they want to study, when they want to study it. (Education & Training Officer)

As long as welfare provision remains identified with the family, some young people are as a group socially excluded and risk the mismanagement of their transition from full and semi-dependency to independent adulthood. Moreover the 'family' framework implicitly constrains the ways in which social provision provided by the Foyer staff might be understood.

I don't want it to be like I'm their father or their uncle, but just as somebody who has a responsibility to manage this space and keep everybody safe...in an adult sort of way. And I think that's really important to get right, really important....when you've got people who are absent from their families, and they're missing God knows what, and life is very, very confusing, the last thing I want is confusion of roles as to what somebody like me is here for. (Accommodation Officer)

To sum up: whether the aim of social policy, or the effect of that policy, is to extend the time during which young people may expect to remain dependent on their families, assessments of the risks they face as a result of that policy must be calculated on the basis either of their inclusion within, or possible exclusion from, the family unit. In employing such a model, it is possible to place many young people as being in a state of transition between their *family of origin* and their *future family of settlement*, and thus in a state full of potential risks from lack of familial support. Such a model, however, takes no account of the inconvenient fact that there may be individuals who either abandon or are rejected by their family of origin and who, intentionally or unintentionally, never find themselves a *future family of settlement*.

If social policy remains family orientated, those young people outside of the family have to negotiate new sets of risks. If the intention of the Foyer is to counter the risks of exclusion from the family, then the project needs to create a series of objectives to counter that exclusion. But the problems that the Foyer faces are not simply about dealing with exclusion from the family, but also how to accommodate the needs of young people as a discrete group. I will now turn directly to the Foyer client's cultural positioning within a confusing insider/outsider dichotomy which the staff often find difficult to handle.

3.3 The Position of Young People

The intention of the Foyer has always been to be sensitive to 'youth culture'. But, as suggested earlier, the original intentions of the project have left Foyer staff to conceptualise what is meant by young people and their culture. As a result the staff position their clients in different ways; professionally, in terms of friendships, teaching and advice; in terms of biological positioning; cultural positioning; education, and employment status, and so on. The data suggest that different ways of positioning Foyer clients often overlapped, and so unsettled the category of

young people for the staff.

I'm as young as some of the tenants and... my personal life actually quite closely mirrors some of theirs in terms of my experiences, and that I'm able to em quite recently recall some of the stuff that they're going through, em, and I left home when I was seventeen, and er wasn't aware of things like hostels and Foyers, and stuff, and so actually went, you know, the long way round (laughs)I can really em relate to a lot of their experiences (Life Skills Worker)

For another member of staff, who had worked with children and young people before, the issue of understanding *young people* was equally problematic:

And I think coming here, eradicating the word child from my head and replacing it with young adult, is very difficult, I still seem to refer to them as children. Because they're young. I mean we can all argue, let's face it, at 20 year old, this person is just a child. When you get old you see that, don't you, you know. But they're not, they're young adults, and I have to respond to them on a disciplinarian level as young adults, i.e. they have the responsibility. So it's a different tact, it's a different strategy. Whereas before...I'd say "now hang on a minute, you may not like this but you are still a child and I have to respond to you as a child, albeit that you might be a large one." Now it's the other way round, and that's quite interesting for me. I find that on a daily basis. (Accommodation Officer)

This suggests that the staffs' positioning of the tenants came from their own individual biographies, as well as from the clients with whom they had formed relationships. Further, that the professional position of the staff, however biologically close they felt in age, was clearly outside the 'youth culture' of their tenants. In fact over and over again these young people were summed up by the staff as apolitical and apathetic. They were also talked about in terms of neo-liberal economics, where their identities were mediated through consumption, lifestyle and leisure activities.

For one tenant also the choice of transitional path through a career in music was firmly located in this type of 'youth culture':

I was going to job centre, and then all of a sudden they said, "do you wanna do you want a New Deal" and I said, "I see I see it advertised on telly", and I thought, "yeah I might as well give it a go, I ain't got nothing else to do", and em, I've been mixing music for about three years, and I thought, "I wanna take my mixing further".

At first glance this chosen route might appear as an unrealistic transitional path. But this tenant has generated her/his own funding, and has a clear perception of her/his own set of goals.

