

Homelessness and Multiple Disadvantage

Barriers to Moving into and Remaining in Settled Accommodation:
Evidence from Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham

Part 1

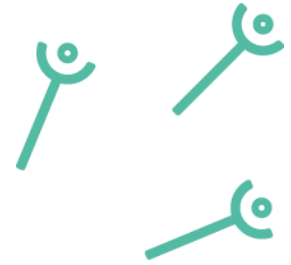
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**FULLFILLING
LIVES**
LAMBETH
SOUTHWARK
LEWISHAM



**COMMUNITY
FUND**



Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is part of the National Fulfilling Lives Programme.

This is a £112 million investment over 8 years supporting people who are experiencing multiple disadvantage; the people we work with have a combination and interconnected needs of mental ill-health, are homeless/or at risk of homelessness, substance use and/or contact with the criminal justice system. We acknowledge that the system doesn't work for everyone – particularly people who experience greater levels of disadvantage.

Certitude is the lead agency of the programme, delivering the programme in partnership with Thames Reach and strategic partners; South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and the three boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. Our three core aims are:

- Co-production: Giving equal value to the voices of both the decision makers and the people we support, so that all opinions are heard and respected equally.
- Service delivery: Working alongside people and services learning and testing different interventions to change the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantages for the better – now and in the future.
- System change: Making an impact on the way people are supported - by influencing policy and practice, locally and nationally.

To find out more please go to our website: <https://fulfillingliveslsl.london/>

Introduction

The aim of this report is to present the experience and insight of people with current or former lived experience of homelessness in Lambeth, Southwark, and Lewisham. These views and experiences were gathered in response to questions posed by CFE Research Institute, and the University of Sheffield¹, to support their data and research around patterns of homelessness in people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The report focuses on people's first-hand experiences of homelessness which include the barriers to moving into and remaining in settled accommodation, and how experiences may differ for women.

This definition of homelessness in this report is that set out by the Fulfilling Lives National Evaluation Team which includes staying in temporary accommodation, such as hostels, Band B social housing, sofa surfing, and rough sleeping.

Background

The National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) is a representative group whose members have lived experience of using Fulfilling Lives services². The NECG was approached to support this work due to their connections with local lived experience groups across the UK. The CFE and University of Sheffield were looking to add the richness of people's lived experiences to complement their data, recognising that numbers are only a small part of a person's story.

Fulfilling Lives programmes reached out to their networks to respond, and the local evidence collected was fed into the NECG regional and national meetings where representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) were present to hear the findings and the evidence presented. This will be used to influence the design, delivery, objectives, and scope of the Government funded Changing Future Programme.

This collaboration has also co-produced reports of learning from across the Fulfilling Lives programmes on what helps in tackling homelessness generally and rough sleeping specifically. A report compiling the national findings from the NECG will be published by Spring 2022.

¹ CFE Research Institute the University of Sheffield have been commissioned by The National Lottery Community Fund to carry out a national evaluation of the Fulfilling Lives programme. To find out more, please go to <https://www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/about/overview/>

² To find out more about the NECG, please go to <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/involvement/our-involvement-work/national-expert-citizens-group-necc>

Methodology

Conversations were facilitated by the Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark, and Lewisham Community team with people across the boroughs. Ten people contributed to the report, five men and five women. No other demographic data was collected. Those spoken to had experience of homelessness and additional disadvantage as defined by the programme.

The data was collected by focus groups both virtual and in person and via telephone interview. All data collected was analysed thematically.

The research was gathered qualitatively using the questions developed by CFE and Fulfilling Lives research team.

Type of research	Number carried out	Gender
In person focus group	1	2 men 1 woman
Virtual focus group	1	2 men 1 woman
Telephone interviews	4	3 women 1 man

The Questions asked:

The findings for each question are presented below. Evidence gathering activities focused on these key questions, identified as part of the NECG activities:

1. What are the ingredients of support that fulfilling Lives provides that help people move from homelessness to settled accommodation?
2. What are the barriers that make it difficult for some people to move into and remain in settled accommodation? Why do some people end up back homeless again?
3. How is the experience of homelessness different for women? What gender-specific support do they need with this?

Key findings

1. What are the ingredients of support that Fulfilling Lives provides that help people move from homelessness to settled accommodation?

