

## **London Workshop – London Authorities and NGOs**

The second day was attended by NGOs and picked up two themes that had become apparent in previous meetings with NGOs (work with the single homeless and street homeless, and the crisis of homelessness in capital cities) and also invited NGOs of homeless populations whose situations had been referred to in previous meetings but organisations working on their behalf had not previously attended – homeless families, domestic violence survivors, refugees.

After the presentation of the network by Maryse Marpsat, the first NGO speakers were from NGOs working with the Single Homeless.

**Tariq Hilal, Policy Manager of CRISIS.** He reported that in the UK, legislation rations social housing to homeless people in priority need and his charity represents those not in priority need because they are without children. Founded in 1967 to raise public awareness of the single homeless and also to provide services. Ran Christmas at Crisis (shelter for all homeless over Christmas) first in 1972. All volunteers until the 1980s. 1990s began to operate more outside of the Christmas period. Reports broke major issues such as mental ill-health among the homeless, tuberculosis, prevention early in the cycle of homelessness and the presence among the homeless of ex-armed forces members. We re-launched ourselves in 2002 emphasising skills and also the need for the homeless to have social networks (Homelessness and Loneliness report).

All this work is important because the Labour Government launched an incredible drive against rough sleeping that has been effective BUT overall homelessness is going up amongst those applying as homeless to local authorities for housing. Now the government has tackled families staying in bed and breakfast.

Therefore our two latest projects are Skylight, based in the East End in order to reskill homeless people, and has an activity centre for those in the City. Open seven days a week all year, core staff of four and the rest are volunteers. The Urban Village, the other project, is a copy of the Common Ground project in New York, and we are seeking funding to build affordable housing in which homeless and non-homeless people can live side by side.

In terms of research that we do it is generally small scale and often qualitative. The production of huge quantitative studies and numbers is not evident. For example on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders being applied to the homeless we have our ideas and the government has theirs but there is no research on either side. The latest emphasis in the UK is on costing homelessness – we need to be able to do this because otherwise we won't speak the language of the Treasury. It is also important for us to talk about the structural aspect of homelessness – the poverty that underlines homelessness which we don't talk about enough.

**James Francis, Director of Street and Hostel services for Thames Reach Bondway** was the next speaker.

I began as a volunteer at the Crisis Christmas Shelter, and since then I have run advice rooms, day centres, supported housing, hostels. We know what causes homelessness and we know some of the solutions. 10 years ago we ran focus groups with our services users, then we had a peer education service and our users have been trained to run groups themselves. We found that obviously there was a need for accommodation, but also we need to address people's health needs – mental health, physical health and substance misuse, and we must address the skills deficit in relation to daily living. The emphasis now is on 'meaningful occupation' from volunteering to paid employment and a sense of belonging. Homeless people can over-identify with being an ex-homeless person and with that life so we need to move them away to the wider community. Finally, self-esteem. So these are the issues we

have to address to move people away from homelessness. One piece of our research was called 'A dream deferred' which also provided a toolkit for practitioners. Thames Reach Bondway works in the whole of the M25 area i.e. inside the motorway ring road that skirts the whole of Greater London as well as the City of London, Westminster and the West End. Our turnover is £14 million pounds and 350 staff. We provide resettlement support. When we first started working with street homeless a lot of agencies were doing their own thing and continued to do so under the Conservative Rough Sleepers Initiative. But the Labour Government re-packaged this initiative and the Social Exclusion Unit (attached to the Cabinet Office) set up the Rough Sleepers' Unit which had a common strategy. (If our organisation hadn't followed the common strategy we would have been cut out of funding.)

There were two parts to the funding. First Contact and Assessment Teams (CATS) for those on the streets and second, Tenancy Sustainment Teams not just for six months but unlimited time in order to resettle those on the streets. This system cut across 33 London boroughs and depended on good information because of the government pledge to cut rough sleeping by two thirds.

At the beginning of the rough sleeper strategy in 1998 we found 2-300 sleeping rough in Central Westminster. But now, with a 24-hour telephone helpline we can be told about any rough sleeper in the area. Over the past twelve months we have helped 1700 in Central Westminster, and on any one night the figure is 180 a night. We know that for every 15 we help off the street, another 14 replace and there is a huge flow through problem. So now there is a 'rapid intervention' strategy.

