

**HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS:**

# Your Place, Not Mine

The experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends



The  
Countryside  
Agency

# CRISIS

Fighting for hope for  
homeless people

**HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS:** **Your Place, Not Mine**  
The experiences of homeless people staying  
with family and friends

**David Robinson**  
**with**  
**Sarah Coward**

**A research report commissioned by Crisis and the  
Countryside Agency**



Crisis is the national charity for solitary homeless people. We work year-round to help vulnerable and marginalised people get through the crisis of homelessness, fulfil their potential and transform their lives.

We develop innovative services that help homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills, join the world of work and reintegrate into society.

We enable homeless people to overcome acute problems such as addictions and mental health problems.

We run services directly or in partnership with organisations across the UK, building on their grass roots knowledge, local enthusiasm and sense of community. We also regularly commission and publish research and organise events to raise awareness about the causes and nature of homelessness, to find innovative and integrated solutions and share good practice.

Crisis relies almost entirely on donations from non-government organisations and the public to fund its vital work. Last financial year we raised £5m and helped around 19,000 people.

Much of our work would not be possible without the support of over 3,700 volunteers.

Crisis was founded in 1967 and has been changing the lives of homeless people for 36 years.

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The Countryside Agency is the statutory body working to: make life better for people in the countryside; and improve the quality of the countryside for everyone.

The Countryside Agency will help to achieve the following outcomes: empowered, active and inclusive communities; high standards of rural services; vibrant local economies; all countryside managed sustainably; recreational infrastructure that's easy to enjoy; a vibrant and diverse urban fringe providing better quality of life.

We summarise our role as: statutory champion and watchdog; influencing and inspiring solutions through our know how and show how; delivering where we are best placed to add value.

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# Foreword

“Homelessness is about more than just a roof”... the phrase has become a bit of a mantra in the homelessness sector, but its full implications have yet to be realised. Although we have moved beyond rough sleeping and begun to tackle the problem of homeless people living in bed and breakfasts and hostels we have yet to fully understand, let alone tackle the true nature and scale of the homelessness problem in this country. One group in particular remain vulnerable, hidden and neglected – homeless people living with family and friends.

It is not that their numbers are insignificant, nor that we are unaware of their plight. Previous Crisis research has shown that people living with family and friends may exist in their hundreds of thousands. Also, ask anyone working in the homelessness sector and they will have anecdotal stories for you of homeless people for whom homelessness has meant moving from friend to friend, sleeping on floors and sofas and living in situations that demand urgent intervention – yet still their plight goes unrecognised.

Part of the problem is that until Crisis and The Countryside Agency commissioned this report, there was no systematic study of the experiences, problems and vulnerabilities that are associated with homeless people living in these circumstances. As David Robinson says in the opening line of the report, until a problem has been “observed and measured” it is unlikely to attract the attention of policy makers and the resources to tackle its problems.

It is this that Crisis’ latest report seeks to remedy. *Your Place, Not Mine: The Experiences of Homeless People Staying with Family and Friends* is the third report in a series of studies exposing hidden homelessness. It is a ground breaking study and one that Crisis is particularly proud to have commissioned.

Yet research is only ever the beginning – now we face the challenge of using what we have found to make a difference to the lives and prospects of homeless people. In this task we cannot work alone and the challenge for everyone who reads this report is to find a way in which they can make a contribution to helping the thousands of homeless people living with family and friends.



Shaks Ghosh  
*Chief Executive, Crisis*

# Executive summary

There are as many as 380,000 hidden homeless people in Great Britain, the majority of whom are sleeping on friends and families floors. Although their existence is widely acknowledged, their plight is rarely tackled. Part of the reason for this is the lack of knowledge surrounding the nature of their experiences and the extent of their vulnerability. This report represents the third instalment in a series of reports to be published by Crisis over the coming year intended to uncover the neglected and denied extent and experiences of hidden homelessness.

