

Homelessness and Vulnerable Young People: A social audit of KeyChange Charity's supported accommodation

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Editorial Note

Megan Ravenhill is a doctoral research student within CASE at the London School of Economics. This study was commissioned by KeyChange, a charity dealing with women's homelessness through hostel provision in Exeter and Reigate. The fieldwork was carried out between November and April 1999. The author would like to thank Etta Colville and Andy Lyle for their help with this research, but more importantly, would like to thank the women living in KeyChange's hostels, who allowed Megan to interview them.

Abstract

Homelessness is still an ever-present problem in many towns and cities in the UK today. This paper is part of a more in-depth study of homelessness and social exclusion. It presents the results of a small-scale study which illustrates the range of problems experienced by homeless young women and those running hostels for them. The study was carried out for KeyChange at their two hostels in Reigate and Exeter. It evaluates the quality of their women's hostel provision, the types of women they help, and the ways in which these women are helped by their time with KeyChange. It identifies a number of factors contributing to the quality of KeyChange's provision and points to areas for consideration where improvements could be made.

Introduction

About KeyChange

KeyChange was founded in 1920 by women concerned for the social and spiritual needs of young single women working in cities (often in menial jobs) just after the First World War. Lunch clubs were set up where they could meet new friends. Hostels opened for young women – and later for men. In the 1950s holiday homes were established to provide young families with the opportunity of affordable seaside holidays.

Life in Britain has changed since the Twenties, but there are still some major social problems. Families are less able to care for elderly relatives, family and marriage breakdown often forces young people out of the home before they are ready, this increases the number of people at risk of being marginalised by society.

Now KeyChange provides accommodation for frail elderly people and supported accommodation for young and vulnerable, homeless people. KeyChange's centres are staffed by committed Christians and run on Christian principles. Their mission statement is 'to offer care, acceptance and Christian community to people in need'.

This report focuses on just one section of Keychange's work, that is their hostels for homeless women in Reigate and Exeter.

Why a Social Audit?

By law, organisations have to have a financial audit, but this only covers income, expenditure and statistics. This kind of information can only show the outcomes of the project in terms of numbers and statistics, these are often called 'hard' outcomes. The social audit aims to show all the other outcomes and the ways individuals benefit from their contact with KeyChange, these are 'soft' outcomes. For example, the statistics may show that a resident left a hostel after seven months to live in a rented flat. A social audit will show that the resident gained self-respect, self-worth and self-confidence, they now feel able to cope with living on their own, making friends, budgeting and working. These skills are difficult to measure in terms of numbers but are a vital part of the resettlement process. These kinds of 'soft' outcomes can provide a strong indicator of how well an organisation is really performing and meeting their aims and objectives.

Thus, a social audit is a way of assessing and evaluating how well KeyChange meets the needs of its clients, where there are points of good practice and areas for improvement. Most importantly, it provides

KeyChange with a view for its future, both in terms of the expansion of existing projects, and the key components for new potential projects.

What is a Social Audit?

To get this kind of information, life-story interviews need to be conducted, ideally with both existing and previous clients, to find out about their life before they became homeless, how they became homeless, their experiences whilst they were homeless (including their time at KeyChange) and what happened to them when they left KeyChange. For the purposes of this research, interviews were confined to those women currently living in a KeyChange hostel. The reasons for this are discussed in the section on research methods.

The social audit also includes a look at the types of people who apply for accommodation but are unsuccessful, and the reasons why they were rejected (e.g. no vacancies, the hostel does not have the facilities to meet a special need).

From this information we can gain a good idea of:

- the types of people who come to KeyChange for help,
- the range of problems that they present with,
- how they get to know about KeyChange and who refers them,
- how the KeyChange experience can transform their lives,
- who KeyChange can and cannot help and what happens to those that KeyChange cannot help.
- how easy it is for people to 'recover' from their homelessness,
- where they go and what happens to them after they leave.

By using first-hand accounts of the whole process of becoming homeless and being homeless, a realistic and accurate picture of KeyChange's work can be painted, along with the enormous scale of the task and the high level of their success. The social audit puts faces on the statistics, giving them lives that can and do change.

What is Social Exclusion?

The Prime Minister set up a Social Exclusion Unit to combat social exclusion; but what is social exclusion? Many people have assumed that it is a new, politer way of talking about poverty and so use the word in that context. The term exclusion is more comprehensive, encompassing the ability to participate in society and to access housing, financial services, education, employment, and so on. Homelessness is a symptom of social exclusion; the homeless are some of the most excluded people in our society. There is no one simple solution to

exclusion, its causes are many and varied, many people have to deal with multiple problems that together have resulted in their exclusion.

KeyChange through the hostel in Reigate and Exeter are actively working to re-integrate (include) excluded women back into mainstream society in a meaningful way. This is not an easy or a fast process, but it can be life changing and lasting.

People who cannot participate in the usual activities of the society they live in, often react in two ways. They either isolate and exclude themselves from the mainstream; or they group with others in a similar position to form subgroups, where they do not feel excluded; some do both. Exeter is a prime example of this, there is a strong and vibrant homeless population and culture in the area, the homeless often feel more included amongst the people on the street than they ever felt before. This makes it very difficult to help them move back into settled housing and mainstream society where they feel like misfits or where they have little in common with the people around them. Thus, re-integrating (including) people back into mainstream society can be a long process with many setbacks. The hostel experience needs to be a powerful life-changing experience if it is to succeed.

About Homelessness

Homelessness is an emotive word. To many people it conjures up images of people with no where to live. Although distasteful, it can also conjure up in people's minds the picture of the tramp walking the street, smelly, dirty and hungry; or the alcoholic, obnoxious, loud and drunk. To view all homeless people in terms of these two stereotypes is to do many an injustice. Many people who are homeless do not live on the streets straight away, especially women. Instead, they live on a series of friends and relatives' floors, until they have outstayed their welcome. Many try to find alternative accommodation, either in the private rented sector, council and housing associations or in hostels.

Those people doubling up with friends and family are often called the 'hidden homeless', they are hidden from the general public's view. Although they are not roofless, they are without a home, and if they cannot find an affordable place to stay, they can eventually end up living on the streets or in squats. KeyChange's Reigate hostel caters predominantly for women who find themselves in this situation, offering them a place to stay when all else fails (but usually before they

are forced to live on the streets). This is a vital role because sleeping rough is a life-changing experience that some people never recover from.

It is often assumed that people without a place to stay at night can go to a hostel. However, there are not always enough hostel places in the major towns and cities in England, including Reigate, Exeter and central London. This means that, inevitably, people will not be able to find somewhere safe to stay. Many people do not see women's homelessness as a major problem because not many women are seen on the streets. However, many women spend longer sleeping on people's floors, are easily diverted into prostitution and are more readily invited into squatting arrangements (Browne, 1998). None of these situations solve their homelessness, they just make a bad situation worse, at the same time it places them in dangerous situations, or situations where they are extremely vulnerable to, for example, violence or rape.

Many homeless women have a history of domestic violent assaults committed on them. A large proportion of these women have also suffered some form of physical sexual or emotional abuse as a child. There is a high proportion of homeless people, that is those living on the streets, (32%) who have spent some time in local authority care (Randall and Brown, 1999). All three of these factors are damaging and undermine the individuals self-worth. The women KeyChange deals with have also suffered the humiliation of being homeless and the stigmas attached to homeless people. This tends to paint homeless women as pathetic victims and although some 'play' that role very well, the majority just want a chance to 'get their heads together' and try again.

Many people also think that the majority of homeless people want to be homeless and live on the streets. This applies only to 5% of the rough-sleeping homeless population (Randall and Brown, 1993, 1996; Randall, 1998). The vast majority want a place to live, but recognise that they need help to not only find accommodation but to be able to cope with sustaining a tenancy and living independently.

What are the Common Causes of Women's Homelessness?

The causes of homelessness are as many and varied as the people who become homeless. Most people who sleep rough on the streets today have several different factors that caused or resulted in them becoming homeless. There are three main routes that trigger homelessness for women (these are derived from this research for KeyChange and through life-story interviews with homeless people at both the Riverpoint day centre and rehabilitation programme – approximately 12

people – plus participant observations of approximately 150 hours at the Merton Anchorage Trust drop in project).

‘MEN AND THE DRINK’

Most women who became homeless in their mid-twenties or after, cite ‘men and the drink’ as the main cause of their homelessness, noting that a relationship was fine until the man started drinking heavily and became violent. Often, the long-term and serially homeless women have had a series of relationships with men who drink and become violent. During the process of running away, they end up on the streets and often end up drinking heavily themselves.

FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Young women, 16-18 year olds especially, often leave the parental home and move straight onto the streets or live on a series of friends floors until they exhaust their welcome. Some young women are escaping from abusive families. However, research is beginning to show that most leave home due to ‘family conflict’ (Smith, Gilford and O’Sullivan, 1998). This may mean they have a row and leave, or increasingly, that a step-parent will not tolerate their behaviour and asks that they leave the ‘new’ family home.

Early intervention for this group is vital, so too is family mediation (Smith, Gilford and O’Sullivan, 1998; Randall and Brown, 1999). The significant number of adult women (mid 20s to mid 30s) in this research (who had been homeless on and off since their teens), points to this. Some women have become so accustomed to being homeless, that they return to the streets at the first sign of crisis. The streets have become familiar, even when women have been beaten and raped several times, they still return to the streets as the streets no longer act as a deterrent to sleeping rough. The women become blunted, immune to the instinctive fear of violence and rape that they once had.

ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ADDICTION

It is often difficult to determine whether alcoholism or drug addiction caused homelessness or resulted from homelessness. Either way, once addicted, it is almost impossible for some women to maintain a tenancy, keep to hostel rules or cope with day-to-day living.

Behind the addiction, there are often deep-seated problems that can stretch right back to childhood. These problems can lead them to hide behind the drink or drugs in the first place. Many women have been sexually abused or raped at some point in their life, some have

been beaten, some never felt they had the social skills to fit in with their peers. Others joined a partner or friends in either drinking heavily or taking drugs and thus became hooked into a downward spiral that is difficult to break free from.

In addition to the three main routes into homelessness for women, there can be the added complication of children. Many women do have children that are often in care or in the custody of family or relatives. The loss of their children can either spur a woman into sorting out her problems (thus earning the right to have her children back); or alternatively act as a further blow (causing her to give up trying and give up on herself). It is very difficult to help these women to enter back into mainstream society – a world in which they feel guilty and where people frown on them because they were not ‘good mothers’. The grief and guilt experienced by some women (whose children have been adopted and so they can never have them back), can be acute and debilitating. Some of the long-term homeless women I have interviewed in day centres, prefer to bury this pain in a bottle or syringe. Part of their recovery from homelessness is to face up to these feelings and learn to live with themselves.

These problems can be compounded for those Asian women who belong to a culture where their partner and in-laws can take custody of their children and throw the mother out of the paternal home. Or where there is sufficient violence or abuse from their partner that they have to flee and seek alternative accommodation, but are forced to leave their children behind.

What are the Common Facts about Homelessness and their Solutions?

BEING HOMELESS

From my interviews with professionals working with the homeless and the police, it appears that it only takes 2-3 days for an individual living on the streets to learn how to be homeless. In those first few days, they:

- get over the traumatic shock of first being homeless and spending the night on the streets;
- learn where they can go to for food, clothing and laundry facilities;
- learn where the begging patches are (if they choose to beg);
- find out which spots are someone else’s sleeping spot;
- make friends or acquaintances on the streets that tell them what it is all about and how to survive.

After those first few days, they begin to learn how to survive and fit in with the rest of the homeless community and start to develop friendships. This offers some explanation as to why those who spend

less time on the streets are more successful in the resettlement process. This points to the need of early effective intervention for the newly homeless; and prevention of homelessness for vulnerable and precariously housed people.

HOSTEL PLACES

A hostel place with the right resettlement programme (this varies from person to person), means that individuals who have spent only a few nights sleeping rough can be housed within 3-6 months or earlier, depending on what caused them to become homeless in the first place (Dane, 1998).

For those who have been sleeping rough for a long time, especially those with a drink or drugs problem, the mentally ill and those with a history of self-harming, the decision to leave the streets does not come easily. Often, there is something that triggers a desire to leave the streets. When that trigger provides them with enough motivation and determination to succeed, they can often manage to secure and hold down a tenancy and gradually integrate back into mainstream society (Ravenhill, 1999).

Hostels can be a place to make friends or a place where people learn other habits, e.g. to take drugs. Many women often feel intimidated in a mixed sex hostel. They can be vulnerable to sexual abuse, exploitation or rape. Some more vulnerable women find themselves being bullied – even in a single sex hostel.

The hostel experience can move people from homelessness to settled accommodation. However, bad experiences in hostels can keep people on the streets or in squats for months and years, too afraid to try again. Thus, it is very important that, while tackling the problems of homelessness, those people also feel safe and secure in their hostel environment.

Some of the most difficult people to help are those with a history of self-harming or personality disorders. Some people use the environment of a hostel or night shelter to provide an environment where they feel 'safe' enough to overdose or harm themselves, either as a cry for help or because they do not want to die alone. Others cannot cope with living with a lot of other people and may become violent.¹

1 This information is part of what Shilhay hostel in Exeter have found when dealing with men who have chaotic behaviour.

LEAVING HOMELESSNESS

Leaving homelessness and resettling back into a 'housed' way of life in mainstream society requires a physical, emotional and psychological transition. This all takes time. Simply placing someone in accommodation does not prevent them from viewing themselves as homeless or automatically convert a flat or bed-sit into a home.

Many people who have been homeless, especially those that have lived on the streets for some time need a lot of support and help before they can take on a tenancy. They will continue to need support for months after being housed. Tenancies often fail because of a lack of tenant support. 85% of people who sleep rough have been homeless and re-housed in the past, but ended up returning to the streets, sometimes two or three years later (Randall and Brown, 1999; Dane, 1998). In contrast to the Rough Sleepers Initiative guidelines, it may take two years or more (not 3-6 months) for most people to recover from homelessness and adopt a more settled way of life. Without the necessary support, many tenancies fail, the result being that the individual ends up back in the hostel system or on the streets (Dane, 1998; Randall and Brown, 1999).

LEAVING FRIENDS BEHIND

Leaving the streets and/or hostel means leaving some very close friends behind. Research shows that individuals who sever all links with past homeless friends are more likely to succeed in maintaining a housed lifestyle in mainstream society. Whereas those that keep in touch with their homeless friends often either return to living on the streets or invite rowdy friends to their flat and then are evicted and thereby they lose their tenancy (Ravenhill, 1999).

Friends made on the streets and in hostels are unlike any other friendships many people have ever made. People are accepted for who and what they are, regardless of their problems. They are surrounded by people, in some cases, 24 hours a day. It is no wonder that when housed in a flat or bed-sit, individuals experience immense isolation and loneliness, at a time when they don't quite fit into hostel or street life, nor mainstream society.

Often an individual that has been housed, does not view their tenancy as a product of their hard work and motivation to succeed, but as good luck. They see themselves as lucky to have accommodation in comparison to all their friends who are still homeless. There is evidence to show that because these people feel that they gained their accommodation because of luck, they fail to seek help when they need it

(Dane, 1998). They see the success of their tenure as 'down to them to succeed' or it is part of their luck if they succeed.

BUDGETING SKILLS

Another hurdle to overcome is budgeting skills. Many people lose their tenancies through not paying their bills. This can be especially difficult for young people who have never held a tenancy or lived on their own. Often they do not see why they should have to pay rent or why rent seems so expensive. This does not appear to be born out of a feeling that 'the world owed them a living' (a common assumption), but from a lack of understanding of the real world. Some older homeless people (especially those with drink or drug habits, can prefer to spend the summer months predominantly sleeping rough, this saves them money and allows them the freedom to drink or take drugs wherever and whenever they wish.

