

## The Volunteer Role of Empowerment Worker

### Introduction – why ‘empowerment’?

Where other agencies seek to ‘**support**’ their clients or service users, Hope Into Action (HIA) prefer to ‘**empower**’ tenants. This subtle change of word gives the job role a different slant to a more traditional ‘support worker’ role and embodies our values as an organisation.

Dictionary definition of Empowerment:

*“Authority or power given to someone to do something. The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights.”*

We seek to encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own lives. The thoughts they have, the decisions they make and the behaviour they choose. We see a major difference between **enabling** and **empowering** and we strive to bring the latter, we accept that tenants are with us for up to two years and by the end of their tenancy the aim is for them to be able and willing to live independently and without support. Therefore, one of the key roles in any house opening is that of ‘Church & Tenant Empowerment Worker’ (EW).

In virtually all the HIA homes open, an EW is in place. The exception being one or two refugee family houses which are in partnership with a 3<sup>rd</sup> agency. All our homes have a church partner who pastorally, practically and spiritually support the tenants.

### The role

The EW is a voluntary unpaid role, and generally we say it takes about a day a week to support a house and partner church (but expect a busy period in the last stage of setting up the house for tenants). The job description is broad, but in short, the EW will be responsible for the following:

#### Tenant Support

- The referral process and selecting tenants
- Weekly support meetings with tenants, including relevant paperwork and actions
- Addressing support needs and encouraging tenant’s autonomy
- Collecting rent and personal charge (excludes Superlite model)
- Advocating for the tenant to other agencies when appropriate

#### House Support

- Monthly Property Checks and relevant actions
- Ensuring Gas safety Certificates, PAT testing, Fire Risk Assessments are completed
- House furnishing and maintenance

#### Church Support

- Liaising with the Church volunteers (aka the Friendship & Support Group or F&S) and maintaining open and clear channels of communication
- Keeping the wider church informed
- Keeping the F&S volunteers enthused and seeking replacements when necessary

## Other

- Occasional fundraising, grant writing or networking opportunities
- Attending HIA: UK training, quarterly skype meetings and Network opportunities
- Adhering to relevant HIA policies, processes and procedures
- Prayerfully covering the project and seeking God's will

### **Who is best suited to the role?**

By and large the role's success will ultimately depend on their ability to empower tenants and manage volunteers. A balance between love, forgiveness and grace on one side, with the ability to make tough decisions, and maintain a professional and disciplined approach on the other.

A well trained and enthusiastic team of volunteers can relieve a huge amount of the job description listed above, if an EW is adept at delegation.

The role of the EW is often referred to as the 'glue' that keeps all the parts of the project together. EWs are not only supported by their line manager locally, they can make use of the Advisor assigned to their location. We also encourage peer support across the Network, as we are aware that often the best advice for an EW can be from another EW! We are also keen to not be heavily reliant on hierarchical structures, but strengthen horizontal support and learning.

EWs need emotional resilience, the ability to multi task, problem solve, think quickly and adapt to every changing situations. They must have a very big heart for the homeless and vulnerable and be passionate about the church rising to the challenge of social injustice. Organisation and excellent communication skills are also a must.

### **A big job gives can offer BIG rewards!**

Not for the light hearted, the role is exciting, rewarding, frustrating, stressful and emotional!

Whatever your background is, the role will inevitably teach you about yourself as well as others, here's some feedback:

A qualified occupational therapist noted "the role of EW has stretched me more in 2 years than I have been in my previous 24."

Someone who'd worked in prisons and rehabilitation observed: "It's so refreshing to be somewhere where you can see cycles of behavior broken and real change happen."

An experienced teacher commented "I have learnt more about my faith and myself since being in this role than I have done for as long as I can remember."

A qualified youth worker said "I've worked for a decade with detached youth in deprived estates, but this is on another scale altogether, I've never known excitement and challenge like it."



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