*Your Place, Not Mine: The Experiences of Homeless People staying with Family and Friends* casts light on the incidence and experiences of people staying with family and friends in response to homelessness. The report draws on evidence generated through a survey of 164 homeless people in three case study areas (London, Sheffield and Craven, North Yorkshire).

## Staying with family and friends: basic facts and figures

Staying with family and friends is a common homeless situation. 72 per cent of the 164 homeless people questioned reported that they had stayed with family and friends on a temporary basis since becoming homeless.

Three common patterns of staying with family and friends were apparent within the homeless accommodation careers of the 79 homeless people who had stayed with family or friends and were able to recollect and detail all the places they had stayed since becoming homeless:

- family and friends as a first port of call – over two-thirds of the homeless people who had stayed with family or friends did so upon leaving their last home
- reliance on family and friends in times of crisis – one in ten people reported that they had stayed with friends or family only after alternative accommodation options, including long-term squatting, hostel accommodation and short lived independent and supported tenancies, had fallen through

- staying with friends as and when the opportunity arises – one in six homeless people reported that they had stayed with friends at different points throughout their homeless career as and when the opportunity arose, often to escape rough sleeping.

Sleeping with family and friends appears to be a common homeless situation across England, with over two-thirds of homeless people in each of the three case study locations reporting that they had stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless.

The vast majority of homeless people staying with a friend or relative do not appear in the official homeless statistics. Only half of the homeless people *currently* staying with family or friends had approached the local authority as homeless in the last two years and only one-quarter had been recognised as homeless.

## The profile of homeless people staying with family and friends

Women were found to be more likely to only ever stay with a friend or relative while homeless and certain minority ethnic groups also appear more likely to stay with a friend or relative. Homeless people who stay with a friend or relative have a younger age profile than other homeless people and the majority are single. One in four of homeless people staying with a friend or relative are in employment.

People staying with family or friends experience personal problems and challenges typical of the problems apparent within the wider homeless population, including experience of time spent in local authority care as a child, time spent in prison or a young offenders' institute, problems with drug and/or alcohol use, mental and physical health problems and learning difficulties, although the profile and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends were found to vary between the case study areas.

## Problems reported by respondents

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=118)	Only ever stayed with family & friends % (n=36)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=46)
Mental health problem	33.1	30.6	28.3
Learning disability	11.0	2.8	2.2
Drug dependency	23.7	13.9	30.4
Alcohol dependency	20.3	5.6	13.0
Probation	35.6	25.0	32.6
Prison/Young offenders' institute	36.4	25.0	28.3
Time in local authority care	22.0	13.9	28.3

### Moving in with family and friends

*Most people stay with a friend or relative upon first becoming homeless.* Reasons for doing so include the lack of alternatives (particularly in rural areas), limited awareness of available options and the immediacy of need, which can prohibit efforts to search out advice and assistance. A lack of direct access accommodation for people who received little warning before being made homeless was a particular problem for people in Craven and Sheffield and was a reason given by a number of women who left home fleeing violence for relying, in the first instance, on friends and relatives. Some people also lack the cognitive resources necessary to negotiate access to alternative accommodation when threatened with homeless. Young people, in particular, were often unfamiliar with access routes into the private and social rented sectors and unaware of available temporary accommodation, such as hostels and bed and breakfast hotels.

*People who stay with a friend or relative as and when the opportunity presents itself* are typically living in hostel accommodation, bed and breakfast provision or sleeping rough before moving in with a friend. It appears common for a number of months or years to pass between staying with friends for these people and individual stays rarely last more than a couple of weeks at most. Three principal patterns were apparent in the

offers to stay with friends received by these homeless people:

- an offer of help from an old friend
- mutual support from a group of homeless friends, such as fellow street drinkers
- an offer to stay from a friend that people had got to know since becoming homeless. In some of these cases the offer of accommodation came with strings attached, particularly in instances where drugs were involved.

