

Dreams Deferred

the families and friends of
homeless and vulnerable people

Gerard Lemos and Stefan Durkacz

There is a growing understanding and acceptance that homelessness isn't just a housing problem. If homeless people are to leave the world of homelessness behind permanently, they need help and support to build or rebuild networks of friends and family.

The common assumption is that homeless people have irretrievably fallen out with their family and friends. But almost no primary research has been undertaken into the nature and extent of the social networks of homeless people. Have family relationships completely broken down, not just with parents, but with adult siblings and grandparents too? What about friendships? Can these old relationships be restored, or are they too harmful and destructive? Is it necessary to build new ones? Is it different for young homeless people? Is it different for people who have been homeless for a long time?

Because so little is known, developing social networks is not normally part of the prevention or resettlement work that is undertaken with homeless people. Except in family mediation projects, homelessness workers have tended not to develop, as part of their set of competencies, knowledge and skills in how to support people in building and rebuilding social networks.

Lemos&Crane, with Thames Reach Bondway, Alone in London and St Basil's set out to map the social networks of a group of homeless people and develop a toolkit and set of skills for assessing the social networks of vulnerable homeless people.

This report argues for the development of person-centred support services. Making friends and rebuilding family ties should be part of an integrated package where housing, drug, alcohol and mental health issues are also addressed together. Ultimately, this approach does not apply just to homeless people – the report concludes that this way of thinking could benefit all vulnerable people, whether they happen to have a home or not.

Lemos&Crane

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together with Alone in London and St Basils
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"As Minister responsible for policy on homelessness I am delighted to endorse this report which has produced some useful findings. Tackling and preventing homelessness has always been a key priority on the Government's housing agenda. Providing a roof over someone's head is merely part of the solution to tackling homelessness and that is why the government is taking forward a new approach that focuses as much on the problems homeless people face as the places they live.

I congratulate Lemos&Crane and all the agencies involved in this project on their hard work and commitment. This report highlights examples on how social networks such as family mediation, befriending and counselling can help homeless people to rebuild and sustain a settled life, and how joint working with other service providers can make a vital contribution to making this happen."

Barbara Roche MP

Minister of State, Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women

"Innovative approaches are needed to tackle homelessness – as are open minds. The present situation should be regarded as unsatisfactory, requiring action. No one has all the answers, so I hope that people will be open to the imaginative ideas contained in this report. I endorse it."

Sir David Ramsbottom GCB CBE

Former Chief Inspector of Prisons

"New services are needed to support the social and health needs of homeless people as well as their need for a home. *Dreams Deferred* puts forward practical ideas and tools for practitioners to work with to help meet some of the needs. I very much welcome it."

Rabbi Julia Neuberger

Chief Executive, The King's Fund

"Many agencies working in the field of housing and homelessness will support the recommendations and value the toolkit."

Sarah Lindsay

Director, Catholic Agency for Social Concern

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Bondway**

Working With Young Homeless People
St Basil's
Charity No.
1000154

alone
in london

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homeless and vulnerable people**

Gerard Lemos and Stefan Durkacz

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Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes (1902 –1967)

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Kath Dane of Thames Reach Bondway, Marsha Blake of St Basil's and Sarah Guy of Alone in London acted as our links to their respective organisations and formed our steering group. They have worked hard with the staff of their respective agencies and with us. We are very grateful to them.

Zeljka Stojanovic of Lemos&Crane brought her insights as a psychologist and a counsellor to bear on the manuscript. We are grateful for her extremely useful comments.

We are, however, even more grateful to the staff of all three agencies who have participated in the action research over and above their other duties. They have attended meetings with us, helping us to frame the interview forms that have now become the toolkit set out at the end of this report. They also conducted the interviews, recorded them thoroughly and kept us informed. Thanks to them.

Above all our greatest debt of gratitude is reserved for the residents and service users who agreed to be interviewed, spending time with the staff and talking openly and at length about their past, their present and their future. This report and the toolkit that goes with it are a testimony to their involvement and commitment. We cannot thank them enough. We hope they have got something from being involved in the project. Their contribution has been enormous.

The views expressed in this report are the responsibility of Lemos&Crane. Ours is also the responsibility for any mistakes.

Gerard Lemos
Lemos&Crane
October 2002

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Summary

Introduction

This action research project addresses the following questions:

- Do vulnerable people still have networks of friends and family relationships or have they been completely disrupted and severed?
- Do they need help to sustain these relationships if they still exist?
- Do vulnerable people need support in making new friends? And
- What sort of help could support workers and others provide to assist service users in re-building old networks of friends and family if they want to or in establishing new friendships?

A series of interviews over several months during 2002 was conducted with 26 vulnerable people by advice, support and resettlement staff working for three agencies – Thames Reach Bondway, Alone in London and St. Basil's. Lemos&Crane had briefed the participating staff and had drawn up formats for semi-structured interviews in consultation with them. The methodology used is described in more detail on pp.6–8. Lemos&Crane analysed the completed interviews and wrote the report and toolkit.

Part I. About the present

Ch 1. Individual experiences

This chapter sets out four case studies of individuals interviewed during this research project.

Ch 2. Relationships with friends

The people interviewed generally have at least some friendships. Their friendships are mostly with other people met through homelessness and supported housing agencies, especially through hostels. These friendships are often transient but long-term friendships sometimes develop. Some of the people interviewed deliberately form transient friendships as part of

their lifestyle of moving around. Shared experiences make it easier, and in their eyes, more desirable for people with the shared experience of homelessness to befriend one another. For others, breaking away from lifestyles and habits means distancing themselves from other ex-homeless people. Older people with longer histories of being homeless and other intractable problems often found their resettlement arrangements unsatisfactory, leaving them feeling lonely and isolated. Employment, for those able and willing to take it up, can be a source of social contacts outside of settings specifically for homeless people. A significant minority of people had partners and were in reasonably stable relationships.

Ch 3. Relationships with family members

The main reason given for family breakdown was conflict between children and parents. Some people had been physically abused by family members and/or taken into care. Nevertheless most of the people interviewed maintained some contact with family members although the frequency of contact varied widely. Many of these contacts are important to, and valued by the individual. Both emotional and practical support is given to them or could be relied on if called for. The most important family relationships were usually with female family members – mothers, sisters or grandmothers. Extended family relationships were often the most lasting and supportive – particularly with adult siblings and grandparents.

Ch 4. Professional support

Many of those interviewed had histories of involvement with professionals and statutory agencies. Some had grown up in care or had been admitted to psychiatric hospitals. All were acquainted with homelessness services and hostels, some more than others. Professionals of different kinds, including specialist workers, were vital sources of support for many. People saw professionals frequently and regularly. Older

people with long-term histories of homelessness relied more on day centres and 'drop-in' facilities for daytime activities and social contacts. Although few complaints were made about the standard of services, people were keen to receive more support and advice on matters ranging from managing mental health problems to accessing leisure activities and college courses. While a great deal of the support needed requires specialist staff much can also be provided by generic support workers.

Part II. About the future

Ch 5. Developing friendships

Rebuilding old friendships and establishing new ones was overwhelmingly attractive to respondents. Older men with long histories of homelessness and personal problems such as mental illness said they were more reconciled to isolation and less likely to see lack of friends as a problem. For people who expressed these views loneliness was sometimes rationalised as 'independence'. This could be a defence mechanism to avoid further experiences of rejection. Conflict with one person had led some people almost by accident to lose touch with other old friends in the same circle with whom they had no disagreement. The desire to rebuild old friendships was motivated by a sense that old friends would be more trustworthy. Respondents also expressed a wish to share memories and reconnect to better times. They were also curious about what had happened to their old friends. Concerns were also expressed about rebuilding old friendships: old friends may have changed too much; they may have done well in life and look down on a homeless person. Or the homeless person's feelings of low self-esteem seemed like a barrier.

Making new friends was motivated mainly by a desire for stable, trustworthy relationships with people who could be relied on for support and advice. Other motivations included the desire to learn and broaden horizons through meeting and talking to other people, to build self-confidence and to find more positive influences. Three main concerns were expressed about making new friends: bad experiences in the past and the subsequent fear of rejection, the prejudices of people who had not experienced homelessness or vulnerability and lack of money for socialising.

Ch 6. Doing new things

Doing new things and visiting new places were overwhelmingly attractive. Two broad categories of potential social activity were popular: sports-based and learning-based activities. The main motivating factors for taking up new activities were meeting new people; increasing knowledge, skills and confidence; passing the time; and alleviating stress. The wish to visit new places was motivated by the desire for new and educative experiences. The three most popular sporting activities were swimming, football and going to the gym. Interest in learning and training mostly fell into three categories: vocational learning; art, music and drama; and the possibilities of self-employment. Young people tended to favour more 'extreme' sports and activities and were more ambitious about new places to visit. For older people with longer histories of homelessness, self-development through breaking old habits was important.

Ch 7. Rebuilding family relationships

Participants expressed mixed feelings. Some people were keen to improve family relationships. Simply having better relations with the family was often reason enough in itself. They also attached importance to longstanding intimacy and trustworthiness. However some did not feel ready to see their families again. Not being accepted for who they are by their parents was a concern for some young people. Some people had left the family home following conflict. They were worried that their families would react negatively to seeing them again. The family can simply be a 'negative environment' and not a desirable place to be for some people. Some saw no benefits in re-establishing contact.

Part III. Staff impressions; Findings and recommendations

Ch 8. Staff impressions

Most staff who participated in the action research felt involvement with the research had motivated service users. They responded positively and appreciated being able to talk about personal matters, not just practical ones. Some staff

believed that focusing on social networks could help service users to handle other areas of their lives more effectively. For example social and emotional issues could be one of the things at the root of some people's drug and alcohol problems. Staff felt the structured approach of setting goals and working towards them benefited the service users and themselves. The research created an opportunity for staff to get to know some of their service users better. Staff were concerned that the discussions for the research would be followed up. Some staff suggested improvements to the interview formats. The success of the interviews often depended on variables such as the mood of the service users at the time and whether or not the member of staff and the service user already knew each other. Some staff felt that a key worker should conduct such interviews if they were part of day-to-day practice. Others felt that a completely independent person would be best placed to conduct the interviews.

Ch 9. Findings and recommendations

Homeless and vulnerable people do:

- Value relationships with friends and family
- Have not lost contact with all their old friends and family members, particularly not grandparents and siblings
- Feel the loss of broken relationships
- Are keen to re-establish some broken ties with family members
- Want to make new friends
- Value the support of staff in discussing these matters and helping them think about how to address them
- Need support in thinking of places and activities where they can meet new people and make new friends; perhaps even meet new partners.

In order to support homeless and vulnerable people in strengthening their social networks support workers will need the appropriate interpersonal skills. Discussions of social networks will need to form part of support planning. Above all support workers will need to be able to recognise the limits of their skills and involvement and when it would be appropriate to refer the service user to a specialist service of

the sort described below.

There are a number of possible specialist and professional services that homeless and vulnerable people who want to build and re-build networks of friends and family might benefit from. These include:

- *Family mediation* services to help homeless people to re-establish contact with family members and build or re-build relationships of trust.
- *Befriending* services to help people participate in suitable new activities and places – sports activities, arts and cultural activities, clubs and so on, that they could become involved with where they might meet new people. The support worker would help the person to identify potential activities and places. Companionship in undertaking new activities could then be provided by a volunteer befriender.
- *Mentoring* might help those homeless people who feel that there are aspects of their current behaviour which are impediments to making new friends or getting on better with old ones.
- *Counselling* – some of the people interviewed were already receiving counselling to help them cope better with events in the past. In so far as anti-social or inappropriate behaviour is borne of repeating, unreconstructed patterns from the past or a lack of insight into the effect of that behaviour on themselves or others, counselling may have an important role to play.

Building a network of person-centred services

To develop the range of services needed descriptions of providers of the services mentioned will need to be drawn up. Some of these providers may not currently work with homeless and vulnerable people, but could, funds permitting, be drawn upon. For example family mediation services which currently only work with divorced or separating couples could also, if commissioned, undertake mediation work between parents and young people at risk of ejection from the family home. These descriptions of services available can then be collected together in one place. The most rational place would be a website, which could be updated when new information or services became available. Those seeking services for themselves or support workers seeking help for

their service users could readily get instant information about the availability of services. The website would also be an opportunity to identify examples of good practice and create discussion forums to discuss and solve problems of policy or practice.

Is it only homeless people who need person-centred support services?

Homelessness is not the only cause of loneliness and isolation. Homeless people also often have a range of other needs (such as drug misuse or mental health problems) as well as having nowhere to live. These other needs, rather than being homeless, may have led to them being isolated and lonely. So vulnerable people from other client groups, such as people with mental health problems or people misusing alcohol and drugs may also be isolated and therefore need assistance with building and re-building networks of friends and family. Services to assist vulnerable people build and re-build social networks should be available to everybody who needs them, regardless of whether they have been homeless. For the support services needed to be generally available, it will be necessary to:

- Find out the extent to which other vulnerable people need support with building and re-building social networks.
- Ensure that the funds and the services are available for all vulnerable people to access the services they need, without first having to become homeless, or be in danger of becoming homeless.

Part IV. Toolkit for mapping social networks

The toolkit is intended primarily for generic support and advice workers. It is designed: to assist support workers working with vulnerable people to map the existing relationships of service users with their family and friends; to help the service user to think about ways in which they might build and re-build relationships with family and friends; to identify the action that needs to be taken; to review how things are going for the service user.

The toolkit sets out underpinning values and ground rules, goals, key stages and interviewing skills needed. In addition there is a set of tools covering semi-structured interviews on understanding current networks; aspirations; motivation; preparation; commitment; and review.

Introduction

*In Brueghel's Icarus for instance: how everything
turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman
may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure: the
sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into
the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must
have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky.
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on*
WH Auden, *Musee des Beaux Arts*

People may regularly see others who live nearby, or those who work in local shops, but that regular contact does not necessarily lead to sharing of personal information or any degree of intimacy. In these kinds of relationships people feel little obligation to one another. People may also have contact with professionals paid to help them – housing support workers, community psychiatric nurses, social workers and so on. But these professionals are not their friends. The person using the service may share intimate personal information with the professionals, but that is with the specific goal of getting access to a service. And even if the relationship may be intimate from the point of view of the service user, it is one-sided. The service user probably knows almost nothing about the professional member of staff's life outside work. Although it may last for several years, the relationship is usually temporary and finite. None of these kinds of relationships – the glancing contacts with frequently encountered but distant faces and the transitory contact with those paid to provide – can be called networks of emotional and social support.

Lasting social networks are likely to have the following characteristics:

- They are mutual – I may help you; you may help me – maybe not straight away, but you feel some obligation to help me in the future because I helped you in the past.
- They are lasting – Although I may not see you

daily, weekly or even monthly, I still expect to be seeing you years into the future.

- They are beneficial – I feel more secure. If I am ill or broke for example, I know that you might help me.

For many people the strongest of these networks are with their families. In the early years of life a parent cares for a child. Later on, in old age, the parent may expect that the child will have to care for them. One of the most painful things that can happen is enduring conflict and the loss of contact between parents and children. Conflicts of this kind are much more common in the families of vulnerable people and people who become homeless than they are in the population at large. Grandparents too have a hugely significant role in supportive and sustained family networks. Children and young people relate differently to their grandparents than they do to their parents. There will be less authority and restraint and more tolerance and indulgence from the grandparents. So much so that parents will often be shocked by the irksome discovery that their children are treated in a much more relaxed and indulgent way by the older generation than the parents themselves were treated when they were children – and by the same people. This has been called 'the merging of alternate generations'.

Adult siblings may also share each other's child care or other responsibilities, or they may be close companions with whom experiences and problems can be discussed in a non-judgmental way; advice can be sought, or a listening ear may be all that is needed. Close friends too can share experiences and problems in these ways; helping out; being a companion or a confidant.

Similarly mutuality exist between partners. Marriages, lasting relationships or partnerships can bring a sense of shared pleasures through the cycles of life, and shared struggle in the face of adversity. If one partner faces adversity, the other will support and help. Later on, the other partner may perform the support role.

All these things are the value that everyone places on friendships and family relationships. In

their absence, we may feel isolated and lonely, even if we talk to plenty of people. Having a strong social network can also increase the chances of a person overcoming problems elsewhere in their life. Friends and family can help alleviate the worst effects of drug and alcohol misuse and mental illness. Most jobs, especially at the lower end of the pay scale, are still filled through word of mouth, networking and contacts. These practical, emotional and social benefits mean that being isolated and lacking a network of family and friends has potentially deep-seated and long-lasting adverse consequences.

Homeless and vulnerable people are greatly at risk of isolation and the breakdown of relationships with family and friends, thereby possibly losing all the benefits already mentioned. Family conflict may be the reason that people became homeless in the first place – it is the most common cause given for homelessness. Sleeping rough and living in temporary accommodation also makes it harder to form and sustain lasting friendships. The sense of crisis that goes with homelessness is also not a good emotional platform for resolving old disputes, building bridges and starting afresh. Many homeless people also feel (as this report will show) – partly because of their other problems such as mental health or a history of drug or alcohol misuse – that their own behaviour, and the reactions of others to that behaviour, are also impediments to forming new friendships and repairing old ones. People becoming homeless because of a lack of others around committed to support them when they need it and find it hard to escape being homeless because no one else is around to help them. So isolation and the absence of social networks is both cause and consequence of homelessness and vulnerability.

