

Focus Ireland

Step-Down Programme, George's Hill
Evaluation Report



Everyone has the right to a place they can call home

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Disclosure Comment:

This report is confidential to Focus Ireland and is prepared solely for the purposes(s) set out in the submitted proposal.

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Sarah Cherry,
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

In July 2007 Juniper Consulting was commissioned by Focus Ireland to undertake an evaluation of the Step Down programme. This report presents the findings of the evaluation, the objectives of which were to:

- provide a profile and history of the programme;
- identify the views of the stakeholders on the effectiveness of the programme;
- establish the effectiveness of the service in meeting its objectives;
- highlight the strengths of the programme and make recommendations in relation to any potential improvements; and
- make recommendations on the future direction of the programme.

1.2 Step Down Programme Overview

The Step Down programme provides a short term housing programme to enable men and women who have completed drug rehabilitation to move into appropriate housing and live independently in a supported environment. The programme is a partnership between Focus Ireland, Keltoi and the Rehabilitation Integration Service (RIS) and the three agencies work in partnership to provide a seamless service to the client.

The objectives of Step Down are to:

- provide clients with a programme of support that will assist them to develop their skills and capacity in making a home for themselves;
- provide clients with accommodation as part of a programme so that they can experience managing a home;
- address issues that may have contributed to their being out of home in the past or put them at risk of being homeless again in the future; and
- support individuals in accessing move on accommodation.

The Step Down programme was launched in September 2005. As of August 2007, 15 clients had participated in the programme and seven were currently taking part. During the six months of the Step Down programme clients are involved in an extensive programme of support and activities. Support is provided by Focus Ireland key workers, a RIS caseworker, aftercare at Keltoi and monthly review meetings. Each client also participates in a number of activities including a day-time programme and facilitated group sessions. Clients are provided with a self-contained apartment at George's Hill for the duration of the programme. Towards the end of the programme they are assisted by Focus Ireland key workers to find move on accommodation. This is usually privately rented accommodation or in some situations (where Focus Ireland staff have assessed the client and feel that they are not ready for independent living) supported accommodation.

1.3 Client Overview

Step Down's 22 clients come from a range of backgrounds in terms of gender, age, household type, qualifications, and homelessness history. There have been high levels of participation and engagement, with 12 of the 15 former clients completing the programme and seven currently taking part. While some clients (who have or are completing the programme) have relapsed, the 12 former clients that have completed the programme and the current seven clients have all engaged with staff and continue to remain drug-free.

Half of the programme's 12 former clients are living independently with a further two living with family or partners. It is believed that all former clients remain drug free at this time and all are either in education/training, employment or are travelling.

1.4 Consultation Findings

Consultations were undertaken with Step Down's staff and clients as part of the evaluation. The consultations revealed that the programme has been a very positive experience for both staff and clients.

Staff consultations highlighted that the programme has a number of strengths, notably the high success rate in clients remaining drug free. In addition there is a good relationship between the programme's partners and between staff and clients. A number of issues were raised through the consultations, namely, move on accommodation, the nominations and referral processes and roles and responsibilities. Staff are however continuing to work together to resolve these issues.

Clients were also very positive about the programme, advising that it had met their expectations and had been a worthwhile undertaking. They also had particular praise for their key workers. Clients also highlighted a number of issues and areas where improvements could be made in the future. These mainly related to the programme's content and move on accommodation.

Overall the findings of the consultations suggest that Step Down has been a successful programme for both staff and clients to date.

1.5 Conclusions

The conclusions of the evaluation in relation to the achievement of the programme's objectives, the strengths of the programme, and the issues that have been highlighted are set out below.

1.5.1 Achievement of Objectives

In relation to the first three objectives (as outlined on page 1), the conclusion of the evaluation is that these have been successfully achieved. The objective of *supporting* access to accommodation has also been achieved, however the *sourcing* of appropriate accommodation for clients remains an issue.

In relation to the aim of providing a "seamless" service to the client, the conclusion is that this is successfully achieved throughout the majority of the programme. However further efforts need to be undertaken by staff in the three partner organisations in order to provide this "seamless" service when clients are being assisted in finding move on accommodation.

1.5.2 Strengths of the Programme

The Step Down programme has a number of key strengths, these are that:

- the programme successfully brings together the expertise of the homeless, housing and drug rehabilitation sectors;
- the programme contributes strongly to Government and Homeless Agency policies, specifically the objectives of moving people out of homelessness and providing high quality support through an inter-linked approach;
- the programme has a high success rate with the majority of clients remaining drug-free and moving on to independent living;
- the high level of support (wrap around care) provided to each client ensures that they have the best possible opportunity to succeed in remaining drug-free and living independently;
- relationships between all those involved (partners, staff and clients) have been very good; and
- clients are very satisfied with the programme.

1.5.3 Issues Arising

A number of issues relating to the programme were highlighted by staff and clients during the consultations. The conclusion of the evaluation is that all of the issues raised (i.e. nominations and referral process, roles and responsibilities, procedures and programme content), with the exception of move on accommodation, are issues that can be resolved relatively easily and quickly if the programme's partners are willing to take on board the feedback from staff and clients.

The move on accommodation issue is one that has been discussed on several occasions by the programme's partners, most recently at a Steering Committee meeting in May 2007. The main outcome of the discussions was that Step Down would be classified as a specialised programme for people who have taken part in drug rehabilitation thus allowing clients to be referred to a transitional programme where the need arises. The partners continue to work together to resolve this issue.

1.6 Recommendations

The following is a summary of the recommendations made in relation to potential improvements in the programme and its future direction.

1.6.1 Potential Improvements

- **Move On Accommodation**

It is recommended that Focus Ireland continues to support clients in finding accommodation by identifying all of the accommodation options available to them either for independent living or supported housing (where necessary).

- **Nominations and Referrals**

It is recommended that the Steering Committee review current procedures, with a view to ensuring that (a) all staff involved are familiar with the criteria for

acceptance onto the programme and (b) RIS and Keltoi staff who are familiar with a client work together to ensure that appropriate nominations and referrals are being made.

It is recommended that the Steering Committee explore a secondary referral source which could be accessed if required, *only* as an option to mitigate the unlikely risk of insufficient referrals from Keltoi.

- **Roles and Responsibilities**

It is recommended that existing documentation is reviewed and updated to reflect current policies and procedures. It is also recommended that existing forms and assessment methods are reviewed to examine if these can be streamlined in any way.

It is important to ensure that Focus Ireland's assessment that a client is ready for independent living is respected by the clients, partner organisations and other services as it is their role to help clients to access independent living arrangements. It is therefore recommended that a memorandum of understanding is developed between the programme's partners and other providers.

It is recommended that a direct link is established between RIS, Focus Ireland and other providers to ensure that issues relating to move on accommodation can be discussed and resolved directly between providers and partners.

It is recommended that the Steering Committee continue to meet regularly with representation from Focus Ireland, RIS and Keltoi. Although RIS are responsible for liaising with other providers it is recommended that these providers should also be directly involved in the Steering Committee in some way (e.g. by attending a meeting once a year).

- **Programme Content**

It is recommended that the programme content continues to be regularly reviewed (e.g. at six monthly intervals) to ensure that (a) the programme content does not overlap between partners and (b) it continues to meet the needs of clients.

In the short term it is recommended that the Steering Committee, in consultation with Soilse, examines the comments made by staff and clients about the intensity of the programme (particularly in relation to the start and end of the programme).

It is recommended that staff examine the possibility of adding more variety and interest to the group sessions where possible.

- **Measuring The Success of Step Down**

It is recommended that the programme's objectives remain the same going forward as they succinctly capture the key elements of the programme's aims.

In order to measure more specific details about the programme's success, it is recommended that a range of performance indicators are developed and it is suggested that further research is undertaken in order to develop these. It is also recommended that a study is undertaken to determine client outcomes (e.g. if a client remains drug free and is still living independently a year later) and the success of the programme in the longer term.

1.6.2 Future Direction

In relation to the future direction of the programme the following recommendations are made. If it is decided to expand Step Down in the future, it is recommended that the issues highlighted previously are addressed and resolved before any expansion takes place.

- **Expanding the Programme**

The question of whether to expand / replicate the Step Down programme elsewhere in the country should be framed within the context of the programme being a model both in terms of partnership working and provision of comprehensive services.

It is recommended that the programme should remain small, with no more than 7 to 10 clients participating at any one time. If the HSE agrees to continue to support the programme and provides additional funding for expansion, it is recommended that the programme continues in its present format for another 9 to 12 months in order to provide an opportunity for the remaining issues (particularly move on accommodation) to be resolved and for all processes and procedures to be agreed and finalised. This timescale should also enable the Steering Committee to formalise its remit.

- **Programme Duration**

It is recommended that the programme continues to be six months in duration.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Step Down Programme Overview

The Step Down programme provides a short term housing programme to enable men and women who have completed drug rehabilitation to move into appropriate housing and live independently. The programme is a partnership between Focus Ireland, Keltoi and the Rehabilitation Integration Service (RIS).

The objectives of Step Down are to:

- provide clients with a programme of support that will assist them to develop their skills and capacity in making a home for themselves;
- provide clients with accommodation as part of a programme so that they can experience managing a home;
- address issues that may have contributed to their being out of home in the past or put them at risk of being homeless again in the future; and
- support individuals in accessing move on accommodation.