*For many people staying with a friend or relative represents a last resort.* In London and Sheffield many respondents reported preferring to rely on alternative options, including hostels and bed and breakfast hotels, whenever possible, only ever staying with family or friends when faced with an accommodation crisis and the possibility of sleeping rough. There are two distinct paths leading to an accommodation crisis that can drive people to approach a friend or relative for help:

- limited awareness of available options, some people being assisted to access hostel accommodation, for example, and when forced to leave being uncertain how to access alternative provision
- problems accessing alternatives, people only

approaching a friend or relative as a last resort when all alternatives were exhausted.

### Living with family and friends

For some people staying with a friend or relative is a positive experience, especially compared to the available alternatives. For most, however, it is a difficult and problematic experience. Most homeless people staying with a friend or relative sleep on a sofa or the floor. Privacy is limited and a whole host of restrictions are placed on their behaviour and lifestyle, including when they can come and go from the property, access and use of washing and cooking facilities, when they can go to bed, and how they can behave in the property. Homeless people can also be exposed to hazardous and threatening environments and behaviour when staying with a friend or relative.

Many homeless people utilise homeless services when staying with friends or relatives, particularly if they have been homeless sometime and are more aware of local provision. People recently made homeless and homeless people in the rural areas are more reliant on other service providers for help and assistance (colleges, probation, health care providers, Connexions officers, social services and such like). Many homeless people staying with a friend or relative were found to be choosing not to approach a local authority as homeless, either because of the treatment they expect to receive or because they misunderstand or are unaware of the local authority's responsibilities to homeless people.

### Living arrangements and day-to-day life staying with friends or relatives

#### Tim's story

Tim is 18 years old and has been homeless for two years. Tim is currently sleeping on the floor of a friend's bedroom in a supported accommodation scheme in London. Tim has stayed with his friend for six months, apart from the odd night he has spent with other friends, who he stayed with to give his friend a 'break' from him and some 'space':

*"I take off for a couple of days to give him chance to do his own thing for a while."*

Tim reported that his friend should not have been letting him stay:

*"By rights I shouldn't even be living there. By rights he's not allowed to have people living there. He's allowed to have overnight guests but not people living there so I stay as an overnight guest."*

Tim was therefore restricted in his use of the facilities and the amount of time he could spend in the flat during the day, resulting in him spending time visiting day centres and walking the streets:

*"A typical day is you get up, go to the day centre, get your clothes washed, get a shower...and then just kill time by walking the streets, basically."*

Tim is not paying his friend to stay, but tries to contribute as and when he can:

*"If I've got money, I'll put money in for food and that, but he doesn't want digs, he doesn't want any money. Just for food and things."*

Tim was grateful to his friend for helping him out but was clear that he wanted a place of his own:

*"I don't mind staying there but I don't want to. I want my own things. I don't want to sleep on somebody's floor. I want to have my own key for my own door."*

### Recommendations

Drawing on the research findings, chapter 6 provides a series of key conclusions regarding the incidence and experiences of staying with family and friends and offers a number of recommendations about how policy and provision might respond to this new body of evidence and more adequately address the needs of homeless people staying with family and friends.

To summarise:

- local authorities, in partnership with housing associations and third sector agencies, must extend their interest in homelessness beyond people living in traditional homeless 'spaces' and ensure that appropriate provision is available and accessible to