Combating isolation and loneliness and building and re-building social networks should be a fundamental purpose and activity for all those involved in supporting vulnerable people, not just an add-on. Relieving isolation is not something additional that can be done once the urgent practical questions of having to live or needing detox or drug rehabilitation have been dealt with. On the contrary a resilient and trusting group of friends and family members at one's side is an important bulwark against, and a method of combating, vulnerability and

homelessness. Paid support staff can do a lot, but they cannot do everything. More care and support is most often given by those attached to us emotionally than can ever be given by those attached to us professionally.

The purpose of this report

This research addressed the following questions:

- Do vulnerable and homeless people still have networks of friends and family relationships or have they been completely severed?
- Do they need help to sustain these relationships if they still exist?
- Do vulnerable people need support in making new friends? And finally,
- What sort of help could support workers and others provide to assist vulnerable people in re-building old networks of friends and family if they want to, or in establishing new friendships?

Methodology

Action research – a series of structured interviews over a period during which the participants would agree to, and then take, action that is then reviewed and evaluated at the next interview – was decided on as the best approach. Support workers conducting the structured interviews, rather than researchers, was also felt to be the most potentially beneficial approach.

These methods were decided upon for the following reasons:

- Since support workers are known to the support users being interviewed, their exchanges are more open and trusting than they would be with an unknown interviewer. The data gathered in interviews is potentially therefore fuller, richer and more textured.
- The staff would also report back on their own experience of conducting the interviews. This gives important insights about how best such support could be offered in the future. It would also help to develop tools that could be used by support workers across the board.
- In planning and conducting action research with practitioners formats for structured interviews could be developed that will then form the basis of the toolkit for more general use by practitioners working with homeless and other vulnerable people who are isolated people and in need of support.

The key stages in developing the research are set out below:

Support and participation was sought from three agencies working with homeless and vulnerable people, offering a range of services to people of different ages with a variety of needs in different parts of the country. Thames Reach Bondway, Alone in London and St Basil's agreed to participate. Short descriptions of the three agencies and the work they do are given at Appendix A. These illustrate both what the agencies have in common – principally that they work with homeless and vulnerable people – and also describe some of the things they do differently from each other.

Volunteers were sought from amongst the staff who would be willing to conduct structured interviews over a few months with a small number of the service users whom they already knew. Without being prescriptive, volunteers were sought who worked in different settings (advice centres, hostels and so on) and with people with a range of different needs. A short description of the projects where the staff participants work is given at Appendix B. Eleven members of staff from the three participating agencies volunteered to take part in the research. The people participating – both staff and service users – were therefore diverse, though not necessarily representative.

At the initial meeting with staff ground rules were agreed for the project, as well as the goals to be addressed with the people receiving support services, the values to uphold, methods and tools and how records would be kept. The conclusions from these initial discussions formed the basis of the initial stages of the Toolkit in Part IV.

At subsequent meetings the skills needed by staff conducting the interviews were discussed. Initially some staff participating were concerned that they may lack the skills needed to discuss such emotionally sensitive matters as sometimes fraught relationships with family members and friends (and the section of this report devoted to findings from the interviews certainly confirms the sensitivity of the subjects discussed). In the event, having thought in a more systematic way about the skills needed, most participants felt that these were skills they already used in other aspects of their discussions with service users. These proposed conversations therefore did not in reality require skills other than those they already had. Fear

was not borne out by fact. The skills that participants felt were needed are reflected in the Toolkit set out in Part IV. Through discussion at a series of meetings, formats were devised for the structured interviews. In an adapted form, these are now the main elements of the Toolkit – current networks, aspirations, motivation, preparation, commitment and review. The staff who had agreed to participate then identified suitable service users to interview according to criteria agreed by all and set out below:

A range of needs

Service users approached to participate in the action research were not selected at random. Whilst participants were not intended to be representative or typical of all people living in temporary or supported housing, interviews were conducted with people of different ages, genders, ethnic origins, backgrounds and with a range of needs and abilities. (A profile of service users who participated in the research is set out in Appendix C).

In some parts of this report distinctions are drawn between the experiences and needs of young vulnerable people and older, more entrenched homeless people. The term 'older' in this context means people over 25 with a history of homelessness and rough sleeping stretching back years rather than months. This group of participants was also more likely to have experienced chronic problems, such as alcohol and drug misuse. In particular, most of the older people interviewed had mental health problems. Again this cannot be assumed to be representative of homeless and vulnerable people in general. Some similar patterns are, however, likely to exist elsewhere.

The term 'young' in this report is used to describe those aged between 16 and 25, particularly those in their teens. These participants tended to have left home or care within the last year and did not disclose chronic problems of the type described above to the staff who interviewed them. Again the participants were not intended to be necessarily representative of all homeless people of their age group.

People from different ethnic backgrounds were asked to participate, although the majority described themselves as white and British. Again it was not intended to seek a group to represent the ethnic make-up of homeless people as a whole. Cultural differences in the experiences of

homeless people did not emerge through the interviews and are therefore not discussed in the report. Participants were not asked to disclose their sexuality. It is only mentioned in the rest of the report if a person who has been interviewed mentions their sexuality.

Indication of interest

Service users who took part expressed a positive interest in participating in the action research. If a member of staff thought, based on their previous experience, that the service user was likely to find the discussions too painful or personal, they were not asked to participate. Similarly, if service users were not thought by staff to be able to give conscious and meaningful consent, they were not approached. If the people who were asked declined the invitation to participate, or having begun were disinclined to continue, this was of course respected. Some staff reported that some service users they had approached did not wish to participate in the action research.

Financial incentives

Service users were offered £20 for participation in all the interviews. Payment was made in three instalments – £5 at end of first interview, £5 after second interview and the final £10 at the end of the sequence of the interviews.

Explaining the project to service users participating

Following discussions with the support staff it was agreed that the purpose of the project would be expressed to participants as follows: The action research aims to build up a picture of the relationships that homeless and vulnerable people have with others, especially their friends and family. This will help support staff to develop ways of helping other vulnerable people to combat feelings of loneliness by making new friends and social contacts, or getting back in touch with old friends and family members, if that is what they want to do.

Participants were informed that they would be asked to participate in a maximum of four interviews over the following six months. They were also reassured that any information the service user gave would be treated confidentially and only be written up anonymously in the report of the research. It was also stressed to participants that involvement was completely voluntary and depended entirely on them giving

consent. The structure of the financial incentive was explained to them. Any questions were answered and, if they were happy with what they had heard and still wanted to participate, they were asked to sign a consent form. Twenty six service users participated in this research.

Interviews were analysed by researchers at Lemos&Crane and findings from the analysis discussed at meetings of all staff participating. Any difficulties that were raised by participants were also discussed in these meetings. Participating staff have also commented on a draft of this report and the toolkit.

Structure of the report

Throughout the report all the people interviewed are described using fictitious names. The first two parts of the report are the write-up of the findings from the research. Part I of the report – chapters 1 to 4 – sets out the present circumstances of the people interviewed. Chapter 1 sets out four case studies of respondents to give an initial overview of the needs and experiences of some of the homeless people who participated in the action research. Chapter 2 describes the relationships that service users participating had with their friends. Chapter 3 sets out relationships with family members. Chapter 4 describes contacts with professionals.

Part II of the report – chapters 5 to 7, sets out the future aspirations and hopes of the service users. Chapter 5 is about attitudes to developing friendships. Chapter 6 sets out attitudes to doing new things. Chapter 7 describes interviewee's responses to rebuilding family relationships.

Part III of the report covers staff impressions, findings and recommendations. Chapter 8 outlines the impressions of staff who participated in the project. Chapter 9 contains findings and recommendations.

Part IV of the report is the toolkit developed from the action research and has the following elements:

- Introduction to the toolkit
- Values
- Setting goals
- Key stages in building social networks
- Interviewing skills
- Tools for understanding current networks; aspirations; motivation; preparation; commitment; and reviewing.

About the present

Chapter 1

Individual experiences

Never give children a chance to imagine that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very beginning that all living is relationships.

Aldous Huxley, *Island*

In this chapter some of the histories and experiences of four individual service users who took part in the research are set out briefly. They are drawn from their responses in interviews. As already mentioned the names are fictional, but they are used consistently throughout the report.

Margaret

‘Margaret’ is a 53-year-old white British woman with a 30-year history of rough sleeping in London. She is originally from Scotland. Although she used to drink she now rarely touches alcohol. She served a one-year prison sentence in 1989 for manslaughter. She did not mention having had mental health or drug problems.

Margaret was brought up in care and by foster parents. She met her birth mother when she was 15 and later lived with her and her stepfather for a while. When Margaret was 23 she had a son. He grew up in care but traced Margaret when he was 18. They lived together for three years. She has had no contact with him for seven years.

During the past 30 years Margaret has avoided contact with outreach workers. She dislikes hostels because they are too chaotic. She has only stayed in one once. She has occasionally held tenancies for flats but has always abandoned them.

Margaret now lives in shared supported accommodation. She still goes to the same day centre that she has attended for the past 20 years where she keeps in touch with friends she made whilst sleeping rough.

Alan

‘Alan’ is a 31-year-old white British man who has a history of rough sleeping stretching back

approximately 10 years. He is originally from Kent. He has mental health problems. He has been admitted to psychiatric hospital four times in the past. He was last admitted in March 2001. He also has drink and drug problems.

Alan was physically abused by his parents as a child and was taken into care. He was close to his younger sister whom he saw at least monthly until she died in August 2001. He is unable to see his older sister due to an argument he had with her partner.

After leaving care in the mid-1980s Alan travelled around the UK. Throughout his period of sleeping rough in London he has also stayed at many different hostels and shelters. He has recently moved into a self-contained supported flat.

Lianne

‘Lianne’ is a 24-year-old black Caribbean woman living in London. She is a single parent with a three-year-old son. She suffers from cerebral palsy. Lianne became homeless several years ago after leaving home following a breakdown in the relationship with her parents. She prefers not to talk about this and has not been in contact with them for over a year. She has no plans to re-establish contact with them.

Lianne found suitable accommodation with the help of an advocacy service. Her flat is specially adapted for her disability. She does not feel that her social worker is supportive enough and would like more medical and practical support to help her to socialise. She currently relies on her friend and her ex-partner’s family for practical help with her son.

Matt

‘Matt’ is a 19-year-old white British man currently living in a hostel in Birmingham. He spent time in care when he was younger, living in four different children’s homes. Since leaving care he has stayed in five different hostels including the one he stays in at present.

Matt has not seen his father for some time. Although he would like to make contact, he is concerned about his father’s reaction. Matt

frequently sees other family members. He has a sister whom he sees daily. He also sees another sister, his mother and his brother at least once a week and he has a girlfriend. His main priority is to be resettled into permanent housing.

* * *

These short histories illustrate, amongst other things, that homeless people have complex needs, of which not having anywhere to live is only one. The starting point for this research has been to work with agencies who work with homeless people. For many people homelessness is a simplistic description of one of the concerns of the many things that have been troubling them – often for many years;

sometimes for most of their lives. Homelessness may be the result of other difficulties in their lives, on top of not having anywhere to live being a problem in itself. With this in mind, in the rest of this report, when the term homeless is used it should be taken to include the range of resonances, problems, vulnerabilities and histories that have affected people's lives, including those mentioned above. There are of course others that have not been mentioned.

In this part of the report we have set out to give a person-centred perspectives. In the chapters to follow, we take a thematic approach, drawing on all the interviews and looking at relationships with friends, relationships with family members and support that service users receive from professionals.

Chapter 2

Relationships with friends

Overview

The interviews conducted for this research show that vulnerable people of both genders, young and older have at least some friends. Some even have partners, demonstrating that friendship and the desire for intimacy have certainly not been completely destroyed by living in institutions and the depredations of being homeless. Often their friends are other homeless people, hostel dwellers or flat sharers, or people they met in hostels they previously lived in, or some of those they met whilst rough sleeping. These friendships are commonly thought of as 'transient' but, according to some of those interviewed for this research, this is not necessarily or always the case. Some staff who participated in the research felt that street living was a lifestyle choice for some people, especially for people who had been homeless for a long time. Some service users mention friends from the street as people they would turn to for help. Nonetheless relationships between homeless people *are* often transient and many people who spend time with homeless or ex-homeless companions would look elsewhere if they needed help, perhaps to a family member, key worker or health professional.

Friendships made with people who have not been homeless were less common, and resettlement sometimes disrupted people's ability to build and sustain friendships. Older people interviewed tended to be less satisfied with their resettlement arrangements. Some felt that being placed in shared accommodation with unsuitable sharers was problematic. In particular, unsuitable placements might make it difficult to attain long hoped for stability. They also tended to rely more on day centres for socialising. The seven people (six men and a woman) interviewed who were in their thirties or older tended to be more thoughtful and analytical about their current friendships and needs and often talked with insight about their present and past circumstances. Many had slept rough and used homelessness services over the years. Three men mentioned chronic mental health problems and some people had also experienced long-term drug and alcohol misuse.

Friendships between homeless people

Almost all the people interviewed regularly spent time with friends who were currently homeless, whom they had met in hostels or on the street. Proximity to other homeless people and shared experiences contributed to these friendships, which are commonly described by homeless people themselves as "transient" as well as "intense". The idea of relationships being transient and intense may seem paradoxical, but it is not as contradictory as it first seems. The relationships are transient because the individuals will quickly move on from the streets or the hostel; and intense, because although the people involved do not know each other and have no shared history they tell each other about their lives, often in intimate detail. The relationship may indeed be transient *because* it is intense, and intense *because* it is transient. Short-lived and intense intimacy may quickly turn from feeling like a strong connection with another person to sudden misunderstandings that may escalate into conflict. Alternatively intimacy and intensity may derive from self-absorption and the need to talk about it. The circumstances and experiences of being homeless may make people more reflective and self-questioning at times.

More lasting relationships

Notwithstanding this combination of intensity and transience in many of the relationships of homeless and vulnerable people, some relationships are more lasting. Amongst people in their late twenties and older, who have been homeless for a number of years, people talked of long-standing friendships with people met originally on the homelessness scene. This group of people had often made and kept friends at day centres or other services for homeless people.

'Margaret', for example, is a woman in her fifties with a history of homelessness and rough sleeping stretching back over many years. She has a friend of 20 years standing and another friend she met two years ago whom she met while sleeping rough. They still keep in touch with each other through the day centre they attend; indeed the day centre is pivotal in their relationship. The key worker who conducted the interview commented that, despite the fact they exchange gifts at Christmas and on birthdays:

"I was struck by the fact that [Margaret] didn't know where they lived or vice versa."

'Alan' is in his thirties. He first slept rough after leaving care in the mid-eighties. He keeps in touch with local squatters and homeless people partly through a drop-in centre. He also visits the hostel where he used to live every week as well as seeing friends from other hostels from his past on most days.

For people such as these, no longer young, often with chronic long-term problems of mental health, drink and drugs and a long and traumatic history of care, rough sleeping and hostel living, their main opportunities for friendship have been with other homeless people. Some of these relationships have nevertheless evidently been sustaining.

Transient relationships

As we have described friendships with other homeless people may not always or in every case be transient, but for some people they undoubtedly are. 'Ronald', a man in his thirties with a history of mental health problems who has intermittently slept rough since his teens, said that all his current friends were people he had met whilst sleeping rough.

"I have always had very transient relationships and I lose touch when I move on."

Discussing the interview later, the interviewer explained that Ronald showed some insight into his situation. He felt the cycle of transient friendships and lack of stable and long-term friendships reflected his own deeper personal problems. He was unhappy with this pattern of relationships and felt that he would need professional help to overcome it. Margaret is also described by the key worker who interviewed her as having left many addresses and abandoned many tenancies as well as losing contact with professional staff and agencies even though, as already mentioned, she has managed to form some lasting relationships through the day centre she attends.

'Brian' is in his thirties. He currently stays in a mental health hostel. He has had several admissions to psychiatric hospital and has slept rough and stayed in a variety of hostels and shelters. He also expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with his contacts in the hostel, saying that, "other

residents in the hostel are just acquaintances".

Hostel dwellers in their teens that have been homeless for a matter of months rather than years often spend their time with other people living in the hostel of the same age. These relationships are described as being loose and transient, borne of convenience and being in the same situation, in the same place at the same time. Some of the young people describe these companions as 'friends'; others describe them as "people at the hostel".

'Caroline', a woman in her late teens, when asked who she spends her free time with, answered straightforwardly:

"My whole time is free time. At the hostel with other residents, whoever is around and seems friendly."

'Gemma' is also in her teens and described her reason for forming transient friendships as follows:

"Sometimes I like to make a fresh start but I'm reluctant to make new friends in case I leave them behind."

The interviewer commented about Gemma:

"[She] finds it difficult to keep connected with people once she has left a particular setting. Most of her friendships are on the surface in readiness to move on."

Identifying with each other

Clearly companionship to help pass the time is a factor in these relationships, but there may be more to it than that. Although Gemma's friendships are mostly shallow and transient the interviewer notes that she also feels she can connect with other homeless people.

"[She has] just left her home area and is in a hostel where she considers that residents have similar problems and understand her."

Other people also expressed this sentiment. 'Colin' is in his forties. He has been resettled with other ex-homeless people in a shared house. He has mental health problems and feels more comfortable with other tenants.

"I feel safe around my co-tenants due to my ill health. I don't think strangers could help."

In an interview with 'Liam', a teenager, the key worker noted that "[he] has started to use his friends in the hostel more for support". The key worker who interviewed Margaret said of the conversation:

"We discussed in detail getting to know another tenant in the house. She said they 'clicked' because the woman was a street person like she herself was. She felt this created a better understanding than with other tenants."

Dangers of friendship with other homeless people

Not everybody wanted to identify with other homeless people however. One key worker commented while interviewing 'Barry', a man in his thirties:

"[He] does not identify himself as homeless or a junkie, so spends less time with other residents."

