

Pendeen Court
The Laurels
Rochfords Gardens
Eltham Avenue
Moor Furlong
Rigby Lodge
Look Ahead Slough
Equinox



Star Association

Slough
Temporary
Accommodation
Residents

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Tenant Involvement In Temporary Accommodation

"Our story"

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Jean Watson for breaking the ground.

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Alan Morris and the committee for doing all the hard work.



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister
Creating sustainable communities

FOREWARD

STAR Association began when tenants felt there was a need for representation for the homeless. It started with a small meeting to test opinion, and quickly grew from there. After a year STAR expanded to become a borough wide association, and represented more tenants.

Representation, empowerment, fundraising, basic research are part of the everyday life for any association. At least, in any ordinary association's everyday life.

STAR Association is not an ordinary association. Our aims have been to represent the homeless, change people's views, improve the quality of life, restore pride, and offer opportunity to all. While all these are excellent aims, we found that this type of association had never been in existence until now. If this has never been done before, how do you know what to do, where to go or who to get help from.

STAR association found that they had an ideal opportunity to shape changes and the views of associations. We were able to write our own rules, as none were available. We could "make it up" as we went along. While this was an excellent way to begin, changing how Local Authorities, Funding agencies and people in general viewed the homeless was a very hard task. But STAR has never been afraid of hard work and encouraging change. We slowly, but surely knocked down the doors, which were closed to us, by one, way only.

Our motto was "Never give up. Someone will listen one day" And someone did. It was Slough Borough Council, Slough Federation of Tenants & Residents, and Ashraf Ahmed of Innovation into Action.

So, why have we written this booklet?

The ground has been broken for the foundations to be built. STAR has built as much as we can on the basic Groundwork's and we will continue to move forward to break new ground.

Now it's your turn.

*Good luck and Never, ever give up.
Someone somewhere will listen one day.*

Sue Morris
Project Manager

1. Our Story:

Never in our wildest dreams could we have imagined the future we were about to face. A time that led to desperation and the feeling of helplessness and having no control. This is what homelessness is like.

It started when I fell ill in January 2000, when all the country seemed to be celebrating the millennium; I had become so ill with arthritis that I was no longer able to live in my own home.

My husband and I lived in a very large house, but my illness meant that I was no longer able to climb the stairs and get around. We contacted Slough Borough Councils Housing Department, & were introduced to the Homeless Department. Alan (my husband) & I filled in all the forms for housing, & settled back to wait to see what happens next. The next step for us was to sell our home and move into Temporary Accommodation.

To live in Temporary Accommodation, you have to be homeless. You are not homeless until you actually walk out on to the street for whatever reason. It may be an eviction by landlord, your landlord may want to sell instead of renting, and a couple may have separated. There are many reasons, and the first priority for the authorities is to get a suitable roof over your head.

Their second priority is to make sure you have not made yourself intentionally homeless, i.e. non payment of rent, selling your home for a profit & many other reasons. This can take a few weeks, and if found intentionally homeless, the Local Authority is not liable to find housing for you.

This is the first step for many homeless. Once in the accommodation or hostel, you find that you are now safely off the streets, having a roof over your head and the council is taking care of you. You pay your rent every week, electricity & rates are included, the homeless team helps in every way possible with all your Housing forms etc., so you have no real worries except to wait for a new home.

But is that enough?

Many people feel that they are now at their lowest ebb. They have lost their home, and may be unemployed, on benefits, unable to go anywhere with a low income, and sometimes feel as if they have failed in life. The children have changed schools, lost friends, no space to play in, and no garden to kick a ball in. A computer is often out of the question due to lack of space. This makes it difficult to do homework, play games. Homework clubs at the schools are often out of the question as children are too far away. Parents may be unable to provide extra fares due to low incomes. Families feel a lack of privacy as they share rooms or facilities.

So where do we go from here?

Many people believe this is enough, but here in Slough we believe in tenant participation and innovative solutions. Our solution as a homeless couple was to take a good hard look at our surroundings and identify the problems in our new surroundings and to start doing something to making our time here worthwhile and meaningful.

This was our first step, and hopefully this will help you.

2. How to start

Identifying the problems.

Take a good look around where you live, talk to your neighbours, do you have common understanding of the problems and solution's? Are you alone or are others willing to help?