- homeless people regardless of where they are living
- limiting the number of homeless people forced to rely on the help of friends or relatives requires action to improve the availability, accessibility and suitability of services for homeless people, including the provision of temporary accommodation, to the needs and requirements of different sections of the homeless population
  - particular attention needs to be paid to the availability of advice, assistance and temporary accommodation for homeless people in rural areas
  - efforts to tackle homelessness and limit the personal, social and financial consequences of ongoing exposure to homeless situations and lifestyles should be actively rolled out to homeless people staying with family and friends
  - central and local government should develop mechanisms for actively supporting people who are able and willing to accommodate homeless friends or relatives
  - central and local government and partner agencies should actively work to limit the penalties associated with accommodating a friend or relative
  - homeless people staying with family and friends should be actively encouraged to approach their local authority for assistance. Even if their application is unsuccessful, the local authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance to homeless people and a corporate responsibility to assist people threatened with homelessness
  - central and local government should urgently attend to the discriminatory consequences of the reluctance of local authorities to recognise staying with family and friends as a homeless situation, which appears to be limiting the likelihood of people in rural locations, women, young people and certain minority ethnic groups being recognised as homeless and deserving of assistance
  - homeless people should not be regarded as intentionally homeless because they choose to no longer stay with a friend or relative
  - staying with family and friends should automatically signal the need to assess the vulnerability of a homeless applicant
  - local authority Homelessness Reviews should strive to appreciate the full range of situations and settings in which homeless people are living. Methods should be developed that are capable of illuminating situations, such as staying with family or friends, which have traditionally remained hidden but are often no less traumatic than more visible manifestations of homelessness, such as staying in bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation
  - estimating the incidence and understanding the experiences of homelessness in rural areas demands that particular attention is paid to the situations of homeless people staying with family and friends
  - the level of reliance among homeless people on family and friends for accommodation provides a useful insight into the availability and adequacy of temporary accommodation within an area and should be integral to any assessment of local needs informing the development of local authority's homeless strategy and the planning of temporary accommodation provision
  - research is urgently required to understand the apparent indifference of the homeless legislation and its application by local authority Homeless Person Units to the plight of homeless people staying with family and friends.

# 1. Introduction

A problem is only likely to attract the attention of policy and be the target of resources if it is observed and measured<sup>1</sup>. Little or nothing is known about people staying in alternative homeless situations, such as squatting, staying with family and friends as a temporary guest or living in hostel accommodation. In contrast, homeless statistics based on local authority actions under the homelessness legislation, have revealed a recent increase in the number of homeless people placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by local authorities, raising concerns about an escalation in the associated costs for the public purse and the consequences for the well being of people forced to live in the often cramped and unsuitable conditions provided by B&B hotels. Rough sleeper counts, meanwhile, have been carried out in towns and cities across England and acquired a particular pre-eminence among the various estimations or counts of homelessness as a measure of a very visible manifestation of homelessness. It should therefore come as no surprise that recent efforts to tackle homelessness have focused on reducing the number of homeless people placed in B&B accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough.

In 2002 the government signalled a sea change in its approach to tackling homelessness. Recognising that, despite the focus of recent policy on reducing rough sleeping and the number of people living in B&B hotels, the vast majority of homeless people are living with friends or in other temporary accommodation situations<sup>2</sup>, government committed to target efforts aimed at tackling homelessness *“as much on the people as on the places that they live”*<sup>3</sup>. As well as introducing a Statutory Instrument extending the groups of homeless people to be considered in priority need under the homelessness legislation, emphasis was therefore placed on extending the statutory response to homelessness beyond the needs of particular homeless people recognised as deserving under the legislation. In particular, the Homelessness Act 2002 obliged local authorities to carry out a review and develop a strategy for their area that prevents homelessness and provides solutions for people who are, or who may become, homeless.

In an attempt to support and advance this ‘new approach’ to tackling homelessness, Crisis commissioned a series of reports with the intention of exposing the incidence and experiences of homeless people living in circumstances and situations traditionally ignored or neglected by research and policy. Other reports in the series explore the lives and experiences of homeless people living in squats and living in hostel accommodation. This report focuses on homeless people staying with family or friends.

## **Homeless people staying with friends and relatives: a question of definition**

This report seeks to cast light on the incidence and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends. It is important, at the outset, to define what is meant by staying with family and friends. Many people are living with family and friends, often as concealed households in unsuitable, unsatisfactory and overcrowded situations. This report is specifically concerned with people who are living with family or friends as a response to homelessness; people who have been forced to leave secure accommodation that they had an established right to occupy, have been unable to access alternative secure accommodation, therefore becoming homeless, and have stayed with a friend or relative in response to this accommodation crisis.