Colin also expressed frustration about associating with other homeless people. The key worker commented:

"He enjoys spending time at day centres and has met new friends there. However it's difficult to sustain relationships and some places allow alcohol so other users are usually under the influence of alcohol."

Both these men have a history of rough sleeping and living in hostels spanning a number of years. For them breaking old habits, getting settled and escaping homelessness is complicated by some of their homeless contacts and the places where they have habitually socialised. The alternative however, which is possible isolation, can be hard to contemplate. The key worker who interviewed Colin sums up the dilemma facing people in this situation:

"[Colin] talks positively and feels he has a meaningful relationship with his co-tenants – but admits he can't carry on drinking this way."

Friendships with non-homeless people

Long-term friends made outside of settings catering for homeless people were less common as part of the current social networks of the people interviewed. However there were some

exceptions to this general rule. For example Brian named a friend made through the church he attends who he sees regularly. Barry mentioned a "long-term family friend" and a friend from his army days. Caroline mentioned a friend from home who she kept in touch with, and Irene, another teenager, homeless for 18 months, talked about four friends that she had known for between three and five years. All these people were living in hostels at the time they were interviewed.

Another interesting exception to the general rule was Ronald. Although, as already noted, he describes his relationships as transient he also chats to people on the Internet. Quoting from the interviewer's notes from the first interview:

"Ronald discussed his interest in the Internet and computer games and how he has ongoing relationships with up to 20 people through this medium... [He] discussed [these] relationships in great detail and very positively."

There is a difference, however, between these relationships and his everyday friendships. Quoting again from the interviewer's notes:

"...these are not people he would actually 'meet". [He] defines these as "safe" relationships."

The picture was different for 'Shola' who was not so reliant on services for homeless people. He maintained stable and supportive friendships outside of hostels and day centres in part because he had no choice. Shola, a teenager from abroad seeking indefinite leave to remain in the UK, relied heavily on friends with no connection to homelessness to help him as he is ineligible for a hostel place, benefits or work. He stays in his friend's flat. He also has a girlfriend whom he says supports him emotionally and practically. Her family also helps him with food and other support. He says he would turn to his girlfriend and flatmate for help. He is also attending a college course. This provides more opportunities to build friendships from other backgrounds. His complicated immigration status makes this difficult, however.

"I've had chances to make friends at college but didn't respond to invites or phone calls. My situation makes it difficult to make friends. I tend to back off before people get too close. I don't want people to know about my situation."

Resettlement

Some resettled people enjoyed more settled friendships. 'Lianne', a young single mother who was resettled some years ago following a period of homelessness caused by the breakdown of her relationship with her parents, has supportive and enjoyable friendships. Her most significant friendship is with a woman she met through work. The friendship has many facets – practical support with each other's children as well as socialising and nightclubbing. She has another friend with whom she goes to yoga classes. This woman's friendships contrast sharply with the idea of the transient friendships between homeless people. The common factor in the first friendship was work, not homelessness, and the ongoing nature of these friendships is based on shared activities and interests as well as mutual aid.

'Stewart' is a teenager living in supported housing. He found that employment was having a positive effect on his life. He answered "Yes and No" when the interviewer asked him if he was happy overall with the way his life is just now. However he mentioned work colleagues amongst his social network, and the interviewer commented:

"Stewart has a job at the moment,[He] feels his life is much better when he is occupied with employment."

'Nina' originally fled domestic violence, was resettled successfully and now has close friends that she sees daily. 'Liam' also has two or three close friends that he sees daily or at least once a week. The key worker who interviewed Liam says of him:

"When he came to... supported housing he was very timid but has started to find his confidence."

Older, more long-term homeless people expressed frustration with their resettlement arrangements, however, as we saw in the case of 'Colin'. The key worker who interviewed him observed that:

"[He is] very unhappy with the type of accommodation. [His] co-tenants, although pleasant, are different age groups and chaotic. He needs older and stable people around him."

Colin says that he would like "to be able to have conversations with people from my generation".

Margaret is also finding it hard to settle into her accommodation.

"The house itself is very quiet. The only other tenant who is ever around is very young, we've nothing in common."

Resettlement is a great opportunity for homeless people and is often eagerly anticipated. However as these examples demonstrate if the housing does not take into account the full range of the individual's needs it can be a frustrating experience.

Partners

Seven of the 26 people interviewed said they had a girlfriend or boyfriend. A further three said that they kept in regular contact with an ex-partner. It was not only the teenagers who had partners. Ronald, in his thirties, has a girlfriend, as does Ian. This reinforces the impression that homeless people have not entirely lost their social networks or social skills. They still seek out companionship and warmth and some manage to sustain intimate relationships despite their often chaotic and transient circumstances.

KEY POINTS

- The homeless people interviewed tend to have at least some friendships.
- Their friendships are mostly with other people met in settings for homeless people, especially through hostels.
- These friendships are often transient but long-term friendships can develop.
- Some of the people interviewed deliberately pursue transient friendships as part of their lifestyle of moving around.
- Shared experiences make it easier and desirable for some homeless people to associate with each other.
- For others, breaking away from negative lifestyles and habits means distancing themselves from other homeless people.
- Older people with longer histories of homelessness often found their resettlement arrangements unsatisfactory.
- Employment, for those able and willing to take it up, could provide a significant source of social contacts outside the homelessness scene.
- A significant minority of people interviewed had partners.

Chapter 3

Relationships with family members

Overview

Although the people interviewed were not living with their families it was rare for anyone to be completely cut off from all their relatives. People still kept in contact with a variety of relatives. The most significant relationships in terms of support, closeness and frequency of contact were usually with female relatives. Many examples of this are given below. Family members were cited as people that respondents would turn to for help. The relationships were positive, valued and involved possible or actual support of a more enduring kind.

Sometimes the relationships relied on infrequent or moderately frequent contact. Ambivalent or critical attitudes were expressed about the family in some cases but nevertheless people tended to maintain at least some contact.

Conflict in the family had occurred in some cases, mostly between children and parents. Some people were understandably reticent or unwilling to talk about family break-up although it seemed to overshadow their lives. An impression emerged in some interviews of partly suppressed painful and angry feelings about some relationships with parents. Although family relationships were frequently damaged or disrupted the people interviewed tended to still view these relationships as important.

One example of this is Brian. He is in his thirties. He currently stays in a mental health hostel. He has had several admissions to psychiatric hospitals, has slept rough and stayed in a variety of hostels and shelters. Brian, whose circumstances are described in more detail below, summed up the continuing importance of family relationships:

"I want to restore the family relationship I lost several years ago. Family is important to me and I care for them."

Reasons for family breakdown

Although few people talked openly about family breakdown, conflict or a poor or non-existent relationship with parents did emerge throughout the interviews. Lianne (whose

history was briefly summarised in Chapter 1) did not want to talk about her parents. According to the interviewer.

"[She] was very closed when I mentioned her parents. Didn't want to talk about this so I left it."

When outlining her current social contacts Lianne said:

"I've not spoken to [my parents] since last year and I'm not likely to for a long time."

Margaret (also described in a case study in Chapter 1) also refused to be drawn into discussing her family. She left her home area many years ago and has only had intermittent contact with them since then. She also has a son whom she has not seen for a number of years. Margaret puts this lack of contact down to her son's nature. She describes him as a "free spirit" as she says she was when she was his age. 'Craig' also does not afford his parents much prominence in his social networks. He was taken into care at a young age and hints at a history of poor relations with them.

"I could get on with my mother possibly but not my father... I see my mum and family at least once a year but I try not to."

Some people spoke out clearly about past physical abuse from their parents. 'Alan' said he did not want to get in touch with his parents. They physically abused by him when he was young to the extent that he was taken into care. 'Nina' said she had no concerns about meeting people from her past, with the exception of her father who physically abused her and whom she would rather not see.

Brian lost contact with his mother and brother after a violent dispute. According to the interviewer, Brian and other members of his family, including his mother and brother, have mental health problems that exacerbated already difficult circumstances. Now the mother and brother will not allow Brian to visit the family home "due to fear of violence". He maintains a relationship with his father but can only meet him away from the family home. Brian is deeply concerned about this situation.

"I haven't seen them since 1999 following an argument and my mental ill health... I am afraid that I may never see them again. I am isolated from them."

Shola is also unsure whether he will ever see his parents or other members of his family again. His parents came to Britain as immigrants but abandoned him and returned to their country of origin several years ago when he was still a child. Shola was left initially with a woman who physically abused him. Social services intervened and placed him with an uncle, an arrangement that has since broken down. He is concerned about his parents and sister.

"I try to blank [them] out but the fact that I can't see them is always on my mind."

'Hasim' is particularly isolated and depressed. A series of events has led to the worsening of his family relationships.

"After I finished school I went to work in Devon with my brother. This did not work out as planned. I became homeless and lived in a hostel for three months. I... went back to live with my parents. The relationship broke down and I was thrown out."

Current family contact

Parents

Some people do not see or speak to their parents at all, as described above. Despite the evidence that some relationships between parents and children seemed to be damaged beyond repair, and despite the distress this caused, some people still maintained ties with their parents that they valued, although they did not always spend a great deal of time together.

Parents were sometimes cited as people to turn to when in need. Although Brian is estranged from his mother and brother, as already described, he still has a relationship with his father that he values and he would turn to him for help if he needed it. Ronald also says that he would turn to his father for financial help. Ronald has a transient lifestyle and so apparently does his family. They "tend to move around a lot" and Ronald keeps in touch by email. He did not mention his mother but he does have a stepmother and four stepbrothers. Matt and Ian cited their mothers as people they would turn to for help. Matt sees his mother at least once a week. 'Govinder' cited his parents, amongst others, as people he would turn to if in need.

'Ian' in particular cites his mother as the single most important person in his life. He sees her at

least once a week. Although 'Georgina' does not list her mother as someone she would turn to for help, she does see her every day. 'Vicky' tries to see her parents at least once a month. Although she finds it particularly hard to maintain regular contact with her father she mentioned him, along with her grandmother, as the most important person in her life.

Other people had less contact with their parents and in some ways more troubled relationships with them, however they still maintained some ties. Nina rarely sees her father now but continues to see her mother daily. Lianne sees her mother at least once a month and her father much less frequently and Stewart sees his mother once a month. Although Hasim appears to be isolated and unhappy and was made to leave home by his parents he has visited them twice since then. However he also says that he did not talk to them during these visits.

Siblings

Relationships with siblings were frequently strong and important to the people interviewed. Contact was regular and many felt that help would be forthcoming if needed.

The young women interviewed tended, if they had them, to be very close to and reliant on their sisters. 'Lisa', in her teens and homeless for nearly a year, said she was, "confident my sister will not let me down" and said her sister was the person closest to her. Prior to moving to a hostel she had lived with her sister, "in an overcrowded situation". She now sees her sister at least twice a week. The relationship also involves her sister's partner and their two young children. She also has two brothers that she speaks to "occasionally". She sees one of them annually and the other every two years approximately.

'Irene' has a large family, with two sisters and three brothers. She is particularly close to one sister and, according to the interviewer:

"[She] feels that she would gain more understanding and support than she would from her parents."

Caroline has a sister in her thirties and is "positive about getting real support from her". She also has a brother but it is a relatively distant relationship.

Some men also had strong ties with their sisters. Govinder spends time with his sister at least once a week and would turn to her for help.

Alan was close to his sister but she died. When she was alive visiting her was difficult.

"My younger sister died in August 2001. She was my only real family as I was brought up in care. I used to see her monthly but there were problems with transport and cost as she lived in Kent."

Alan also has an older sister with whom he has lost touch.

"We lost touch after an argument with her partner. We last met at my sister's funeral."

Barry values the relationship with his sister. He says it is "meaningful" and they keep in touch with each other. Craig has a seven-year-old sister whom he has not seen for two years. He says she is "the only important person in my life". Ronald has a large family but as already mentioned he maintains little contact with them. His is a 'reconstituted' family: he has a stepmother and four stepbrothers. The family member he sees most often is his sister. They meet about once a month. He sees other family members once a year or less. Four other people mentioned close relationships with a sibling.

Extended family

People also maintained a variety of other family relationships. Some of these were potential sources of support. For example Ronald lists his grandmother as someone he may turn to for financial support even though he sees her infrequently. Georgina also lists her grandmother as someone she would turn to for help. For Stewart his cousin is a potential source of support.

Grandmothers are prominent in these social networks, although the frequency of contact varies. Alex and Vicky see their grandmothers at least once a week. Vicky names her grandmother, along with her father, as the most important person in her life. Georgina sees her grandmother at least once a month. 'David', a young man in his early twenties, "mainly visited [my] Grandma but she is no longer alive". According to the interviewer he now "seems unsure about whom he values as important in his life". He feels that his grandfather is important to him yet he has not seen him for two years. Matt also has a low level of contact with his grandparents. He sees them at least once a year. For Shola, as mentioned above, the situation is distressing. He does not even know

whether his grandparents are still alive.

Some people maintained links with aunts and uncles. Shola lived with his uncle but this arrangement failed as already mentioned. He still visits his uncle's house occasionally to check for post but the relationship is still poor. He "doesn't really have much to do with him". Georgina and Lisa have aunts that they see every week and Matt has an uncle he sees at least once a year.

Lianne is one of the people most isolated from her family. However she has an uncle living some distance away from her in a different county. She tries to keep in touch with him. She also says that she "caught up with some family members at Christmas".

Children

Four respondents – Ian, Margaret, Lianne and Govinder – had their own children. Margaret's son is grown up and she has not seen him for several years. Nor does she appear to want to find him. He was brought up in care and with foster families and traced Margaret several years ago. They lived together for a while but the son moved on again. The interviewer noted that "Margaret expressed no desire to resume contact with her son". Ian also deliberately avoids maintaining contact with his son. He feels that it is best if he has no further contact so that the child can have "a fresh start". Govinder also has a son. He is separated from his girlfriend and does not now see his son as often as he would like. Lianne is a single mother and is primarily responsible for her son who is very young.

'Surrogate' families

Shola and Lianne appeared to be isolated from their own families. Shola however seems to be treated almost as part of his girlfriend's family. He sees her parents, brother and nephew at least once a week and they provide him with conviviality, advice and food.

Lianne has little desire to see her parents again. She has two female godparents who throughout her life seem to have compensated for aspects perhaps lacking in the relationship with her parents.

"[They] are a surrogate family; they give me emotional support but it's not the same as when I was young, but we're still close."

Although Lianne is separated from her son's father she still sees him at least once a week,

along with other members of his family. Her son also has a godfather who provides practical support with things such as shopping.

KEY POINTS

- Most of the homeless people interviewed maintained some family contacts although the frequency of contact varied widely.
- Many of these contacts are important, valued and involve possible or actual support, both emotional and practical.
- The main source of family breakdowns amongst the interviewees was conflict between children and parents.
- Some people had been physically abused or taken into care.
- The most important family relationships were usually with women – mothers, sisters or grandmothers
- Extended family relationships were often the most lasting and supportive – particularly relationships with adult siblings and grandparents.

Chapter 4

Professional support

Overview

Many people interviewed relied on professionals for various kinds of support. Eleven of the 26 people interviewed said that they would turn to professionals if they needed help. Many different kinds of professionals made up this web of support, from support workers and housing officers to mental health workers and counsellors. Some younger people were already working with more intensive family mediation services. Many of those interviewed described long histories of involvement with professionals, particularly in mental health, fostering and care.

People in their thirties and older tended to have more limited contact with family and friends, a longer history of homelessness and chronic problems such as mental ill health. This combination often meant their reliance on staff in voluntary and professional services tended to be more pronounced. Some therefore counted staff amongst their networks of informal as well as formal support. For hostel residents of all ages, contact with hostel staff was frequent and they were often mentioned as people to turn to for help.

For the older people places like day centres and drop-in facilities often played a pivotal role in their social lives. They were places to congregate, meet people and get support; places to go for people who had nowhere else to go.

Satisfaction with support services was not universal and some people felt that the current support they were receiving was not sufficient. They needed more support with a variety of different, seemingly unrelated things, for example health, housing, benefits and money and basic skills such as reading and going shopping. Many wanted to take up new activities (as we shall see in Chapter 6) and needed practical advice on how to find out about and become involved with these activities. Generic support staff, not necessarily specialists, could provide much of the support and advice requested.

Past professional support

Several people interviewed had been in care as children. Alan started sleeping rough after leaving care in the 1980s. Since then he has also stayed in

many different hostels. Margaret grew up in care and living with foster families and has been in prison. Her own child also grew up in care. Craig was in care and in foster homes from an early age. He became involved in criminal activity as a teenager and has also been to prison. Many of the teenagers interviewed have stayed in more than one hostel and are developing patterns of moving from one hostel to another.

Some of the older service users such as Alan, Brian and Ronald had histories of mental health problems. They had been admitted to psychiatric hospitals in the past and some were in regular contact with mental health staffs.

Current professional support

Hostel staff, housing staff and key workers

People who lived in hostels tended to see hostel staff every day. They were also frequently mentioned as people to turn to for help. Resettled people in supported housing often had regular contact with a housing officer and some people had key workers for support.

Although Brian “wouldn’t talk to hostel residents as they have their own problems”, he would turn to hostel staff for help. He also has a key worker that he relies on for support. Alan is particularly reliant on professional and voluntary support provision (as described below). He says he would turn to his current key worker for support but he also keeps in touch with former key workers from hostels he has stayed at in the past and would also use these sources for support. Ian would turn to the housing staff in his current project.

