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The Housing Histories of People who have Experienced Homelessness

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Further copies of this document can be obtained free of charge from:

Helen Wyatt
Research and Information Unit
Social Justice and Regeneration Department
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Tel: (02920) 821718
E-mail: helen.wyatt@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Website: http://www.housing.wales.gov.uk

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1. Introduction

1.1 The focus of the study

The purpose of this research is to identify factors which lead to the successful resolution of homelessness problems. In this context, much can be learnt through looking at the housing histories of people who have experienced homelessness. This research included undertaking interviews with thirty people from across Wales – all of whom had experienced homelessness but who had settled into independent accommodation and had not used support agencies in at least twelve months.

A multi-agency /multi-disciplinary team – a University researcher, two senior management staff from Caer Las Cymru and the policy manager from Shelter Cymru - undertook the interviewing and the analysis. Participants were contacted through support agencies and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

1.2 Background to the study

This research has been undertaken within a radically developing homelessness context in both Wales and the UK. The establishment of the Welsh Assembly Government has led to significant proactive work in homelessness, in consultation with the statutory and voluntary sectors. This has included the establishing of a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary Homelessness Commission and the development of the National Homelessness Strategy. Key developments include the following:

1) In March 2001 The Welsh Assembly Government's statutory instrument – The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001 - introduced new priority needs groups under Section 189(2) of the Housing Act 1996 and gave statutory priority to five groups of people considered to be particularly vulnerable to homelessness. These are:

   - a care leaver or person at particular risk of sexual or financial exploitation, 18 or over but under the age of 21;
   - a 16 or 17 year old;
   - a person fleeing domestic violence or threatened with domestic violence;
   - a person homeless after leaving the armed forces; and
   - a former prisoner homeless after being released from custody.

2) The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area, and to develop a five-year homelessness strategy aimed at reducing homelessness and providing improved and integrated services and homelessness prevention.

3) The National Homelessness Strategy developed by the Welsh Assembly in consultation with a broad range of organisations was published in March 2003. The strategy has been developed following the Welsh Assembly's core principles of sustainability, equality and tackling social disadvantage. It establishes a national vision and leads to policy and practical developments to tackle homelessness at the local level.

4) The new *Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness* was published in March 2003. This provides improved guidance to local authorities,

and emphasises the need for collaborative working and homelessness prevention.

Additionally, other policy developments highlight the importance of cross-cutting themes within the social policy agenda in Wales. For example, within health:

1) The needs assessments, to be undertaken in preparation for the development of local Health, Social Care and Well-Being Strategies, should involve an assessment of access to health care and services for people experiencing homelessness.

2) The NHS Wales Resource Allocation Review considered the re-structure of health spending and the allocation of funding to tackle key health determinants including housing and homelessness.

3) *Improving Mental Health Services in Wales: A Strategy for Adults of Working Age* recognizes the associations between homelessness and mental illness and the difficulties people experiencing homelessness find in accessing services. It recommends that social services and the voluntary sector, in each area, develop flexible and collaborative working arrangements to address identified needs.

All these developments recognize the challenges of developing effective homelessness intervention and collaborative working and should, if translated into practical action, lead to improved standards of homelessness services, improved homelessness prevention and innovation in homelessness policy and practice in Wales in the future.

1.3 Characteristics of the participants

Gender:
14 women
16 men

Age:
11 participants were under 30
15 were between 30 and 49
4 were over 50

Household type:
14 were single men
12 were single parent women
4 were living as couples

Tenure:
4 lived in private rented accommodation
13 lived in local authority properties
13 lived in RSL accommodation.

Geography:
12 lived in South Wales,
11 lived in North Wales
7 lived in mid and west Wales.

Where histories are quoted within the report, pseudonyms are used and some details have been changed e.g. occupation, town of residence etc. so that anonymity is preserved.

1.4 Causes of Homelessness

The following factors were seen as being involved with the initial homelessness situation. Some participants mentioned more than one.

	Men	Women	Total
Breakup with partners	3	9	12
Breakup with parents	5	1	6
Leaving care	2	2	4
Eviction/problems with property	4	2	6
Coming out of institutions - prison	2	0	2
- hospital	2	0	2

Relationship breakdown and family conflicts were the predominant causes of initial homelessness for the participants of the study. These included breakdowns where physical and mental abuse were factors. This reflects Welsh national figures where 'relationship breakdown with partner' is recorded as the main cause of homelessness of those found to be 'eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need' during recent years. Figures, for Wales, where 'parents were no longer able to accommodate' are also high. As Lemos (2000) points out, relationship breakdown, as people grow up and move on, is an ongoing processes and, moreover, is an increasingly significant characteristic of society.

Problems with property and evictions, from both social housing and the private rented sector, were initial causes of homelessness for some. In Scotland, there is an increase of those leaving institutions within homelessness figures (Prècis 118/2000) and this study reflects this.

There is some gender difference in these initial causes of homelessness. More young men left home than women and more women left partnerships. All those coming out of institutions were male but these differences are not marked and do not reflect national figures.

Participants were contacted through local authorities, RSLs or support agencies. This influenced the characteristics of the participants. For example, 7 women were contacted through different women's refuges. 5, mostly men, were contacted through one drug and alcohol housing support project and 4 young people were contacted through one RSL provider of hostels and accommodation.

Although the authors feel that categorising people into groups goes against the findings of this report, the following table may be useful for the reader in placing these participants within the context of other studies:

- 7 of the participants were women made homeless through relationship breakdown, often including physical and mental abuse;
- 7 of the participants had first become homeless on leaving care or the family home;
- 4 of the participants, all men, had been homeless on leaving institutions;

- 4 of the participants were homeless following eviction; and

- 8 of the participants, mostly men, had drug and alcohol problems associated with their homelessness.

1.5 Lessons from the literature

Literature suggests that there are predictable patterns in the way people move through homelessness (Hutson and Liddiard 1994; O'Callaghan et al. 1996; Fitspatrick 1999; Anderson and Tulloch 2000; Crane and Warnes 2002). One report, Rosengard (2002) acted as a starting point for this study, with a similar number of informants and emphasis on participants' accounts. Many of our participants fall within one category of Rosengard's typology – 'resettlement with temporary support' - as this study did not reach anyone who had resolved their homelessness themselves. There is general agreement that the pattern of movement is influenced by the availability of housing, access to it in relation to legislation and the resources of the individual.

There is a debate in the literature as to whether people become homeless as a result of demographic change (e.g. maturity and changes in relationships) and so can be seen as 'ordinary' or as a result of existing pathologies such as alcohol etc., in which case their 'vulnerability' is seen as the cause (Webb 1994; Carlen 1996, Lemos 1999).

The literature identifies the need for interventions such as: **the importance of information** (Birch 1999; Shelter 2003); **preventative work** in terms of education (Smith 1998; 2000); the problem of **repeat tenancies** and ways to reduce them (Prècis 138 2001); **health care**, including whether this should be specialist or mainstream for people who are homeless (Bines 1994; Bhugra 1996); enabling people to access **education, training and work** (Macdonald and Jackson 1998; Wyler 1999); the way in which people **leaving institutions** can be informed of housing services; and the different types of **support** needed for those who have experienced homelessness (Douglas et al. 1998; Quilgars 2000), including life skills (Prècis 141 2001).

A number of reports look at the **role of hostels** (Carter 1999; Rosengard 2002); **multi-agency working** (Scottish Executive Homelessness Task Force 2003); and the homelessness situations of certain groups of people such as women (Webb 1994); older people (Crane 1999; Crane and Warnes 2000) and British Minority Ethnic people (Boyce 2001).

The literature suggests that there is considerable knowledge about interventions which work to resolve homelessness. A great deal of this informative work has come from Scotland (Scottish Executive Homelessness Task Force 2003). It is hoped that this study, together with others commissioned in 2003/4 will add to knowledge from a Welsh perspective.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This section will outline the process adopted to undertake the study and explore some theory surrounding action research. As outlined above, the purpose of the study was to interview individuals who had been in receipt of services at one time, as a result of their experience of homelessness, but had subsequently lived in independent accommodation, without support for a minimum of 12 months.

The work was undertaken jointly by three organizations, Caer Las Cymru, Glamorgan University and Shelter Cymru. This study was important to the three organisations involved for two reasons.

1. It gave the opportunity to offer individuals a voice in determining what was important in service design and approach.

2. It would provide information that would supplement wider exploration of service effectiveness by evaluating what interventions worked.

Given the nature of the study, the research team was concerned with a number of issues. Individuals would be approached, but with the team having no indication of whether the individuals would be willing to become involved. Would the individuals with whom the team was working have the knowledge to produce the necessary information for the study? How could the evidence be measured, given the qualitative nature of the study and what would be the practical outcomes?

However, it was clear from the outset that the team would be working with individuals directly to understand their experiences. A process was needed which would maximize open and honest responses, and enable the researchers to listen actively to the stories that emerged from the individual interviews. The thoughts and feelings needed to be gathered, and then used to gain an understanding of the participants' particular experiences. A relationship needed to be established so that the information gained, and the experiences shared, could open up new ways to inform action and thinking. This study would be both participatory and practical.

2.2 An overview of the method

The research team wanted to work with a cross section of individuals to understand whether their specific experiences varied relative to their starting position within the homelessness cycle. The different experiences of those living in hostels, local authority care, women's refuges, detoxification units or young people's projects, might impact on the participants' capacity to communicate their experiences.

The first stage was to conduct thirty one-to-one interviews. These interviews would be unstructured to enable participants to share their stories and thinking and to encourage authentic responses that would not be over-influenced by their role as an interviewee. A list of prompt questions (Appendix 1) was devised but the interview could vary to reflect the interest of the participant.

Following on from these one-to-one interviews the researchers analysed the findings which had been generated. The participants' own critical thinking was extracted. To do this, the researchers held eight inquiry group meetings in which an action-research method was used. The narratives from each of the one-to-one interviews were scanned to see what the participants had experienced and the impact these experiences had had on them. Throughout, the researchers were reflective of their own positions – as practitioners, a policy officer and a researcher.

This study was rooted in a humanist approach. This non-directive, non-judgmental approach creates the conditions necessary for people to be able to share their stories. The importance of the approach adopted is supported by Payne (1997) where issues of honesty, genuineness, respect and acceptance are seen as crucial if a mutual relationship, between researcher and participant, is to be established. By talking to participants in a mutual way the researchers experienced them as real people, and not simply as 'homeless people'.

2.3 Selecting the participants

Participants were contacted through local authorities, RSLs and voluntary sector organizations throughout Wales, which were felt to be representative of the housing and support services available to people who are homeless. Agencies contacted individuals who fitted the study's criteria. These individuals were then contacted separately by the researchers to ascertain if they wished to become involved.

The researchers made a conscious decision not to request background information from agencies about the participants. It was important to the research team that they entered the process without any prior knowledge which could have influenced the way they worked with participants. It was important to hear the participant's story first-hand. This approach enabled the team to engage more fully with the people involved and prevented the researchers from over structuring or framing the dialogue.

2.4 Action Research

Reason and Bradbury (2001) described action research as being a participatory process to develop practical, knowing and new ways of understanding. This method brings together action, reflection, theory and practice to achieve practical solutions. Within action research there are multiple choices over how this method can be applied. However, three broad pathways can be identified (ibid) namely, 'first', 'second' and 'third person practice'.

'First person practice' requires the researcher to be alert, consider carefully and choose the information gathered with insight into what merits attention. It was significant that the four researchers came from different backgrounds.

'Second person practice' requires the researcher to enquire with others about issues of mutual concern through dialogue. Isaacs (1999) suggests that speaking and listening to others is critical in research. The effectiveness of dialogue, at all stages of research, is that it is authentic and not exploitative. In addition, contribution and feedback from all is encouraged.

'Third person practice' requires the researchers to widen the inquiry and involve people who are not involved in the

research process. In this way the research, rather than just happening, becomes a 'political event' as suggested by Toulmin and Gustaven (1996). Sharing this work with a variety of agencies , and communicating this narrative with the readers will achieve this level of practice.

The researchers' primary focus therefore was to achieve understanding through conversation and dialogue with the participants. These formed the raw material for the researchers' reflexive analysis of themes in the inquiry groups. No outcomes were predicted at the beginning. The ideas and structure emerged from the dialogue with all effort being made to break down the barriers between researchers and interviewees. The narratives form the backbone of this report.

2.5 The structure of the report

From the stories of the participants and the reflective processes of the researchers, a number of themes emerged. These themes were subjects which recurred time and again in the accounts and which were felt to be significant by both the participants and the researchers. The Sections in this study follow the themes identified:

- Information and Partnership working;
- What is a home?;
- Housing policy and practice;
- Temporary accommodation – hostels and refuges;
- The significance of support; and
- Returning to work.

3. Information and Partnership Working

3.1 Introduction

The provision of good quality advice and information is very often stated to be a key element in both the National Homelessness Strategy and local homelessness strategies (Welsh Homelessness Strategy 2003; Scottish Homelessness Task Force 2003). Many of the local homelessness strategies developed in Wales recognize the importance of providing information and are using diverse methods to ensure that information is more widely available and that people are also aware of what assistance is available. Nevertheless, there is a gap in researching the way people gain information when homeless (Salford University, forthcoming p.25) and both Bynin (1994) and Shelter Cymru (2003) show that information for people who are homeless is often poor and gained late.

The importance of information to our participants is shown by the fact that seventeen of them talked about information and also that it featured strongly in the accounts of seven of these.

