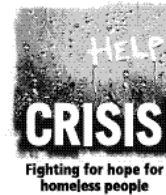


research summary



Prevention is Better than Cure

Research by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown

Introduction

Homelessness is about a complex myriad of problems and manifests itself as the most extreme example of social exclusion. The problems and issues facing homeless people as they work to leave homelessness behind extend wider than simply housing.

This reports examines in detail the many issues which place people at risk of homelessness and the crisis points which immediately precede homelessness. It considers in turn issues ranging from time spent in institutions, low levels of literacy to lack of social support networks. It then makes detailed recommendations for services to be developed in all the areas identified as being key in working to prevent homelessness as well as highlighting current good practice examples.

Methodology

120 people who had slept rough where interviewed as well as staff from 19 different projects which work to prevent homelessness.

Findings

The key risk factors are:

- **Disputes with parents and step-parents:** 33 per cent of homeless people gave this as one of their reasons for first sleeping rough and 21 per cent as the main reason, rising to 37 per cent of people aged under 26.
- **Experience of physical or sexual abuse:** surveys have found up to 40 per cent of homeless young people have suffered violence or abuse.
- **Time in local authority care:** surveys find between a quarter and a third of people sleeping rough have been in local authority care at some stage.
- **Lack of qualifications:** only 38 per cent of people sleeping rough have any educational qualifications, compared to 66 per cent of the general population.
- **School Exclusion:** 28 per cent of people surveyed had been excluded from school.
- **Unemployment:** 90 per cent or more of homeless people are unemployed.
- **Alcohol and drug misuse:** between a third and a half of people sleeping rough have alcohol problems and up to 40 per cent younger homeless people have drug problems.
- **Mental health problems:** research has found that as many as 60 per cent of people sleeping rough may have mental health problems
- **A combination of mental health, drug and alcohol problems:** 36 per cent of people surveyed gave an Indication of having multiple problems.
- **Contact with the criminal justice system:** around half of people sleeping rough have been in prison or a young offenders institution and many have repeated contact with the police and courts.
- **Previous service in the armed forces:** surveys have found that around a quarter of people sleeping rough have served time in the armed forces at some point.
- **Marital or relationship breakdown:** 13 per cent of the people surveyed gave this as a reason for sleeping rough the first time and 9 per cent gave it as the main reason.

- **Previous experience of homelessness:** 85 per cent of the survey had experienced more than one episode of sleeping rough.
- **Lack of a social support network:** agencies interviewed identified this as leading to and prolonging homelessness.
- **Failure to furnish or maintain a home:** agencies giving tenancy support identified this as a warning sign that the tenancy may be failing.
- **Debts, especially rent or mortgage arrears:** 26 per cent of people surveyed gave arrears or money problems as a reason why they first slept rough and 11 per cent as the main reason.
- **Causing nuisance to neighbours:** agencies identified this as a symptom of other problems, often linked to mental health and alcohol difficulties, as well as being a cause of eviction.

The key crisis points which can precipitate rough sleeping are:

- Leaving the parental home after arguments
- Leaving care without adequate support
- Leaving prison
- Discharge from the armed forces
- Marital or relationship breakdown
- A financial crisis of mounting debts
- Eviction from a rented or owned home
- A sharp deterioration in mental health or an increase in alcohol misuse.

Recommendations

- The wide variety of problems which lead to homelessness means that an equally wide range of different types of intervention is necessary to prevent homelessness.
 - Suitable accommodation coupled with appropriate support needs to be offered to people attempting to leave homelessness behind.
 - The challenge now is to develop a network of cost-effective services which will have a substantial impact on reducing the number of people who end up on the streets and support those as they move away from rough sleeping.
-

Prevention is Better than Cure

Research by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown

Publication information

- Publication Date: 1999
- Pages (incl. cover) 54pp
- Cost £7.50
- ISBN No.: 1 899257 33 0

Order form

To order this publication please use the form below and post to:
Crisis, 64 Commercial Street, London E1 6LT.

Alternatively ring the credit/debit card hotline on 020 7426 3804 and quote reference number HAD/LA. Thank you.

Cost

- Publication £7.50
- Postage & Packing £3.00
- Donation £ _____
- TOTAL £ _____

Personal details

Name: _____ Organisation: _____
Position: _____
Address: _____
Postcode: _____
Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Payment details

1. Credit/Debit card

Please debit my MasterCard/Visa/Amex/Switch/CAF Charity Card (delete as appropriate)

Card Number:

Expiry Date: Issue Number (switch only):

Signature: _____ Date: _____

2. Cheque/Postal Order

- I enclose a cheque/postal order payable to Crisis
- I would like to receive a complete Crisis publications leaflet; you may alternatively call 020 7426 3804 to request one or visit the Crisis website at www.crisis.org.uk/publications
- I would like to be included on Crisis' mailing list to be invited to conferences (annual Innovations Fair, etc)
- I do not want to receive information about other Crisis publications
-



Crisis, 64 Commercial Street, London E1 6LT

Tel: 0870 011 3335 Fax: 0870 011 3336

E-mail: enquiries@crisis.org.uk Website: www.crisis.org.uk

To make a donation contact 0800 038 48 38

Crisis UK (trading as Crisis). Charity no 1082947. Company no 4024938.