Young people also relied on support staff. Hasim is currently staying in a hostel and is particularly reliant on hostel staff. He isolates himself as much as possible and does not appear to have any friends.

“I would talk to staff in the hostel if the staff see me looking down and ask if I’m OK. If I have a problem I’ll talk about it.”

David also stays in a hostel and would also look to a member of staff for help. For Gemma, it “depends on the sort of help” she needs but in some circumstances she would ask a member of the hostel staff. According to the interviewer, she “feels confident in asking hostel staff for help”.

Alex and Liam are both young people who have been resettled. They both mention their housing officers as people they would turn to for help. Alex sees his housing officer at least once a

week. Stewart also says he would ask housing staff for help.

An exception to this pattern is Lisa. She lives in a hostel but is keen to maintain contact with family and friends who have not been homeless. She does not want to cast herself as a homeless person and according to the interviewer has “no relationship with the [hostel] staff”.

Day centres and other ‘drop-in’ facilities

Long-term homeless people tended to rely more on day centres and drop-in facilities. They are important places for maintaining social networks. For Margaret, in particular, the day centre was vital even though she has been resettled in supported, shared accommodation. Margaret mentions the day centre staff, along with supported housing workers, as people she would consider asking for practical help.

Alan is not religious but he uses a church drop-in centre at least once a week for free food and to catch up with friends and acquaintances. Barry attends an ex-forces fellowship centre and a drop-in centre where he meets people he knows. Day centres are also important to Colin who says, “I feel safe in supervised places”. He says he would like to go to day centres more often. Some younger people also used day centres. Gemma said:

“I sometimes use the day centre to fill the gap... when I have to leave the hostel.”

Young people, however, tended to avoid using homelessness services like day centres. The staff participating in the research explained that this was because young people did not as a rule think of themselves as homeless, although nonetheless they look to hostel staff and support workers for help.

Mental health staff and other health professionals

The people interviewed with mental health problems tended to rely on Community Psychiatric Nurses (CPNs) and other mental health staff. Ian lives in a short-stay mental health project and lists the CPN as someone he would approach for help. Alan sees his GP and CPN at least once a month. He has been known to mental health services for at least four years and has had four admissions to psychiatric hospitals. Brian has also been admitted to psychiatric hospitals several times and is now staying in a mental health hostel. He has also had contact with a drugs worker. And Ronald, although not receiving any treatment at present, has a

history of mental health problems with one hospital admission. Lianne does not appear to have any significant mental health problems. However she sees a counsellor to “have space to talk about things”. She feels she lacks emotional support.

Support needs

Satisfaction with current support

People have frequent contact with professionals, as already described in this chapter. Hostel and housing staff, key workers and health workers are significant sources of help and support. However some dissatisfaction was expressed with these relationships. Gemma says:

“I need someone to explain things as I’m not good at asking for help.”

Gemma feels that her support worker “should be more perceptive and interested” in her well being, according to the interviewer.

Lianne is not satisfied with the support she receives from her social worker.

“My social worker is not very supportive, I feel I struggle a lot on my own.”

Housing and resettlement

Help with finding and settling into a new home was a high priority for some. Alan says:

“I need advice... especially regarding moving to a flat for the first time. I am now concerned with improving myself and feeling more settled.”

Alan felt that he needs support from his key worker, as well as a resettlement worker and the mental health support team. Resettlement was also important to Barry and Lisa, and Lianne also felt she needed housing advice. Lianne is a single parent and has a disability. She has needed advocacy support in the past for obtaining suitable accommodation.

Barry is particularly keen to be resettled.

“I feel confident that when I’m resettled everything will fall into place.”

Resettlement is not easy for some people, as Margaret’s experience recounted in Chapter 1 shows. She dislikes hostels, finding them chaotic, and deliberately avoids them. She says she has held tenancies for flats in the past and has abandoned them. She says bluntly that she got “fed up” and left. Brian has had at least one

tenancy, renting a bedsit from a private landlord. He abandoned it after three months.

Money and benefits

Brian acknowledges that he finds it difficult to manage his finances although he feels that he is coping at present.

"My budgeting is poor but I am learning to deal with this."

Lisa also says she would like help with managing money. Ian would like advice on benefits.

Health

Mental health has been a problem for most of the older people interviewed as already mentioned. Ian wants advice and support on general and mental health issues and on "avoiding boredom". He says his mental health problems make him restless and easily bored. Brian says, "I don't feel I am very healthy" but again says that he is currently coping by himself. And as mentioned above, Alan would like support from mental health staff in coping with moving into his own home. Advocacy with health issues was important for Lianne.

Family mediation

Two people were already being supported by family mediation services at the time of the project. Brian is also keen for reconciliation with his mother and brother. He recognises that he will need help with this. The interviewer notes that there are "mental health issues for all the family" that will have a bearing on the level and type of support needed to bring about reconciliation.

Basic skills and advice

Many people simply wanted to know more about the services available to them – not only professional services but local leisure facilities, libraries and so on. Colin is keen to distance himself from the 'homelessness scene'.

"I need help to establish contact with day centres, not necessarily for homeless people."

Ian feels he needs comprehensive advice and support in many areas including finding out about "daytime activities and [making] day-to-day decisions".

"I need guidance and support... I've lived independently since the age of 14 and lived by my own advice. This was not always good advice."

Georgina needs help to develop basic skills.

"I need help with reading and shopping from... hostel staff."

Across all the types of support discussed respondents also expressed the need for advocacy. For example Gemma finds it difficult to ask for help, as illustrated above, and Lianne's circumstances mean that advocacy is important in many aspects of her life.

Generic versus specialist support

Clearly professional support plays a part in many of respondents' lives, support received from a range of professionals, from mental health professionals to family mediation workers. To achieve their goals and change their lives others may need to be referred to professional specialists of different kinds. People also overwhelmingly want to take up leisure and educational activities, however, and these do not require specialist help. They need advice and encouragement and practical help to access activities like sports, college courses and socialising. Generic support workers or volunteers (or a combination of both) could provide much of this support.

KEY POINTS

- Many of the people interviewed had histories of receiving various professional services. Some had grown up in care or had been admitted to psychiatric hospitals and most were well acquainted with homelessness services and the hostel system.
- Professionals, including specialist staff are vital sources of support for many. Contact with professionals is frequent and regular.
- Older people with long-term histories of homelessness rely more on day centres and "drop-in" facilities.
- Although few complaints were stated about the standard of services from supported housing agencies, people were keen to receive more support and advice on matters ranging from managing mental health problems to accessing leisure activities and college courses.
- Although much of the support needed requires specialist workers, a great deal can also be provided by generic support staff and volunteers to assist people in initiating and developing stronger networks of family members and friends.

Part II

About the future

Chapter 5

Developing friendships

Overview

Most of the people interviewed wanted to re-establish old friendships. Seventeen of the 26 people interviewed answered Yes to the question "Is there anyone from your past that you would like to get back in touch with or see more of?" Eight of the 17 cited friends they would like to meet again or see more of. Making new friends was even more popular. When asked if they would like to meet new people, 22 of the 26 interviewees said Yes. On the other hand, across age groups and genders there were also concerns about building and re-establishing friendships.

The need for friendship

Differences in attitude towards the need for friendship seemed at least partly to reflect age and gender. For example, Lianne talked openly and at length about the type of support she needs. Discussing her emotions she said she tends to "bottle things up". She is concerned about this and is tackling it by seeing a counsellor to "talk things through" and keeping a journal of her feelings. She feels she can rely on her current friends for practical support but questions whether she can, or would want to, rely on them for emotional support.

By contrast, men were more likely to play down the importance of making friends and receiving emotional support and expressed more tolerance of isolation. Lack of friends was therefore not always described as a problem. Isolation was sometimes rationalised as a personal choice or the consequence of a fixed feature of the individual's character. Some men spoke of being independent. Ronald went as far as to describe himself as "emotionally independent". He said that he attended boarding school between the ages of 12 and 18 and traced his sense of emotional independence to starting

boarding school. When asked with whom he would like to get back in touch or see more of he said he would like to re-establish contact with people from school. He also said that he had never got on well with work colleagues. The interviewer observed that:

"Ronald seems to look back to schooldays as a kind of model for how he would like relationships to be."

Ronald seems to idealise his time at school and his desire to re-establish ties to this period in his life may suggest he has not 'moved on' emotionally from boarding school. As already mentioned, Ronald's friendships are generally transient. When asked who he would turn to if he needed help he "immediately thought of financial help", according to the interviewer, and "didn't really view emotional support as 'necessary'".

Alan, a man in his thirties living in supported housing, echoed these sentiments. According to the interviewer he "wants to be independent". Alan makes a point of not talking to his neighbours and illustrated this by describing how he did not ask them for help on an occasion when he accidentally locked himself out of his house.

Brian also keeps to himself:

"I wouldn't talk to fellow residents as they have their own problems."

Nonetheless it would be wrong to conclude that these men really need or value friendship less than other people. As we shall see they often have ambivalent attitudes, desiring friendship yet unwilling or unable to fulfil this wish. They have long and traumatic life histories involving rough sleeping, family breakdown, drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness and experience of institutions. Past 'friends' and acquaintances may have abused or taken advantage of them. This is hinted at more than once. They may want to break old habits and this wish may be in conflict with sustaining their current friendships with other homeless people. They also desire stability. The danger is that seeking to avoid

further bad experiences may mean that the person withdraws further from potential stable friendships. Problems with resettlement, discussed in chapter two, and mental health difficulties can further complicate matters.

Finding old friends

Losing touch

Why did respondents' friendships break down in the first place? In some cases conflicts unrelated to the friendship disrupted it. Nina was trying to locate an old school friend. She said that the relationship was originally lost due to problems with her family. Lianne lost touch with a friend she had grown up with because the friend's children's father did not like her. Gemma expressed a wish to reconnect with people from her home area but not with everyone she used to know. A conflict with a certain person or group caused wider disruption in her social network by forcing her to leave her home town altogether. The interviewer noted that:

"[She] would like at some point to get in touch with family and friends in her home area, but feels that if she sees one she sees them all. [It is a] tight community."

Falling out and drifting apart was also described. Caroline felt that her old friends had "followed the path of expectation" into further education and jobs, according to the interviewer. Lianne had another friend, her best friend, with whom she fell out a few years ago and "never patched things up". According to Lianne they "used to talk about everything". As noted above Lianne now feels she has nowhere to turn to for emotional support.

Motivation for finding old friends

People who wanted to regain contact with old friends were motivated by a feeling that these friends would be trustworthy and understand their problems. They also wanted to share memories and establish a connection back to often better times. Curiosity also played a part – people wanted to see what had become of old friends. However, as described earlier in this chapter, in the case of Ronald, idealisation of past networks of friends may not always be a positive thing.

Ian, a man in his thirties with mental health problems, left the family home in his early teens. He lived with a friend for a number of years before the arrangement broke down and he found himself sleeping rough. He expressed an

interest in rebuilding old friendships and described the possible benefits of doing so:

"Sharing past memories... Enjoying past friendships with people I know I can trust."

Trust appeared to be a particularly important issue for Ian. He said:

"People are only friends when I have money."

The interviewer observed:

"[He is] fearful about being taken advantage of... for example buying drinks in the pub."

Stewart felt that finding old friends could re-establish a connection back to "the good old times". Vicky, who lives in a hostel and is in her early twenties, felt an old friend could be more understanding.

"I feel my old friend will relate more to any problems I may have."

Concerns about finding old friends

Old friends may have changed so much that rebuilding the friendship is impossible, or the homeless person may worry about finding out that their old friend has done well in life while they perceive themselves to have done badly. In some cases low self-esteem, or even feelings that the breakdown of relationships with family and friends were their fault, prevented people from considering contacting old friends.

Gemma was initially enthusiastic about meeting friends from the past.

"It would be good to catch up with old friends, to find out what they have done."

The key worker conducting the interview, however, thought Gemma had doubts.

"I felt that the young person was in two minds. Although she is curious as to what her old friends may have done she is also anxious as to how they might see her."

Caroline was also "in two minds", according to her interviewer. She also appeared to have low self-esteem and perhaps blamed herself for her situation.

Initially [she] said yes; she would like to contact friends where she grew up. But on reflection said No because they were now so different to her... Though they may not

have had perfect families they seemed to have managed to get by unlike herself.

Hasim in particular displayed a lack of self-esteem. This young man deliberately isolated himself and showed little or no interest in making friends and taking up new activities. He was emphatic on the subject of contacting old friends, according to the interviewer.

"I asked him why he doesn't want to contact old friends. He said they would not want to see him because they are in a better position than him."

Alex wants to contact old friends but, like Gemma and Caroline, is also ambivalent. He became homeless more than 12 months ago. The key worker who interviewed him notes that "Alex looks at his stay [with us] as a new start in his life". He is trying to rebuild his family relationships although he is finding it difficult. His attitude towards meeting old friends is cautious.

"You would see how other people had done in their lives. I would want to be very careful who I met."

As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, sharing memories and a connection to the past can be motivating factors for rebuilding old friendships. For Alex, however, this was also a reason for *not* contacting some old friends. When asked whether he would like to get in touch with anyone from his past, he replied:

"Not all the people I used to know, it would be a bit sad as you would realise what has passed."

These are all young people and relatively newly homeless. Their teenage years have been chaotic and filled to a greater or lesser degree with conflict. As Alex illustrates, resurrecting old friendships may not necessarily help in achieving a balance in a new setting. Finding old friends would need to be done in a cautious and measured fashion by these people.

For older people finding old friends could also be fraught with risk. Colin is in his forties. He had been homeless for four years and was recently resettled. He expressed a desire to re-establish ties with other street homeless people who had been resettled. The interviewer commented:

"He talks about the changes he has made since he was resettled and thinks and hopes his friends were resettled."

Forming, however, lasting friendships with homeless people does not mean that the friendships should be based on continuing their previous lifestyle. Colin draws a clear distinction between friendships with street people that he wants to pick up again and street culture itself. The interviewer comments:

"He is clear that he does not want to be drawn into street culture, so he has certain expectations of people close to him."

Ian, although positive about finding old friends, is also "fearful about being taken advantage of", according to the interviewer.

Making new friends

Motivation for making new friends

Most of the people interviewed said that they wanted to make new friends. The desire for friendship in itself was the main motivating factor. People were generally dissatisfied with their current circumstances. They wanted someone trustworthy to talk to or turn to for advice. They wanted to feel less isolated and to have more of a social life. Other motivating factors included the opportunity to learn and broaden horizons through meeting different people, to build self-confidence and to find better and more positive influences. At least two of the older respondents expressed a wish to make stable friendships with people of the same gender, friendships lacking from their current range of contacts and relationships.

For Barry participating in this research motivated him to re-examine his current relationships. He initially said he was happy with the friends he had. At a subsequent interview, however, the key worker interviewing him found that he had changed his mind.

"[He] has done a lot of soul-searching and realised that those he feels strongly about might not feel the same way about him."

When asked what he felt he would get out of new friendships he cited peace of mind, a sense of security and advice.

Stewart also altered his views slightly during the course of the research. At first he did not want to meet new people, but the key worker noted later on that he had developed some interest.

"[He] feels his circle of friends is sufficient. However he thinks that maybe new friends will lead to better role models."

Being exposed to different views and learning new things was a popular theme. Alan spoke of the wish to “broaden my horizons and open new avenues”, and Irene felt that new friends could lead to “different experiences and views”. Making new friends could also boost self-confidence. Lianne is keen to meet more people of the opposite sex.

“I would like to meet more guys and I would always like to meet new people. It would be good for my confidence.”

Alex feels that self-confidence could lead to a range of positive benefits.

“I feel that making friends would build my self-confidence which would affect other parts of my life.”

For some people new friends can have positive influences on their lives. They want friends who can help to “broaden horizons”. Gemma says:

“I’ve met new people... and have discovered a lot about people and places.”

Govinder is a young man on probation and living in a hostel.

“[I’d like] new friends who are positive. Would make me feel more confident [and] more sociable.”

Friendship – the desire for companions and confidants – was in itself the main motivating factor, however. When asked what he might get out of making new friends, Brian said:

“Having people around would stop me feeling bored. To know I have people close to me.”

Margaret said:

“The enjoyment of seeing people. Feeling comfortable with people. Having someone to talk to.”

As we saw earlier she has two close male friends with whom she keeps in touch. Margaret is not, however, entirely satisfied with the situation.

“It’s difficult to meet new people, the people I know at the day centre are generally the same people I’ve known for years. New people, younger people usually, turn up over the Christmas period but don’t generally stay around.”

The interviewer observes that:

“Margaret is a very friendly, conversational person and it surprises me that she is as isolated as she is.”

Not having friends with other women was a concern for Margaret. The interviewer noted that:

“Margaret seemed surprised at the lack of women in her circle – as if she hadn’t thought about it before.”

According to Margaret the reason she has few female friends is because there were few women in the group she slept out with.

Ronald also has difficulty making friends with people of his own gender but the reasons he gave are more complex. He is clear that he would like to change his overall pattern of relationships.

“I’d like more permanent and long-lasting relationships. I have not had proper friendships since school and I’d like to change this.”

In particular, Ronald says he would “like to spend more time with men in a social context”. He is repelled, however, by much of what he perceives as typical of friendships between men. He says he is “not a team player”, has difficulty relating to heterosexual men and has “a problem with laddish behaviour”. He also says he has never got on well with work colleagues in the past. Nonetheless, he feels comfortable with some people.

“I get very attached to women, sometimes inappropriately, and I also get on well with gay men... my most important relationship is always with the woman I am seeing at the time.”