3.2 The right information can be a turning point

In James' account, the gaining of the right information about services was a turning point in the resolution of his homelessness.

James, having retired early, after an industrial injury, moved in with a woman friend. When this relationship ended, James came to Wales to revisit an area he had known through his work. James was at the end of his tether and did not know where to turn. He recounted that he was on his way to the docks to end it all when he got talking with a man who directed him to an advice agency. That same day, the advice agency referred him to a homelessness hostel where the staff helped him sort out his life. A year or so later he was settled in his own flat. Several times during the interview, he referred to this meeting with the stranger as *'luck'* or *'fate'*.

Several of our informants gained their information 'by chance' or through friends. It is likely that this way of gaining information will continue. What is important, is that once this information is acted upon, the next step – assessment and referral – is in place.

3.3 Information by 'chance' or through a known source

This view of information as bringing about a turning point is continued in the accounts of Debbie and Harriet where knowledge of, and contact with, a woman's refuge enabled them to leave situations of long-term domestic violence and, eventually, to settle independently. In both accounts, there was an element of 'chance' in the way in which the information was gained. Both women gained their information through a friend or a relative and, because this came from a known source, the information was trusted. In Debbie's case, the information came from a family solicitor; the importance of key

professionals or front-line workers is also evident in other accounts.

Harriet had lived for twelve years in a physically and mentally abusive relationship in the north of England. She spoke to her hairdresser about her situation and this hairdresser had a friend who worked in a women's refuge in Wales. Harriet telephoned the refuge's advice line and they gave her telephone support for ten months until she felt strong enough to leave and come to Wales. She said: *'This contact gave me strength – a violent relationship means you go round and round in circles – to make the move'.*

Debbie had endured years of domestic abuse although this was not a label she had ever applied to her situation – she did not view her predicament as unusual. By chance, her brother was speaking to a solicitor on another matter and he mentioned his sister's situation. The solicitor immediately identified this as domestic violence and gave information on how to contact a women's refuge in west Wales where he knew one of the workers. Debbie left home three weeks after her contact with the refuge. After several years, and following some difficulty with accessing local authority housing, Debbie is now in an RSL flat and, partly through returning to education, is re-gaining control of her life.

Debbie feels strongly that many women return to abusive partners because of lack of information about assistance and alternatives. She feels that the range of professionals – solicitors, GP's, health professionals - who come into contact with women suffering abuse should be aware of the available alternatives and support. This point will be further illustrated in Alison's history.

3.4 A 'dead end' in information

Alison also contacted a woman's refuge in Wales, with which a relative had contacts. However, this account is informative through the presentation of negatives. Alison, a college-educated woman sought advice about a violent marriage and, although she contacted key professionals, met with a series of dead ends. She felt that '*the right information at the right time*' could have kept her in her own area, Northern England, where she had family support, which she valued. She gives advice on how information, in this case about women's refuges, could better be available.

Alison was living in the north of England in the late 1980s. She sought information to solve her problems but failed to get it. She thought the Police, whom she felt had acted well in the emergency episodes of domestic violence, could have given her information on where to gain assistance. Her partner had a drug problem. Alison approached a drugs agency for him but she felt that she was excluded from any exchanges between the agency and her partner. Marriage guidance was sought but was unsuccessful. The GP could not give her information about her partner's use of drugs or support for herself and Alison found out what she could in the public library. Alison felt that, if she had been given information, she might have stayed in her home area, where she had support from her relatives. Instead she moved to a woman's refuge in Wales, which a relative knew about. When she left the refuge, her accommodation was insecure and linked to an unsatisfactory relationship. With the help of two voluntary sector advice agencies, she eventually gained a local authority house and settled in Wales.

It is interesting to note that, in the accounts, there were four positive comments about gaining information which made possible a turning point in leaving homelessness but there were nine comments about not gaining information. The following accounts, by Phil and Paul, illustrate the initial lack of information, then followed by access to useful information.

3.5 Information on leaving institutions

Phil and Paul had both served prison sentences although Phil came out of prison a decade later than Paul. Neither felt that they had received any advice and information about housing, either in prison or on release. Phil gained information about housing and support later, after he had been discharged from prison. Paul gained similar information, by chance, through his father talking to a solicitor. The gaining of information by chance echoes the cases of Debbie and James. In both cases, this information and the housing and support which resulted from it, enabled the two young men to settle down and re-establish their lives. Both young men left homelessness as a result of information about voluntary sector housing and support projects.

Phil was living with his girlfriend in a south Wales town. He had not known where to access information or been provided with good information since he had become homeless fifteen years earlier. He had spent short periods in prison but had not been given any housing information then. He said: *'When I was in jail, they came and said "We'll help you get a job, help you get a flat". As soon as you are outside the gates they say, "We can't help you any more, you're not a prisoner". And that was that.'*

A decade later and with several failed local authority tenancies, Phil was living in a shed and had a mental health problem which led to several short spells of hospitalization. Although calling daily at the local authority housing office, he was not given assistance or accommodation. It was not until he was referred to a support agency, as part of one hospital discharge, that he was able to gain accommodation and eventually begin to re-establish his life.

Paul became homeless in 2002 as a result of the collapse of his relationship with his partner. Paul had little information about what to do regarding accessing accommodation. Although he had lived with a number of women, they had always dealt with housing matters e.g. managing bills, paying the rent etc. and Paul did not know who to approach for assistance. As a result of an injunction that stopped him from approaching his ex-partner and also the home of his parents, he lived in his car for several months. He had approached the local authority but had been informed that *'we have nothing…no chance…you're a single man.'* He was subsequently sentenced to 3 weeks in prison for breaking his injunction. Neither at his sentencing, nor during his sentence, was he asked if he had accommodation to which to return or whether he required any assistance. It was only subsequently, through a solicitor informing his father about a voluntary sector Prison Resettlement Project, that he was successful in accessing accommodation and support.

3.6 Information through front-line workers or referral by agencies

The following accounts, a decade apart and different in many details, show two young people who were eventually successful in contacting a housing and support agency

through which they were eventually housed.

Christine and a female friend arrived in Cardiff in the early 1990s. The Fire Service put them up and referred them on to an advice agency. Again, front-line workers are contacted. This did not end the women's instability and a hostel and private rented accommodation did not work out for them. As in the case of Phil, Christine was referred to a voluntary sector housing and support project on being discharged from hospital following a violent attack by a friend. Through this project, Christine gained a local authority house in an area she wanted. Jamie, unlike Christine, was homeless in his own home area. A visit to the housing office was unsuccessful as he was male and single. On the advice of a friend, he approached social services who referred him to a housing and support project. Through this, Jamie began to re-establish his life.

Christine was a college graduate and arrived in Cardiff in the early 1990s with a friend. The two women slept rough for a couple of nights and then were assisted by Cardiff Fire Service who gave them food and access to shower facilities. The Fire Service then advised them to visit the Citizen's Advice Bureau who referred them to a local hostel. They found this rather male-dominated and so moved into the private rented sector, where they had bad experiences which included being locked out of their flat and illegally evicted. It was only on being discharged from hospital after being physically abused by her flat mate, that Christine was referred to a voluntary sector housing and support project. With the help of this project, she eventually moved into a women-only accommodation project and later, with support, into local authority accommodation in a location of her choice.

When ***Jamie*** became homeless, in the 1990s, in a small rural north Wales town, he did not know where to go for information or assistance and, on the advice of a friend, approached social services from where he was referred to a housing and a support project. Jamie says *'several years ago there was nothing, no advice on boards or anything, like you have Shelter Cymru all over the place now … if you were a single mother you could easily have got a place…but [otherwise] you didn't know where to go. A friend of mine just said, "Try social services"'*. Social services referred him to a relatively local accommodation provider that assisted him to re-establish his life.

Again information is provided by a friend and housing and support is accessed through social services referring Jamie on to an RSL which provided specialist housing support for young people. In a number of other accounts, people were referred on to housing and support agencies through other agencies; so good inter-agency information is crucial. Overall, there were seven mentions of people gaining information about other services through the supported housing agency which was working with them.

The improvement of the provision and the accessibility of information needed by people when they are homeless can prove crucial in preventing or solving a homeless situation. Appropriate information can follow a comprehensive assessment. Non-housing services, such as the Police, Fire Service, GPs and health workers can be important in referring people to available homeless services and so should be made aware of these. Advertising of homeless services could be placed with these cross-cutting agencies.

3.7 Education about housing and services

Several of the accounts illustrate a lack of knowledge about housing issues which can lead people to make mistakes and so end up in a homeless situation. When Kim and her partner – who later became abusive - purchased a house, it was purchased in his name. Alison was in a similar position when she moved in with a partner who owned the house. Paul had never lived independently and had left finding and managing accommodation to the women he lived with. These, and other situations, show that there is a need to fund a coherent programme for preventing homelessness – through public education and schools.

This education should include information about available services. A lack of knowledge about domestic abuse and women's refuges left three women – Debbie, Harriet and Alison – to suffer years of domestic abuse. Louise, who lived in a lorry for sixteen weeks, thought that a women's refuge was for 'battered women' which she did not feel she was although her husband had evicted her. As she said: *'I'd rather leave the place open for a mother with a child - that's my nature.'* Three male participants - James, Harry and Phil were quite unaware of the different housing and support services which were available and which, in the end, changed their lives.

The National Homelessness Strategy supports educative and preventative measures and, currently, a network of independent housing advice and advocacy services is being developed in Wales.

3.8 Partnership working

In the accounts above, information was often passed between agencies. Partnership working in order to tackle homelessness has been identified as an important element in helping people leave homelessness (McClusky 1997; Yanetta and Third 1999; Rosengard et al 2002). Although this importance was acknowledged in the Homelessness Act 2002, there is considerable work to be undertaken in order to deliver the flexible, client-centred services advocated.

Participants talked about experiences of partnership working but, they themselves, did not use this term. In this section, the interviewer is often interpreting the facts in the account as an example of partnership working. Although some accounts highlighted the failure of partnership working and the need for improvement in order to minimize the time people spend in crisis situations, some participants spoke of experiencing positive partnership working, which provided them with pathways out of homelessness.

Interestingly, many participants distinguished between services delivered in the statutory sector and those delivered by the voluntary sector. In many cases, participants spoke positively about the voluntary sector housing and support projects through which they had been housed. There were fewer positive comments about housing and social service departments. For example, twenty-six people spoke about support work and all but two were positive. Twenty-one people spoke about housing providers but only eleven comments were positive. Nearly all the negative comments were about local authority landlords. This distinction between statutory and voluntary services is referred to in the literature. Salford University (forthcoming) suggests that homeless users feel more comfortable with

the voluntary sector which, they suggest is more flexible and innovative and can better cater for their needs.

In the accounts in the earlier section, clients identified the importance of key frontline workers, such as GPs and the police in being able to inform and signpost people to services. In two of the above, they were referred to housing and support projects on discharge from hospital and this ended quite long periods of homelessness. In a number of cases, particularly in north Wales, social services were able to refer homeless young people onto an RSL partner with a range of accommodation, including a hostel and also support. This helped Martin access temporary accommodation and also helped Natalie to move into independent accommodation with general support. Mark, and Harriet, see below, escaped homelessness in this way.

Mark had been staying with friends for 7-8 months when he approached the local authority. The housing services interviewed him, explained his rights and options and then contacted a local RSL provider. The organisation undertook an assessment of need and secured temporary accommodation in which he remained for a period of 5 months. When he was ready, Mark then moved into move-on accommodation with low-level support and subsequently into independent accommodation.

Although ***Harriet's*** history shows a failure of partnership working when the Police failed to signpost her to services during instances of domestic violence, it also demonstrates the value of collaboration and good relationships between the statutory and voluntary sector.

After Harriet accessed women's refuge accommodation, support staff assisted her to terminate her tenancy in Manchester and - through a good working relationship with the local authority – ensured that she was assisted to complete a homelessness application so that she and her two children were allocated a house when she was ready to leave the refuge.

The following account, of Sarah and Kevin, demonstrates negatives aspects but also points to a way forward to positive proactive joint working and support.

Sarah and ***Kevin*** were evicted from their local authority home in north Wales. Sarah has learning difficulties and Kevin has a heart problem. Drug users had been taking advantage of their vulnerability and using the house to get high and drunk. Sarah and Kevin commented: *'It was other people, chucking stuff... in the garden and everything … windows getting smashed all the while ... they were breaking the windows and by the time we come back from town they were already in ….'*

Sarah and Kevin said that the council would do nothing about the *'druggies'* as they had rent arrears. They had been referred by the council to social services who undertook an assessment but, even though the property was in poor condition, they did not do anything to help. They did not refer the couple to other organisations that could have assisted.

The Probation Service finally referred Sarah and Kevin to an advice and support service which helped them with the move. Sarah and Kevin compare their life before and after: *'Anything … we can do anything now. We can go out and not worry about the house. The landlord doesn't bother us. This place is our home. We've really settled down here … The dog's settled down and doesn't disappear as he used to before so he's settled…'*

3.9 Summary points

- Information, generally about housing and support projects, can form a significant turning point in resolving a homeless situation.

- Participants felt that they often gained this information by chance or through friends. It is important that the next stage, of referral and assessment, should be in place.

- A significant number gained information through friends, relatives or known professionals. These sources were trusted and the information was acted upon.

- Participants felt that front-line workers were in a good position to provide information – the Police, GPs, solicitors, and the Fire Service.