A further point of clarification is that the report focuses on single people and childless couples (people without dependent children), in response to the particular problems these households are known to encounter because of the tendency for them to be considered less deserving of help and assistance under the homelessness legislation.

## **The need for research: the limits of current understanding**

Referencing the Crisis estimate, which was recently updated to suggest that 380,000 people are living in hostels, staying with family and friends or living in other temporary places,<sup>2</sup> the government’s ‘new approach’ to tackling homelessness signalled a

commitment to recognise and respond to the needs of homeless people whose experiences and situations had traditionally been neglected and denied. Policy documents, local strategies and research reports also appear more willing to recognise that homeless people are often residing in various accommodation situations, other than sleeping rough and staying in bed and breakfast hotels. There remains little evidence, however, about how common it is for homeless people to stay with a friend or relative and nothing is known about why and when in their homeless career people stay with family and friends.

National and local surveys often detail the living arrangements within households and identify people staying with a friend or family member, but rarely clarify whether staying with a friend or family member represents a temporary solution to an accommodation crisis or a long term accommodation situation, providing a degree of security, which might be formalised in a tenancy arrangement. Neither do they provide any insight into the precise arrangements under which a person is staying with a friend or relative, which could range from sleeping on a sofa or floor, through to living in a room of their own with en-suite facilities and a front door key, allowing them to come and go as they please. Research, meanwhile, has tended to consider the experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends within discussion of a wider collective of homeless people referred to as the 'hidden homeless', membership of which is rarely defined. Consequently, there are few conclusions of significance to be drawn from the available evidence, other than the fact that black and minority ethnic households are less likely to be 'visibly' homeless (known to service providers or visibly sleeping rough) and more likely to rely on friends and family when homeless; women are more likely to adopt strategies of invisibility when homeless, evidence suggesting that a reliance on friends and family is one such strategy; and homeless people in rural locations are often reliant on friends and family due to the relative dearth of temporary accommodation and support services for homeless people in rural areas.

The virtual absence of information about the incidence and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends would not be an issue were it not for anecdotal evidence suggesting that staying with family and friends is a common and, often, problematic experience for homeless people. For example, the vast majority (93%) of 74 homeless specific and generic housing service providers, advice centres, refugee and minority ethnic community group organisations in three case study areas (London, Sheffield and Craven, North Yorkshire) contacted during this research project reported that they were aware of homeless clients who were staying with a friend or relative. Half of these service providers, the majority of whom were working specifically with homeless people, reported that it was common or very common for clients to be staying with family and friends. Service providers also made a number of specific comments about the problems and difficulties associated with staying with a friend or relative when homeless, which included insecurity, poor living conditions and exposure to hazardous and threatening situations.

This report aims to explore these reported experiences, by drawing on data collected through discussions with homeless people, and to reveal the incidence of staying with family and friends across a cross sectional sample of the homeless population drawn from three case study locations where different housing market conditions apply and the provision of homeless services varies in scope and nature.

## **The research approach**

This report draws on an extensive new database detailing the experiences and accommodation histories of 164 homeless people. This database was generated through face-to-face interviews undertaken with homeless people in three case study locations.

### **Case study selection**

Case study selection was designed to ensure the inclusion of homeless people living in different housing market and service provision contexts, key factors known to impact on the incidence and experience of

## HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

homelessness and considered likely to inform the reliance of homeless people on family and friends for a place to stay. To assist with the selection process, and to ensure inclusion in the sample of homeless people living in very different contexts, a threefold categorisation of location types was developed:

1. High demand for affordable housing, relatively high house prices, recognised homelessness problem and wealth of associated provision (temporary accommodation, advice and day centre provision, outreach work with rough sleepers and such like).
2. Relatively low demand for affordable housing, relatively low house prices, a history of homelessness in the area and some associated provision.
3. High demand for affordable housing, relatively high house prices, no recognised homelessness problem and limited provision of associated services.