Unlike Margaret, Ronald’s problems with making friends of the same gender are not to do with simply not meeting enough of them. They are deeper than that. His inability to make male friends and his distaste for certain aspects of male behaviour seem to contribute to his unstable lifestyle, not least by affecting his ability to hold down a job.

Gemma has a habit of treating friendships as transient. However she displays some insight into her behaviour.

“Sometimes I have to think of other people a bit more. But at the same time I have to

think about assessing the situation a bit more, like asking if this relationship will last or is it worth it."

And Colin felt that even if he wanted to make new friends, whether or not he could was outside his control. Society's prejudices about older and homeless people would always work against him.

"There's nothing that people could do [to help me]. It's what society's all about."

Concerns about making new friends

Most people interviewed, as already mentioned, were keen on the idea of making new friends. A number of concerns were raised, however, including a fear of commitment, sometimes due to past negative experiences, or fear of rejection. There were also concerns about the possible reactions of people who were not homeless. They may have prejudices and preconceptions about homeless people and their problems. Another significant concern was money: Socialising without money is difficult.

Stewart felt that knowing too many people could "complicate" his life. He was guarded in his attitude towards making new friends. Initially he was not interested at all. Having friends is not always a good thing.

"I don't know many people but I'm happy with that. Too many people in my life will complicate it."

For Vicky making friends, as well as having them, did not seem worthwhile.

"Having friends is too much like hard work. It's like finding a boyfriend."

Matt, a teenager, summed up these feelings. He said that while making new friends can give you "more knowledge", it can also mean "more stress".

Shola, as mentioned earlier, is particularly guarded about making friends due to his uncertain position as an asylum seeker. Money is also an issue. This has caused him to miss out on opportunities to make friends.

"Money is difficult, if I'm invited to the pub I can't afford to buy drinks so I may back off rather than take up the opportunity. I don't want to have to explain my situation. I want to make the right impression."

Money is also an issue for Hasim, who says that "to be with people I need money". And in the case of Barry lack of money makes it difficult to break away from destructive people and habits. In the interviewer's opinion:

"Lack of resources makes it difficult to go to socially recognised places. It appears this has an impact on him although he doesn't mention it."

Barry does mention that:

"All my new friends have been made in a drinking environment. I haven't had a partner since I became street homeless."

Stewart "recognises that lack of money dictates the circles he moves in", according to the key worker who interviewed him. And lack of money also makes it difficult for Alan to socialise.

"I feel I can't go out unless I have some money to pay for things, for example seeing friends who expect me to pay for drinks in the pub."

Low self-esteem and past experiences also made Colin nervous about making new friends, according to the key worker who interviewed him.

"[He] has a very low self-esteem, perhaps the reason he is reluctant to start new relationships. He has had bad experiences before he was resettled."

Hasim also suffers from low self-esteem, as already mentioned. He is frightened that people will reject him and goes out of his way not to meet new people.

"I don't want to talk to people I don't know. I believe most people will treat me the same, not liking me."

Alan finds it particularly difficult to trust people.

"I feel that it takes a long time to trust people, this has always been a problem."

Another problem for Alan is his mental health. He feels this is a barrier to getting to know people.

"I feel I need to hide myself due to my mental health and self-harm. For example covering up my arms which have scar marks."

Ian has similar concerns about the stigma of mental illness.

"I feel nervous because my schizophrenic diagnosis makes people fearful of me attacking them. Also I have had heavy facial tattoos since I was 16 which makes people think I'm racist or violent... I feel like a threat in company. I try to talk to people about their fears and perceptions."

The stigma of homelessness is another concern for Barry, who says that he is "shy that I am living in a hostel". The key worker interviewing Irene also notes that she has similar concerns.

"People who have not experienced homelessness and the hostel scene may react to her in a hostile, judgmental manner."

Margaret's attitude, however, contrasts sharply with this. The interviewer discussed with her some potential barriers such as lack of income and history of rough sleeping. Margaret did not feel that these constituted barriers.

"People take me as they find me and if rough sleepers keep themselves clean and tidy people do not know their situation."

The interviewer comments that:

"If Margaret meets someone and they respond to her negatively then she won't maintain contact with them. She feels quite strongly about this point."

Lianne, as we saw earlier, is particularly keen on meeting new men. This brings its own set of concerns.

"I can feel very negative around them because I feel they're only after one thing."

Lianne also has a disability and again this raises a particular set of concerns.

"When meeting new people I wonder if they want to get to know me or if they just feel sorry for me because of my disability, because I can be in pain and need help."

Overall she feels that "it's better to meet people when I'm feeling more positive".

KEY POINTS

- Rebuilding old friendships and establishing new ones was overwhelmingly popular.
- Older men with long histories of homelessness and personal problems such as mental illness were more tolerant of isolation and less likely to see lack of friends as a problem.
- For these people loneliness was sometimes rationalised as 'independence'. This could be a defence mechanism to avoid further experiences of rejection.
- Conflict with another person or persons had led some people inadvertently to lose touch with their old friends with whom they had no conflict.
- The desire to rebuild old friendships was motivated mainly by three things: a sense that old friends would be more trustworthy, a desire to share memories and reconnect to better times and simple curiosity.
- There were three main concerns about rebuilding old friendships: old friends may have changed too much, they may have done very well in life and look down on a homeless person and personal feelings of low self-esteem.
- Making new friends was motivated mainly by an unmet need for stable, trustworthy relationships with people who could be relied on for support and advice.
- Other motivating factors included the desire to learn and broaden horizons through other people, build self-confidence and find more positive influences.
- There were three main concerns about making new friends: bad experiences in the past and the subsequent fear of rejection, the prejudices of non-homeless people and lack of money for socialising.

Chapter 6

Doing new things

Overview

The prospect of doing new things was overwhelmingly popular amongst the people interviewed. Nineteen out of 26 people said they wanted to take up new interests, hobbies or activities and 19 expressed an interest in visiting new places. People were asked about the types of hobbies and activities they might like to do and about their motivation or reasons for wanting to take up new activities and see new places.

Two broad categories of activity were particularly popular. These were sport and fitness pastimes on the one hand, and activities based around learning on the other. People who had been homeless for longer periods of time, those in their late twenties and older, were more likely to express an interest in low-key pursuits. Overall, respondents expressed a strong desire to ‘improve’ themselves, not just mentally and physically but also in terms of developing basic skills and self-reliance. They were also keen to end what they saw as negative habits.

Motivation

Several motives emerged strongly and consistently for taking up new interests, hobbies and activities. Meeting new people, increasing knowledge, skills and confidence, passing the time and alleviating stress were all mentioned. A desire for new experiences and education was the main motive for wanting to see new places. This is discussed later in this chapter.

For many people there was a combination of motives. Alex summed up the benefits for him of taking up a new activity.

“It would get me to meet new people and give me something to do other than sit about.”

Gemma talked about focus in her life.

“I would like to know what I want so that I could know what to do.”

During the research Gemma began to develop her interest in art. She became sure that a new pastime would benefit her.

“It would be good to have something to concentrate on, one thing to put my mind and time into.”

For Vicky, new activities could lead to “a less stressful life [and] something to occupy my time”, and Govinder wanted a “buzz” and “stress release”. Brian envisaged many things that he could get out of it.

“Pass the time, learn new skills, meet new people. It might lead to job opportunities.”

Sport and fitness

Sport was universally popular, however the sporting interests expressed by young people often tended towards more extreme activities. These included bungee jumping, surfing, sky diving, parachuting and rock climbing. Overall people expressed an interest in a wide variety of sports and games. Activities like swimming, going to the gym and, amongst men, playing football were particularly popular. Other team games were mentioned like basketball and netball. One-on-one competitive games such as badminton, tennis, table tennis and snooker also interested some people.

Football was particularly important for Shola.

“I made it to semi-pro when I was younger. I wanted to be a professional footballer. I feel I can express myself through football.”

Shola also says that he “needs to be mentally fit to play properly”. Worries about other areas of his life are preventing him from “thinking straight” at present.

The outdoors was Alex’s particular interest. He wanted to go camping and undertake other outdoor activities.

Education, training and employment skills

Vocational learning

Many service users were keen to learn new things, whether through formal courses or in more informal group activities with other enthusiasts around subjects of personal interest. Alan and Lianne were both interested in taking IT courses while Georgina was keen on taking a customer care course and Craig wanted to train to be a chef. Ronald was simply interested in “more study of any kind”.

Art, music and drama

Artistic pursuits were popular amongst men and women of all ages. People expressed an interest in music and drama groups, art classes, singing lessons and learning sound recording skills. Alan, for example, expressed an interest in amateur dramatics and starting a band.

Self-employment

Margaret was engaged in a Training for Work course and Shola was studying business at college at the time of the project. Both were interested in starting their own businesses. Nina was also keen on self-employment. She said that "I would like to start my own painting and decorating business". According to the interviewer, "she studied interior design and has always been keen to develop this".

Basic skills and self-development

Self-improvement

Brian was interested in joining a cooking group. He is also a religious person and attends church regularly. He wanted to develop himself spiritually by taking up Bible studies. Lianne wanted to learn self-defence.

Breaking old habits

Older people with a longer history of homelessness tended to be more overtly preoccupied with changing their own patterns of behaviour. Stopping smoking was a priority for Brian and Alan wanted to cut down on drinking and drug taking. Barry was also keen to get away from alcohol, saying that he wanted to "make new friends in a non-drinking environment".

Margaret has a history of abandoning tenancies and moving around and she seemed keen to break this pattern. When asked whether she would like to see new places she was only interested in terms of taking day trips and holidays.

"I've moved around a lot in life so I'm not too concerned with new places... London is a home for life now. I've done enough moving around."

Although Ian finds it difficult to motivate himself due to his mental health problems, he is eager to find new ways of passing the time.

"I get bored and restless easily so I spend all my time in the pub. I can't relax and watch TV. I need stimulation and good company."

Visiting new places

Young people

Many people were extremely enthusiastic about seeing new places. They took "visiting new places" to mean different things. There was interest in travelling the world and seeing different countries and in seeing more of the UK. Younger people were more ambitious about travel and holidays and what they felt they could get out of them. For example Vicky wanted to go to Cornwall and Georgina was keen on seeing Jamaica. Gemma said: "I love travelling. I like to look further and meet new people". Shola was equally enthusiastic.

"I haven't stepped out of London. I've only been to Margate. I would like to see other places – France, Egypt, Dubai. I'd also like to explore London. I think travelling and visiting gives you a different view of life. It affects the way you think. You can compare cultures and learn."

Experiencing new cultures and ways of life and broadening horizons were commonly perceived as benefits of travel and holidays abroad.

Stewart summed up these feelings.

"See new things, experience new cultures and ways of life, an escape from everyday life in Birmingham."

Lianne also feels that holidays could benefit her as a single mother and someone with a disability.

"Going somewhere hot is good for my health as the cold affects my disability... I'd like to visit new countries and places in England... I'd like to go on a caravan trip with my son."

For Vicky the attraction of visiting new places was straightforward.

"I don't care where I go as long as I enjoy myself."

Older people

Older, long-term homeless people were also keen to see new things but were comparatively modest in their aspirations. Alan expressed an interest in getting out into the countryside, in visiting historic houses, art galleries and museums. Margaret likes going on day trips to the seaside with her day centre and would prefer to do new things, including visiting new places,

in a group. She says she “likes places like Margate for the shops”. She is also interested in visiting museums and craft fairs, “quiet and peaceful” excursions. Ian would like to visit old houses, museums and caves and Brian is interested in going to the seaside and going shopping.

Colin and Barry have less clear ideas about places they would like to visit. For them the issue is simply to be exposed to new and positive experiences, which they feel they have lacked throughout their lives. Colin seems acutely aware of this.

“I’ve been less privileged in life. I haven’t done much.”

Colin was distressed at this point in the interview, according to the interviewer’s notes.

“He feels he is a victim of circumstances. At this point he looks down and is deep in thought. When asked he said he had feelings of regret and anger.”

The key worker who interviewed Barry observed:

“He believes in himself that he can start a better life if he was exposed to different situations.”

Other pastimes

People also expressed an interest in other pursuits. These ranged from Alan’s interest in starting a band to Colin’s desire to play bingo. Photography, shopping trips, walking and going to the cinema were also mentioned.

KEY POINTS

- Doing new things and visiting new places were overwhelmingly popular.
- Two broad categories of activity were popular: sports-based and learning-based.
- The four main motivating factors for taking up new activities were meeting new people; increasing knowledge, skills and confidence; passing the time; and alleviating stress.
- Visiting new places was motivated by the desire for new and educational experiences.
- The three most popular sporting activities were swimming, football and the gym.
- Interest in learning and training mostly fell into three categories: vocational learning; art, music and drama; and self-employment.
- For older people with longer histories of homelessness, self-development through breaking old habits was important.
- Young people tended to favour more “extreme” sports and activities and were more ambitious in terms of visiting new places.

Chapter 7

Rebuilding family relationships

Overview

The current state of family networks and the background to some of the breakdowns in family relationships were discussed in Chapter 3. Although there was often discord and not much contact with family members, people nevertheless tended to maintain at least some family relationships, and some of these were important, valuable and involved actual or possible support.

Mixed feelings were expressed about rebuilding relationships with family members. Some people interviewed were keen to improve or repair their family relationships. This could involve re-establishing contact, improving the quality of relationships with family members or increasing the level of contact. However some people were in a dilemma about their families, particularly those in their teens that may have left the family home in the last six to 18 months. They did not always feel ready to face their families, or did not want to re-establish contact with all their family. Rebuilding relationships, particularly with parents, may depend on the family accepting the young person on their own terms.

On the evidence here the nuclear family can be a place of conflict. However, extended families seem relatively to be in good shape. Even where there is conflict some would like to resolve it. Where children are separated from their parents they do not necessarily want to sever all ties; rather they would like more understanding and acceptance so that they could continue their relationship.

Motivation

Establishing contact with family members and building a better relationship with them was, for the people who wanted to do so, often motivation enough in itself. When asked what she might get out of improving contact with her family, Irene said:

"Just to see family, to know you have someone."

And for Lisa it was "knowing that you can talk to them again". Georgina would simply like to "build a better relationship with them".

Barry decided during the period of the research that he would like to see more of his family. He is based in London and his family is in the East Midlands. At present he rarely sees them.

"I'd like to establish contact with them again... Although I'm coping I feel empty."

Shola was separated from his family in the tragic circumstances outlined in chapter three. He was left to the care of an unsympathetic uncle when his parents left to return home to another country. He is particularly keen to contact his parents and sister. His main motivation is simply "to know they are okay". He also says:

"I would like to meet my family again to know about my origins. feel I have lost my identity and roots."

Craig wants to establish "a normal family life". He has had an extremely chaotic childhood and adolescence, becoming involved in criminal activity, and his life so far has been anything but stable. The key worker who interviewed him summarised his history.

"He has been in the care of social services since age seven. He has been fostered on numerous occasions but the arrangements have always broken down. He has been in various children's homes up until he was 15 when he served his first custodial sentence. He spent 18 months in custody and was put into a custodial foster home. He then at the age of 16 obtained a flat of his own. After only a month he was asked to leave the area due to problems he admits he caused. He was then put in a hostel before being put in a youth offenders unit where he spent 14 months. His youth offending team then moved him to [his current accommodation]."

Craig rules out any reconciliation with his father but says he could "possibly get on" with his mother.

Matt hints at a troubled past. His motivation for considering contacting certain family members and friends is to get "answers to what happened in the past".

Vicky wants more contact with her father.

"I would like to go and see my Dad on a

weekly basis."

David is keen to see more of various family members.

"I'd like to see my dad, brother and other aunts... I'd especially like to see more of my cousin."

According to the interviewer, however:

"Although the participant would like to see his dad he appears to be content if it does not take place."

Concerns

Most people who wanted to regain contact with their families or certain family members were worried about the reactions of members of their family. They may not have seen each other for a long time, or the person may have left home abruptly. The reason for the conflict may not have been resolved. The attitudes and behaviour of homeless people themselves can be a factor. They can have equally strong views and strong personal boundaries as the family members with whom they have fallen out. Members of their family may see their behaviour as antagonistic or anti-social.

Alex is looking for independence and the opportunity to restructure the relationship with his family on his own terms. He sees his involvement with a homelessness agency as "a new start in life". He is trying to rebuild relationships with his family but "this is proving very hard". He says, "I would like my family to accept my lifestyle". At present, in the words of the interviewer:

"He does feel there are some people he cannot face... mostly family. He feels they would be very judgmental."

Alex is philosophical about his concerns.

"I think it is only something you can deal with when confronted by it."

Matt has a similar attitude.

"I'll go and see what happens. I don't know how my dad is going to react... I haven't seen him for a while."

Vicky first left home aged 16 and stayed in a hostel. Since then she has twice returned home only to return to a hostel again soon afterwards. As with Alex she is still open to reconciliation with her family but she feels it must also be on

her terms.

"My concerns are their behaviour towards me in terms of accepting me the way I have grown up and become."

Brian lost contact with his mother and brother suddenly after a violent row. They will not now allow him to visit them at the family home and refuse to see him. Brian is concerned about their reactions to him, but he is particularly concerned that he may never see them again.

Lianne is isolated from her family, especially her parents, as described in Chapter 3, and is not keen to see them again. For her, the family constitutes a "negative environment".

"I have concerns about meeting my family. I don't want to be in a negative environment... I feel that spending time with some members of the family would not be good for me. Gets me into a negative cycle."

Although none of the homeless people interviewed identified themselves openly as lesbian, gay or bisexual during the interviews, participating staff pointed out that in their day-to-day work issues of sexuality are sometimes be at the heart of family conflict and disputes over lifestyle.

