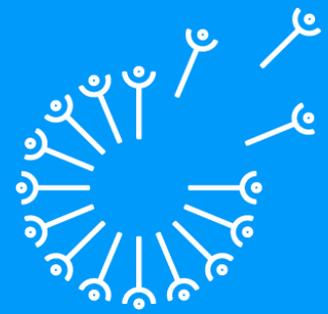


# Homelessness and Multiple Disadvantage

Barriers experienced by Minoritized groups:  
Evidence from Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham

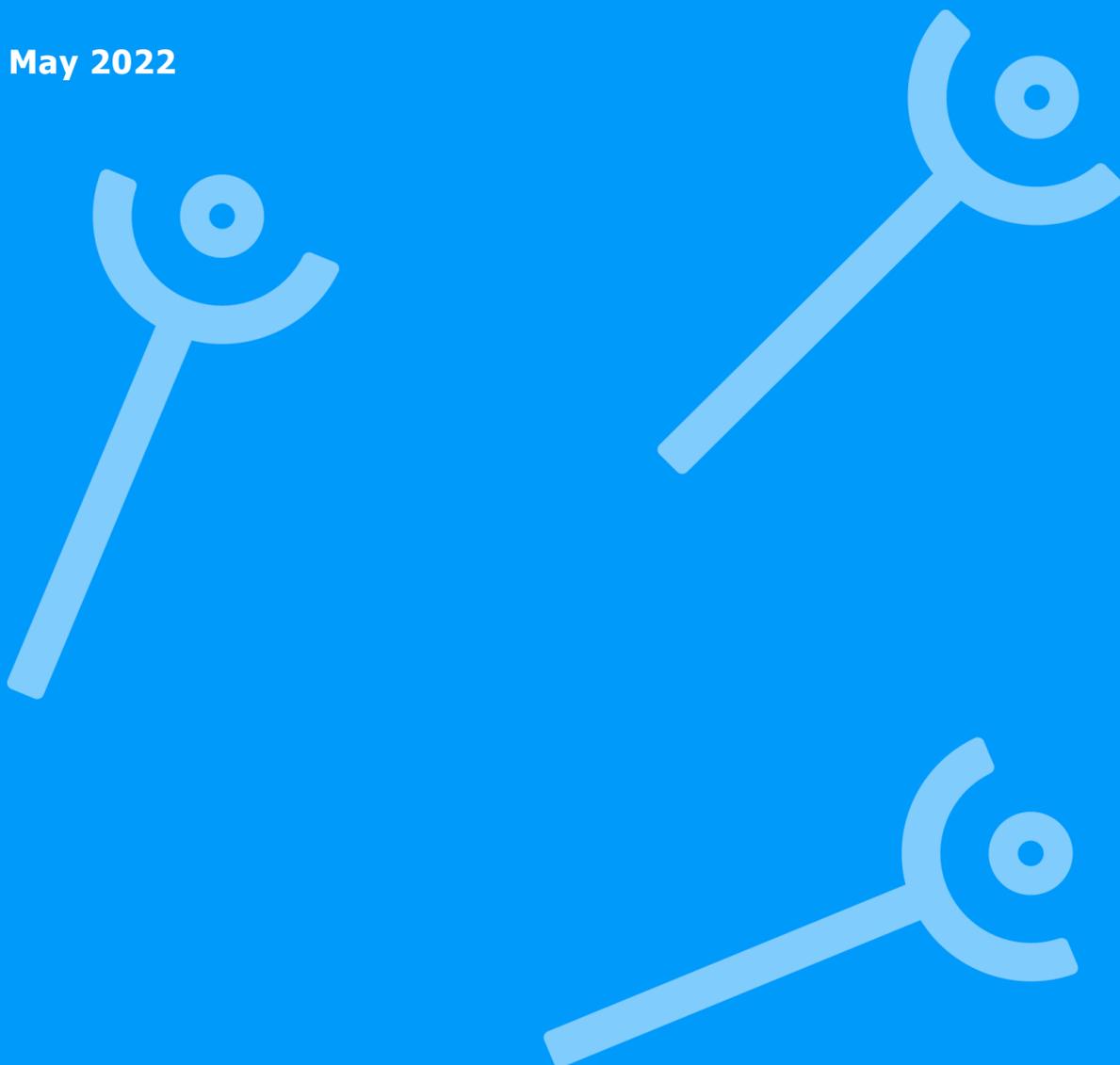


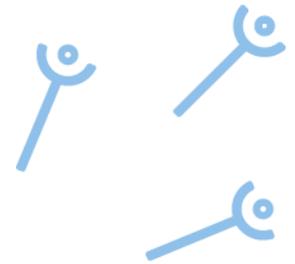
**FULLFILLING  
LIVES**  
LAMBETH  
SOUTHWARK  
LEWISHAM



Part 2

May 2022





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.

# Introduction

This report is the second part of two reports presenting the experience and insight of people with current or former lived experience of homelessness in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. See the first part in the [Breaking the cycle of homelessness](#) report.<sup>1</sup>

These views and experiences were gathered in response to questions posed by CFE Research Institute, and the University of Sheffield<sup>2</sup>, to support their data and research around patterns of homelessness in people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

This report focuses on the barriers people from Black, Asian and Minoritized groups experience and specific support they need, what local authorities and housing services can do to ensure people are appropriately housed and what that support looks like.

The 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)<sup>3</sup> is a representative group whose members have lived experience of using Fulfilling Lives services. 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 peoples' 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 Department of Housing Levelling

<sup>1</sup> Homelessness and Multiple Disadvantage: Barriers to Moving into and Remaining in Settle Accommodation: Evidence from Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham. Breaking the cycle of homelessness | Fulfilling Lives ([fulfillingliveslsl.london](https://fulfillingliveslsl.london))

<sup>2</sup> 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/>

<sup>3</sup> [National Expert Citizens Group \(NECG\) | Revolving Doors \(revolving-doors.org.uk\)](https://national-expert-citizens-group.org.uk/)

Up and Communities 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.

# Methodology

Conversations were facilitated by the Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Community team with people across the boroughs. Six women contributed to the report. Some demographic data was collected. Those spoken to had experience of homelessness and additional disadvantage as defined by the programme.