Social Exclusion and Women's Homelessness

Although street homeless people are some of the most excluded people in our society, the process of social exclusion started long before they became homeless and had to sleep rough or in squats. In many cases, the process of social exclusion began during childhood and was simply compounded by the additional responsibilities of adulthood.

The following are factors which stem from the interviews and are backed up by the literature, which contribute to social exclusion and homelessness:

- Family breakdown, disputes with parents, step parented families;
- Low educational achievement or learning difficulties;
- Child abuse;
- Time in local authority care;
- Poverty;
- Unemployment;
- Domestic violence;
- Divorce or relationship breakdown;
- Loss of a local network of friends and social support networks;
- Alcohol or drug addiction;
- Mental health problems;
- Contact with the criminal justice system especially during childhood (Randall and Brown, 1999; Smith, Gilford and O'Sullivan, 1998; Dane, 1998; Ravenhill, 1999).

Homelessness and social exclusion are rarely caused by one single factor. It is the accumulation of several factors and the way these factors

interact that results in people becoming socially excluded from the society they live in. Even then many socially excluded women never become homeless (though some become vulnerable to homelessness), instead they hover on the margins. Only a minority of socially excluded women affected by any one of the factors above actually become homeless and have to sleep rough.

The effect of social exclusion on homelessness means that it is rarely sufficient to provide a homeless person with a flat or some form of accommodation. Their homelessness is the result of a long process; a chain of events, decisions and personal factors, that together cause confusion, undermine confidence and self-respect, and erode social networks that would otherwise have acted as a support network or buffer to prevent homelessness. Thus for this process of exclusion to be reversed, a process of inclusion needs to be set in place. Time needs to be spent in understanding each woman's problems, the life events and the decisions they made that led to them becoming homeless. Each of these issues needs to be addressed and resolved, often as one set of issues or problems are sorted out another set of underlying causes emerge which also need to be addressed. Social inclusion is not complete once a person has been moved into their own accommodation. Research shows that this is when the real battle for inclusion actually begins (Randall and Brown, 1999).

Often social exclusion for the homeless becomes a question of access to services and facilities.

- a. For the rough sleeper, especially those with drink, drug and/or behavioural problems, they are often barred from pubs, cafes, restaurants, some shops and public toilets. They are excluded from access to food, toiletry and washing facilities, although this is often not without just cause. Many hostels and projects exclude homeless people with severe drink or drug problems, especially if they have behaviour problems (Randall and Brown, 1999). Thus they are denied access to what is often the only help that is available to them.
- b. Single people are excluded from access to housing via the homeless persons' legislation because they are not regarded as statutorily homeless.² That is unless they are classed as vulnerable

2 The statutory definition of homelessness defines families with dependent children and without access to accommodation as homeless and those accepted as in 'priority need' on the grounds of 'vulnerability' (i.e. age – over 60, pregnant, mental ill health, or young people in danger of exploitation,

- because of a mental handicap or illness or because they are in danger of sexual or financial exploitation.
- c. Young people (16-18 year olds) are excluded from benefits until they can prove they are homeless, and even then they are limited to a lower rate of benefits.
 - d. In the areas like those studied in this research, people who claim DSS benefits are often excluded from renting in the private rented sector, as private landlords can earn more money from professionals and do not want to have to wait weeks for their rent as benefits are sorted out.
 - e. People without a permanent address are excluded from access to employment. Those living in hostels and gaining employment often get lower paid and lower grade work.
 - f. As it is mainly men who form the visible signs of homelessness (i.e. rough sleepers), most hostel places are for men. Women are therefore excluded from many hostels because they are not male. Women who are nervous of sharing a hostel with men are further disadvantaged as there are not many female only hostels. Where there are female only places, there is often an age limit, so some women are further excluded from access to shelter because of age.

Exclusion from access to services, the migration of homeless people to areas where there are better facilities (e.g. day centres, hostels, good rehabilitation programmes), and rejection by their peers in mainstream society results in social isolation. Once a woman has moved away from family and friends (either geographically or socially), the only friends they usually make are people of like mind, living in the same circumstances. Thus, once homeless, they join the homeless community where they make friends, learn how to survive on the streets and they often spend the day drinking and keeping each other company. This is a process of inclusion, but not inclusion into mainstream society, it is inclusion into the homeless world.

To recover from homelessness, they often have to go through a second form of social exclusion, by excluding themselves from the homeless community, but without necessarily feeling included into mainstream society. This is especially so for those with drink and/or drug problems. For them to recover from alcoholism or drug addiction, it often means leaving behind their old drinking or shooting-up friends. This means that most homeless people tend to suffer from acute

either financially or sexually). This excludes the vast majority of single homeless people.

loneliness and feelings of social isolation, especially when they have left their hostel or rehabilitation programme and are trying to settle into mainstream society.

It is difficult for re-housed people to participate in mainstream society, on several fronts. Often the following points become further sources of exclusion from participating in mainstream societies usual activities:

- 1) It is difficult for them to find work, often they are not ready or capable of working when they are first re-housed and need time to sort themselves out (e.g. they are not mentally and emotionally stable enough, or they do not have the physical strength).
- 2) Often they have not worked for some time and so do not have an up to date CV.
- 3) Many homeless people are re-housed with little or no furniture, this makes it difficult to invite new friends round.
- 4) Although they receive the same level of income support as other people with no income, many homeless people have difficulty with budgeting. In addition, the start-up costs of starting from scratch in a new home with, for example, food and household cleaning items, can leave them short of money for some time.
- 5) At first it is difficult for re-housed people to join in everyday conversations with people they meet as they have few frames of reference that they can chat about (i.e. work, family, holidays, where they were this time last month).
- 6) Recovering alcoholics cannot go to the pub for a pint to find a place to make friends.
- 7) Women who have had their children put into care, want to talk about their children, but fear that society will judge them if they know about the children.

The government, after spending nine years funding the three phases of the Rough Sleepers Initiative and conducting research into homelessness has examined the impact of the various schemes designed to alleviate homelessness. This has changed the governments focus from cure to prevention. The main focus for now will be on stemming the continuous tide of newly homeless people, preventing them from becoming homeless in the first place and in particular, ending the need for people to sleep rough. With this in mind, the Social Exclusion Unit has set a target for reducing the number of homeless people sleeping rough by two thirds by the year 2002 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). There is evidence emerging that there is a second level of prevention that the government and charities will need to focus on, which is the prevention

of people, who have been through rehabilitation schemes and have been re-housed, from returning to the streets. Funds in the future will be increasingly focused on projects that tackle the prevention of homelessness.

The Hostels in Context

Homelessness in Reigate – A Profile

COMMUTER BELT

Reigate is a town in a popular part of the South East's commuter belt. Its easy access to London, Gatwick airport and other major cities makes it an ideal suburb for homeowners wanting to escape city life and find cheaper house prices. However, this creates a set of housing problems that predominantly affect the young, the single and those on a low income. It is difficult for people in these groups to buy their own property, especially in an area where local house prices are rising faster than incomes (Community Services Department, 1998). This makes them dependent on the private rented sector or the local authority and housing associations.

House prices and the demand for private rented accommodation in the area means that landlords/ladies can charge high rents and ask for high bonds (rent in advance). Many properties could be let several times over. Most landlords avoid taking in people on housing benefit, as they can let their property at a much higher price and without waiting for housing benefit to be sorted out. This means that the vast majority of properties are out of the price range of people on a low income and young people just starting out in life.

In Reigate, the housing department recognises that there is a shortage of low cost social housing units and housing association properties. This is due to several factors:

- the sale of local authority properties under the government 'right to buy' scheme, that has been running since the 1980s;
- a reduction in the number of new social housing properties being built;
- reduced funding for and building of new housing association units.

The net result of this is a shortage of low cost accommodation that is easily accessible by those on a low income.

EXPORTING HOMELESS PEOPLE

Many people who present themselves as homeless to the local authority are not accepted as statutorily homeless (Randall and Brown, 1999). That is, they are not accepted as legally homeless under the definition laid out in the 1996 Housing Act. The vast majority of single people (especially men) are not included in this definition, even if they are sleeping rough at the time. At best the local authority merely has a duty to advise.

In Reigate, there is currently a shortfall between need and alternative provisions (i.e. hostel places) for homeless people. The local authority's community service department commissioned research into the housing needs of young people in the Reigate area in 1995/6. It was discovered that this shortfall was particularly acute for people aged 16-21. This research identified a need for 30-60 temporary/emergency bed-spaces for single young people. Problems are exacerbated further for 16 and 17 year olds, as they are not legally old enough to hold a tenancy in their own right, so they do not have the option of renting in the private sector, even if they could afford to.

As a result of the shortage of accommodation, high rents, few hostel places and the councils' legal duty towards people presenting as homeless, many single people (especially young people) are directed to the next nearest available emergency accommodation, which is currently outside the Borough in areas like Leatherhead and Guildford, thus exporting the problem. This is not an uncommon practice, it shifts the problem elsewhere and can increase the likelihood of people having to sleep rough as a last resort.

EMPLOYMENT

Most people in the Borough of Reigate and Banstead commute elsewhere for employment. For those looking for employment nearer to home, the vast majority of work involves a high level of skills, strong secretarial or office administrative skills, jobs that require good training and plenty of work experience. This makes it difficult for younger people to find work.

A significant minority of those people presenting as homeless have been in care and therefore are more likely to have achieved less at school, left school early and have few or no qualifications. Again this disadvantages them in the employment market.

STREET HOMELESSNESS IN THE REIGATE AREA

At first glance, there does not appear to be a street homeless problem in Reigate. There are no immediately visible signs of people sleeping

rough. However, 19% of the 107 organisations responding to the questionnaires for Reigate Council's report on the 'Housing Needs of Young People' had contact with people sleeping rough (Community Services, 1996). There is no direct evidence of regular rough sleeping in the borough, but there is 'anecdotal' evidence that some rough sleeping does occur. My own interviews with residents at Wayside hostel in Reigate pointed to people sleeping rough in the Priory area, especially during the summer months.

Although there are no visible signs of homelessness, Reigate does have a hidden homeless problem. Many people, after leaving the parental or shared (with a partner) home, spend time staying with friends or relatives before becoming homeless.

EXISTING SERVICES IN THE AREA

Wayside Hostel – a 15 bed hostel for single young women aged between 16 and 35 years of age. Access is by referral and interview only, although applicants can be self-referral. The hostel is virtually always full so gaining a place is not easy.

Women's Refuge – a refuge for women at risk of domestic violence.

Night Stop – 2-3 places for emergency overnight accommodation for single young people aged 16-25 who suddenly find themselves to be homeless. Those in need of a bed stay in the home of approved volunteer hosts.

Next Step – for 16-25 year olds this project primarily acts as a 'go between' to negotiate between landlords and young people to find rented accommodation for them and to act as a guarantor for rent payments (rent guarantee type scheme).

Homelessness in Exeter – A Profile

UNIVERSITY CITY

Exeter is a University City. This means that most cheap accommodation for rent is taken up by students or converted into holiday Bed and Breakfast flats. Consequently, for those on low incomes or who are vulnerable, there is little accommodation about. This means that landlords can easily find tenants and, in some cases, can charge rents higher than the DSS benefit level. In addition, the delay in landlords receiving housing benefit cheques for tenants receiving benefits, means that DSS claimants are not an attractive option to them. This kind of

pressure on the local housing market inevitably results in some homelessness.

The local authority is under extreme pressure to provide for Exeter residents who qualify as statutorily homeless. There are only 7 bed spaces per annum allocated from local authority stock. Each hostel and charity working with the homeless have to push forward their clients who are ready to be housed each year. This means that these vacancies are often filled by the end of January, with no more council housing places coming available for the rest of the year.

One of the biggest housing problems in Exeter that affects homeless people is what is known as 'silting up'. This is a phrase used to explain the process where the network of facilities (i.e. direct access hostel → hostel → permanent accommodation) gets so full of people that it becomes 'log jammed'. No one else can be taken off the streets because people further along the system cannot find permanent accommodation and move out of hostels. This works in a similar way to the selling 'chain' experienced by house buyers when they try to move. These chains can take months to clear. The public, private and housing association rented sectors have consistently proved incapable of supplying enough accommodation to meet demand.

MAGNET OR MECCA?

Added to this is the migration of some people from other areas or cities (e.g. Plymouth) who move into Exeter. They know about existing facilities for the homeless which are better than those in their own area, or because they are running away from some issue centred around their own area. This increases the number of people presenting as homeless in the area and the number of people looking for cheap rentable accommodation.

HOMELESSNESS IN EXETER

Exeter does have a problem with homelessness, especially street homelessness. This is recognised by the government, hence the area receives funding from the Rough Sleepers Initiative Budget. The police estimate that there are on average 25-35 people sleeping rough each night in the area (this number is in addition to those who are already living in hostels in the area). Unlike the larger cities including London, most homeless people in Exeter do not sleep in full view of the general public, instead they use the graveyards, parks, sheds, squats and skips.

EXISTING SERVICES IN THE AREA

Drop-in Day Centre

St Petrock's drop-in day centre, has 60-70 people come through their doors each day. As it is possible for an individual to attend more than one during a single day, this represents an average of 40-45 different individuals, who come in for meals and evening activities. St Petrock's also runs the only outreach team in the area as part of the daytime project, members of the outreach team literally go out on the streets to find people sleeping rough and to tell them about the services available in the area.

Direct Access Hostels - Men – Palace Gate is a direct access hostel for men, run by Shilhay. They offer predominantly dormitory style accommodation to men with chaotic behaviour (i.e. those with drink/drug problems, mental health problems, etc). The hostel is nearly always full, they turn away on average 3-4 men a day. They have a three-tier resettlement system within the hostel designed to move people at their own pace, through the stages and onto the next stage hostel where they get their own room, and eventually into their own accommodation.

Direct Access Hostels – Women – Esther Community is the only direct access facility in the area for women, run by KeyChange, it is a 9 bed hostel. Although they do not keep a waiting list as such, they are full 93% of the time. It is not certain how many people are turned away on average per day or per week. Women are offered keyworker support and some resettlement support. As a direct access hostel, it has a 13 week time limit on the length of stay.

YMCA and YWCA Hostels – Currently the YMCA and YWCA have two large projects that cater for people aged between 16-25 with special needs (namely people leaving care, on probation, social service referrals or people suffering from mental health problems). There is always a waiting list of 6-7 people and they can be on the waiting list for 4-5 months on average. Some work orientation is provided along with warden assisted secure flats. Access to these facilities is by interview only, and only those who are felt to be capable of coping with the rules and a degree of independent living are accepted.

The YMCA also has 8 flats for those clients who they feel are ready for independent living but cannot find alternative accommodation.

Women's Refuge – a refuge for women at risk of domestic violence.

HAG (Housing Action Group) – deals specifically with finding accommodation for homeless people and people in need of housing in the Exeter area. They do not provide accommodation, but liaise with landlords to find accommodation for their clients. They offer some resettlement support, but this is usually after the client has moved in, rather than preparatory work.

The Research Methods Used

Three research methods were used to gain enough information to carry out an accurate social audit of:

1. Depth Interviews (10) with residents at Wayside and Esther Community
2. Participant Observation in Esther Community
3. Interviews with hostel staff and managers and other officials working with the homeless in both Exeter and Reigate.

1. Depth Interviews

To gain a variety of good quality, detailed information unstructured and semi-structured interviews were carried out with residents at both Wayside and Esther community. Each interview lasted on average approximately 40 minutes. Information was gathered from both a retrospective and current perspectives, to gain an idea of how and why each person became homeless, what happened to them while they were homeless; and their hopes for the future. This information gives a clear indication of the types of women KeyChange is working with, their problems and difficulties, and the type of help that they need.

Ideally, interviews with current residents and past residents would have given a clearer picture of the extent to which women who had lived in KeyChange hostels had benefited from their time there. However, neither hostel had a formal follow-up procedure of ex-residents and therefore none could be contacted. The absence of follow-up was in part because most women already had social workers and keyworkers involved in their case, so extra contact from the hostel was not necessary for the residents well-being. Some of these women, although housed, still remained vulnerable and in crisis and therefore it was inappropriate to add to their stress by interviewing them directly.