How do the children feel? What do they want? What issues do they have? How can they be solved?

We suggest that to gauge the feeling of other tenants

- Write up a short survey and canvass your hostel to find out what they want.
- Organise a meeting with council staff
- Let tenants know when the meeting is taking place
- Try and provide some refreshments to encourage people to come out
- Before your first meeting write up some of the questions that you have and recommendations
- At the meeting, is there the possibility of tenants forming an action/campaign group, possibly a resident's association?
- Ask your housing officer what help they can give you

Organizing and managing your meeting.

Find out if there is a suitable common area where tenants can get together. Most hostels have a common or family room. Check the available for the date of the meeting? Let others know about the meeting by word of mouth. This is always the best type of advertising.

- Make sure everyone has been informed.
- Invite the hostel manager or housing officer.
- Set an agenda.
- Provide refreshments.
- Make sure the meeting place is accessible to all.
- Is the time and date suitable? Some people can only be there at certain times.
- Is there enough seating?
- Do you need to cater for young children? (young children should always be accompanied by an adult)

The first item on the agenda should be introductions. There may be new tenants, or people who have kept to themselves up until now. Make sure everyone knows everyone else, and this will lead to a friendly atmosphere. Explain the purpose of this meeting. Tenants have identified a problem and would like to engage the management in talks to resolve this. Having frank and open discussions will always get things moving. The hostel managers work there, but may not know the issues of tenants living there. It's not a case of them not going their job. It's more like "If you don't tell me, how will I know?" The managers have guidelines and rules to work towards, and can't always offer an immediate solution.

Once your meeting is underway, you can now begin the process of starting a group/residents association. Explain what an association is, how it will work, how it can improve life and surroundings, that it can give you a voice. Just because you are in temporary accommodation or homeless, there is no reason for you or anyone else to think you have any less rights than other council tenants.

- Keep a friendly atmosphere.
- Try not to have the manager "put on the spot".
- Take notes of the meeting.
- Explain about an association and the benefits.
- Try to find out who will be interested in being on a committee.
- Look to develop key actions points from the meeting

3. Committee Working

Electing a committee

During your meeting, possible may not stand out as being interested in an association. If tenants are willing, try to elect a committee while everyone is together for the first time. Or maybe ask people to think about whom they would like to see representing them and organise a meeting for the following week. If this is the case, again, organise your meeting as before, but remember that this time a committee will be elected. How do you go about electing a committee? During the days before the next meeting, ask who will be interested in standing, and what it will mean to them. Try to involve the housing or hostel manager from the outset. Local authorities are usually very keen on tenant participation, and will be able to help and advise. They may also be able to help your group attract funding and tell you of other organisations such as a Tenants Federation, who can provide training etc. Organise your meeting as before. The election process consists of electing

- A chairperson, secretary and treasurer
- All those nominated have been done so by another person

What happens next?

Congratulations. You now have a full working committee. So, what do you do with yourselves now?

Our first task as a residents association was to liase with the Hostel manager to help improve the quality of maintenance and cleaning. We had our committee, adopted a model constitution, set up a bank account, and began to represent our members. For the first year of our association we were Pendeen Court Residents Association. This was the hostel were it all began, and we wanted our name to reflect our home, as other associations. We began projects for the children, joined the Federation, held monthly meetings, produced minutes, and generally ran as any other association would. During our first year, our work covered many things.

- Planting project for the children.
- Film nights in the common room.
- Birthday and Halloween parties.
- Reading groups.
- Started a small book and toy library.
- Collected outgrown clothes, and resold to other tenants to raise funds.
- Held sleepovers in the common room for the children. They thought it was like camping.
- Started painting a large Snakes & Ladders and Hopscotch on the playground.
- An artist worked with the children to produce wooden cut-outs of them. These were then painted by the children and hung on the playground walls.
- Started to look forward to what we wanted for the future.

4. A year on

Before you know it, you are a year old

By now we, as should you, had become victims of our own success. Pendeen Court had its own association, but there were other hostels in Slough. Where was their representation? The next project was to include these in our meetings. We consulted with the temporary accommodation manager, who was very keen for all the hostel tenants to get together.

We now became a borough wide organisation. Pendeen Court Residents Association no longer existed. We were now STAR. Slough Temporary Accommodation Residents Association. And so the challenges begin! How do you meet with everyone and keep them informed while covering a large area?