... about a year ago I decided that I wanted to do the course. It's took me all this time to try and get on there for, through funding. I asked about fifty em charities, grant, charities if they'd er give me a grant. Every single one of them replied, and said no they couldn't. But I applied to one called The Princes Trust and they actually give me five hundred pound grant, paid for the whole course. I was over the moon even my brother was over the moon. I bought a book the other day, er twenty four pound book about that thick, just having a read through it now, trying to understand a bit about the course before I actually go on the course. I been mixing like records and that for three years. I wanted get into it deeper and that's the way I'm gonna do it, this way. I've I've actually

been for em an interview with a record company, but they said that they wanted me to get on this college course before they actually em give me a job. So as soon as I've done this course I'm going to (unclear) with the company. So hopefully everything should be all right.

This tenant, with little advice or support from the Foyer, managed to get funding and has also received a firm offer of a job on completion of the course. It would be wrong to imply that the Foyer staff have been hostile to her/his goal; on the contrary some staff, though surprised by her/his resourcefulness, have been highly supportive of her/him. But in this case 'support' has not been needed: the tenant simply found in the Foyer an appropriate space from which to follow her/his transitional path, within her/his own cultural framework.

3.4 Life Skills and Education

The most open insider/outsider articulation, relating to the 'separate' positioning of young people by staff, emerged in terms of education provision. As implied by the introduction of the New Deal, education is currently perceived as a social *investment*, often talked of in terms of future returns. For the Foyer, education is also seen as a way to improve the productivity and earning power of the tenants, but it was also seen to contribute to improved citizenship competencies. It has thus placed great emphasis on pioneering an accredited Life Skills course, which has been adopted throughout the Foyer movement:

...one sort of like founding principles of the Foyer is to ... meet those sort of independent living needs of a of a young person, and the Life Skills training programme ... serves to equip young people with those skills ... some young people say well I don't drink or take drugs and so its not relevant to me, em but I issued a programme and particularly those workshops, as being an opportunity for them to em learn about the effects of drugs and alcohol, and not necessarily for their own use or lack of, but just in terms of being with other people who might be drinking... so its quite crucial then that they they are aware of the sort of, em skills that they'll need to live independently... (Life Skills Worker)

This member of staff saw Life Skills as providing necessary non-vocational skills. Though not easily measured, these skills were essential for a smooth transition to *independent* adulthood.

4. From Intentions to objectives

At the simplest level the Foyer project's intention is clear; to give an *opportunity* for some young people at risk to make a smooth transition to independent adulthood. In order to achieve this intention the project also needs a series of explicit, or concrete objectives as ways of enabling and supporting the transition.

As a residential facility, the project has developed a set of unambiguous conditions for each tenant's residency. The objectives behind these conditions are overtly linked to the primary intention of providing the opportunity for transition to independence. But they are also problematic as they are a mechanism for monitoring the worthiness of the tenants for support. To become a tenant an individual has to sign a tenancy agreement. S/he, on the basis of three initial interviews with staff, has to draw up an action plan related to her/his personal goals. These goals are meant to relate to the individuals existing educational achievements and housing and employment aspirations. The tenant has to attempt to achieve these goals as a

condition of remaining in the project. It would seem that the Foyer's objectives here are to support those who need help in the achievement of these goals, and to monitor those tenants whose progress is not apparent to the Foyer staff.

One of the ways of achieving this monitoring is through the Life Skills course which supposedly equips the tenants with valuable strategies '...that they'll need to live independently...'. Attendance on the course is a condition of residency within the project. Some tenants though, have already developed effective life skill strategies, and the others should have already explored similar strategies in pastoral and social education while at school.

Interviewer: *yeah you said you said you learnt responsibility while you've been here can you tell me about that tell me about a time when you think you learnt about responsibility*

Tenant: *well you learn about responsibility (unclear) straight away, when ... the first em fortnightly money comes through you can't think, "well I'll go out this weekend", you've gotta think to yourself straight away, electric ,water er, food and em ... money to get you through the week. You ain't got a parent there anymore to say, "can you lend me a fiver, lend me a tenner". You gotta you gotta learn responsibility straight away, you gotta learn how to work a washing machine straight away, mustn't have dirty clothes. How to cook, clean. Even the simple things like setting an alarm clock, waking up yourself, cos some people still getting their mothers to wake them up. I know a couple of people that can't wake up by theirselves, and that's just mm yes I think you know you gotta learn that everything is not perfect.*