Obtaining interviews with current residents was not without problems either. Most women at both Wayside and Esther Community were wary about being interviewed, especially when they received no direct benefit, other women did not want to go over their problems and circumstances yet again. However, after assurances of confidentiality and assurances that they would not be pressed into talking about issues that they could not or did not want to discuss, five people from each hostel were interviewed.

Esther Community, Exeter, was visited three times to gain the five interviews. At that hostel, there was open access, allowing time to be spent mingling with the women and getting to know them better in a relaxed atmosphere. The women were approached in the communal rooms for interview, the research was explained to them and they were invited to take part. Staff also tried to encourage some women to talk to me, or pointed out which women were most likely to consent to being interviewed.

Wayside hostel, Reigate, was visited twice to gain the five interviews. At that hostel, the women were far more suspicious of being interviewed after taking part in an educational video produced by KeyChange earlier in 1998. Etta Colville, the hostel manager, managed to persuade four women to be interviewed in a group (rather than individually), a fifth person was interviewed separately with Etta sitting in. Prior to the interview, Etta had discussed with that resident how much she could disclose on her behalf if she found it difficult to talk to me. The group interview meant that very personal information was not disclosed, but the general discussions round some of the topics proved very enlightening.

At the end of every interview, a wind-down session was initiated to allow the women to relax, to ask any questions about the research and the researcher and to discuss how they felt after the interview was over.

The accuracy of these interviews was checked in two ways. Firstly, interviews previously conducted with other homeless women at different locations in London, acted as a guide to the plausibility of the information. Secondly, bearing in mind that confidentiality had been assured, some facts were checked with staff.

2. *Participant Observation*

Participant observation was only possible at Esther Community, where open access was given. Time was spent chatting to the women as they prepared meals, joining them for meals and sitting with them to watch television. This offered insight into the dynamics of the community, the

problems individuals were coping with, and the way the women supported and interacted with each other.

Wayside residents attended the video launch, I was able to talk to some of the women who attended; although the conversations were brief, insight into the way they viewed and felt about their homelessness was gained.

3. Interviews

A number of interviews were carried out both with hostel staff and managers at Wayside and Esther Community, as well as other hostels in the areas. A spokesperson from each of: the police, the local housing authority and other key officials dealing with homelessness in their area were interviewed. Thus an overall picture of the extent, and type, of homelessness was gained for each area. In addition, to the facilities that were on offer; and the way that KeyChange fitted into the overall picture of provision for each area. Most importantly, these interviews highlighted:

- the continuous shortfall between bed-spaces and demand;
- the types of people who were not catered for by anyone;
- gaps in provision – where specialist help was needed but none existed in the area;
- the interdependence of each organisation on the others for referrals, specialist help and at times, moral support.

Representativeness of the Sample

Esther Community is a 9 bed hostel. Over the three visits approximately 15 women would have been resident. Therefore the five women that were interviewed would represent approximately a third of the residents.

Wayside hostel is a 15 bed hostel, over the two visits that were made approximately 20 women would have been resident. Therefore the five women that were interviewed would represent approximately a quarter of the residents.

It is impossible to do more than reflect the views of the sample interviewed, I believe they reflect the resident's views, life experiences and the value of the 'KeyChange' experience.

Research Findings

The ten interviews carried out for the social audit between November 1998 and February 1999 (five at Wayside, Reigate and five at Esther Community, Exeter) generated a number of useful and interesting findings. Most of the findings were not easily comparable across the two hostels. This is due to four main factors: -

1. The different record keeping methods used by each hostel. Exeter has a much more statistical quantitative record keeping method with easily quantifiable categories, whereas Reigate uses a more qualitative method of record keeping which offers rich detail about clients, but does not have easily accessible statistics on their clients. Both methods are adequate and have their own advantages and disadvantages. The main disadvantage is that there is no easy way of comparing the progress of both hostels equally.
2. The hostels are completely different, Exeter's Esther Community is a short stay (3 months maximum) direct access hostel, whereas Reigate's Wayside is a long stay hostel (3 years maximum). This means that the type of intervention work done with the women along with the end results are vastly different, as far more can be done to rehabilitate someone over a sustained period of time rather than three months.
3. The type of homeless people who apply for residence differs between the areas, as has already been discussed. Both types of homelessness require a slightly different management style, and the women on the whole, require different degrees of intervention and help.
4. Access for interviewing residents was different, due mainly to both the type of clients using the hostel and the fact that one hostel was short stay and the other long stay.

It is worth noting that throughout this section quotes from the interview transcripts have been used. To protect the women's identity, they have only been identified by their interview number (e.g. Int.05) and the hostels area (i.e. Exeter or Reigate). As a further means of protecting the interviewee's identity any names of people or places have been removed, where this has happened this is indicated in the text by square brackets, which are also used to indicate added words to help clarity.

What can be Compared?

1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE HOSTEL

All the residents interviewed commented on the fact that when they first arrived at a KeyChange hostel they were surprised at the friendly atmosphere.

“The staff were so friendly, they tried to make me feel at ease”. (Int.07 Exeter)

“I like the fact that everyone seems to get on. The atmosphere’s relaxed and friendly, the first night I was here, I had a good night’s sleep, that’s a good sign of how comfortable I felt”. (Int.09 Exeter)

“Its not too bad here, it feels a bit like having a family. There is a really homely feel here; they even eat meals together”. (Int.03 Reigate)

Most residents had an impression of what a hostel would be like before they moved in. These were often negative impressions based on past experiences of hostel living or assumptions based on peer group talk or the media. Most residents were pleasantly surprised by KeyChange’s standards, often commenting about cleanliness and the standards of hygiene.

“I had an impression in my head about what a hostel would look like before I moved into Wayside, the hostel is a lot better than that”. (Int.02 Reigate)

“I thought the hostel would be a nasty place, with a lot of bitchy girls there. But it’s not, the girls are friendly, you can have a laugh and a joke and they share their fags. The staff are friendly too, it feels like one big family, but I’ve only been here two weeks” (Int.07 Exeter)

“I lived in another hostel once before, it was a hostel with children in it. I had to sleep on a sofa because there was no spare bed. The kitchen was a mess, it was never clean, unlike this kitchen. I left that hostel to doss down with friends, I usually doss with friends now instead of using hostels”. (Int.09 Exeter)

“It’s warm and clean here and you are allowed to use the washing machine and dryer. The staff are OK too. (Int.08 Exeter)

2. DEMAND FOR HOSTEL BEDS

From the statistics of the number of people offered a bed, and the number of people either referred to the hostels or contacting the hostels for a place to stay; it was clear that only half or less of the applicants

were actually offered residential accommodation within the hostel. For example:

Between August and December 1998 Esther Community received 88 referrals for accommodation. 46 of these had to be referred on to other organisations because Esther Community was full.

The over-riding reason for this was the fact that the hostel was full at the time of application. This meant that there was almost always a waiting list of some form for both hostels. This demonstrates the high demand for hostel beds in both areas. KeyChange hostels are always in demand because of the high standard of cleanliness, hygiene and the friendly atmosphere. Although urgent referrals and enquirers are referred on to other hostels in the area, this does not mean that there are bed spaces available.

“I heard about KeyChange hostel through St Petrock’s Centre. I had to wait three weeks to get in here. I came for a meal and asked if I could stay. There aren't any other hostels, except the YWCA, and that has a waiting list”. (Int. 036 Exeter)

“There needs to be a system so if you’re single and have nowhere to live you could find somewhere to stay immediately. When the housing [department] would not help, I was sent to HAG [Housing Action Group]. At HAG, you have to go through all the rigmarole of an interview before you get a safe place, but you have to wait four days for an interview. I have no survival skills. I’ve never been in this situation before”. (Int.06 Exeter)

a. Exeter

In Exeter, despite the fact that a second YMCA foyer-style hostel is planned, there is and will continue to be a shortage of bed-spaces for women aged 16-25 who have drink, drug or behavioural problems. There is also a severe shortage of bed-spaces for women over the age of 25. There are no bed-spaces for women over the age of 35. There are no facilities in the area for women (especially the over 25s) who have been through a drink or drug rehabilitation programme, and who need somewhere to live on leaving that establishment. Often these women cannot get alternative accommodation or are not ready to take on a tenancy and live independently in the wider community.

Esther Community is likely to continue to be full to capacity for some time to come. There will also be a tendency for them to take women with drink, drug or behavioural problems, and those who are over the age of 25 as these are the women that are not accepted by other hostels in the area.

b. Reigate

In Reigate there is a shortage of every type of hostel bed at the moment. According to the Director of Community Services, Tom Crowley, permission has been given for a YMCA hostel to be built in Redhill (an adjoining town), to alleviate the high rate of youth homelessness in the area. The YMCA hostel will not be in a position to receive residents for at least another 18 months. Thus, there will continue to be a high demand for bed-spaces at Wayside hostel in Reigate throughout that period. Once the YMCA hostel is built, there is every indication that Wayside will continue to be in high demand. There will still be no other facilities in the area for women struggling with drink, drug or behavioural problems and no facilities for women over the age of 25. In addition, because Wayside is a small hostel, it is ideal for women who are particularly vulnerable and who would not cope or would be bullied in a larger hostel setting.

Both hostels have problems with 'silting-up'. 'Silting-up' is a phrase used by commentators on homelessness to refer to the way hostels become full to capacity, with some bed-spaces blocked by residents who have to stay either beyond the hostel time limit and/or after they are ready to leave; because there is no other suitable accommodation to move on to. Suitable accommodation may be, for example, a drug rehabilitation unit or permanent rented accommodation.

At the time of the research, both hostels had people staying over their time limit because there was nowhere else for them to live. There are several points that can be made here: -

- a) The nature of the housing market in both areas means that there is a shortage of suitable, affordable housing in the area (see profiles above). In particular, the high demand and high rents in the private rented sector, means that women who are ready to move back into the community and mainstream society cannot help themselves. They are dependent on Housing Association and local authority allocations.
- b) There is a need for Housing Associations and the local authority in both areas to consider the number of dwellings they offer to

homeless people (especially the non-statutory homeless) (Randall and Brown, 1999).

- c) There is scope for KeyChange to expand their work in both areas.
- i. In Reigate, there is work in progress to build an extension to the existing premises, thereby increasing the number of bed-spaces, but this will make little impact on demand. There is every indication that there will be room for a second KeyChange hostel in addition to the YMCA hostel once it is built.
 - ii. In Exeter, there is room to expand the work in two directions:
 - ◆ A second stage hostel akin to Wayside that could work with women with long-term problems over a much broader time scale. Thereby allowing them time to be rehabilitated and to recover fully from homelessness and/or alcohol, drug, behavioural or mental health problems.
 - ◆ There is a need for a direct access night shelter style hostel for women who are not ready to leave the streets but periodically want a break from the streets. This hostel could feed people into the existing Esther Community hostel.

3. THE AMOUNT OF HELP RECEIVED

a. *Practical support*

Residents commented on the fact that the staff were prepared to “go the extra mile” to help them sort things out, especially practical issues, like collecting belongings, sorting out DSS or housing benefit claims. The residents seemed surprised both at the level of practical help and the sensitive and caring way in which it was often carried out. Even the residents who had lived at Wayside for a number of years, still commented on the level of practical support they received.

“The staff are wonderful and helpful, they even leant me the bus fare for an important visit – I paid them back later when my giro came”. (Int.09 Exeter)

“When I first moved in, Andy took me back to my old flat to collect some things. Most of the furniture was sold for drugs, but I managed to get some photographs. The landlord was closing the place down” (Int.08 Exeter)

“When there is a problem, Etta helps and she keeps on helping until the problem is sorted out. She just won’t give up”. (Int.02 Reigate)

“Etta is very understanding and caring, it’s the extra little things that really count and mean a lot. At Christmas, I got a present and card, today it’s my birthday, and she remembered it and bought me another present and card”. (Int.01 Reigate)

b. Keyworker Support

Both hostels use a keyworker system. This is much more overt at Esther Community, where regular sessions are actively pursued by keyworkers. The difference between the two approaches to keyworking is due to the difference in the length of stay at each hostel. Wayside has time to let residents settle in and work with residents over sustained period of time, at the resident’s own pace. Whereas Esther Community has to make an impact on the women’s lives within three months, during this time they need to find out what the woman’s needs are and help them to find the most appropriate form of accommodation to move on to.

Most women did not talk about their keyworker, as this was their private space, where one-to-one advice and counsel is received. Those who commented liked their keyworker and found the sessions useful. However, according to staff at Exeter, it is sometimes hard for the keyworker to arrange sessions as residents can forget about appointments, stay in bed or go off the premises to avoid meeting and keeping previously arranged appointments. It seems to be that when women are in crisis and in need of the most help, they have a tendency to either cancel or not arrive for the appointment. This makes it very hard to support them.

Keyworker sessions can be harrowing for the keyworker as they listen to residents pain, absorb their anger and frustration, try to support them through difficult times, depression or suicidal feelings. Meanwhile they still have to remain objective, guide individual women along the best paths to resolve their problems and empower the women to take control of their own lives. This will never be an easy task. Many people when reaching difficult times in their lives prefer a quick fix solution, homeless women are no different. The keyworker has to work with their client to help them realise that there are often no quick answers to complicated problems, that often they will make mistakes and fail, but failure is part of life and part of recovery.

The research showed that some of the newer residents at Esther Community (resident for one week or less), did not realise that they

could have keyworker support, that there was a time limit to their stay, and what type of help was available to them. The amount of information they had received seemed to depend on who had booked them into the hostel, and what time of day or night they had arrived. The assistant hostel manager, explained that often residents were given a lot of information on induction, which was easily forgotten as there was so much to take in. To compensate for this, another meeting was usually held with the resident at the end of their first week, to go through some of the details again and to assign them to a suitable keyworker.

c. Support workers from other agencies

Both hostels liase with and use specialist support workers for women with specific problems. The most commonly used by both hostels are the following: -

- | | |
|--|---|
| ◆ Social Worker | For residents either because of their age, mental health or disability, and if they have children. |
| ◆ CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse) | For residents with mental health problems and in need of counselling and psychiatric support. |
| ◆ Probation Officer | For residents who have been in prison or have been taken to court and placed on a probation order. |
| ◆ Drug or Alcohol Support Worker | For alcoholic or drug addicted residents. |
| ◆ Sexual or Needle Transmitted Diseases Specialist | For residents in need of support for diseases like Hepatitis, Aids and other illnesses or diseases associated with drugs. They monitor the illness/disease, give health advice and in some cases counsel clients. |

A by-product of using other agencies and support workers is that the number of keyworkers assigned to individuals rises and this can cause confusion. Each keyworker discusses the woman's life history and the problems they are going through at that time and the type of help that is needed.

“I’ve a keyworker with counselling as well as here [Esther Community]. I’ll have three key workers eventually. I like my keyworker here.” (Int.09 Exeter)

Residents wanting to find work or who were house hunting found that multiple keyworker sessions ate into their spare time. Those with compulsory sessions (i.e. with social workers, probation officers), sometimes resented these, viewing them as an invasions of privacy, or as “bureaucratic red-tape that gets you nowhere”.

There is a need within both hostels to keep formal records of the number of keyworkers and professionals assigned to each individual and the nature of the support they offer. This would not only allow KeyChange to fill in any gaps in provision, but also to support the women in seeking help and talking through issues with the most qualified person to help.

4. AFTER CARE

- a. Neither hostel has any formal aftercare set up for residents after they leave the hostel. However, residents do know that if they want to stay in touch, need a chat or advice they can contact hostel staff or visit the hostel after they have left.
- b. Four out of the ten residents interviewed felt that they may need support after they left the hostel. Of those that would have preferred follow-on support, two were anxious about their ability to cope on their own if they had a “big problem” with anything from bills and DSS forms to ill health.