- In two cases, participants were successfully referred to services following hospital discharge. Release from prison is similarly an important time for information.

- Lack of knowledge about housing and available services made several participants vulnerable to homelessness. Such subjects could be included in general education.

- The histories show a number of examples where partnership working, in particular robust referral routes, led to the delivery of appropriate housing and support to people who were homeless. Many participants made a distinction between statutory and voluntary services.

4. What is a Home?

4.1 Introduction

In this research, the definition of 'having left homelessness' is being settled in independent accommodation without support from agencies for at least twelve months. Therefore housing, or living in independent accommodation, is taken as a successful endpoint. The participant's accounts showed us, however, that appropriate housing, where a 'home' can be created, is a catalyst for other outcomes. Having a 'home' affects peoples' relationships and social networks as well as their self-esteem and health. Having a home enabled them to 'get on with their lives' after their particular difficulties associated with being homeless. It has long been recognized, in the literature, that a 'home' is more than just bricks and mortar (Webb 1994) and that being homeless can have a negative effect on education, employment and health (Scottish Executive 2003; Welsh Assembly Government 2001). It is now recognized that independent housing is the best option for most single people, as well as families, and the provision of appropriate and good quality 'homes' for people is central to both national and local housing policies (Bines 1994; Bhugra 1996).

Seventeen of the participants spoke about the significance of having a 'home' which indicates that it was a subject of importance. Most spoke positively of their current housing and, for some, their home was a particular source of pride. Many compared the safety they felt in their present home compared with their lack of feeling safe in the past. In particular, safety from a violent partner or safety from earlier harassment. For some, having their own home made an independent life possible. Some participants felt that their home allowed them to participate again in mainstream life. For several older men, decorating and maintaining their homes increased their self-esteem, after a period in their lives which had been dominated by alcohol. Having such a home meant that friends or members of the family could visit. Having shelves and window sills meant that photographs of family and children could be displayed. The following are just a few accounts of many, which show the importance of having a house which can be turned into a 'home'.

4.2 Stability, safety, self-esteem and social networks

In the first three accounts, Phil, Frank and Mathew, all in their 40s, speak about the importance of their homes. Phil, homeless for 15 years after leaving home in his early 20s, stresses the safety which his RSL flat gives him from the drug users who had robbed him in the past. He feels that this new security helps him keep his self-harming and mental health problems under control. Interestingly, he had had two previous flats from the local authority but these were without support and did not give him stability. The turning point for Phil came when he was referred to two support agencies after coming out of hospital. Through these support agencies, one of which specialised in supporting people with drug and alcohol problems, Phil found his RSL flat and was supported over the next four years. Several recent reports (Scolfield 1998; Précis 138 2002) show that, increasingly, homeless applicants have already held and lost social housing tenancies and this was the case with Phil.

He felt that the input and quality of the support was an important factor in his sustaining the tenancy.

Phil was moving around south Wales for 15 years. He slept in cars, stayed temporarily with friends and squatted. He was sentenced to several prison terms. During this period he was allocated two local authority flats but was forced to abandon both due to being the target for robberies which, he felt, were committed by heroin users. When his lifestyle was chaotic, Phil's housing situation was chaotic. At the end of this long period of homelessness and instability and following some time sleeping in a shed, Phil was admitted to hospital with mental health problems. When he was considered ready to be discharged he was referred to a local support organisation and, through their assistance, was allocated an RSL flat. With support, Phil was able to settle into the flat – he felt his quality of life improved and he was able to deal with other issues. He began to feel that his drug use, self-harming and subsequent need for hospitalization were now under control. The safety and security, which the flat gave him, enabled him to move forward with his life. He believes that a CCTV entry-system would increase his peace of mind and his continued fear of heroin users means that he only leaves his flat at certain times of day, only goes to certain places and always with his girlfriend. Phil's main comment on why things had worked out well was: *'Everyone needs a base, no matter what they are or who they are. That's very important'.*

Frank had been evicted from his RSL property in Swansea because of his alcohol problem and complaints from his neighbours. After more than a decade of instability, living in shared accommodation in the private rented sector, he gained a local authority house through a support agency. His comments show the pride and self-esteem he feels in his new home and the fact that he can ask his friends back to such a home.

Frank speaks of the importance of having his own house: *'When you put the curtains up, the nets up, you start tidying up, painting it and you decorate it, and you think you have done that and you haven't needed any help and it's clean, it's tidy, you are clean and tidy. Everything I have got now is paid for, everything I have got is mine, it's all clean, it's fresh and it's tidy, and there's a feel good factor that I can invite anybody back to my place and I am not ashamed and they know it will be clean and tidy'.*

The way in which having a home can link a person into social networks and enable them to integrate into mainstream life is shown in the account of Mathew. After a disabling accident in his teens and rehabilitation in a Swansea hospital Mathew moved from dependent accommodation to independence. His friends, made through an arts project run by the same homelessness support agency which had worked with Frank, helped Mathew to decorate his new home. Again, a housing and support agency found his new home and supported him there.

Mathew moved from England to Swansea for specialist rehabilitation. On leaving hospital, his social worker found him an 'adult placement' which Mathew describes as being a small flat converted from a garage with a couple whom he felt provided minimal support for the money paid. Because of a dispute he was asked to leave after a year and was extremely anxious about the future. At the time, Mathew was attending an arts project run by a homelessness support agency. This agency contacted social services who found him temporary accommodation in residential care. His subsequent attendance at an arts project increased his confidence and he was able to take up the offer of a local authority flat in an area of his choice, with the support of the homelessness agency. He discussed colours to decorate his new flat with several people at the arts centre. These friends helped him paint his flat as well as choose the furniture. In the interview, he spoke about those people involved in his life as he talked about the pieces of furniture and colours that were chosen. Mathew had made some of the furniture, himself, at the arts centre.

Thomas, now over retirement age, was interviewed in his RSL flat in Cardiff, surrounded with the furniture he treasures – a Persian carpet and a leather armchair amongst other things. Looking around the room he comments: *'I can honestly say now I feel more content in a rented flat, which is only a peppercorn rent anyway. I feel more content with my lot than I have in my adult life.'* He is comparing this small flat with the five-bedroomed house he left several decades ago with a drinking problem some years after a divorce. His pride in this flat, and the mobility car which gives him independence, is linked to the pride he expresses when he talks about overcoming his alcoholism.

4.3 A home is a starting point for younger people

With Mark and Martin, having independent flats after moving though a hostel for young people, gives them safe and secure bases from which they can consider their situation and think about the future. Mark feels that he will move in the future if new opportunities necessitate this. Both these young men are looking towards the future and change to a greater extent than the older men above.

Mark was living in a private rented flat in north Wales, which he found through a housing and support agency for young people. He is currently working in a music shop and felt that it was his interest in music, which took him through the problems of having to leave home at 17 and spend several months in a hostel. Speaking of his current flat, he said that he was *'settled in a way'* but would leave if he could find opportunities to fulfil ambitions and improve his employment prospects.

Martin, who had moved through the same hostel and been supported into housing in the same way as Mark, felt that in his flat he had a place of his own and that '*there is no restriction to what I can do*'.

4.4 Safety and security in the neighbourhood

Many of the participants spoke of the importance of safety and security in their homes as a key factor for successful resettlement. This was seen in the case of Phil above. The history of Sarah and Kevin also highlights the importance of the security of both a house and its neighbourhood. Sarah has learning difficulties and Kevin has health problems. It was only when an outside voluntary sector support agency intervened that their accommodation problems were resolved.

This account highlights the need for local homelessness strategies to consider the causal factors of anti-social behaviour and to develop support services aimed at preventing homelessness and dealing with contributory issues. Local authority and RSL landlords should seek to minimize exclusion and regularly review the circumstances of households that are excluded from social housing.

Sarah and ***Kevin*** were evicted from local authority accommodation in north Wales, for rent arrears. Although rent arrears was the legal ground for possession, one of the main reasons for their eviction was anti-social behaviour and this was perpetrated by drug users who, exploiting the couple's vulnerability, would break into the property when the couple were out, cause damage and use drugs. The couple clearly did not feel safe in the accommodation and were not offered support by social services although the housing services of the local authority had referred the case to social services for an assessment. Sarah's probation officer referred them to a voluntary sector support organisation which ensured that the couple found alternative accommodation in the private rented sector and that support was also provided. Sarah and Kevin are now settled in their home and one of the underlying factors is that they feel safe and able to move-on with their lives: *'We can do anything now. We can go out and not worry about the house…this place is our home. We've really settled down here'.*

4.5 Summary points

- Pride and self-esteem were often boosted through the process of creating a home - for men as well as women;
- Friends and family can be invited into a home, thus linking people into mainstream life;
- Two younger men thought they would move in the future and that their present accommodation was a starting point rather than an end in itself;
- Participants stressed the safety and security which a home, and a desired neighbourhood, could give them against dangers. Safety and security can have a positive effect on health;
- In all the cases illustrated here, the housing was found by an agency and support was given when the participant moved in.

5. Housing Policies and Practice

5.1 Introduction

Nearly all the participants had approached housing services and all but a few were tenants either of the local authority or RSLs. In the accounts, there were many comments about social landlords. Some of these comments were positive but others were negative. As this group had been selected because they had successfully escaped homelessness and all but three were satisfied with their present accommodation, the negative comments recorded were often from the past. However, an understanding of what participants identify as 'poor practice' is important if homelessness is to be prevented or resolved.

Earlier studies (Rosengard 2000; Webb 1994) highlight two barriers facing homeless people. Firstly the difficulty of gaining access to social housing, particularly for those without 'priority' status; and second the fact that properties eventually offered are sometimes in a poor physical state or not in the location preferred. Allocation of inappropriate properties is seen to be a factor in tenancy failure (Prècis 138, 1998). The following accounts show the need for allocation policies to be sensitive to the needs of tenants as this, itself, can prevent future homelessness.

5.2 The importance of positive housing practice

Eleven participants spoke positively of their current accommodation and/or their previous contact with local authority or RSL housing services. In this first account, Harry moves from a situation of chaos and ill health to a settled home and family life. This account illustrates the extent to which the type and location of accommodation available affects the outcome. It suggests that good practice in housing allocation has significant and long lasting effects on people's lives.

Harry had travelled and worked in England for over 10 years since he had left the care of the local authority. He had ended up in a large hostel in the south of England where his drug use and mental illness, which he feels were linked, had escalated. After being hospitalized for some time he arrived in Cardiff and then moved on to Swansea and stayed in a smaller hostel. He was provided with, what he described as, a *'package of care'* and he was given support to apply for local authority housing. He asked if they *'could get him something out of the way, not near drugs'* as that would exacerbate his illness. His choice was considered under the local authority's allocation policy and he was offered a flat in one of his preferred areas. He was settled in this area for a year until the flats were demolished. He was again offered a choice of properties and chose a house, again in a preferred area. Harry decorated the house and was given two weeks rent relief in return. He and his partner are both working and she is expecting a baby.

The following account, of Kim, ends with good practice but the participant felt that some of her earlier troubles had occurred as a result of poor procedure linked to a Housing Benefit claim. This account also illustrates the way in which personal relationships and domestic violence create instability in housing. It reminds us that people who have previously been home-

owners, particularly women, may need social housing after a relationship breakdown. This account also shows that relatively simple arrangements can give people the safety needed to start a new life.

Kim first became homeless at 16 years old because of family conflict. A south Wales hostel refused to accommodate her, as she did not have her parent's signature. She returned home and passed the A levels required to go to university. After university she bought a house but lost it through repossession. She moved into a private rented flat with a partner but this relationship subsequently became abusive. She left this relationship and later bought a house with another partner. However this relationship also became abusive and Kim, who now had two young children, fled the relationship and rented a private sector flat. She told us that her ex-partner had discovered her address through her Housing Benefit claim. She cancelled the claim and this then lead to the accumulation of debts.

Kim fled with her children to a women's refuge in west Wales where she remained for seven months before being re-housed. Kim feels that her own education helped her navigate her way through but that this assertiveness can alienate some professionals. Kim was finally allocated an RSL property and was allowed to make the claim for housing benefit using an alias. Social services also secured a non-disclosure alert which meant that no information about her was given to a third party which did not involve the alias name.

Kim found this instance of local authority practice very helpful. She also spoke positively about the qualities of the house, the repair service when needed, the community and the friends she had acquired.

It is obvious that the majority of these participants, who had left homelessness and successfully settled, had gained access to appropriate housing. Several women fleeing domestic violence had come from England and were pleased with the housing and the area - speaking positively of the rurality, the schools and their new friendship networks.

One older man was able to retain his flat over two years of detoxification treatment. He said that possession of the flat was one of the things which kept him going. In all these cases, support work had been there and the value of housing providers working with support agencies was a major factor in the success of many participants.

5.3 The importance of having housing in order to access support

The positions of Dan and Simon, both from England, can be contrasted. Simon was staying with Dan at the time of the interview.

Dan spent a year in a residential detoxification centre and then gained a RSL flat in Cardiff with support. He speaks of his flat: *'I feel more settled, more relaxed. I'll tell you something else. You can come and go as you want to. You can do what you want. Go to bed when you want. It's more or less like a bachelor flat'.*

Simon had nowhere in Cardiff to live and his main purpose in life was to gain a flat there where his children could come and stay. He was still a named tenant on a local authority flat in England where his partner and children still lived, following a relationship breakdown. Simon had broken his probation and feared approaching any authorities. He said that he could not gain a place on a residential detox as they would only take people in emergency situations, such as after a road accident. His GP was not helpful and he was turned away from the surgery when they could smell alcohol on his breath.