KEY POINTS

- There were mixed feelings overall. Some people wanted to improve family relationships.
- Simply having better relations with the family was often motivation enough in itself.
- Some did not want to do so, however, or did not feel ready to see their families again.
- Being accepted for who they are by their parents was an issue for some young people.
- Some people had left the family home following conflict. They were worried how their families would react to seeing them again.
- The family can simply be a "negative environment" and not a desirable place to be.
- Relationships with extended family members are often stronger and more positive than with parents. Conflict is mostly inter-generational.

Staff impressions; Findings and recommendations

Chapter 8

Staff impressions

Overview

The staff who took part in the research worked in a range of projects. These included hostels, resettlement, supported housing and family mediation. Some of these projects catered specifically for people with particular needs such as mental health problems, alcohol and drugs.

The overall reaction of the staff to participating in the research was positive. People said it was “a good idea”, “interesting”, “beneficial” and “helpful”, especially for service users but also for staff. The structured approach to working with service users on building and re-building relationships with family and friends, helping them work towards reasonable and attainable goals, was regarded as particularly valuable. Staff recognised that support with personal and emotional concerns such as family and friends could enable service users, in the longer term, to handle practical issues better such as rent and social security benefits. Other less concrete but equally important gains for service users were also mentioned such as increased self-esteem, motivation and self-awareness.

Some staff also talked about considerable enthusiasm amongst service users for the research. This was particularly welcomed by the staff as it was sometimes difficult to motivate the service users they were working with.

Staff also talked about benefits to themselves. Meeting staff from other agencies was widely considered to be useful, as an opportunity to learn, network and exchange experiences. Finding new ways of working with service users, getting to know them better and a feeling of doing something constructive were also seen as benefits.

There were also concerns, however, and some suggestions for how the research could have been conducted differently. Some felt that the style and ordering of some of the questions in

the interviews could have been changed. There was a little concern about the type of service users who should and should not be approached. Carrying on the work with the client beyond the period of the research was also seen as an important priority.

Benefits of the action research

Benefits for service users

Some staff felt that the project motivated service users to recognise and potentially address their own problems. One member of staff commented that service users are very much in denial about their problems. Participating in the project enables some service users to begin to recognise the root causes of their current problems, thus building a platform to start addressing them. Another member of staff said:

“They could identify gaps in their lives and where recurring problems came from... [It was] quite motivating for clients that the extra support from the worker was there.”

A member of staff showing an interest in the client’s feelings and in areas of their lives not often touched upon was viewed as beneficial and perhaps sometimes lacking in current work. One member of staff felt that the benefits lay in:

“...someone showing an interest in how they’re feeling rather than going through the usual process.”

And another member of staff expanded on this:

“[The research project] may have made their experiences feel important and valuable, and that they are being listened to. They tend to get lost in the system otherwise. Agencies tend to concentrate on the practical side, like housing and benefits... [Social networks] is missing from current work and is actually a very important aspect.”

One member of staff described the enthusiasm her clients felt for the project.

"Things went better than expected. Clients were more predictable than usual... They attended interviews and returned calls."

Another member of staff said:

"It made them think, it motivated some of them to think about what to do and then do it."

Another member of staff working with people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems spelt out why they believed discussion of social networks could help his clients.

"Although we tend to focus more on drug and alcohol problems and not social networks and emotional issues, these may be at the root of the drug and alcohol problems. So it would be worthwhile to talk about them... Less structured lives for these people lead to worse problems."

The structured approach used in the interviews could also potentially help service users to manage their problems more successfully and feel less overwhelmed.

"It helped them to plan for themselves, see where they were and what they wanted. It gave them a framework for planning."

And another said:

"Clients moved from ideas about what to do to [taking] action by the end of the project... [It was] simple but effective. The project itself motivated them."

Perhaps the most striking example of this was the case of Ian, one of the homeless people interviewed. During the project he revealed that he was aware that his extensive facial tattoos may be a barrier to making friends. He therefore made the decision to have these tattoos removed.

Another member of staff from a resettlement project talked at length about the benefits to service users of the way of working introduced in the research project.

"It's a good structure for working with clients; it tied in well with the resettlement project where I discuss with clients their future plans and how they will cope... Setting reasonable and achievable goals and helping clients work towards them is a good way of working. Resettlement focuses largely on practical issues like housing and

benefits but it's also good to discuss health, social networks and settling into a new neighbourhood... It's an opportunity to address the past, talk through past events, talk about the lack of social networks. Issues about the service users sexuality and sexual health are easier to address as part of a wider discussion of their life and aspirations rather than introducing it as a big issue on its own."

Benefits for staff

Some staff felt that participating in the research project allowed them to get to know their service users better. One person described the interviews as "a good ice breaker". Another said that they "got a fuller picture of the clients, got to know them better". Another said:

"I was more involved with residents, I found out about their feelings, motivations and so on, which I wouldn't have known if I hadn't been doing the project."

Another member of staff commented:

"It helped me to empathise a bit more with the clients. They often wanted to meet people outside the hostel."

One member of staff discovered through the project "how resourceful young people are in looking after themselves even when social networks are not in place" and "how forthcoming [they] are about their lives".

Staff frequently mentioned the opportunity to meet staff from each other's organisations as a benefit of participating in the research project. One person said:

"It was good to meet people from other organisations. I could learn from them where I was going wrong with my clients and the gaps in the service I was providing."

The research was also an opportunity to develop and learn skills. One member of staff described it as an "expansion of my present work" and another said:

"If I were ever to do research it would help me to design questionnaires and know what questions to ask. It could benefit all [agency] staff."

One member of staff from a family mediation project felt that broadening the scope of their

work to encompass relationships with friends generally, not just the family, could give staff “a better understanding of what the client wants”.

“It could work by being broader than family mediation. People aren’t necessarily interested in meeting their family but they may want to make new friends or find old friends.”

The structured approach of setting goals with service users and working towards them was also viewed as beneficial to staff as well as to service users. For one member of staff a benefit was simply feeling they were “doing something constructive”. Other members of staff felt the project improved their interviewing techniques and one-to-one skills with service users.

Concerns about the project

Concerns for service users

A key concern was if and how the work begun with the service user during the research project would be followed through. Some participating staff were concerned that service users would be “abandoned” with no planned ongoing support, often with hopes and expectations raised or with painful issues from the past brought to the surface once again due to the research project. One support worker from a hostel commented:

“[The research] needs to be followed up when they leave the hostel and move into housing. There must be ongoing support with this work.”

Another member of staff said:

“Some questions were a bit patronising. Clients thought of things to do but had no means to do them, especially financially.”

They also went on to point out that for some service users “it’s just another questionnaire... they find it a chore”.

Another said:

“I wasn’t too clear about the research aim. Would it lead to new developments? How would it help people in the long run, and what would be the outcome for the people involved?... I would have liked more information on what the research was aiming at.”

The same member of staff found that the success of the exercise also depended on the client’s frame of mind at the time of the

interview. Talking to an uninterested respondent can be dispiriting.

“The discussion sometimes took off, other times the client couldn’t be bothered. It depended on how they felt... Sometimes clients were not in the mood to answer certain questions... One person seemed to be saying what he thought I wanted to hear rather than what he actually thought. He looked like he couldn’t be bothered.”

This member of staff was one of two who felt that money was a major incentive for their service users in participating in the research project.

One member of staff felt that more worthwhile interviews depended on knowing the client beforehand. This member of staff also illustrates how the interviewing process may go awry if there is no pre-existing rapport.

“Knowing the client makes a difference, you can engage better with someone you know well. ... One person I didn’t know well divulged a lot of information and then disappeared. It’s part of his pattern.”

The member of staff had slightly mixed feelings, however, about carrying out the interviews only with service users they know well.

“It’s easier to do work with people you know, but that wouldn’t give you a full picture.”

Another member of staff:

“It may help if an independent person conducts the interviews – there are arguments for and against. It may encourage the service user to open up more because the interviewer is seen to be impartial and not the same person who deals with their housing. However service users have a rapport with their key members of staff.”

How the project could have been conducted differently

Staff that participated were generally happy with the interview formats but felt that some changes would be helpful.

One member of staff felt that the order of some of the questions “wrong-footed” some of the service users, in particular by moving from potentially fraught areas like family relationships

straight on to questions about leisure activities. This member of staff found that leisure activities and hobbies were far from the service user's mind after discussing, for example family breakdown.

Other members of staff felt that they needed more time than was available to conduct their interviews, given the difficulties in selecting suitable service users and the tendency for some service users to "disappear". One member of staff suggested that adding a review as an extra stage in the interview process would be useful to support the service user and maintain their interest.

The points made about the structure and contents of the interview formats have been addressed in the drafting of the toolkit. Similarly a new tool has been introduced for reviewing action taken.

KEY POINTS

- Staff participating felt that the research motivated service users to think about how they could improve their lives.
- Service users mostly responded well and appreciated being able to talk about personal matters, not just practical ones.
- Some members of staff believed that focusing on social networks could help service users to handle other areas of their lives more effectively. For example social and emotional issues could be at the root of some people's drug and alcohol problems.
- Staff participating felt the structured approach of setting targets and working towards them benefited the service users and themselves.
- The research allowed members of staff to get to know some of their service users better.
- Members of staff were concerned about how the interviews they carried out with their service users would be followed up.
- Some staff suggested improvements to the interview formats.
- The success of interviews often depended on variables such as the mood of the service user at the time and whether or not the member of staff and the service user already knew each other.
- Participating staff were unsure whether a key member of staff or a completely independent individual would be best placed to conduct the interviews.

Chapter 9

Findings and recommendations

Overview

This research sought to address the following questions, set out in the methodology section of the introduction.

- Do homeless people still have networks of friends and family relationships or have they been completely severed?
- Do they need help to sustain these relationships if they still exist?
- Do homeless people need support in making new friends? And finally,
- What sort of help could support workers and others provide to assist homeless people in re-building old networks of friends and family if they want to or in establishing new friendships?

From the findings of this research the answer to the first three questions would appear to be Yes, and the fourth question is addressed in this chapter. To summarise the findings from the research: whatever pain has been suffered; however much the loss, homeless people, at least amongst those who took part in this research, do:

- Value relationships with friends and family
- Have not lost contact with all their old friends and family members, particularly not grandparents and siblings
- Feel the loss of broken relationships
- Are keen to re-establish some ties with family members
- Want to make new friends
- Value the support of staff in discussing these matters and helping them think about how to address them
- Need support in identifying places and activities where they can meet new people and make new friends; perhaps even meet new partners.

These findings reinforce the point made in the introduction to this report: the objective of services for homeless people should go beyond practical support with finding somewhere to live and perhaps helping with access to training and employment. A council flat and a training scheme should not be the only or highest purposes of

services for homelessness and vulnerable people. Providing the emotional support needed for people to build durable friendships, old and new, is an essential element of ensuring that people who have been homeless or vulnerable are able to live lives which are not just superficially independent, but also interesting, enjoyable and mutually supportive.

Are service users being supported in building social networks?

The findings from this research, both from service users and support workers, suggest that supporting people in building and re-building their relationships with friends and family is not a core activity offered as part of housing-related support. The main reasons for this are set out below:

1. The roles of staff in supported housing agencies may be too restricted. Key workers and housing support workers tend to focus on practical matters such as benefits or rent, and less on the emotional concerns of their service users. Supporting people in building social networks does not feature on support plans (where they exist) or the duties of key workers as a matter of course. As a result any work done with service users about family and friends is likely to be unstructured and often unrecorded.
2. Support workers may not have the counselling and other interpersonal skills to explore more deeply felt and complex issues with service users. So if a service user needs that kind of support, they will either have to find it from another agency or be referred to another service provider by their support worker if they know of one.
3. Person-centred services offering the kind of emotional support that people need to build and re-build their social networks (as described below) are patchy and uneven and there is duplication in some areas. There are wide variations between the services provided by supported housing agencies and not enough awareness of services they do not provide. Whether or not a service user is offered intensive emotional support can often be down to chance. Referral may depend on factors such as staff awareness of the need for support to whether local intensive support services known to staff have the capacity to meet the identified needs.

Developing the skills of support staff

The findings from this research have stressed the importance of building and re-building social networks of family and friends for homeless and vulnerable people. They also demonstrate that helping homeless people to consider the state of their friendships and family relationships need not only be an activity for specialists, especially not in the first instance. It can also be a part of the day to day support activities provided by support staff in day centres, hostels and so on. The toolkit in the next chapter will assist support workers to incorporate helping people to build social networks into their day to day practice – alongside advising on welfare benefits, helping people to find training or employment, resettlement and the other activities that take place as part of housing-related support. Some support workers will also need to develop new skills.

Taking into account vulnerable people's social networks should become part of:

- the assessment of service users' needs,
- support in day centres, hostels and temporary housing, and
- resettlement.

Developing new and existing services

For some people, however, more is needed than can be provided by generic support workers. They will need specialist support – family mediation, befriending, counselling and so on. These services are not readily or generally available to homeless and vulnerable people. Some agencies that provide temporary supported accommodation for homeless people also provide a range of one-to-one services such as employment training or family mediation. No homeless agency currently, however, would offer the full range of person-centred services mentioned above. As a consequence no homeless person can be guaranteed to receive the particular combination of generic and person-centred support they may need. Instead, they will receive the services that are available from the agency by which they have been housed, or from agencies known to that organisation. This is restrictive and casts vulnerable people not as a person with choices, but recipients of services that happen to be available and on the chance that a support worker identifies the need for them.

Services needed

There are a number of specialist services, over and above generic housing-related support, that vulnerable people who want to build and re-build networks of friends and family might benefit from. These include:

- Family mediation services to help homeless and other vulnerable people to re-establish contact with family members and build or re-build relationships of trust. Developing negotiation skills amongst vulnerable people and their families could be part of this.
- Befriending services to help people identify suitable new activities and places – sports activities, arts and cultural activities, clubs and so on, that they could become involved with where they might meet new people. Going to new places and meeting new people may seem a difficult prospect especially if, as we have noted, people lack self-esteem or confidence. A companion may make the initial contacts easier. A volunteer, once a homeless person had established an activity with which they wished to become involved, could provide that companionship.
- Mentoring might help those homeless people who feel that there are aspects of their current behaviour which are impediments to making new friends or getting on better with old ones. For example one person felt that his extensive tattooing was a barrier between him and the new people he met. A mentor might help to enable some of these changes to be made.
- Counselling services were already being used by some of the people interviewed to help them cope better with events in the past. Counselling may have an important role to play if anti-social or inappropriate behaviour is the result of unresolved conflicts from the past leading people to repeat patterns of unacceptable behaviour. Similarly counselling will help people with a lack of insight into the effect of their behaviour on themselves or on others. It can also be helpful for people with mental health problems.

Suggesting, however, that every supported housing project should also provide the range of person-centred services mentioned is impractical. There is also an advantage in some of these services being provided outside the housing context. Confidentiality will be easier to maintain; trust may be more readily established; openness and intimacy engendered and so on.

So currently the circle cannot be squared: all vulnerable people should have access to person-centred services if they want and need them, but all supported housing agencies are unlikely to provide them. These two propositions can be reconciled by those agencies which currently offer these services, either to the residents of their own housing or to other service users, being drawn into a network.

Building a network of person-centred services

In order to build such a network descriptions of services available in local areas will need to be drawn up. These will need to include the following information:

- Services offered
- Standards adhered to
- User groups served, including eligibility and exclusion criteria
- Geographical catchment area
- Capacity to take on new work.

These descriptions can then be collected together in one place. The most rational place would be a website, which can be updated with new information about needs, services and organisations providing relevant services. Those seeking services for themselves or their service users could readily get instant information about the availability of services from the website. The website would also be an opportunity to identify examples of good practice and create discussion forums to discuss and solve problems of policy or practice.

One could imagine a support worker and a service user identifying (as part of the key working arrangements and in a support plan) that the user needed more intensive support than the support worker could provide. This might be counselling or family mediation. Or they might identify that a volunteer could befriend the service user and help them to go to new places, do new things and perhaps meet new people. If there was a website where information was available, organised by locality, about other agencies outside supported housing that could provide these services or support, they would be available to get the information for the homeless or vulnerable person and help them to contact these other providers. Best of all, homeless and vulnerable people could access the website themselves, perhaps with the help of an advice worker or an advocate, and

identify for themselves support services, volunteering groups and social activities which they might want to make contact with or participate in.

Such a website might drastically improve a situation from one in which:

- The number of specialist, person-centred support services available for homeless and vulnerable people is insufficient.
- Services are patchy.
- Housing support workers don't always know how to access them, or even of their existence.

To a situation in which:

- Service users need for support in establishing and developing networks of friends and family members is part of key working and support planning in supported housing agencies
- Support workers would have the skills to assist service users in identifying the need to work on building and re-building their social networks
- Support workers would know where and how to access person-centred support services when the service users they were working with needed them
- Service users who identified that they needed more in-depth, person-centred support would be able, either on their own or with the help of a support worker, to identify and access services available in their area.

The report of this research is, we hope, a small milestone on the road to this destination.

Is it only homeless people who need person-centred support services?

The table below sets out some of the past problems and experiences mentioned by the service users who participated in the research which have contributed to their current needs. Not having a home is evidently usually only one of several problems (see table over).