Mostly rough sleepers are rehoused in shelters, and others in hospital beds, and under 40% are ready to be moved in independent accommodation. Therefore hostel beds, hospital beds and psychiatric beds are 'silted up'. Therefore rapid intervention is difficult.

We now have a different issue in relation to 'value for money'. Government is arguing to stop work through CATS etc and take a street management approach as in the US and use police, traffic wardens, cleaning authority to send people to day centres and hostels. But we don't think this will work because many are long term homeless. We think the new agenda of enforcement is a political issue and not our policy.

In relation to research we are looking at longitudinal research of which we have had a first study. To look at what works in resettlement.

**Tony Dodson** from **Groundswell** was the next speaker.

I have a background of being homeless over 30 years – both streets and squats – but not know and I want to talk to you about a different way of doing research – peer research. I ask 'Who is the expert? The person who has learned the theory or the person who has lived the experience?' Peer research is about people conducting research that they understand through experience – whether it is face-to-face interviews, or questionnaires or tape-recorded. It is very useful for service evaluation. Moreover homeless populations are not hard to reach for those who have been homeless and the research involves an element of outreach as well.

My latest piece of research involves interviewing homeless people from black and minority ethnic groups (BME), and one with people with drug problems and problems with accessing services.

It is a very cost effective method as researchers can work at their own rate.

**Andrew Van Doorn** from **HACT (Housing Association's Charitable Trust)** then spoke on refugees and homelessness in the context of UK legislation on asylum seekers.

The experience of many refugees and asylum seekers does not fit well with the current discourse on homelessness within Europe because we speak about refugee housing needs. Refugees have lost their country and their home and often fled persecution and therefore are vulnerable, but they perhaps don't display the same sorts of needs profiles as single homeless people – mental health, drug abuse, alcohol use.

In the UK there was a significant increase from about 5,000 a year claiming asylum in the late 1980s to about 100,000 in 2002 but during that time there has been an erosion of rights for asylum seekers, a growth of xenophobia in some quarters including that of the press.

There are different periods of the process: first, arrival as asylum seekers and the possibility of deportation; second, once they have achieved refugee status a period of transition from one system which provide specialist support for asylum seekers to another system which is the general welfare system of the UK. But settlement takes longer than this and transition can lead to difficulties.

HACT itself is nearly 45 years old. It was set up by the housing sector at a time when social housing was expanding and big new housing developments occurred. We have also been a catalyst for change in the housing world; we procure and support networks and deliver training and consultancy and record what works. We also seek to change policy and practice. Currently we have three programmes: supported living; older people including refugee elders; refugee housing integration programme. We have invested £1.5 million into refugee community associations. We now have funding from the European Refugee Fund to deliver training to refugee organisations that provide housing advice.

One of our major problems is around the dispersal system in this country that followed from the 1999 Act that aimed to a) stem the flow of refugees into UK and b) disperse refugees from London and the South-East to the North of England and Scotland where more housing was available. However, many of these communities are deprived and without work and are unused to receive immigrant communities. A third aim of the government with this Act was to split the dispersal into three types of housing – local authority housing, housing association housing, and private rental market housing.

In 2002 the Nationality and Asylum Act was passed that aimed to provide a holistic system. But it removed state support to those claiming asylum and this led to street homelessness identified in a report by the Refugee Council. The Refugee Council also identified an issue of poor quality housing, and that those with special needs were being made destitute. This has been compounded in the latest legislation this year which created a local connection for refugees with the area they had been dispersed to. Therefore if they returned to London they couldn't ask for housing assistance without being referred back to that other area.

The culture of the homelessness sector is to focus on individual needs and it is weak at working with and supporting the assets of local communities, and dealing with community tensions. There is a need for a new partnership between the housing sector and refugee communities e.g. the government's new Sunrise Project.

Similar problems have affected people from the accession states in Europe who are coming to this country to work particularly in agricultural labour.

What are the research needs for this homeless population? I) We need to plan better and invest better in particular areas and we need statistics that show flows of people. II) Distinguish between refugees and UK citizens among populations; research in the 1990s showed the different needs between the UK BME populations and refugee populations. III) Effectiveness of different kinds of support for refugees. IV) Use peer research as reported above among other homeless populations. V) We need to use

research to stress the importance of housing in integration not just employment which is what the government agenda has been. VI) We need to look much more at aspirations and assets.

