

## Community Campus '87

### Teesside-based social enterprise offering practical solutions to youth homelessness



Community Campus '87, a Teesside-based social enterprise with charitable status, was formed by a group of young people in 1987 who wished to address the rising problem of youth homelessness within their local community. Formally registered in 1988, Community Campus has evolved from its roots as a community programme to a

trading social enterprise offering a wealth of services for young homeless people, enabling them to realise their full potential and build towards a better life.

The primary aim of Community Campus '87 upon its formation was to provide supported housing, giving young homeless people the skills and experience needed to obtain and maintain their own place to live. In 1988, the organisation was able to move forward with this objective after leasing its first property from Middlesbrough Council and a further six properties from Stockton Council. From 1989 Community Campus '87 has bought and renovated its own properties, and this service has matured into a comprehensive supported housing plan delivered from bases in Middlesbrough and Stockton through which each young beneficiary of the service is designated their own tenant support worker who provides support in areas such as managing a tenancy, budgeting skills and self-care and life skills.

Yet, after establishing its initial supported housing service, Community Campus soon realised that homelessness itself was not the only problem facing the young people the organisation helped, and brought with it a range of other issues. The organisation found that the young people they housed were often lacking in confidence, self-esteem and direction. In many circumstances, Community Campus '87 found the reasons why young people became homeless were often related to the reasons why they experienced low self-confidence and contributed to their lack of educational and vocational direction.

This realisation, combined with poor quality of workmanship when contracting local construction firms to renovate their properties, led Community Campus '87 to develop and launch its Key Skills Project in 1991 with the aim of giving young people direction in their lives by providing them with work-related skills. The project began life as a self-rehabilitation scheme that focused on renovating empty properties that were at a surplus in the declining housing market, resourcefully linking the organisations need for housing with providing formal and informal training for young homeless people in property renovation and construction skills. The Key Skills Project offered and continues to provide training placements through recognised training agencies and employment opportunities within Community Campus '87 and Tees Valley based Intermediate Labour Market Initiatives. The success of the Project now means that the organisation is able to renovate up to four vacant properties a year, providing training for young people and in turn providing further supported and affordable housing for those experiencing homelessness.

The Key Skills Project also contributed to Community Campus '87's acquisition of the derelict Heaven nightclub in Stockton town centre. The nightclub was in a state of disrepair and was subject to a high degree of vandalism, though Community Campus '87 saw buying the property as an opportunity to further achieve its social objectives by utilising the young homeless people trained via the Key Skills Project to renovate the property. The property, aptly named the 'Heaven Project' not only provides office space for Community Campus '87, acts as a central hub for the organisation's work with homeless people in Stockton and includes drop-in facilities, an ICT room, a life skills area and a workshop and

meeting room. A number of offices in the building are also leased to other agencies which provide a valuable income stream for Community Campus '87, securing its financial position as a profit-making social enterprise.

The success of both the Heaven and Key Skills projects led to an increasing demand for the services that Community Campus '87 provided, with organisations recognising the value in utilising a social enterprise that could not only deliver quality construction, building maintenance and painting and decorating services at a competitive rate but also provide training and employment opportunities for local young people. This in turn led to the formation of Community Campus '87 Trading Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Community Campus '87 that provides a construction and building maintenance services to a range of clients within the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. The organisations trading arm acts as a further income stream, enabling it to meet its core objectives by allowing a higher number of young homeless people to be housed and trained and further supporting the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Aiding young people to realise and achieve their full potential by overcoming the barriers faced by homeless young people is central to Community Campus '87's beliefs and aims. The organisation works in partnership with Middlesbrough Borough Council to deliver a project that supports young homeless people into work by offering services such as confidence building and providing information regarding moving towards employment such as creating a CV, interview techniques and application form support. Community Campus '87 also offers young people a participative role in determining their housing and personal development opportunities with beneficiaries of the organisations work contributing to all levels of Community Campus '87 via formal membership of the organisation, attending project and tenant meetings and representing Community Campus '87 to visitors and project sponsors. This structure allows young people to inform the running of Community Campus '87, utilising their experiences of bad housing, homelessness, unemployment, isolation and disadvantage to pursue the organisations aims and objectives. The inclusive nature of the organisation along with the training services provided is clearly invaluable to the young people the organisation works with. 'Since I have been at Community Campus I have done many different trades. I feel that it has turned my life around. I belong here as part of the team and I am hoping eventually to get an apprenticeship', says one young user of the organisations services.

The HOT initiative is particularly indicative of Community Campus '87's dedication to allow young people to influence its strategic direction. The initiative, supported in part by Community Campus '87 and Stockton Council, comprises of young people who have experienced homelessness and wish to raise awareness of homelessness in Teesside. The group aims to work with key stakeholders including homeless sections, housing providers and local and central government to influence how they deliver services and to increase the reduction of homelessness locally and nationwide.

Over the coming years Community Campus '87 plans to extend and develop its main services, both continuing to house young homeless people whilst providing construction-based training and employment opportunities for its beneficiaries. The organisation will also further its participation in the Community Building Ventures project, a new trans-national project aimed at creating opportunities for young people from disadvantaged communities in the UK to utilise their building and training skills to benefit communities in Southern India. The first phase of the project, developed in partnership with COMMACT (Community Association for Local Action and Economic Development), Community Business Scotland International, Renton Development Trust, the Hilda Trust, the Reed Centre and non-governmental organisations working in South India, took place in early 2007 when two groups of young people from Teesside and Glasgow travelled to Bangalore to build a classroom and office for the Jamboo Savari Dinne School on behalf of the Reed Centre. Community Campus '87 plans to further contribute to this project via the construction of a Community Centre in Kerala in conjunction with the Hilda Trust and a rural housing project north of Bangalore, working again with the Reed Centre.

Overall, Community Campus '87 strives to continue to achieve its core objectives via its local and international projects of working to reduce homelessness, helping young people to achieve their potential, promoting inclusion and providing innovative and financially sustainable solutions to the issue of youth homelessness.

## Contact

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