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

The data was collected in person and via telephone interview. All data collected was analysed thematically and the key messages distilled.

Type of research	Number carried out	Gender
In person interview	1	Woman
Telephone interviews	5	Women

Ethnicity	Number
Black	2
Other	1
Unknown	3

All quotes used within this report are from participants interviewed.

# Key Messages

The key messages from the interviews are presented below. The five main themes that emerged are discussed below.

## **1. Race, ethnicity, and nationality.**

*"People have a better opportunity because they are white"*

Our evidence shows that race and ethnicity were factors which impacted a person's experience of being housed for those who identified as being from Black, Asian or Minoritized groups.

Different standards of treatment were identified: personally, to the individual and in responses to their need. Variables of the standard of treatment included relational experience (how they were communicated to, stereotyping and flexibility), the time it took to process their applications in comparison to those who were white, banding allocation, location of property and the type and quality of the dwelling offered. This was also experienced by members of the same racial group from those of their race who were culturally different and/or not British born.

*"Cultural difference can be a barrier, understanding that there are many cultures within black. It's not so much about skin colour but about culture- not only for blacks but for Asians also."*

Services which did not have the visibility of a diverse workforce at point of entry proved to be a barrier for some individuals approaching the system to start the journey to be housed. The absence of racially and culturally similar persons to identify with, limited the developing of good service relationships and led to a lack of trust and understanding between service providers and those identifying as part of Black, Asian, Minoritized group accessing them.

*"Support from their own culture to feel understood. Can be hard going to an English person to explain."*

The experience left a negative effect, and was qualified as an unfair process, with the institution being labelled as racist. This was both a perception and an experience.

