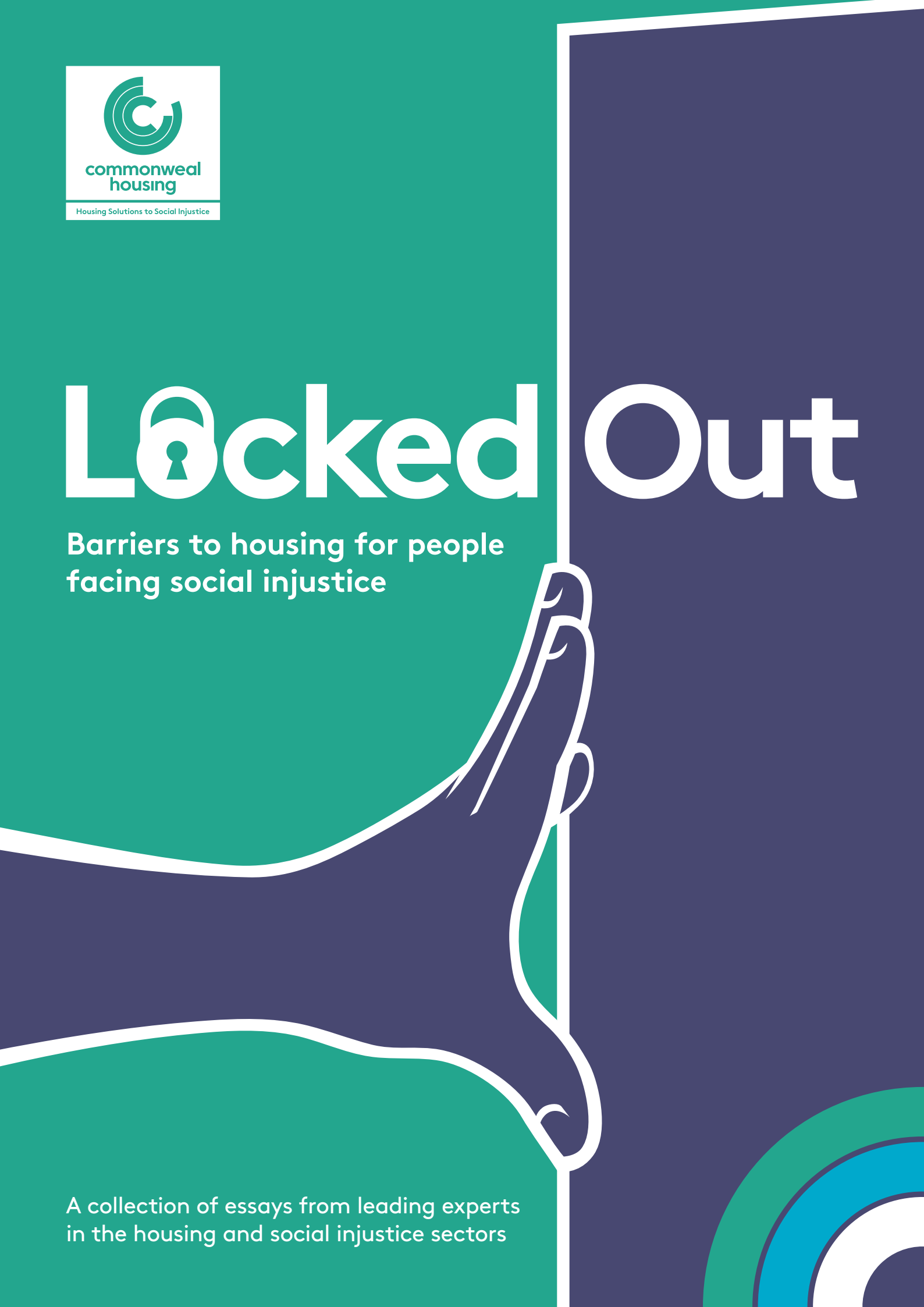
commonweal housing

Housing Solutions to Social Injustice

Locked Out

Barriers to housing for people facing social injustice



A collection of essays from leading experts in the housing and social injustice sectors

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Foreword

Jack Mactaggart, Chair of Commonweal Housing

Reading this collection of essays it is impossible not to be deeply humbled by the wide range of adversities facing many of today's vulnerable people.

Sitting within the fairly unique position as facilitator or 'enabler' of pilot project ideas, Commonweal are exposed to a particularly broad set of issues and developing themes in the sector – and are increasingly striving to share this leaning.

This topical and thoughtful collection, written by subject matter experts, does just that.

As an action-learning charity that's focused on innovation, Commonweal is truly flexible in our approach and mindset, but completely focused on capturing learning and using it in the most impactful way possible. Indeed, this is in many ways underpinned by our financial independence, due to the longstanding generosity of our benefactor, Grove End Housing. Free from the pressures of fundraising, or beholden to rigid project eligibility criteria, we are able to follow our nose and explore the often uncomfortable issues at the margins.

This ability to be independent extends throughout all aspects of our approach. We are not a housing association, a homeless charity, a VAWG charity or one focused on youth issues or the criminal justice system. There are many other organisations with these issues as their mission statement – and they do it brilliantly.

Instead, we aim to be a trusted and experienced voice between them all; funding ideas, facilitating pilot schemes and then being obsessive about capturing and sharing the learning – both the good and bad.

We are fortunate to work with and support some really brilliant partners who do inspirational work every day. Like everything, it is a team effort.

We hope this anthology continues to bring together the ecosystem of organisations working together in the sector. Our experience has shown us that collaboration can be one of the keys to success, and as such we are committed to using our position to share knowledge and insight as widely and frequently as possible.

We hope the following pages get you thinking as much as it made us – our door is always open for those with a project, an idea or even just a thought.

Commonweal Housing
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About the authors

Kelly Henderson is a Researcher at Durham University, prior to which she co-founded DAHA and was Business Manager – Domestic Abuse at a large housing provider. Her previous experience includes Domestic and Sexual Violence Lead for a local authority, coordinating the area's Multi Agency Domestic Abuse Partnership. Kelly's housing experience includes roles in housing management, asylum, policy and research. She recently was seconded to Northumbria Police to manage a Home Office funded multi-force project to improve the police response to domestic abuse and oversee research into the provision of a national response to perpetrators of domestic abuse. She has a Masters in Housing Policy/Management. Her PhD (Durham University) researched the role of housing in a Coordinated Community Response to domestic abuse and included the largest UK questionnaire to housing providers on domestic abuse. She was named 24 Housing's 'Housing Professional of the Year' 2018 for her work and research on housing and domestic abuse.

Rebecca Vagi is the Whole Housing Programme Manager at Standing Together and delivering the first 'Whole Housing Approach' project, which improves the housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse across all tenure types so that they can achieve stable housing, live safely and overcome the abuse and its harmful impacts. Rebecca has worked in the field of gender-based violence for 12 years delivering and managing front line services, coordinating a local community response to domestic abuse and working with health and housing organisations to build in-house interventions.

Elizabeth Jones began working with Standing Together in October 2019, and joins the Whole Housing Team after working on Pathfinder, a national health project aimed at improving health responses to domestic abuse. She started her role as Whole Housing Approach Coordinator in April 2020. In the 6 years prior to joining Standing Together, Elizabeth directly supported survivors in her capacity as a helpline volunteer, refuge worker and Independent Domestic Violence Advisor, with safety and social welfare issues, including various private rented, social housing and supported accommodation concerns. She also worked at Citizen's Advice, assisting the in-house solicitor and supporting clients through eviction hearings. Elizabeth has a keen interest in legal and justice issues and holds a Graduate Diploma in Law, and a Masters degree in Medical Ethics and Law with International Law.

Rosa dos Ventos Lopes Heimer is a Policy Coordinator at the Latin American Women's Aid, where she has been working on the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) project funded by Trust for London and run in partnership with London Black Women's Project. She is the author of the recently published report "A Roof, Not A Home: The housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London", which builds on research and case work experiences of the first year of this project. Before joining LAWA, Rosa completed an MSc in Gender, Policy and Inequalities at LSE, and worked in research and policy, managing projects in the intersecting areas of gender equality, migration, violence against women and LGBTQI rights in the UK, India and Lithuania. Rosa is also currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Geography at King's College London.

Georgie Barron is a Senior Keyworker at The Nelson Trust Women's Centre, as part of its Change Team project supporting women with multiple and complex needs. Georgie has worked at the Trust for nearly five years and loves being able to support women in her local community. Her particular passion is supporting women through complex social care involvement to try and remain with their children.

Nicola Drinkwater is Clinks' Policy Manager and joined the organisation in September 2012. As well as leading on specific thematic policy areas including women and accommodation, Nicola is responsible for managing the work of Clinks' highly regarded policy team. Nicola has a BA in Criminology from the University of Leicester and an MA in Criminology and Criminal Justice from King's College, London. She has previously worked in both the Policy and Service User Involvement teams at Revolving Doors Agency and previously volunteered as a mentor for a young carer.

Burcu Borysik is the Policy Manager at Revolving Doors Agency, a national justice charity that aims to end the cycle of crisis and crime. She currently spearheads a three-year policy programme to embed a public health approach to policing young adults with repeat low-level offences through design thinking. Prior to joining Revolving Doors Agency, she was the Head of Systems Change at the homelessness charity Mayday Trust, leading on policy and strategy to embed strengths-based approaches. Previously, she was the Policy Manager at Homeless Link, overseeing a large portfolio of policy and research projects on supported housing and health. She is a member of the Editorial Board of ThinkHouse and the academic journal Housing, Care and Support. She tweets @BurcuBorysik

Jessica Southgate is interim CEO of Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk. Jessica has worked in policy, research and service-user lead campaigns in the voluntary sector for over ten years, with a focus on gender, youth and justice. Most recently she led on research and policy development into girls' experiences of public sexual harassment for Plan International UK. She is currently one of the Clore 2020 Emerging Leader: Women and Girls Programme cohort. Jessica has a Masters in Gender from the LSE and is a Griffins Society Fellow. She is a Trustee of Clinks, formerly Women's Breakout, and volunteers with Opening Doors London.