**Discussion** on single homeless and refugee population homeless:

- i) We must not forget to take care of couples with children, who are also not eligible.
- ii) There are refugee immigrants in many countries but why are they homeless in one and not in another. This is an important issue. Is it connected with the social construction of the problem?
- iii) Working with single homeless in the UK seems to be to get them into accommodation, as well as working with their social needs. Whereas in Southern Europe, homelessness is not a problem of the housing departments, but of the social affairs. It is important to compare the two approaches. However, in the UK there is now some shift from seeing homelessness as a housing issue and more as a social work issue and the Homelessness Directorate has moved to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.
- iv) Although the relationship between benefits and work and housing is a problem in the UK in terms of choice it is preferable to a situation where women fleeing domestic violence are unable to access support in some Southern European and Eastern European countries.

The next two speakers spoke on the operation of the homelessness legislation in London.

**Simon Cribbens** spoke from the **Homelessness and Housing Unit of the Greater London Authority** about the housing problems of the capital city of London.

1986-2000 London governed only by 33 local boroughs because the old London authority (GLC) abolished. 2000 re-establishment of a pan-London government with an elected mayor and 25 members with a budget of £5 billion.

Household size has fallen in the capital – single people, divorced people – and this has led to a growth in the number of households. First time buyer properties cost 200,000 £s, 1.6 national average. Therefore there is a challenge to house key workers and create sustainable communities. In London the social housing sector is declining and private is rising. An increase in social housing built by housing associations but that has been negated by the sale of local authority housing to their tenants. So the Mayor wants to rise the housing target from 19,000 to 30,000 a year. Problems of London are common to other areas of the country except that the issues of poverty, health and housing are on a much greater scale. How many homeless would there be in London if all the different group were included – statutory homeless under the legislation, non-statutory homeless, those fleeing domestic violence, those vulnerable?

2003/4 30,000 households accepted as homeless by London local authorities and the local authorities then have a duty to house them; these households were in priority need (dependent children, older persons, or vulnerable persons or fleeing domestic violence etc.) A further 14,000 households/ people were homeless but not accepted by the local authorities as owing a duty because they were not in priority need and most of these would be single homeless and there would be many more single homeless who didn't apply.

Our big problem in London is not just single homelessness but also that homeless households can expect to spend two and a half years in temporary accommodation before they are re-housed by local authorities.

Currently there are about 250 to 300 rough sleepers in London on any one night. It is a success that the numbers have fallen this low but it is still a pressing problem. On

top of this there are 14,000 single homeless living in hostels waiting move on accommodation and that has taken up many of the hostel beds.

We also have 32,000 asylum seeker households being supported by local authorities – some under homelessness legislation and some by social work departments – and further 24,000 supported by NASS (National Asylum Seekers Service).

The GLA has done research on households at high risk of homelessness (hidden homelessness): 140,000 severely overcrowded households, 15,000 in hostels and night shelters and refuges, 9,000 living involuntarily in bed and breakfast, and 8,000 squatting.

Not all local authority housing can go to homeless households. Therefore the numbers of homeless households living in temporary accommodation keeps rising and by 2007 it will reach 80,000. At the moment there are over 60,000 and obviously that is very expensive and would buy a lot of houses.

Much new housing will be out of London, where private sector rental is less expensive. But the homeless population is vulnerable and need their social networks. We would like the focus to shift to homeless prevention. The Local Authorities realise their own stock isn't enough and they need other solutions. We try to spread joint working across boroughs and we have a web-based information system across boroughs.

#### **David Ginshall from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.**

The problems of Tower Hamlets are the same as the other 32 London boroughs but they are also different because of its situation near the City of London. Historically it has been one of the 3 poorest boroughs in England but now has some of the most expensive developments.

Government pressure has pushed the local authorities to transfer their housing stock to housing associations. Whereas we were the biggest landlord in the borough we will now be very insignificant. We have a poor community, many are very vulnerable, and worsening drug and alcohol misuse problems, and the worst overcrowding in the country. 40% of our borough population is from BME groups.

Those who apply as homeless have to complete a short questionnaire and then meet the Enquiry and Prevention Team which offers specialist housing advice and offers to help with rent deposits to prevent homelessness by moving people into the private sector. We can only deal with landlords who accept housing benefit level rents because our tenants couldn't pay the short fall if they weren't in work. We also offer family mediation as a way of preventing homelessness particularly between a young person and their family. We have our own team of social workers working with young people (all 16-17 year olds are priority need under the 2002 Act).

Because of all this the number of acceptances has fallen.

