

## SHAID and Shaidy Characters

SHAID provides a range of housing advice, support and related services to help young people aged 16-25 make the difficult transition to living independently in the community. The main part of our work involves one to one support work with young people while they are homeless and also in their own tenancies when they find accommodation. In addition the organisation delivers life skills training and housing education to young people at risk of becoming homeless or living in their own accommodation for the first time.

SHAID has always tried to involve its client group in decision-making and day-to-day running of the organisation, and in since 2001, SHAID has employed a worker to develop projects aimed at and run by young people. This has enabled our clients to become more involved in both decisions made within the organisation as well as the day to day running of the project. Projects range from peer education and research on housing and homelessness from a young person's point of view, to more practical activities such as filmmaking and interior decoration.

In 2005 the young people took ownership of this initiative and formed a service-user group with their own set of rules, Shaidy Characters. Shaidy Characters is made up of young people who are or have been clients of SHAID, although non-clients are also welcome to join. This means that most of the group have experienced homelessness in one form or another and are in the process of setting their lives back on track. The group acts as a means for the young people to support each other through what can be difficult experiences and help combat social isolation felt by many young people when they are supporting themselves on their own.

Shaidy Characters' main aim is to give a voice to socially excluded and homeless young people who want to use their experience constructively in order to help others who are in similar situations and raise awareness about youth homelessness. This objective is carried out in three ways:

1. **Having a say** – to contribute to SHAID's future progress by feeding directly into its decision making processes and commenting directly on the services of larger local and national institutions
2. **Having a go** – to take part in one off projects and help establish longer term services for young people, run by young people
3. **Having a laugh** – to provide a network of peer support and encourage self-help, and continue to receive informal support from SHAID

In 2006 the project received a three-year grant from the Big Lottery Fund for Young People to continue the excellent work carried out by the young people. In July of that year Shaidy Characters were short-listed from 33 applicants to receive the runner's up prize in the Michael Whippman Award, organised by Homeless Link to acknowledge and celebrate service user involvement in the homelessness sector.

### Main Achievements

- o In the first year of the initiative, (April 05 – March 06), 68 young people took part directly in activities, putting in approximately 3,500 volunteering hours between them.
- o Organising two SPEAKOUT events in 2004 and 2005, where both young homeless people and professional housing managers can come together and discuss the issues around homelessness.
- o Producing the film HYPE, which highlights the problems young people face when leaving home and then developing workshop activities around the film, now used as an educational tool in schools and other youth work settings with young people at risk of homelessness. The workshops have been delivered now to around 300 young people in Derwentside.

### Outcomes for Participants

- o Increased motivation and confidence of individual young people
- o Increased self reliance and ability to take on responsibility
- o Increased willingness to access further training and improved career aspirations. 30% have moved on into employment and another 30% in education or training.