5.4 The impact of negative practice

In a research interview, people often have less to say about success and satisfaction and more to say about their dissatisfaction and complaints. However, let us now consider some of the complaints about housing practice, concerning both current and past accommodation. In the first two cases, poor housing practice significantly affected the lives of Leanne and Owen.

Leanne's account describes 5 months of insecurity and homelessness for herself and her 12-year-old daughter during 2000 and 2001, when the family house was being sold following the breakdown of her marriage. The local authority involved informed her that they did not have suitable temporary accommodation for her and told Leanne that she *'would not like'* the accommodation on offer. This happened despite the fact that she was found to be in priority need. Leanne was advised to look for private rented properties and described seeing some in conditions that *'would have left me suicidal'.*

After 5 months the council offered her a house on an estate she did not want: *'When they said I had to go there…I cried before I saw it and then I cried even more when I saw it'.* She graphically describes the condition of the house when she moved in: *'There was dog muck, cat muck, everywhere'.* The former tenants had left their furniture and she did not receive any support with cleaning and decorating the house. With the insecurity and the stress of both facing homelessness, the failure of her marriage and the allocation of a sub-standard property she said: *'I had this on top of what I was going through, you know which was not good. So I was under the doctor'*.

Two years later, she is still waiting for a decorating grant. Because of this she feels that she cannot get on with her life. She said: *'I feel I'm stagnating. I can't move on. I can't decorate. I can't do anything until they have done the repairs'.*

This negative experience highlights the importance of proactive and co-ordinated allocation policies, and of suitable accommodation.

Owen is a single man, now in his late 50s. His history highlights the lack of support for young people as far back as the 1960s. Of more relevance, Owen's history raises concerns about housing support during the late 1990s, and the quality of his current accommodation.

Following a long history of homelessness that began with the breakdown of his relationship with his family during the 1960s, ***Owen*** moved into private lodgings, subsequently into a hostel and then into a local authority flat. Many years later, and with the assistance of a support organisation, Owen moved to a local authority house. Owen remains in this accommodation and its condition is particularly poor. He has no neighbourhood support and speaks of the poor state of repair in his house: *'I've got a leak in the chute, the manhole needs doing, and rats are in the cupboard in the kitchen. They poisoned the two rats so that they need to put a thing in but they have not done that … to cover up the hole, where the rats got in'.* He explained why repairs took so long with the Local Authority: *'Like one job is only two minutes away from the other job [but] they won't do it until it's reported to the office and 'til the inspector has seen it'.*

As already highlighted in Section 3, good information about housing, combined with positive allocation policies that take account of choice, can have a critical effect on the pathway of a household from a homelessness situation into settled accommodation. Having a 'home' impacts on many aspects of life and can prevent repeat homelessness. In contrast, policies that do not offer choice and which also allow the allocation of properties in poor condition have a negative effect on a household's ability to create a home and move-on from previous negative experiences. Several of the accounts show that where housing services listen to clients and, where necessary, bring in support agencies, intervention is more likely to be successful.

In the next account, the wrong information and an inappropriate allocation exacerbated Debbie's situation when escaping from domestic violence.

Debbie became homeless as a result of domestic violence and subsequently feels that she was not provided with a good service by a local authority when she was allocated a property after leaving a women's refuge in west Wales. She was placed in one flat that was in a very poor condition. After she had spent several months improving the flat, she belatedly learnt that this was only temporary accommodation and that she would have to move again - this time to a very unpopular area where her older son feared harassment. She felt that the local authority procedures were very unclear with regard to the information provided to her and that the authority did not take account of her needs and choices and, in fact, treated her as a 'criminal' rather than a 'victim'. Debbie felt that women from refuges were negatively stereotyped, and other women had similar accounts.

Two women, Louise and Phillipa describe how they felt forced to live in unsatisfactory situations in order to qualify for housing and felt that they could not take a flat on a temporary basis as this would damage their application.

When her husband threw her out, ***Louise*** went to the housing department and a RSL in mid Wales. She was told that, in both sectors, no accommodation was available. She did not want to accept temporary accommodation in the private rented sector because she feared that this would lead to her losing her eligibility for housing. Instead, Louise lived in a lorry for sixteen weeks, which had no toilet or running water, clearly risking her health and her safety. She was subsequently allocated an RSL house.

Andrea, from the same area, who gained a house after a period in a women's refuge, confirmed Louise's belief and told of her friend who had taken a private rented flat and, two years later, was still waiting to be housed.

Phillipa, from north Wales, was unable to pay her rent when her partner left and her Housing Benefit, on a private rented property, was reassessed leaving her with £45 a month benefit to cover £90 a month rent. She made a homeless application and was offered temporary accommodation, which was too far away from her two sons' schools. She spent 7 months on the waiting list but, with the help from a flexible private landlord, was able to stay in her house. Nevertheless this period was stressful. This stress was added to by being allocated a house on an estate, which her son was particularly worried about. She says: '*[He] really wobbled when he knew he was going to ... I had to reassure him and work out strategies of how we would handle things if he got hassle or whatever'.* This fear of hassle came from Phillipa's lesbian lifestyle.

Phillipa said of this homeless period, even though she always had a roof over her head: *'It was very tough, mind bogglingly stressful. It was the most stressful time of my life'*. She compared it with the death of her mother: *'That was a fairground ride compared to it … I can feel it now. I don't want to go through that again. The financial stress plus the uncertainly. It was the sheer uncertainly'.*

Phillipa's homelessness was not linked with a problem such as alcohol, drug use or mental health problems. She did not need support in the new tenancy. She had housing knowledge and both family and social networks to give her support. Nevertheless, she found the period very stressful and housing procedures caused some of this. What Phillipa tells us above compares starkly with her description of herself when she eventually moved from the private rented property into a local authority property:

'I've got the bounce back, the humour back. There is a network developed in the area of other women, other lesbians, and that has just started in the last year or two and I am heavily involved in that. And I have got the headspace to organize events as opposed to just go, and I have a great social life in work as well'.

This account also illustrates the importance of a secure home in turning around a life.

5.5 Geographical movement and homelessness

The housing histories collected indicate that geographical movement is a characteristic of some homeless applicants. The reasons for movement were varied but the most common movement reported was that of moving to a hostel and then settling in the area of that hostel. The need to flee from domestic violence was a major cause of relocation. Four women moved within the county and three women moved from England into Wales. All but one of these women moved to women's refuges before they gained housing in the area of the refuge. One mentioned that if the right services had existed, she would have liked to have remained in her home area where she had family support. Generally, these women were positive about the new area

they had moved into. Two women felt that the health services in Wales were better for their children, one of whom was disabled.

Six men moved between towns in the same county in order to access a hostel or other services. One man came from England to use specialist hospital services in Swansea. As with the women above, most settled into housing near the service. As above, most expressed satisfaction with their new area although one wished to return to his home town.

Four participants had ended up in Wales after travelling. They came into the area just to visit friends rather than to access services.

Viv**,** now in her 20s, dramatically illustrates the importance of being allocated housing away from an area of previous troubles.

Viv left care in south Wales in the early 90s. After a year of squatting, and involvement in prostitution and drugs, she was offered RSL accommodation in a suburban area of Cardiff. It was only by moving away from her previous friends that she could begin to build a new life.

The literature emphasises the importance of providing houses close to support networks (Scolfield 1999; Hutson and Pope 2000; Précis 38, 2002) and several of our accounts confirm this. However, other accounts illustrate that movement can be part of homelessness and many people who relocate into an area are able to settle, given the right conditions. Movement away from troubles may be positive for some people and there is clearly a need for cross-boundary working and funding, both at an early stage in a person's homelessness and later.

5.6 Summary points

- Housing polices affect a person's access to housing. Choice is important, as is information and legal safeguards. There was evidence here of single men being allocated good quality tenancies in the South of Wales.

- Some of our participants had experienced tenancy breakdown in the past. It appeared support intervention was a key issue in leading to successful resettlement.

- Nearly half of the participants who had experienced homelessness relocated from outside the area into which they settled. This was particularly true of women fleeing domestic violence. Others had moved to find services or temporary accommodation. With appropriate housing and support, nearly all had settled.

- The poor physical state of properties allocated and allocations to unpopular areas can cause extreme stress, which can exacerbate the actual experience of homelessness.

- These issues of housing policy and practice are central to local homelessness strategies, as is multi-agency working which is crucial to the resolution of homelessness.

6. Temporary Accommodation - Hostels and Refuges

6.1 Introduction

A significant number of our participants – eight men and seven women - had used hostels or women's refuges in their routes through homelessness. This constitutes half the group of interviewees. A number spoke at length of their experiences in these types of temporary accommodation. Problems with traditional hostel accommodation were identified in the 1980s, such as the mixing of people with different needs and the problems of managing direct access accommodation (Tai Cymru 1991). As a result, there has been an expansion of smaller bedsit units and floating support schemes in Wales. New funding regimes have favoured this development. Surveys confirm that most homeless people want a place of their own and move-on schemes from hostels and projects have been developed in Wales. A recent survey of hostels in Scotland (Rosengard 2002) identifies problems but suggests that hostels can have a role within a range of local provision. Women's refuges are generally smaller than hostels and provide support only for women who are fleeing domestic violence. There is a strong element of self-help in the support but, like hostels, there are issues around the problems of communal living and the difficulty of gaining 'move on' accommodation.

6.2 Some problems with larger hostels

The accounts which follow starkly illustrate some of the classic problems with large hostels where support is minimal – in particular the mixing of clients, some with very high support needs, and the escalation of drug use and mental health problems particularly with younger people. However, other participants progressed apparently unscathed through the same hostels or had no complaints. The next two accounts illustrate the dangers of hostel living.

Harry speaks of a large hostel in England. He ended up there after many years travelling and working in England. By the time he reached the hostel his mental health problems and drug use had escalated. Harry said of this large hostel: *'It's the environment you are living in. I was living in a hell of an environment, it was not doing me any good'... 'I was so mixed up, drugs, mental illness, drink. It was all ages. That one in [name of town] was a nut house. It was insane. I mean people were dying all over the place. Committing suicide and that'.* Harry commented on the control in the hostel: *'They were chasing the people with the drugs all the time, people were ill. I was just left along the wayside'.*

Harry left this hostel after six months, and by this time he was quite ill. He travelled to south Wales, where a friend lived, and signed into a Cardiff hostel, of which he said: *'…you walked down corridors, and it was like prison … when I was in [the hostel above], I did make some friends and stuff. It wasn't that bad, but here I thought "Oh God, why have I come here", like'.*

Stuart, about ten years younger than Harry, went to a hostel in Cardiff, when he became homeless at 18 as a result of long standing difficulties in his family. His account matches that of Harry. He speaks of the danger both inside the hostel and outside:

'A hostel's a crazy place. It's a crazy environment. It's not a very nice place and a mixture of people with severe problems. You don't really need it. It's just not good. All with bad problems, all using drugs. It's a mixture of horrible atmosphere, crazy fighting - all the bad things in life really, into a package'. He speaks further of that time: 'When I'm drinking a bottle of gin a day and going down to [name of public house], the most dangerous inn in Cardiff, it was a very dangerous situation to be in. I'd be there but with that awareness that I didn't really want to be there – with all these horrible people in this dangerous situation'.

After these damaging experiences, Harry moved to a smaller hostel where he was given support - 'a package of care' - including mental health treatment, rehabilitation into work and support in a local authority flat. The Drug and Alcohol Team referred Stuart to a residential therapeutic centre in England where he stayed for nine months and successfully resolved his mental health problems.

It is interesting that another participant, Dan, stayed in the same south Wales hostel as Harry, when he moved to be near his girlfriend after his father had died. He makes no comment about the hostel. He had left a small business in England. He left the hostel to stay in a privately rented flat with his girlfriend. Several years later he was referred to a residential detox unit and then to an RSL flat and a specialized drug and alcohol support scheme.

Thomas, an older man (now in his 60s), ended up in a Cardiff hostel after escaping from an alcoholic lifestyle in a nearby town. He spent two years there before moving to the hostel mentioned above because he felt that being able to drink in his room would be better as his mobility was becoming restricted by poor health. Within a month in this second hostel, Thomas was re-housed into an RSL flat, where he still lives some 5 years later. His experiences of hostel life were more positive and it was the move-on scheme from the second hostel which enabled him to start a new life. He explained what happened in the second hostel: *'I was there about 3 weeks and a young man came into my room and gave me a contract to sign which was fine and I signed. And when I read it, it said, "If you don't apply or be seen to be applying for fresh accommodation within 6 months …", it was optional on them whether they renewed it." So I thought it was time to find myself some accommodation and within 3 weeks they had found me this place'.*

Although criticism could be levied at the first hostel for letting Thomas stay so long, without proactive move-on, he felt that he *'needed that time [2 years] to recuperate'*. He said: *'when I was in the first hostel I was quite content. The trauma of being with all these drinkers in my [home town] all this time, I just wanted to regroup my body and thoughts.'* He admits that a 'lady' did come and see him when he first arrived. He described the event as: *'We had a meeting there with a woman talking about new accommodation, I'd only been there a couple of weeks, and I said I don't want to move yet. Mrs.L. looked at me and said: "Do you want to die here?" I said I didn't want to die anywhere really. I said I just want to get myself back together and that's what I utilized the first hostel for.'*

These different accounts show that individuals can react differently to the same institutions which indicate the difficulties of catering for different needs. The accounts of Harry and Stuart (the two younger men) show the dangers of a hostel environment, the spiralling drug use and the resulting exacerbation of mental health problems. The older man, Thomas, is more willing to remain in a hostel. Dix et al. (1995) found that some older men saw their hostel in Cardiff as 'home' and did not particularly want to move on. Interestingly, Harry, who was so much at risk in the larger hostel, found a way out of his homeless situation into family life through support provided by another, smaller hostel.