“What I really need when I leave here is more help. I would prefer someone to visit me, someone there so that if things start going wrong I can talk with them and they will help me to sort things out. Leaving is very scary”. (Int.03 Reigate)

“When I leave here it’d be good to have some form of contact, because say two years down the line [or much sooner] something drastic could happen. Then I’d want to know that there was some contact – be it just a phone call from staff asking how you’re doing, or even being able to make friends with the staff here”. (Int.06 Exeter)

- c. Other organisations or officials, e.g. social workers, probation officers, housing association keyworkers do carry out a lot of aftercare with residents. However, there does not appear to be any formal agreements between the hostel and these organisations regarding the nature and extent of aftercare, or even any guarantees that aftercare is available. There is a need for KeyChange hostels to formalise aftercare arrangements, making proper agreements with providers with regard to the extent and

nature of the support being offered. It may be necessary for KeyChange to consider filling any gaps in provision (if they are to succeed in achieving long-term success) to help homeless people back into mainstream society.

After care is an important issue in the long-term success of the resettlement of homeless people. Recent research has shown that homeless people who are resettled into the community need follow-up support for a minimum of 6-12 months, which is 2-3 times that recommended by the Rough Sleepers Initiative (Dane, 1998). Too many keyworkers can cause confusion, and lead to inadequate and fragmented support. Most resettled people trust their hostel keyworker or hostel staff more than any other keyworker or professional (Ravenhill, 1999). This is mainly because the hostel keyworker has been there through some of the most difficult transitions in their life, they have not let them down or rejected them and thus earned their trust. Especially in the smaller hostels, staff are viewed as good friends rather than workers. In the case of Wayside in Reigate, the hostel manager is often viewed more as a mother figure than a hostel manager.

This level of after support is not easy to maintain as it is time consuming and exists over and above hostel staffs regular duties. Although Esther Community in Exeter is a short-stay hostel, some women do move directly into accommodation (as opposed to other hostels or back on the streets). According to existing research, the longer a person has been homeless, especially if this has included street homelessness, the more long-term sustained support they are likely to need if they are to remain housed and cope with a tenancy and all the responsibilities that go with that tenancy (Dane, 1998; Randall and Brown, 1999). This suggests that despite the fact that Esther Community “is not designed to be a therapeutic hostel”, some consideration as to after care ought to be given to those women moving into their own accommodation directly from the hostel.

After Care for Wayside residents, on the whole, does not need to be as intensive as the type of after care needed for long term rough sleepers. The three year maximum stay means that most women do not leave the hostel until they are capable of coping. However, they still remain vulnerable to homelessness, loneliness and the fears of living alone. The relationship that Wayside residents have with the hostel and hostel staff is far more intense than that at Esther community, by virtue of the length of stay. Thus links with the hostel and hostel staff become very important.

At Wayside, there have been attempts made to keep in contact with women once they have left the hostel, this is predominantly carried out on an informal basis, i.e. they telephone Etta, the hostel manager, to update her on their progress. Etta also organised regular, shared meals on Monday evenings at the hostel for ex-residents to come back and visit. This has been met with varying degrees of success, often no one actually turns up. More formal after care is needed, some of this is absorbed by other professionals, but on the whole it is difficult to offer such help with existing staff levels and time commitments.

5. BENEFITS AND INCOME IN GENERAL

Money is always a contentious issue and this is no different with homeless people. Common myths are that they either have no money and that is why they are destitute or that they have lots of money and get a good income from begging, but drink all their money or spend it on drugs. The truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. Homeless people over the age of 18 have access to DSS benefits whilst on the streets. Once in a hostel they can claim housing benefit and Income support or Job Seekers Allowance. Although they have an income, this does not mean that it is easy to make ends meet, the need to 'eat out' most of the time is a big drain on finances, without the added burden of cigarette, drink or drug addiction.

For the women interviewed at both Wayside and Esther Community, money was at issue on several fronts: -

- a) Why should we have to pay rent for a hostel room?
- b) Why should we have to pay for food?
- c) It is difficult to survive on a benefits cheque.

a. *Why should we have to pay rent for a hostel room?*

Women questioning why they should have to pay rent for a hostel room, were predominantly found at Esther Community. None of the women interviewed commented, but the women who chatted to me in the kitchen or TV lounge during the observation times, commented on the fact that they had to pay rent for their room. They argued that as they were homeless, housing benefit ought to cover the whole cost of rent. This attitude was confirmed by staff, who noted that a minority of women simply did not pay their rent, and after being warned several times had to be evicted. Other women also managed to play the system very well, they knew the upper limit of arrears permitted before eviction so always paid enough money to keep themselves from being evicted, but never fully cleared their debts and often left still owing money.

Although at first sight it may seem harsh that women are evicted for not paying rent, which means there is a strong chance of them having to sleep on the streets or in squats, it is still a necessary part of resettlement. Women who truly want to leave homelessness behind need to start taking responsibility for themselves and their actions. They know before accepting a place in a hostel that they have to register for housing benefit and contribute towards their rent, still there are some who push the rules to see how much they can get away with. There are others who either have such chronic drink or drug problems that they would rather run the risk of having to sleep rough than pay £10 per week rent. Some women just want a room for a while so they can get a few good nights sleep, hot baths and clean clothes or escape some of the coldest nights. They are happy to be evicted and see no reason why they should waste money on rent.

Here again, there is an argument for having a night shelter type hostel arrangement for these women. A place where women who need somewhere to stay, but are not ready for rehabilitation and assessment, can stay on a first come first served, ad hoc basis until they are ready to commit to rehabilitation.

b. Why should we have to pay for food?

Comments were made by interviewees at both hostels with regard to paying for food, although this was for very different reasons.

Esther Community

On my first visit to Esther Community in November, many women complained that they had to pay a contribution of £20 per week towards their food. They argued that they would never normally spend that much money on food and that they could provide for themselves more economically. The hostel manager had already taken action on this matter and after that month meals were no longer to be provided. Cheap meals (25p for a main course) could be bought at the homeless drop-in day centre at St Petrock's, or women could buy in and prepare their own food.

At my next visit, most women seemed happy with this arrangement, but some newer residents felt that they should still be able to get some food items free at the hostel (especially bread, butter, tomato sauce, etc.). One interviewee objected to having to use St Petrock's day centre for food, feeling that she did not want to mix with the "sort of people that use St Petrock's". Another interviewee was happy to use St

Petrock's for food and a warm dry place to meet up with street friends and make new friends in the area.

"I go off down St Petrock's on a morning and stay there all day. I get food there its only 25p a meal, extra if you want pudding. It's a good place to go, I am meeting up with some of the friends that I made, the men all look out for me, they look after me. You can have a good laugh, depending on who's there". (Int.07 Exeter)

Two residents thought that food really ought to be free and local shops, churches or businesses should provide it.

"...now we are going to have to buy our own food as well, so that will make it even more expensive. It's a shame that the hostel cannot get food donated to make it cheaper" (Int.08 Exeter)

"They ought to have food given for free, they should ask the shops and businesses to give them food and the churches". (Int.06 Exeter)

Wayside

Wayside residents took a slightly different angle when talking about paying for food. Two of the residents in the group interview discussed the way they went without food if they wanted to buy something in particular.

"I don't have a lot of money. Sometimes I starve myself so that I can buy something that I want. Don't get me wrong, I don't starve myself for luxuries, I starve myself for things like a dress that I want. If I starve myself for a couple of weeks, then I can save enough money for what I want". (Int.03 Reigate)

"They reckon that you can live on £18 a week³ but you've £10 rent to pay before you buy any food or toiletries... I have to starve myself sometimes too. It's not for luxuries either, its stuff that you need. You know deodorant, shampoo, that sort of stuff." (Int.02 Reigate)

Although both girls referred to starving themselves, it is most likely that this was an exaggeration. However, there is every reason to believe that they did cut down considerably on the amount and quality

3 This seems a low amount of money, but due to problems with benefit rules, this is all that this resident is entitled to.

of food they bought, to save money. This demonstrates the problems experienced with the level of income from state benefits, especially for 16-25 year olds especially those under 18.

c. It is difficult to survive on a benefits cheque.

The level of benefits is a contentious issue for both the homeless and people living in poverty, there is no doubt that it is difficult to make ends meet when on benefits for a sustained period of time. Thus interviewees had plenty to say about benefit levels.

“The future’s not going to be easy. I’m going to need a deposit for a flat and I’ll need to get badged up for the Big Issue, if I’m going to be able to afford to keep me and my kids. You can’t live on the social”. (Int.08 Exeter)

“It’s not my fault that I’m short of money, I’ve got a job, but you don’t get that much, it goes in tax and then rent. It’s no wonder some people start stealing. They don’t steal to make money, they steal because they haven’t got enough money” (Int.03 Reigate)

“The professionals should try it, they should live like this, before they work in those kinds of jobs, then they would understand what it is like and how hard it is. Instead professionals just talk down to you, they think you should just get a job, but getting a job is easier said than done.” (Int.02 Reigate)

More importantly, there are often delays with benefit offices sorting out peoples claims, so women have to wait some time before getting any money. This can cause acute stress and anxiety as they worry about paying for food etc. Benefits can also be cut or stopped without warning, if someone spends anytime in hospital or a rehabilitation centre. The women often do not know that this will happen or do not understand why it has happened. Once they have left the hospital or rehab centre, it takes time for their claim to be reassessed and their full entitlement reinstated. This often involves more form filling (the same forms time and time again) and interviews, all of which is time consuming and adds to the stress levels of already vulnerable women.

The long delays in processing housing benefit is one of the main reasons for private landlords disinterest in taking on homeless tenants or people on income support, in both Reigate and Exeter. This effectively excludes them from the rented housing market, which is already over burdened.

Hostels also experience funding problems as a result of delays in housing benefit claims, especially short stay hostels like Esther Community. Delays in payments of housing benefit to cover the cost of hostel rooms can deprive them of much needed cash. Similarly, if claims take up to three months to be assessed, accepted and paid, residents can leave during that space of time, making it more difficult for the hostel to claim the full amount of rent that they are due.

6. THE HOUSING SITUATION IN BOTH AREAS

Residents at both Wayside and Esther Community were shocked to find that they were advised to take Bed and Breakfast accommodation or directed to hostels. However, without money, these were inaccessible. Even with money, there was no guarantee that a hostel would have vacancies.

“I’m 23 and I’ve no kids, I think the council expected me to go away and have a kid so that I could get emergency housing. I went to the council the day I had to leave my fiancé’s house. I sat there all day, trying to get a room and then trying to get a crisis loan for Bed and Breakfast. At the end of the day I was thrown out of the offices with no help and I had to stay the night in a squat. I can tell you that was a big shock”. (Int.06 Exeter)

“Social Services don’t give you much help. When I became homeless, I went to Social Services and reported myself as homeless they told me they couldn’t pick me up. I was told the nearest places for me to go to for help were Guildford or Leatherhead, but I’d no money for the train fare so that wasn’t a great deal of help. When I got into Wayside I found out Social Services did have a duty to pick me up and do something. I feel cheated...they lied to me and because I didn’t know any different they got away with it”. (Int.02 Reigate)

These examples are common occurrences, a significant number of people have slept rough or in squats, because they did not receive adequate help from local authority departments. It would appear that some local authorities regularly breach or bend the law laid out in the Housing Act 1996 and Children Act 1989 (Kincaid, 1999). They either refuse to house people who clearly meet the legislation criteria, or they exercise their duty to offer advice and assistance, but offer advice that is rendered useless, because housing and DSS departments do not work together. For example, advising some one to take Bed and Breakfast accommodation or travel to the nearest town or city for a hostel place

without dealing with the fact that they have no money is of no help or assistance.

This places hostels and charities working with the homeless in an awkward position, as amongst other skills required, they are now increasingly in need of a good knowledge of the law and access to legal services to enforce the law on behalf of their clients. These are not services currently offered by Wayside or Esther Community.

Residents ready to leave the hostels and move into rented accommodation also find great difficulty gaining access to accommodation in the private rented sector (see the profiles above).

“It doesn’t matter how many times you try ringing landlords that advertise their flats in the papers, landlords in the private rented [sector] will not rent to people on housing benefit” (Int.04 Reigate)

“In the [private] rented [sector], no one takes people on housing benefits. When you ring up and tell them that you are on benefits they tell you that they don’t rent to people on the DSS”. (Int.02 Reigate)

Several of the interviewees were also frustrated with the way that housing waiting lists appeared to work. They felt that they were often being bypassed in favour of people who they felt did not need accommodation as much as they did.

“It’s unfair to everyone when you have to wait on the waiting list, only to find that someone else can jump the cue and get moved into accommodation before you”. (Int.01 Reigate)

“What’s really needed is more help for people of my age. Students get help, so do those on probation. You’ve got to break the law to get a flat – the system stinks”. (Int.09 Exeter)

There was also a strong recognition amongst the women that if they had children, they would be able to find accommodation much more easily and quickly.

“The housing system is unfair, some people on the waiting list are not desperate for somewhere to live, but they get housed. I’m desperate for somewhere to live and can’t get housed; I have to live in a hostel. The length of the council waiting list is disgusting; you can get a flat if you have a baby”. (Int.02 Reigate)

“I still need help finding somewhere to live. I’m on the council waiting list, but they say I’ve to wait three years before I can be housed. Because I’ve been sensible and not had a baby, I can’t get a flat, I’m being penalised for being good.” (Int.04 Reigate)

What do the Residents have in Common?

1. LAST PLACE OF RESIDENCE

It is interesting to look at where each interviewee last lived before they became homeless. There is every indication to suggest that these ten people are representative of the rest of their respective hostel residents.

Table 1: The last place of residence

ID No.	Age	Hostel	Last place of Residence	Ever Slept Rough?
Int.02	16	Wayside	Boyfriend’s home	No
Int.03	18	Wayside	Foster care then a hostel	No
Int.05	19	Wayside	Boyfriend’s house then an auntie	No
Int.01	34	Wayside	Fiancé’s house	No
Int.04	36	Wayside	Lived with her partner	No
Int.10	18	Esther Community	Father’s home then mothers house	No
Int.07	20	Esther Community	Boyfriend’s house, then slept rough in the bus station	Yes
Int.06	23	Esther Community	With fiancé, then in a squat	Yes
Int.09	27	Esther Community	In boyfriend’s house, then slept rough	Yes
Int.08	28	Esther Community	Lived with partner, then slept rough	Yes

Table 1 shows a marked divide between Wayside and Esther Community hostels in terms of the number of residents who have slept rough. This demonstrates the different types of homelessness in each area and the different types of people the hostels are dealing with. With regard to the last place of residence, eight out of the ten women last lived with a boyfriend or partner, often the property they lived in

belonged to the man, so that once the relationship broke down the woman became homeless.

“I left my parent’s home to move in with my new boyfriend, he’s older than I am. But once I moved in I found that we did not get on very well, I stayed there for a little while but things got worse and worse. I left of my own accord. I had no relationship with my mum so I could not ask for help, so I was on my own”. (Int.02 Reigate)

“I’ve been homeless now on and off for a year, this is the latest episode. This time I became homeless when I left my boyfriend. He’d a drink problem and was heavy into debt. He did cruel things like water down my methadone. I tried leaving him several times, but he kept wanting me back. I felt trapped because the flat was in his name, he kept reminding me of that. He kept saying he could throw me out whenever he wanted to. (Int.09 Exeter)

2. VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence featured strongly among the interviewees as one of the main contributory factors that lead to them becoming homeless. In some cases, it was a direct cause of their homelessness.

Table 2: Victims of domestic violence

ID No.	Age	Hostel	Victim of Domestic Violence?
Int.02	16	Wayside	No
Int.03	18	Wayside	No
Int.05	19	Wayside	Yes
Int.01	34	Wayside	Yes
Int.04	36	Wayside	Yes
Int.10	18	Esther Community	No
Int.07	20	Esther Community	Yes
Int.06	23	Esther Community	Yes
Int.09	27	Esther Community	Yes
Int.08	28	Esther Community	Yes

Table 2 shows that seven out of the ten women interviewed had experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives. (It tended to

be the younger residents who had never been in a violent domestic relationship with their partner. However, at least one of these women had experienced violence and abuse as a child).