*"Everyone should be treated the same and you should not be closed because of the skin colour- they should be fairer."*

## **2. Having an informed (trauma, culture, gender) and blended (lived and learned experience) workforce.**

*"The staff- if they were trained to have more empathy- no compassion from the workers."*

Homelessness is complex and persons presenting can and often present with combined issues that have their roots in unaddressed and unrecognised traumatic experiences in their histories or in the present.

Staff (including reception staff) need to be equipped to identify and respond to the behaviours or lack thereof, that persons who are homeless in combination with mental ill-health, substance use or escaping violence (domestic and community) present with. An informed (trauma, culture, and gender) workforce will reduce the incidents and impact of shame and harm that an untrained workforce can inflict on those it is meant to be supporting.

*"More-staff- they are understaffed- staff that are going to be caring and respectful. They can be rude the way they talk to you. Looking down to you like you are no good."*

Lived experience professionals are an essential component in the provision of therapeutic services. Lived experience professionals have the advantage of being both relational and inspiring thereby enabling often undocumented therapeutic benefits. Relational in that the professional providing the support has a real-life experience and understanding of the disadvantage currently being experienced. Secondly, it can serve as hope for those in their current disadvantage that they can progress out of the disadvantage they are experiencing.

*"The people supplying the support having lived experience as well -lived experience is really beneficial. One of my support workers in my hostel has lived experience and it make it a lot easier to relate to him. I would probably rather talk to him than anyone else within the staff."*

Services need to acknowledge that homelessness often does not happen as an isolated issue and provide the appropriate training for staff to identify signs of trauma, enabling the delivery of effective interventions and care.

*"Those who felt it know it! So, they can support those who are currently going through similar situation."*

## **3.Safeguarding and multi-agency working**

*"Keeping on top of safeguarding because in my experience it is very easy for people to find out where you are living when you are living in a hostel."*

There's need for better and improved safeguarding. Safeguarding for people who are experiencing homelessness should not be narrow: just the provision of accommodation. Services should have in place safeguarding measures that corresponds to their interconnecting disadvantage that has led to being homeless and include emotional and psychological safeguarding. These measure should take into consideration the location and housing types where the person is to be housed.

*"Ongoing support to monitor those who are vulnerable from being cuckooed. The person usually being intimidated. The council need to go in and close it up and move the person away from that area."*

Housing service providers, the police, mental health and other services need to improve their communication, coordination and reduced siloed working practices as they work alongside the individual. This is urgently needed especially for those who have experienced cuckooing and other forms of personal and community harm and exploitation.

*"Need to be a relationship with housing, police and mental health- they always go after people with mental health. Safeguarding measures put in place where the person is treated as a victim."*

Housing individuals out of areas where they have experienced conflict and making sure the accommodation is secure to reduce anxiety and fear of threats to their person is important. Families should not be housed in hostels, especially where there is drug use as this can create a sense of lack of safety: emotionally, psychologically, and physically.

*"It is important to feel safe first of all. Living in a borough where they feel safe. I know there were certain places in Lewisham couldn't live. Making sure they are kept way from the areas they need to be kept away from."*

Mixed hostels are not always appropriate. There should be separate hostels for those who are detoxing or in recovery from those who are still in their disadvantage of substance use.

*"They [nonusers] are housed into hostels with people taking drugs and it puts them at risk. If they are detoxing and you put them in hostels with drug users, they pick up and people overdose and die."*

#### **4. Person led education, training, and skills provision.**

*"If they are interested in doing courses, education, do groups with what they like to do."*

Housing service providers should strive to enable those who are transitioning through their services to gain the tools, skills and have adequate access to knowledge and training that will prepare them for the reality and challenges of independent living.

*"Would be good if they had courses in the hostels to show people how to care of themselves. How to live independently. Teaching us about bills and rents and teaching us what to expect when we move into permanent housing."*

Standard traditional person-centred (doing for and to) approaches of how many services work, should be replaced with person-led (working with the individual) approaches, enabling and cultivating personal agency in the process.