2.2 Evaluation Overview

In July 2007 Juniper Consulting was commissioned by Focus Ireland to undertake an evaluation of the Step Down programme. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- provide a profile and history of the programme;
- identify the views of the stakeholders on the effectiveness of the programme;
- establish the effectiveness of the service in meeting its objectives;
- highlight the strengths of the programme and make recommendations in relation to any potential improvements; and
- make recommendations on the future direction of the programme.

The evaluation was carried out through primary and desk research. Interviews were undertaken with staff from Step Down's three partner agencies and with 10 of the programme's current and former clients. Information relating to the profile of clients (Chapter 5) was carried out through a review of information held by Focus Ireland. Organisational reports and documents relating to Step Down were also reviewed, as were relevant policy documents.

2.3 Report Format

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Chapter 3 Context - a review of the strategic and policy context relating to homelessness and drug abuse.

Chapter 4 Step Down Programme – information about the rationale for Step Down, the programme content and how the programme is managed and delivered.

Chapter 5 Step Down Client Overview – information about the programme's clients.

Chapter 6 Consultation Findings – the findings of the interviews undertaken with Step Down staff and clients.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations.

3. CONTEXT

This chapter provides a high level overview of homelessness and drug abuse in Ireland and discusses the strategies and policies relating to these areas. The contribution of the Step Down programme in meeting the aims and objectives of these strategies and policies is also discussed.

3.1 Homelessness

Definition of Homelessness

The Housing Act, 1988, states that a person shall be regarded by a housing authority as being homeless if:

- (a) there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of; or
- (b) he is living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a); and

he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources.

The European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) has developed a European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). This typology classifies people who are homeless according to their living situation. Four conceptual categories are used:

- *roofless* (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough);
- *houseless* (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter);
- living in *insecure housing* (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence); and
- living in *inadequate housing* (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding).

It is estimated that there are at least 5,000 people homeless in Ireland at any one time¹. Many are based in Dublin and the Homeless Agency's 2005 *Counted In* survey found that the total homeless population in Dublin was 2,015 individuals. This comprised 1,361 households of which 77 per cent were single people. Although this figure represented a 19 per cent decrease on the results of a similar survey in 2002, it is acknowledged that homelessness in Dublin and the rest of Ireland is still a significant issue due to the high number of people that remain homeless.

¹ Source: www.makeroom.ie

3.1.1 Strategic and Policy Context

The Government's homelessness strategy, *An Integrated Strategy*, was launched in 2000. This was followed in 2001 by the *Youth Homeless Strategy* and in 2002 by the *Homeless Preventative Strategy*. Although the timeframe of these strategies has now expired a new strategy is expected before the end of 2007.

An Integrated Strategy introduced some key changes to the way services for people who experience homelessness are delivered, namely that:

- services would focus less on emergency responses and more on moving people out of homelessness and preventing homelessness;
- local authorities would be responsible for meeting the accommodation and housing needs of people who are homeless, while the Health Service Executive (HSE) would be responsible for meeting their health and care needs. The agencies are jointly responsible for ensuring that these services are delivered in a coordinated way; and
- every local authority is required to agree an action plan on homelessness, in partnership with the HSE and relevant voluntary and statutory organisations in their area.

The Homeless Agency Partnership was established in Dublin as a result of the *Integrated Strategy* and in response to the higher levels of homelessness experienced in the city than elsewhere in Ireland at the time. The partnership comprises of the four Dublin local authorities and statutory and voluntary sector agencies. It is responsible for the implementation of the Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness and for developing and delivering services for people who experience homelessness. The Agency's current action plan *A Key to the Door* outlines the vision of "*eliminating long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough by 2010*". The action plan sets out three main aims, which are:

- putting in place initiatives to prevent people from becoming homeless;
- ensuring that those people who do experience homelessness are given high quality support to address their needs and to move them out of homelessness as soon as possible; and
- ensuring that there are appropriate housing options for people moving out of homelessness.

The action plan recognises that there have been marked improvements in the quality of services for people experiencing homelessness and that the sector has developed a stronger focus on supporting people to move out of homelessness. There is therefore a change of emphasis in the action plan from providing services to people who are homeless, to moving people out of homelessness and into long-term housing, with whatever supports they require to maintain their homes. The action plan also notes that the solution to homelessness "*is not only housing, but the appropriate short-term intervention and long-term support to ensure they can maintain their homes in the future*".

Despite the advances that have been made in homeless service provision and the change in focus to moving people out of homelessness, one of the main issues affecting people who experience homelessness is actually accessing suitable long-term accommodation. Focus Ireland's 2010 strategy outlines that "*the fundamental problem of insufficient supply of affordable, good quality and secure long-term*

accommodation remains". The MakeRoom campaign also highlights that *"it is practically impossible to get decent accommodation in the private rented sector with the rent supplement limits set by Government, especially for single people"...and that..."local authority allocations to single people are also very low"*.

The Step Down programme, with its focus on providing accommodation and helping clients to live independently, therefore contributes to Government and Homeless Agency's aims of *"moving people out of homelessness"* and providing *"high quality support to address their needs"*. However, as will be discussed later in this report, the problem highlighted by Focus Ireland and MakeRoom of accessing suitable long-term accommodation is one which has also impacted the Step Down programme.

3.2 Drugs and Drug Abuse

The first survey relating to drug use among the general population in Ireland was carried out in 2002/2003 by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD). Results showed that almost one-in-five respondents reported ever taking an illegal drug, with cannabis cited as the most commonly used drug.

More recently a study carried out by NACD in relation to drug use among the homeless population showed much higher drug usage². Almost three-quarters of the sample reported lifetime use of an illicit drug and 43 per cent were currently using cannabis. Dublin had the highest percentage of current illicit drug users (59 per cent); this compared to an average of 52 per cent across the sample.

3.2.1 Strategic and Policy Context

Ireland's seven year *National Drugs Strategy* was launched in May 2001 with the aim of *"significantly reducing the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs"*. The strategy aimed to deliver this through four inter-connected pillars dealing with:

- supply reduction;
- prevention (including education and awareness);
- treatment (including rehabilitation and risk reduction); and
- research.

In 2005 a mid-term review of the strategy was undertaken and it highlighted a number of issues, particularly in relation to rehabilitation, that are contextually relevant to the Step Down programme, namely that:

- rehabilitation services need to be tailored to meet the client's needs and to flow seamlessly from treatment, as part of the continuum of care;
- aftercare was seen as a key gap in terms of access to employment, sheltered and appropriate housing and relapse prevention, and to break the cycle of drug dependence; and

² National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD). *Drug Use Among the Homeless Population in Ireland* (2005)

- that there is a need for more rehabilitation services focussing on general life skills, as well as vocational opportunities.

The review also highlighted the need for a more comprehensive and inter-linked approach to rehabilitation and recommended that rehabilitation be made the fifth pillar of the *National Drugs Strategy*. Following the review a Working Group was set up to examine rehabilitation and its report was published in May 2007. Among the findings of the Group was that:

- rehabilitation can only be delivered effectively through an inter-agency approach;
- a “seamless continuum of care” is desirable;
- the lack of suitable housing is one of the main barriers to rehabilitation; and
- if housing is not addressed adequately, this increases the likelihood of relapse following rehabilitation.

In relation to housing the Working Group’s recommendations included the following:

- that the specific issues in relation to problem drug users of accessing emergency, transitional and long term accommodation should be examined with a view to putting in place, at a local level, the inter-agency procedures necessary to facilitate recovering drug users in accessing appropriate accommodation and the services necessary to ensure that tenancies are maintained;
- dedicated supported accommodation should be provided to cater for those who have difficulties with an independent living environment; and
- the provision of transitional/half-way housing for recovering drug-users should continue to be increased.

The Step Down programme contributes significantly towards achieving the issues highlighted by the Working Group and the Review of the *National Drugs Strategy* in that:

- an inter-linked approach to rehabilitation is provided by bringing together the services and expertise of the programme’s three partners, to provide a “seamless” service;
- it provides a service that is tailored to meet the needs of the client;
- dedicated accommodation is provided to clients which is supported by a programme that aims to provide the life skills needed to enable independent living and maintain tenancies; and
- clients are provided with aftercare from Keltoi and follow up support from RIS.

4. STEP DOWN PROGRAMME

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides information about the rationale for establishing the Step Down programme, the programme's content and how the programme is managed and delivered. The programme is a partnership between Focus Ireland, Keltoi and RIS who work in partnership to deliver the programme. An overview of the work of each partner is set out below.

Focus Ireland is a national voluntary organisation working to prevent people becoming, remaining or returning to homelessness through the provision of quality services, supported housing, research and advocacy. Founded in 1985, Focus Ireland works with single adults, families and young people, believing that everyone has a right to a place they can call home which is safe, secure, affordable and appropriate to their needs.

The **Rehabilitation Integration Service (RIS)** was established by the HSE in 2000 to develop a co-ordinated and integrated response to individuals seeking to progress out of problem drug use. The service assists individuals by recognising that rehabilitation is a process not an event. RIS assess, plan, broker and provide linkage for the client in line with their own aspirations, and meet and work with clients at all stages in their drug use. The service assists in accessing rehabilitation programmes, training, education, employment, housing, counselling and support services. Individuals are referred to RIS through a variety of sources (e.g. doctor, probation and social workers) or are self-referred. RIS work with clients for a two year period, which can involve a drug detoxification programme and attendance at a residential drug rehabilitation unit (such as Keltoi).