- Plan the year's meetings in advance.
- Hold the monthly general meeting on a Rota system.
- Hold a coffee morning in each hostel during the month. This ensures that if a tenant is unable to get to a meeting, they are not missed out.
- Post your minutes on each hostel notice board.
- Produce a newsletter to all tenants. This can be monthly, two monthly or quarterly, dependant on your resources. Try to get tenants to write articles for it.
- Carry out surveys to find out what tenants want.
- Be prepared for tenants who have issues, but will not attend meetings. A one to one meeting can work.
- Be aware of tenants with different languages.
- Work with the Federation & the Participation team. They can give good advice on hard to reach tenants.

How to sustain your association.

STAR Association was now beginning to realise that there were other things we could do for our members. The surveys were now showing that tenants, especially children, were now looking for more. The attitude had changed from being a homeless person to being a tenant with full rights.

We knew that earlier projects had been successful, so decided to start larger projects. To do this we needed funding on a large scale. We asked our tenants for their ideas for a project, and they came back with a multitude of ideas. Our next task was to find out which were feasible and how to gain funding for these projects.

HOW TO GAIN FUNDING FOR YOUR ASSOCIATION

STAR Association began the funding applications by applying for the forms, and then looking at whether we met the criteria. This was very difficult, as there seemed to be nowhere that would fund our projects. We contacted Innovation Into Action, and received an application form. It was then that we realised that it's not just a case of filling in a form. We started at the beginning by holding a fun day for the tenants. The purpose of this day was to have Youth workers with the children to produce an official report on their views, what they wanted for a project, what was lacking in their lives. This report was the basis for all future funding applications, so had to be an expert report. Our children told us that they wanted a new playground, space to play, computers for homework, more fun days out together, contact with other hostels. We had our report, and so were able to start to build a project from this. The first step we took was to produce a business plan for STAR to take us through the next year. This plan incorporated the project, and is now a permanent fixture at our AGM.

Business plan.

A business plan can be very simple and be an effective way of monitoring the progress of the planned works. It is a way of putting your ideas down on a chart/plan to help you through the coming year. When trying to gain funding, this plan helps show that your association is looking to achieve sustainability in all things.

How do I produce a business plan?

This may be your first large project, and needs to be updated every year. It will help you to be more professional, help identify partnership working, assist your association in the following years work and help with delegation to all the committee, remember:

- Allow yourselves and committee a day together for a "brainstorming" session.
- Write down all the projects you want to do in the following year.
- Prioritise these projects.
- Identify which will need outside funding.
- Identify who will be your working partners.
- Put all your ideas in to an easily read table in the order of work, and how long each project should take.
- Identify which can be done this year, and which will be ongoing.

Keeps checking the plan to ensure your priorities are correct.

Remember -

- ✓ Projects for this year/next year.
- ✓ Priorities
- ✓ Partners
- ✓ Possible funding.

You now have a working document for your association. This will help keep you on target with your year's work, and can be used to help gain funding for your projects.

The STAR Association project

The STAR project started out when the children and committee realised that to encourage tenants to become involved we were going to have to aim at something that mattered to them and show the benefit of tenant involvement. The children's playground was inadequate for present needs. It consisted of a concrete courtyard with outdated equipment at one end and nothing at the other end. The toddlers wanted to play on the equipment, but with the older children playing faster, and rougher games, this was not a completely safe area. Also we had the problem that toddlers are curious.

If someone went out of the front doors, we would sometimes find the little ones would go for a walk up the road to see what was going on. Obviously, this was a very dangerous play activity that needed to be rectified. The older children felt that while adults were being catered for with the association, their voices were not heard. This came to light as a result of the consultation day out. The remedy was very easy at first. The children started their own association, called Bright Star Association. Their logo was "Future Decisions".

Bright Star ran along the same lines as any other association, with a few exceptions. The children had to be kept safe. The solution was to have a committee member take a full Child Protection Procedures course, and install a Child Protection Policy. Bright Star elected their committee, held monthly meetings, met with council officials, and talked to us about the project. As well as a new playground, they wanted other projects.

- New playground with safety fence.
- Computers for homework clubs.
- Playgroups for toddlers.
- Reading clubs.
- Days out together.
- More contact with other children who were homeless.
- Better facilities in one of the common rooms.