Bill Tidnam has worked for Thames Reach since 2000, initially within the Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TST). He then became Service Manager, still managing the TSTs but also helping develop other services including floating support services and some of those that now form part of Community Support Services. He has been a member of the Senior Management Team since his appointment as Departmental Director at the beginning of 2004 and chairs the organisation's Central Equality and Diversity Group (CED). Bill became Chief Executive of Thames Reach in July 2018.

Katharine Sacks-Jones is the Chief Executive of Become, the charity for children in care and young care leavers. Become helps children in care and young care leavers to believe in themselves and to heal, grow and unleash their potential. They do this through direct support to young people, driving improvements in practice, and campaigning for changes to policy and practice. They ensure that the voices of children in care and young care leavers are listened to and their rights upheld. Katharine has over 15 years' experience working across policy, campaigns, public affairs and parliament and has worked in the charity sector for the last 10 years. Her focus has been on disadvantage and inequality – she has worked on issues including homelessness, unemployment, multiple disadvantage, mental health and domestic and sexual abuse. Katharine has spoken about and written extensively on disadvantage and inequality issues and has sat on and chaired government advisory groups. Before joining Become Katharine was the inaugural Chief Executive of Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk.

Sam Pannell has been at Rentstart since mid-2017 and his role has three main components. He provides pre-tenancy training and supports Rentstart's clients once they are housed. He works on the Freedom 2 Work project: a scheme trying to break the cycle of homelessness by combining housing, training, and support for re-entering the job market. On this project he spends his time co-ordinating training and support around employment as well as encouraging clients to partake in a match funded savings scheme, building key components for more stable lives. He also links in with our local community to further the work of Rentstart in many different ways including delivering school assemblies. He is really excited to be working with a charity who, and running a project which, adopts a tailored, personal approach, aiming to create lasting and sustainable change in people's lives.

Introduction

Connie Muttock, Policy and Communications Manager, Commonweal Housing

In the midst of a national housing crisis, it is obvious to most of us that too many people are locked out of safe, secure housing in the UK. But which groups are particularly at risk and why?

This collection of essays highlights the links between housing and social injustice, and the ways in which our most marginalised populations are further disadvantaged by housing policy, provision and practice. It contains contributions from expert leaders across the third sector, writing on: violence against women and girls, the criminal justice system, and periods of transition. These subjects were chosen as a focus for Commonweal's 2020-2022 strategy, as areas in which social injustice and housing insecurity collide.

Written against the backdrop of the global outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown of spring and summer 2020, many of these essays reflect on how pre-existing injustices left many vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic. For some, unprecedented measures have given them a roof over their heads at long last – too many others face far worse conditions than before.

This introductory chapter sets out the context of housing and social injustice in the UK, before giving a brief outline of the chapters in this anthology. It is written with many thanks to all the writers who contributed, and especially to the people they work with and support – who have been fighting for their housing needs to be met for too long.

A deepening housing crisis

It is common knowledge that the UK has been in the depths of a housing crisis for many years. As home ownership has become impossible for many, the private rented sector has boomed, with private renters now spending an average of 40% of their income on rent.[1] There is a significant lack of affordable and social homes across the country: from World War 2 to 1980, an average of around 126,000 social homes were built every year – yet in 2018/19, just 6,287 homes were built in England.[2]

For those caught in the crisis, the impacts have been devastating. In England:

There are **1.5 million households** currently on a **waiting list for a social home**[3]

8.4 million people are living in an **unaffordable, insecure or unsuitable home**[2]

Before the pandemic, 4,266 people were sleeping rough on a single night – an overall increase in 141% from 2010[4]

88,330 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of 2019 – up by 84% since December 2010[5]

The popular message that 'we are all one pay check away from homelessness' doesn't capture how certain groups are particularly at risk. It is those at the sharpest end of inequality – people facing poverty, oppression, and violence – that are more likely to be locked out of the housing system, often with devastating effects.

> **"It is those at the sharpest end of inequality – people facing poverty, oppression, and violence – that are likely to be locked out of the housing system, often with devastating effects.**

Safe and suitable housing: an arm of social justice

From prejudice among policy makers, landlords and housing providers, to challenges like poverty and generational trauma impacting your ability to sustain a tenancy – social injustice is embedded in the housing system from top to bottom.

Maslow has highlighted that humans must meet their basic needs – of food, shelter, and safety – before they can focus on building relationships, growing self-esteem and eventually achieving their potential. Without a roof over your head, or when you are living in an unsafe home, it can be near impossible to move forward into long term stability. A lack of housing can mean social injustices are exacerbated and entrenched: people staying with abusive partners because they have nowhere to go; others cycling in a revolving door of homelessness and offending; people sleeping rough facing worsened mental health and substance dependencies. Too often, the housing system can be an arm of injustice – when it should be a route to safety and stability.

> **"Too often, the housing system can be an arm of injustice – when it should be a route to safety and stability.**

While these essays hone in on three specific areas, there are a range of other social justice issues that intersect with housing and homelessness. For example, recent evidence shows:

90% of wheelchair users struggle to find **accessible** housing in the **private rented** sector[6]

BAME homelessness is on the rise: the percentage of **homeless households from ethnic minority groups has risen** from 21% in 2006/7 to 32% in 2017/18[7]

Young LGBT people are particularly affected by homelessness, and in turn can experience a lack of understanding and even discrimination when accessing services[8]

EEA nationals make up 39% of rough sleepers and **100,000 migrant households** experience destitution annually[9]

In this anthology

This anthology of essays focuses on three subject areas: violence against women and girls, the criminal justice system, and transitions. Commonweal chose to focus on these areas in our three-year strategy 2020-2022: in our experience, they are areas where housing insecurity and social injustice collide – and while there is a range of excellent policy and practice in these areas, some of which is highlighted in these chapters, there is still a huge amount of work to be done.

> **“This anthology of essays focuses on three subject areas: violence against women and girls, the criminal justice system, and transition.**

Chapter one focusses on the experiences of survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Evidence from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance shows us how important access to safe housing is to tackling domestic abuse – with the financial burden of moving and a lack of available housing a key barrier to survivors leaving their abuser. Rosa dos Ventos Lopes Heimer from Latin American Women's Aid highlights in her essay how Black and minoritised women and girls facing VAWG are particularly impacted, and how by and for BME women's refuges have been depleted by austerity. This chapter also contains a special essay from the Nelson Trust, who chose to highlight the story of one of their clients, who struggled to access secure housing while she coped with the overlapping impacts of abuse, poor mental health, and addiction.

In chapter two, experts from criminal justice charities highlight the cycle of homelessness and offending for people in contact with the criminal justice system. In her essay, Nicola Drinkwater from Clinks explores why more than half of people are homeless on release from prison, and what needs to change. Burcu Borysik from Revolving Doors Agency highlights similar challenges across the criminal justice system, as well as the specific issues caused by the devastating disruption of a short prison sentence. Jessica Southgate from Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk, draws attention to the particular challenges for women in contact with the criminal justice system, such as finding housing that can reunite them with their children, and overcoming the legacy of trauma and disadvantage.

Chapter three focusses on a range of different social injustice areas which are caused or exacerbated by points of transition – between services, life stages, employment, and other states of disruption. In her essay, Katharine Sacks-Jones from Become highlights the housing challenges for young people leaving care, revealing that housing is the most common issue young care leavers seek advice for. Sam Pannell from homelessness charity Rentstart focusses on the risks of homelessness at the transition between benefits and employment – particularly following the roll out of Universal Credit. Bill Tidnam of Thames Reach reflects on a lack of support that is tailored to needs of homeless EEA (European Economic Area) migrants, and the difficult transition out of homelessness.

A perfect storm: the housing crisis, social injustice, and Coronavirus

The question on everyone's lips, is where do these issues fit in the current context? At the time of writing, the UK is moving out of lockdown and looking ahead to a potential cliff edge, as vital safety nets such as the ban on evictions and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme are removed in the autumn.

The previous months have exposed long-standing inequalities to a wider audience than normal. We saw how Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities were the worst affected by coronavirus; calls to domestic abuse helplines rocketed; disadvantaged children were worst affected by school closures – the list goes on. For many of us, the only aspect of this crisis that has not been 'unprecedented' is that those already facing injustice have been the hardest hit.

But we also saw the capacity for previously unfathomable change. In the housing world, we saw almost everyone sleeping rough housed through the everyone in directive – with Government now looking to find more long-term housing solutions for this group through the Next Steps Accommodation Plan. These are welcome and long overdue measures that have reinvigorated an ambition in the sector to end homelessness for good.

But the issues highlighted in these essays did not emerge out of nowhere this year – nor are they likely to go away any time soon. What we need to see now is thoughtful, ambitious discussion of the challenges and the potential solutions – and for this we are grateful to the contributors to this collection. We hope this anthology generates a meaningful and helpful conversation about how we can ensure some of the most marginalised communities get the housing and support they need – so that by the time the next crisis hits, we won't be having the same conversations.