In the light of the multi-faceted connections between a range of needs including homelessness, vulnerability and loneliness and isolation, it would be wrong to confine access to support services for building and re-building social networks solely to people who have been homeless. For all the reasons that homeless people need these services, people with mental

Table: Reasons for homelessness disclosed by participants in their personal histories*

	<i>Times mentioned</i>
Family conflict	10
Rough sleeping	7
Alcohol and/or drugs	4
Mental health	4
Care	5
Prison	2
Total number of participants	26

**Note: Some participants disclosed more than one problem in their past*

health problems or other needs may also need them. In some ways these are not very different people to the participants in this research. Other service user groups such as refugees, could also benefit. If they have the same needs, they should, it should go without saying, have access to the same services. One of the goals of bringing together a range of revenue funding

streams for housing-related support into the Government funding programme for supported housing commencing 2003, *Supporting People*, is to avoid arbitrary exclusions of some client groups from some types of services. So the strongest case exists for:

- Finding out the extent to which other vulnerable people from all groups of service users need support with building and re-building relationships with family and friends.
- Ensuring that the funds and the services are available for all vulnerable people to access the emotional support services they need, without first having to become homeless, or be in danger of becoming homeless.

Vulnerable people, whatever their range of needs, should of course have somewhere to live and perhaps a paid job. But even if these goals of independence cannot be achieved straightaway, or for some people at all. Everyone giving and receiving help and support from family and friends can begin to feel themselves to have the self-esteem that comes from giving as well as receiving – and the fulfilment of a life of work, pleasure and love.

Part IV

Toolkit for mapping social networks

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Toolkit for mapping social networks

*All learning is for the sake of action and all
action for the sake of friendship*

John MacMurray

Introduction to the toolkit

The starting point for this toolkit is that a network of friends and family members are important to vulnerable people in the same way and for the same reasons as they are important to all of us. Vulnerable people, particularly those who have been homeless may, however, need further assistance in building and re-building relationships with family and friends if they have lost touch with people they value, or become isolated. The experience of this action research is that support workers performing generic roles can include in their work an element of assistance with building and re-building relationships with family and friends. But friends and family, or generic support workers are not a substitute for professional help with, say, mental health, drug or alcohol misuse, behaviour management and so on. Relationships with friends and family however are important contributors to confidence, self-esteem and a sense of wellbeing – an improved quality of life. Discussions of relationships with friends and family may also highlight other needs which generic support workers may not be able to deal with which may require more intensive support. For example, an individual service user might want the help of a skilled mediator in making contacts with family members they have lost contact with. Or they may feel that they need counselling which would again require an intensive and skilled input.

Purpose of the toolkit

This toolkit is designed to assist support workers working with vulnerable people who are not specialist professionals but who nevertheless can provide a degree of emotional support to help service users to begin to:

- Map their current social networks and relationships with family and friends.
- Consider whether they have aspirations to

change or strengthen them.

- Be sufficiently motivated to take the next steps.
- Prepare and make an active commitment.
- Plan and take the action they have decided upon. And finally,
- Review and learn from the action they have taken, in preparation for taking further action.

The overarching aim is to provide vulnerable people with a structured way of reflecting on their relationships, their lives and their behaviour. They can then consider their goals, take action to meet those goals and learn from that action. In short, it is a structured approach to facilitating people to change some aspects of their own lives. Support workers, however, whilst wanting to support service users to maximise their potential, should guard against being over-ambitious. Unrealistic expectations, both about what can be achieved and the pace at which it can be achieved, should be avoided. Not every vulnerable person even with the help of a support worker will be able to work their way through all stages of the toolkit. Staff and service users can use the parts they think are relevant and helpful and which will help service users to make as much progress as they feel is appropriate for them. Similarly the toolkit may raise issues and problems that are beyond the skills of the support work and using the toolkit may therefore highlight the need for the input of a professional counsellor or mediator.

Who is the toolkit for?

As has already been mentioned, the toolkit is principally aimed at support workers working with vulnerable people. They could be working with vulnerable people at any stage of service delivery – assessment, support or resettlement. However using the toolkit to focus on social networks at a time of crisis, such as when a tenancy has broken down, or someone has left the family home, is unlikely to be appropriate. The toolkit is a more long term and incremental approach to sustaining independence and improving quality of life, not a 'quick fix' in a difficult situation. In a crisis people are more

likely to need immediate and unconditional support.

The toolkit could be useful in a range of different service environments:

- As part of advice services for homeless or other vulnerable people
- In day centres
- In hostels or supported housing
- As part of preparing for resettlement.

It may also assist specialist staff, such as practitioners of family mediation or befrienders, but it is primarily designed for the use of generic support and advice workers..

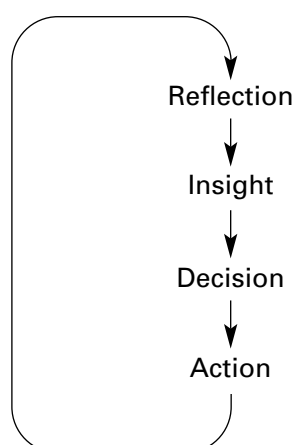
How does it work?

The toolkit sets out the essential pre-requisites for this work – values and ground rules. It then sets out the goals which the homeless person and the support worker working with them might set themselves to work towards. Next, the key stages for the discussions are set out following the model of:

1. Plan
2. Do
3. Review.

The toolkit then sets out the arrangements for the initial discussion and the skills needed for conducting the interviews. After these initial stages are described, the toolkit provides a series of tools to use in interviews with service users to go through the key stages listed above.

The toolkit is designed to encourage service users to combine reflection, insight and action in a sequence as set out below, and at the end of each sequence, people would be encourage to reflect on the action they have taken, such that the process would become iterative and self-reinforcing:



1. Values and ground rules

The following are the important underpinning values that should inform working with service users to help them build and re-build relationships with family and friends.

- Recognising the importance and *value of sociability and mutuality* in everyone's life. By mutuality we mean relationships where support or the possibility of support is given and received by both parties, though not necessarily at the same time.
- How people choose to organise and conduct their social relationships is a matter of individual *preferences*.
- Some people will place the *balance* of importance on friendships. Others will think family relationships more important. Some people want large circles of friends; others are content with smaller circles. Some people want frequent contact; others are content to see their friends and family less often, and feel no less intimate for that. Service users should decide for themselves the right balance for them.
- Service users who seek assistance with building and re-building relationships with family and friends do so by *consent*. Nobody should be forced to discuss these matters, or have to continue to discuss them if they don't want to.
- The service user will be *regularly updated* and will have the *right to withdraw* from the service.
- Staff will seek *not to be judgmental* about users' current or future lifestyles.
- Staff will seek to establish and maintain a relationship of *trust* with users and other staff.
- The approach will be *non-intrusive*. If a service user does not wish to answer a question or discuss a specific issue, they will not be expected or forced to.
- The approach will be *facilitative, not interventionist*. For example it will not normally be appropriate for support workers (except when they have professional mediation skills) to make contact with family members or old friends on behalf of the service user, but to assist the individual to make contact themselves.
- The member of staff's relation to the service user will be one of *empathy*, not sympathy. In other words the member of staff will try to identify with and comprehend the service

user, not simply agree with the sentiments or opinions they express.

- Discussions will be emotional for service users and participants (though the strength of the emotions being felt may not show) bringing up feelings of loss, rejection or abandonment. The approach will be to *support* people through those feelings.
- Staff should recognise the *limits* of their roles and skill levels and be aware of when to refer the service user on to a specialist or professional service.
- The goals set by an individual user, will be *goals set by the user themselves*
- Information about users will remain *confidential*. Wherever possible users will remain anonymous in discussions with other workers.

2. Goals

What sort of goals might users set for building and re-building social relationships with family and friends?

The following goals are ones that the support worker and the service user might jointly agree to work towards. These goals are demanding and it is, once more, important that neither the support worker or the service user has unrealistic expectations, proceeding in a way and at a pace that the service user finds comfortable and helpful, not intrusive or pressurising.

- Beginning to explore *past relationships*, what happened; why; what can be done about it, if anything.
- Seeking to re-establish, strengthen or invest in contact with *children, parents, grandparents, siblings, old friends or partners*
- Working towards reducing conflict and/or strengthening their *current relationships*
- Endeavouring to establish *new relationships* appropriate to their age.
- Beginning to *replace relationships and patterns that users themselves regard as negative*, with ones they regard as more positive.
- Starting to form *more informal and less stigmatising relationships*
- Developing *hobbies and interests* and rediscovering old ones
- Establishing contact with *shared communities of interest* – e.g. lesbians and gay men, religious groups or faith communities. And possibly,

- Reflecting on the reasons for repeating *old patterns of behaviour* such as tenancy abandonment and drug and alcohol misuse

Though this final goal may be more achievable by counselling than by housing-related support workers.

3. Key stages

The key stages are:

Plan

- Raising awareness of the importance of positive social relationships
- Exploring and examining reasons for isolation
- Exploring and examining reasons for losing contact with friends and family in the past.
- Exploring and examining current relationships including reasons for attachment to relationships that the user recognises as negative or destructive.

Do

- Developing new social skills, if necessary. In line with the users setting and prioritising their own goals, they will also be asked to identify their own sense of potential for social relationships and activities. Ideas about appropriate numbers or types of relationship will not be imposed.
- Exploring options for
 - the user
 - the member of staff
 - the member of staff's team
 - other organisations.
- Action planning
 - action that the service user will take
 - action that the member of staff will take
 - action that a third part might take.

Review

- Considering answers to the following questions:
 - How did it go?
 - How did the service user feel about the way it went?
 - How did people react?
 - Should the service user have done anything different?
 - What are the next steps?

4. Interviewing skills

Listening

The support worker will want to listen actively to what they are being told and to communicate to the other person they have been listening carefully. Some of the techniques of active listening are set out in the boxes below.

- Give clear verbal and non-verbal signals that they have heard what is being said.
- Ask open questions in a structured way.
- Follow up questions in a supportive and probing way.
- Summarise and reflect back on what has been discussed.
- Use silence actively.

The support worker needs to show they are listening through their behaviour. Some of the ways of communicating they are listening are set out below:

- Maintain an open, attentive posture.
- Keep eye contact without staring in a disconcerting way.
- Show they are listening by, for example, nodding or leaning forward.
- Do not interrupt.
- Do not fire unconnected questions.
- Do not change the subject without summarising what has been said and agreed, and checking whether there is anything they want to add.

Active silence

When people are talking they should be allowed to take their time. The support worker should not be put off by silence. They should consider what is going on in the silence – is it an active silence? Is the other person using the silence to think or are they waiting for the support worker to say something? If they are thinking, the support worker should not interrupt them. It might distract them. Some people, however, may need prompting if they are stuck.

Pace of the discussion

The support worker should let people finish what they are saying. If the support worker is not sure if they are ready for the next question, ask them instead of ploughing on at the first break in the conversation. A successful interview needs time. Don't hurry it; don't protract it. The support worker needs to check that they have got the pace right. If the individual is upset, the support

worker will need to take it more slowly. The support worker should not set the pace by their attention span, diary workload or other priorities.

Although it is important not to rush people, it is important for the service user to know how long each discussion is going to last. They then have a sense of boundaries and limitations and will feel the need to use the time available appropriately and usefully and to try to avoid trivial or irrelevant matters, though the discussion will need to be discursive and reflective, without being meandering or lacking direction.

Verbal and non-verbal messages

Service users will respond not only to *what* is said but *how* it is said. They use physical cues to judge a speaker's sincerity. These include eye contact, facial expression, tone and volume of voice, body position, and gestures. Non-verbal communication can either add to what is said, or it can minimise or even contradict it. Verbal and non-verbal messages need to be congruent. Where they are not, the listener will become confused and either disbelieve what is being said, or interpret it through their own feelings.

If it is said in a calm, clearly audible voice, maintaining direct eye contact and giving congruent behavioural messages, by leaning forward or nodding the service user will feel confident that the support worker will indeed do what they can to help. Perhaps more importantly, they will also feel a degree of confidence that what they do will actually help.

Body language

Everyone has their own behavioural norms and habits. Families will understand them; however to strangers, everyday behaviour, such as looking away when talking to someone or folded arms across the chest may detract from or contradict what is being said. *The support worker should ask themselves the following questions:*

Eye contact?

- Do I look another person directly in the eye when I am talking to them?
- Do my eyes shift away?
- Do I lower my eyes when I am feeling doubtful, uncertain or negative?
- Do I stare in a way that makes people uncomfortable, or turn away feeling intimidated or unsure of themselves?

Facial expression?

- Do I smile at inappropriate moments, out of anxiety, and not because I am amused in any way?
- Do I look severe and unfriendly, when I really am just feeling serious?
- Is the fact that I am listening clearly communicated through my behaviour?
- Do I nod, or make a sound of acknowledgement?
- Do I look bored?
- Do I look inappropriately anxious?

Tone and volume of voice?

- Do I find it difficult to use a firm tone of voice?
- How do I behave when I am interrupted?
- Do I press on regardless, or do I stop and listen to what they are saying?
- If it is important that I finish what I am saying, do I say that, then ensure they are listening before continuing?
- Can people I am speaking to hear me clearly?
- Do I appeal to others in a child-like voice?
- Do I speak too loud or too slow when speaking to someone whose first language is not the same as mine?

Body posture and gestures?

- Do I generally stand or sit too near or too far from the other person? A good indication of this is if the other person moves away, or leans back.
- Do I wring my hands, fiddle with my hair, jewellery, or pen, fidget, doodle etc.?
- Do I sit forward in my chair when I am anxious?
- Do I lean forward when I am trying to emphasise a point?
- Do I lean back and slouch looking indifferent when I really am listening?
- Do I sit with my arms folded across my chest looking defensive and excluding?
- Do my arms, by my side or on my knees, convey openness and interest?

Most people probably don't know the answers to all these questions. They will need to ask someone they can trust to be honest with their feedback about their body language and what they can do to get their message across more effectively. Videotapes of one's own behaviour and body languages can also provide important insights into unconscious behaviour patterns that may be unintentionally off-putting or misleading.

Questioning

The support worker should ask questions one at a time – double-headed or multiple questions do not work. The person being interviewed will forget some of it and only answer what they remember. The support worker will therefore not get a clear picture.

Open questions

Open questions simply suggest the subject matter for an answer. They do not pre-suppose what the answer might be. They generally cannot be answered by Yes or No. They do not limit the time taken to answer or the amount of information offered. Each subject for discussion in the interview needs to be initiated with an open question. Open questions generally begin with the words 'How...?' or 'What....?'.

Some examples of open questions are: "How did you feel about that...?" Or, "What did that make you think...?"

Rephrasing open questions

The support worker may need to rephrase questions that were misunderstood or were not clear. There is a temptation to follow an open question with a leading one. Leading questions are discussed below.

Follow-up questions

After an open question the support worker may need to ask follow-up or probing questions. The support worker needs to note their follow-up questions, allow them to finish their answer to the original question first, then put the follow-up questions one at a time. There are two sorts of follow-up questions:

1. to clarify, to get more detail or to confirm your understanding, and
2. to move on to a new subject.

The first sort may be a fact-seeking question. It helps to summarise the first answer before asking another. The second sort moves on to a new subject. The support worker should focus on what they are told – basing further questions on previous answers. This will encourage them to believe they are being listened to and taken seriously, building their confidence to open up and give a full account. Launching a barrage of questions will have the opposite effect.

Closed questions

Closed questions should only be used to establish facts. They do not encourage someone to open up. They often just have the answer 'Yes' or 'No'.

Leading questions

Leading questions imply the answer in the way the question is phrased – usually demanding a yes or no answer. Support workers should only use leading questions to clarify something, or as a prelude to summarising and reflecting as discussed below. The danger is that they do not correct misunderstandings. The support worker may put words into someone's mouth, which they may not have the confidence to contradict. For example, these would be leading questions: "So you would agree that...?" Or, "Was that because...?"

Loaded questions

Loaded questions contain value judgements which will undermine your objectivity. They are not appropriate because they imply disbelief, suspicion or aggression. Examples of loaded questions are: "Are you sure you would do that....?" Or, "You didn't really think that, did you...?"

Summarising and reflecting

Summarising and reflecting on what has been agreed brings one section of the discussion to an end and forms a bridge into the next. Using this technique ensures the service user knows

exactly where they are, and that the support worker has understood them. They will not be repeating things out of anxiety that the support worker had not yet got the message. So as the discussion moves on, they can clear their minds to focus on the next questions.

Taking notes

The support worker should explain the need to take notes to help remember the discussion, and to keep a complete, accurate record. Taking notes in the wrong way can undermine the empathy the support worker is trying to establish, making them doubt the supportive intent of the support worker. If they feel the support worker is keeping notes to challenge them, or to hold them to account for what they have said, they will be reluctant to be frank. They could start to see the support worker as putting pressure on them. The notes should record as closely as possible what people actually say, without the note taker adding their own interpretation. Notes are for accuracy, not to make judgments. The support worker will want to write out the key questions in advance and, if they use the suggested templates in the Toolkit, they can then write the answers as they receive them.

Notes can be read back after each stage in the discussion to help to summarise. Once the service user confirms the accuracy of the notes the support worker should ask if they have anything more to add which could be included.

Tool 1. Mapping current relationships

When recording “Support worker’s comments” on this and subsequent tools, the worker should be aware of the client file confidentiality arrangements in their own organisation.