6.3 A smaller hostel which centralises services

James speaks of the same, smaller hostel. He ended up there on the recommendation of a stranger when his life had reached a very low ebb. He had come to Wales following a relationship breakdown which followed an injury and early retirement from his profession. Nevertheless he points out that the hostel environment, which he so benefited from, does not suit everyone.

James, now in his 60s, praises the small hostel where Thomas lived. He said of it: *'The staff was wonderful. There were a few rules, like no drugs, no violence'*. However, James did feel that this hostel was not appropriate for everyone. He spoke of some younger men who did not like the rules and called the hostel *'the prison'*. He described a younger man whom he could see was self-harming by cutting his arms when his peers put pressure on him in the hostel environment. James said that the hostel helped this man – by bandaging his arms and taking him to casualty – *'but they couldn't stop him cutting his arms'*. James, who did not have these kind of problems contrasted himself to many in the hostel. As he said: *'I did not have problems like that'.*

6.4 Young people and hostels

John's account of a young person's hostel in north Wales is interesting. He has many positive things to say about the motives and the programme of the hostel. Nevertheless, he identifies some aspects of 'communal living' – which he learnt to cope with and sees as an inevitable part of the homeless scene.

John left home at 22, following conflict with his stepfather. He approached social services and was referred to an RSL which operated several hostels for young people as well as supported move-on schemes. John spent nearly three years in hostels and has been five years in his current flat. He found living in hostel accommodation a shock at first but decided to learn from it – about other people, about independent living skills, and even about rock climbing and other outdoor activities that were arranged for the young people. John *says: 'It was a good standard of living, but you were forced to associate with people you wouldn't normally associate with, and there was a lot of drug culture going on…and these are the things you have to put up with in the homeless environment, as they call it… pot heads aren't so bad, they just want to chill out, they're not threatening in any way. But if you get the likes of heroin abusers and that sort of thing, then that can be uncomfortable, not while they're on heroin, because they just go to sleep, but umm, their cold turkey, that's when the problem starts'.*

John's advice to others suggests that there are good, as well as bad, things about his hostel experience: *'You might be looking at a flat, which is a better start, I think. But if you*

end up going into a hostel environment, try and be as open minded as you can because like I said before, there's a lot of "flarey" people in there, whether they're on drugs or not … But also, there's a lot of very nice people that will help you, not just staff, residents as well. You know, it's very much become a family type of environment type of thing'.

He goes further in contemplating about what he gained from this time: '*One thing I've learnt in the hostel system is I can go anywhere I want now and not be afraid to walk into a place, because the open-mindedness is there, you know, you cope. I can go in anywhere and not be too worried. That's one good thing I can say about the hostel system*'.

Mark's account reinforces John's comments on hostel living.

Mark left home at 17 after conflict with his father and stayed in a hostel for four months. He describes the hostel as 'odd': *'People with all sorts of different problems in there together…some people who I am still in contact with aren't coping at all, you know they have got kids and they are this far away from losing their life'. Mark thinks that people have to be strong and determined in a hostel situation because: 'there is an element of danger, because it is a scary place the hostel, you have got to learn to say "No" to people. You've got to say, "No, I don't want to get involved in what you are doing" and "No I don't want to do what you are doing"'.*

Mark spoke of having to get through the experience: 'All I do is play music because I am a musician, that's what got me through the hostel being a musician'. Mark, like John, saw the hostel as a necessary place in which independent living skills are learnt before the move to a flat is agreed: 'If you prove to them that you can, and with my age that helped then they think "Oh, I think he can look after himself, we are going to house him"'.

6.5 Women's refuges and communal living

Six of the participants who had stayed in women's refuges mentioned some difficulties they experienced with communal living.

Kim, who stayed for over seven months in one refuge describes the difficulties of sharing with women who have different needs. After two months, she wanted to leave because some women in the hostel were quite aggressive and it felt like a hostile environment. Kim said: *'Some were alcoholics and others had emotional problems – everyone had different problems – and they were all in the refuge together...Some quite bullying, hard women whom other vulnerable women struggled to deal with…'*. She felt experiences of bullying within the refuge environment were very common, and she noted that it was the different experiences and insights that determined the individual's capacity to cope with what could be very difficult situations. She also felt that the communication and co-ordination between the two different refuges where she stayed was poor.

For ***Harriet***, the refuge was an essential first stage intervention and staff initially supported her and accompanied her to the local authority offices to make a homelessness application. However, with other elements she (and others) were left to struggle unsupported and this was difficult as she was in an unfamiliar town and area. Harriet noticed that: *'The refuge was always overwhelmed with paperwork and staff were never available to help. It did not provide 24 hour support and this would have helped'*. Harriet felt that the refuge staff were unprofessional in other ways. *'The staff were women who had gone through similar experiences but this does not qualify*

them to help. Things were done on a personal basis rather than a professional one – if they liked you etc.'

She concluded: *'The refuge was not the right environment and you could not deal with your own problems because you were in an environment where you were close to the problems of others'.* Harriet felt that increased funding was needed to make the service more professional and more support should be provided in the hostel and when moving into the community. She suggested that the council could provide information about relevant services in the area.

Alison stayed in a local refuge in north Wales and three months in a refuge in the west. She felt that her experience of refuge life had been *'OK'* but she felt that women's experiences were based on *'luck'* in relation to which other women and children were in the refuge at the time. She felt that she had been fortunate in so far as *'Many women who were sharing the refuge at the time did not have complex contributory problems including drugs or alcohol'*.

It was interesting that Andrea and Carol, who commented very positively about mid Wales's refuges, both stayed in them when they were fairly empty.

The participants recognized the difficulties of mixing people with different needs together. Harriet thought that the accommodation units could be more self-contained or that greater use could be made of outreach working. It is clear, from these accounts, that each area in Wales needs to develop a range of housing and support options which meet the different requirements of their population.

6.6 The advantages of a room in a shared house

In addition to the thirty individual interviews with people who were living independently, a visit was made to a 'wet house' in Cardiff, where three men were interviewed. They did not meet the criteria for this research as they were still receiving housing support. They had, however some interesting things to say about different types of accommodation. The house, a listed building close to the centre of Cardiff, accommodated 5 men in their own furnished rooms with support provided on a flexible basis. The support was intense for one older disabled man. Two of the men had spent a year or more on the streets. Two men contrasted this experience in a shared house with their previous experience of larger hostels.

One man underlined the insecurity, which can be engendered by a night shelter where people sign in each night for a bed. He spoke about disappearing for a few days – to visit a friend or whatever – and consequently losing his hostel place. Breaking the rules could lead to an eviction. This was one reason why sleeping on the street could seem more secure than staying in a hostel. He contrasted this with his present situation where he could go away for a while, perhaps to take advantage of the summer weather, but could still return.

Another man pointed out that he preferred to stay in this shared house, rather than an independent property. Firstly, furniture was supplied in the shared house. He said that he had been allocated a number of flats in the past but had lost the tenancy each time. This meant that he was back to *'square one'*. Keeping a room in a shared house was less of a commitment and suited his current life style.

6.7 Specialist residential units

There is a difference between hostels that provide temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, and specialist residential units. We had a number of very good comments on a residential detoxification facility in Cardiff. In addition, Stuart speaks of his successful treatment in a mental health unit: *'One thing that did help me a lot was when I went to Bristol and it was all talking, talking. Talking and feeling and being aware. For me, having that bit of awareness. I didn't have any and I went over there and I had loads'*.

6.8 Summary points

There are ongoing debates regarding the appropriateness of hostels, 'wet' houses, refuges or providing people with immediate access to permanent housing, with support if necessary. In this section, participants have related experiences of the problems of larger hostels but others, who have stayed there, have not mentioned them. Clearly management and support are crucial elements and hostels that cater for differing needs must have adequate support and staffing to enable them to deal with varying levels of need. In Wales, hostels and refuges remain as ways of channelling people, particularly single men and women fleeing domestic violence, through homelessness. Recent work by Caer Las Cymru (Jones and Highgate 2000) suggests that, if the appropriate support is accessible (and the appropriate accommodation available), people do not need to access hostels, but rather can immediately move into independent accommodation.

- Half the participants had come through temporary accommodation – hostels and refuges and most had been housed through these, with some move-on support.
- The problems, sometimes severe, of larger hostels with minimal support, were illustrated.
- Problems of lack of resources were evident in some accounts of women's refuges. Higher levels of support and information would require more funding.
- Some benefits of programmes in hostels were outlined – outdoor activities, a package of care. Several young men felt they had gained through having to cope with hostel living.
- Specialist residential treatment centres (detoxification and mental health) were praised – leading to move-on housing with support.

7. The Significance of Support

7.1 Introduction

Twenty-six people spoke of support work as being a crucial intervention in helping them leave a homelessness situation and settling into independent accommodation. No other intervention is referred to as often or in such positive terms. Because the majority of the participants were contacted through support agencies, it is not surprising that support was frequently mentioned, but this does not explain the ways in which support was seen as successful by the recipients.

Support, from the street and/or hostels, has long been considered an essential part of successful resettlement (Scolfield 1999). Support in housing is being offered more widely - through young people's projects, by women's refuges, to homeless applicants with special needs or to specific households in failing tenancies (Quilgars 2000; Douglas et al. 1998; Morris, J. 1995). Supporting homeless people, and others, into independent tenancies has expanded and developed in the last two decades, particularly in Wales where Special Needs Management Allowance has been available from the late 1980s. This linkage of housing with support has led to multi-agency working which is now an essential part of homelessness strategies. Through Supporting People, revenue and grant funding are still only available for those people placed in accommodation. The participants' accounts, in this research, suggest that support provision should be centred on the person, rather than the tenancy, and that it should be holistic, client-centred and based on on-going assessment.

There is general agreement (Quilgars 2000) that 'support' can be divided into:

1. Immediate support with practical problems such as the new tenancy, benefits etc.

2. Support linking the client into the community and other agencies.

3. Social/emotional support which can be specialist (e.g. drug/alcohol) or general support.

This study suggests adding two more categories of 'support' to the beginning of this list namely, 'the giving of information' and 'accessing accommodation'.

The main disagreement in the literature is over the importance and content of general support. Some studies (Quilgars 2000; Hutson and Pope 2000) suggest that clients can make their own social links but others (Lemos 1999) see an important role here for professionals alongside family and friends. Other studies show that all types of support can be delivered successfully through arts-based programmes (Cupitt 2003) or life skills training (Précis 141 2001). Two research reports (Précis 135 2001; 141 2001) emphasize that the way support is given is more important than its actual content.

7.2 The support which participants received

Before we consider what the participants had to say about support, the following points provide a profile of the way in which support had been received:

- Eleven received regular support in their accommodation for between 2 – 6 years. In the case of six, this was from a specialised support service. In no case was the support given more frequently than weekly visits.

- Six women received support from women's refuges, which involved support in the refuge and sometimes support resettling into independent accommodation.

- Five young people were in a similar position, receiving some support in the hostel and two received some significant resettlement support.

- Five people received support only in accessing accommodation.

- Only three – Louise, Phillipa and Leanne - did not receive any formal support.

- Significantly three people – Christine, Phillipa and Alison - are now themselves working as volunteers in support projects.

Only three of our participants accessed housing without the help of a support agency, and all but these three, were given information and practical help in setting up a tenancy and claiming benefits. Referral to other agencies was evident. It should be noted that all the support was provided by the non-statutory voluntary sector, except for four of the five young people whose support came through an RSL. Interestingly, half the participants received ongoing social support.

7.3 'Practical' support

Frank speaks about the support he received from a voluntary sector project after moving into a council house. Four years previously he had lost his family, his job and his house through alcohol use. He speaks of how, with support, he overcame his fears of coping with the practical issues of independent living.

Frank says that his confidence to live independently was lost: *'I used to panic over the least little thing, everything was so simple, but at the time I panicked about it and there was no need because everything would come out in the end eventually, I mean all you have got to do is sit down, take a deep breath … I was trying to avoid the issues, but the issues were always there, if it wasn't today it would be tomorrow, so what with the help with Judy and she helped me sort out my gas, my electric, my water and all my bills, and helped me move in and get settled, and it was good'.*

However, before this stage was reached, when Frank was still living in a shared house with support, he talks about how the discovery of a talent for mathematics through education classes helped him to control his drinking. He said: *'I did City and Guilds in maths, which I had passed with pretty high marks in the 80s. I learnt to type, I learnt computers and I stopped drinking, but it did not end there because I started to get confidence to get my life back on track. I had been off drink about a year, and I got to the stage then I felt comfortable enough, but I was having people up to visit me and I was saying to them I feel like getting my own place now'.*

Frank sees his success in terms of increasing self-esteem and confidence. The support was delivered in a number of different ways: practical, emotional and educational.

There is no doubt that support agencies have an important practical support role to play - in the sorting of benefits as tenants move into new accommodation and, also, helping with debt which is a common issue for people experiencing homelessness. Interestingly financial hardship was only mentioned by three people in this study – all of them young: Phil was evicted from his flat for accumulating debt problems; Viv found paying the bills in her RSL flat difficult after living in a squat; and Mark was still struggling with debt.