> **"What we need to see now is thoughtful, ambitious discussion of the challenges and the potential solutions – and for this we are grateful to contributors to this collection.**

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1

Housing for survivors of violence against women and girls

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Safe and stable housing

A key to access to justice for survivors of domestic abuse

Rebecca Vagi, Elizabeth Jones and Kelly Henderson, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)

For people experiencing domestic abuse, the home is often the most dangerous place. Women are more likely than men to experience domestic abuse, and are also more likely to experience repeated and more injurious abuse.[1] While not all abuse is perpetrated inside the home, it is often confined to the home as an intentional tactic to keep it hidden from public view. Nowhere is this more evident than the startling Domestic Homicide Review statistics. 112 women on average are killed each year in England. 68% of these deaths occur inside the victim's own home, whether shared with the perpetrator or not.[2] Safe and stable housing is therefore vital for people living with domestic abuse.

112 women on average are killed each year in England. 68% of these deaths occur inside the victim's own home.

Securing this often requires relocating, with the onus too often falling on survivors and their children to flee. They bear the emotional, financial, and practical costs of starting over while the perpetrator remains in the property, consequence free.

For survivors, justice is not confined to the court system. Even when survivors access the criminal justice system, the instability of their housing situation (as well as, in many cases, continuing financial/economic abuse by the perpetrator that is linked to housing) prevents them feeling that justice has been achieved.[3] Survivor consultations show that housing instability and the financial burden of relocating – which is often used by the perpetrator as a method of control – is experienced as **a form of injustice**.

> **"Housing instability and the financial burden of relocating – which is often used by the perpetrator as a method of control – is experienced as a form of injustice.**

The ability to relocate and access safety is dependent on the material situation of the survivor and their access to economic resources. Walby's analysis of data from the Crime Survey of England and Wales considered the impact of the economic crisis of 2010 on women. It identified a rise in the severity of domestic abuse, and a correlation between domestic abuse and economic inequality, particularly relating to employment and home ownership. Women who were unemployed and rented their home had access to fewer economic resources, reducing their economic resilience and ability to leave. This consequently led to ongoing abuse and drove an increase in repetitions.[4] Walby further found that women who cannot find £100 at short notice are 3.5 times more likely to experience domestic abuse.[5] Housing is clearly a key resource affecting domestic abuse rates, with access to housing identified as more important than increasing criminalisation.

> **"Housing is clearly a key resource affecting domestic abuse rates, with access to housing identified as more important than increasing criminalisation.**

There is an emphasis on refuge services as the main housing option for women and children to escape a dangerous perpetrator. However, these services are overstretched and often cannot meet the high demand for their support with 64% of referrals to refuge in 2018-19 being declined.[6] While refuges are lifesaving and much needed services, their existence illustrates how survivors are the ones to burden the cost to freedom, having to flee their homes to reach safety.

Services are overstretched and often cannot meet the high demand for their support with 64% of referrals to refuge in 2018-19 being declined.

Survivors who have additional support needs or are from minoritised communities often find accessing refuge service spaces even more difficult. Of women supported by the No Woman Turned Away project in 2018-19, only 18.3% of women with two support needs found a suitable refuge service space compared to 27.4% of women with one support need. Only 11.7% of women with no recourse to public funds were accommodated in a suitable refuge service.

All too often, these barriers lead to survivors remaining in unsafe, unsuitable, or unstable accommodation: 17% of women supported by the project stayed living with family or friends, while 9% stayed in the same accommodation without the perpetrator present. For many survivors, the instability of their housing situation forces them to return to their perpetrator, as 10% of women supported by the project did.[7] If 90% of survivors were housed, these groups would occupy the remaining 10%. While the cycle of abuse would be interrupted and housing justice would be delivered in many cases, the remaining barriers would ensure that survivors stay in unsafe accommodation with the perpetrator, as the only alternative would be destitution.

“For many survivors, the instability of their housing situation forces them to return to their perpetrator.

Shelter identify that since 1980, the number of social renting households has declined by 26%. They state that in 2018/19 only 6,287 new social rent homes were delivered whilst at the same time sales and demolitions of social housing totalled 23,740 homes resulting a shortfall of at least 17,000 social homes in a single year.[8] The current housing crisis includes:

- A shortage of affordable and social housing stock
- Long waiting lists for social housing (1.5 million households currently on a waiting list for a social home)[9]
- High cost of private rented housing (the average private rental home not being affordable anywhere in England for women on median earnings).[10]

Together, these create additional major barriers that factors strongly into a survivor’s decision about whether it is possible to leave the perpetrator.

Survivors are also losing their security of tenure with a refuge provider in London identifying that 53% of women accessing their service had lost their secure tenancy after fleeing a perpetrator.[11] The correlation between domestic abuse and homelessness should therefore come as no surprise. St Mungo’s, one of England’s largest charities offering a range of accommodation and support services to homeless people, found that 50% of women rough sleepers had experienced domestic abuse, with 30% attributing domestic abuse as the leading cause of their homelessness.[12]

St Mungo's ... found that 50% of women rough sleepers had experienced domestic abuse, with 30% attributing domestic abuse as the leading cause of their homelessness.

Housing providers are key in responding to domestic abuse. The Whole Housing Approach (WHA)[13] engages stakeholders across all tenure types to address the barriers disabling access to safe housing when it is needed most. This begins with reforms to policy and legislation. A WHA enables the sector to consider and respond to survivors housing needs, including options to remain in existing home or relocate where it is their choice to do so. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)[14] is an initiative that forms part of the WHA. DAHA offers an accreditation process for social housing providers, focussing on transforming the organisation's response and considering appropriate perpetrator intervention so that the human, emotional and financial costs do not unjustly fall on survivors.

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Colluding crises

Black and minoritised women in the midst of violence, homelessness and COVID-19

Rosa dos Ventos Lopes Heimer, Policy Coordinator, Latin American Women's Aid

Women's homelessness is a largely hidden and under-reported social problem. And so is violence against women, which in turn is a leading cause of women's homelessness in the UK and worldwide. Whilst the intertwined realities of abuse and risk of homelessness may affect all women, **Black and minoritised ('BME')[1] women are made particularly vulnerable by intersecting and structural inequalities**.

Research has shown that Black and minoritised women are generally trapped in violent relationships for longer than white British women.

Research has shown that Black and minoritised women are generally trapped in violent relationships for longer than white British women.[2] In particular, factors such as immigration status, language ability, and race-based discrimination often act as additional barriers in exiting violent relationships. Centrally, these barriers make harder for 'BME' survivors to seek and access safe, suitable and stable accommodation. This is not only due to increasing lack of appropriate refuge spaces and permanent, suitable and affordable houses to accommodate them, but also caused by issues in homelessness assessments and housing allocations as well as insufficient provisions for women with insecure immigration status.

Since 2018, the Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA) and London Black Women's Project (LBWP) has been running the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) Project, in coordination with the OYA consortium of *by and for* specialist Black and minoritised ending-VAWG organisations. The WAHA project is aimed at addressing Black and minoritised women's intersecting pressures of poverty, homelessness and gender-based violence, through promoting changes in housing policy and practice in the UK using a rights-based approach.

Throughout the two years of the project we supported a total of 110 complex cases of Black and minoritised survivors who were homeless or at risk of homeless, provided ad-hoc housing advice to 264 'BME' women, and trained 51 'BME' professionals on housing matters. All women supported by the project were from Black and other minoritised backgrounds, an extremely diverse group in terms of nationalities, religious background and borough of residency. They were from over 34 different nationalities, **Brazilians (15%); British – 'BME' (13%); Colombians (10%) and Bangladeshis (8%) were the largest nationality groups**, whilst the majority of women were **Muslim (31.6%), Catholic (31.6%), or Protestant (13.5%)**. Women were supported across **more than 24 different boroughs/local authorities**.

"We supported a total of 110 complex cases of Black and minoritised survivors who were homeless or at risk of homeless, provided ad-hoc housing advice to 264 'BME' women, and trained 51 'BME' professionals on housing matters.

Our direct casework experiences through the WAHA project shows a range of housing issues arising at the different stages of Black and minoritised survivors' journeys, from leaving their abusers, moving on from refuges, to issues arising even after they have been re-housed. The majority of our cases (52%) were of 'BME' women seeking support because they had just become homeless or threatened with homelessness due to a current or very recent DV situation. The support offered varied, but in its majority support was given for women to safely re-house to emergency accommodation or other forms of housing, whilst for a few cases where it was safe to do so we supported women to maintain their tenancy. In those cases, challenges around language barrier, wrong assessments as NRPF given immigration status, and unfamiliarity with UK systems proved to be particularly acute issues. The remaining cases supported were of women in the Move On (24.5%) stage, in need of support given challenges in dealing with local housing authorities in relation to re-housing from a refuge, or in a Post-Move on stage (23.5%), meaning that further issues with accommodation had arisen even after women had already been re-housed by housing authorities.

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A detailed analysis of experiences of women supported throughout the project was published in October 2019 in the report *A Roof, not a Home*.[3] This report presents findings and provides policy recommendations to address gaps and failures in housing policy and practice in relation to 'BME' survivors' experiences of homelessness. Our research suggests that Black and minoritised survivors are faced with complex structural barriers to access safe and stable forms of accommodation. They are often at high risk of homelessness and re-victimization at different stages of their journeys of fleeing violence; not only at the point of exiting a violent relationship but also for an extended period thereafter as a result of systemic and institutional failures and discrimination. This plays out not only in terms of poor welfare and housing provisions and structural sexism but is also compounded by intersecting structures of oppressions based on race, immigration status, language barrier, class and/or disability. Our findings indicated systemic and institutional failures and discrimination by public authorities when dealing with Black and minoritised women's cases of violence. In the case of local housing authorities, this is appeared not only at the point of exit but also throughout Black and minoritised survivors' journeys in seeking emergency accommodation, making a homelessness application, moving on from refuges and even after they have been re-housed.