Interviewer: *You said that you gotta learn that everything's not perfect*

Tenant: *Yeah when you're on your own it ain't. But when you're a little kid you think, "yeah em I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that when I'm older". But then you got, every everyone's got to realise that you got this to pay, you got that to pay, you got that to pay, you gotta get them you gotta get them out of the way first, the priorities, first before you can do anything else, and em nothing is perfect .*

Interviewer: *you gotta a alcohol awareness group em today*

Tenant: *we'll all get together and that'd be for two hours and that'd be all right, and you get to know people that way.*

Interviewer: *... how do you come to go to the alcohol awareness group?*

Tenant: *You've gotta a thingy, you gotta make this er like a little promise. ...every so often they they'll have a little group, er like, er subject about sex. Next, next, er, month it will be about drugs, next week it'll be about alcohol. And you must attend these, em what is it called these*

Interviewer: *Life Skills*

Tenant: *yeah life skills, you must attend the skills otherwise it'd affect your stay. But their life skills are all right. Anyway you meet people there and then you get your name down put down, and you're attending at the same time.*

The *teaching* of Life Skills clearly is one objective of the Foyer, while for some tenants opportunities for socialising may be a more important function. The tenant quoted above implies that managing skills are individually learned through the structural constraints of life in the Foyer, rather than ‘taught’. However, life skills are also informally taught by all the staff through their involvement in the project, and formal sessions are a way of *monitoring* the less visible tenants’ commitment to pursuing their individual action plans.

4.2 The Staff

It seems that Life Skills training also functions as a way of indicating the professional boundaries between the staff and their tenants. Yet, as the intentions behind the project have not been clearly conceptualised, these boundaries can create unclear or muddled roles for the staff:

So I get to play kind of dual role where I'm kind of a befriender, councillor, advisor, helper, but I'm also the person that turns round and waves his fingers and says “no you mustn't do that and if you do it again you're going to be in trouble”. So, which is quite a fine line to play. It's very easy to alienate young people because you're the one who tells them off, but sometimes I need to be able to put my arm round their shoulder and say “hang on a minute, don't do it this way, do it that way” and be quite, you know, influential in that way. And I spend, as I say, aside from assessing referrals and that, I spend a lot of my working week at the moment dealing with issues that young people raise. (Accommodation Officer)

As a consequence of this type of fluidity of role, resulting from the projects unconceptualised initial intentions, the Foyer’s *developing* management structure has had to grapple with how to work as a staff team who have diverse expertise:

You know, you’re constantly producing reports for the board, or whoever, erm but not getting feedback from my management... They kind of hinted that, I mean I-I may be doing all right but there’s no kind of real review about what I’ve been doing...so that’s quite frustrating at times cos you want to talk through what you’re doing. (Manager)

The data indicates that this fuzziness is experienced equally by all levels of staff, from the director down, and that for the concierge this has been particularly problematic. The concierges are the Foyer’s *front line* staff, who have from the start inherited an unclear set of objectives in relation to their role:

I mean, that's not entirely their fault, when their jobs were advertised initially they weren't advertised as any kind of youth workers, they were just sort of door openers and cleaners. So what we have currently is a staff that has evolved from that kind of a role So they have quite a mix of abilities, a mix of commitments across the team, albeit only five people. So managing that has been quite hard work because they're people with such different agendas.... (Accommodation Manager)

In fact the Foyer’s current strategy for dealing with this problem is to lay off most of this team, and readvertise the post of concierge with a more realistic job description. Professional levels are being raised by the appointment of three or so more qualified staff, a programme of in-house vocational training (NVQ - National Vocational Qualifications) training, and a

system of quality review and certification through the organisation 'Investors in People'. At the time of the interviews the first Investors in People meeting had been held and was commented on enthusiastically by the staff. It seemed likely to lead to clarification of roles and improved co-ordination between staff and agencies. At board level discussions were also beginning on a new 'hub-and-spoke' model, which would group a number of Foyers together, allowing more specialised needs to be met in smaller units, and the 'hub' to provide a centralised pool of professional training and support.

