Future Builders: Lessons learnt and future plans
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1. Introduction
1.1 Introduction to Future Builders

Developed and funded by OVO Foundation and delivered in partnership with End Youth Homelessness, Future Builders is an innovative live-in apprenticeship scheme designed to break the cycle of homelessness for young people. Future Builders addresses the current gap in service and funding provision that prevents young people who are ready to leave hostels or supported housing and access employment from doing so.

The benefit-free model creates a new, alternative and affordable move-on option for young people aged 16-24, and aims to:

- Provide them with the necessary training to access an apprenticeship and the opportunity to refurbish a semi-derelict property that will become their home
- Provide an affordable and secure place to live whilst completing the apprenticeship
- Offer them wraparound support to sustain wellbeing
- Help them find a job and get their own place when they've finished the scheme

Future Builders launched as a pilot in Bristol in 2016 and 12 young people benefitted from training and/or housing in 2016/17. The scheme has since doubled in size in Bristol, and in November 2017 OVO Foundation launched Future Builders in Sheffield. In Spring 2018, the University of the West of England conducted a social return on investment (SROI) study on the Future Builders pilot in Bristol which calculated that for every pound invested in the scheme, £11.10 of social value is created.

OVO Foundation aims to have Future Builders up and running in five cities by the end of 2018 and the ultimate aim is for the model to become part of the core services that youth homelessness organisations offer across the UK.
1.2 Future Builders event

In order to achieve this, OVO Foundation will be developing partnerships with more local governments, housing providers, employers, funders and investors. In May 2018, OVO Foundation, in collaboration with LKMco and End Youth Homelessness, held an event bringing together existing and prospective delivery partners as well as funders and experts in the field to share best practice, refine the model and consider how to develop and scale Future Builders sustainably.

To share best practice in the sector more widely and to encourage more organisations to take up the scheme, we have detailed the main findings from the day in the following document, covering two main themes:

1. **Refining the model:**
   - Reflecting on the lessons learnt from the programme so far, and suggestions for refining key components of the model going forward, including acquiring housing, recruiting and retaining young people, training courses and working with employers.

2. **Developing and scaling the model sustainably:**
   - Suggestions for how to develop and scale Future Builders, identifying what needs to be done to achieve this sustainably, with input from key stakeholders in youth homelessness, including local government, academics, funders.
2. Refining the model
2.1 Securing housing

Future Builders pilot was developed to make use of empty, semi-derelict local council properties, providing opportunities for the young people on the scheme to refurbish these homes alongside building contractors. However, the availability of local council housing stock varies widely across the UK – some council’s have suitable housing readily available whilst in some areas, council housing is non-existent.

Local authorities also have different priorities regarding their properties which may also impact how easy it is for charities to secure housing, for example housing families may take precedence over housing single young people. Understanding and adapting to these differences is key to successfully expanding the programme to new locations.

**Recommendations for the future**

- Assessing the availability of local housing stock (e.g., who owns it and what their priorities are) is an important first step when setting the programme up in new locations.
- OVO Foundation is open to working with smaller housing associations or other property providers that have appropriate properties available, and will consider potential partnerships, so long as the conditions are reasonable.
- Developing strong relationships with relevant people from the housing provider (local authority or otherwise) can help to secure properties.
- Organising formal and minuted meetings, explicitly agreeing key aims and deadlines alongside a specific person to follow up, can help getting properties formally signed over to charities.
2.2 Selecting building contractors

Future Builders involves an unusual mix of requirements from building contractors, particularly the ability to train and work with young people. It is therefore important to think about what's required from building contractors, beyond the normal considerations of the cost and quality of their work.

**Recommendations for the future**

- The primary criteria when selecting a contractor should be the quality of the building work they are able to deliver.
- It is also important to consider a contractor's approach to working with young people. However, training and support for the young people are primarily the Future Builders Project Coordinator and training provider's responsibility.
- Whilst some degree of formalised tender process is required to ensure contractors can meet the projects' needs, over-complicating the process can deter contractors who are not used to tendering in this way and may lead to excessively high quotes.
- When selecting a contractor, it is important to take into account their capacity. Where a large number of properties are being renovated at once, it may be easier to work with a single larger company that can manage all of the work, rather than the Future Builders' Project Coordinator trying to manage a number of different contractors.
2.3 Traineeships

Future Builders originally involved the young people undertaking a pre-apprenticeship training programme with a local college in Bristol. However, the scheme is now being developed to provide young people with traineeships – a government-funded qualification that will give access to a wide variety of careers, not just construction. Traineeships are delivered by a range of providers and do not have to be conducted in a school or college setting, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility in catering to young people’s needs.