As evidenced in our report, homeless Black and minoritised survivors have long been living under a crisis resulting from the UK government, local authorities and public services' poor responses to their refuge and housing needs. This has been compounded by a decade of austerity policies disproportionately impacting the specialist 'BME' *by and for* sector.[4] The recent COVID-19 outbreak has further exacerbated this crisis: rates of domestic violence have peaked whilst chronic shortfalls in refuge provision have been aggravated by the need for safety measures. Women's refuges are reportedly struggling to receive new residents under COVID measures, whilst re-housing women due to move on from refuges has become ever more difficult.

During the first weeks of the lockdown the availability of refuge spaces was reduced by 50% compared to the same period in the previous year.[5] This dire reality is even more troubling for Black and minoritised women for whom dedicated refuge bed spaces are even more limited, and migrant women with NRPF in particular, whose impediment from accessing refuge may force them to choose between becoming homeless or staying put with perpetrators. In light of that, the WAHA project, Imkaan and the wider 'BME' women's sector have been calling for urgent action from the government in key areas to support vulnerable survivors during the pandemic, in particular those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.[6] However, while some support has been forthcoming and it has been welcomed, the response has on the whole been slow and insufficient.

It is also likely that the compounded effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the knock-on effect of Brexit will continue to create further difficulties for women escaping violence and seeking safe and suitable accommodation. This is also the case for women who have an EU passport and have been working in the UK for many years. Although the legal position of EEA nationals still has not changed, in practice local authorities have been using their discretion to place extra barriers to these women citing Brexit as an excuse. It comes as no surprise that women with limited or no access to public funds whatsoever are facing even sharper barriers to access housing support during these troubling times. More meaningful action needs to be taken to protect survivors and ensure no woman will be forced to endure abuse for fear of becoming homeless and destitute.

> **"More meaningful action needs to be taken to protect survivors and ensure no woman will be forced to endure abuse for fear of becoming homeless and destitute.**

1. Groups that due to their race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality and gender are minoritised and as a result of social constructs have less power of representation compared to other members or groups in society. This term is used as a better reflection of minoritised groups than the previously used 'Black and Minority Ethnic' terminology, however, we continue to use the 'BME' acronym hereafter for practical reasons.
2. Imkaan (2010). Vital Statistics. London: Imkaan.
3. Latin American Women's Aid (2019), A Roof Not A Home http://lawadv.org.uk/en/waha_executive_summary
4. Imkaan (2015) State of the Sector: Contextualising the Current Experiences of BME Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Organisations and Women's Resource Centre and Women's Budget Group (2018) Life-Changing and Life-Saving Funding for the Women's Sector. London.
5. Based on weekly snapshots taken from the Routes to Support database, the UK violence against women and girls service directory run by Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland; Scottish Women's Aid; Welsh Women's Aid and Women's Aid Federation of England.
6. www.imkaan.org.uk/waha-imkaan-letter-homelessness-cov

Overcoming trauma

The journey to a safe home for survivors with a dual diagnosis of poor mental health and substance dependency

Georgie Barron, Senior Keyworker, the Nelson Trust

As a trauma-informed service that works directly with women, at the Nelson Trust we understand that in order for Her to thrive, there is an essential need for safety. Without this, a woman can be pushed into further trauma and cycles of trying to manage this unsafe world around Her; substance misuse and addiction, sex work, offending and loss of vital connections. All of this is a fight to survive. Housing is such an empirical aspect to recovery, along with the belief that there is always the possibility of change, the possibility and right to a safe future for all women.

“Housing is such an empirical aspect to recovery, along with the belief that there is always the possibility of change, the possibility and right to a safe future for all women.

Rachel’s story

This is one woman’s story of trauma, resilience and recovery.*

Rachel grew up in Lithuania with her parents and sister, but from very early on family life was very challenging for Rachel. She admired and loved her Dad, but he was an alcoholic; his moods changed frequently with his drinking and this made it impossible for Rachel to feel truly comfortable at home. Not only this, but she also experienced abuse from wider family members, meaning that there wasn’t a single place in her life that she felt safe. This made life feel really difficult for Rachel, her home didn’t really feel like a home, it actually felt more like a constant trigger. She knew she had to get out, so she started to work to save up to move out and get her own place – this felt like it would be a turning point, that everything would finally feel ‘normal’, that maybe she could move on with her life.

Rachel was complaining to a friend that her job didn’t seem to be paying her a fair wage and that she was desperate to get out of her family home to move towards independence. Her friend mentioned that there were some men she knew who could get her into the UK and could find her work that paid well. Suddenly Rachel had what she thought was the opportunity of a lifetime: the chance to escape her family home, to find work and to live independently! This was all she had ever wanted, she would finally be safe.

As soon as Rachel landed in the UK, she knew things had changed. Rachel was picked up by some men who drove her to a house, where she was told she would be staying. Once in her room, she was locked in. Her room was dirty and small, it was not the bright new start she had been led to believe.

*Anonymised – all names and places have been changed for safety.

She started to question whether she would ever have safety, even thinking that maybe she didn't deserve it. It was from this point that Rachel was forced into sex working; she had been trafficked.

Life for Rachel became unbearable. She experienced horrific trauma day after day, the ideas she once had for life felt impossible to even consider any more. What did being safe even feel like? What was a 'home' supposed to be? In her time in this house, Rachel had also been given alcohol to keep her docile, this then became the only thing that started to make life feel liveable, it was her only escape.

Rachel was trapped for nearly two years. Two years of unimaginable trauma and now, two years in alcohol addiction. The day that Rachel escaped, she was picked up by police for attacking her perpetrator, she had also been seen shoplifting - which she had been forced to do. Whilst in police custody, Rachel couldn't find the words to tell her story, this meant that unfortunately Rachel was sent to prison for a short sentence. Yet another place that seemed to take Rachel further away from ever finding a home.

This is where we met Rachel. Part of our work is reaching out to women in our local prison: in offering empathy, understanding and kindness, as well as our holistic approach we are able to support women right from custody out into the community. When we met Rachel it was clear she was experiencing the symptoms of complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, in addition to her alcohol use. Whilst in custody, she was able to detox safely and we then worked with her to get her straight in our residential rehab from her custody release.

Whilst in rehab, Rachel felt as though she had started to feel like she had found a home. She was able to start processing her trauma in a way that kept her safe and the intensive work she completed started to help her think that maybe she could realise her old dream of living independently.

Once she left rehab, Rachel was able to find accommodation in a supported housing unit. She also met a man who made her feel special. For Rachel, things seemed to be moving forward exactly how she had always imagined them and she allowed herself to see her future again. Unfortunately, the man she had met became abusive and following a violent attack, Rachel became so triggered that she relapsed. Things escalated quickly for Rachel and despite working closely with her and her housing unit, she was evicted within a matter of days for causing damage to the property whilst under the influence. Rachel was now homeless and in the middle of a serious flashback episode which left her extremely vulnerable.

Due to Rachel's dual-diagnosis of both alcohol addiction and complex mental health, we were struggling to support her back into much-needed accommodation. Rachel was now street homeless and experiencing constant chaos that she was unable to escape from. Local supported housing units were full and due to being under the influence, it was impossible to support Rachel to complete a homelessness application. We knew that in order for Rachel to start building on her recovery once more, she would need her basic needs met first and that started with having safe accommodation. How could we expect Rachel to manage anything else, if she didn't have access to that? As Rachel's mental health continued to deteriorate and her alcohol use increased as a result, it became harder to get proactive support services involved in her essential care. Every day of survival for Rachel was an achievement and we were becoming increasingly concerned that she was not going to make it. Rachel's situation really amplified to us how too often that women with complex needs slip through the net of essential and life-saving services, especially housing.

We were able to finally get some mental health support for Rachel, a few days later she then also made steps to reduce her alcohol intake safely. After a month of homelessness, Rachel was then offered some emergency accommodation within a supported housing unit, meaning she could start to focus on her recovery.

In the coming weeks, Rachel started to flourish and six months into her recovery she had left her supported living unit to move into her own flat. For the first time in her life, Rachel had moved into accommodation that was just hers - Rachel finally had her own home.

Reflections

Rachel's story is not uncommon to our service and especially for women, homelessness when you're experiencing substance misuse and complex mental health, life feels dangerous. For those women with dual diagnosis, the idea of achieving stability can often feel impossible and that is due to the lack of support and understanding of their needs. To us, we understand – as within the Five Core Principles of Trauma Informed care – safety is paramount to recovery and without safety, a woman's recovery cannot be achieved. Rachel's story highlights the disparity within housing accessibility, particularly the overwhelming amount of pressure emergency housing are under as more people are experiencing homelessness. It should not be a privilege to be able to access safe housing – what form that housing takes can vary, but every woman has a right to safety, regardless of their circumstances.

> **"It should not be a privilege to be able to access safe housing – what form that housing takes can vary, but every woman has a right to safety, regardless of their circumstances.**

2

Housing for people in contact with the criminal justice system

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Stable, secure and safe accommodation

Why can't people in contact with the criminal justice system access it?

