

Outline of speech made by Bob Wilson to the LSE on 17th Feb, 2010

Objectives: The event will act as a bridge between LSE social policy students and organisations that deal with homeless issues. It will be a chance for students to learn about national homeless strategies and how these policies get implemented at a ground level. The event aims to put a human face on the issues, to hear about experiences of homeless people, and common problems that the client group faces. Your experience of working with homeless people will be invaluable and add much depth to students learning process. The event will offer you a chance tell your stories and experiences to the next generation of social policy officers, to give an insight into the issues that the homeless sector is facing today and in the future.

Guest speakers:

Dr Becky Tunstall, Lecturer in Housing, Department of Social Policy, LSE, and CASE Research Associate

Becky Rice, Research and Information Manager , Broadway Homelessness and Support

Bob Wilson, Trustee, Turnaround Resources E1 & BHUG

Barry Conway, Housing Support Officer, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Conclusion

- London, like any major city, acts as a magnet for people looking for the opportunity to increase their employment chances – nowadays probably a false hope. Perhaps by informing people on the lack of opportunities and the lack of accommodation we could reduce the influx into London not only from the regions but also Eastern Europe. Turnaround had to stop registration of new clients last year due to the excessive demand on our resources partly due to Eastern Europeans. We are now looking to expand our space and extend our service delivery. We have become a UK Online Centre.
- Some years ago there was a lot of talk about moving jobs from London to the regions – the DWP is an example – and now, with the communication infrastructure, how many jobs could be moved reducing the demand for housing and at the same time saving firms money.
- Although the number of homeless people has reduced over the last 10 – 20 years there was an increase in the year to July 2009 with one in seven being of Eastern European origin possibly due to the current economic climate. Turnaround has seen an explosion of Eastern Europeans in the last two years.
- The Supporting People programme, which offered vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence until 2009 and is now the and is now administered by Local Authorities, gave service users the chance to influence how services were designed, delivered and evaluated. BHUG through its social enterprise is and has been involved with several Local Authorities in delivering

- these. (Steve a one time user and volunteer will give an outline of what was involved.)
- Hopefully the governments, along with other agencies, pledge to end Homelessness by 2012 will be fulfilled but given the shortage of housing available and the huge number of hidden homeless this is inconceivable. It can only be assumed that what they mean is that rough sleeping will be ended or at least not necessary.
 - Why do we have the current figures/and level of homelessness: In England there are estimated to be over 500,000 empty properties with something approaching 80,000 in London alone. Surely a number of these could be brought onto the market for leasing. The councils have the legislation through Empty Dwelling Management Orders and/or Compulsory Purchases to take over privately owned property which has been vacant for some time, unfortunately it wasn't possible to find any statistics to determine how many times, if any, these powers have been used.
 - Although the present government's policies on homelessness have had a huge influence on reducing homelessness and improving service delivery it is still left to Charities, and the funders of these charities without whom a lot of charities could not exist, to carry out the frontline work to support people in developing their skills and building a new life for themselves.
 - Some review of the benefits is needed to make work more attractive. Due to high rents the financial return for working is sometimes seen as worthless. On the minimum wage and even higher most people still have to claim "In Work" benefits. Why is it that certain companies making huge profits are being subsidised by the tax payer to top up their employers wages?

What is Homelessness

Legal Definition of Homelessness (From OSW website)

In England the 1996 Housing Act states that a person or persons are defined as homeless if:

- there is no accommodation that they are entitled to occupy
- they have accommodation but it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy this accommodation
- they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it
- they have accommodation but It consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where they are entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it

Anyone meeting this definition and who has successfully applied to their local authority to be classified as such is officially recognised as being homeless.

Statutory Homelessness

In England, people who are accepted by local authorities as being officially homeless, and who are deemed to have a **priority need**, are referred to as **statutory homeless**.

Local authorities have a duty to accommodate people who are statutory homeless, as long as they also have a local connection and have not made themselves homeless intentionally.

The priority need groups include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way for example because of mental illness or physical disability.

In 2002 an Order made under the 1996 Act extended the priority need categories to include: applicants aged 16 or 17; applicants aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care; applicants vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces, and applicants vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

The following websites are good sources of information and statistics about homelessness in the UK.

[Broadway - Research](#)

[Crisis - Policy Watch](#)

[Homeless Link - Policy & Information](#)

[Shelter - Policy and Research](#)

[St Mungos - About homelessness](#)

[National Statistics Online - Homelessness](#)

[Department of Communities and Local Government \(DCLG\) - Homelessness](#)

[Scottish Executive - Homelessness Data Guidance and Analyses](#)

[Welsh Assembly Government - Homelessness](#)

[Department for Social Development Northern Ireland - Housing Statistics](#)

(Some of the input below has been taken directly from other websites for effect and clarity)

There are two categories of homelessness:

Visible

- Rough Sleeping

Hidden - By far the biggest homeless population

- Living in a hostel
- In temporary accommodation
- Sofa surfing

On top of that there is what Local Authorities classify as Statutory Homelessness, where the Authority has a duty to help the individual or family, and Voluntary Homelessness where there is no or little assistance to house given by the Local Authorities.