Keltoi, based at St Mary's Hospital in the Phoenix Park, is a HSE residential therapeutic rehabilitation facility designed to meet the needs of former drug-users. The Keltoi model uses an innovative systematic approach whereby an environment is created in which clients can enhance their living skills. An outcomes evaluation study has been completed on the Keltoi programme. This shows that 51% of respondents have been alcohol and drug-free between one to three years post-completion of the residential component of the programme. There are currently eight beds available and clients reside at the unit for a period of eight weeks.

4.2 Rationale for Step Down

The need for a programme like Step Down was first recognised in 2004 by RIS and Keltoi when it was identified that some people who had taken part in drug rehabilitation at Keltoi did not have a secure and safe living environment to return to. As a result they were likely to relapse and use drugs again within a short period of time. It was also identified that some people were not ready to return immediately to independent living and that they needed accommodation and support in preparing to do so. While Keltoi had previously referred clients to the already existing Focus Ireland transition programme, it was felt that this 9 month programme was too intensive for clients who had already completed the Keltoi rehabilitation programme and had access to significant aftercare support. It was also felt by

Keltoi and RIS that clients would benefit from the peer support which they would receive by being involved in a programme that was totally drug free and where everyone had a similar experience.

Following an approach by the HSE, Focus Ireland became involved in discussions to develop a programme. A housing needs assessment was also undertaken at this stage with a small selection of Keltoi residents. This revealed that homelessness had been experienced by two-thirds of the respondents and that all but one had experienced difficulties in sustaining accommodation. All also identified a need for a programme in order to assist them to “step down”.

During a period of approximately 12 months the programme was developed. This involved reviewing and adopting suitable policies and procedures, outlining the role and responsibilities of each partner, developing criteria for acceptance onto the programme and preparing the content of the programme. Funding was also secured through the HSE for a two year pilot programme. It was agreed that accommodation for Step Down would be provided by Focus Ireland at their George’s Hill site (Dublin 7) and it was intended that a maximum of seven units of accommodation would be available at any one time³.

The Step Down programme was launched in September 2005 with the following aims and objectives:

Aim

To provide a short term housing programme (lasting six months) to enable men and women who have completed drug rehabilitation to move into appropriate housing and live independently in a supported environment. Focus Ireland, Keltoi and RIS will work in partnership to provide a seamless service to the client.

Objectives:

- to provide clients with a programme of support that will assist them to develop their skills and capacity in making a home for themselves;
- to provide clients with accommodation as part of a programme so that they can experience managing a home;
- to address issues that may have contributed to their being out of home in the past or put them at risk of being homeless again in the future; and
- to support individuals in accessing move on accommodation.

4.3 Step Down Overview

The following sections provide an overview of how the Step Down programme operates. Prior to any involvement in the programme, a person will have been referred to RIS, who will in turn have referred them to Keltoi.

³ Accommodation in September 2005 began with three units and gradually built up to seven units as apartments became available.

4.3.1 Joining Step Down

During a person's stay at Keltoi, Keltoi staff identify and nominate those that may be suitable for Step Down. There are three types of people who may participate:

- residents from Keltoi who are homeless and registered as such with the Homeless Persons Unit;
- residents who have a history of homelessness; and
- residents who would be putting themselves at relapse risk should they return to the accommodation they occupied previous to their detoxification and rehabilitation stay.

If a resident meets the above criteria, Keltoi will nominate them for the programme. Following discussions with RIS, RIS will then make a referral to Focus Ireland, usually during the fourth week of the person's stay at Keltoi. This involves RIS staff completing a referral form and the resident completing an application form. An assessment meeting is then held between the resident and Keltoi and Focus Ireland staff. During the meeting residents are provided with information about the programme and a range of topics are discussed, including their situation and needs, and the expectations of the programme. Subject to a successful outcome an offer will be made to join Step Down.

During the final two weeks of their stay at Keltoi residents visit George's Hill on two occasions to familiarise themselves with the programme, the local area and to start establishing a relationship with their Focus Ireland key worker. It is hoped that by doing so they are in a better position to make an informed decision as to whether the programme is right for them. A handover meeting then takes place in the final week of their stay in Keltoi. This is attended by the individual, staff from the programme's partners and any other relevant professionals (e.g. Probation Service). Once their rehabilitation programme at Keltoi is complete residents move into their accommodation at George's Hill directly from Keltoi.

4.3.2 Programme Content

During the six months of the Step Down programme clients⁴ are involved in an extensive programme of support and activities.

Support

Each client:

- is allocated a **Focus Ireland key worker** who they meet with individually each week. The aim of the meeting is to support clients with any personal and social needs that they may be experiencing. An apartment check is also carried at this time;
- continues to meet with their **RIS case worker** on a regular basis (usually fortnightly);
- is encouraged to attend an **aftercare** session one evening a week at **Keltoi** and also to meet with their Keltoi key worker; and

⁴ The term client is used from this point onwards instead of resident

- attends a **monthly review** meeting with their Focus Ireland key worker and RIS officer. These meetings follow a set format and cover topics around settling into George's Hill, group sessions, meetings with key workers, feedback and goal setting.

Activities

Each client:

- attends an appropriate **day-time programme** on a full time basis during weekdays. This is organised in advance of their participation on the programme by RIS. The day programme is usually undertaken at Soilse or Coolmine. Some clients also attend a Community Employment (CE) scheme through FÁS;
- attends **two facilitated group sessions** each week at George's Hill⁵. These sessions aim to assist educational and personal development as well as developing home management skills for independent living. The programme of sessions has evolved over time and is currently based around six modules consisting of: practical skills, education, stress management, housing, communication and health care.

Accommodation

Each client is provided with a self-contained apartment at George's Hill for the duration of the programme. A licence agreement is signed with Focus Ireland, and clients are responsible for the payment of rent and other household services such as electricity and telephone supplies.

Move On Accommodation

Towards the end of the programme clients are assisted by Focus Ireland key workers to find independent accommodation to move to at the end of the six month programme. This is usually privately rented accommodation or in some situations (where Focus Ireland staff have assessed the client and feel that they are not ready for independent living) supported accommodation. A Tenancy Support worker is provided to each client by Focus Ireland for up to six months after they leave George's Hill (should they request this support). RIS also continue to work with clients for another year after they have finished the Step Down programme.

4.4 Step Down - Management

As outlined previously Step Down is a partnership between Focus Ireland, Keltoi and RIS. The three agencies work in partnership to deliver the programme with the aim of providing a "seamless" service to clients.

Figure 4.1 illustrates how the programme is managed and provides details of the staff involved in delivering the programme. Each partner has its own staff that are dedicated to Step Down, however they work closely with each other on a day to day basis to deliver the programme for clients. Each partner also has a clear remit:

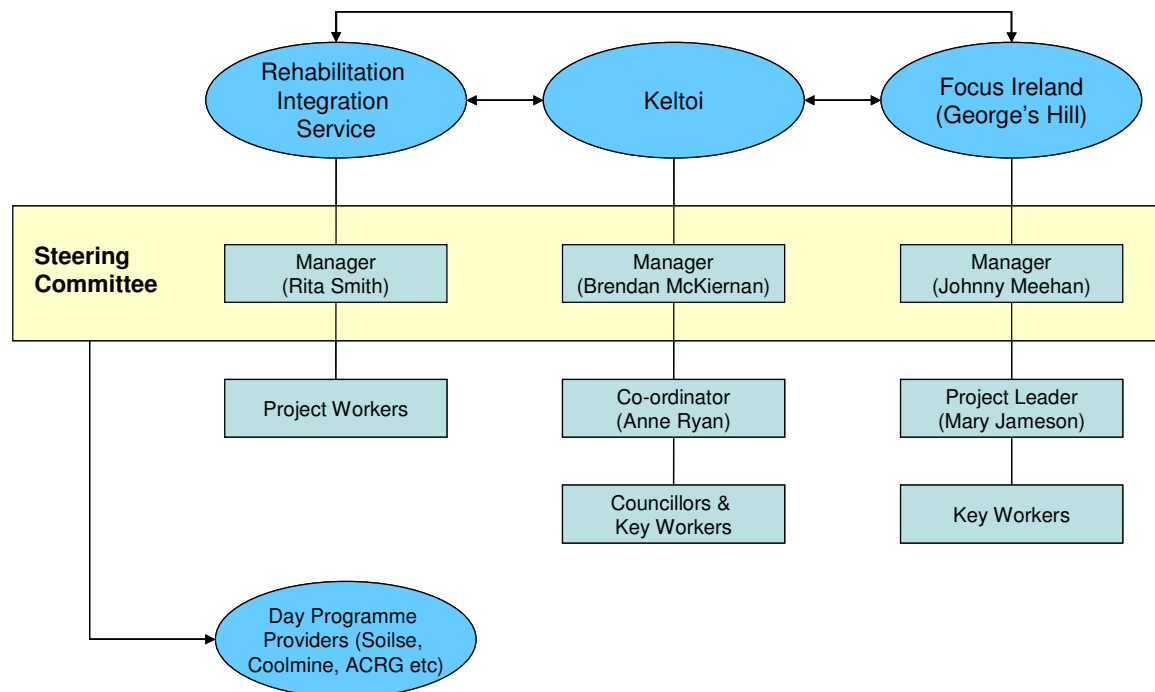
- **Keltoi** – provide a drug rehabilitation service and nominate residents to take part in Step Down. They subsequently provide an aftercare service through group sessions at Keltoi and a case worker;

⁵ During the last month clients attend just one facilitated group session a week

- **RIS** – make referrals to Step Down based upon Keltoi's nominations, arrange for clients to attend a day programme, and attend a client's monthly review meetings. They also maintain regular contact with the client and work with them for a year after they have completed the programme; and
- **Focus Ireland** – provide clients with accommodation at George's Hill, develop skills for independent living through group sessions and key worker support, and assist clients to find move on accommodation at the end of the programme.