Nicola Drinkwater, Policy Manager, Clinks

Imagine waking up knowing that today is the day you will be released from prison and all the hopes and dreams you would have for rebuilding your life. Everything should be in place to enable you to begin to do this. If you need benefits, you should have an appointment set up with the local job centre, you should have ID to help start your claim, you should have a bank account; if you have health needs, everything should be set up for you to receive your prescription. And you should have somewhere to live. But all too often this isn't the case, with resettlement support failing to ensure people have their basic needs met when they are released from prison.

For example, take Josh's experience. He is a prison leaver supported by the charity Switchback and was released from prison with a £46 release grant, homeless. He was forced to sleep in friends' cars, sofa-surf (with people still connected to crime) and at weekends, he slept on trains. Josh tried to find housing but was shunted between different council offices and unable to make a housing application because he didn't have ID. Without ID he couldn't get Universal Credit; without Universal Credit, he was ineligible to stay in hostels, and so he continued sleeping where he could.

> **"Josh tried to find housing but was shunted between different council offices and unable to make a housing application because he didn't have ID.**

There are big challenges with data collection and transparency, but what we do know is that Josh's experience isn't unique and many people leave prison without somewhere safe to live. In 2018-19, Ministry of Justice statistics show that less than half of people (48%) released from prison had settled accommodation on release.[1] Nearly one in six (16%) was homeless or sleeping rough. If we look at how many people this relates to, HM Inspectorate of Probation tells us that in the same year, 11,435 individuals were released from prison homeless. And that is just the people we know about.[2]

In 2018-19, Ministry of Justice statistics show that less than half of people (48%) released from prison had settled accommodation on release.[1]

Nearly one in six (16%) was homeless or sleeping rough.

If we look at those statistics in more depth, we see that at least 22% of people released from prison who are deemed to be the highest-risk individuals in the probation caseload were released from prison without stable accommodation in 2018-2019 – equivalent to 6,515 individuals. And only 75 per cent of individuals supervised by the National Probation Service (currently people who are identified as high risk) were in settled accommodation 12 months after release.[3]

Accessing accommodation is not only a basic human right, but research has shown that it is an essential part of someone's desistance process and can reduce reoffending. For example a recent thematic report published by HM Inspectorate of Probation found that the proportion of service users recalled or resentenced to custody within 12 months of release was almost double for those without settled accommodation.

Why is this happening?

People in contact with the criminal justice system face a range of barriers when trying to access secure, safe and stable accommodation. In April 2018 we published a paper that detailed all of these issues in depth, and gave solutions about how these can be addressed.[4] Although this was two years ago, sadly many of these challenges remain – but as the landscape has now shifted, due to changes in legislation such as the Homelessness Reduction Act as well as the impact of Covid-19, new and emerging challenges are being felt by people in contact with the justice system.

The following aims to give a flavour of some of these challenges and focuses on those that are unique to people who have been convicted of a crime.

- **Everyone and no-one's responsibility** – Responsibility for securing safe, stable and appropriate accommodation for people in contact with the criminal justice system does not rest with one government department or local agency. It relies on strong partnership working and the transfer of information across and between different organisations and agencies. Although there are some examples of good practice to support this, all too often people in contact with the CJS fall through the gaps. **A cross-departmental accommodation strategy led by the Ministry of Justice would go some way to addressing this challenge**. Many people in contact with the CJS have protected characteristics under the Equalities Act (2010) or experience multiple disadvantage, meaning they often require specialist support and services to ensure their specific needs can be met. An accommodation strategy should be responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics.
- **Lack of reliable data** – There is no reliable data collected about accommodation outcomes for people serving a community penalty and on release from prison. This makes it challenging to see the scale of the problem and what needs to be implemented to alleviate any challenges. This needs to be swiftly addressed, **with key stakeholders including prisons and probation providers being routinely required to record and publish both the accommodation needs and long-term outcomes of people in contact with the CJS. This needs to move beyond just accommodation outcomes immediately on release and include longitudinal outcomes**.
- **Failure to address issues early** – As soon as someone comes into contact with the CJS there is an opportunity for agencies to assess and respond to their accommodation needs which can help prevent offending and reoffending. However, people are often not asked about their accommodation needs – and even if they are, they are often not addressed. **Opportunities for early intervention and prevention should be capitalised on; every time someone has contact with criminal justice agencies their accommodation needs should be identified and addressed**.

Further, just having a conviction can be a barrier to accommodation, particularly for people who have committed certain offences including those of a sexual nature or arson. This is particularly true for access to the private rented sector as many private landlords are unwilling to

accommodate people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system. As well as this, some local authorities have been known to define people as being 'intentionally homeless' if they have committed a crime, precluding them from support or access to accommodation.

Where do we go from here?

Although many of these challenges are entrenched and without a significant building programme to address lack of stock, it can be challenging to see how these issues can be addressed. But there is hope. Government has recognised these issues, which can often be the first steps to action, and HM Prison and Probation Service have been working to develop an accommodation framework to support partnership working.

And we saw incredible work take place as lockdown measures were introduced across the UK in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The 'everyone in' initiative was rolled out across local services and we saw organisations work in partnership to ensure everyone who needed accommodation was able to access it. This required innovation and thinking outside of the box as existing accommodation was repurposed and new processes and procedures were developed. Local services worked tirelessly towards the same goal and in some cases, people who had not been able to access accommodation for many years were housed.

That was not without its challenges and we heard that quickly accommodation options were exhausted and people were not able to access support alongside their housing. But there is a lot we can learn from this work and it is essential that these lessons are not lost as we move into the next phase of the pandemic.

Above all, we need there to be clear responsibility and accountability for securing accommodation for people in contact with the criminal justice system. If this doesn't take place we will continue to see people falling through the gaps and experiencing homelessness as a direct consequence of being in contact with the criminal justice system.

> **"Above all, we need there to be clear responsibility and accountability for securing accommodation for people in contact with the criminal justice system.**

1. Ministry of Justice (2018). *Freedom of Information request 180915001 by Vicki Cardwell.* Available at: www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/homelessness_on_release_from_pri#incoming-1240602
2. HM Inspectorate of Probation (2020). *Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England.* Online: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accomodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf (last accessed 20/08/2020)
3. Ibid
4. Clinks (2018). *RR3 Special Interest Group on accommodation: ensuring the accommodation needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system are met.* Online: www.clinks.org/publication/rr3-briefing-meeting-accommodation-needs-people-contact-criminal-justice-system (last accessed 28/08/2020)

A hollow promise or a hope for desistance?

Burcu Borsyk, Policy Manager, Revolving Doors Agency

Having a safe, secure and good quality home is a basic human right. The significance of housing for human dignity, physical and mental wellbeing and overall quality of life only begin to reveal some of its human right implications. **But for tens of thousands of people leaving prison each year, the right to housing remains a hollow promise.**

For nearly 30 years now, Revolving Doors Agency has been advocating policies to 'end the revolving door'. There is no more telling example of the 'revolving door' than people cycling from unsafe and unsecure accommodation to prison and back onto the streets. Each cycle exposes people to further violence and trauma, exacerbates mental ill-health and problematic substance use, and makes further criminal justice contact more likely.

There is clear and persuasive evidence that shows homelessness and insecure tenure is a reliable predictor of higher rates of non-violent and violent offending[1] even controlling histories of previous cautions and convictions.[2] The recent HMI Probation[3] added to this evidence, showing that people who are released without a settled accommodation are almost twice as likely to be recalled or resentenced to custody. If we are serious about reducing crime and increasing public confidence in the criminal justice system, we must follow the evidence. Giving people a safe place to live reduces crime, reduces victims and keeps communities safe.

> **"There is clear and persuasive evidence that shows homelessness and insecure tenure is a reliable predictor of higher rates of non-violent and violent offending.**

> **The recent HMI Probation[4] review on accommodation shows that a quarter of people released from prison into homelessness.**

Yet, homelessness remains prevalent across the criminal justice system. The recent HMI Probation[4] review on accommodation shows that a quarter of people released from prison into homelessness. Rates are likely to be higher, as the Ministry of Justice does not know where one in ten people go upon release from prison. Homelessness is a particularly acute problem among people serving short prison sentences under six months. Data Revolving Doors Agency obtained under the Freedom of Information legislation revealed that the rates of rough sleeping among people who have served sentences of less than six months has increased by 25-fold between October 2016 and June 2018. Considering nearly half of all people sentenced to custody each year serve a short prison sentence under six months, addressing homelessness upon prison release just among people serving short prison sentences presents a huge challenge.

> **"The rates of rough sleeping among people who have served sentences of less than six months has increased by 25-fold between October 2016 and June 2018.**

It is important to remember that most people serve a short prison sentence under six months for relatively minor and non-violent offences, such as theft and minor drug offences. We know these are crimes of despair, driven by multiple unaddressed problems such as poverty, addiction, and homelessness. All the research shows, and the Ministry of Justice acknowledges, that short sentence prisoners have significantly higher levels of needs compared to the wider population in the criminal justice system. For instance, data we obtained[5] under Freedom of Information legislation shows that nearly two thirds of people sent to custody for less than six months report a drug or alcohol problem on arrival at prison. HMI Prisons found the overall rate for all sentence lengths was a quarter.[6]

It is not at all surprising that these short prison sentences command some of the highest reoffending rates in the system. Indeed, our recent analysis[7] showed that 82% of people convicted of theft who are sentenced to less than six months in prison are convicted again within a year of release. Ministry of Justice research is extremely clear: short prison sentences have higher rates of proven re-offending than community orders when matched 'like for like' offenders. This is because short prison sentences not only fail to provide any meaningful rehabilitation, but also disrupts housing and treatment programmes.