“I became homeless through domestic violence. I kept calling the police but they would come round and then leave me without any help. Eventually I ran away to a hostel in [area she used to live in]. Etta was the hostel manager there, I moved to Reigate when Etta took over the hostel here”. (Int.04 Reigate)

“I used to live with my fiancé in [area she used to live in], he was violent towards me, he’s hit me several times in the past. When I mean violent, I mean being kicked and punched, thrown across the room and things like that. One time he pushed me so hard that I hurt my back quite badly”. (Int.01 Reigate)

“I had a bad relationship, I lived with a man who battered me. I left him and tried to hide from him, but he kept finding me. So I left [the area she used to live in] and moved to Exeter because I thought I had friends here, but I ended up sleeping in a bus station”. (Int.07 Exeter)

“I was engaged and working, my life seemed normal. My relationship with my fiancé ended violently, when he drank he became very violent. I moved out to get away from him, I stayed with friends to hide from him. I ended up in a squat living with people I knew from the streets”. (Int.06 Exeter)

Many women find it difficult to break free of these kinds of relationships, it can take several attempts. Once free, many women find themselves attracted to similar men and so break free from one violent relationship only to enter another and another.

“I’ll tell you why women become homeless, its because of violent men. They live with men that become violent and then they have to leave, but they’ve no where to go so they end up on the streets. Take me I had four good men but the relationships were trashed because of drink. Drink turns the man bad, he goes violent. One of my ex’s got done for dealing, another for burgling, they were all bad.” (Int.09 Exeter)

Often leaving a violent partner in a hurry results in a woman loosing all or most of her possessions. This not only means that she has to replace these, but this can affect her sense of self-identity and self-worth as well. Women have to start again from scratch and rebuild their wardrobe, possessions, etc.

“In [name of town] I lived with a man for a while, but he was violent – in the end I had to leave. But when I left, I left all my clothes behind and couldn’t go back for them. This meant that I had to start all over again.”
(Int.09 Exeter)

In the autumn of 1999, new rules for housing benefit are due to take effect (Fields, 1999), these will affect homeless women and women fleeing from violent relationships, as well as the hostels they apply to. In future, they will need their National Insurance number to be able to apply for housing benefits, women who leave home in a hurry are most likely to have no proof of identity and no National Insurance number. This may increase their vulnerability to street homelessness.

3. FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Family breakdown is a term used to describe the breakdown of relationships between the parent and child, rather than divorce or separation. For interviewees at both hostels, a breakdown in the relationship between their parents and themselves contributed to their initial homelessness. There was some evidence that, in some cases, this had contributed to repeated episodes of homelessness. Table 3 shows that seven out of ten interviewees discussed the breakdown in their family relationships and associated that with, either the cause of their homelessness, or as a factor that exacerbated their homelessness.

Table 3: Evidence of family breakdown

ID No.	Age	Hostel	Family Breakdown?
Int.02	16	Wayside	Yes
Int.03	18	Wayside	Yes
Int.05	19	Wayside	Yes
Int.01	34	Wayside	No
Int.04	36	Wayside	No
Int.10	18	Esther Community	Yes
Int.07	20	Esther Community	No
Int.06	23	Esther Community	Yes
Int.09	27	Esther Community	Yes
Int.08	28	Esther Community	Yes

Once homeless, or on the brink of homelessness, these women felt that they could not contact their parents for help. This was not simply because they were ashamed of what had become of them, (although this was true of some of the older women who had been sleeping rough on and off for years) but because they felt that there was:

- breakdown in communication;
- abuse or abusive behaviour during childhood;
- a lack of interest in them or in bridging the gap on the parents part.

All three factors made it either impossible for the women to re-establish contact, or made them reluctant to make contact.

“I don’t want to talk about my family background, it upsets me too much. All I can say is I had problems with my mum, she went on too much and was very strict, she pushed me about a bit. As a kid I was always threatening to leave home, but she told me there was no point because the police would bring me back. She kicked me out when I was 16, then rang the police for them to fetch me back... my sister told me that the police couldn’t do anything now I was 16. So I was free to go, to stay away for good. That’s when I started dossing down on friends floors”. (Int.09 Exeter)

“My dad is a very violent man, he often booted me around the house. I haven’t spoken to him since I left home. (Int.08 Exeter)

Some of the women interviewed moved in with their boyfriend because they were not happy at home. When this relationship broke down, or when the boyfriend became violent they became homeless, because often there was no one else to turn to for help.

“Her mum died when she was only 8 years old. Soon after her dad got a new partner and she fell apart. She met an older man and lived with him for four and a half years. She used to be beaten regularly. She became depressed and began drinking. When she came to Wayside she had a serious drink problem, and was in such a state that she took four overdoses” – (Int.05 Reigate)⁴

4 This woman was interviewed with the hostel manager present, who filled in details that she should not talk about. These details had been agreed with Etta prior to the interview.

“There was no one that I could turn to, to prevent me from becoming homeless. I had no relationship with my mum, so I couldn’t ask her for help, I was on my own. Other than winning the lottery nothing could’ve stopped me from becoming homeless”. (Int.02 Reigate)

People who have been in care at some point in their lives are far more vulnerable to becoming homeless and, in particular, becoming rough sleepers, than the rest of the general population. One of the women interviewed, who had been in care for most of her life, spoke about the lack of support and help they received from their social services departments, and the lack of facilities that had meant that they had to move from foster care into hostels.

“At the end of the day Social Services is basically cruel, they don’t support you or help you. You go to the council for help and they send you back to Social Services. Social Services send you back to the council... I lived with foster parents just before I became homeless, but the relationship with them broke down. I’ve lived with 6 foster parents, none of the placements lasted. I didn’t get a choice about where I came to this time. I was simply sent to Wayside whether I liked it or not”. (Int. 017 Reigate)

A woman at Esther Community, who did not want to be interviewed, but wanted it ‘on record’; told me she had been in care, and that

“If you want to know why I am homeless you should ask Exeter social services because they put me here, and they know f*** all about how it feels to have been in care and have no one to turn to”.

People are in care because the relationship between them and their parents has broken down, for whatever reason. Often they have no recourse, no opportunity to mend bridges and return to their family. Social services are legally their parent until they are aged 18, and have a duty to offer assistance and advice until they are aged 21. However, if a young person drops out of a foster care placement, or has to leave home between the ages of 16 and 18, they are often found hostel places not foster placements.

In addition, young people under the age of 18 are not legally able to hold a tenancy agreement, so they cannot gain access to accommodation. Even when accommodation is found and offered,

under the age of 25 they can only draw reduced housing benefit and income support, this means that even the lowest priced accommodation is often too expensive.

“I am on the job seekers at the moment, they are helping me. I have to work to get benefit. My age is against me, I can’t get proper money because of my age and I can’t get enough housing benefit because of my age. I think this is unfair. I worked it out, the number of hours I work and the amount of job seekers I get, it means I am earning 50p an hour.⁵ Talk about minimum wage, no one should be expected to work for that, it is slave labour”. (Int.02 Reigate)

Young people who find themselves homeless after relationships with their parents breakdown or who have been in care, are vulnerable financially (as well as by age) to becoming homeless. They are excluded from attempting to take responsibility for themselves and live independently by a benefit system that expects their housing, food and clothing costs to be cheaper than those for adults over 25.

There are occasions when a case for some form of family mediation can be made. It would be dangerous for some young people to return home, for others it is the breakdown in communication between child and parent(s) that needs resolving. This can still be very traumatic for all concerned. However, after listening to the young person carefully and establishing that home is a safe place and that there is no abuse happening there, family mediation could be offered to some people. This would be time consuming, and the young woman may need to live in a place of safety (i.e. the hostel) while family problems are being sorted out. A family mediator could either be employed by KeyChange, or alternatively there may be adequate facilities already in the area that could be utilised.

The following is an example of why this could be an alternative to a hostel place, and in this particular case, being offered any bed. The young woman speaking in the quote below said she was 18. She arrived at Esther Community the evening before this interview took place. She only stayed at the hostel approximately two weeks before being found a place in the local YMCA hostel.

5 The 50p an hour quoted by this 16 year old in the above example, though surprising, is correct. Due to problems with her claim, part of it had been disallowed.

“I did not get on with my dad, he always said I was rubbish at things. We had a row and I left home and stayed with a friend for a few days, but they said I could not stay there indefinitely. I had to leave [the area she used to live in] and come to Exeter because my mum was here. I can't get a place in [the area she used to live in] because my dad has to write a letter saying he kicked me out. He won't do that because he hasn't kicked me out, he loves me and he wants me to come home so that we can try again. But I can't go back now, not once I have made the break. So the only thing to do was to move away and declare myself homeless. What I really wanted was a place in the YMCA but they were full so my mum got me in here” (Int.10 Exeter)

From the interview, it was possible to ascertain that there had been no abuse (physical, sexual or emotional), she loved her dad and he loved her and wanted her back. They had been having a few arguments over who should help with the housework and the fact that her little sister was annoying her, after one row she walked out. The father's occupation, as well as her appearance, leisure pursuits and vocabulary all suggested that she was from a middle class family. She did not use drugs and only drank socially. To a certain extent, she was quite naive about street culture, and the drug scene. Having arrived at her mothers' house, her mother allowed her to stay there until she could find her a hostel place.

Thus she moved from her fathers home, to her mothers home and then into a hostel, that she shared with women some of whom had been smack addicts for years. Others were on Methadone and trying to come off drugs. One of the women interviewed, had a boyfriend who is a drug dealer and she visited him daily. Another had been a drug dealer in the past. There were also women with serious drink problems and psychological problems living there. Most of the other women that I chatted to in the evenings or in the kitchen as part of the participant observations had spent some time on the streets and/or had smaller drink or drug problems. If a YMCA hostel place had not come up so quickly, this young girl could have been in danger of learning new life skills (i.e. drug taking) that would take a lifetime to overcome.

There are two points to make here; firstly, this is clearly a situation where communication had broken down within the family. Ideally, attempts at reconciliation between father and daughter ought to have been made in the first place. No accommodation would have been necessary, (as the girl was housed with her mother at the time) and could have remained so until more appropriate accommodation could

be found. Secondly, KeyChange (and in this particular case Esther Community), need to seriously think about exactly who they are trying to help in each hostel and whether some people would be in more danger in the hostel than, for example, sleeping on a parent's floor. The YMCA in Exeter has very good facilities and are well equipped and better suited to deal with homeless young people who do not have any current drink or drug problems. However, they do have a waiting list of up to three months. The girl and her mother knew that she could move up the queue for the YMCA if she managed to get into Esther Community.

4. CHILDREN

In both hostels, there are a number of women who have children. Many of these women are in contact with social services and fighting not only to find accommodation but also to be allowed to have their children back. Often, the women have supervised access visits with their children, as Social Services try to keep the family together while the woman gets her own problems sorted out.

Staff at both hostels have to deal with the roller-coaster of emotions that these women go through. This is both in relation to access visits with their children and as they go through the various social work and legal channels.

Esther Community and Wayside differ in the type of women they receive and therefore problems relating specifically to women and their children are slightly different.

a. Wayside

Wayside often deals with Asian women, some of whom belong to a culture where their partner and in-laws take custody of the child, while the mother is thrown out or has to flee and seek alternative accommodation. Although social workers and legal experts deal with custody claims, Wayside staff have to help such women both practically and emotionally, to deal with the loss of their home, relationship and children in the first instance, and then to support them as they piece their life back together and fight for their children.

b. Esther Community

The Esther Community takes in far more women with serious alcohol and drug related problems than Wayside, some of these women do have children. For obvious reasons, when the mother is found to have a drink or drug problem, the children are taken into care, the drink or drug

problem is often the cause or a strong contributory factor in them becoming homeless. Overcoming their addiction is often one of the prerequisites for getting their children back.

These women often still have supervised visits with their children. They suffer the same grief and pain that any other woman would when they are separated from their children. These visits can cause anger and severe distress.

“I know I’m half drunk, but that’s because my social worker f*****d my head up this morning. I saw my kids and their foster mother, the youngest, my little boy, hardly recognised me. My kids are not supposed to be in care, they were just supposed to be in care for two weeks while I went through detox and got my head together. I wanted me and [partners name] to go into detox together with the kids as a family, but Social Services said no. While I was in there the DSS didn’t pay my rent, I was in so much arrears when I came out that we got thrown out of the place. Now me and [partners name] are both homeless and they won’t let me have my kids back. Now they are talking about having them adopted. I love my kids”.

This dialogue was shouted at the on-duty evening staff member while I was observing. Hostel staff regularly have to contain and defuse this kind of anger and distress safely, by listening to outbursts and talking calmly through issues.

The woman’s loss of her children can cause a number of reactions, it can spur her into recovering from her addiction and regaining control of her life, or it can make her withdrawn and depressed and cause her to give up on life. Some women attempt to recover from drink or drug problems for their children’s sake rather than their own. The following example is of a woman battling with a serious heroine addiction:

“They say plan A is not working, plan A’s for me to go into [name of drug rehabilitation centre] and get sorted out. I said I’d do it, but they can’t get me a place. I was supposed to go before Christmas, then after Christmas, then sometime last month but they can’t get me a place. Now they say we have to go on to plan B and my kids will be adopted, if they’re adopted they’re gone forever. I tell you, if [partners name] finds out, he will check himself out of ‘dry-out’ [alcoholic rehabilitation centre] and kill himself. If my kids go into adoption there is no way I am coming off smack, that’s all I’ll have left and I’ll need it then to go on living. If they get adopted, I will be out of here and I don’t care where I go”. (Int.08 Exeter)

KeyChange have a difficult task in situations like these, they offer such women a place to stay and through specialist help from outside agencies; motivate, encourage and work with women to overcome their drink/drug problems. They also sort out other personal and emotional problems and support the women to comply with social services wishes. In cases of acute alcohol or drug problems, women are found places at specialist rehabilitation centres, where women can safely 'detox'. However, there is often a three month waiting list or more for residential facilities in areas outside London, making it very difficult for women needing help straight away to keep motivated to change.

Findings from Wayside Hostel – Reigate

1. THE STIGMA OF LIVING IN A HOSTEL

Short conversations with some of the hostel residents at the video launch, pointed to a lot of feeling about the way hostel residents are viewed in the wider community. The dramas at the video launch presented the homeless as the dishevelled beggar on the streets approaching people for money, and the cause of homelessness as simple misunderstandings between mother and daughter, where the daughter stormed out because she was unhappy and did not feel that her mother was listening to her. This upset Wayside residents, because although those two scenarios represent some homeless women, they felt that it trivialised what they had been through or were going through.

The women wanted people to understand that at Wayside most women have never slept rough. They regard themselves as middle class, and most have had a decent education. They are at Wayside for a variety of reasons that led to them becoming homeless and in need of somewhere to stay.

“You know most of us aren’t anything like that. We are decent middle class girls, we’ve never been on the streets and we’ve never begged. Most of us have a good education and a lot of us have jobs. We are just homeless, that’s all.”

There are several stigmas that have to be faced by residents, including:

- a) That they are seen as dirty and smelly or young people out of control.
- b) They are disadvantaged in the labour and further education markets.
- c) A perceived lack of freedom due to curfew rules.

a. *Seen as dirty and smelly or young people out of control*

The group interview at Wayside revealed that friends and other people in the community viewed them as dirty and smelly or young people out of control. They felt that they were struggling enough with being homeless and its associated problems of low self-esteem and low self-worth as a result. The need to constantly prove themselves in the wider community was felt to be an additional and unnecessary burden.