Participants highlighted three main themes in response to this question:

Relationships

The importance of being introduced to members of the team who were going to be part of their support structure, they recognised that this connection fostered meaningful relationships.

"The sense of community Fulfilling Lives felt like quite close because you knew members of the team."

"There was an element of unconditional care in my experience, the unconditional want to help me."

The link worker model

The model Fulfilling Lives LSL (Lambeth Southwark Lewisham) adopted for delivery was seen as vital. Small caseloads allowed for more intensive and focused work with the person being supported, including the flexibility to accompany individuals to their appointments with services, and to follow up and advocate on their behalf.

"I was included quite a lot without realising it. I didn't only have the homelessness issue but a few other and they were here there and everywhere with me. Went through everything with me."

"I started with them in the hostel. They help me in the move process to independence. They chase up a lot because it was slow and were the liaison between me and the housing services."

Welfare Budgets

The Fulfilling Lives programme was able to offer practical financial assistance to those it supported at various stages of their transitions.

"I had help financially moving into my flat, given direction to get grants and they purchased a new bed and washing machine."

Key findings

2. What are the barriers that make it difficult for some people to move into and remain in settled accommodation? Why do some people end up back homeless again?

Location and environment

Lack of availability of accommodation in general and having little choice in deciding the location you were housed was a contributing factor. The quality of the accommodation also influenced the utilisation of the accommodation. Some themes that emerged were:

- Distance from support network such as family and friends leading to loneliness and poor mental health
- Feeling unprepared and not knowing what to expect when you move into different accommodations e.g., hostels.
- Being placed in environments and accommodation that does not meet your needs.
- Sometimes your house can be taken over by drug dealers or domineering and abusive family or "friends".

"House ends up getting taken over. Trauma in your life- vulnerable and maybe getting the flat makes you a target. Drug dealers, others take over their homes because they are vulnerable."

"Sometimes you're so grateful to be getting accommodation that you accept places that don't meet your needs and then it doesn't work out."

"The environment can be a factor, if it's not nice, you're not going to stay. Why would you settle for that?"

More than a flat

People using services felt that service providers saw accommodation as a complete solution without there being any work done to address their underlying trauma and issues which lead to the cause of homelessness.

"People think that a flat is the answer, but are you dealing with the root causes as to why that person became homeless in the first place? These needs dealing with, and those reasons will be unique and personal to that individual."

*"People need to take the time to understand you and why you are struggling."
"You can still feel homeless with a house, a home is more than a roof over your head."*

Emotional vulnerabilities

Many people highlighted that receiving their own accommodation caused emotional needs to surface. They identified that their transition was into accommodation but not always into community which lead to their emotional and mental wellbeing being affected negatively. Some of the themes that came through were:

- Abandonment- a feeling of helplessness due to services reducing or ending their contact.

"Sometimes when you get somewhere to live you are reaching out for help, but you just feel forgotten about, you can feel abandoned."

"Sometimes you just need someone to touch base with but there's no-one there"

- The need for peer support during the transition and in the initial stages of the transition

"It would be great to have peer support- ex homeless people that can support you when you first get into accommodation and know about the difficult things you are facing."

- Isolation and depression- moving to a new location where you know no one and/or there is a no animals allowed policy

"Sometimes human connection is more important than resources."

"Moving from a shared accommodation a lot of stuff goes through your mind and can be stressful. Moving can cause depression."

- Lack of connectedness and community and low self-worth

"People need a sense of belonging somewhere, that's more than a roof over your head."

"I don't feel like I deserve a place, I don't know how to take responsibility, and I don't feel empowered."

"When your life has been shaped by neglect, even when you get a home, you can neglect yourself and neglect your responsibilities and lose it all."

- Substance use

Substance use played a role in people's ability to maintain accommodation and was a deciding factor in being housed. This varied depending on the type of temporary accommodation they were in before the move to their own accommodation.

The use of drug and alcohol in hostels:

"When I was living in a hostel my battle with drugs could have potentially been a problem, almost got me kicked out."

"People battling drug use in hostel- they know you take drugs, but it is taboo even when they accepted me, they knew I was using substance because it is on my file. Very contradictory to then kick me out because of the drug use."