Under current homelessness laws, local councils must ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is available for homeless households who are **eligible for assistance**, in **priority need** and **unintentionally homeless**, until settled (ie long-term) accommodation can be found. Such temporary accommodation can include:

- housing owned by local councils
- private rented sector stock
- short-term housing leased from private landlords
- hostels run by councils or housing associations
- bed and breakfast hotels (B&Bs).

One of the main problems with temporary accommodation is that it can be far away from where the person is familiar with and can isolate them from their family and friends whose support is often vital in helping them cope.

Causes of Homelessness

The causes of homelessness are widely discussed. Often these are interchangeable, for example unemployment could have caused someone to lose their home, but unemployment could also be the result of becoming homeless.

Although you cannot “stereotype” Homeless people they tend to have a higher incidence of the following:

- Physical and/or mental health problems
- Substance misuse
- Gambling problems
- Unemployment
- Basic skills needs and other learning difficulties
- Experience of sexual or physical abuse
- Have spent time in care
- Have spent time in the armed forces
- Experience of the criminal justice system
- Relationship breakdown
- Problems accessing welfare benefits

Figures from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), detailing priority homeless acceptances for the last quarter of 2008, reveal that primary reason for loss of last settled home broke down as follows:

- 23% Parents unable or unwilling to accommodate

- 14% Relatives/friends unable or unwilling to accommodate
- 13% Domestic violence by partner
- 11% End of shorthold tenancy
- 7% Mortgage or rent arrears
- 6% Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner
- 6% Other violence or harassment
- 6% Loss of other rented housing
- 4% Left institutions, Local Authority care or HM Forces
- 3% Left Home Office asylum support accommodation
- 7% Other reasons

Effects of Homelessness

The experience of sleeping on the streets

Fear of attack

Many rough sleepers avoid sleeping in conspicuous locations for fear of being attacked, abused, robbed or moved on. In a study carried out by Shelter, rough sleepers reported feeling threatened not only by other members of the street community but by the general public too. Many of those interviewed also claimed to have been subjected to police harassment – this included being unfairly searched, arrested and repeatedly moved on.

Effects on physical and mental health

Many factors damage the health of people sleeping rough:

- Cold, hunger and fear experienced by people sleeping rough disrupts their sleep, which in turn damages both mental and physical health.
- Health is damaged through a lack of basic facilities for personal care such as bathing and washing clothes.
- Homeless people often have problems with drugs and/or alcohol, made worse through being on the street.

Without support, street life can affect homeless people in a number of ways:

- Loss of self esteem
- Becoming institutionalised
- Deterioration of mental and physical health
- Increase in substance misuse
- Loss of ability and will to care for oneself
- Increased danger of abuse and violence
- Increased chance of entering the criminal justice system
- Development of behavioural problems

The experience of staying in temporary accommodation

- Although this accommodation is described as 'temporary', in practice, homeless households may be forced to spend a long time in such living arrangements due to the current shortage of settled housing..

- Homeless people suffer high levels of stress from their lack of control over their housing situation, combined with high levels of poverty and often poor living conditions..
- Living in temporary accommodation can have very damaging health effects, both physical and mental. Surveys conducted by Shelter have found that:
 1. 58 per cent of families in temporary accommodation (other than bed and breakfast) said their health had suffered as a result of where they were living
 2. people who had been living in temporary accommodation for over a year reported increased health problems and greater use of health services
 3. almost half of parents with children and 71 per cent of childless people said they were depressed.

Summary of Homelessness and associated problems

Homeless people are a very disadvantaged and excluded group and this is highlighted in a number of ways:

- Difficulties in accessing social housing or private rented housing
- High rents in hostels can cause difficulties in finding work
- Temporary accommodation (such as hostels) are often difficult and insecure environments to live in, to establish routines or to plan ahead
- Difficulties in opening bank accounts and access to other mainstream services
- Stigma and harassment
- Discrimination
- Poverty

Introduction to Turnaround

Turnaround were formed in September 2000 and officially opened by Mo Mowlam, then a Minister without Portfolio and Louise Casey the governments Homeless Czar in April 2001.

It was formed as a response to gaps in the services provided by the housing agencies for the homeless. Whilst the shelter they provided was better than no shelter at all, they did little to advance the people they housed. They had poor liaison with local mental health or drug abuse services and the job centres. Many of their staff thought life on benefits was the norm for their clients and did nothing to encourage them into work or voluntary activities.