“When you are in a hostel people stereotype you. As soon as you say you live in a hostel they make a judgement about you. They think that if you live in a hostel you must be dirty and smelly.” (Int.02 Reigate)

“They think all youngsters are trouble. This is how they stereotype people like me. They just think that we are poor. They don’t really give a.****..” (Int.03 Reigate)

“I think all hostels have a stigma attached to them. Most people think that if you have to live in a hostel, then you must be a psycho or mental patient. This is insulting.” (Int.01 Reigate)

b. *Disadvantaged in the labour and further education market*

Residents found that the stigma of living in a hostel is a stumbling block when trying to find work, settle into a new job or get onto a college course. They felt ashamed of their circumstances and where they have to live. Also, when someone leaves home in a hurry, they rarely take with them all their paperwork, the last thing on their mind is picking up certificates that prove to potential employers their educational achievements.

“Living in a hostel makes it hard for you to get a job. So instead of having a permanent job, a proper job, now I have to do voluntary work to get Job Seekers Allowance. They don’t believe you have qualifications if you live in a hostel either. They just assume that you lie about your qualifications, because they think that all people that live in a hostel are thick, stupid and poor.” (Int.02 Reigate)

“Look I had a very rough life, ok. I have really messed up, and that hurts. I had hopes and dreams of a career, but when I became homeless in the way that I did, all those hopes and dreams just go down the drain.” (Int.03 Reigate)

The women interviewed do not actually tell potential employers or friends and work colleagues exactly where they live, for fear of either not getting work, losing work or what other people may think of them.

Instead, it is common practice in the hostel, to use the house number and street address only, rather than the title Wayside.

c. *A perceived lack of freedom due to curfew rules*

Stigma is not just confined to access to work or the way they feel about themselves. They find it difficult to conduct what they call 'normal lives' from the hostel setting. Simple things like having to be in by 11.30pm or finding a friend's floor to sleep on for the night, means that they feel different, they complain that they cannot go out to the night-clubs like the rest of their friends.

"My mum is very strict so I prefer it at Wayside, but I don't like having to be in by 11.30pm at night or find somewhere else to stay overnight. And you're only allowed to stay out three nights a week and no more. I think there should be more lea-way and that we should have a key to get in or night staff to let us in especially at weekends". (Int.02 Reigate)

"It really p***** me off that I have to be back in by 11.30pm on an evening. People at work really take the p*** out of me" (Int.03 Reigate)

They say they are embarrassed about having to tell them that they can't stay out late. This provoked a lot of discussion in the group interview, as two out of the four interviewees wanted the rules relaxing and the other two women felt safer if the rules were kept as they were. Here age had a big impact on the interviewees point of view, with the 16 and 18 year old wanting the curfew lifted and rules relaxed and the 34 and 36 year olds wanting the security of knowing that the building was safe and no one could wander in and out.

"There are very good reasons for the hostel rules being what they are, the hostel rules used to let you have a key and come back late, but the rules were broken. These rules make it safer now" (Int.04 Reigate)

This issue of curfews and keys was later discussed with the hostel manager, who confirmed the rules and explained them in more detail. In the past, some women tried to sneak boyfriends into their rooms. Also, the partners and ex-boyfriends of some women fleeing from domestic violence had tried to gain entry to the building making those and other women feel unsafe. In addition, some women were involved with drugs and they have had times when drug dealers have been at the door trying to find one of the women.

However, to a 16 year old just free of strict parents and dreaming of adult freedoms, no set of rules seem sensible if they prevent you from doing what you want. Part of the hostels' role is to provide a safe and secure home for all their residents and to protect vulnerable residents. The hostels' role is also to encourage residents to become responsible citizens. The residents are interviewed before they are accepted for a place, the rules are explained to them so that they can choose whether or not to accept that place. Part of being a resident and preparing to live in mainstream society, is learning to accept a given set of rules.

Whilst these stigmas are entirely understandable, the residents' reactions to them must be born in mind as they play a key part in the success of their rehabilitation.

2. LEARNING TO ACCEPT THE RULES

All aspects of society have a set of rules in some form or another, most are so implicit or second nature to the majority of us that we follow them without thinking. People who have been homeless for some time, or perhaps in care do not always remember, understand or know these rules. This leads to problems, for example, when a homeless person has to do things such as, start paying contributions towards rent or food (especially if they have been used to getting it for free). An unrealistic understanding of the cost of living causes many tenancies to fail. Newly housed people not only do not budget properly, but are surprised by the cost of living, or defer payments until they can afford them. A part of rehabilitation within the hostel is teaching homeless people about what is acceptable in society (and what is not) and how to handle their money and budget wisely.

These are not easy lessons to learn. One 18 year old at Wayside discussed the fact that she thought she was being cheated out of some of her money, but did not know who she could trust to find out the truth. When she first arrived at Wayside, she filled out various forms and could claim housing benefit and Job Seekers Allowance. After some time she found a job, she stopped receiving Job Seekers Allowance, which seemed perfectly fair to her, as she was no longer looking for work. However, despite social workers and several different members of staff at the hostel explaining that her housing benefit would either stop or be reduced (her contributions towards her room rent at the hostel would then increase). She saw this as unfair, mainly because she knew other residents were still only paying the £10 contribution towards rent after full housing benefit.

“Because I have a job now, I am expected to pay £260 a month rent. I don’t think that’s fair, because when I had no job I only had to pay £10 a month. What I really want is for someone to come and sit down with me and tell me what to do and how to get help. I don’t know who to trust I can’t tell whether or not I am being ripped off. Most people have parents that help them sort their bills out and things, they explain everything. This sort of thing is an adult thing and I am expected to just suddenly be able to cope with it. It is very frightening” (Int.03 Reigate) – *Interviewee aged 18*

Unrealistic expectations caused this young woman to doubt the level of rent that she needs to pay. She knows that rent costs a lot of money, but there appears to be a difference between what seems a lot to her and the amount that she is being charged.

“To get a flat in the [private] rented [sector], you really need to have a job first, because it costs a lot of money” (Int.03 Reigate)

It is sometimes very difficult for people who have been let down by most of the adults in their lives, to trust people again. They don’t know who to trust, and therefore trust becomes a very frightening issue. The young woman in this example is battling with trust more than anything else. She desperately wants the help and warmth of friendship that Etta and the other hostel staff and volunteers offer her daily, but cannot bring herself to trust them, despite having been at the hostel for nearly two years. This is a good example of how long it can take to really help some women, to turn them around and help them to live a more productive life, where they feel physically, mentally and emotionally secure. This is the strong advantage of having a three year time limit for staying at Wayside, it gives residents time to really sort themselves out. The limit also spurs them into action, rather than drifting on aimlessly for many years in the hostel system.

3. FEAR

All five interviewees at Wayside spoke of their fear. Their fears came into three main categories:

- a) Fear of violence
- b) Fear of trusting other people especially officials
- c) Fear of failure once they left Wayside

a. *Fear of Violence*

Three out of the five women had lived in violent domestic relationships before living at Wayside (this has been discussed in more detail above). The level of fear of violence varies from woman to woman, but one past resident was in so much fear of being found by her ex-partner that she ran away and eventually had to be found an alternative safe hostel in another area. Although none of the women would speak specifically of their childhood, there were some indications that violence had featured strongly in their childhood, and this had affected their relationships and confidence as adults. It can take a long time for women to overcome their fear of people (especially men) being violent towards them. Some do gain enough confidence in themselves to feel safe again, however, other women never fully recover and the best that Wayside can hope to achieve, is that they learn how to cope and make themselves feel safe in their own homes when they leave.

b. *Fear of Trusting Other People Especially Officials*

Trust is a very big issue for several wayside residents, it not only affects the way residents arrive and settle into wayside, e.g.

“When I first arrived at Wayside I was petrified. I was terrified because I did not know who I could trust and who I couldn’t trust. I did not know if people at Wayside were trustworthy. When I first arrived I used to cry myself to sleep. At first I would not come downstairs to be with the other girls in the lounge or kitchen because I was so afraid”. (Int.01 Reigate)

Trust also affects the type and level of help that staff can give to them. Often help is rejected through fear of trusting, this means that staff have to spend a lot of time building up trust and waiting until a woman is ready to be helped. When one interviewee arrived at Wayside she had a serious drink problem, it took months of patience and hard work before the hostel manager could earn her trust.

“When she came to Wayside she had a serious drink problem, and was in such a state that she took four overdoses...She didn’t trust anyone. Now she trusts some people, she will now talk to me.” (Int.05 Reigate)⁶

6 This woman was interviewed with the hostel manager present, who filled in details that she could not talk about. These details were agreed with Etta prior to the interview.

Now that same resident is waiting on the council waiting list for a place to live, has a job and generally has more self-respect. As part of learning how to budget her money, she has started to buy items of things that she will need for her new place. She already has everything she will need for the Kitchen and has begun collecting things for the bathroom. This was only possible once she learnt to trust Etta and herself.

A different resident spoke about her fears, but she has not learned to trust yet, thus there is a stark difference in attitude and outcome.

“I feel really frightened at the moment, everyone I’ve ever trusted in the past let me down. Now I’m afraid to trust anyone... When I leave, I am going to need help with getting my own things together, ready for when I move into a new place. I need some kind of social worker who will help. Someone who visits the hostel say once a week to advise me about what to do and how to do it”. (Int.03 Reigate)

The type of help this woman is asking for already exists both within Wayside and via her own social worker. All the help and assistance that she will need is there, but she does not feel it or see it, because she is too afraid to trust the people offering her help. As she trusts no one at the moment, it is impossible to give her the help and feelings of security that she so desperately wants. It can take a long time before women regain their trust, hostel staff can only be patient and wait until such women realise that there is help and that they can trust some people.

c. Fear of Failure Once They Left Wayside

The interviewees who were preparing for leaving viewed their leaving with a mixture of fear and optimism. They were excited about the prospect of getting their own place and moving on, but were afraid that things might go wrong once they left Wayside or that leaving Wayside might be emotionally difficult.

“I want to feel secure and safe in my new place, I don’t want to live in fear of being evicted or losing the place once I have it.” (Int.03 Reigate)

“I’m looking for a place to live with the council. I want to go; I’m ready to go. I don’t want to hang on because it’ll be harder to go then. I don’t know what help I will need when I leave, but I’ll stay in touch with Etta”. (Int.05 Reigate)

4. WORK

Four out of the five residents at Wayside were either in fulltime employment, training schemes (i.e. the new deal) or in education (see table 4). The interviewee that was neither in work or education has learning difficulties and so finds it more difficult to gain employment. In spite of this, she was hoping that her disability worker was going to be able to find her employment. This is in stark contrast with Esther Community, where none of the interviewees were in work, training or education.

Table 4: Residents in Employment or Education

ID No.	Age	Hostel	In Employment	In Education
Int.02	16	Wayside	No	Yes
Int.03	18	Wayside	Yes	No
Int.05	19	Wayside	Yes	No
Int.01	34	Wayside	No	No
Int.04	36	Wayside	Yes	No

However, residents at Wayside were limited with the type of work they could find in the Reigate area. Most of the jobs in the area were for secretarial or office jobs that required a high degree of technical and communication skills. The interviewees were either too young to have gained the level of skill required, or too vulnerable to cope with a job that was so demanding. Thus all the interviewees that were in employment, worked in the caring sector, typically as care assistants or working with the elderly or children. This means that they were not working in the types of jobs that would pay average or high salaries and thus are neither able to pay the rents required in the private sector nor pay the bond (rent in advance) that is required by landlords.

5. UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Throughout the group interview, the interviewees demonstrated the fact that they held unrealistic expectations on a wide variety of issues. These issues varied from the trivial to important issues for the residents future ability to cope and function in wider society. For example:

a) *Housing* – residents felt that they should not have to wait on local authority housing waiting lists, and that they should have priority over other people because they were living in a hostel. One exception to this

was the resident who had lived in the same hostel for three years and then was told that she would have to wait a further three years on the housing waiting list. Whilst she should have applied for housing sooner, this clearly was not an unrealistic expectation. However, some residents who had been at the hostel for only a matter of months expected to find a fast and easy route into housing and were disappointed to find that there were no short cuts.

b) Ex-partners and Accommodation – for some residents there were unrealistic expectations concerning the breakdown of relationships, this was mainly due to age (e.g. a 16 year old) or intellectual ability (i.e. someone with learning difficulties). For example, two residents complained that after moving into their respective partners own home and then leaving when the relationship broke down (in one case after a couple of months), they felt that it was unfair that they had become homeless and not the partner. There was no recognition that the partner owned the property, paid all the bills and that they had no entitlements as they had not lived there for very long. Neither woman seemed to think they should have any financial settlement or that they should keep the property, but felt that someone should have ensured that the partner was made homeless too.

c) Cost of living – the younger residents were surprised at the level of rent they had to pay both before and after housing benefit. They felt that it was unfair that they should pay so much, but were unsure whether this was unfair or ‘normal’. Younger residents understood that they needed to learn to budget and learn to control their spending, so that they could make their money last and save up for when they moved into their own place. However, they were shocked by the cost of living compared to the level of benefits they received. One resident also felt that housing benefit should not be reduced or stopped when she managed to get a job. There appeared to be a basic belief that, (similar to when living with parents or foster parents) all bills were paid for and any money they had was all theirs.

d) Storage – one resident had stored her things in a garage after leaving her fiancé, however, she felt that social services or the local authority should either pay the garage rent or pay for her things to be moved and stored elsewhere. There was no appreciation that these were her things and her responsibility, the rent was cheap and easily affordable on benefits.

e) *Pets* – a minority of residents felt that hostels should allow you to take your pets in with you (i.e. your cat, hamster or goldfish) as the hostel is your home and at home you would be allowed to keep your pets. At times, some residents failed to realise that hostels are not home from home and that rules had to be applied that respected all residents.

Findings from Esther Community hostel - Exeter

The interviews and observations conducted at Esther Community were far more qualitative than those at Wayside and therefore have much richer detail that have generated more findings.

1. FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS

It is significant that all the interviewees at Esther Community first became homeless whilst in their teens (or in one case when she had just turned 20) – see table 5. For the youngest two interviewees, this was their first episode of homelessness. This is a critical point for their future, in terms of what happens to them next, as the right help now could prevent them from becoming repeatedly homeless in the future (as is the case with the oldest two interviewees). Interviewee .06 is slightly different, she began the interview by claiming that she had never been homeless before, but later in the interview went on to describe a period when she was in a different hostel and went through a three stage programme of resettlement. This may have been part of a drug rehabilitation programme, but either way the programme ended with the provision of housing. (For this interviewee, it was impossible to get an accurate date of previous homelessness, the estimate of late teens is based on her current age and the various timings of other events that she described).

For the older two interviewees in Table 5, a lot of rehabilitative work is needed, both these women have had numerous long episodes of homelessness throughout their life. They are so accustomed to surviving on the streets, that it is often easier and cheaper for them to return to the streets for a while, in the sure knowledge that when they are ready they will find a place in a hostel and then find somewhere to live. They are no longer afraid of sleeping rough and soon make friends on the streets. This makes it difficult to find a resettlement programme that will have a lasting affect. Both women have drug problems, both stay off heroine and cocaine for a while but then go back onto drugs and repeat the cycle of drugs, debts and homelessness. Esther Community is not in a position at present to help these women long term. It can only act as a holding

place, giving them a secure safe place to stay until they can be found an appropriate rehabilitation programme or long stay hostel place.

Table 5: Age of first episode of homelessness and reasons

ID No.	Age	Hostel	Age first homeless	Reason	Reason for this episode of homelessness
Int.10	18	Esther Community	18	Ran away from strict father	Ran away from strict father
Int.07	20	Esther Community	20	Left violent partner	Left violent partner
Int.06	23	Esther Community	Late teens	Possibly drug related	Left violent partner
Int.09	27	Esther Community	15	Family background	Left violent partner
Int.08	28	Esther Community	17	Drug Addict	Drugs related

The age of the resident's first episode of homelessness has two main implications for Esther Community's work:

- a) There is a need to ensure teenagers find a swift long-term solution to their homelessness, which not only provides them with accommodation; but also equips them with the necessary life skills to maintain a settled life.
- b) Teenagers are encouraged to develop friendship networks with people in the housed population in the area they are going to live in – as opposed to making friends with mainly homeless or ex-homeless people. In this way, the amount of street culture that they absorb will be reduced, they will feel that they fit into and belong in mainstream society (and therefore be more likely to remain housed once they have been resettled).