Someone also highlighted the difficulty in maintaining their accommodation especially during a lapse:

"You can be clean and can be on track, but when you relapse your focus is not going to be on maintaining accommodation and financial priorities, even maintaining hygiene of the place and some landlords come around and check this stuff."

"Having a drinking issue and not able to maintain your flat."

The weight of Responsibility

The weight of being responsible or maintaining a property without support felt daunting, especially for those in independent accommodation for the first time or who had experiences extended periods of homelessness. People highlighted the following themes:

- Feeling overwhelmed

"I felt overwhelmed living in a flat, there's so many responsibilities, finances and paying bills, it felt too adult."

"When out on the street you don't have the responsibility and having a place can be overwhelming. Sometimes being homeless looks like freedom."

- Lack of skills e.g., budgeting

"Some people don't have the skills to manage a tenancy – especially if it is your first ever tenancy or coming out of supported housing 24/7 supported housing. They should move on gradually – semi-independent housing and skills in budgeting, life skills, cooking where to get food from."

"Spending rent, benefit money on alcohol not able to maintain utilities especially if you don't have budgeting skills."

"Have not got the skills for inside a home or to maintain a home. A lot of responsibility in having your home, a lot of pressure if you have not done it for a while."

"Having a lack of life skills and being unable to manage on your own, that can make managing your own place really difficult."

- Antisocial behaviour

"My partner coming over, arguing, people calling the police."

"Having a lot of friends over and making a lot of noise at the wrong times."

- Not understanding processes

"Sometimes the calls that you need to make to set up and maintain a place feel intimidating to do on your own. Understanding the processes and all the things that you have to do is too much, it feels easier being homeless!"

"It is hard to keep up a tenancy, they are lots of rules. The lifestyle was attractive, the chaotic lifestyle can look more attractive than settling down."

The reality of homelessness v. Processes

Requiring references and other documentation and evidence from people who have had extended periods of homelessness caused delay in getting people housed, especially if in the private rented sector (PRS). The length of time that processes took were raised as a concern.

"It is just hard. When you presented, they wanted additional information which was very difficult. A letter from a mental health team, a support worker, just assuming that I had them. I didn't even know those services existed"

"Depending if it is council or private and the need for references."

"There was no one in the team with lived experience of working with multiple disadvantage individuals who understood how hard the process was for me."

"Sitting in housing space/ places for hours- if you have a drug habit you can't keep still, and they give you ridiculous times like 830 in the morning. Sometimes it closes and you are still there."

"The process was so long- no guarantee, there was no catchment team."

Communication

With many housing services having to be accessed online, not having access to the internet and technology was identified as a barrier. This was described along as the cause of not meeting deadline dates in some correspondences. Anxiety that leads to procrastination, and ill health were also highlighted as barriers:

"Prolong hospital stays can affect your accommodation if housing does not know."

"Ignoring letters which could be important from housing – not receiving information about being in arrears."

"Some people don't want the responsibility- too many letters – especially the brown owes."

"Procrastination, leaving things to last minute."

"Without access to a smart phone you can't do half the things you need to do, everything's online, and if you do have access to the right technology after being on the street for a while you might not feel confident in how to use it."

Lack of support

People highlighted the reduction in support or support ending abruptly, when they moved into their own accommodation especially those moving from 24/7 supported hostels impact persons remaining in their accommodation. People also identified a lack of practical support in setting up rent payment, utilities, and council tax triggering mental ill-health:

"Universal credit- people get the housing money into their account. Organisations don't want that responsibility and they expect you a drug addict/alcoholic if you are not well that day- you end up spending your money."

"Support sometimes ends quite prematurely especially moving into independent accommodation. There should be a plan put in place until the person is ready. Often, we go from lots of support to no support. I went from 24/7 support in a hostel to no one."

"Anxiety of bills and brown envelopes, unnecessary things- no need to involve me in the rent increases letter when on benefits they should send it straight to Lambeth."

"Lack of floating support and support teams,"

"Quite daunting need to be retaught skills budgeting."

People commented on the impact the support they received, highlighting the importance of having that support and the challenges they would have encountered had support not been available:

"If I didn't have the support in setting up rents, financially, setting up water, electricity. Help in searching for discounts. Without that I would have used my money on something else."