Turnaround was founded from a belief that inactivity saps morale and leads to hopelessness. The aim was to establish an activity centre as an alternative to isolation in the hostel room or aimless wandering in the streets. Classes and courses are available to the unemployed and/or homeless at little or no cost but these can barely occupy someone more than six to twelve hours a week. What about the rest of the time? The hostels at that time contained chronic alcoholics and drug addicts. Being in such company all day is damaging to morale but where else is there to go without money?

The centre was to be somewhere that people could treat as a surrogate work place; somewhere they could be active every day for all of the day, if they chose to, away from their hostel room and it was to be a drug and alcohol free environment.

The project took over the premises of a charity that had folded and abandoned its computers. They were networked, linked to the internet and made available as a resource to be active on.

The need that the founders identified has proved to be real, lasting and extensive. The Resource has never been idle with queues to use it at times. It has been re-equipped twice since its foundation with charitable capital grants. It has fourteen computers available to clients in the main resource room and two in a study room for those with particular projects.

Turnaround's Objectives

The Charity is intended to be a warm and inviting place, a safe haven, where the users can relax and attempt to build (or re build) their lives to be more inclusive in society. The objectives of Turnaround Resources E1 as embodied in its articles of incorporation approved by the Charity Commission are:

1. To relieve poverty among homeless, ex-homeless and other socially and economically disadvantaged members of the community in the London region.
2. To develop their capacities and skills in such a way that they are able to identify and meet their own needs and participate more fully in society.

The aims of the Charity are to:

- Provide a place where people can be active – a type of surrogate workplace
- Reduce isolation
- Minimise the need for dependence on alcohol and/or drugs
- Encourage the development of basic ICT skills and signpost those so equipped to other agencies where they can develop their skills further
- Assist with the preparation for work and with the search for work
- Sustain a sense of community for all who attend
- Assist with securing suitable accommodation
- Maintain a multi-cultural environment where contact with those from other lands and background teaches tolerance and the ability to co-exist with different ways and values and reduces tensions within the community.
- Assist people in opening bank accounts, obtaining proof of identity and the right to work in UK

The clients have their mandatory tea breaks in our office together with the staff and volunteers. This helps to minimise the “us and them” divide and helps build confidence and trust between all and just as importantly lets all the different cultures interact socially and get to understand each other.

HCIP

Thankfully most hostels have now been modernised with a big initiative from the Government's Hostel Capital Improvement Programme which spent over £80M on hostels removing dormitory type accommodation and replacing them with mostly single rooms as well as establishing services such as provided by Turnaround and BHUG, although we have had feedback from clients that in some cases these are understaffed and not open long enough. Unfortunately for Turnaround our funding from central government was stopped at this time – coincidence or were they pulling in purse strings to finance the HCIP – who knows, we never received any reason so it's only conjecture.

BHUG

Bhug has three main areas of work;

Community Insight:

Community Insight provides tailored research, training and consultancy into homelessness and social inclusion. We specialise in accessibility, quality of services and user involvement.

We work for local government departments, housing associations, statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and market research organisations.

Community Insight is run by experts in social inclusion: people who, as homeless people, have themselves experienced social exclusion. Working with our clients, we design research projects to ensure that the authentic voices of service users are heard. Our aim is to improve services to vulnerable people

User Involvement

B.HUG works to encourage and support service users to influence design of policies and delivery of services from frontline providers to policy makers in government.

Involve U Project

An exciting project commissioned by Brent Supporting People and Hammersmith & Fulham Supporting People and Brent DAAT to coordinate service user involvement. The project that has started in June 08 has successfully achieved the following aims:

Training 17 Service Users from H&F and Brent in peer consultancy skills (accredited)

Produced user-led newsletters (Spring 09 and Summer 09 editions)

Engaged with over 350 service users from H&F and Brent

Set up 3 user groups

B.Heard (Supporting People Brent)

SPIN - Supporting People in Numbers (Supporting People H&F)

B3 (Drug and Alcohol Action Team)

Prevention and Awareness

B.HUG runs homelessness road shows in youth clubs and secondary schools in Brent.

We want to inform young people who are at the turning points in their life of the realities

of homelessness, to ensure they are aware of the support available to them should they find themselves in a situation that can lead to them being homeless. The Homelessness Road show is a way of increasing awareness of homelessness. The Road Shows are delivered by people who have a personal experience of homelessness.

A Chance 2 Work

We provide a training and pre-employment service which supports homeless people to build on their own experience and skills.

Case Studies and Outcomes

Although it is hard for Turnaround, like other similar projects, to persuade people to talk about their experiences - some never even come back to tell us of a successful outcome, some case studies and comments by, of our clients and volunteers can be found on our website.