Currently, the YMCA has the best youth programme for resettlement, so liaison with them or hostel transfers to the YMCA is probably the best action. Esther Community already works closely with the YMCA, so this needs to be continued and encouraged.

In addition, residents who have had recurring phases of homelessness throughout their life; need long-term resettlement programmes, that incorporate not only life-skill training, but counselling and a realistic after care support programme, that supports them as they integrate back into the community. The provisional plans for a second longer stay hostel for Exeter would be the ideal vehicle to help such

women and could incorporate such facilities. At present, there are no facilities for women who need intensive longer term help in Exeter.

There is another aspect to resettlement that needs addressing, although this is not easy. Many homeless people (men and women) see the answer to their drink, drug and homeless problems as finding a partner or being in a relationship. This is part of their search for love and understanding, and in some senses, is no different from the yearnings of the housed population. However, as has already been shown, many women enter violent and abusive relationships, many women become homeless after leaving the partner's home.

“I met a guy yesterday, he took me back to his place for sex and wants me to meet him again today. Life must be more than sex though, mustn't it? I want to see him again, but I need to get my head straight. I want to see him, but I don't want to get to know him and I don't particularly want him to know me, it would just be for sex. But it never works out like that. Anyway, sex is not all that it is cracked up to be. What is sex anyway?” (Int.09 Exeter)

The women interviewed at Esther Community (and some of those women I chatted with during the participant observations) would still leave any accommodation provided for them to move in with a man. This leaves them vulnerable to becoming homeless if things do not work out. Women on the streets are also in danger of being encouraged/dragged into prostitution (Browne, 1998). One interviewee had become a stripper and then a maid in a sauna where she took bookings for prostitutes in order to get a place to live. The only reason that she did not become a prostitute herself was because by this time she had Hepatitis C.

2. THE EXPERIENCE OF SLEEPING ROUGH

Most of the women at Esther Community had slept rough at some point, even if that was only for one or two nights. Table 6 Shows that four out of the five residents interviewed had slept rough at some stage in their life.

Table 6: Residents that Slept Rough at Some Stage in their Lives

ID No.	Age	Hostel	Ever Slept Rough?
Int.10	18	Esther Community	No
Int.07	20	Esther Community	Yes
Int.06	23	Esther Community	Yes
Int.09	27	Esther Community	Yes
Int.08	28	Esther Community	Yes

This way of life is not an easy option even though some women repeatedly returned to the streets to live. They simply became used to this way of life, regardless of how hard, cold or dangerous that was. One woman had been raped three times when living on the streets, but no longer had any fear of sleeping rough. She treated it almost as an ‘occupational hazard’. In some senses, this was indicative of the way she felt about and viewed herself. In her understanding, the worst thing had happened to her and she had survived, nothing would ever be that bad again. After the first period of homelessness, those women who repeatedly become homeless know what to expect, how to cope and how to get by, they also know that they can make good friends on the streets, which makes the hardships tolerable. In street culture there is a strange inverted logic where they see a street homeless person that becomes housed actually being weak. Being housed becomes the sign that they can not handle the street life.

“I enjoyed living with them because they were friendly and you could have a lot of friends. You could move round the country and were always welcome on a traveller’s site, even if you had not known them before. It can be dangerous too, I remember [name] beating the... out of someone with a shovel for breaking an ambulance window [they slept in an old ambulance at the time]. Site politics I suppose.” (Int. 036 Exeter)

Some of the residents tried to explain what it is like to sleep rough, what can happen and how it made them feel.

“I ran away from [boyfriend’s name] but [friend’s name] would not let me in so I had to sleep rough that night. I remember waking up with my hair and hand frozen on the pavement. It hurt a lot. Can you imagine that? (Int.08 Exeter)

[The following is a different episode of homelessness for the same interviewee]
I left [boyfriend's name] and just got on the bus from [name of area] to Exeter. Our friend [friend's name] attacked us with an axe and smashed the flat up, so I had to get away. I was raped the day after I arrived in Exeter in a graveyard. It was another tramp; he would not leave me alone. He was very violent and threatened me with a dog chain and scissors." (Int.08 Exeter)

"...That's when everything started. I started dossing down at friend's places, sleeping on floors, settees, bed-bases, even in bathrooms – but never in a proper bed. Living like that does not make you feel good about yourself, you feel dirty and horrible. It's not good for your health either. I've slept rough all over the place, on the street, in train stations, sheds, derelict buildings." (Int.09 Exeter)

"So I left [the area she used to live in] and moved to Exeter because I thought I had friends here, but I ended up sleeping in a bus station. I met a man there who knew a girl in here, he asked if there was a place. There was and I'm glad because I was really frightened on the streets". (Int.07 Exeter)

In addition to the dangers of sleeping rough, there are problems of personal hygiene and where to get food. Some areas have good drop-in day centre facilities like St Petrock's in Exeter, where cheap food can be obtained. However, in other areas rough sleepers have to be creative, they have to beg for money or food, steal it or look in dustbins.

"When I was on the streets in [name of city] we looked through the bins and skips at the back of shops, restaurants and hotels. But then they used to put bleach on the food they threw out in skips to stop homeless people from taking it. They prefer homeless people to die in [name of city] than to feed them." (Int.08 Exeter)

3. DRINK OR DRUG ADDICTION

A number of residents at Esther Community did have drink and/or drug problems, of the five interviewees three had drug problems and two had serious alcohol problems – see Table 7.

Table 7: Residents with drink or drug addiction

ID No.	Age	Hostel	Drink Problem	Drug Addict
Int.10	18	Esther Community	No	No
Int.07	20	Esther Community	No	No
Int.06	23	Esther Community	No	Yes
Int.09	27	Esther Community	Yes	Yes
Int.08	28	Esther Community	Yes	Yes

a. Alcohol

Many people who sleep rough have serious drink problems, those who do not have a drink problem when they begin to sleep rough usually develop one soon after. The first stage is caused by social factors (i.e. fitting in with the street crowd) and boredom. This is followed by drink becoming a useful way of getting to sleep especially when it is cold. After a period, drinking until you pass out on a regular basis, soon develops into an addiction.

“When you’re on the streets you drink yourself into a stupor just to get to sleep – especially if you’re on your own. When you’re on your own it’s very scary. Most alcoholics have a bad record for violence to women, there are a lot of alcoholics on the streets because their wife kicked them out because they’re violent.” (Int.08 Exeter)

Alcoholics often take time out periodically to get their drinking more under control (Ravenhill, 1999). Thus they often enter rehabilitation programmes but to curb the strength of the addiction, rather than to give up drinking forever. Similarly hostels, especially the hostels where they can stay on the premises all day if they choose are a good place to go when they want to slow down on drinking and get it under more control.

“In the next three months [while at Esther Community] I’m hoping to clear my head a bit and stop panicking. I want to get some peace. When I’m stronger I’ll be able to do more things. I want to get my determination back...I’ve slowed down on the booze. The good thing about that is that I actually got a bit of money now, so I can buy clothes and things. I bought some clothes the other day, it made me feel good”. (Int.09 Exeter)

b. Drugs

Drug addiction is a major cause of homelessness; two of the interviewees became involved with hard core drugs (heroin and cocaine) in their late teens. They have entered the cycle of drug addiction, methadone substitute, back on drugs etc. When addicted, the acquisition of drugs becomes the sole aim, nothing else matters and rational decision making ceases, the drug addict will do anything for their next fix. It is common that drug taking leads addicts to lose not only their possessions but also their accommodation.

“We did anything for drugs. We swapped the telly for drugs, we sold the furniture for drugs. We sold or swapped anything we had for drugs...” (Int.08 Exeter)

[*Some years later and during a different episode of homelessness*] “When I first moved in [to Esther Community], Andy took me back to my old flat to collect some things. Most of the furniture was sold for drugs, but I managed to get some photographs.” (Int.08 Exeter)

[*A different episode of homelessness*] “I went back to stay with [name] after I’d lost the baby. And I stayed there until I was kicked out of the flat ‘cos I was dealing drugs to students underneath. When I was kicked out of the flat, I lost my deposit, so I couldn’t find anywhere else to live”. (Int.08 Exeter)

As far as the drug addicts at Esther Community were concerned, becoming a drug addict does not happen overnight. It is a long slow process as the addiction begins to take hold, gradually more and more heroin is needed to induce the same effects.

“Getting a drug habit is hard, it takes three years to get a heroin habit, but just one year to get a methadone habit. It takes a long time to earn enough money to develop a real habit”. (Int.08 Exeter)

Methadone is used as substitute for heroin and cocaine, but this can be just as addictive and equally as difficult to wean yourself from it. Even the prescriptions of methadone are abused by the addicts, some use methadone along side hard drugs to make their drugs last longer and their money go further. Others experiment with different ways of taking methadone for maximum impact.

I'm on sugar free methadone, because the stuff is really bad for your teeth. I've seen people who've rotten teeth because they've been on methadone. Someone told me the other day that you can inject the sugar free stuff straight into your veins. I'm not doing that, that's not why I asked to be put on the sugar free. I don't shoot up, I don't want to get into shooting up". (Int.09 Exeter)

There was very definite evidence of a pecking order of drug addiction and addicts at Esther Community. The bigger the habit, the better drug addict you were, and the longer you had spent living on the streets the greater authority you were on all aspects of homelessness. Residents who had been homeless or addicted to drugs for longer took great pride in this, and classed themselves as a cut above the rest of the residents.

"The smack and coke in this area is weak, so I've to get hold of a lot more to feed my habit. I've never lived anywhere where the drugs are so poor, not even the E's are good. When I tested the coke, you know by rubbing it on my gums, it didn't even make my gums go numb. That proves just how weak it is... normally when I inject coke I get a rush up my arm, but with this stuff I didn't, that's how I know it's weak... People in this area and in here [Esther Community] say they are going over on the coke they think they're drug addicts, but they're not. They wouldn't be able to take the real stuff that I've taken in the past. They aren't heavy users like I used to be. Some people here [Esther Community] wish they'd a drug habit, but all they really want is to belong to people, they're sad." (Int.08 Exeter)

However, there is mutual respect amongst addicts and homeless people who feel that they are the 'same grade'. There is often a comradeship and friendship between them that can be both comforting and supportive. The common bond means that they are not on their own, someone else knows and appreciates what they are going through, they know just how big an achievement every seemingly small success is. There is also an appreciation that they are not in a drug rehabilitation centre, where people can feed off each others problems or flout rules.

“I get on best with [name of resident], she’s on the same medication and going through the same kind of things... It’s nice to have someone who knows what you are going through... I like it here because there are no users. There are ex-users having counselling, but that is different, they are in the same boat and don’t drag you back into using.” (Int.09 Exeter)

4. MEDICAL PROBLEMS

A number of residents had long term medical problems ranging from Asthma to Hepatitis. There was some evidence that residents regularly shared their medications, during the periods of observation residents on more than one occasion shared their inhalers. There are obvious dangers with sharing medications that could have serious consequences. At the time of the research, one member of staff commented that there were no official records as to whether residents were on any medication and if so which type. This was something that she was concerned about and was hoping that management were going to look into.

The connection between hepatitis and drug abuse was clear. One resident had Hepatitis C another Hepatitis B; both were receiving counselling, medical advice and drug treatment from specialists at the St Petrock’s day centre. Both types of hepatitis are contagious, Hepatitis is usually only passed on through bodily fluids, but Hepatitis B is highly infectious and hygiene of plates and cutlery needs to be observed closely. Hepatitis B is both easier to catch than Aids and is also a bigger killer than Aids. The presence of hepatitis and the ever-present threat of Aids means that hygiene and health and safety, needs to be observed.

At the time of the research, there was no obvious evidence of precautions being taken surrounding the hygiene of communal plates and cutlery in the kitchen. Although the Hepatitis B infection can easily be cleaned away using hot water, on one of my visits there was no hot water or heating, the residents informed me that this had been the case over the previous weekend, this was confirmed by the staff member on duty. After repair the boiler system had broken down again that day, meaning that they would be without hot water for at least another night and morning.

5. THE HOMELESS COMMUNITY

There is a strong homeless community in Exeter, most of the homeless people know everyone else or at least several other homeless people and newcomers are easily spotted. This has both advantages and disadvantages. New comers to the area and people living on the streets

for the first time are often helped by other homeless people. However, they are also in danger of being raped, beaten or having their possessions or money stolen from them.

This young woman was fortunate:

“...but I ended up sleeping in a bus station. I met a man there who knew a girl in here, he asked if there was a place. There was and I’m glad, because I was really frightened on the streets”. (Int.07 Exeter)

There are often conflicts within the homeless community that can be transferred into the hostel and cause serious problems within the hostel. These are usually connected with squabbles or problems with the male members of the homeless community.

“I’m worried about meeting him again for another reason, though. He knows where Esther Community is; he is someone else who lives at Esther Community’s ex. That might make things complicated. Meeting him might cause me problems, some of the other women might mind.” (Int.09 Exeter)

“I know [resident’s name], she was baby sitting for a friend of mine while I couldn’t work. She was baby sitting for free, she says, but she wasn’t. He is one of the biggest drug dealers in the area. She was doing it for drugs. I don’t know what possessed him to choose her, I mean you’ve seen her, the way she dresses compared to me. He’s taken me back now, [resident’s name] doesn’t like it, but he has a standard to keep up. Anyway his little girl has now got nits and she must have got them from [resident’s name] because there’s no where else for her to catch them. [resident’s name] is gunning for me now, because she thinks I told him that she has scabies and that is why she can’t baby sit anymore.” (Int.06 Exeter)

“I am stopping in the hostel at the moment a lot, it isn’t safe out there at the moment. [resident’s name] has been telling everyone that I grassed up [man’s name] for raping me, when I first arrived. But I tell you I haven’t grassed him. I haven’t told no one and there’s no way I’ve spoken to the Bill.” (Int.08 Exeter)

There is little that staff can do about such squabbles and quarrels, they have to listen when appropriate but remain impartial and neutral at all times when residents are in conflict. Such problems can make the streets a very dangerous place to live and increase tension and anxiety amongst the homeless population and hostel residents.

There was evidence that Esther Community had a hierarchy among residents. Those residents who had slept rough the longest, had the most episodes of homelessness and/or had the most serious drug addictions, classed themselves as a 'cut above' those residents with fewer problems that were of shorter duration. This meant that some older residents were intolerant of younger hostel residents that had never slept rough or had small or no drink/drug habits.

"I hate 16 year olds in the hostel showing off about their homelessness, when they can't know what it's like to be really homeless because they haven't been homeless for long enough". (Int.08 Exeter)

The common bond between residents who saw themselves as 'the same grade' served a useful purpose as it allowed the residents to form informal support networks with people could appreciate what they were going through.

6. RELIGION

Three out of five interviewees discussed (without prompting) the fact that Esther Community is a Christian hostel. They expressed their observations and fears about the way staff communicated their beliefs. It would appear that most residents were very wary when they first arrived at the hostel, in case there would be heavy preaching or attempts at indoctrination. However, once they had been there for a week or so they realised that there would be no 'hard sell' of religious beliefs.

"They sometimes have community meetings, everyone here is invited, but we don't go because they just want to tell us about God and stuff and we're just not interested. I won't listen to any of the religious bits. This place isn't bad though, they have their posters and things on the walls, but this place doesn't force religion down your neck like some of the places I've been to. Some of the drug rehab places do that you know, force religion down your neck". (Int.09 Exeter)

"This place has a lot of Christianity in it, but it's not bad, there's a good balance, they don't force it on you, it's not like the God squad or anything. When you first arrive you're scared that you're going to be preached at, and you can't hack that, but it's not forced on you, you're not pressurised into having their beliefs. It's just that there are morals and respect there if you want it." (Int.06 Exeter)

Residents also appreciated the fact that they are free to ask staff questions about their beliefs and that they will be given an honest answer, but no one will go into the 'hard sell' mode and try to preach at them.