"It helped that it was sorted at the beginning so not to have a debt – I had a little bit of debt, but it was manageable. This was due to the change over from HB to UC (Universal Credit). They help with direct debit for Universal Credit, so the rents came straight out."

Key findings

3. How is the experience of homelessness different for women? What gender-specific support do they need with this?

Gender differences

Some highlighted the difference in men and women's experiences, noting that:

"Naturally, we are a bit more vulnerable- women might be weaker physically and may not be able to defend themselves."

"Safety – a man being homeless is a lot safer than women, men are subject to a lot less harm than women on the streets."

"Menstruation- not having access to sanitary wear and a place to wash can lead to infections and great uncomfortableness."

Survival sex work

Women are more likely to be involved in sex work compared to men who experience homelessness, and this is often accompanied by an additional disadvantage e.g., substance use. However not all exchanges are for primarily for money or substances.

"The prostitution side of it- more likely to be a woman than a man. Some feel it's an expectation- everyone knows what prostitution is don't know if they feel it, is the only way."

"I was doing prostitution for accommodation and not money."

"Women who are on the street are more susceptible to getting involved in sex working."

Fear of violence

Women are more likely to be the target of sexual violence than men. In addition, women are more likely to get involved in survival sex work, including the exchange of sexual services for drugs or somewhere to sleep. Sex work involves a level of risk and those working on the streets are likely to experience physical and sexual violence.

"Working for free for a place to sleep can end up in modern day slavery."

"Women are vulnerable – absolutely- sexual attack, rape, pimping them, using them because they are more resourceful."

"The street can be an unsafe place to be you have a vagina and therefore you are at risk of sexual assault."

"Women are just vulnerable – can be pressured into sex working or into drugs."

"Can be sexually abused or used- taken advantage of."

"Being used for drugs – it happens with men also."

Lack of understanding of multiple disadvantage

Women reported becoming homeless due to domestic abuse and often present with other problems including substance use and un/diagnosed mental ill health. The lack of understanding of the interconnectedness of these issues by service providers creates an addition burden and can be retraumatizing.

"I was refused by several refuges because I was seen as a high risk because I was self-harming and using substances. That made the whole experience harder. I was mentally prepared to leave London but that was taken away from me. I was not seen as high priority."

"Refuges are very strict- the realistic situation is that you can be in love and letting go can be difficult and making a mistake by seeing the guy you get kicked out or for anything like drug use. Sometimes people don't connect the drug use to the domestic violence. Like how some mental health services will not help you if you have a drug issue."

Some women we spoke to had challenges proving the domestic abuse they had experienced to their local authority to be housed:

"I had a tough time being housed. I was fleeing domestic violence and it took multiple hospital trips for them to even consider housing me."

One respondent expressed their frustration stating:

"There needs to be services that offer peer and self-help groups. Services that understand the trauma we have experienced, rape and domestic violence."

Social Services were also highlighted as not understanding the interconnected disadvantage and needs of the women.

"Social workers are textbook people and are unaware of life struggles."

Pregnancy & Women with Children

Women are also more likely to have children in their care than men and may be pregnant or become pregnant whilst homeless. The women we spoke to highlight the guilt they feel about their children also becoming homeless.

"As a woman its often you that has the responsibility for the children, that makes homelessness even worse, when you know that you are dragging your kids through your problems."

When a woman becomes homeless, children may be taken out of her care and placed into the care of social services. This can be a very traumatic experience for both the mother and her children and have a long-term impact on well-being. Social services are perceived as lacking understanding of the experiences of homeless women.

"The kids just get taken away leading to deeper problems."

"Social workers are textbook people and are unaware of life struggles."

"Women don't ask for help because they are scared, they will have their children taken away"

Women who are pregnant and homeless may not have access to pre-natal care, which can impact the health of the mother and child.

"Women often get pregnant on the street- no prenatal care, GP (General Practitioner), Midwife involvement and at risk of having births on the street while homeless."

Female only services

A key theme that emerged was the need for female only services including drug and alcohol services and hostels or housing options. Women also pointed to the need for support around sex work.

"Women only facilities where women can washed get their sanitary wear, disposable underwear, contraception, rest, get medication."

"A female run support service – for females only – only women staff and women attendees. Some females will not go to the support centre because there are males working there."