7.4 General social support

John, although requiring a lower level of support, had much to say about his support worker, Amy, from the RSL housing and support project for young people in north Wales. What John says about Amy reflects an important aspect of support, which is reiterated in the literature (Lemos 1999) as well as in these accounts - that the support worker is seen as a 'friend' by the client and not just a worker. This describes a method of working which, whilst respecting proper professional boundaries, is accessibly, friendly and non-judgmental. In addition, the continuity of this 'friendship' is valued, even after the formal support has finished. This suggests that the sustainability of support, and of projects which provide it, is crucial.

John says of Amy: *'She's great; she's like a second mother to me, looked after me. Well, the thing with Amy is she gives it the personal touch. It's not, "Oh, right, I've come to see you and this is the timescale". She'd stay for an hour or so and make sure everything was fine, you know… I look at Amy as more than that, as a friend, I call her a mate like, you know, because what's involved, you know, the amount of time she spends on it … I've still got her phone number in my mobile, and I can talk to her if I need, if I've got a fraught situation going on'.*

The only negative account we had of support was from Alison when she spoke of the support she was offered after she left the women's refuge.

Alison said of the support: *'There was an automatic expectation that if you stayed at the project then you were expected to receive support two to three days a week'*. Alison felt that she did not require this, and therefore did not engage with it. Her priority was to attend college, which she did. She said that she felt under pressure to conform in a way that did not assist with her confidence and self-esteem.

This case suggests that, if support is not person-centred and flexible, then its effect can be negative.

7.5 Long-term social support

Viv, then in her 20s, and Thomas, now in his 60s, spoke of the long-term support which they received over six years. Thomas' original support worker was employed by an RSL and, after two years, he transferred to a specialist drug/alcohol support project. Viv was supported by a specialist youth project over a 6 year period. Thomas and Viv differed in age but both had experienced problematic life styles and received long-term regular support after they were re-housed. Thomas felt that he persisted in his detoxification treatment partly because of his support worker and that her weekly visits gave him a reason to keep himself together. Viv felt that her support worker kept her sane and

smoothed out the difficulties of slowly building up a new life.

Thomas, recovering from a long period of alcohol use, used specialist detox services but also received tenancy support. Both workers built up his self-esteem. He said: *'The fact that I had somebody calling and my pride was still intact. I didn't want to be out of order when they called so it was an incentive in itself. Someone was calling, and a lady. I'm an old fashioned chap. You have to treat someone like that with a bit of respect'*. The following comment shows how the support worker emphasizes the positives in Thomas' life: *'This other lady said: "You are trying to recreate the past. Your past wasn't all drink. You had some excellent parts". I played a management part in the local Football Club for many years. She said: "Why don't you try and recreate some of the better parts of your past"'*. It was this worker who suggested to Thomas to buy a *'motability car'* with his mobility allowance. Thomas said: *'From then I never looked back'*.

Viv was evicted from her first support project after she left care. From this eviction, everything went wrong and she became involved in prostitution and lived in squats for nearly a year. She was eventually placed in a new housing and support project. They found a house for her outside the city centre and an excellent support worker worked with Viv for more than two years, helping her to build up a new life and encouraging her to go to college. Viv spoke of the earlier problems, financial and psychological, of settling into the flat: *'It was so difficult. I went mental. I sat with the four walls. I had money problems'.* Later, another project worked with Viv. Although the next six years were not without their problems for Viv and she changed from studying art to business studies, she is currently at university.

In these two accounts, as with Frank above, the support was general, long-term, person-centred and non-directive. The participants emphasized the effect it had on their self-esteem and confidence. Thomas and Viv both received support for six years and it took this long for them to successfully re-establish their lives. This illustrates the importance for support funding to be flexible and not time-limited. Changes are being made to the Welsh Assembly funding framework to allow for continuing support where necessary.

7.6 Support 'linking the client with the community' and other agencies

Harry's problems with drugs and mental health escalated in a large hostel with minimal support or control. Moving to a smaller hostel he speaks of a package of care – health, housing, training and a special employment agency – which serves to highlight how effective support usually requires partnership working. Harry now feels that his mental health problem is under control and he has a new family – with a partner, and a baby on the way.

Harry felt that, for the first time in his life, the support package he required in both housing and health was provided for him by the smaller hostel in Swansea. Interestingly, he comments on the amount of support there is now: *'I didn't know there was so much help. I think there is help but it's hard to find. [The support] you need … it's all in bits. You've got, how can I describe it … you've got your medical help, your health and your housing. When it's all put together, like it is in this hostel, it works well. When it is all fragmented, you find it hard to get it all together. It's employment as well. If you get someone on the straight and narrow and back to work…'*

7.7 The role of professionals – positive and negative

Kim, from a women's refuge, resolved her situation largely without a support worker. This may have been because the resources were not available in the refuge for this support. However, it was more likely to have been because Kim was educated and had previously worked in the field.

Kim spoke very negatively of her contact with a range of professionals - from the judges whom she felt had little knowledge of domestic abuse to the social worker who was not sufficiently trained in the nature of her abuse. She felt that she succeeded in the end because of her own knowledge, her maternal drive to see her children again and her own desire *'to drag myself off the floor'.*

Louise, in contrast, felt that it was largely because of three professionals that she came through her sixteen weeks stay in a lorry. These professionals were her doctor, who provided evidence of the effect of homelessness on her health, her psychiatrist, who documented her mental health situation and her solicitor who provided evidence that she had legal access to her daughter who could live with her if she was housed.

It should be noted that we have not given separate coverage to health problems as these were not brought up as a major area of discussion in the interviews. Eight participants reported current health problems but these were only a feature in three interviews (all men). Interestingly, three participants said how much they valued the '*straight talking'* by their GPs (in all cases about the effect of alcohol on their health) and referred to this encounter as a turning point in their alcohol use.

Dan felt that he gained access to a residential detox because a counsellor referred him. He said: *'I was lucky. I was in [hospital]. I saw a counsellor. She was lovely. She helped me out. She got me into [the detox]'*. His friend ***Simon***, in contrast and a year later, could not get into the detox unit, *'unless I was picked up off the street in an emergency',* and said that he was turned away from his GP Surgery because his breath smelt of alcohol.

7.8 Participants speak of a sense of control/empowerment

When asked why they had been successful in staying in independent housing for more than a year, some participants emphasized the importance of their own character and being in control (see section 9).

Mathew, who was living independently after a disabling accident in his teens, felt that 'laziness' prevented some people from finding accommodation, but not him. He sees himself as always working hard, persevering and getting the job done, and he sees this as being a very big factor in helping him to move out of homelessness and to run his own life and his flat.

Christine, who spent several years in unsatisfactory accommodation and was in contact with two different housing and support agencies, felt that there came a time when it was important to move away from support projects. Christine spoke of *'a point when you are unable to share other problems and you need to focus on moving on yourself'*. She felt there was a danger of being *'continually dragged down if you surround yourself with vulnerable people [on a project]'*. For Christine, her singing in the church choir and the social contacts from that, together with her volunteer work and her local authority flat, gave her control over her life.

Two older men, Thomas and James, retained control over their situations by emphasizing their success as young men and also their more recent success in overcoming alcoholism. Debbie also speaks of the importance of gaining confidence – through education.

Thomas said that he had wanted to stay in one hostel for two years and ignored move-on advice. He felt he needed time to recoup and recover from his experiences of excessive drinking with friends. Later on, his support worker encouraged him to access a residential detoxification programme but Thomas said that he only went when he was ready. Throughout his account he spoke as if he was in control.

Similarly ***James'*** account emphasised his control of the situation. Partly, this control was made possible by using part of his disability benefit on a mobility car. He said that he had gone from spending £30 a night [on drink] to nothing because of his car and because of the need to stay sober to drive. He was proud of his car and it enabled him to visit places and people from his past in England and Ireland. It also meant that he could live outside the centre of the city.

Debbie, having become homeless as a result of domestic abuse, was supported by her brother. She said that education and voluntary work had provided a new focus in her life. She had passed three NVQs and these courses had improved her image of herself and her self-worth and this had been invaluable in helping her move forward with her life rather than dwelling on the past.

It is clear from these accounts, and others throughout the report, that clients must be ready to engage, feel in control of the process and feel that they are making an essential contribution. Moreover, the support needs to be flexible, if necessary long-term, and result from a comprehensive needs assessment. It is important for those working in homelessness to acknowledge that simply being in accommodation is not necessarily the only requirement for success. These accounts suggest that support should be linked to the person and not the property. There can be other, equally important elements of success such as self-esteem and confidence. Support through education, training, employment as well as community arts projects, can be as important as support linked to tenancies.

7.9 Friendship, family and social networks

Lemos (1999; 2000), from a survey of seventy-nine homeless men, mostly experiencing substance misuse, suggests that the main reason for homelessness is relationship breakdown and finds that the lack of social networks into mainstream life is a barrier to escaping homelessness. For this reason: 'The solutions needed are ones that help people sort out their personal difficulties, re-establish old relationships with friends and families or to form new friendships and partnerships and to earn a decent income' (1999:37).

In this study, relationship breakdown, with parents or with partners, is the major reported reason for initial homelessness and was mentioned by over half of the participants. At the same time, several participants reported that support from friends had been an important factor in helping them cope with their period of homelessness. This was particularly the case with women fleeing domestic violence and also young people. Overall a third of the participants spoke of support from family and friends.

Natalie, who had spent years in local authority care, was undergoing counselling to help her cope with her relationship with her mother, who had been absent most of her childhood. Her father had thrown her out of the family home at 13 and for many years she did not have any contact with her family. She said that her friends were one of the factors that helped her survive while sleeping rough; they remained important during the years in foster placements and remain important today.

Phillipa also mentions a core of friends as being part of the support network that helped her deal with her situation. She speaks of: *'A few mates, good friends that I could ring up and talk to…Yes, to sit and chat to and moan to…'*

For ***Frank***, the imminent arrival of a grandchild was the catalyst for him to give up alcohol. After the GP had told him that he had only months to live if he did not give up alcohol, he said that he did not want to die from drink. He spoke of his earlier isolation from family occasions because of his alcoholism: *'They have these parties, these functions, they are going to weddings and stuff like that, and you are not a part of it, and at the end it really was getting to me, and I was drinking then'.*

Overall, this section and the study underline the importance of flexible person-centred support services in assisting people to overcome their experience of homelessness. Different support levels are required for those with different needs and the support provided must be flexible enough to deal with the complexity of issues faced by households. Practical support, for example, in accessing housing, information, setting up the tenancy, benefits, and also referring on to other agencies is widely required. Social/emotional support may be required at a specialist level, for those undergoing trauma, drug and alcohol problems, and/or at a general level where participants stress that the value lies in boosting self-esteem and confidence. These ideas are further developed in section 9.

7.10 Summary points

- Participants saw support as a crucial element in their leaving a homeless situation and sustaining independent accommodation. Nearly all had very positive things to say about the support.
- Only two people accessed housing without the backing of a support agency. Only three sustained their tenancies without the help of support agencies.
- The frequent mention of support may be related to the fact that most were recruited through support agencies but this does not account for the very positive way in which support was described.
- Support can be divided into:
  - information;
  - accessing accommodation;
  - immediate support with practical problems;
  - linking the client into other agencies and
  - general social support.
- In general social support, the emphasis is on raising self-esteem and confidence. The participants need to feel ready for support and to feel in control and that they are contributing to the process. Support can be needed long-term, and

is most effectively delivered when the provider is perceived as a 'friend' – when the relationship with the provider is seen as friendly and the client feels valued - whilst proper professional boundaries are understood and maintained.

- Outside professionals, in particular police, doctors, solicitors and legal advice workers play an important part in the process of preventing homelessness. They can refer clients to other agencies.

- Support through education, training, employment as well as community/arts projects, can be as important as support linked to tenancies.

- Friends and family can provide support, particularly through helping people cope with their difficulties.

- Support needs to be person-centred and flexible. This can best be achieved through a careful assessment of needs. Where support is preventative, services should be flexible in that they are not time limited, and are responsive to the needs of the person.

8. Returning to Work

8.1 Introduction

There has long been an interest in the importance of education, training and employment in enabling people to leave homelessness. The Scottish Executive Task Force (2003) considers that the 'fundamental services to help people out of homelessness are: advice and information; accommodation and resettlement support; healthcare; work and related opportunities; and social or personal support'. The same report identifies one of the main problems for people who have experienced homelessness as the inflexibility of the benefits system: the rapid withdrawal of housing and other benefits as income increases; and the difficulty of returning to benefits which means that people fear trying employment. It also suggests that pre-vocational schemes should accept 'soft outcomes', such as pre-work skills, and group working. This emphasis on learning and employment opportunities is reflected in the Welsh National Homelessness Strategy (2003).

8.2 Participants, work, education and volunteering

This study indicates that work and related opportunities were clearly of importance in helping people who have been homeless return to mainstream life. Of the participants:

- Six were in employment: full-time and part-time;
- Two women were in college; and
- Three women were engaged in voluntary work.

However, most (19) were not employed. Of these, nine were not available for employment because of age, disability or looking after pre-school children. For this reason, it was only a few participants who talked about work. This section, therefore, reflects the researchers' feelings about the significance of work rather than the emphasis of the participants, which has driven all previous sections.