A Steering Committee (formed in May 2007) aims to bring the three partners together at a management level every three to four months. The Steering Committee has met on one occasion so far and while its remit is to be finalised, it will broadly be to review policies and procedures, resolve issues and to develop awareness of the programme. RIS, on behalf of the Steering Committee, are responsible for liaising with the programme's other providers (e.g. Soilse).

Figure 4.1
Step Down – Management Structure (as of August 2007)



Note: The above diagram outlines the core management structure for the programme. There are more senior management levels within each partner organisation and additional support structures are also involved in delivering the programme (e.g. HR, IT and maintenance), However, for illustrative purposes, only details of the core staff involved in delivering the programme have been provided.

5. STEP DOWN CLIENT OVERVIEW

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides information about Step Down's clients. Information about the profile of clients is presented (e.g. gender, age, qualifications, income and homelessness history) along with details about their level of participation and engagement with the programme. The final section provides information about the current situation of clients who have completed the programme.

5.2 Profile

As of August 2007, 15 clients had taken part in the Step Down programme. Of these 12 had completed the programme and three had left before the end of the six months. Seven clients are currently participating in the programme.

5.2.1 Gender and Age

Of Step Down's 22 clients, 7 (32 per cent) are female and 15 (68 per cent) are male. The youngest client is aged 19 and the oldest 38. Table 5.1 details the gender and age range of clients and shows that 15 of the 22 clients (68 per cent) are aged 26-40 and of these 11 are male.

Table 5.1
Gender and Age Range

	Male	Female	Total
18 – 25	3	3	6
26 – 40	11	4	15
Unknown	1	0	1
Total	15	7	22

5.2.2 Place of Origin

Table 5.2 provides details of where the programme's clients are from. Fifteen (68 per cent) are from Ireland, one from an EU country and six are from other countries or their place of origin is unknown.

Table 5.2
Place of Origin by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Ireland	10	5	15
EU	1	0	1
Other Country	2	0	2
Unknown	2	2	4
Total	15	7	22

5.2.3 Household Type

Table 5.3 outlines the household type of each client. The majority of clients are single (n=18), with only one male advising that he is part of a couple with children. Seven clients advised that they have children, of these six are male and one is female. All have one child each, apart from one male who has three children. All clients with children are aged 26-40.

Table 5.3
Household Type by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Single	13	5	18
Couple, with children	1	0	1
Unknown	1	2	3
Total	15	7	22

5.2.4 Qualifications

The highest qualification held by clients varies, with seven having no formal educational qualifications and four having a Leaving Certificate. Broadly females have better educational attainment levels as only one female client has no qualifications compared to six males. In addition three clients advised they have a FÁS qualification, three an apprenticeship and two a VEC qualification.

The age at which clients left school also varies. Four clients left school between the ages of 13 and 14, 12 between the ages of 15 and 16, while only three stayed at school until they were 17 or 18.

Table 5.4
Highest Qualifications by Gender and Age

	No formal qualifications	Inter/Junior Cert.	Leaving Cert.	Certificate*	Total
Male 18–25	1	2	0	0	3
Male 26–40	5	1	2	1	9
Male Total	6	3	2	1	12
Female 18–25	1	0	2	0	3
Female 26–40	0	3	0	1	4
Female Total	1	3	2	1	7
Total	7	6	4	2	19

Note: Details unknown for 3 male clients. * No details provided as to the type of certificate

5.2.5 Income Source

Income sources vary between clients, with six different types of allowance and benefit claimed. The most common is Unemployment Benefit (n=6) followed by Disability Allowance (n=4).

Table 5.5

Income Source

	Total
Community Employment	1
Disability Allowance	4
Disability Benefit	2
One Parent Family Payment	1
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1
Unemployment Assistance	3
Unemployment Benefit	6
Unknown	4
Total	22

5.2.6 Addiction and Medical History

All 22 clients had a history of serious drug and alcohol addiction issues. Prior to attending Keltoi, 20 were involved in poly drug use⁶ with heroin being their primary drug of choice. The remaining two clients identified alcohol as their main drug of choice with heroin following closely behind. Three male clients are recorded as having a mental health illness and three advised that they have a disability.

5.2.7 Homelessness History

The length of time that clients had been homeless before participating in the Step Down programme varies. Six of the 15 males spent less than a year homeless, while a further four were homeless for over five years. Less information is available about the programme's female clients (three of the seven female clients' details are unknown), however three spent less than a year homeless before joining the programme.

Table 5.6

Length of Time Homeless by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
< 6 months	4	2	6
7 – 12 months	2	1	3
1-2 years	1	0	1
2 – 5 years	3	1	4
>5 years	4	0	4
Unknown	1	3	4
Total	15	7	22

⁶ The use of two or more drugs

5.3 Participation and Engagement in Step Down

5.3.1 Former Clients

- **Engagement**

As noted above, 12 clients have successfully completed the programme to date. In addition three clients (all male) were asked to leave (i.e. were served a notice to vacate) before the end of the programme. The reasons for this were as follows:

- Client 1: This client was involved in a serious altercation which resulted in him being on a life support machine. Following his release from hospital he began to use heroin, and although support was offered he decided to continue to use drugs. A notice to vacate was served 25 days prior to the end of the programme due to continued drug use. The client moved to a hostel;
- Client 2: This client relapsed on heroin shortly after beginning the programme. After engaging with staff he made a conscious decision to enter a methadone programme. A notice to vacate was served after seven weeks and the client returned to the family home. He is still in contact with RIS; and
- Client 3: This client did not engage with the programme and relapsed twice while at George's Hill. A notice to vacate was served two months prior to the end of the programme and the client returned to the family home.

- **Day Programme**

Of the 15 former clients who took part in Step-Down (including the three that did not complete the programme), 13 attended Soilse, one attended Coolmine and one worked in a museum as part of an employment scheme organised by RIS.

- **Relapses**

Of the 12 clients who have successfully completed Step Down, three relapsed during the programme. Of these, two were females and one was male. All three clients engaged with Focus Ireland and Keltoi and as a result continued to be drug-free for the remainder of the programme.

5.3.2 Current Clients

- **Engagement**

All except one of the seven clients are actively engaged in the programme.

- **Day Programme**

Four clients are attending Soilse, two are attending Coolmine and one is attending a Community Education programme.

- **Relapses**

Of the seven current clients, five have remained drug free. One client relapsed with a positive reading for alcohol in the second week of the programme however he engaged with staff and since then has remained drug and alcohol free. Another female client tested positive for opiates in her fifth month of the programme, however she refuted the test results. Since then her urinalysis test results have been negative.

5.3.3 Needs Identified

A range of client needs are identified by staff during the programme and advice and support is subsequently provided where required. Table 5.7 outlines the six categories of needs identified. The most common are the Management of Drug Use (n=16), Accessing Appropriate Housing (n=14) and Managing a Tenancy (n=12).

Table 5.7

Needs Identified

	Total
Addictions	
Management of Alcohol Use	7
Management of Drug Use	16
Behaviour	
Bereavement and Loss	1
Development of Appropriate Communication Skills	2
Development of Parenting Skills	2
Development of Social Skills	3
Management of Anger	3
Management of Relationships	4
Management of Violence (physical)	2
Education	
Literacy (3Rs)	1
Training	2
Employment	
CV preparation	1
Job guidance	2
Health	
Medication Management	1
Mental Healthcare	1
Physical Healthcare	4
Life Skills	
Accessing Appropriate Housing	14
Budgeting	9
Development of Housekeeping	8
Managing a Tenancy	12
Resettlement	6

5.4 Former Clients – Current Situation⁷

Some information is available about the 12 clients who have successfully completed the Step Down programme. This information has been gathered by Focus Ireland key workers, either through direct contact with former clients (on an ad-hoc basis) or from RIS and Keltoi.

5.4.1 Current Accommodation

The following information (Table 5.8) is known about the living arrangements of former clients:

- six are living independently (50 per cent of former clients);
- two are living with a family member or partner (17 per cent); and
- four are living in transitional housing (33 per cent).

Of the six clients who are living independently, three males and one female are living in privately rented bedsits, while two males are currently travelling in Australia. One female client returned to the family home after completing Step Down, while another is living with her boyfriend. Of the four clients living in transitional housing, one male and one female are accommodated by Daisyhouse Housing Association (low support transitional), while one male is living at the YMCA and another male is living at St Catherine's Foyer (Cara Housing Association).