4.3 Safety

One of the objectives of the project has been to create a safe and secure environment for staff and tenants and here again the objectives relating to the concierges' role are unclear.

On one level, safety and security are understood in very practical terms. This arises from a number of assaults and burglaries in the accommodation block which have resulted in strict security. For example, there are two monitored electronic security doors into the building, any guests have to be signed in and out, and notice has to be given for overnight stays. Furthermore, each floor is defined by gender. For the tenants such levels of control are not always comfortable:

That's it's your own flat I, I think should allowed have anyone you want up here, and no-one's allowed in after twelve o'clock... I mean I know why they have it, if you let someone in at twelve o'clock, to start banging on everyone's doors, it's gonna make a nuisance. So the best way they can deal with it is just have no one here after twelve. But it's unfair for people who do go out, and wanna bring someone back, and stuff like that
(Tenant)

But the Foyer is not simply concerned with physical safety and security. As a staff member of one of the project's referral agencies pointed out, the Foyer also has an implicit definition of appropriate and *safe* tenants, which is partly constrained by the relatively low staffing levels:

...because we are in this building we are their major referral agents into the housing scheme, ...even though we're the closest to them I'm still not very clear as to what level of support they're looking for for young people who want to apply. There's another project in the borough which does exactly what this Foyer does on a lot smaller scale. There're only eighteen residents em and their staffing to tenant ratio is a lot higher, em but the disadvantage from the young person's point of view is that the accommodation is shared, em and most therefore would prefer to come here, em but [in that project] they're very clear that they want people that have got high level of support needs. So if they have er a drug problem, alcohol, history of depression or violence, they want them. Whereas prospective applicants for this Foyer, that have had those sorts of problems, they don't want them, they reject them for that, but at the same time those that indicate that they haven't got a very high level of support are also rejected, er so that makes it really difficult for us to know exactly what they're looking for. (Referral Worker)

This would suggest that the Foyer has an implicit set of symbolic as well as physical boundaries, and also that the project has developed functions and objectives to maintain these boundaries. Some of these boundaries arise from the lack of initial development work. The project's admission policy is consequently grappling with two competing groups of would-be residents: young people described as needing much support and seen as either potentially

unmanageable and/or disruptive, and those who seem to need little in the way of support. The exigencies of staffing capacity and budgetary demands often compromise the project's objective of targeting 'homeless' young people, and maintaining tight entry criteria, which are specified as sustained street homelessness, repeated moves such as three in one month, or family violence. There is a premium on achieving full occupancy, since rents are crucial to the project's funding. Yet maintaining full occupancy requires a complex administrative process of co-ordination, not least since the structuring of the accommodation into a first highly supported and furnished stage, followed by a second 'move-on' stage in an unfurnished unit, means that every final move to independent housing involves three moves. The relatively low staffing levels (1:17, compared with 1:6 in smaller projects) bring economies of scale, but they greatly restrict the project's ability to cope with specialised needs and more challenging behaviour, which are common among the 'target' group. Follow-up support for young people emerging from probation orders or local authority care, or suitable mental health services, have all been expected but not delivered by 'partners'. In any case the referral process takes three to four weeks, which is awkward in the case of street homeless people:

***Interviewer:** can you tell me more about the time when they gave you a place*

***Tenant:** they wasn't actually gonna give me it at first they said that em they didn't think my needs was all that (unclear), but I had actually nowhere to live, I'd already stayed round my mates a couple of nights, stayed round here a couple of nights. I even slept in a couple of cars couple of nights but they didn't really give me it [at first].*

One strategy of the board towards establishing more sustained and specialised support for vulnerable tenants has been to secure membership from all the main local economic stakeholders, which in that area include land, property and transport development, and to make ambitious training agreements with major employers, such as British Airways Authorities and supermarket chains. The Foyer has been concerned to achieve a more representative ethnic, as well as gender balance. In its early stages 70% of tenants were Afro-Caribbean, reflecting, but also exaggerating, patterns of overcrowded housing and of youth unemployment in the area.