Several of those who were working emphasised the importance of having employment.

Leanne felt that it was her part-time jobs in the health services, which had kept her going. She said: *'I'd say it's my outlet. My work is my outlet. It is my communication with people, which I love doing anyway.'* The three women doing voluntary work said how important this work was in making a contribution to them regaining their independence.

Harry, whose long involvement in work from leaving care to building up a new life after homelessness, saw work as important because he felt that it was through working that he made friends and: *'You get a proper sense of what life's about. It's not the homeless life'.*

Harry had worked as a plasterer since he left care in the 1980s. He travelled around England taking labouring jobs. After several years of homelessness and problems with drug use and mental illness, Harry resolved his health and housing with the help of a small hostel in south Wales. He then wanted to get back to work, although this would make him significantly worse off than if he stayed on his disability benefit. The job centre, which was helpful, put him on the Job Force Wales scheme that was then in operation. He worked in a building firm for just £10 in addition to welfare benefits. Although he commented that it was like *'free labour'*, he was positive about the experience. Harry was referred to a specialized employment service, which helped him find the job and smoothed out any difficulties in a confidential way. Harry was working three days a week claiming Disabled People's Tax Credit but retaining his Disabled Living Allowance.

Mark, a younger man had a less than helpful experience at the beginning. While he was being helped into accommodation by a housing and support agency in north Wales, he was told that he would have to pay for his flat if he continued to work. Mark speaks of the demoralising and negative financial impact of this: *'It demoralised me completely and I started getting in debt because I couldn't work and I had been out of work for 2 years then, it was kind of the norm'*. He found it difficult to get back into work later. As he said: *'So then to work was a bit "Oh no, I can't do this" so I had a couple of jobs before I was settled in my job now, but it did really knock me for six in a sense'.*

Several participants in the study referred to activities that had been organized by both housing and non-housing projects, as being positive in helping them develop their interests and skills that could be useful in accessing future employment.

John became homeless at 22 years old as a result of family conflict and was referred to a young person's hostel. While there, he was able – through the hostel provider's links with the Prince's Trust – to pursue an interest in rock climbing which helped him gain new experiences. It also assisted him to counter the temptation in temporary accommodation to *'sit there and vegetate'*.

8.3 Summary points

- The participants who were working, albeit mostly part time and in some cases voluntarily, all stressed the importance of this to gain confidence and felt they were making a contribution. Work was mentioned as a 'coping strategy' and a way to widen and normalize social networks.

- A minority of participants were working although some were not working because of age, ill health or caring for children.

9. Last Words

9.1 Introduction

In this last section, quotes are chosen from each participant to highlight factors, which they picked out as being important in their leaving a homelessness situation. In many cases, the quotes are in answer to the question: 'What helped you most in leaving homelessness?' A brief summary is supplied to put these 'Last Words' into context and to give a point of reference for the other sections. The participants are listed in alphabetical order.

9.2 The participants

Alison came from England and moved to a women's refuge in Wales because of the lack of suitable services in her own area. She did not find the support helpful on leaving the refuge and the flat she found herself with a partner, broke down. At the time of the interview, she had a local authority flat and felt settled. The researcher comments: *'She finds the tranquillity of the house and the village beneficial and recognises that, given the offers of accommodation many women receive, she just happened to be in the right place at the right time to receive such a fortunate allocation'.* She now works and the children are both doing well at school.

Andrea spent three months in a women's refuge in order to gain sufficient housing points. She said: '*The refuge worker helped you. They took you to the council. They help you fill the forms in for you. They do it for everyone … the woman from the council was good. I had heard she was good so I asked for her. I took the first house I was offered. I didn't know if I had to'.* Andrea and her children have friends on their estate.

Carol, following a domestic incident with her partner, stayed two nights with a friend who referred her to the woman's refuge. She said that: *'I had lots of points because I had a two year old and I was pregnant. It all went quite smoothly'*. When asked what advice she would give others in a similar position, she said: *'Just try and keep calm and don't make it difficult for the children'*. Like Andrea, she and her children had friends on the local authority estate.

Christine had been in college and working in Ireland before she came to Swansea with a friend to look up an acquaintance. She spent a number of years in unsatisfactory accommodation before gaining a local authority flat through a housing and support agency. She spoke of her relationship with one particular resettlement worker, who had referred her to a stress management course. However, she also spoke of the need to *'move on'* and not to become dependent on a support project for *'vulnerable'* people. Christine's involvement in voluntary work, and in a local church, provided a driving force and gave her friends and activity throughout this time.

Dan had run his own business but moved to Cardiff, where his girlfriend lived, after the death of his father. He ended up in a hospital detox but felt that he was lucky to be referred on to a residential detox hostel where he stayed for nine months and which was *'brilliant'*. He gained an RLS flat with specialized support and has been in his present flat for five years. He mentioned the support of his girlfriend, who had died. Asked what he would advise someone with an alcohol problem, he said: *'Find them help … you certainly need help … medical help definitely'.*

Dan's friend ***Simon*** - left his wife and children in England where he still had a local authority tenancy. Because he had broken his probation order by leaving a bail hostel he was unable to register for housing. He complained that he could not gain access to a detox facility in Cardiff.

Debbie – through an abusive marriage - relied on her family for respite care. The professionals (doctor, solicitor), whom she came into contact with, did not have the information she needed. Debbie heard about a women's refuge in west Wales through her brother who had received the information by chance. She left after a few months. She found the refuge's support, and the one-to-one counselling she received, invaluable and feels that such 'self-help networks should be established and well resourced'. Debbie and her daughter spent 17 months in an unsatisfactory local authority property, experiencing harassment. They later accessed a RSL house. Educational courses (NVQ) '*gave a new focus to my life … improved my self worth and have been invaluable in preventing me from being stuck in and thinking of the past*'.

Fiona had been forced to leave home in Cardiff at the age of 16 in 1982. She was told that, as a single woman, there was no help available. In the 1991 recession, she and her husband had to sell their house in England at a loss and return to Wales. Following divorce, Fiona eventually gained a RSL house. She spoke of the help she received from CDAT and a voluntary sector support agency. This agency had helped her to reduce her drinking, resolved her benefit situation after a hospital discharge and: *'had helped her rebuild her life, and to get out'.* A family therapy agency had helped her with parenting. She was very insistent that something should have been done when she had been homeless at 16.

Frank was evicted from his RSL house and lost his job through alcohol problems following his divorce. After some years in the private rented sector, he decided to give up drinking when a straight-talking GP told him he only had a matter of months to live. A further incentive was to prove to his family that he could bounce back. As he said: *'I was about to become a grandad because my daughter was due to have her first baby and if I had to go I didn't want to have died a drunk, so I went home, finished off what I had, and I have not had a drink since'.* At the time of the interview, he felt that he was a different person: *'I am cool, calm and collected, nice to talk to. I don't get aggressive. It takes a lot to upset me, and my children are now talking to me'.*

Harriet – after enduring twelve years of domestic abuse - came to a Welsh women's refuge, which she heard about through her hairdresser. The refuge supported her, over the telephone, for ten months before she left. She felt that she had needed this: *the first stepping-stone, the first intervention. Harriet also spoke of: 'her own strength and the need to carry on for the children'*. She called for greater professionalism in services in women's refuges and more information about the new area of settlement. She speaks of the present: *'I have life now … I was not living before as it was about fitting in with him ... avoiding his moods and simply existing … I can now think for myself, do what I want ... make plans'.*

Harry settled in Swansea with the help of a package of care from a small hostel and is now working, and living with his partner and baby. Harry speaks of the importance of finding help at the right time and having to go on after failure: *'It's chance as well. If you've got the right support at the right time, I think you can get out of it, you know … it's knowing when is the right time …' When asked: 'How do you know it's the right time?', he answered: 'You hit the bottom, I think … I feel like I have had a hell of a lot of failures'.*

James – retired from the Merchant Navy with an injury. After a breakup with a girlfriend, he was travelling around south Wales, at the *'end of his tether'*. Through a chance meeting with man on the docks, he was directed to the Citizens' Advice Bureau and then to a small hostel, which helped him put his life back together again. He gained an RSL flat and a mobility car. Looking back, he mentioned 'fate' and the fact that he did not have problems like other people in the hostel. He said: *'The big difference between those who were successful in settling and those that weren't was whether they had problems with drugs or alcohol or not'.*

John left home after falling out with his stepfather. He found a support and housing project for young people and spent several years in their hostels before getting his own flat. He spoke of the hostel: *'There's a lot of very nice people that will help you, not just staff, residents as well …*' and what he learnt from living there: *'One thing I've learnt in the hostel system is I can go anywhere I want now and not be afraid to walk into a place, because the open-mindedness is there, you know, you cope. I can go in anywhere and not be too worried. That's one good thing I can say about the hostel system'. He mentioned the outdoor activities and holidays organised by the hostel. When asked what advice he would give others, he replied: 'Find whatever channel you can to sort yourself out. I don't think it really matters, which way you'll go. In the long run, you'll get sorted out …'.*

Kim left home at 16 but was forced to return as there were no services (in the early 80s). She went to University, bought a house but lost it through repossession. Her second partner was abusive and Kim went into a women's refuge with her two children and then gained a RSL house. In describing what had helped her through this difficult time, she said that: *'the key thing was people, and particularly people who really listened; that people trusted you and were prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt; that people's approach and attitude was non labelling and non-judgmental'.* She also acknowledged her *'own knowledge of Women's Refuges and how the system works; my intelligence; my belief that I can do it; the maternal drive to see my children survive and the learning from this experience'.*

Leanne's house was sold following a divorce. There was no social housing available and she was told that she would not like being in a hostel with her 12-year-old daughter. As she said: *'they just put me on a list, that was all'*. Eventually Leanne was given a local authority house in a very bad state and two years later is still waiting for repairs to be done so that she can decorate. She speaks of the support of her friends and her part-time work: *'I'd say it's my outlet. My work is my outlet. It is my communication with people, which I love doing anyway'.*

Leo lived in a bail hostel for eight months after leaving prison. He was a capable person, organised and resourceful. He had already made enquiries about private rented and RSL properties. He found a worker in the bail hostel helpful and used an advice service to find a private rented flat. He advised others to *'persevere and to use an organisation rather than dealing with a homeless situation on their own'.*

Louise was thrown out by her husband. She went to the local authority and a RSL but there was no accommodation available. She feared taking temporary or private rented property as she felt this would lose her housing points. She spent sixteen weeks in a lorry but, as winter came, she became ill. She was then offered an RSL flat and her daughter returned to live with her. She felt strongly that three professionals had helped her get her house, by confirming her custody of her daughter and reporting on her health. She said: *'My solicitor, my doctor, my psychiatrist and really they all got together and worked together … I needed them all … they were there'.*

Mark left home after serious trouble with his father. He was put in touch with a supported housing scheme and spent some time in hostels before gaining his own flat. He felt that: *'being in the hostel made me a stronger person*'. Although Mark works in the music business, he is still worried by debts, which have built up through his homeless years. He spoke of friends and the strength he drew from music: '*I always had this one thing. It doesn't rub my back, don't get me wrong, but it is always there for me. Music is something that I can lean on when I am annoyed and I just get lost within it'. He said: 'I have succeeded because if you look at where I have come from that's why I am here today. It is a hell of an achievement but I have got a lot more to do that I haven't done … I said I was going to be this person and I am still not that person'.*

Martin left home at 17 when his relationship with his parents collapsed. With positive support from a social worker, Martin eventually moved into a hostel run by a housing support project. After an unsettled period living with a girlfriend in a private rented flat, he returned to the hostel. He has now been in his own flat for five years and is training in college. When asked why some people manage to live independently and others don't, he replied: *'I don't know. All I have to say is that some people can't be arsed getting themselves motivated and getting their own place and those like me who can't be bothered staying in a hostel, you have got to get out yourself'*.

Mathew was evicted from unsatisfactory 'supported accommodation' which had been found for him when he left the rehabilitation unit in Morriston hospital. Eventually he was offered a local authority flat, which he took, despite his disability, with the support of an agency. He spoke of making friends through the community centre run by this agency. He spoke of *'a laziness in some people'* but not in himself. He feels that people: *'have to take responsibility and get going for themselves, they have to work hard'.* He sees himself as *'always working hard, persevering and getting the job done'*, and he sees that as a very big part of being able to run his own life and his flat.

Natalie – Because of troubled relationships in her family, her uncle took her to the police station and she was referred to social services at the age of 13. Later, at 16, a support worker from a youth housing and support scheme, found her a flat and later, when she had a baby, a house. Natalie says of this worker: '*She was really nice … she helped me with things, visiting places, the Job Centre, DSS, interviews'.* Social services helped her take her employer [a hairdresser] to a tribunal for owing her money. She felt that she: *'got through the experience of homelessness because of her own strength, the help of this worker and her friends'*. At the time of research, she was finding a counsellor helpful in dealing with her earlier family relationships.

Owen was forced to leave home early in the 1960s. After several years in hostels, he gained a local authority flat, first in a block with a helpful warden and then in a city centre property. His account of mice in his kitchen and being assaulted in his house and in the street is depressing but he points out that he has his own flat and is able to live independently. He puts this down to his own ability: *'The reason I got the place of my own is because I want a place of my own. I don't get my money and go straight and get drunk and smoke my fags. Now some people would prefer to live rough…'* He also speaks of leaning to cope with harassment through the help of a support agency: *'Now like I say I have learned how to live in this place. When I come home I do my best, if someone shouts something after me to go straight past and go to my place. Now when someone knocks the door now I never open it'*.