> **"Short prison sentences have higher rates of proven re-offending than community orders when matched 'like for like' offenders.**

We can prevent this unnecessary churn of people from prison onto the streets by limiting the use of short-sighted custodial options where possible and safe to do so. For the last two years, we have been calling on the government to introduce a presumption against short sentences, requiring the court to only impose such a sentence if no other appropriate disposal is available and to record publicly the reason for a custodial sentence.

> **"We can prevent this unnecessary churn of people from prison onto the streets by limiting the use of short-sighted custodial options where possible and safe to do so.**

And for those people who end up going to prison, despite a presumption, need better support. Our work with Public Health England and Home Office showed that people in the criminal justice system suffer multiple health issues, including asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, and pulmonary embolism, hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, as well as blood borne viruses. Homelessness and poor-quality housing put people at higher risk of disease and increases demand on health and care services. Not knowing where they will sleep tonight makes it nearly impossible for people to access any support: many people leave prison with the wrong medication or none at all, not being registered with a GP in the community, leaving without an official assessment of their social care needs.

This failure is costing lives: the risk of suicide[8] is highest in the first 28 days following release, with men leaving prison 10 times and women leaving prison 40 times more likely to commit suicide compared to the general population. INQUEST's recent analysis[9] shows that 1,093 people under community supervision died last year – the highest rate on record. A third of these deaths were self-inflicted, and a further third from natural causes. Could some of these deaths be prevented through the right housing and support?

Finally, it is important to emphasise the need for good quality and secure accommodation. A recent peer-led review[10] we carried out showed that serious and repeat victimisation is common, and experiences of physical and sexual assault are alarmingly high among people in supported accommodation settings. Men appear more at risk from physical assault and theft and women more at risk of sexual victimisation (however, crime types were not gender-exclusive). We found that the dynamic between crime and homelessness is often complex. The predominant discourses frame criminals and victims as polar opposites, enforcing the view that the crime takes place between 'a perfect criminal' typified by opportunistic and violent behaviour and 'a perfect victim' typified by innocence and helplessness. The participants' accounts provide a different alternative, where they are 'at once frequent victims, frequent offenders and frequently moved on.' It is vital that the criminal justice agencies acknowledge that people who come into repeat contact with the criminal justice system agencies as perpetrators of offences are also frequently victims in their own right, and support them through a trauma-informed lens.

"It is important to emphasise the need for good quality and secure accommodation. A recent peer-led review ... showed that serious and repeat victimisation is common, and experiences of physical and sexual assault are alarmingly high among people in supported accommodation settings.

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4. Ibid.
5. www.volteface.me/feature/nearly-two-thirds-prisoners-short-sentences-drug-alcohol-problems-70-go-reoffend-within-year-new-figures-show
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Caught in the cycle

Housing challenges for women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system

Jessica Southgate, CEO of Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk

For many women and girls, it is the culmination of years of poverty and multiple disadvantages that leads them to become involved in the criminal justice system.

More than 1.2 million women in England have experienced extensive violence, both physical and sexual abuse, from childhood into adulthood. Without support, they are left to deal with the legacy of the trauma this causes on their own. This can affect their mental health, feelings of self-worth, and they may also turn to drugs or alcohol to cope. These experiences can be compounded by other forms of inequality and discrimination, adding further layers of disadvantage to the problems they face. This can lead to a downward spiral into homelessness or involvement in the criminal justice system.

More than 1.2 million women in England have experienced extensive violence, both physical and sexual abuse, from childhood into adulthood.

Homelessness: a cause and effect of offending

Homelessness and offending are part of a vicious circle. For women who are not already homeless, getting a criminal record or being sent to prison can make an already precarious housing situation even more challenging. Many women commit crimes either directly linked to their homelessness (such as theft or public nuisance offences) or simply to get a roof over their heads. But when they are released, their basic needs (such as safe housing and income) remain unaddressed and they still do not have a secure home to go to.[1] Many women who sleep rough have fled abusive partners, yet their only option when they are released from prison is to go back on the streets or return to live with their abuser.[2]

Around two thirds of the approximately 4,000 women in custody are serving a sentence of six months or less, the majority of which are for non-violent offences. A short sentence dramatically increases the risk of homelessness as benefits payments are stopped and rent arrears mount up, with research showing women are more likely than men to lose a tenancy when they go to prison.[3]

“A short sentence dramatically increases the risk of homelessness as benefits payments are stopped and rent arrears mount up.

This is backed up by statistics that show around six in 10 women do not have a home to go to on release.[4] In 2017, women were reported to have left HMP Bronzefield with nothing but a tent.

Around six in 10 women do not have a home to go to on release.[4]

The considerable increase in the women's prison population over the last two decades (which more than doubled between 1995 and 2010), combined with limited and reducing housing stock, makes the problem even greater.

Lack of a stable home makes it harder for women to get a job, establish relationships in their community or get support from trusted services over a period of time. It also makes it harder for them to meet any licence conditions they may have, putting them at risk of breaching and recall to prison.

One woman, Alison, who grew up in care and had a history of poor mental health, explained to Agenda how she stayed with an abusive partner out of fear of becoming homeless but had to leave after a brutal attack:

> **"I had to run out in my dressing gown and shoes. I ran into town and that's how I became homeless.**

> **"I ended up getting into trouble and being on warrants and all that. I was an angry person, I fought a lot because I was angry against the world. I think it is harder for women, we're scared and we're ashamed.**[5]

It was only with the help of a supportive probation officer, who put her in touch with a voluntary organisation that worked with homeless women, that Alison was able to get her life back on track. Women who have been imprisoned also find it much harder to get their children back into their care, or to keep them there. Too many women face the catch-22 of being made homeless when imprisoned, then struggling to regain care and custody of their children upon release because they don't have adequate family housing. Each year around 17,700 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment, and 66 per cent of women in prison are mothers with dependent children – demonstrating the scale of the problem.[6]

> **"Each year around 17,700 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment, and 66 per cent of women in prison are mothers with dependent children.**

Girls and young women

Inappropriate housing or the risk of homelessness can pose a real risk for girls and young women, especially those who have been in care. An estimated two thirds of young women (aged 16-21) in custody have recently been in statutory care.[7] This is compared to just under half of boys.

Girls aged between 16 and 17 in the justice system, who have been in care or on the edge of care, may have experienced being placed in mixed-gender, unregulated accommodation. When they reach 18, they may also be placed in mixed hostels and accommodation with much older adults, putting them at significant risk and potential exposure to criminal activity.

These are widely recognised as inappropriate environments for vulnerable children and young adults, with qualitative data indicating that girls in these settings are at risk of exploitation from both their peers as well as adult men that they come into contact with there.[8] These experiences can be the start of a cycle of abuse and disadvantage that can draw them into the criminal justice system.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic

Agenda's new research has found that lockdown exacerbated the risks faced by women being released from prison, with the biggest challenge being a lack of safe accommodation.[9]

With many services supporting this group of women disrupted and delayed at the beginning of lockdown, some continued to operate on reduced capacity or were reliant on grants to support women into safe housing, meaning the already depleted safety net for women at girls at these critical points has diminished further.

Solutions

If we are to tackle this, all strategies to reduce the risk of women and girls entering the criminal justice system must include housing in their solutions. For younger women in particular, this must include support to ensure they are able to manage and maintain their tenancies.

Preparing housing support for women released from prison should be core to resettlement planning, but often is not. This is made harder for women being released from women's prisons, because as there are fewer prisons, they are more geographically dispersed and further from where they might live or end up. Ensuring women have a home to go to not only reduces the likelihood of them being put at further risk but increases their chances of being safely reunited with their children.

Cross-government leadership and stronger cooperation between central and local government must be aimed at delivering effective community support for women, including housing, as well as mental health provision, addiction treatment, health and social care.

Women's community centres must be at the heart of solutions and partnerships to address the underlying causes of women's offending, which often include histories of being exploited and abused. As places that provide gender and trauma-informed support, they have been proven to be highly effective in supporting women at risk of offending to make positive changes in their lives.

> **"Women's community centres must be at the heart of solutions and partnerships to address the underlying causes of women's offending, which often include histories of being exploited and abused.**

1. www.russellwebster.com/prtwiphomeless18
2. www.mungos.org/women-homeless-prison
3. www.russellwebster.com/prtwiphomeless18
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3

Housing for people affected by transitions

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Home alone

Transitions to independent living for young people leaving care

Katharine Sacks-Jones, CEO, Become

'Transition' is a familiar term for all young people who leave the care system. The word features prominently in every discussion with a social worker, in every written care plan, and in every decision made by others about their lives. Whilst the word itself might be quite abstract, the transition to independent living is felt very acutely by over 10,000 young care leavers each year.[1]

Many young people who leave care go onto achieve amazing things, recovering from experiences of trauma in childhood to lead happy and healthy adult lives. However, too many continue to find themselves experiencing the worst aspects of both the housing and care systems at a critical time in their young lives. At Become, housing is the most common issue we support young care leavers with through our advice services. Young people come to us with challenges around accessing safe and suitable accommodation as well as maintaining it, often alongside wider problems with finances, employment and mental health.

> **"Too many continue to find themselves experiencing the worst aspects of both the housing and care systems at a critical time in their young lives.**

Leaving care

The majority of young people will leave care at age 18 when they cease to have the legal protection associated with being a child, although they can leave at any time from age 16. This change is marked by a withdrawal of support from the local authority, in theory intended to reflect how any good parent would prepare their child for early adulthood. However, the process of leaving care is instead experienced by many young people as abrupt, disruptive and isolating.