Our project was becoming increasingly larger, and we were in need of a large amount of funding.

We put together the plans, and sent out the Innovation in to Action form. We had a visit from Ashraf Ahmed, and our project began to take shape. With funding from Innovation in to Action, Slough Borough Council, Children's Fund, East Berkshire Community Foundation and Slough Estates - a local business we achieved the following:

- A new playground with fence and safety gate. This would stop toddlers going out.
- Refurbishment of Rochford hostel common room. Fitted storage seating with soft furnishings and new lighting, providing an adequate and comfortable meeting place
- A 16 seater minibus for days out, shopping trips, etc,
- Educational toys.
- 2 resettlement workers to assist with life skills, budgeting skills, moving in to permanent accommodation. This has now increased to 4 officers in the year 2004.
- A large storage room to be converted in to a computer room.
- A link worker to work with the children. The link worker could manage play activities and the educational clubs needed for the children.
- 6 computers.
- Printers.
- 1 year's supply of stationery.
- 1 years Internet fee's.
- 1 years modem line charges.
- 1 year's insurance.
- 1 year's public liability insurance.

The local business gave a donation to provide

- 6 desks.
- 6 chairs.
- 1 year's insurance for the minibus.

You may be asking yourself, out of all this, what exactly did STAR Association provide for their tenants? Every one is giving their money, staff, and premises. STAR Association, as will you, gave one of the most important things. We gave time. Our time is precious to any funding. Without time there would be no project plan, no application for funding, no changes, and most of all no association. Volunteer hours are a very precious commodity for funding. Volunteers run the projects. We work with our tenants to make sure that once a project has been identified, it will be brought to life and sustained over the years. At the end of the project life, volunteers are there to gain other funding, begin new projects, and continue the work for our tenants.

What did the project mean to tenants?

Building and managing a project is of no use to anyone if it has no meaning, ambition or commitment to the future. We started to think about what this project would mean, what are the aims and objectives of the association?

Aims and Objectives for STAR

We developed the STAR Action Plan in conjunction with our project. This would help us in our way forward to achieve a good sustainable project.

STAR ACTION PLAN

This Action plan covers all the projects that STAR will be undertaking for the forthcoming year, and a projected plan for other projects in the future. STAR aim to provide a brighter future for the tenants in Temporary Accommodation, and to promote all activities undertaken by STAR and Bright Star.

STAR is very keen to work in partnership with all its partners, and to seek the necessary funding to raise the profile of Temporary Accommodation. Temporary Accommodation tenants lead the work of STAR and all projects are agreed at public meetings held throughout the year at the hostels.

We welcome all tenants to participate in all aspects of running STAR, and seek to represent the views of Temporary Accommodation in all consultation with Slough Borough Council.

The purpose of the group is as follows:

- Promote the interests of all the tenants in Temporary Accommodation on matters that concern them.
- Restore pride and ensure opportunities are available for tenants to have equal access to services.
- Improve the quality of life through participation in working in partnership.
- Develop and promote the skills of all residents, through Health and Educational needs.
- Empowering residents to have a say over all the services provided, within a safe environment

STAR's sole objective is to restore pride in every way possible for the tenants during their stay in Temporary Accommodation.

We look forward to working with all our partners in providing better facilities and opportunities for STAR tenants.

We now had our action plan, our project plan, our funding. We had found our way forward. The project had developed its own aims and objectives along the way, as had STAR.

The project aims and objectives

Everything now linked together, and we had a large, workable, sustainable project.

Forging the links.

The older children and adults will be using the "Starlight IT Centre" at Pendeen Court. While there, they can learn computer skills, apply for jobs, hold homework clubs, learn how to write a CV, contact relatives in other countries via the Internet and e-mail, follow council policy and contact them on the website.

The smaller children will be able to play in complete safety in the playground. It has a fence, safety gate, new safety surfacing, new equipment. The link worker may be available to play games with them.

What happens if they live at another hostel, and the facilities are at Pendeen Court? Rochford hostel has a refurbished common room. This is new seating, new carpet, new lighting. The link worker can arrange play sessions for children who wish to remain in their home. The adults and older children can visit the IT centre in the minibus to carry out their activities. The resettlement officers and link worker now have a refurbished common room, new playground, the Starlight IT Centre and transport for allow them further opportunities to work with their clients.