What are the steps to being accepted as homeless? First, the household has to be eligible and many are not. Second we look at priority need e.g. with children, pregnant women, 16-17 year olds. Third we look at vulnerability, e.g. through mental illness. Fourth test is whether the household is intentionally homeless e.g. previously abandoned their tenancy. Finally, are they local, do they have a local connection with the borough?

Last year we accepted 1,600 households and currently have 3,000 households in temporary accommodation costing £25 million pounds a year. We used to use bed and breakfast accommodation (a few years ago 500 households were in bed and breakfast) but only 170 families are in bed and breakfast accommodation currently under the six week limit that the government allows for families to be in this type of accommodation. We are allowed to use bed and breakfast for young people. Our households are living in private accommodation that we lease from the landlord. We also use what stock we have.

There is an average wait of 2 to 3 years but if you are a family that needs a large property like 5 bedrooms then it can be up to 10 years.

One final point is that the OPDM believes that 15-20% of homeless acceptances are of people who have been homeless once or twice before. That is not true of our figures – only 1.5% of our applicants have been and that is because we have developed initiatives such as our own independent living team to give our households life skills.

**Sarah Credland from SHELTER**

Our history is similar to CRISIS, as we were established in 1966. At that time homelessness was dealt with through social services and it was ad hoc. We campaigned for the passing of the Homelessness Legislation in 1977 which placed the same duties on all local authorities. We are now the main independent provider of housing advice – we advise 100,000 homeless or potentially homeless households or single people each year. We run more than 50 housing aid centres and a legal advice centre for London and a telephone helpline service called ShelterLine.

We have also begun providing living support through a service called Homeless to Home, helping people sort out their bills once they are re-housed. We have a new project called a Shelter Inclusion Project which is a pilot project working in Rochdale to prevent homelessness.

The government has now recognised that it needed to extend the groups of people who are in priority need and that has been done under the 2002 legislation. Equally local authorities are now focussing more on their strategy – creating homeless strategies was also a part of the legislation. SHELTER set up a Homelessness Act Implementation Strategy after the legislation. During the year we surveyed 28 local authorities to see what was happening and set up a website to work with local authority staff. 107 boroughs signed up to the website. They are completing their homeless strategies by 2005 and finding out their information gaps. Half of the local authorities thought that creating homeless strategies was a very effective method because it allowed them to access different resources.

This campaign couldn't continue because it is very resource intensive but we have set up regional strategy groups that mirror the OPDM housing regions.

A large part of our campaign is about temporary accommodation – there are over 97,000 homeless households living in temporary accommodation. We are also running a campaign to highlight the fact that over a million children in Britain are growing up in unfit or overcrowded or emergency accommodation. We have done 7 pieces of research looking at this including a survey based on 400 questionnaires from households living in temporary accommodation. We estimate that using temporary accommodation costs £500 million pounds a year and that includes increased medical needs. We also interviewed children living in temporary accommodation.

Our current research is also about the impact of the changes to priority need groups in the legislation. Many of us are members of a research forum run by Homeless Link and there we discuss broader research issues that affect us all.

**Linda Delahay, Housing Services' Policy Officer from Women's Aid Federation of England** which is the main domestic violence charity working across England.

We have a network of 270 refuges and these plus the local authority run refuges come to 500 refuges for women providing outreach services, local helplines, advice centres and accommodation. It was formed 30 years ago.

Research from National Children's Homes (NCH) has found that 90% of all domestic violence incidents have children in the same room or the next room, 25% of women are assaulted for the first time when they are pregnant, 44% of all incidents reported to the police are domestic violence incidents. 2 murders a week are of women by their partners.

20% of all homeless acceptances have the reason of relationship breakdown. The 2002 Act has broadened the definition of violence and that will be helpful in gaining accommodation for those vulnerable due to violence.

There has recently been research called 'Routes to Safety' on domestic violence which found that local authorities were a key agency for women seeking help to survive domestic violence. A quarter said they had problems but that included having to live in temporary accommodation, but some included advice such as take out court orders or go back home which put them at risk.

In 2002 we had 16,738 women and 22,350 children accommodated in refuges in England (and there are refuges in Scotland and Wales as well). A third of these women will present to local authorities as homeless. We are concerned because a lack of housing seems to be a major factor in preventing women leaving a violent relationship and a very strong factor in forcing women to stay for a very long time. Some women have to stay up to two years in refuges before they are rehoused - that in addition silts up the available accommodation.