*"Teaching living and social skills. Living life course, wellbeing course, eating healthy and access to a benefit advisor. It should be person led."*

## **5.The importance of relationships and community for success.**

It important to acknowledge that many individuals who are moving into settled accommodation very often build trusting relationships with the professional in those services as they are waiting to be given their settled accommodation. This professional relationship and those formed by "free community" (forming relationships by participation of activities via opportunities provided by services) creates safety, consistency and structure which the transition of relocating disrupts.

*"Having a friendly community or support which can make it easier to feel at home.*

*Community coming together to embrace newcomers- getting more information of where you are moving to- community clubs – social clubs to prevent me from isolating."*

If this transition is not managed well, it can re-activate anxieties of abandonment and neglect, cause isolation and depression and can lead to re-engaging of behaviours that might have led to homelessness previously as coping options.

*"Very important to take account you are not moving them some where they are isolated from their community, taking into account their cultural needs."*

Community impact and value in the process seems to have been overlooked. Not all interactions have to be carried out by statutory service providers but

can be facilitated by the community local groups volunteers and organisations.

*Having volunteers to go around and knock and engage them in activities, shopping, and walking – spending a little time, having a conversation with them. People know people struggle especially through the pandemic. The government had people phoning others during pandemic why can't that be standard and that could help that person."*

A transition from homelessness into settled accommodation should not be the end goal in and of itself and high value should be placed on individuals being reintegrated and connected into their community. Vital relationships should be established before the move is completed to afford a sense of familiarity (to the new location) and connectedness (to new professionals and support networks) engendering a sense of community (significance and belonging.)

*"Information to make connections in the community. Getting involved with other programmes -I want to interact with others."*

## **6. The need for extended support and more semi-independent accommodation.**

*"There is not a lot of places to give advice – there is not a lot of housing support."*

The evidence points to the need for a variety of support when moving from homelessness to being housed, including one which is race and ethnicity specific.

*"A place where people of colour can go to get advice before going to the council."*

Designated information centres which are online and based in the community to provide information and practical support for Black, Asian and Minoritized groups. This support includes the provision of an independent housing advocate to accompany individuals to commence and during the housing process.

Support also includes the provision of more semi-independent housing to reduce the impact of transitioning to independent living. These homes will serve as preparatory and up-skilling centres turning the knowledge they have received into practice with real life living where their actions have consequences, but in a safe, supportive, and restorative environment.

*"Semi-independent places before you get your own place. Teaching about housing benefit, signing on and what*

*happens. This is going to be the place where you are going to learn the skills to live independent."*

Support often ends too quickly and at times abruptly once the individual has changed status to being in settled accommodation. More continued and extended support is required. The current system of support for a set period should be replaced. Support should be tailored to the needs of the individual, being person-led. Assessments criteria should also include practical living capabilities, emotional and psychological preparedness for independent living.

*"Ongoing continual support – once the person is housed the support seem to get wrapped up. Services tend to pull away- it can be very overwhelming – it is a different way of living."*

In addition, individuals who have or are transitioning out of homelessness need additional support which have been sparse to non-existent. Supports include support groups, networks, and safe spaces specific to the housing experience, to share fears, challenge, and exchange ideas, knowledge and solutions as they navigate the liminal space into having a home.

*"Housing support groups, if there were a support group of that nature more people will be willing to go and willing to get help and accept help and to know that you are not the only person going through it as well."*

The system can be more supportive to individuals accessing it by effectively sharing information, better communication and coordination between services working with them. This avoids having to repeatedly explain and retell one's story which can and is often a traumatising encounter.

*"Streamed line information- instead of having to repeat your story which can be traumatising and annoying and painful."*

## **7. The lack of availability of affordable, inhabitable and safe homes.**

*"Doesn't matter what colour you are because there is not enough social housing and they are not building any for people like us."*

Housing standards vary between housing associations, private landlords and across boroughs. There is an absence of clear consistent definitions of what constitutes clean and inhabitable spaces. This can lead to people being housed in building and environments which are unsuitable and with the limited or no access to funds for home decorations or repairs and can remain in that condition for years.

