



Transcript

Introduction video 4 | Framing with context

Slide 1

Welcome to the fourth video of our introduction to framing homelessness. Now, we're going to focus on context. We'll explore why we need to frame with context, what this means for individual stories and then what this might mean in practice.

It should take us about twenty five minutes with two exercises, where I'll ask you to press pause before carrying on.

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Let's start again with our narrative arc. Context framing is all about how we answer the questions: what's this about? And what can we do about it? And this helps us address one of the biggest misconceptions we face when talking about homelessness with the public.

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What do you think that is? Pause this video, then take a guess. If you want a clue, keep watching.

'To say it's their own fault they, they put either drink drugs or that before they think of their future and before they think of anyone else. So that they themselves are making their own destiny. They're not thinking of the future and how it affects everyone else. So that's why I think they've made that decision to go that way. So you know that if you don't stay on a right path something horrible's going to happen to you... whether you intend it to happen. But that's just it. We all have a path we should go, and if you deviate from that path well, that's your choice. Whether it's right or wrong you know it's your choice.'

That misconception:

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Homelessness happens because of individual choice.

It's worth picking up on a few things in the video we've just seen. Because the woman here recognises that the causes of homelessness are complex. She recognises that people who are facing homelessness are often dealing with difficult circumstances, like issues with addiction.

Where she differs from the sector story is on how those circumstances came about. Who has responsibility. And so what this means for preventing and ending homelessness. There's nothing here on structural or systemic causation. So she's able to take a step back. To disengage. To conclude, you can't fix human nature. Because bad people will always make bad choices.

And when we're only telling stories through the lens of individual action and individual choice, we are reinforcing this belief.

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And the research shows that this is one of the biggest barriers to building support for the kind of solutions we need.

We've seen a version of this slide before - the mental shortcuts that we draw on to make sense of the world around us. What's worth stressing here is that once these shortcuts are activated, it's almost impossible for us to reverse course and think differently. To understand the context that can lead to homelessness: like poverty, rising living costs, childhood trauma. Or the context that can make a precarious living situation worse. Let's refresh our memory.

The first shortcut, we've already covered. Homelessness happens when individuals make bad choices: the idea that we succeed or fail in life based on how hard we work, how much we try. And just like the woman we saw earlier: when this shortcut is active, we don't see systemic causes. And we don't see prevention as something that can happen. Because bad people will always make bad choices. And we can't fix human nature.

The second. Homelessness affects other people: middle-aged men with an addiction, young people, and abused women. None of these groups are seen as homeless because of social factors. Instead, it's things understood as individual issues: mental illness, drug and domestic abuse. And when this shortcut is active, people not only exclude other groups at risk of homelessness, but actively stop thinking about homelessness as a social or political issue. It's just about individuals.

The third: Homelessness services are already available. They're just unknown or unused. And when this is active, the only solution to homelessness that makes sense is awareness raising. Education. And if someone knows about these services and chooses not to use them well, it's their choice.

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Our first exercise. Take a look at Shaun's story. There's a copy in your workbook. Think about the mental shortcuts that it's activating - both the one's we've covered here and in earlier videos. Underline the words and phrases that activate these mental shortcuts.

And when you're done, think about what this means for that big misconception we face when talking about homelessness. That it happens because of individual choice. So pause the video now, and we'll talk about it more soon. Have you paused?

Welcome back. There's a lot going on here, as you will have noticed. Here are a few of the phrases worth thinking about from the perspective of context.

'I went to rehab for heroin addiction' - with no explanation of why he was susceptible or exposed to addiction in the first place.

'I ended up on the streets' - presenting homelessness as the natural, passive consequence of addiction. And reinforcing the idea of who becomes homeless.

All of the things that could be dismissed as bad choices: 'I...ended up just hurting everybody' 'I missed the first date' 'It didn't deter me from begging' 'either that, or go out and rob.'

And 'the courts didn't tell me anywhere to go to try and get support.' Implying that support and services are out there - he just needs to be told.

And from the perspective of context framing, there's very little here on the wider social context. There's some indirect hints about the Vagrancy Act, but nothing on employment, cost of living, rising poverty - the things that can push many people into homelessness. So what do we do instead?