"I was talking to Andy [hostel manager] about this place and the God posters and telling him what happened to me. He gave me a New Testament Bible. But he did it in a nice way, no strings attached, no preach, he just said that I might like to read it if I wanted to. I don't mind that, it's not in your face, there's no heavy sell, it's just there if I want it. Another time I was talking to Cindy [night staff] in the night and she invited me to church with her sometime. I don't know if I'll go, but I might. The good thing is I don't have to." (Int.06 Exeter)

"The staff are good here and friendly, you can chat with them any time day or night. I was chatting to Cindy, she invited me to go to church with her. I did, it was all right. She says I can go again with her some time, if I want to". (Int.07 Exeter)

Residents did not seem to be offended by invitations to church or when they were given literature and to a certain extent found it comforting and a sign that staff cared and wanted to be friends.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The interviews presented in this report offer illustrations of the problems facing homeless young women. The report also identifies a number of factors that demonstrate the quality of KeyChange's provision for homeless people in both Exeter and Reigate. It points to some possible areas for consideration where improvements could be made.

Residents' Life Experiences

1. For 8 out of 10 women, the last place of residence was living with a boyfriend or partner. The property they lived in together usually belonged to the man, so once the relationship broke down the woman had to leave and became homeless.
2. 7 out of 10 women stated that domestic violence was one of the main contributory factors that lead to them becoming homeless. In some cases it was a direct cause of their homelessness. Three out of

ten women had lived with several partners who had all been violent towards them.

3. 8 out of 10 women first became homeless in their teens. 3 of these women (all from Esther Community) were in their late twenties and had been homeless several times.
4. 7 out of 10 women cited family breakdown as either the cause of homelessness or a major contributory factor in their first phase of homelessness. Some of the older women acknowledged that problems with their relationship with their family during their teenage years led to them becoming homeless at that age and was in part a cause of their current episode of homelessness.
5. 4 out of 5 women at Esther Community had slept rough the night before admission (no one at Wayside had ever slept rough). 3 of these women had slept rough for considerable periods of time on several occasions in the past.

Those women who had slept rough for considerable periods of time in the past, had become so accustomed to surviving on the streets, that they no longer saw it as a problem. When problems occurred with partners or housing it was easier for them to return to the streets for a while, knowing that when they were ready they could find a place in a hostel and then somewhere to live. Thus making it difficult to find a resettlement programme for them that will have a lasting affect.

6. 4 out of 10 women had serious drink and/or drug problems. Of these, 3 Women at Esther Community had drug problems, two of whom also had alcohol problems. One woman at Wayside had a serious alcohol problem. It was not possible to tell how many other women had minor drink or drug problems, but several certainly had experimented with drugs.
7. 4 out of 10 women felt that, after they left the hostel, they would need support to be able to live in the community. This ranged from help with sorting out bills, filling in forms, general advice and someone to talk to when 'things got bad' or went wrong.
8. 4 out of 5 Wayside residents were in fulltime employment or education (no one interviewed at Esther Community was either in employment or education). Employment was limited to care assistant and low waged work.
9. Residents, especially at Wayside, found the stigma attached to living in a hostel is a stumbling block, especially when trying to find work, settling into a new job or college course. They felt disadvantaged in job and education interviews and were ashamed of their circumstances and where they lived. However, they still

sought work or education courses, regardless of the stigma and the way they felt.

10. Some women felt excluded socially from normal activities with their peers, because of the nature of hostel life and the stigma attached by outsiders to people living in hostels.
11. Trust was a big issue, especially for younger residents. Some women had been let down by most of the adults and professionals in their lives and had developed a strong mistrust of anyone trying to help them. Staff recognised that they had to demonstrate their trustworthiness, by being open and honest about what was happening and helping and advising residents where they could.

Homeless Communities

1. There is a strong homeless community in Exeter (there was no obvious homeless community in the Reigate area). Most of the homeless people know everyone else or at least several other homeless people. Newcomers are easily spotted. Other homeless people often help those who are new comers to the area and people living on the streets for the first time.
2. There are often conflicts within the homeless community that can be transferred into the hostel and cause serious problems amongst residents within the hostel. These are usually connected with problems centring round male members of the homeless community.
3. Esther Community had a hierarchy among residents, where those who had slept rough the longest, had the most episodes of homelessness and/or had the most serious drug addictions, classed themselves as a 'cut above' those residents with fewer problems that were of shorter duration. This had three effects:
 - ◆ there was a great deal of intolerance by residents towards younger homeless women, with small or no drink/drug habits;
 - ◆ a common bond between residents who saw themselves as 'the same grade' was formed;
 - ◆ informal support networks between some members developed. They could appreciate what the others were going through.

Use of Other Agencies

1. Both hostels make use of other agencies to supplement and enhance the service they offer to KeyChange residents. However,

there are still gaps in provision that could be filled locally and ensure an even better service from KeyChange hostels.

2. Esther Community may be able to forge stronger links between the hostel and public sector organisations, whereas Wayside need to forge stronger links between the hostel and voluntary sector organisations.
3. Both hostels could formalise their records to help clarify residents needs. For example:
 - ◆ the number of named keyworkers and professionals assigned to each individual, both by KeyChange and other organisation.
 - ◆ the type(s) of the support the individual needs,
 - ◆ what the individual is actually offered and is receiving.
 - ◆ any gaps in provision.

This would ensure that all KeyChange residents get the appropriate help they need to sort out the issues that led them to become homeless. It would also make the monitoring of outcomes more valuable for future work.

4. More co-ordination, between other organisations and KeyChange, is needed to ensure that residents are fully supported when they leave the hostel. Keyworkers from other organisations may provide support, but they do not necessarily provide for all needs or start where KeyChange leaves off. KeyChange needs to be sure of exactly what kind of support residents are or are not going to get before they leave the hostel. This allows time to ensure that ex-residents will be adequately looked after and that any gaps in provision are filled.
5. Ex-residents tend to trust hostel staff and keyworkers more than any other professional or keyworker, because they have built up a relationship with them over time.

Medical Matters

1. Residents share their medications (i.e. Asthma inhalers) on a regular basis. The hostel does not keep records about the medical problems or medications that residents use, for example they have no record of which residents are asthmatics or diabetics.
2. A number of residents had Hepatitis strains B or C this was strongly associated with prolonged drug abuse. Counselling for Hepatitis and other medical or drug related problems was

available from specialists working through the St Petrock's day centre.

3. Both forms of Hepatitis are contagious and in the case of Hepatitis B, it is both easier to catch and is a bigger killer than AIDS. There ought to be precautions surrounding the hygiene of, for example, communal kitchen equipment.

Housing Problems

1. There is a shortage of suitable affordable housing in both areas.
2. Women who are ready to move back into the community and mainstream society are dependent on housing association and local authority allocations. They find it difficult to help themselves, by finding their own accommodation in the private rented sector.
3. Women recognised that if they had children, they would be able to find accommodation more easily and quickly.
4. Housing and DSS departments do not work together in either area. This leaves sketchy provision for the homeless under the 1996 Housing Act.
5. When the housing departments and homeless persons units do offer advice and assistance to homeless women, this often cannot be taken up because homeless women do not have access to finance for travel or Bed and Breakfast expenses.
6. The Social security departments are not willing to offer crisis loans to cover travel expenses or Bed and Breakfast bills until Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance or Housing Benefit has been sorted out. They effectively exclude women from acting on the advice and assistance given by housing departments and from gaining access to accommodation.

State Benefits

1. Some homeless women had unrealistic expectations of what state benefits should cover. They expected food and all accommodation costs to be completely free.
2. It is difficult enough for anyone to survive for long periods of time on state benefits. Homelessness compounds those problems experienced by people on benefits in mainstream society.
3. The level of benefits is extremely low for young people under the age of 25. Under 25 year olds that are living independently incur all the same costs as people over the age of 25. The level of benefits, especially to young people, actively excludes them from taking control of their situation and helping themselves out of

homelessness. Under 18s are particularly hard hit as they are not automatically entitled to benefits.

4. Day to day expenses for food, etc. are more expensive when living in a hostel, as residents often have more meals out, cannot buy in bulk or store much food.
5. There are often delays and problems with receiving income support, this can leave residents with little or no cash for food. It also increases pressure on already vulnerable women who are finding it difficult to cope with life and homelessness.
6. The amount of paper work involved in making benefit claims can be bewildering, especially for women with a poor educational background, learning difficulties, mental health problems or in crisis.
7. Delays in receiving housing benefit places extra constraints on hostel resources, and actively deters private landlords from accepting tenants on housing benefit.
8. Benefit problems place many extra demands on hostel staff.

The KeyChange Experience

A. THE HOSTEL

1. Both hostels have a welcoming atmosphere that enabled new residents to settle into their new environment quickly and easily. The staff were seen to be very helpful and often going the 'extra mile' to help residents (this was in contrast with the residents experiences at other hostels). Residents commented on the noticeably high standard of cleanliness and hygiene at both hostels.
2. The two hostels are full to capacity 95% of the time, Wayside has a formal waiting list and the direct access hostel, Esther Community, has a constant supply of potential residents. KeyChange hostels are always in demand because of the high standard of cleanliness, hygiene and the friendly atmosphere. Both hostels will continue to be full to capacity, regardless of the planned new developments in both areas.
3. Both hostels have a tendency to 'silt-up', becoming full to capacity. Often bed-spaces are blocked by residents who have to stay beyond the hostel time limit and/or after they are ready to leave. This is because there is no other suitable accommodation to move on to.
4. The keyworker system is working well, especially at Esther Community where it is more overt. However, it would appear that

there is not enough support or space for staff to 'off load' after heavy keywork sessions. Wind down sessions could also be used as a vehicle for helping and advising staff on the way to tackle issues as they arise.

5. There is scope for KeyChange to expand their work in both geographical areas if they so wished.

Reigate – KeyChange could consider extending their work in the area to meet the need for move-on second stage housing. This would allow hostel residents who are ready, to be more independent for a time, before moving on to more permanent rented accommodation. A second hostel could also be considered for the Reigate area.

Exeter – A second stage hostel akin to Wayside for women is desperately needed in the area, especially for those aged 25 and over and women with long-term problems. In addition, a direct access, night shelter style hostel for women is needed, this could accommodate those women who are not ready to leave the streets but periodically need a break from the streets. This type of hostel could feed people into the existing Esther Community hostel.

B. THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOMELESS PEOPLE HELPED

1. The two hostels deal with different types of homelessness: -

Wayside – the majority of residents have never slept rough and this is their first episode of homelessness. A significant proportion of these women are from middle class backgrounds. Many are either in employment or find employment or college training courses soon after they arrive at Wayside. Wayside deals predominantly with women from the borough. Wayside uses a preventative approach to homelessness, preventing women from sleeping rough by helping them as soon as they are homeless.

Esther Community – deals predominantly with rough sleepers; most of their residents slept rough at least the night before they moved into the hostel. A high proportion of their residents have chaotic lifestyles, and some have severe drink and/or drug addictions. A significant number of the women migrated to Exeter from other areas, often because there were better provisions for the homeless in the Exeter area.

2. KeyChange hostels take in women with mental health, drink, drug or behavioural problems. Both hostels are the only hostels in their area that cater for women with such problems. The lack of bed

spaces for these women means that there will continue to be a strong need for KeyChange hostels.

3. Over time, 'hard core' drug addicts and chronic alcoholics, get stuck in a repetitive cycle of addiction, debt, homelessness, rehabilitation then addiction again. This is especially so for those who have been addicted for a number of years or who have had more than one episode of addiction.
4. Neither hostel is in a position to help these women long term. The hostels can only act as a holding place, a secure safe place to stay until an appropriate rehabilitation programme or long stay hostel place can be found.

C. AGE

1. There is a shortage of provision for people aged over 25 in both areas. KeyChange is the only provider that accepts women up to the age of 35. There is no provision for women over 35, with the exception of women's refuges, that only take women who are victims of domestic violence.
2. In both areas there are plans within the next two years to open Foyer style hostels that cater specifically for young people aged 16-25. This means that the proportion of over 25 year olds in the hostels will rise when the new hostels come into action. The Foyer style hostels do not cater for people with drink or drug dependency problems, behavioural problems or some mental health problems. Thus, there is every indication that there will be an increase in the proportion of young people with such problems in KeyChange hostels within the next two years.
3. There is a need to ensure that teenagers find a swift long-term solution to their homelessness. A solution that not only provides them with accommodation; but equips them with the necessary life skills to maintain a settled life.
4. KeyChange needs to look seriously at who they are trying to help and how. The example of the non-streetwise teenager who moved into Esther Community to share residence with drug addicts and ex-drug dealers highlights the possible dangers of trying to help anyone and everyone.
5. A family mediator is needed to work with young people and their families. This person could either be employed by KeyChange or a local organisation that uses a mediator could be brought in to work with KeyChange. This would not necessarily result in the young person going back to live with their parents, but it could

restore a very valuable relationship with their family for the future.

D. RESETTLEMENT

1. Both hostels could look more closely at resettlement work.

Wayside – has strong support for women who live in the hostel. It has informal follow up procedures dependent on the ex-resident keeping in touch with the hostel. This needs to be formalised and be much more comprehensive if long-term resettlement is to be ensured.

Esther Community – has no resettlement programme, although some preparatory work is done during the residents' three month stay. It needs a formal resettlement programme, especially for those women who are not going to be referred onto other hostels or projects. There also needs to be follow-up work on women who move onto other projects, to check that they have settled in and that they are in the project best suited for their needs.

2. The older age group of women (i.e. 25 plus) are most likely to have been:
 - ◆ homeless more than once,
 - ◆ disadvantaged on housing waiting lists;
 - ◆ are more likely to have multiple problems.

This means that some form of resettlement work and follow up is more important. HAG (Housing Action Group), do offer some resettlement work once an individual has been housed by them, but no preparatory work.

4. Long-term resettlement programmes are needed, which follows residents for 1-2 years. They need to incorporate life-skill training, counselling and a realistic support programme, that supports them as they integrate back into the community.
5. To ensure long term resettlement is achieved, it is essential that residents (and ex-residents) are encouraged to develop friendship networks with people in the housed population in the area they are going to live in. Instead of simply making friends with homeless or ex-homeless people, who will have similar problems and can tend to drag each other down over time.
6. Had contact been maintained with people who had moved on from KeyChange hostels, a better picture of the effectiveness of KeyChange's work with the homeless could have been gained. This information would feed back into the resettlement

programme (and KeyChange's work in general) valuable information about:

- ◆ problems experienced by ex-residents,
- ◆ the types of things the women needed more help with,
- ◆ local issues that affect homeless women settling back into the community.
- ◆ gaps in provision both in the area and through KeyChange.

This would have given a much clearer indication of where the 'KeyChange experience' is working well and where improvements need to be made. This is vital if the hostels are to continue to improve and offer high standards of support and provision.

6. Increasingly, charities working on the front-line of homelessness need to enlist the services of people with a good knowledge of the law, who are able to access the legal system. They are in a position to enforce the law on behalf of clients, ensuring that local authorities do carry out their statutory duties.

F. CARE LEAVERS

1. Young people in both areas, who left care or foster placements, did not receive enough support or help. They often had little or no choice about where they would live, but were sent to local hostels. This was bemusing and left them feeling isolated and that they had no one to turn to or trust when they needed help or advice.
2. Care leavers are one of the most vulnerable groups to homelessness and serial episodes of homelessness. They remain vulnerable for many years. They need an adequate resettlement preparation programme and will continue to need support in the community for some years after being housed.
3. Once they have left the hostel, they are more likely to trust hostel staff (rather than, e.g. a housing association keyworker) for help and advice, as it is these people that they have formed a good relationship with and have learnt to trust.

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