*"More flats should be furnished. I found it difficult to pay for everything. Should be more of an effort to have them furnished: washer machine sofa bed fridge things like that because not everyone is entitled to support with that."*

The changing economic, environmental, and social character of some places means that people are no longer able to return to live in their community because they cannot afford the rents, or there is no social housing stock.

*"Went through rehab and moved in a move on house for seven years and finally got a flat. People cannot afford the rent; they are building for money and not for social care but they are willing to put people in B&B and hostels which cost more. If they build more social housing, we can afford to have more homes for people to live in."*

From the evidence there needs to be a standardisation of criteria for what constitutes clean and inhabitable accommodation so that councils, housing associations and private landlords can all be held to the same standards. Those who decline inadequate properties should not be sanctioned or excluded from the pathway or labelled as making themselves intentionally homeless. An example of this type of framework has been developed by Shelter<sup>4</sup>

*"The property needs to be in good order before people move in- no damp. Moving people into habitable properties- making sure they are up to par. Double glazing, central heating and secure. Should not live in a place with damp, decorated to a minimum standard."*

<sup>4</sup> [Shelter Legal England - Accommodation standards and costs for homelessness accommodation - Shelter England](#)

# CONCLUSION

People from the Black, Asian, Minorized groups experience barriers in relation to housing due to their race and their ethnicity. The institutions that either provides housing services and/or the structures that they sit within were viewed as racist both by experience and perception. This provided a barrier to accessing the service to initiate the process of being housed.

Ethnicity, however seemed to be a greater barrier once they were in the system. Culture, religion, language, accents which allowed for geographical identification were all points where those in the housing process could be discriminated against by those from the same racial group.

These barriers made it difficult for relationship to form, which needed ingredients of trust and understanding if they were going to succeed. This was made more difficult where there was little to no representation within service providers of the racial or ethnic groups accessing the service to identify, relate and connect with during the process. This combination inevitably left many with an experience of being treated unfairly by the system and at various points in the process.

The lack of the acknowledgement of the gravity of the transition of moving from homelessness into housing will only continue to create a revolving door of being housed only to quickly become homeless unless effective support networks are embedded at all points within the system.

There is an urgent need for services to be trauma, gender and culturally informed, with a targeted campaign to include all staff. Most importantly reception and administrative staff who can be overlooked in the delivery of such training but are the first persons who those accessing services encounter whether in person or over the phone.

The provision of more semi-independent housing needs to be accelerated. These can be places where essential skills for independent living are cultivated by narrowing the gap between the skills individuals exiting homelessness have currently to manage a home and the reality of the responsibility.

Providing housing is only part of the whole in taking people out of homelessness. The underlying issues that led to homelessness especially when presenting with substance use, mental health, fleeing from violence or historical experiences of these must be addressed. Therapeutic support should be provided as standard, thereby increasing the probability of remaining housed and moving on to a more fulfilling life.

Community participation and integration seems to have been overlooked and/or undervalued or not a point worthy of consideration in the process of housing individuals. A paradigm shift is needed where the homelessness solution is not just the provision of an abode, (especially for those coming out of multiple disadvantage or the prison system.) A move away from person-centred to person-led coupled with practical and reasonable steps

taken to facilitate participation in their new “imposed community” (location offered by services) as well as their “free communities” (association based on interests and passions) will yield better outcomes, engendering a sense of connectedness, significance and belonging.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Services providers workforces should be reflective of the people groups they are supporting, and they should actively strive toward this.
2. More semi-independent housing to be provided along with adequate support in place to develop and practice the skills required for independent living. This support should also be person led.
3. Better and more robust multi-agency working is needed to effectively safeguard those who are vulnerable and most at risk of community harm and exploitation using the Team Around Me (TAM) model.
4. Support groups specifically for those who have moved out of homelessness into settle accommodation to come together to share experience and challenges and successes should be piloted.
5. All staff (including receptionists) to be trauma, gender and culturally informed.
6. A paradigm shift away from 'just housing' the individual to one of community integration which promotes a sense of connectedness and belonging.