In this section I have described how, due to a lack of initial development work, the project is currently grappling with which group to target, how to define young people at risk, and also how best to develop objectives which meet that group's need. Just to add to this complexity, the project has long-term objectives in terms of local young people over and above residents:

I hope that in time [this] will become to be seen as being one of the main focal points for young people, er, in this part of East London. And that the Foyer is- yes, it's incredibly important and yes, it meets the needs of a particularly disadvantaged group of young people. But there are ... an even larger number of young people who are on the edge...So th- the wider picture of what is a Foyer, it isn't just about 210 people ... it's about thousands of young people that come and make use of the services in this building on the High Street. (Director)

5. Funds and Partnerships

As indicated above, the project was premised upon the creation of a cluster of inter-connected services. This has led to the Foyer developing various funding and partnership strategies.

From the start the project was meant to become self-funding through the rent it collected from

its tenants and leaseholders, and indeed, the low staffing levels should allow a considerable profit margin.

...every penny that we don't collect is a penny that we don't have available to us to spend. Erm so whether a flat is empty...or we have somebody ...not paying rent...all that money is lost...last financial year we only managed to secure about 80% of the money due to us...We set very challenging targets...we had to collect, during this financial year, between 92.5% and 95% of all the rent we should collect...that we would only allow ourselves a maximum of 2.5% voids. (Housing Manager)

However, even this level of return is insufficient to ensure the future of the project, and alternative sources of funding are currently sought. According to the project director, because the Foyer movement enjoys a currently fashionable status, until now it has been relatively easy to find funding:

...Foyers are not cheap to run. At the moment they're flavour of the month, and people are (enthusiastic) to put funding in to run Foyers... But another two or three years' time there will be something else that's flavour of the month... My view about sustainability is that you must get to the point where you are capable of delivering the service that is required without having to fall back particularly on your charitable and corporate givers, because those people move on. (Director)

The partnerships needed to provide the cluster of integrated services involve complex funding and leasehold arrangements, which requires ongoing negotiations. A recent challenge to the board has been the re-scheduling of the original capital loan of £4.8m, which entailed repayments charged at £1000 per day, through a cheaper European bank. A good portion of the debt accruing from voids in the first year of operation has been adopted by ETHG, following recognition that the property was handed over half empty. A stronger financial footing is also being sought through negotiations for increased support, both financial and professional, from local statutory services, who often 'off-load' their far more expensive work onto the Foyer. Board membership by the relevant professionals and working group structures are key measures for securing such partnerships.

The diversity of intentions behind involvement in the project makes for ongoing difficulties for the Foyer in autonomously developing its own objectives, and maintaining autonomous control over its own budget. The provision of a complex cluster of services through partnership problematises the initial and current aspirations of long term financial independence.

5.1 Staff, Funding and Leaseholders

The Foyer's staff have had to learn how to learn how to juggle the very different sets of social and financial agendas that partnership has brought. The management of these external relationships has proved very time consuming for all staff involved. An example of this is the Foyer's radio project where partnership issues have altered the role of the staff member brought in to provide training:

... fundraising stuff... takes up most of my time now. Either fundraising or you know doing all the admin that all the funders require. Cos we started off being funded by Stratford City Challenge, the first year I was here. We got fifty grand I think, which

paid for the studio to be built. Rem. and then that went down, and so the second year was thirty grand, and the third year was ten grand, and now we don't get any money from them... An ESF [European Social Fund] application had been put in already, before I had taken up the post, and was accepted, so ... my first year really I didn't do very much fundraising at all really. It all started really more in the second year ...just stuff like never ending. ... like with ESF, not only do you have to do the application, but when you've got the money you then have to, you know ... do an evaluation and review and all of that. (Radio Project Officer)

For other staff, financial partnerships have had an impact on the services that the staff provide from the moment their jobs started:

...because they provided funding, they wanted to know that we were, you know, coming up with the goods, so that on the- on the employment training side, as a Foyer we are actually succeeding, which was a joke considering that we'd only had an employment training officer in place for the last three weeks of this funding... They wanted to know how many tenants were in training ... had succeeded in training, how many training weeks we'd done, erm that kind of thing. You know ... it's part of the contract of getting the money. (Employment and Training Officer)

Both these examples show that the task of getting funding, and keeping the partnerships needed to run such a multi-faceted project, has proved a time consuming process. This has also been true with those partners who, on the face of it, appear to have had a fairly simple and straightforward relationship with the project.