Renting is difficult with children but also private assured shorthold tenancies only have to last for six months and then the women is back in a revolving door. In some areas women are being asked to find their own remedies or being referred out of their own area despite wanting to live there near their own social networks.

A further problem is that many women's organisations and refuges don't have the resources to provide for women with additional needs such as disabled women, or women from BME groups or from refugees. Some of these have not access to welfare funds because of their nationality.

Young single women and women without dependent children also have difficulty getting housing although in Wales if you are fleeing domestic violence then you are in priority need with or without children as it should be elsewhere.

A lot of refuges have outreach services but these have closed because outreach is not funded through the new funding arrangements of Supporting People because it is defined as prevention. This is very short-sighted on the part of the government.

How women fleeing domestic violence are treated by local authorities still depends on the availability of accommodation. Local authorities have ever dwindling resources because their stocks have been sold.

The next group of speakers dealt with the issue of youth homelessness.

**Lorna Eisen of St Basils, Birmingham**

Supply in our city is not such a big issue. We are a city of 1 million, the largest single local authority and there are 120,000 social housing units. But the housing is not popular – it is what we call 'low demand' and people move in and out of it. At the moment stock is transferring to housing associations whilst Birmingham city has to create the homeless and housing strategies.

Our organisation has existed for 30 years. We are now the largest voluntary organisation for young people outside London. Every year we work with 4000 young people, and at the moment 300 are living in our accommodation, and supporting another 200 who have been moved into their own tenancies. Our emphasis is now on helping young people keep their home. Supporting People – the new funding stream – has been a blessing in providing money to do this. But we also raise our own money in order to provide innovative new projects. We have found a lot of issues in relation to drug, alcohol misuse and lack of education. We try to provide the young people with skills so that a crisis doesn't become a catastrophe. We have family mediation projects. We educate young people about the risk of homelessness through peer educators and peer befrienders from young people who have been in our accommodation.

So we have a range of prevention and early intervention projects, and also crisis intervention through the provision of accommodation.

We did a peer based research project.

### **Emma Strong, Centrepoint**

Our organisation is 35 years old. We began in London and our direct housing services provide 500 bedspaces a year to young people in London but we also work outside London now. We believe that you have to intervene in the downward spiral that young people are on and help them address their health, learning, job needs, alcohol and drug and we have a support and development model which is on our website.

We conduct a lot of research based on our experience of working with young people. Our service users have met with Gordon Brown and told him what their support needs are. We are working with Joan Smith and Megan Ravenhill at London Metropolitan University to research the perceptions of homelessness held by young people and by their parents.

We have a national development team that negotiates between local authorities and the voluntary sector and other statutory bodies. We have done this in about 70 local authorities. We do a lot of work around joint protocols i.e. the services young people should receive from housing or from social work under different Acts of Parliament such as homelessness and the Children Act. This is to streamline services for young people.

We are very interested in prevention, we draw together learning from the Safe in the City programme which was an action research programme. The risks of becoming homeless were identified by Joan and Safe in the City set up cluster programmes in local areas aimed to address those risks. The work of the clusters was hugely successful and we are taking that work forward in other areas. Over the next two years we will be working with local authorities to do this.

Centrepoint wants to be at the heart of defining what prevention work is in relation to homelessness. We see it as a continuum of services from prevention in the early stages when they show risks of homelessness, through to hostel accommodation and through to support in their own independent accommodation. Homelessness is not just about accommodation but about the other needs people have for support. We aim to work with education services and social services.

### **Pat McAllistair, from the Foyer Federation**

Foyers were set up in the UK just over 10 years ago. There are now about 133 offering holistic support including accommodation to 16-25 year olds with different levels of needs, some of whom have complex needs. Tackling skills deficits among the young people is one area and that is about motivating young people and developing their communication skills.

Foyers can be on a single site or they can be dispersed – on many sites – particularly in rural areas. In 50 of them there are on-line centres where young people and people from the community can learn on-line through Learn Direct and other programmes.

Foyers see about 10,000 young people a year both for housing and for skills training. Our new programme is Safe Moves which is very similar to the Safe in the City project. The difference is that we have peer mentors that we have trained from the Foyers in order to talk to young people at risk of homelessness. This is important because foyers are seeing more and more sixteen and seventeen year-olds becoming homeless. We are also seeing more young people with children and more refugees.