Table 5.8
Current Accommodation

	Male	Female	Total
Living Independently	5*	1	6
Living with Family/ Partner	0	2	2
Transitional Housing	3	1	4
Total	8	4	12

Note: * 2 males are travelling in Australia

5.4.2 Drug Free Status

It is believed by Focus Ireland staff that all former clients remain drug free at this time.

5.4.3 Employment and Education

All former clients are either in education/training, employment or are travelling.

Of those in education/training, eight (five males and three females) are attending full time courses, such as social studies, community work, theatre studies and sports coaching. One male is undertaking an apprenticeship course (security systems).

One female is currently working and attending a course on a part-time basis. As noted above, two males are currently travelling in Australia.

⁷ As of September 2007

Table 5.9
Current Employment and Education

	Male	Female	Total
In Education/ Training Full Time	6	3	9
Working/ Education PT	0	1	1
Travelling (Australia)	2	0	2
Total	8	4	12

5.5 Summary

This chapter has provided information about Step Down's clients in relation to their profile, their level of participation and engagement in the programme and their current situation.

The programme's 22 clients come from a range of backgrounds in terms of gender, age, household type, qualifications, and homelessness history. There have been high levels of participation and engagement with 12 of the 15 former clients completing the programme and seven currently taking part. While some clients (who have or are completing the programme) have relapsed, all have engaged with staff and continue to remain drug-free.

Half of the programme's 12 former clients are living independently with a further two living with family or partners. It is believed that all former clients remain drug free at this time and all are either in education/training, employment or are travelling.

6. CONSULTATION FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings of the consultations undertaken with Step Down's staff and clients. The consultations with staff explored their experiences, their views on the programme's strengths, issues that have arisen and their views on how the programme can be developed in the future. Clients were also asked about their experiences, particularly in relation to each of the programme's key elements, namely, joining the programme, moving to George's Hill, the content of the programme and moving on to new accommodation.

6.2 Staff Consultations

A range of interviews were conducted with staff involved in establishing and running the Step Down Programme⁸. The following sections highlight the main points raised during the interviews.

6.2.1 Overall Experience

Staff were very positive about their experiences of the Step Down programme. Those interviewed advised that there is a good working relationship between all involved. There is good communication between staff and a respect for each of the partner's contribution to the programme. The relationship between partners was described as "open and transparent" and "flexible". It was noted that while there are some challenges for the programme, there is a willingness among staff to openly discuss the issues and work towards resolutions.

All staff felt that they were achieving the programme's aim of providing a "seamless service" to clients, however it was accepted that this has not been the case when it comes to finding move on accommodation (see Section 6.2.3).

It was also noted that relationships between staff and clients is very good, a view as reflected by clients themselves (see Section 6.3.4).

6.2.2 Programme Strengths

Staff felt that the Step Down programme has a number of strengths. These are that:

- the programme successfully brings together the expertise of the homeless, housing and drug rehabilitation sectors;
- the programme has a high success rate with the majority of clients remaining drug-free and moving on to independent living;
- the high level of support (wrap around care) provided to each client ensures that they have the best possible opportunity to succeed in remaining drug-free and living independently;
- relationships between all involved (partners, staff and clients) have been very good; and

⁸ Appendix I provides details of those consulted

- clients are very satisfied with the programme (see Section 6.3.1).

6.2.3 Issues Arising

Although the Step Down programme has a number of strengths, some issues have arisen during the last two years which have been identified by staff. In highlighting these issues, it is recognised that this was a pilot programme and that there will inevitably be issues when establishing any new initiative. It is also recognised that the partners have made considerable efforts to discuss and find solutions to these issues and that most have now been resolved or are currently being addressed. The main issues highlighted are discussed below.

- **Move On Accommodation**

This issue relates to the objective of supporting clients in accessing move on accommodation at the end of their six months stay at George's Hill. It is an issue that has existed since the programme was set up and it is still relevant.

The original intention of Step Down was that clients would be able to live independently at the end of six months and move to accommodation such as a privately rented flat or Dublin City Council (DCC) housing. As highlighted in Chapter 3 there are many issues with housing in Dublin, and as a result clients often have limited options due to their background, financial support and/or accommodation available. The last few months of the Step Down programme can therefore be a challenging and stressful time both for clients and staff that are trying to support them in finding accommodation.

On a number of occasions clients have stayed longer than six months in George's Hill due to difficulties in finding accommodation; one client stayed an additional 47 days, while another stayed 45 days (see Appendix II). As highlighted in the previous chapter, four clients have moved to transitional housing as they felt they were not ready to live independently. In addition, because of difficulties in finding accommodation two clients approached a provider involved in the programme, who subsequently made referrals on their behalf to sheltered accommodation.

The move on accommodation issue is one that has been discussed on several occasions by the programme's partners, most recently at a Steering Committee meeting in May 2007. The outcome of the discussions was that:

- Focus Ireland staff are best placed to make decisions about move on accommodation for clients and this position should be reinforced;
- There is a need to continue to lobby and advocate, through the Steering Committee, DCC and government for better housing options, especially for those who are single. The primary issue in relation to move on accommodation is the lack of affordable, good quality housing especially for single people, and this is not just specific to the Step Down Programme (see the Homeless Agency's Evaluations of Transitional Housing).
- Focus Ireland would examine additional move on accommodation options for clients (e.g. the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)). It was also acknowledged that some clients, in exceptional circumstances, may not be ready for independent living after six months and if this occurs alternative accommodation options will be examined;

- Step Down would be classified as a specialised programme for people who have taken part in drug rehabilitation thus allowing clients to be referred to a transitional programme where the need arises, i.e. where they have been assessed as requiring further support to develop skills required to live independently; and
- There may be clients who require supported housing for an indefinite period and this type of accommodation is also in very short supply.

- **Nominations and Referrals**

As outlined in Section 4.3.1, nominations and referrals to Step Down are made by Keltoi and RIS during the first few weeks of a person's stay at Keltoi. It was pointed out during the consultations with staff that Keltoi nominates a resident for Step Down after only knowing them for a few weeks. It was thus suggested that Keltoi staff may not be familiar enough with the person after such a short period to make an appropriate nomination. A comment was also made that there have been occasions when RIS staff have made a referral to Step Down (following nomination by Keltoi) without being familiar with the resident. However it was highlighted that this has now since changed and RIS staff who have an established relationship with the resident must be involved in making a referral.

In making these comments staff however recognised that the majority of people referred have been suitable candidates for the programme, but some staff suggested that more discussion about nomination and referral processes and procedures would be beneficial.

Another issue that arose relates to the number of nominations made to Step Down. This has generally been sufficient, however earlier this year Keltoi experienced difficulties as a number of their clients relapsed and therefore had to leave their rehabilitation programme. This meant that Keltoi were not able to make enough nominations to Step Down. Keltoi have advised that this was an unusual occurrence and one that should not be repeated.

- **Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities**

When the Step Down programme was established, processes and procedures were developed to guide the operation of the programme. During the course of the consultations it was mentioned that changes made to the programme may not necessarily have been documented in the policies and procedures. As a result this led on occasions to differing perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of each partner in delivering the programme. It was suggested that more clarity is needed around the roles and responsibilities of partners.

6.2.4 Future Developments

Through the course of the consultations a number of suggestions were made about how the programme could be developed in the future. The suggestions related to the following areas:

- **Programme Content and Timetable**

It was emphasised by several staff that there is a need to review the programme regularly to ensure that there is no overlap between the services provided by partners and the day programme providers. It was also recognised that client

feedback is important and valuable and that the programme must continue to respond to their needs.

Several comments were made about the intensity of the programme's content which was noted as being very demanding on clients. One consultee suggested that there could possibly be less individual sessions for clients, while another suggested that the timetable of activities could be gradually built up over two to three weeks at the beginning of the programme. It was also noted by several staff that currently all of the programme's activities come to an end at the same time (after six months) and that this can add to the stress clients are already experiencing when trying to find accommodation. The suggestion was therefore that towards the end of the six months the cessation of activities would be staggered.

- **Programme Duration**

The issue of the programme's duration has been debated several times by staff, with some suggestions being made that the programme could be longer, possibly nine months in duration. However the general consensus from those that were consulted was that a six month programme is sufficient.

- **Expanding the Programme**

The issue of how best to expand the Step Down programme was also discussed during the consultations. The general view was that the programme should remain small, with no more than 7 to 10 clients participating at any one time. It was felt that this small number would ensure the high level of individual support that each client currently receives would be maintained. With regards to expanding the programme, consultees felt that this would be best done by replicating the Step Down model in other locations, either in Dublin or further afield. This would however be dependent on similar services (as provided by the programme's current partners) being available.

- **Procedures**

It was pointed out during the consultations that each partner organisation has different forms and assessment methods that are used for the Step Down programme. It was suggested that the current arrangements could be streamlined by developing a generic set of forms and assessment methods for the programme, therefore avoiding duplication of effort. It was also noted that the Homeless Agency are introducing a holistic needs assessment form which will be used by the programme from next year. This form will therefore assist with the streamlining of current forms and assessment methods.

- **Measuring The Success of Step Down**

The views on how best to measure the success of Step Down were also sought from staff. There was general agreement that the following indicators would be a good basis to start from, however it was suggested that more research should be carried out to develop the indicators further. The indicators discussed were that clients would:

- not have relapsed during the programme;
- be drug free at the end the programme;
- have moved on to appropriate accommodation;

- be able to manage a budget;
- be in good emotional, mental and physical health;
- have good interaction and socialisation skills; and
- be involved in a training/education programme or in employment.