Difficulties in securing suitable leaseholders for the café, the most public amenity within the Foyer, have been particularly dramatic. One early and convincing applicant then withdrew, on the grounds of financial non-viability, and a subsequent leaseholder had to be prosecuted on both criminal and civil grounds. This highlights the difficulties for the Foyer in linking up with commercial concerns; concerns which might be thought as outside a conventional public service remit.

5.2 The Foyer Federation

As a particularly large and early project of its kind in Britain, the Foyer has played a leading and pioneering role in the wider Foyer movement, through its membership of the Foyer Federation, and in its negotiations with central government on legal initiatives. Staff members are aware that much can be learned from its early difficulties concerning staffing structures and qualifications and viable funding arrangements:

We do need a good solid professional service, from people who have very, very good communication skills with young people. (As a result of staff restructuring) I think finally they're in a position to get that and I do believe that the new applicants and the new interviewees are going to reap the benefit. Likewise I think people who are now embarking upon Foyer projects, are looking to this Foyer for guidance. Our mistakes will certainly benefit other projects around the London area in particular, where they can iron out those kind of difficulties before they get started, and save themselves a lot of money in the process. (Accommodation Officer)

The Foyer has modelled Life Skills training, and achieved a crucial change in primary legislation to allow short-term tenancies, a power which was previously restricted to local authorities. The removal of security of tenure facilitates the enforcement of contractual conditions concerning training and accommodation.

Another ‘mission’ of the Foyer has been to pressurise government to effect at the central level the ‘partnerships’ and ‘joined-up government’ it advocates at the local level. The Housing Corporation and the Department of Education and Employment ‘never speak’, according to the Foyer Director, and there is poor co-ordination between the criminal justice system and other services.

Conclusion

The Foyer is an ongoing project which has attempted to create a cluster of integrated services in relation to the transition of young people from compulsory education to full-time employment. Its challenge has been how to understand young people in relation to social exclusion in conjunction with managing a complex cluster of integrated services in terms of partnerships and funding. What has struck me throughout the fieldwork is the placing of *young people* and *social exclusion* within the current social policy orientation towards *the family*. From the point of view of the young people concerned, it seems clear that this was often too simplistic an understanding, that a person’s sense of independence was not necessarily described in relation to a *future family*, even if more commonly a young person’s *dependency* was described in relation to an existing, or non-existing, *family of origin*.

If the Foyer seems to have been strongly affected by the problems arising from policy emphasis on the family, its own framework for understanding young people themselves was equally problematic. Each member of staff appeared to continually grapple, at some level, with what was meant by *young people* in relation to the project, depending on whether *young people* were to be understood as a biological age group, a cultural identity, an educational stage, or a group lacking family support.

Though the project was started with a clear intention to help young people at risk achieve a smooth transition to independence, the East Thames Housing Group (ETHG) which made the bid for the funding seemed to have given little time to developing a clear conceptual framework to understand the group their provision was aimed at or the levels of professional support which would be needed to support them. Failing to address such basic questions meant that the project initially had no point from which to develop clear intentions and objectives. As a consequence the current Director and staff have all been involved in an ongoing process of development and re-development, struggling to define its objectives and intentions, while still satisfying the expectations of its partners. Equally challenging and laborious has been the re-organising of the funding structures, on both capital and revenue sides, and the structuring of dependable partnership relationships, at strategic board levels as well as in everyday interactions. The Foyer has played an important wider role by using its experience to establish more workable models for other newly developing Foyers. Through its influence in the Foyer Federation it plays a national leadership role, also as a ‘small but powerful example of joined up thinking’, as the board chair put it.

Before leaving the last words with a member of staff, I want to make it very clear that throughout my fieldwork I was constantly aware of the care and enthusiasm shown towards the tenants and non-tenants by the project staff. It was obvious to this observer that, despite all the

problems discussed above, the staff of this project not only found their work both rewarding and valuable, but also provided a very caring service.