The links have been forged, we have partnership working, sustainability, representation, and pride in achieving a large project. To STAR this is a wonderful achievement. As we worked on this project with Innovation in to Action, we became aware of one very important factor. We had hoped to help tenant's full representation and input to policies affecting them. Not only had we achieved this but taken it one step further. Our tenants had a voice, facilities to improve their quality of life, opportunities for further education, new careers, and better prospects for the future were available. We had achieved that ideal that everyone strives for with an association.

TENANT EMPOWERMENT.

The three C's.

During our project work, we became aware of the three C's as a very important factor. They help run the association, manage and build the project, engage in partnership working, and make your funding applications much easier.

What are the three C's?

Consultation.

Always consult with your tenants, committee, and council. Let the council know about your project. You may need their approval if it affects their property.

Communication.

Communicate with everyone. The tenants by newsletter, meetings, notices, personal contact. They will in turn communicate with you, let you know what they want from the association. The council will communicate with you as partners.

Compromise.

Don't expect to get everything you want. It may not be feasible to run the full project, but only part of it. Be prepared to compromise if necessary.

Our next task was to see if this could be taken further, to other homeless people in Slough. Look Ahead became our new members. They have their monthly meeting and a coffee morning, as all the hostels do. The tenants there have had input to the newsletters, and offered help and advice for the STAR project. Look Ahead joined STAR in 2003.

In 2004 a new ODPM funded project began in our town centre. This is called Equinox Project 316. Equinox is a live in rehab centre for drug and alcohol abuse. All of the tenants are homeless, and want representation. So, of course, they elected to join STAR. Equinox now have their own projects and presentations underway, some of which will benefit the children of Slough. STAR have now learnt to look outside the box. Temporary accommodation tenants are not the only homeless. Everyone deserves to have their voice heard, better quality of life, the opportunity to change for the better, and have full representation. This is our commitment to the homeless, and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future.

WHAT CAN PARTNERSHIP WORKING DO FOR YOU?

The Temporary Accommodation manager asked STAR if we would be interested in working on a resettlement project. We were very interested and began meeting with the temporary accommodation team, a representative from the NHS, and former homeless tenants. We discussed the way people in temporary accommodation lived, at what point you became homeless, and when should help and guidance on resettlement begin. The opinions varied, as would be expected. The council and NHS believed that resettlement began when you started living in the hostel. STAR and former tenants believed this began while you were still in your former home. You had to leave your home to resettle in temporary accommodation. We agreed on this point and many others after debate. The meetings carried on for a few months and a booklet and report was produced by Slough's temporary accommodation department.

This led to the basic research for a funding application to the Government for 2 resettlement officers for Slough. They have now been in post from 2003, and we are now waiting for 2 other officers to join us in August 2004. This shows that you can never do enough research and consultation. Sound research can be used for a multitude of funding applications for yourself as an association, for partnership working, or for your partners to access funding in consultation with your association.

CAN ANYTHING GO WRONG WITH AN ASSOCIATION?

Most associations can run for many years once the first teething difficulties have been overcome. But with the homeless and temporary accommodation, nothing is so easy. You have to overcome a long list of difficulties.

- Expectations. Others expect to be re-housed quicker if they join the committee.
- Turnover. Tenants will be re-housed, and the committee depleted.
- Prejudice. Some people believe the homeless have "brought it on themselves", so deserve no help.
- Unable to gain funding. This gets easier with more practice.
- Tenants no longer need an association. There are times when you suddenly find a different group of tenants, who are happy as they are. The way round this is to move to other areas of homeless tenants, and concentrate there, while keeping everyone else informed of the projects.

There are many other reasons why you can fail or be unable to continue. Most of these reasons are linked to this list. You can find ways around an obstacle. Work with your Participation Officer, your Federation, and your council. Partnership working can ease the situation. The one thing to remember is this. An association is provided for tenants to voice their issues, be represented, improve their way of life and where they live.

Be determined. Continue to hold your meetings, send out newsletters, and visit your tenants in their hostels. While you are doing all of this, you are continuing to represent the homeless. The meetings are there for the benefit of others. You may have provided everything they need to date, and everyone is happy.

REMEMBER

Opportunity is everything and the key to a better association.

*Star
Association*



Star Association

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