It was also suggested that it would be worth undertaking research that studies clients before, during and after their involvement in Step Down (e.g. from their first contact to last contact with RIS) in order to best assess clients' outcomes over a longer period. Keltoi has recently completed a similar study which analyses the outcomes of their former residents⁹.

6.3 Client Consultations

In addition to the staff consultations, interviews were also carried out with Step Down's clients. The purpose of the interviews was to gather their views of the programme, particularly in relation to each of the key elements, namely, joining the programme, moving to George's Hill, the content of the programme and moving on to new accommodation.

Client names have not been used in the following sections in order to ensure confidentiality. Ten interviews were carried out, eight with former and two with current clients. Of the ten, seven clients were male and three were female.

6.3.1 Overall Experiences

Clients were very positive about their experiences of the Step Down programme. All believed that it had been a worthwhile undertaking and the right decision to participate. Some clients commented that the programme had given them an opportunity to start afresh and to get back to independent living. Others said they appreciated the supported and safe environment of George's Hill. One client remarked: "*when I look back now it did me the world of good, I'm a different person to what I was when I came to Dublin*".

6.3.2 Joining Step Down

At the start of the interview, clients were asked about how they had heard about Step Down, their reasons for applying and their expectations of the programme. They were also asked about the process of applying to the programme.

Clients primarily heard about Step Down directly from Keltoi staff, but a few had heard about it from people who were attending after-care at Keltoi. One had also known someone that had previously taken part in the programme.

There were various reasons given by clients for applying to Step Down. Some said they were homeless, had nowhere to go and needed somewhere to live, while others advised that they wanted help to live independently again. For others they applied to have a "*safe base to operate from*" or because they felt that they would be safer at George's Hill than living on their own. Clients' expectations of the programme also varied. Some wanted to learn how to live independently again, others wanted practical support (e.g. managing bills and money) and some wanted more emotional help (such as confidence building and interacting with other people).

⁹ Completed in October 2007

The programme and what is involved appears to have been explained well to clients both at the interview stage and during visits to George's Hill. Clients explained how they were shown apartments, observed group sessions, met key workers and had rules and policies explained to them. Clients also stated that they found the visits helpful and were clear about what the programme involved. No clients had any issues around the application process and only one commented that there had been "a lot of form filling and red tape".

Overall clients felt that the programme was right for them and had no serious concerns before moving to George's Hill. Comments made at this stage of the interview included the following:

"I was in a place, where I was terrified that anything would set me off...but very quickly I realised that it would be OK"

"With George's Hill your kids are allowed to stay and I was really happy with that ...my son could stay overnight and I could build the relationship with him...because through drug addition the relationship really broke down"

"I knew it would be good for me 'cause the busyness would keep me active".

6.3.3 Experiences of Moving to George's Hill

There were mixed experiences for clients when moving from Keltoi to George's Hill. Some advised that it only took them a short while to settle in (i.e. 2-3 weeks) while for others it took much longer; one client advised it had taken him two months. Another said that "I didn't settle at all the whole six months cause I new I had to move".

Knowing other Keltoi residents that had moved (or were moving) to George's Hill seems to have helped some clients cope with the move, but others advised that they were lonely during the initial few weeks. Clients also commented that the experience was "strange" and that they were "nervous and didn't know what to expect". The following comments aim to illustrate this point:

"It was a bit strange, it was a bit hard at the start 'cause when you're in treatment... you're like wrapped up in cotton wool, you've people around you 24/7, then when you come out, you're put into a room, a place on your own, it's a bit strange, it's a bit lonely...but there's people in here, staff you can talk to, you can talk to anyone, you know other people from Keltoi...'cause it does get lonely after being in treatment for two months"

"After getting out of treatment and being around people all the time ...and then getting your apartment... and you know being on my own...sort of what do I do now?, you know, it was just a bit lonely... you just have to do it...but it took a while to settle in"

"...settling into an apartment, especially after Keltoi where you're around people 24/7...to be landed in an apartment and it's yours, and there's nobody there...that took a while to get used to".

Clients were asked if there was anything that could have been done to make it less lonely for them. None of those asked made any suggestions and some felt that it was good, or even necessary to experience these feeling:

Interviewer: *Could they do anything to make it less lonely?*

Client Response: *"I don't think you could...it is good to feel that, you have to start living your life...you have to stick with the loneliness 'cause if you can't stick with that you're going to go back down"* (i.e. on drugs).

6.3.4 Programme

The next section of the interview asked clients about their overall experiences of Step Down and the key elements of the programme i.e. key worker support, group sessions and the day programme.

Overall Experiences

Clients described their initial experiences of the Step Down programme as being *"intensive"*, *"very hard"* and *"tiring"*. However when they got used to the routine of the programme most clients said that *"it got easier"* and *"became more manageable as time went on"*.

Several clients commented that although the programme was intensive they would not have changed it:

"I wouldn't change it 'cause its working for me...however...on occasion I'd have a good whinge about it, but no I wouldn't change it because its really working for me...and nothing ever has before...it was tough...but really necessary"

"In a way it was good...it kept you active, kept you away from harm"

"It's hard to get used to it, it's so busy, but you're more prepared for life, because life is stressful".

However one client commented that they felt the programme was too intense:

"Everything was kind of a rush because I was doing a day programme in Soilse, so my life was very busy for the six months I was here....Three groups a week...I thought they were too much, especially when you're doing a day programme...and you're coming into a group in George's Hill and you haven't even had time for your dinner...at the time it was too much for me".

Key Workers

Clients praised the support they had received from their key workers at George's Hill. All clients met formally with them each week and most also had informal contact every few days. Clients gave numerous examples of the support and advice they received, such as how to manage bills, timekeeping, help with application forms and opening bank accounts. Key workers also helped them to set and achieve goals in these areas.

Some clients commented that the key workers had been strict at times (usually about rule keeping) but this approach seems to have been appreciated by the clients and looking back most saw the reasons for this and realised that it had benefited them. Clients also commented on the helpfulness of the key workers, one saying that *"they were willing to help in any way that they could"*.

Group Sessions

Feedback in relation to the group sessions was more mixed. Some clients liked the music¹⁰ and relaxation sessions while others commented that they just liked being part of a group. A few clients were more critical in their comments and described the sessions as “*boring*”, “*a waste of time*” and “*repetitive*”. One client also advised that they had found it difficult to engage with the topic (as they were self-conscious) and with others attending the sessions. However, some of those that made negative comments did go on to acknowledge that the sessions had been beneficial and helpful, particularly those on housing:

“At the start I hated coming to them....but looking back now....they were beneficial”.

A number of former clients advised that they have used the skills they learnt during the group sessions since leaving the programme. Examples included meditating regularly, using the information that they had learned on tenant rights and social welfare, paying ESB bills weekly and using conflict resolution and anger management skills:

“The place I moved into, the landlord was trying to pull a fast one with the lease, and I knew, because of Step Down who I could ring”

“I learnt to pay my bills weekly through coming here...now, if I hadn’t have come here I probably wouldn’t have done it that way...I probably would have paid them in lump sums and my head would have been wrecked, but now when I get my bill I’m paying it 3 or 4 weeks in advance, so when I get it it’s down to €20”

“I’m still doing the meditation every morning and every night before I go to bed...its very good for you, you’re more relaxed”.

A number of suggestions were made about how the group sessions could be improved going forward. One client thought that there should be more creative sessions (e.g. art and music) while another thought that sessions which help with self esteem and confidence building would be useful. Other clients were less specific and just thought that the sessions could be more interesting and offer more variety.

Day Programme

All clients were positive about their experiences of the day programme. Eight had attended Soilse, one is taking part in a Community Education programme and one is attending Coolmine. A variety of activities are undertaken on these programmes including English, Maths, Communication, Health & Fitness, Computers and Addiction Studies. All of the former clients interviewed have gone on to study further and are undertaking courses such as social studies, community work, theatre studies and sports coaching.

6.3.5 Moving On

Towards the end of the interview clients were asked about their experiences of moving on from Step Down and in finding accommodation.

¹⁰ Music was originally one of the group sessions but it has since been discontinued

Five of the eight former clients advised that they were ready to move on after six months; however the rest commented that they would have liked the programme to have been longer. Some clients had also stayed a few extra weeks because of problems finding accommodation:

“(The programme) seemed very short....one of the worst things for me was housing...rushing to get somewhere for us”

“At the time I didn’t think it was long enough because coming towards the end of the time I didn’t have any accommodation”.

As these comments suggest, and as highlighted previously in Section 6.2.3, clients found that finding move on accommodation was very stressful. One client commented that they were in *“panic mode for the last month”* while another said that *“it was a stressful last month having nowhere to go”*.

It was acknowledged that Focus Ireland key workers had helped them to find accommodation, but overall they felt that they would have liked more support and re-assurances that accommodation would be found for them. One client advised that their Probation Officer, rather than Focus Ireland, had found them accommodation, while another advised that they had since moved from their original bed-sit (found through Access housing). After four months of living in the bed-sit (described as *“a filthy kip”*) they approached another provider involved in the programme and asked them if they could source transitional housing for them, which they subsequently did.