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First up: we need a range of different stories about homelessness. Different forms. Different people. Different starting points. This helps people see that homelessness is more than rough sleeping - it captures a range of insecure living. It helps people see that homelessness affects more than those three groups: young people, middle-aged addicts, and abused women. Those others.

And then, we need to place those stories in context. To surface the social causes of homelessness and the changes needed to end it. So what might this look like?

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Here's the old Crisis website. Take a look at what's there. Whose stories are told. And how this might narrow public thinking about what support is needed.

And here's the new Crisis site. A small snapshot of the range of different stories that are told. The range of experiences that are shared.

This is not to say don't tell stories about middle-aged men, young people, and abused women. It is to say that we can open up people's understanding of homelessness if we tell more than just these stories.

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And when we tell them, or help others to tell them, we need to place them in context.

Context framing means telling individual stories through a much wider lens.

It locates blame in systems - not individuals, action or choice

It stops stories from being dismissed as exceptional or isolated incidents. Because you show that they represent much broader trends

And we're explaining why we need to fix systems and conditions - not people.

Because the solution to something that affects many different people cannot be at the level of a single individual.

Here's what this could look like in practice, for first person storytelling.

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On screen are a few phrases that we at FrameWorks put together with a group who had direct experience of poverty. We wanted to find phrases that would show context. The scale of problems. The support systems that were there - or should have been there. And what this meant for people's lives.

And we wanted phrases that also felt true to the language and stories people wanted to tell. These won't work for everyone - but dropping these, or ones like these, into individual stories widens the lens of that story.

To pull out a few:

‘Like a lot of working parents, people with health problems, etc I...’ It’s a small change to the start of a story that can prevent it being dismissed as exceptional. And instead directly positions it as part of wider social trends.

‘Cut down on my options.’ This was another small change. Instead of saying ‘cut down on my choices’ or ‘I had no choice’ we used the word ‘options.’ And when we talk about options instead of choices, we get people thinking about context. And what is and isn’t available and accessible to us. Which is very different to judging an individual for making good or bad decisions.

And here’s what this could look like when we’re telling stories in the second person.

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I’ve underlined a few phrases that bring in context. It’s also using the constant pressure metaphor from our last video, to get people thinking about the external forces that act on people without their control.

“Poverty puts pressure on people. Scott was under this kind of constant pressure. He was paying increasingly high rent on a low-paying, zero-hours contract job. When he got ill, the pressure became too much and he was pushed into homelessness. Now, he’s sleeping on sofas and floors. His health continues to crumble.

Scott’s story shows us what happens when we leave people exposed to this kind of pressure. We need to work upstream to prevent homelessness. This means fixing our jobs market so that people aren’t living on zero-hour contracts.”

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Let’s go back to Shaun’s story from the start of this video. Pause here, and take a minute to refresh your memory. Then we’ll go on to our final exercise.

Welcome back.

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Here’s another individual story. A contrast to the one you’ve just seen. One that has space for individual agency - but places that agency in context.

I want you to take a look at Pudsey’s story. There’s a copy in your workbook. Spend five minutes thinking through, and noting down all of the ways in which this piece is surfacing context. Is navigating problematic mental shortcuts. Is widening the lens. And maybe note one or two ways in which it could be improved.

When you’re done, think about if there’s anything you might change about how your organisation approaches individual stories.

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We’ll end with a few tips on context framing in practice.

Talk about options (not choices). A quick win that does a lot of work for us.

Name the systems and supports that improve or limit our options

Use and extend the constant pressure metaphor, where it makes sense

And watch out for mental shortcuts that activate individual choice

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And if you only take away three things from this video, let them be these:

Context framing draws attention to systems - not individuals

And because of this. It protects and works with the people you're working with and for. Within the wider training programme, we can unpick and surface this one a bit more.

And finally: it's easier than you'd think.

Now take a look at the last page in your workbook. And add any good ideas or phrases you've come across today to your framing thesaurus.

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Next up: a recap.

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And as always, thank you for taking the time to work through this video.