Recommendations for the future

- Partnering with the right training provider is crucial. Providers need to be able to deliver flexibly and respond appropriately to participants’ unique needs. Smaller training providers may be well placed to do this as they are sometimes able to provide a bespoke offer.

- Delivery partners should take the time to focus on young people’s talents and not just the issues they face. This may include putting them forward for more challenging qualifications if they feel they are capable.

- Delivery partners could consider consulting a ‘job coach’ to provide young people with careers-focused support, alongside the traineeship programme.
2.4 Working with employers

Future Builders began with a focus on property and construction, however, traineeship qualifications will allow young people to access apprenticeships in a variety of sectors and access opportunities they have a genuine interest in, which should help to ensure they sustain employment.

Recommendations for the future

● Delivery partners should carefully analyse the local job market and growth sectors, as this is where long-term employment opportunities are most likely to be. For example, the upcoming 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham are creating opportunities in construction.

● It is worth considering the full range of roles within each sector, for example, a young person may decide against a career as a builder, but may find an admin role within a construction firm.

● Working with the private sector, and particularly larger companies, can bring benefits as they are likely to have the capacity to take on apprentices and to draw on dedicated corporate social responsibility teams.

● Productive relationships with employers play a crucial role in helping young people into apprenticeships and employment, and are often dependent on providing employers with the right support. Where possible, delivery partners may look to assist companies working with young people from Future Builders and other youth homelessness schemes. This might involve training or workshops to raise employers’ awareness of the challenges these young people face and how to work around them.

● Delivery partners need to help bridge the gap between what young people need and what employers expect in terms of ‘job-readiness’.
2.5 Recruiting and retaining young people

Future Builders aims to help young people with relatively low support needs who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness and would benefit from training and affordable accommodation. However, many youth homelessness charities have found that young people with lower support needs are no longer eligible for the majority of the charity’s services and as a result they no longer present to local authorities, or to the charity for help. This may mean that delivery partners could be working with other referral agencies or organisations to reach this target group.

Recommendations for the future

- Anyone referring young people to the Future Builders scheme (e.g. Support Workers) should have a clear understanding of what the programme involves, what the level of commitment is, and who the programme is aimed at. This will help to help ensure the right people are referred to the scheme in the first place.

- Given the nature of poverty and young homeless people’s situation, it is important to target those on low incomes, not just those on benefits.

- It is important to be honest and explicit when setting young people’s expectations as they are recruited to Future Builders whilst assuring them that they will be well-supported to meet the demands of the scheme.
2.5 Recruiting and retaining young people (ii)

- Running multiple smaller cohorts, staggered over the course of the year, could increase the programme’s flexibility whilst maintaining cohort cohesion. The optimum size of each cohort should be considered carefully to avoid compromising cohort solidarity and ensuring the numbers are manageable for Project Coordinators.

- OVO Foundation funds Project Coordinators to provide wrap around support to young people on the scheme, and help prepare them for independent living. For delivery partners, hiring an experienced, organised and motivated Project Coordinator is key to the success of the scheme. Ensuring this individual is in post in time to recruit the young people is important to develop strong relationships with key stakeholders early on.

- A degree of flexibility is important when working with young people who have unstable personal lives. Future Builders delivery partners could consider allowing young people who leave the programme to re-engage with the scheme later where appropriate. This may help young people to better deal with the perceived ‘failure’ of having to drop out of the scheme.

- Long-term employment is not the only indicator of success and Future Builders aims to consider the wider benefits that young people may gain, even if they do not achieve all the intended outcomes of the scheme.
3. Scaling Future Builders
3.1 Views from local government and funders

Youth homelessness is a huge issue in the UK, with only a fraction of young people getting the help they need due to strict guidelines around who counts as “statutory homeless”. As a result, hundreds of thousands of young people each year make up a “hidden homeless” population, sofa surfing between friends and family, with no safe, stable place to call home.

Previously local authorities had an affordable “housing offer”, but young people today face rising private sector rents, decreasing levels of social welfare and lack of access to jobs. Future Builders was developed to fill the current gap in service and funding provision that prevents young people who are ready to leave hostels or supported housing and want to access employment from doing so.

OVO Foundation recognises the widespread need for programmes like Future Builders and has a long-term aim to scale the scheme across the UK, initially to five locations by the end of 2018. To scale the scheme successfully, OVO Foundation, End Youth Homelessness and local homelessness organisations will be working with local councils, funders and investors each of which have varying reasons for invest in programmes like this.
3.1 Views from local government and funders (ii)

**Local government**
When the scheme was originally developed as a pilot in Bristol, it aligned well with the local council's priorities to:

- Stop rough sleeping before it becomes a way of life;
- Make better use of their housing stock; and
- Develop the future workforce

Each local authority has different priorities, budgets and targets for homelessness, housing, training and education – key areas where Future Builders can make long-lasting sustainable impact for young homeless people.