Paul left his home when the relationship with his partner broke down. Whilst sleeping in a car, he felt that his *'passion for fishing'* kept him going. He could not face people so he spent most of his time fishing. This helped him put his problems *'to the back of my mind'.* Breaking an injunction put Paul in prison for three weeks. His father's solicitor told him of an advice agency, which helped him find a private rented flat. At this stage, *'getting focused'* has helped him. His parents visiting him also helped. He may soon be allowed to see his children.

Phil spent fifteen years moving around south Wales, mixing with drug users and losing local authority accommodation. Leaving hospital, a support agency found him an RSL flat. He felt that if he hadn't got his flat he would be dead by now as: *'I just takes drugs to bury my problems.'* He said that his girlfriend was his main help and that, if they were able to get together with their respective children, things would change again for the better. He says he could not have managed without the support agency and describes it: *'They would help us see the direction … it's little things … all sorts of little things. If you needed a lift to the doctors. I've got arthritis in my shoulder. They are going to take me back into hospital. If I really need them, they are still there'.*

Phillipa's housing benefit was decreased when her partner moved out so she was forced to apply for a council house. She was offered a local authority house in an area far from the boys' school and their father. Phillipa felt that her friends had helped her thought this stressful time: *'a few mates, good friends that I could ring up and talk to'*. She also said: *'Maybe it was my own personality and character … the two boys because I didn't want them to see me crashing*

as then the older one would think he has now got to look after two parents'. (Her husband had been ill previously).

Sarah and Kevin – Sarah had learning difficulties and Kevin had a heart problem. They were evicted from their local authority property after others had come in and used the house while they were out. Asked what could have been done, Sarah replied: *'The council could have moved us…but because we had debts to them they wouldn't … they did nothing about the problems'* [with the *'druggies'*]. A visit from social services led to nothing. Sarah's probation officer referred them to a voluntary sector tenancy support project: *'It was sorted out by them'*. Asked to compare their present tenancy with the past one, Sarah said: '*You don't get the druggies here for a start and it's so quiet…we can play music and anything. The dog's settled down and doesn't disappear as he used to before so he's settled'.*

Stuart was living in his own flat in Cardiff after spending nine months in a specialist drug unit. He had been supported for two years in this accommodation, but was now unsupported. He describes the type of support, which helped him: *'Some people are easier to talk to. If you are feeling down, or have problems, some of the staff you talk to, they can help you. Some people you talk to make you feel worse'.* Stuart went on to explain why the specialist drug centre was so helpful: *'It was all talking, talking. Talking and feeling and being aware. For me, having that bit of awareness … and when you are very aware of things, it's easier to think, in situations, "why am I here?"'*

Thomas ran his own business and lived in his own 5-bedroom house before his wife left him, taking the children. He began to drink heavily with friends. He moved to a hostel in Cardiff and, after several stays in a residential detox, gained an RSL flat with support. He spoke of his decision to give up alcohol: *'I knew in my heart, when I saw the education charts in the residential detox, the chart of your body and where it affects your health, your kidneys, brain – I thought "Goodness me". In the end I thought "I must pull my act together and do something". So I decided … the other thing is that I have always had a sense of humour. Even in dire straights, I have still managed to retain that. That's from watching and being a great fan of Laurel and Hardy. When things go wrong, instead of crying or trying to commit suicide, I will go: "Here's another fine mess" and start again. Eventually, you get there'.*

Viv – spent all her childhood in foster care. On leaving care at 16 and being evicted from a supported project, Viv became involved in prostitution and squatted in central Cardiff for many months. One helpful social worker referred her to a new housing and support scheme through which she gained an RSL house in the suburbs. With support, Viv broke with her old life, went to college and is currently at University. When asked how she had left prostitution, she said: *'I knew I didn't want to stay. I saw older people that had been working. I didn't want to be there when I was 50 – just an old bag. I thought "what can I do?"'* She said, several times, that she had stayed in education *'just to piss people off and show them I could do it'.*

Will cared for his elderly mother for six years in her own house. He had no support as a carer. When the family home was sold, he gained an RSL property with help from an alcohol support agency. They also helped him sort out some of the family troubles. Will works part-time but feels that his job is not secure. He has recently been concerned about some harassment in the street and wishes to move back to his home area. Asked what advice would he give to anyone with drinking problems, he said: *'I wouldn't have any advice [laughs]. I would advise them to get in touch with agencies – if they are interested. It depends if they want to do anything about it …'*

9.3 What factors were important in resolving a homeless situation?

The key interventions which participants chose reflect points made in earlier sections – in particular the importance of support which features in eighteen of these 'Last Words'. Twelve participants (Leo, Dan, John, Viv, Will, Harry, Mathew, Debbie, Harriet, Andrea, Sarah, and Kevin) refer to support as a key intervention, from housing and support agencies, specialist support agencies such as detoxification or women's refuges. Six participants chose to talk about the support they have received in detail. Stuart found the *'talking'* of the drug and alcohol project invaluable. Christine spoke of her positive relationship with one resettlement worker. Natalie described how her support worker visited other agencies with her. Kim valued workers who really listened and were *'non-judgmental'*. Phil cited being *'given direction'* and all the *'little things like lifts to the hospital'*. Fiona said that the support worker helped her to *'rebuild her life'.*

A new element which features is the emphasis on personal endeavour. Fifteen participants speak about this. Owen emphasises his ability to pay the rent and not spend his money on alcohol. Kim speaks of her *'knowledge of the system, her intelligence and her drive'*. Mathew emphasises *'the need to take responsibility'* and *'to get yourself going'*. Martin points out that some people, not himself, cannot get themselves motivated to leave the hostel. Leo emphasises the necessity of perseverance. For Thomas, his *'sense of humour'* is essential. For several women, their children keep them going. Phillipa felt it was her *'own personality and character'.* John feels he can *'go anywhere'* after his experience of hostel life. These statements show the value given to individual effort and action and so the importance for people to feel that they are in control.

Five participants emphasised the importance of friends in giving support through homelessness. Christine and Natalie relied on their friends. Phil mentioning his girlfriend, Mathew found friends from the day centre and John stressed the help from other hostel residents. Two participants specifically emphasised the role of their families - for Debbie in giving support and for Frank in acting as an incentive to give up drink.

Four participants felt that their working (Harry, Christine, Leanne) or educational courses (Debbie) were crucial in getting them through their difficulties. For two young men, Mark and Paul, their hobbies ('music' and 'fishing' respectively) kept them going through difficult times.

The importance of information and support from professionals (GPs, solicitors, councillors, fire officers, police officers) was mentioned by four participants (Frank, Louise, Natalie, Christine).

It was interesting that Alison, Harry, Harriet and James all felt that successful outcomes resulted from *'chance', 'fate'* or *'being in the right place at the right time'*.

9.4 Change over time

These accounts suggest that housing and support is now more available for young people leaving care or home in their early teens than in the past and so some youth homelessness is being prevented. Owen left home in the 1960s and faced a lifetime of instability. No services were available for Phil, Kim, Fiona and Viv in the 1980s with disastrous consequences for Viv and Phil. In contrast, the four participants who left home/care in the 1990s were all found accommodation and support following a period in a hostel for young people (John, Martin, Mark and Natalie).

9.5 Summary points

- Eighteen participants (out of thirty) emphasised and discussed support when asked to identify what interventions resolved their homeless situation. This support came principally from the voluntary sector.
- Fifteen participants spoke about personal endeavour – character, intelligence, drive, and perseverance - as being crucial. The participants expressed a need to feel in control. This is most possible when support is person-centred and flexible. In contrast, four participants felt that chance and being in the right place at the right time was the crucial factor.
- Four participants said that information from and the support of professionals had been important. Five emphasised the support they had received from their friends, and two from their family, though this support was more about coping with, rather than resolving their homelessness. Working, attending education classes and hobbies were emphasised by six participants as helping them to cope and also increasing their self-esteem.

10. Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

This study has provided an insight into some positive interventions that have assisted individuals across Wales to leave homeless situations. Some of the failings within the individual histories also point towards means of improving future working practices and interventions. The study echoes the findings of other research, the findings of many local homelessness reviews and echoes many of the priorities set out in the National Homelessness Strategy.

10.2 Information

It is clear that information and advice is critical in promoting successful pathways out of homelessness and helping people to resettle. When appropriate, good quality information was provided, this often proved to be the catalyst for the participants to deal with issues. Deficient information was also highlighted as it had led to a delay in resolving homelessness. General education in housing and services can be a key to preventing homelessness.

Many participants had approached or been in contact with front-line workers such as GPs, police officers or solicitors. It is, therefore, important that front-line workers are well informed about homelessness and services. Many routes out of homelessness were achieved through inter-agency referral and so up-to-date information is again essential here. Joint working is a way to achieve this. Joint working is also central to the new local homelessness strategies. Leaving institutions is also a time where good information and referral is essential.

10.3 Housing and housing practice

The participants' accounts illustrate the crucial importance of appropriate housing which can provide a 'home'. Having a home creates stability, security and, for many, is a source of regaining self-esteem as well as renewing and/or creating friendships or family links, which themselves help people to cope. People can lose accommodation where housing is inappropriate or where support is needed but not supplied.

Several of the accounts illustrate the way in which good housing practice can prevent homelessness or enable people to leave insecure lifestyles. In contrast, bad housing practice can cause extreme stress or even homelessness. Good and bad practice was illustrated around the allocation of properties, repairs to property and policies over anti-social behaviour, as well as the referral to support agencies. In this way homelessness is connected to mainstream housing policies and the provision of housing.

10.4 The value of support

Participants emphasised the value of support in enabling them to leave homelessness. In nearly all cases, housing was accessed through support agencies. Support agencies gave information and referred participants to other agencies. Significantly, over half received general social support, often through weekly visits. They wanted support workers to work as a 'friend'. This describes a method of working which, whilst respecting proper professional boundaries, is friendly, non-judgmental and delivered in a way which makes the client feel valued as a person.

This support was valued for raising self-esteem, which enables the client to act for him/herself. Participants emphasised the importance of personal endeavour and character as well as the importance of feeling in control.

It follows that successful support needs to be client-centred, linked to the person not the tenancy, flexible and not time-limited. Comprehensive needs assessment practices are required in order to assist people to deal with issues and successfully overcome homelessness. Assessments should be client-centred and provide the person with a reviewable plan to address the needs identified. Such models have been piloted in Bridgend and Cardiff. Significantly, this support was provided mostly by voluntary sector organizations although one RSL support scheme also featured.

The extent to which participants had moved geographically and also had used hostels or refuges was, perhaps, surprising. Over half had moved between countries, counties or between towns and half had used hostels and refuges. Some dangers of larger hostels were mentioned and suggestions were made for women's hostels to have a higher staff ratio and to deliver more services. Two specialized residential units – a detoxification unit and a mental health unit – were praised by several participants who had subsequently been referred on to housing and support.

10.5 Friends, education and work

Friends, work, hobbies, and education helped some participants come through difficult times. Several had gained housing advice and support through art or other community projects. The minority who were working emphasised its importance and this is echoed in national strategies. However, only one specialised work agency was mentioned. There is clearly room for development both in pre-work schemes, education, assisted employment schemes and benefit policies.

10.6 The future profile of homelessness

Over half the participants had become homeless initially because of relationship breakdown with parents or partners. There is unlikely to be a decline in the numbers affected by such breakdown, which highlights the urgent and ongoing need for housing which is affordable. There will be an ongoing need, not only for appropriate housing, but also for information, good housing practice and support. What is interesting, throughout the study, are the common threads which are identifiable across differences in age, gender and different situations. Many of the causes of homelessness, the barriers to leaving homelessness, and the successful interventions were similar for different individuals.

10.7 Are these findings already known?

These findings are repeatedly echoed in the literature. Here, for example, is a list of factors, stated as contributing to sustainable tenancies in a report looking at the same subject as this one (Rosengard 2002: 81):

1. Person centred assessment of need;
2. User-centred planning;
3. Access to appropriate and accessible accommodation;
4. Resettlement in areas people know;
5. Move-on assistance and follow on support;

6. An enabling approach to support;

7. Opportunities for meaningful (daytime) occupation;

8. Access to advocacy;

9. Staff networked and linked to other services; and

10. Monitoring and review of outcomes.

All these suggestions would be firmly endorsed by the findings of this report. It seems there is plenty of knowledge about what works in terms of interventions to enable people to leave a homeless situation and successfully settle. What needs to be done now is to translate this knowledge into action.

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Appendix 1

Interview checklist

1) How did you move into this place?

2) Where were you living before? What problems were you having with housing?

3) What made it OK for you?

4) What made you hold it together?

5) What helped you? Who helped you?

6) How did you find out what to do? Did you go and see someone or did they come to you?

7) What went wrong and how was the situation solved? Who got involved and how? What did they do and did it work? How could it all have been prevented or solved more quickly?

8) Who were you living with then? How were you making a living at that time?

9) Did you have problems with drugs or alcohol then? Did you have any contact with the police?

10) Did friends or family make a difference - then and now?

11) What can you do in your life now that you couldn't when you were having trouble with accommodation?

12) Do you feel settled now?

13) How is your health today compared with before?

14) Why do some people succeed in getting a place of their own and other people don't?

15) Do you know anyone else who has gone through these experiences?

16) What advice would you give to someone in the position that you were in?

17) Do you know anyone else who has gone through a similar housing situation?