"Women only services – separation from males or an option if there is an option for many women would accept help, better for women and transsexuals. Mix housing opens up a can of worms."

"I would appreciate a separation in the drug services and female key workers. I had a lot of male key workers which was sometimes hard."

Culturally appropriate services

Services should also be culturally appropriate and understand and accommodate for diverse cultural needs.

"In my culture – when I went to seek help from outside all my family members stopped talking to me, in my culture you're only supposed to seek help from your family, you don't seek help from outside – we should only deal with it"

inside – but they're not counsellors they're not psychotherapists they can't help."

Discrete Services

Some women spoke about not feeling safe accessing a service that were overtly advertised and were worried about being seen by others.

"I would be more comfortable going to a service which is not advertised as much as others – when you go to these buildings which are advertised the kind of support they can give – it isn't discreet."

"For women there may be many problems they might be scared if someone sees them walking in there."

The sense of feeling unsafe cut across cultural differences as one person shared:

"The thing is she's Muslim and I'm not – a lot of things we don't have in common, different cultures deal with things differently but we both had stigma accessing."

Flexibility

The need for flexibility in service provision was also highlighted.

"Support that are designed specifically to be more flexible because homeless is a very complicated situation."

Trauma informed services

Many women who have experienced homelessness will have gone through trauma; services must be able to respond to this effectively.

"Services that understand the trauma we have experienced, rape and domestic violence."

Lived experienced in services

Another key aspect of service provision emphasized was the need for staff with lived experience and facilitated peer support.

"We need more with lived experience- I might be making assumption but I think many services do not have lived experience staff"

"There need to be services that offer peer and self-help groups."

"If women experience rape or coercion, they need support from other women."

Conclusion:

The impact of the transition from homelessness to settled accommodation on a person's emotional and mental wellbeing is often underestimated. It needs to be further understood for each individual, and tailored support provided, if the cycle of being housed and returning to homelessness is to be broken.

The shortage of semi-independent living accommodation where people can gradually and progressively adjust to the responsibility of independent living has contributed to homelessness due to the lack of essential living skills required to successfully manage a tenancy and create a home.

Remaining in long-term hostel accommodation can be detrimental to some people's progression. Mixing substance users with ex-substance users or non-users and mixing men and women together can also be an issue.

The evidence gathered here shows that there is a difference in the experience of homelessness for men and women and that there is a need for gender specific support and services.

The key finding from this report is that the support and options available to people need to be person-led as peoples experiences are personal and unique to them.

Recommendations:

Our recommendations based on the themes that consistently ran through the response of those we spoke to are as follows:

<p>1. Access to trauma, gender, and culturally informed service provision.</p>	<p>Trauma, gender, and culturally informed training should be provided for workers, especially those working with individuals defined as experiencing multiple disadvantages.</p> <p>It is important that staff have knowledge to support the diversity of service-users, including those from different religious backgrounds and those who are trans or gender non-conforming.</p> <p>Commission and deliver services that are designed to meet the needs of its users e.g., Services for women only and staff by women only.</p>
<p>2. Provision of more semi-independent accommodation</p>	<p>Provide accommodation where individuals can practice living, gain life and social skills, confidence, and knowledge to improve the chances of making their transition to independence a success.</p>
<p>3. Have lived experience throughout organisations</p>	<p>Housing services should seek to utilise the wealth of knowledge those with lived experience have and should strive to create a blended workforce that includes volunteers and paid positions at all levels of organisations for people with lived experience of homelessness and multiple disadvantages.</p>

<p>4. Embed co-production</p>	<p>Co-production must be embedded to ensure that the voice of those in their current disadvantage is heard and must be infused in development, design, delivery, evaluation, and governance.</p>
<p>5. Peer Support</p>	<p>Moving from homelessness to being housed is a journey and is often part of an individual's recovery. Peer support should be available throughout this process for as long as a person needs it.</p> <p>Peer groups should be created for individuals moving out of homelessness and into settled accommodation. This would create opportunity for people to come together and share their experiences and challenges and develop relationships outside of services.</p>
<p>6. Flexible and tailored support</p>	<p>Support people's involvement in services to be reduced gradually at a pace that suits the person as they develop the competencies required for independent living.</p> <p>Ensure access to longer term tailored floating support.</p>