1A. Semi-structured interview template

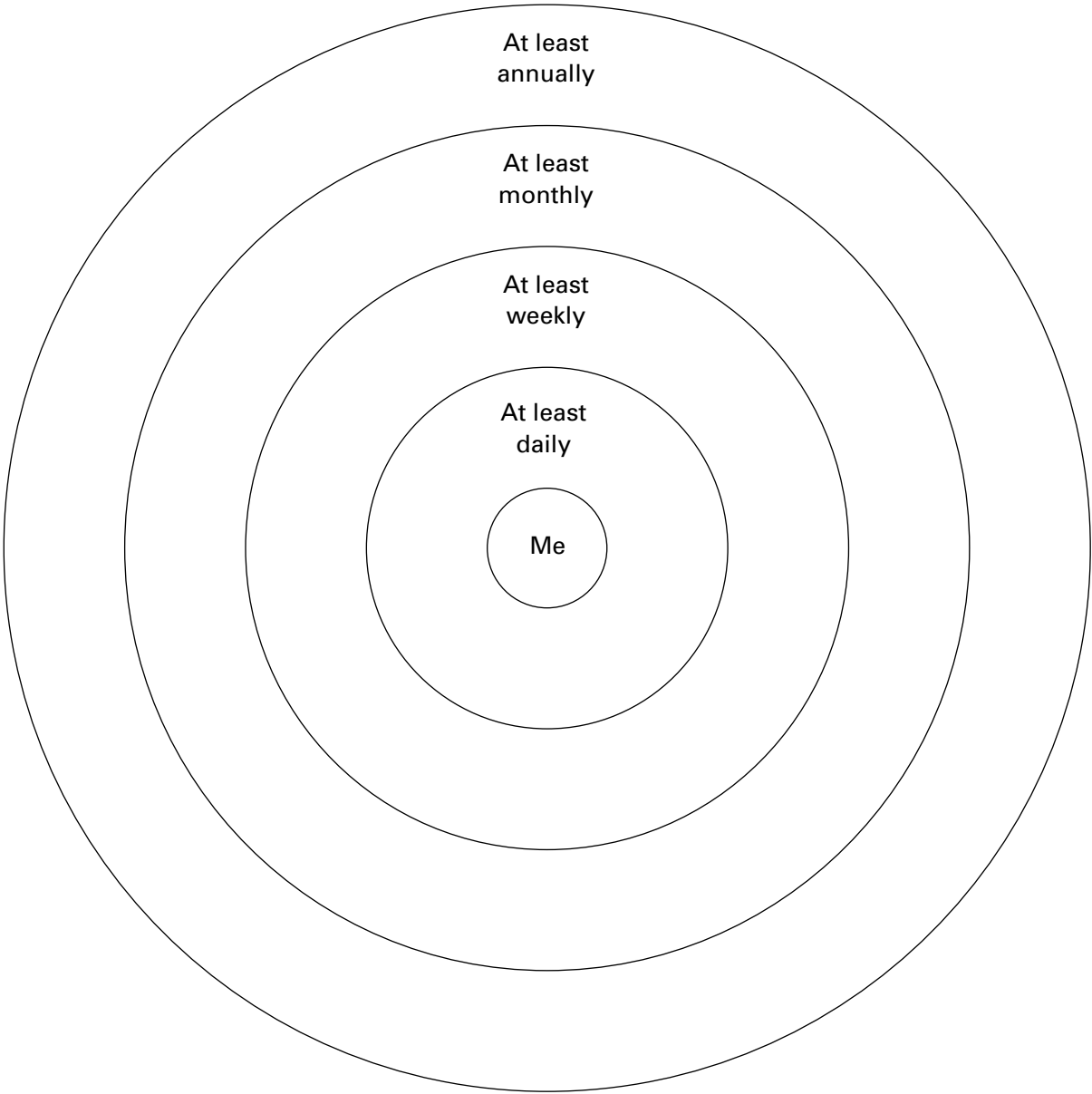
Questions	Answers	Support worker’s comments
1. Who do you spend your free time with?		
2. Who would you turn to if you needed help?		
3. Who are the important people in your life? [use tool 1B and 1C)		

Tool 1. Mapping current relationships

1B. Who do you see the most?

The frequency with which people are seen may be represented in the following diagram.

Is there anyone you see less than once a year?



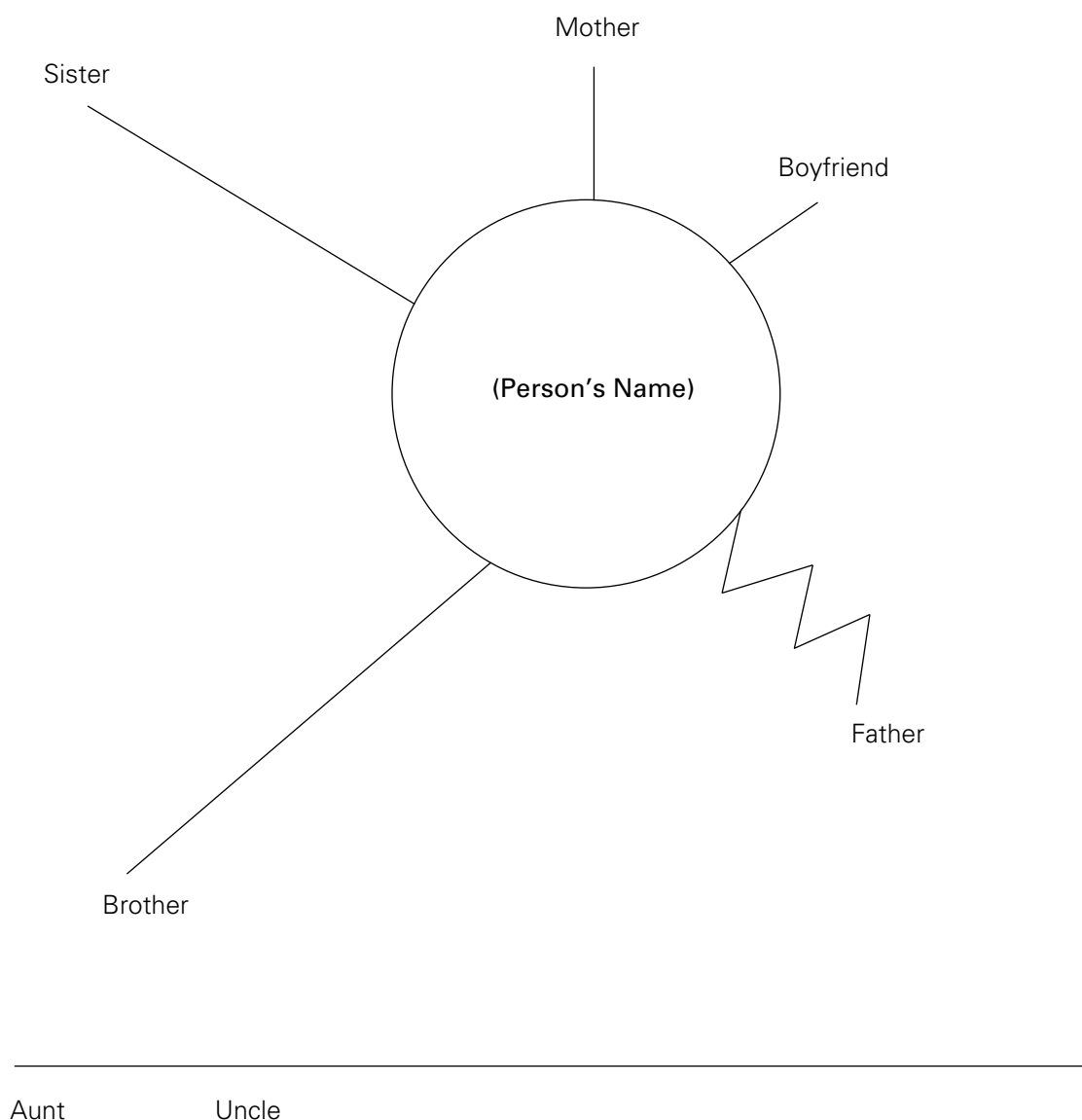
1C. Which relationships are important?

Another diagram can be constructed to explore with the service user the relative importance of their relationships. It provides a visual aid to help the client to think about what their important relationships are, especially in relation to each other, and can help to structure the discussion between the support worker and the service user. An example of the diagram is reproduced below.

The member of staff begins by drawing a small circle with the service user's name in it in the centre of a blank sheet of paper. They would talk through the service user's relationships with each person, encouraging them to think about which relationships are important and which are less so. Each person named by the service user would be entered on the sheet of paper. A line is drawn linking them to the circle with the service user's name in it. The service user decides how close to the circle they want the person's name to be written depending on how important the relationship is to them. The line can be used to give more detail about the relationship. For example a jagged line can be used to denote a difficult relationship. In cases where there is no relationship, no line is drawn.

In the example below the most important relationship to the service user is with their boyfriend, followed by their mother. The relationship with the father is fairly important but is also difficult, the difficulties being represented by the jagged line. The service user also has an aunt and uncle but has no relationship with them.

Example of important relationships diagram



Tool 2. Aspirations

Semi-structured interview template

Questions	Answers	Support worker's comments
1A. How do you feel about the way things are now with your friends and family?		
1B. What would you like to see change in your relationships with friends and family?		
2A. How do you feel about getting back in touch with or seeing more of people you used to know?		
2B. Are there particular people you would like to get back in touch with or see more of?		
3. What do you think about meeting new people?		
4A. What do you think about taking up new leisure activities?		
4B. What new activities might you be interested in starting?		

Tool 3. Motivation

Some questions in this tool may partly repeat what has been covered in Tool 2. These tools can be used in separate interviews and the slight repetition allows for the worker and client to recap on what was discussed in the previous interview.

Semi-structured interview template

Questions	Answers	Support worker's comments
1A. How do you feel about making new friends?		
1B. If you feel you would like to make new friends what do you think you might get out of it?		
2A. How do you feel about getting in touch with old friends or members of your family that you have not been in contact with recently?		
2B. If you would like to get in touch with some of them, what do you feel you might get out of it?		
3A. What do you think about taking up new interests, hobbies or activities?		
3B. If you would like to, what do you feel you might get out of it?		
4A. How do you feel about visiting new places, or visiting places from your past again?		
4B. If you would, what do you feel you might get out of it?		

Tool 4. Preparation

Semi-structured interview template

Questions	Answers	Support worker's comments
1. What are your concerns about meeting new people or re-establishing old contacts?		
2. What do you feel you need to do to address these concerns?		
3. What help do you think you might need?		
4. What are the next steps you feel you need to take?		

Tool 5. Commitment

What activities would you like to get involved in?

Semi-structured interview template

Questions	Answers	Support worker's comments
Volunteering to work with homeless people		
Other opportunities for volunteering		
Work, training or education		
Religious organisation		
Self-help group		
Sports		
Personal interests/hobbies		
Political activities or campaigning		
Clubs		
Outings or holidays		
Find a romantic partner		
Other		

Tool 6. Action

Semi-structured interview template

Questions	Answers	Support worker's comments
Action plan: what are you going to do and by when?	1. By:	
	2. By:	
	3. By:	
	4. By:	

Tool 7. Review

Semi-structured interview template

Questions	Answers	Support worker's comments
1. What did you do – try to recall in as much detail as possible?		
2. Did you feel you did what you wanted to do, or did it turn out differently to how you expected?		
3. What were you thinking at the time?		
4. How did you feel while you doing it – positive and negative emotions?		
5. How did you feel that other people reacted?		
6. Were you pleased or displeased with their reaction?		
7. Is there anything you feel you should have done differently, if you were doing it again?		
8. Having thought about how it went, what are the next steps you are going to take?		
9. When do you think you might take the next steps?		
10. When shall we meet to discuss how things are going again?		

Appendices

Appendix A

Profile of participating agencies

Thames Reach Bondway

Thames Reach Bondway works with men and women who sleep rough in London, and with other vulnerable homeless people. Thames Reach Bondway's Strategic Intent is to end street homelessness. The organisation's objectives are to:

- Identify the housing and support needs of homeless people
- Provide the assistance needed to help them move off the streets and maintain accommodation
- Improve their quality of life.

To meet the above objectives Thames Reach Bondway provides the following range of services:

- Outreach services covering parts of Westminster and Lambeth in central London, which in 2001–02 helped over 1300 people to come in off the streets. In addition, a street rescue service covering 16 London boroughs seeks out and assists isolated and vulnerable rough sleepers.
- Community support teams, which helped over 1,000 former rough sleepers maintain independent accommodation during 2001–02.
- Hostels and specialist supported housing projects catering for people with mental health and substance misuse problems, which in 2001–02 housed and maintained over 2000 different individuals.
- Employment, education, self-help and activity projects, enabling people to readjust following a period of homelessness and to increase their confidence, including a painting and decorating work scheme, peer education project, active services users' group, links with an organic farm and art projects.

Thames Reach Bondway works with a wide range of people from a variety of backgrounds. The majority of its service users are over 25 and

male, reflecting the profile of rough sleepers in London. The level of need of many Thames Reach Bondway service users is high, with a significant proportion having 'multiple needs' – that is having a combination of different problems often involving poor mental health and substance misuse. Many have been homeless for a considerable period with 43 per cent having spent one year or more sleeping rough.

Alone in London

'Alone in London's mission is to 'enable vulnerable young people under the age of 26 to make positive decisions about their lives'. Set up in 1972, its key objectives are to resolve young people's immediate housing crises and to define underlying causes; obtain statutory services on their behalf; re-establish positive family links, where appropriate; and support the acquisition of independent living skills and the transition to full independence.

Alone in London offers a range of services to meet these ends:

- Advice and Assessment – concentrating on solving the most immediate problems for young homeless people such as finding a place to sleep at night and then recommending appropriate services to address underlying causes. Alone in London has a centre based in Kings Cross and a Telephone Advice Service
- Advocacy – providing information and advice on accessing benefits, information and representation. Equipped with legal expertise and experience, the service works in partnership with other agencies such as Shelter and Homeless Link.
- Supported Housing and Resettlement – enabling young people to live independently. Alone in London has nine supported housing projects throughout London and links with housing associations such as Circle 33 and Local Authorities that provide accommodation when young people are ready to be resettled.
- Family mediating – enabling young people to have positive contact with their families. Sixty-four per cent of Alone in London's

service users cite family breakdown as a major cause of their homelessness; 56 per cent want to try to repair their relationships. The service offers three levels of support: help and support in making and sustaining contact with family members; improving communication through letters and phone calls; and referrals to other support services. Volunteers provide telephone advice and help initiate and sustain family contact; trained mediators undertake the mediation process.

- Training and Employment Service – enabling young people to access the training, educational and employment opportunities necessary for them to achieve their long term goals.

St Basil's

St Basil's began its work with young homeless people in 1972 with the opening of the first night shelter for young homeless men in the West Midlands. Since then it has grown to become the largest organisation outside London working with young homeless people. Four thousand people were referred to St Basil's in 2001–2002, with 1,100 admissions.

St Basil's has 26 projects all over the City of Birmingham and in neighbouring Solihull and

Redditch. Twenty-three of these offer accommodation. The organisation has helped prevent an organised 'cardboard city' developing in Birmingham despite its being the UK's second largest city with all the associated homeless problems.

St Basil's provides a range of services:

- accommodation, with 308 bedspaces at the end of 2001
- housing aid and advice
- employment, education and training
- personal development training
- counselling
- resettlement
- family mediation.

St Basil's aims to enable young people:

- to find and keep a home
- to develop their confidence, skills and opportunities, and
- to prevent homelessness.

The age range of service users is 16 to 25 years. In 2001–2002, 70 per cent of people referred were under 21 and 84 per cent of service users were successfully resettled.

Appendix B

Staff participants and their projects

Eleven staff from Thames Reach Bondway, Alone In London and St Basil's participated in the project. They interviewed 26 service users

in total. Within their respective organisations the staff participants worked for projects providing services ranging from supported housing to family mediation. A breakdown of the staff participants by name, organisation and a brief description of the project they work in is given in the table below.

Name	Organisation	Project
Michael Campling	Alone In London	Supported housing and resettlement project
Carol Ricketts	Alone In London	Family Mediation
Sarah Shears	Alone In London	Advocacy service
Dave Bybraves	St Basil's	New Boot (hostel for males aged 16–25)
Darren Cound	St Basil's	Family Mediation
Jimmy Garvey	St Basil's	The Link (housing aid and advice service)
Cathy Lynch	St Basil's	Voluntary work with Family Mediation, New Boot and Carole Gething House (mixed gender hostel for people aged 16–25)
Yvonne Wisdom	St Basil's	Grosvenor Court (supportive hostel for men)
Derek Austin	Thames Reach Bondway	Mental health resettlement project
Nomsa Dube	Thames Reach Bondway	Stamford Street (hostel for people with problems such as mental health and drug and alcohol misuse)
Donna McLean	Thames Reach Bondway	Key South Services (supported housing for people with problems such as mental health and drug and alcohol misuse)

Appendix C
 Profile of participants

		Gender		Ethnicity						Personal history (where known)					
Client ref.	Age	Male	Female	white British	Black African	black Caribbean	British Asian	mixed race	rough sleeping	mental health	alcohol and/ or drugs	prison	family conflict	care	
1	31	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓			✓	
2	35	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓		✓		
3	24		✓			✓							✓		
4	32	✓						✓	✓	✓					
5	53		✓	✓					✓		✓	✓		✓	
6	18		✓												
7	19		✓	✓											
8	19		✓	✓											
9	18		✓	✓											
10	-	✓		✓									✓		
11	-		✓	✓									✓		
12	-	✓			✓								✓		
13	18		✓	✓									✓		
14	18	✓		✓										✓	
15	18	✓		✓								✓		✓	
16	18	✓			✓								✓		
17	36	✓		✓					✓	✓					
18	19	✓					✓						✓		
19	20		✓			✓							✓		
20	17		✓	✓											
21	20	✓				✓								✓	
22	49	✓		✓					✓						
23	39	✓		✓					✓		✓				
24	-	✓											✓		
25	-	✓													
26	-	✓													

Note: Some profiles are incomplete where data was not recorded/available at the interviews.

Appendix D

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