...(the) Foyer programme is something worthwhile, and is bringing about real changes in the live of many young people who have lived very chaotic and difficult lives... (Staff member)

Appendix: The Foyer Chronology of Development

1970		44% of young people leave school with no qualifications.
1988		Minister for Social Security removes benefits for 16-17 year olds saying 'It is not the government's job to give an incentive to people to leave home'.
1990		Sheila McKechnie (Director of Shelter) becomes interested in the French network of <i>foyers pour jeunes travailleurs</i> .
		Sheila McKechnie forms a link with Grand Metropolitan Community Services (GMCS), a large non-governmental provider of training for young people. They attempt to create partnerships in order to launch the Foyer concept in the UK.
1991		6% of young people leave home with no qualifications.
	November	Shelter and GMCS form the Foyer Federation as a co-ordinating, training and advisory body.
1992		Conservative manifesto makes a special case for Foyers.
	May	The Foyer Federation is officially launched. The Housing Corporation agree to create 3 new Foyers. As part of their 25 th anniversary celebrations, Shelter run a national competition to decide one of these Foyers.
	August	East London Housing Association (ELHA) submit a proposal and come second.
1993	September	ELHA approve proposals for an accommodation block.
	December	ELHA join the National Foyer Federation.
1994	January	A site is identified for the ancillary services.
	February	Waltham Forest YMCA express interest in the possibility of joint involvement in the project.
	March	Work begins on the accommodation block.
		ELHA meet to discuss the Foyer Training Scheme to offer 'the closed and supportive environment necessary to help a unique and difficult client group into full-time employment or training'. The scheme aims not to be exclusively for the use of Foyer tenants but for the local community as well.
	June	The building that will house the ancillary services is purchased.
		The name for the project is chosen by local young people.

	September	Building work starts in the ancillary building.
	October	Discussions begin with prospective leaseholders for the café that will be housed in the ancillary building.
1995	March	Leaseholders are found for the café; they agree to work with the architect on the design.
		Contact is made with the Community Radio Association about setting up a community radio station.
	April	The Foyer becomes part of the local Training Network.
	June	The Radio Project Manager is appointed.
	October	The ancillary building and the Support Bank open.
		The Radio Project broadcast as 'Youth FM' for 8 days.
	November	The Foyer becomes a limited company.
1996	February	Problems arise with the management of the café. There is doubt over their commitment to the ethos and philosophy of the Foyer.
		An article in 'The Guardian' reports on and promotes the Foyer's nine-month training course in community radio.
	March	The first Community Radio Project runs aimed at disadvantaged young people.
	May	Problems continue with the management of the café.
	July	Director of the Foyer is appointed.
	August	A decision is made to find an alternative leaseholder to run the café following a serious deterioration of the relationship with the current management.
	September	Tenant interviews start. The handover of the accommodation block is scheduled for October.
		The Foyer is in deficit; East Thames Housing Group (ETHG) agree to cover it.
	October	Introduction of job seekers allowance.
	November	The second Community Radio Project starts.
		The first Foyer tenants take up residence.
		Formal opening of the Foyer; it is the only Foyer in the country to

		cater for disabled young people.
	December	The former leaseholders of the café are sued for £2000. A warrant is issued for their arrest for theft of equipment.
		The Board of the Foyer agree there should be tenant representation.
1997	March	Tenants meetings begin, with both Foyer and Move-on tenants.
	May	68% of Move-on tenants in employment.
		There is a deficit on the Radio Project (CRP); it is proposed to cover it by running short, non-accredited courses.
		Funding applications to several grant-giving bodies are submitted, including the Sir John Cass Foundation and the London Boroughs Grant Unit.
		Second tenants in the café leave citing too much competition and too high costs.
	July	The Foyer becomes a formal subsidiary of ETHG.
		The Café opens again with new tenants.
		Different funding bodies confirm their short-term support. Application submitted to the Lottery for funding for the Life Skills programme.
		CRP gets 6 months ESF funding but the future beyond that is uncertain.
	September	Lottery grant application is approved.
		Work underway to reduce rent arrears.
	October	The Foyer requires funding from ETHG in order to continue.
		23 qualifications, including GCSEs and degrees, achieved by Foyer residents to date.
		Charitable funding is awarded for an Employment and Training Officer, available from September 1997.
1998	February	New chair of the Board is appointed.
		Café continues to establish itself.
	May	New Deal involvement begins to evolve.
		More funding is obtained from the local authority.

	June	A member of the Foyer staff and two tenants meet Nelson Mandela.
	July	Investors in People (IiP) diagnostic exercise takes place.
	September	Half-day staff workshop on IiP. It is planned that IiP be in place by spring 1999.