As the number of children in care has risen dramatically in the last decade, with disproportionate growth in the number of older teenagers especially, the number of young people aged 16 and above who leave care has also increased. Since 2010, there has been a 37% increase in the number of young people aged 16 or above leaving care, rising from just over 9,000 to over 12,500 last year.[2]

> **"Since 2010, there has been a 37% increase in the number of young people aged 16 or above leaving care.**

Some care leavers will return to live with their families, some will stay a little longer with their foster carers, and some will continue to be supported in transitional accommodation or by adult social services. However, the majority will be expected to complete their 'transition to independence' on or shortly after their 18th birthday – to manage their own household and the responsibility that comes with this, including paying for rent, bills, and food.

This early forced transition to adult life is not one experienced by the majority of their peers. Over half of all young people aged 18-24 live with their parents and this remains at 1 in 4 even when looking at those aged up to 34.[3] By contrast, most care-experienced young people are tasked with going it alone long before this, missing the practical and emotional safety net available to others through their family and social networks.

Accessing housing

Most local authorities will prioritise care leavers in their allocation policies for social housing, but limited availability across the country means this far from guarantees them a home. Even if they can access housing through this route, young people are not always effectively supported through the process, and many report feeling pressured to take on something unsuitable or unaffordable – risking a judgement of 'intentionally homeless' in the future if they build up rent arrears and lose their tenancy.

For those who have spent their recent years living in foster care or a children's home located outside of their local authority area, they face an incredibly difficult choice: apply for social housing where they currently live based on a 'local connection' claim, or apply in their home authority where they stand a better chance as a care leaver but sacrifice the relationships, support networks and opportunities in the area they may now call home.

About 1 in 10 care leavers will move initially into some form of supported accommodation commissioned by the local authority.[4] Although they are designed to act as a 'stepping stone' to a more independent setting, these options (including foyers, supported lodgings or self-contained flats with floating support) vary considerably in their quality and can introduce young people to additional risks.

Given the shortage of other accommodation types, care leavers are often pushed into the private rented sector. However, they can face significant challenges here, including pulling together sufficient cash for a deposit, having a named guarantor, and sometimes battling against the prejudices of private landlords – especially if they're using benefits to pay their rent. These difficulties often drive young people leaving care into less secure arrangements with unscrupulous landlords who may take advantage of their tenant's vulnerable position.

"Care leavers are often pushed into the private rented sector. However, they can face significant challenges here, including pulling together sufficient cash for a deposit, having a named guarantor, and sometimes battling against the prejudices of private landlords.

Previous research has suggested that 26% of care leavers have sofa surfed, and 14% have slept rough.[5] Care leavers are deemed "priority need" under homelessness legislation, but only up until age 21. Too many are pushed by the system into cycles of homelessness at crisis point and temporary relief through short-term emergency accommodation. This inevitably has enormous impacts on their mental health and ability to pursue education or employment.

Research has suggested that 26% of care leavers have sofa surfed, and 14% have slept rough.[5]

Care leavers cease to be eligible for any support from children's services at age 25. Those older care leavers are absent from national and local data, even if we know the legacy of care experience is likely to impact on their ability to access stable housing. The whereabouts of about 1 in 10 care leavers aged 19-21 isn't known to local authorities[6] – these are the young people likely to be at most risk of homelessness.

The future

The government response to COVID-19 has demonstrated that things thought previously impossible – such as offering accommodation to nearly all rough sleepers – are in fact possible with the right political will, funding and systems in place. The government guaranteed that no young person should be forced to leave care during this crisis, recognising the importance of stability and care at a time of national emergency. We shouldn't now accept a return to the status quo where 18-year-old care leavers are expected to demonstrate an almost overnight 'transition' to a mythical state of 'independence'.

There are some very clear policy changes the government can make to improve access to housing for care leavers, including investing in more social housing and high-quality supported accommodation, ending the postcode lottery in local authority allocation policies, expanding priority need to homeless care leavers beyond age 21, and establishing a national deposit and guarantor scheme to enable easier entry into the private rental market.

However, reform needs to be wider than this too. Our ambition is that all children leaving care have somewhere to live as young adults that isn't just 'suitable', but somewhere they can truly call home – somewhere that doesn't provide just physical safety but comfort, dignity, and a sense of belonging. Our housing and care systems must work together to provide the best start to adulthood for all care-experienced young people, centred around the importance of stability and strong relationships. In the future, we hope the transition for young people leaving care won't be over the course of weeks but experienced instead over the entirety of their time in care and founded on principles of interdependence rather than independence.

> **"Our ambition is that all children leaving care have somewhere to live as young adults that isn't just 'suitable', but somewhere they can truly call home.**

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Highlighting the challenges of the transition to Universal Credit and how it impacts housing

Sam Pannell, Rentstart

When the Government announced a new structuring of the benefit system, many in the social sector were intrigued. They planned to bring all the benefits under one 'umbrella'. In principle the system is an excellent one, and the process of applying is less complicated and more user friendly than the old way. But unfortunately, the creases continued to emerge for us, and when transitions to Universal Credit go wrong it creates social injustices and pressures for its clients which can threaten their homes, jobs and security. It is one thing to say that the system will adapt, but at what cost?

> **"When transitions to Universal Credit go wrong it creates social injustices and pressures for its clients which can threaten their homes, jobs and security.**

The initial challenge from Universal Credit came through the 'up to five week delay' to set someone up on the system. Thankfully we had some reserves which meant we could wait for the rent to appear later on, but for many clients with private rented sector landlords this created a struggle. At best this has created friction and trust difficulties between tenants and landlords, and at worst it creates an insurmountable barrier to the private rented sector in an already competitive market. Universal Credit created budgeting loans to try and negate this, but should we really encourage a culture of credit for some of the most vulnerable in society? The difficulty of months of future payment cuts to cover the loan arguably just extends the initial struggle.

Then came the second hurdle. As a homelessness charity, one of our biggest attractions to landlords is our offer of guaranteed rent, which means we rely on rental income from clients in order to keep delivering our services. As such, the direct payment option is always something we require, ensuring the client's rent is paid on time. This option was covered with Universal Credit by a 'UC47 submission' and seemed rather simple. In reality, the UC47 form can take over one month to be set up, which means that the first month's rent is nearly always paid directly to the tenant.

For many of the most vulnerable adults, some with addictions, others with limited financial literacy or access to internet banking or bank statements, a £600 payment can disappear in days. Couple this with the initial five-week registration delay, which at worst has meant that clients received three month's rent directly. This risks immediately putting the tenant into a situation where their tenancy is at risk almost as quickly as it began and creates a logistical and ethical nightmare for local charities like ourselves. Unfortunately, when this happens the landlord (us) cannot claim back this money. There is an option to ask Universal

Credit to deduct arrears payments from their allowance, but this has to be done with the permission of the tenant. Put short, if we have to evict due to Universal Credit delay-related arrears, we pick up the bill.

One of the selling points of Universal Credit was that with their new sliding scale for income, everyone truly should be better off in work than remaining on benefits. It made sense that the new system, linked to an NI Number would automatically allocate and adjust funds depending on how many hours the person worked. The problem we have found is that while the sliding scale of 'income vs amount of benefit payment' exists, we as a charity do not have access to it. This has made it incredibly hard to advise clients on how employment will actually impact their housing or personal payment. Therefore, the uncertainty remains, and where there is uncertainty, we have found that the past 'you're better off on benefits' comes back to stop them from taking the risk into employment. It also makes it very hard for us as a support agency to push clients to take that first step, when we cannot tell them for sure it won't financially impede them.

The final factor we have experienced is that while Universal Credit was meant to remove the need to go to the council, the nature of the LHA rate in Surrey means that clients nearly always have a deficit between their rental figure and their Universal Credit payment. As a result, they have to seek support from the local council again through a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), complicating the process rather than simplifying it. Whilst this does create a bit of admin, the biggest threat is again to client housing. By nature, the DHP is discretionary, which means it is never guaranteed. Secondly, you can only get a DHP with proof of your tenancy agreement. This means the tenant has to take a tenancy they cannot afford in the hope that the council will help them. Unfortunately, with a high LHA rate also comes the risk of the benefit cap, which again can cause financial disadvantage to clients. Despite the government increasing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate to support clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, this pushed many of our clients, especially the older single adults or those with children, over the benefit cap, meaning the automated Universal Credit system actually reduced their personal payment by an average of £200. Those affected therefore had to... you guessed it... go back to the council and apply for a DHP to cover them for the money they had lost.

> **"You can only get a Discretionary Housing Payment with proof of your tenancy agreement. This means the tenant has to take a tenancy they cannot afford in the hope that the council will help them.**

I think we at Rentstart all see the potential of Universal Credit. I was comforted by a Universal Credit representative at the National Youth Homelessness Conference, who explained the system is built to adapt, and that over time the system would grow into the vision we all hoped it would be. However, for people at the sharp end of society, any issues experienced immediately undermine their financial security and threaten their homes, health, and lives. We as a charity have also lost thousands of pounds of rent which simply cannot be recovered. We feel that over time the situation is improving, as we start to create valued links with DWP contacts and get a feel for how to avoid previous pitfalls. But the question still remains – is it acceptable that charities working to support the most vulnerable in society should have to second-guess a system at potential detriment to themselves and their clients?

> **"Is it acceptable that charities working to support the most vulnerable in society should have to second-guess a system at potential detriment to themselves and their clients?**

Supporting the transition away from homelessness

Bill Tidnam, Chief Executive, Thames Reach

Thames Reach works to end rough sleeping in London. Over the past ten years we have seen the numbers of people coming onto the street double, and while numbers were beginning to drop before the pandemic they are still high, and most significantly, the flow onto the streets remains troublingly high. This is mitigated to some extent by outreach teams' effectiveness at finding new rough sleepers and getting them off the streets quickly with an option identified.