The final point, which was raised by two clients, related to additional pressures they experienced at the end of the six months. They advised that this was caused not only by accommodation issues but because their day programme, and individual and group sessions, also came to an end at the same time. One of the clients commented that *“it all comes together at the end...finishing here, finishing Soilse, and finding somewhere to live...it all happens at the one time...it was an awful lot of pressure”*.

6.4 Summary

The consultations undertaken have revealed that the Step Down programme has been a very positive experience for both staff and clients.

Staff consultations highlighted that the programme has a number of strengths, notably the high success rate in clients remaining drug free. In addition there is a good relationship between the programme’s partners and between staff and clients. A number of issues were raised through the consultations, in particular that of move on accommodation for clients. Staff are however continuing to work together to resolve this issue.

Clients were also very positive about the programme, advising that it had met their expectations and had been a worthwhile undertaking. They also had particular praise for their key workers. Clients also highlighted a number of issues and areas where improvements could be made in the future. As with staff, move on accommodation was their main concern.

Overall the findings of the consultations suggest that Step Down has been a successful programme for both staff and clients to date.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter sets out the conclusions of the evaluation. Recommendations are made in relation to potential improvements and the programme's future direction.

7.2 Conclusions

The conclusions of the evaluation in relation to the achievement of the programme's objectives, the strengths of the programme, and the issues that have been highlighted are set out below.

7.2.1 Achievement of Objectives

The Step Down programme has the following objectives:

- to provide clients with a programme of support that will assist them to develop their skills and capacity in making a home for themselves;
- to provide clients with accommodation as part of a programme so that they can experience managing a home;
- to address issues that may have contributed to their being out of home in the past or put them at risk of being homeless again in the future; and
- to support individuals in accessing move on accommodation.

In relation to the first three objectives, the conclusion of the evaluation is that these have been successfully achieved. The objective of *supporting* access to accommodation has also been achieved, however as highlighted in the report the *sourcing* of appropriate accommodation for clients remains an issue.

In relation to the aim of providing a "seamless" service to the client, the conclusion is that this is successfully achieved throughout the majority of the programme. However, as the findings have indicated, further efforts need to be undertaken by staff in the three partner organisations in order to provide this "seamless" service when clients are being assisted in finding move on accommodation.

7.2.2 Strengths of the Programme

The Step Down programme has a number of key strengths, which have been highlighted throughout this report. These are that:

- the programme successfully brings together the expertise of the homeless, housing and drug rehabilitation sectors;
- the programme contributes strongly to Government and Homeless Agency policies, specifically the objectives of moving people out of homelessness and providing high quality support through an inter-linked approach;
- the programme has a high success rate with the majority of clients remaining drug-free and moving on to independent living;

- the high level of support (wrap around care) provided to each client ensures that they have the best possible opportunity to succeed in remaining drug-free and living independently;
- relationships between all those involved (partners, staff and clients) have been very good; and
- clients are very satisfied with the programme.

7.2.3 Issues Arising

A number of issues relating to the programme were highlighted by staff and clients during the consultations. The conclusion of the evaluation is that all of the issues raised (i.e. nominations and referral process, roles and responsibilities, procedures and programme content), with the exception of move on accommodation, are issues that can be resolved relatively easily and quickly if the programme's partners are willing to take on board the feedback from staff and clients. As considerable efforts have been made in the past to resolve issues and some of the issues highlighted are already being addressed, this should not result in any difficulties for the future development of the programme.

7.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in relation to potential improvements in the programme and its future direction.

7.3.1 Potential Improvements

In relation to the issues that have been raised during the evaluation the following recommendations are made:

- **Move On Accommodation**
 - Move on accommodation is an on-going issue for the programme and one that Focus Ireland has been trying to address since the programme began. It is also recognised that the issue is part of a wider problem of an insufficient supply of appropriate housing in Dublin and of rent supplement limits set by the Government. It is therefore recommended that Focus Ireland continues to support clients in finding accommodation by identifying all of the accommodation options available to them either for independent living or supported housing (where necessary). Additionally, there is a need to continue to lobby and advocate, through the Steering Committee, DCC and government for better housing options, especially for those who are single.
- **Nominations and Referrals**
 - It is recommended that the Steering Committee review current procedures, with a view to ensuring that (a) all staff involved are familiar with the criteria for acceptance onto the programme and (b) RIS and Keltoi staff who are familiar with a client work together to ensure that appropriate nominations and referrals are being made; and
 - The reliance on Keltoi for referrals represents an on-going risk to the programme and the levels of occupancy at George's Hill. Keltoi have advised that the situation that occurred earlier this year should not be

repeated and that they are hoping to increase the pool of possible referrals through increased bed spaces. However, in order to mitigate this risk in the future it is recommended that the Steering Committee explore a secondary referral source which could be accessed *only* should this situation occur again (see also Section 7.3.2). Keltoi would still be the primary and prioritised referral partner for the programme.

- **Roles and Responsibilities**

- It is recommended that existing documentation is reviewed and updated to reflect current policies and procedures. This will hopefully limit any future differences of opinion about roles and responsibilities and will also help with business continuity when staff changes occur in the future. It is also recommended that existing forms and assessment methods are reviewed to examine if these can be streamlined in any way;
- The evaluation has highlighted several instances of clients finding move on accommodation (usually transitional) from other providers. Although Focus Ireland staff may have assessed that a client is ready for independent living, this assessment has at times been undermined by clients contacting other providers who in turn have helped them to find transitional accommodation. Although this issue was discussed at a Steering Committee meeting earlier this year, it will be important to ensure that Focus Ireland's assessment is respected by the clients, partner organisations and other services as it is their role to help clients to access independent living arrangements. It is therefore recommended that a memorandum of understanding is developed between the programme's partners and other providers. This document should set out:
 - an agreement by providers to support the objectives of the programme, to respect assessments made, and to work with the programme's partners to assist clients;
 - procedures for providers to notify Focus Ireland if they are approached by a client directly to source them accommodation; and
 - how providers can support Focus Ireland, should the need arise, in finding appropriate accommodation for clients.

It is also recommended that a direct link is established between RIS, Focus Ireland and other providers to ensure that issues relating to move on accommodation can be discussed and resolved directly between providers and partners; and

- It is recommended that the Steering Committee continue to meet regularly with representation from Focus Ireland, RIS and Keltoi. Although RIS are responsible for liaising with other providers it is recommended that these providers should also be directly involved in the Steering Committee in some way (e.g. by attending a meeting once a year). This may help to ensure that all providers are engaged and remain supportive of the programme. It would also provide them with an opportunity to discuss any issues that might arise directly with the programme's partners.

- **Programme Content**

- It is recommended that the programme content continues to be regularly reviewed (e.g. at six monthly intervals) to ensure that (a) the programme

content does not overlap between partners and (b) it continues to meet the needs of clients;

- In the short term it is recommended that the Steering Committee, in consultation with Soilse, examines the comments made by staff and clients about the intensity of the programme (particularly in relation to the start and end of the programme). In making this recommendation it is recognised that it is important that the programme prepares clients for living independently and the challenges and stresses that they will face when they leave George's Hill; and
- In relation to the group sessions, it is acknowledged that the content of these has developed over time in response to client feedback. While it will never be possible for all clients to be satisfied with the group sessions, it is recommended that staff examine the possibility of adding more variety and interest to the sessions where possible.

- **Measuring The Success of Step Down**

It is clear from the information presented that the Step Down programme has been a success and has helped the clients who have participated in it. The success of the pilot programme has been evaluated by examining if the objectives that were set at the start of the programme have been achieved. While the objectives are quite broad, they succinctly capture the key elements of the programme's aims, and it is therefore recommended that these objectives should remain the same going forward.

In order to measure more specific details about the programme's success, it is recommended that a range of performance indicators are developed. Although some possible indicators were discussed with staff during the consultations (see Section 6.2.4) it is suggested that further research is undertaken in order to develop these. It may also be possible to adapt indicators currently being developed by Focus Ireland for similar support programmes. An illustration of how these indicators could be used, using information presented in Chapter 5, is provided below.

While the indicators developed can be used to measure the success of the programme at the point at which clients leave George's Hill, it is also recommended that a study is undertaken to determine client outcomes (e.g. if a client remains drug free and is still living independently a year later) and the success of the programme in the longer term. This study could be similar in nature to that recently completed by Keltoi (see Section 6.2.4).

Table 7.1
Programme Indicators - Example

Indicator	Number	%
No of client accepted on programme	15	n/a
No of clients that completed programme	12	80%
No of clients remaining drug free at the end of the programme	12	100%
No. of clients that relapsed during the programme (but continued)	3	25%
No. of clients that have moved on to independent living	6	50%
No. of clients that have moved to transitional accommodation	4	33%
No. of clients in good emotional, mental and physical health	12	100%
No. of clients that have good interaction and socialisation skills	12	100%
No. of clients that have the ability to manage a home	12	100%
No of clients involved in training/education/employment	12	100%

7.3.2 Future Direction

In relation to the future direction of the programme the following recommendations are made. If it is decided to expand Step Down in the future, it is recommended that the issues highlighted previously are addressed and resolved before any expansion takes place.

- **Expanding the Programme**

The question of whether to expand / replicate the Step Down programme elsewhere in the country should be framed within the context of the programme being a model both in terms of partnership working and provision of comprehensive services.