**Funders**
Funders have a range of requirements and preferences when it comes to funding programmes like Future Builders. Many funders have these clearly stated in their grant specifications, which can be a useful checklist when applying for funding.

Funders specifically focusing on homelessness have a range of specialities. Some funders, like LandAid, prioritise increasing the provision of affordable accommodation as one of the solutions to youth homelessness. This is primarily through bringing empty properties back into use, from commercial spaces to residential properties. Others, like Sage Foundation, focus on prevention particularly in areas such as the North East of the UK where there are already a number of schemes focused on ‘putting roofs over young people’s heads’.

Some funders, like LandAid, as well as some property companies, provide pro-bono services focusing on property for charities who often lack the resources, networks and expertise in this space which is dominated by the private sector.
3.1 Views from local government and funders (iii)

Recommendations for the future

- Youth homelessness organisations will face a range of different priorities and opportunities in the partnerships they develop to deliver Future Builders (including local councils and training providers). OVO Foundation encourages organisations to explore these opportunities, whilst staying true to the core ideals of the Future Builders scheme.

- OVO Foundation will continue to work with delivery partners to develop a clear, simple model for Future Builders that can be communicated easily to funders and other potential partners. As a part of this, OVO Foundation and End Youth Homelessness will also work with delivery partners to develop robust evidence of the impact the scheme has on young people and their local communities.

- Future Builders was developed around the core ideals of collaboration and partnership. OVO Foundation believes that fostering a collaborative environment allows organisations to share expertise and learn from each other, not just for Future Builders, but for tackling youth homelessness more broadly.

- OVO Foundation encourages delivery partners to develop a test and learn environment, allowing space to learn from mistakes. This is key to developing a core model that can easily be scaled to different locations.
3.2 Test, learn and scale sustainably

Scaling and replicating Future Builders requires delivery partners to continue to test the model and understand the different local inflections that their particular context will bring to the scheme. OVO Foundation and End Youth Homelessness aim to work with other delivery partners to develop a core set of principles for Future Builders in the early stages of scaling the scheme, and what areas have a degree of flexibility.

A key part of successfully scaling a sustainable scheme will involve gathering evidence of the effect of the scheme and understanding what does and doesn't work and why.

There is a lack of reliable, accessible research into homelessness interventions in the UK and across the world (something that The Centre for Homelessness Impact has been set up to address). OVO Foundation is therefore committed to working with its partners to undertake research and evaluation of the scheme and share the results with the wider sector. This may include comparing cohorts and locations in longitudinal studies to understand long-term impact of this intervention.
4. Conclusion
4. Conclusion

By bringing together key stakeholders from the youth homelessness sector, we have had the unique opportunity to share best practice and consider how to scale the Future Builders model. Sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration will help us bring the opportunities and support provided through Future Builders to mainstream youth homelessness services.

The key learning from this event has been that different local contexts and the priorities of partner organisations and funders will continue to shape Future Builders. Reflecting on these will help OVO Foundation and its delivery partners to develop a core set of principles for the Future Builders model, whilst establishing what areas have a degree of flexibility.

We hope that the lessons learnt and ideas presented in this report will help existing and prospective partner organisations to reflect on how their local context will shape the model and explore new opportunities and partnerships in their local areas.

If you’re interested in partnering with us to scale up Future Builders in the UK, we want to hear from you. We’re looking for organisations who are:

- Working with young people aged 16 - 24 who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness
- Willing to develop partnerships with relevant local education/training providers and local council to deliver the project

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This report was commissioned by OVO Foundation, OVO Energy’s charity. Our mission is to support inspiring organisations with smart ideas in three areas: youth poverty, education, and energy and the environment. At the heart of it all is our mission to give young people a better future. More than 81,000 OVO Energy customers choose to donate to OVO Foundation each month through their monthly statement. OVO Energy matches all customer donations doubling the power of what we can achieve together.

This report was written with the help of education and youth development ‘think and action tank’ LKMco. We believe society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

The Future Builders event was hosted by End Youth Homelessness, who are working in partnership with OVO Foundation to deliver Future Builders. End Youth Homelessness is a UK-wide network of local charities that have joined forces to tackle youth homelessness together. It provides a national platform to raise awareness, share experience and generate voluntary income.