> **"Over the past ten years we have seen the numbers of people coming onto the street double.**

But this system has changed over the last few months. We have seen an increase in new rough sleepers, driven by the breakdown of informal arrangements, such as the sofa in return for a contribution to rent, or the bed in a shared room above a café; this has been driven by the collapse of much of the service economy. The pandemic has meant that new rough sleepers are quickly offered hotel or temporary accommodation as part of the government's 'Everyone In' initiative, but there is often little capacity to take the next step: an assessment leading to the quick identification of a longer-term route away from the streets.

We know that quick intervention to prevent and quickly divert people away from street homelessness is crucial; living on the streets is damaging and dangerous, and the longer that a person is on the street, the longer and more difficult the recovery.

> **"Quick intervention to prevent and quickly divert people away from street homelessness is crucial; living on the streets is damaging and dangerous.**

A group disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and who have also been a key demographic in increasing rough sleeping figures over the past nine years, are EEA (including EU) nationals, many of them from the so-called accession countries and particularly Romania and Poland but also from more established EU members such as Portugal and Ireland.

Based on information collected by outreach workers throughout the year, CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) figures show numbers of EEA nationals rough sleeping in London steadily increasing from 39% of the 6,437 total in the year 2012/13, to a peak of 46% of a 8,096 total in 2015/16. In the most recent years for which we have full figures, 2018/19, total numbers were up to 8,855, and 38% were EEA nationals. This rise in EEA rough sleepers did not start in 2013, but there are close links with the government's desire to be seen as 'tough on immigration', and the derogation from EU regulations that allowed our government to withhold any sort of public funds from EEA citizens.

> **In the most recent years for which we have full figures, 2018/19, total numbers were up to 8,855, and 38% were EEA nationals.**

There is a familiar trope that sees EU migrants and Romanians in particular as freeloaders, driven by a desire to exploit British generosity in the areas of health benefits and housing. In practice, this is not what we see. More

than half the EU nationals seen on the streets were not new to the UK, and were reported as having been in the UK for at least a year. They are likely to have worked, usually in low paid and insecure jobs, and they are more likely to have been exploited by unscrupulous employers, who don't pay taxes (or indeed wages). It's likely that many of them would be entitled to apply for settled status in the UK, however their working lives on the fringes of the employment market make providing the evidence they need to show their working history difficult or impossible.

Unlike many of the people that we work with, whose homelessness is part of a picture that also involves significant support needs, this group's need is primarily for stable and secure accommodation and the income to support this. They do not generally require the sort of long-term support we are familiar with providing through hostels, supported housing, tenancy support and Housing First. There is a danger, however, that without timely support to secure suitable accommodation, and the means to pay for it, they will drift into entrenched homelessness with the associated damage to their lives and future chances.

> **"Without timely support to secure suitable accommodation, and the means to pay for it, they will drift into entrenched homelessness.**

Back to the pandemic, and the public health response to homeless people has seen around 5000 people helped into temporary accommodation and hotels, procured at pace by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and local authorities to provide a secure space for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough or in shared shelter accommodation to safely isolate. The response from the authorities and from charities was immediate and heart-warming and evidence clearly shows that this decisive action has prevented the high levels of infection amongst the homeless population that was originally feared. Relatively low levels of infection have been seen and these have been successfully contained; those with symptoms have been not only able to isolate but also given first-class health care, due to our collaborative project with Medicins Sans Frontieres and University College Hospitals, with a dedicated hotel that was set up for symptomatic homeless people.

The economic impact of the pandemic has affected different groups in different ways, however, and a group that has been particularly badly affected has been this group of EEA nationals. Clear figures are hard to come by, but estimates suggest that well over 50% of those who have been newly accommodated during the crisis are in this group. We know that a high proportion of this group do not have settled status and because of this will struggle to find and keep housing when they move on from the hotels. Thames Reach will continue to work with them to help them establish settled status, and to help them find jobs, but this is obviously more difficult in a changed employment market. Even those who do find work will find it difficult to pay rent without help from the benefits system, and they are likely to be at risk of longer-term homelessness without this help and the fragile support systems they relied on previously.

Many people from Central and Eastern Europe have already decided to return to their home countries and many more will no doubt do so. However this supposes that they have homes to return to and for many people this is not the case. Many of the people we work with have lived in London for many years and now rightly call the city their home. They have worked hard and have made London the exciting place it can be – either literally by building our city and our infrastructure, or by working as cleaners or in sandwich shops and restaurants.

As we move away from lockdown and towards 31 December and the end of the Brexit transition period, it seems a good opportunity to move away from the divisive politics of the twenty-teens, and think about relaxing onerous and sometimes impossible evidential requirements to grant vulnerable people their settled status. Doing so will remove at least one barrier to security and stability for a group that has contributed so much to London and its communities.

Where next?

The future of housing for people facing social injustice

Ashley Horsey, Chief Executive of Commonweal Housing

The housing crisis: not enough homes; not enough homes where people wish to live; not enough of the right homes meeting the size and types of requirement our society has; not enough homes that people can genuinely afford to pay for on normal wages without relying upon state benefits; not enough safe, secure and well maintained homes; not enough homes providing the support and additional hand-holding many of us need at key points in our lives. These are all the bare facts of a housing crisis.

But what is too often overlooked is the impact that 'not enough' is having on those that are already marginalised in our society; those that are tackling a range of other seemingly intractable problems, problems that are exacerbated by inadequate homes or sometimes no housing at all. Housing can be part of the solution to tackling social injustice – just as, sadly, a lack of it or the wrong housing can be the accelerant to a downward spiral of personal and societal injustice. There is no doubt that we need urgent investment in genuinely affordable and social housing to tackle the shortage in the UK.

> **"Housing can be part of the solution to tackling social injustice – just as, sadly, a lack of it or the wrong housing can be the accelerant to a downward spiral of personal and societal injustice.**

Every one of these essays has highlighted how a depletion of housing in recent years has impacted their clients. At Commonweal we support calls across the housing sector to build social housing – with the National Housing Federation recommending 145,000 new social homes every year.

But what emerges from this anthology is not just the need for a roof over everyone's head – vital though this is. Over and over contributors have stressed the need for **safe, secure, and appropriate housing**. What this means in practice is more than just bricks and mortar.

> **"Over and over contributors have stressed the need for *safe, secure, and appropriate housing*. What this means in practice is more than just bricks and mortar.**

When Commonweal invited authors to contribute to this anthology, we asked them a crucial question: if 90% of the people you work with (already some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised) were housed, which groups would be left behind and why? We asked this because we know from experience that people at the sharpest end of social injustice are usually the ones who fall through the cracks. Too often housing isn't tailored to meet their needs. They may need certain levels or certain types of support to be able to sustain a tenancy. They may need a particular type of property – perhaps one that's shared, or self-contained, or that has a spare room for a dependent or a carer.

For more than a decade, Commonweal has been working to find housing solutions to social injustice; using our charitable resources to help expert partners try and test new ideas and new models. What we have learnt from this work is that with the right kind of housing at the right point in their personal journey, even the most 'hard to reach' groups can be supported towards stable and secure lives.

> **"With the right kind of housing at the right point in their personal journey, even the most 'hard to reach' groups can be supported towards stable and secure lives.**

These essays show us how specialist voluntary organisations hold decades of expertise in the needs and experiences of their clients – expertise which is invaluable to those providing housing to these groups. But charities like these have faced significant cuts in the last decade, with many struggling to stay afloat and keep up with a growth in need as a result of increasingly depleted public services. This has been exacerbated since the Coronavirus crisis, with a recent NCVO survey finding almost half of organisations (43%) surveyed reported an increase in demand for their services but a 48% decline in voluntary income.

> **"Almost half of organisations (43%) surveyed reported an increase in demand for their services but a 48% decline in voluntary income.**

To ensure the needs of people facing social injustice are met, we need these organisations to survive the impact of the crisis, and meet the level of need it will create. In the longer term, we need to see a deepening of the positive partnerships between housing providers, local authorities, and the voluntary sector, so that people facing social injustice can get the specialist support they need to sustain a tenancy and eventually move on to stability.

As we head into the unchartered waters of a world that is adapting to the impact of the pandemic, there has never been a more important time to get this right. There has been a welcome movement as a result of the pandemic towards large-scale solutions, rather than tinkering at the edges as has too often been the case. But as we work towards a world in which no one goes without a home, we need a number of different options to help people get there – and crucially, to stay there for good. We need a housing supply that is adaptable to the needs of the people it serves – rather than a 'one size fits all' solution.

We need an open conversation about the nuanced responses needed to meet the myriad of different needs of individuals and society and a realisation that there is no silver bullet, no single solution. And whilst some solutions are absolutely known already and need to be shouted about and replicated, others are yet to be found. It is helping to find those yet-untested solutions that remains Commonweal's focus.

As these essays have shown, there is sadly much still to be done. As we head into the unchartered waters of a post-coronavirus world, it is the role of national and local decision-makers, experts, housing organisations, and the social injustice sector to work together to put a roof over everyone's head – and meet the needs of everyone under that roof.

> **"It is the role of national and local decision-makers, experts, housing organisations, and the social injustice sector to work together to put a roof over everyone's head – and meet the needs of everyone under that roof.**

We investigate, test and share housing solutions to social injustice

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