The general view amongst staff consulted was that the programme should remain small, with no more than 7 to 10 clients participating at any one time. It was felt that this small number would ensure the high level of individual support that each client currently receives is maintained. The evaluation concurs with these views. If the HSE agrees to continue to support the programme and provides additional funding for expansion, it is recommended that the programme continues in its present format for another 9 to 12 months in order to provide an opportunity for the remaining issues (particularly move on accommodation) to be resolved and for all processes and procedures to be agreed and finalised. This timescale should also enable the Steering Committee to formalise its remit.

- **Programme Duration**

Consultation findings indicate that a programme lasting six months is appropriate. Although some clients advised that they felt the programme was not long enough, it is thought that their anxieties related more to the difficulties in finding suitable move on accommodation, rather than on their readiness to leave George's Hill. It is therefore recommended that the programme continues to be six months in duration.

APPENDIX I
CONSULTEES

Name	Organisation	Position
Johnny Meehan	Focus Ireland	Services Manager
Mary Jameson	Focus Ireland	Project Leader
Natasha Gardner	Focus Ireland	Key Worker
Edel Sweeney	Focus Ireland	Key Worker
Christina McTaggart	Focus Ireland	Director of Advocacy Unit
Jenny Heath	Focus Ireland	Former Step Down Services Manager
Brendan McKiernan	Keltoi	Manager
Rita Smith	Rehabilitation Integration Service	Manager
Bríd Walsh	Rehabilitation Integration Service	Project Officer

APPENDIX II
DURATION OF CLIENT'S STAY AT GEORGE'S HILL

APPENDIX III
REFERENCES

References

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- MakeRoom (2007) What does 'ending homelessness' mean? [online]. Available from: <http://www.makeroom.ie/policy/index.html> [Accessed 04 September 2007]
- National Advisory Committee on Drugs & Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (2005) *Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland, First Results (Revised) from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey*. Dublin: NACD
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APPENDIX IV
CONSULTATION DISCUSSION GUIDES



Step-Down Programme Evaluation Client Consent and Receipt Form

Please read the following statements:

- I understand the information outlined in the leaflet given to me.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation and the information that I will provide.
- I understand the importance of providing my true opinions of the programme.
- I understand that the information I give will be treated as confidential and it will not be attributed to me in any way.
- I am happy to take part in the interview and I give permission for Focus Ireland and Juniper Consulting to use the information I provide to help with the evaluation of the Step Down Programme.

Please sign here if you are
happy to continue with the interview _____

We would like to tape this interview to make sure that everything you say is recorded correctly. Once the evaluation is completed the tape will be deleted.

Please sign here if you are
happy for us to tape the interview _____

I confirm that I have received a €25 Dunnes Stores voucher

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date _____



Step-Down Programme Evaluation Information Leaflet

Thank-you for agreeing to help with the evaluation of the Step-Down Programme. This leaflet explains more about the evaluation and today's interview. If you have any questions about the interview or the evaluation please ask me after you have read the information below.

EVALUATION

The Step-Down Programme started in September 2005 and was set up to provide a short term housing programme to help men and women who had completed drug rehabilitation to move into appropriate housing and live independently. The programme is a partnership between Focus Ireland, Keltoi/After Care Team and the Rehab Integration Service (RIS).

The programme has been running for nearly two years and Focus Ireland has asked Juniper Consulting to carry out an evaluation of the programme. As part of the evaluation we are talking to all those involved in the programme including the programme's clients. Focus Ireland would like to continue the programme over the next few years and are therefore looking for views on the programme and suggestions for how it could be improved. Your views are therefore important in helping us to do this.

THE INTERVIEW

- The interview will be with Sarah Cherry and/or Peter Gavaghan from Juniper Consulting. We are carrying out the evaluation of the Step-Down Programme for Focus Ireland.
- The interview will last between 45 mins and 1 hour.
- We would like to talk to you about:
 - your background and how you became involved in the Step-Down Programme;
 - your experiences of the programme (your key worker, group sessions, day programme etc);
 - what you have been doing since you left the programme (if applicable);
 - what you liked about the programme;
 - how the programme has helped you; and
 - how you think the programme can be improved.
- We will also ask you for some details about yourself like your date of birth, if you have children and where you are from.
- We will use the information you provide to help Focus Ireland improve the Step-Down Programme in the future. It is therefore important that you give us your true opinions of the

programme. What you say will be treated as confidential and will not be attributed to you in any way.

- We will provide you with a €25 Dunnes Stores voucher at the end of the interview. This voucher is to show our appreciation for your time and to cover any expenses you may have had in travelling here today.
- You do not have to talk about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable and you are free to stop the interview at any time, if you wish. If you say anything in the interview that you would prefer not to be used in the research, let me know and it will not be used.

Thank you.

Sinead McGinley
Research Officer
Focus Ireland
9-12 High Street
Dublin 8
Phone: (01) 8815900

Sarah Cherry / Peter Gavaghan
Juniper Consulting
Holywood
Co. Down



Step-Down Programme Evaluation Client Interview Guide

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: _____ Gender: Male Female

Date of Birth: __/__/_____

Where are you originally from? _____ County _____ Country

When did you arrive at George's Hill? _____ Month _____ Year N/K

When did you leave George's Hill? _____ Month _____ Year

N/A – Still on Programme N/K

Status (e.g. single, living with someone, married) _____

No. of dependents/children _____

JOINING THE STEP-DOWN PROGRAMME

How did you hear about the Step-Down Programme?

Why did you decide to apply for the programme?

Can you remember the meeting you had with Focus Ireland and Keltoi about joining the programme? If so.....

- What did you talk about at the meeting?
- What did you learn about the programme?
- Did you understand the purpose of the programme and what was involved?
- What did you expect from the programme at that stage?

Can you remember visiting George's Hill before you moved in? If so.....

- What did the visit(s) involve?
- What did you learn about the programme and George's Hill?
- Did you feel that the programme was right for you at that stage?
- Did you have any concerns?
- How did your move from Keltoi to George's Hill go? Were you happy with how it went?
- Did it take you long to settle into your apartment?
- Were there any issues/problems?

EXPERIENCES OF THE STEP-DOWN PROGRAMME

Individual Support

- Who was/is your key/case worker at George' Hill?
- How often did/do you meet with them? How often did/do you see or talk to them?
- What did/do you talk about when you met (at weekly meetings and monthly reviews)?
- How did/does (key worker name) help you?
- Do you set goals for you to achieve? If so, what type of goals? Were/are these achievable?
- Did you give (key worker name) feedback at the meetings? If so, what about?
- Were/are you happy with the support that you got/get from (key worker name)? If no, why?
- Would you change anything about the support you got/get from (key worker name)?

Group Sessions

Can you tell me about the group sessions that you had/have in the evenings?

- What did/do you learn about? (e.g. stress management, health, housing)
- What did/do you like about the sessions?
- Did/do you feel that the sessions were/are helpful? If no, why?

- Is there anything you would change about the group sessions to make them better? If so, what?
- If former client..... since leaving George's Hill how have you used what you learnt at the sessions?

Day Programme

Can you tell me about the course/work experience you attend(ed) during the day?

- Where was/is it (Soilse, Coolmine, ACRG, other)?
- What did/do you do there?
- What did/do you learn about?
- Did/do you find it helpful?
- Is there anything you would change about it?

Rehab Integration Service (RIS) / Keltoi

Did/do you see or talk to staff from RIS or Keltoi during your stay at George's Hill? If so...

- Why?
- What did/do you talk about?

General

- Did/have you had any relapses (in drug use) since coming to George's Hill?
- Did/have you experience/d any other difficulties while at George's Hill?

MOVING ON (for those that have left the programme)

After 6 months at George's Hill it was time for you to move on.....

- Did you feel you were ready to move out after 6 months? If no, why not?
- Where did you move to when you left George's Hill? What type of accommodation was it?
- Who helped you to find the accommodation?
- Were there any difficulties in finding accommodation? If yes, what?
- Are you still living there? If no, where have you moved to? Why did you move?
- Did you continue with any courses or find work when you left George's Hill? If so, what?
- Are you still on a course / working?
- Have you had any relapses (in drug use) since you left George's Hill?
- Have you experienced any other difficulties since you moved out of George's Hill? If so, what?

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

- Do you think it was worthwhile doing the Step-Down programme?
- Do you think overall that the programme met your expectations?
- What were the best things about the programme?
- How has what you learnt on the programme helped you since you moved on? Give examples.
- How has what you learnt helped you to manage a home / your accommodation?
- Apart from what we've discussed so far, have you any other suggestions for how the programme could be improved?

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF INTERVIEWS – DISCUSSION TOPICS

General

- Role and responsibilities of staff interviewed
- Overall experience of the programme

Programme Establishment (where appropriate)

- Rationale and identified need for the programme
- Establishment of the programme – content, procedures, roles and responsibilities
- Setting of objectives and indicators

Programme Management

- General operation of the programme
- Changes that have occurred to the programme
- Issues and challenges that have arisen
- Mechanisms in place to review the operation of the programme
- Steering Committee

Relationships

- Relationship between staff and clients
- Relationship between partners and other providers

Evaluation

- Programme strengths and successes
- Achievement of objectives and indicators
- Lessons learned
- Suggestions for changes and improvements going forward
- Expansion of the programme in the future