

March 1999

Response to consultation on Supporting People

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation welcomes the opportunity to contribute its views on the recently published consultation paper. However we are unable, in the time available, to do justice to the document. This, therefore, is an interim reply: we are planning a meeting with key contributors to our work in this field and will make a further submission at a later stage in your consultation process.

General Comments

The government will be aware that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has funded a wealth of research into housing and community care issues, the early stages of which are summarised in an overview report (Lynn Watson, [*High Hopes: making housing and community care work*](#), 1997). Much of the research we have funded after this publication is also pertinent to the principle and substance of the proposals put forward.

Our work in this area means that we recognise the confusion and complexity of the current labyrinth of funding mechanisms, whose fragmentation and lack of transparency lend themselves neither to coherent cost-appraisal of options, nor to quality-driven services. These factors were certainly highlighted by our recent joint publication with the Chartered Institute of Housing (Lynn Watson & Maryrose Tarpey, [*Pick and Mix: Developing flexible housing choices in community care*](#), CIOH, 1998). Other reports have similarly highlighted the perverse incentives to fund particular 'solutions'; the consequent distortion of 'options'; and the propensity for disabled people to be caught in a poverty trap which requires them to choose between a job and a home (for example, Ken Simons, [*Home, work and inclusion*](#), 1998).

We can also welcome much of the principle underlying the proposed reforms, particularly the focus on the needs of individuals rather than the requirements of bricks and mortar provision; the emphasis on preventative action; and the explicit recognition of enhanced quality of life as a stated policy objective. We have recently pulled together a Foundations summary about the value of low intensity support services, drawn from a series of studies that were published last year. We hope that this helps to highlight just how effective relatively modest provision can be in preventing dependency and keeping the person centre-stage.

In general terms, therefore, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sees much to commend the efforts to place funding for housing support services on a more rational and coherent basis, underpinned by sound principles and clear objectives. We are mindful, however, that considerable effort will be required to translate the vision presented by the proposals into a workable reality for those receiving and providing housing support services. We are also conscious that while the interests of these two groups will sometimes be in conflict, the

success of policies in the future depends upon the support of both.

Finally, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation welcomes the suggestion for piloting and the possibility of phased implementation, and sees thorough ongoing evaluation as an essential safeguard if mistakes are not to be repeated. The impact on older people of policies shifting from 'home help' to 'home care', for example, is graphically illustrated by a recent qualitative study (Heather Clark et al '[That bit of help: the high value of low level preventative services for older people](#)', Policy Press, 1998).

Specific Consultation Questions

Given the time-scale of the consultation period, and the sheer scope of the proposals, our response is not intended to be comprehensive at this stage. Rather, we have highlighted some of the work we have undertaken which addresses some of the broader themes. We shall be looking out for the detail as it becomes available, and are keen to play a part in what we hope will be an ongoing process of involvement and consultation.

Scope of proposals

Our work suggests a need to be wary of very tight definitions. Research suggests that support is most likely to succeed when services adopt flexible boundaries and an approach that is sympathetic to people's own priorities. Recent relevant reports include:

- Foundations summary, [Low Intensity Support: preventing dependency](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999
- Deborah Quilgars, [A Life in the Community: Home-Link: supporting people with mental health problems in ordinary housing](#), Policy Press, 1998
- Ken Simons, [Living Support Networks: the services provided by KeyRing](#), Pavilion 1998

People Requiring Support

Again, it is probably important not to be overly prescriptive about this, but the following groups of people do not feature in the document at present:

- Refugees/asylum seekers whose past experience of trauma, combined with the challenges posed by unfamiliar systems, may mean they could benefit from support where they live
- Older people who could not be described as 'frail' but who would nevertheless benefit from the kind of preventative support offered through sheltered housing or community alarm schemes

- People leaving protective environments that are not necessarily institutional in nature - for example, disabled people leaving the family home.

Also, the consultation document indicates that revenue funding for Home Improvement Agencies will be subsumed into the specific grant. If this continues to be the intention, it is important to note the potential value of the HIA model beyond its traditional constituency of older people. Younger disabled people whose homes are in need of repair and adaptation could also come into the equation. We would particularly wish to draw attention to important recent work relating to the housing needs of families with disabled children (Christine Oldman & Bryony Beresford, *Homes unfit for children*, Policy Press 1998)

Access to services

We appreciate the rationale behind putting an intermediary between the service provider and access to the resource, and the desire to make as much use as possible of existing arrangements where appropriate to do so. However, our research has shown that this is an area where issues need to be thought through very carefully if principle is to translate into practice. Relevant research includes:

- Ann Davis, Kathryn Ellis & Kirstein Rummery, *Access to assessment: perspectives of practitioners, disabled people and carers*, 1998
- David Clapham et al, *The Right Home: the Assessment of in Community Care*, University of Cardiff, 1998

Welfare to Work and means-testing

Whilst the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recognises that a funding system needs to be transparent and capable of quantification, we are sure that we will not be alone in expressing concern about the implications of cash-limiting. The potential dangers are that those whose needs are not so acute, or whose needs are 'less popular' than other groups, will be ignored.

We welcome the concept of a lower rent which will follow from taking out the support element: but the ambition of removing work disincentives could be undermined by any extension of means-testing.

This is clearly going to be a key area about which the detail at present is particularly scant. We look forward to seeing what proposals emerge.

Other Remarks

Our response to the proposals began by recognising the need for change, and welcoming the potential of a person-centred approach with a focus on prevention. However, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation also recognises the enormity of the task if the principles underlying the proposals are to be translated into a meaningful reality for those people requiring housing support. There are many salutary lessons to be drawn from the experience of the early stages of community care, and the perverse incentives that have beleaguered the envisaged transition from institutional living. It will be important to ensure that these are taken on board in working through the current proposals.

We are enclosing summaries of the research reports referred to above, and others not cited but which we feel to have relevance. Given the overarching nature of the proposals so far, it is inevitable that 'much of the devil will be in the detail'. After we have distilled the thinking from our meeting of key players, we will submit a further paper to you. (A meeting may be useful at that stage). We hope this interim response is of help.