In addition, the selection process also recognised the need to ensure inclusion of locations from across England, rural and urban districts and London, given the very particular and extreme situation in the capital. The result was the selection of three case study locations: London, Sheffield and Craven, North Yorkshire.

### **About the case study locations**

Homelessness is an extreme problem in **London**. According to the homeless returns for the first quarter of 2003 submitted to central government by local authorities, 2.6 per 1,000 households in London are homeless and in priority need, compared to 1.6 across England as a whole. In Tower Hamlets the rate of homelessness and priority need is 5.3 per 1,000 households, in Islington the comparative figure is 4.4 per 1,000 households and in Newham 4.2 per 1,000 households. Almost one-quarter of all applications for assistance under the homeless legislation in England are made to London boroughs, one quarter of all people accepted as homeless under the homeless legislation in England are accepted by a London borough, more than half of all homeless people accommodated by a local authority in temporary accommodation in England are living in London and

almost two-thirds of all homeless people living in bed and breakfast accommodation in England are in London<sup>4</sup>.

The profile of the homeless population in London is also distinct. In particular, according to government figures, almost half of all people who become homeless in London belong to a minority ethnic group and 37 per cent of all people accepted as homeless and in priority need in London are from a minority ethnic group, compared to 17 per cent of applicants outside London.

Responding to the scale of the homelessness problem in the capital, government has tended to concentrate efforts to tackle homelessness on London, the Rough Sleepers Initiative, for example, focusing on tackling the problem in London, before being spread out to other major towns and cities in England. Voluntary sector agencies are also responsible for providing a range of services targeted at the specific needs of different sections of the homeless population, which are unrivalled elsewhere in England both in scope and scale and include outreach services for people sleeping rough, direct access and long stay temporary accommodation, day centres and mental and physical health care provision.

In large part, the homelessness problem in London reflects the relative dearth of affordable housing in the capital. Although London has a sizeable social rented sector compared to other regions of England, there are currently over 220,000 households on a local authority housing register in London and less than 35,000 new social housing lettings per year. Less than two per cent of the social rented sector is considered to be in low demand and only 3.2 per cent of the housing stock is thought to be empty<sup>5</sup>. This relatively high demand for housing is reflected in house prices, the average price of a house in London being £242,000<sup>6</sup>.

**Sheffield** is a city in South Yorkshire of some 500,000 people. Homelessness is a long standing problem in Sheffield but, according to official figures, has increased dramatically in recent years, the City Council reporting an 81 per cent increase in the number of decisions made under the homeless legislation between 2001/02 and 2002/03, compared to a six per cent increase

during the same time period across England. There was also an increase of 104 per cent during the same period in the number of households recognised as homeless. Linked to this dramatic increase in the number of people recognised as homeless, there was a 50 per cent increase in the number of homeless people placed in temporary accommodation by the City Council during 2002, a period during which the use of temporary accommodation by local authorities elsewhere in England was declining.

The profile of households recognised as homeless in Sheffield also differs markedly from the national picture, only one-third of homeless applicants being recognised as in priority need in Sheffield in 2002/03 because of dependent children or pregnancy, compared to 61 per cent nationally. According to the 2001 Census, nine per cent of the population belong to a minority ethnic group and one-third of these people are of Pakistani origin. Local authority returns, however, reveal that over one-third of households accepted by the city council as homeless and in priority need belong to a minority ethnic group.

The reasons for the dramatic increase in official levels of homelessness are unclear, but likely relate, at least in part, to the low demand problem within the district, the desire to fill void properties giving the City Council scope to be more liberal in its interpretation of its duties under the homeless legislation. Analysis of the changing demand within the Yorkshire housing market has noted that, although Sheffield has areas with buoyant demand and high and rising prices, some 40 per cent of the stock is at risk of low demand<sup>6</sup>. Reflecting this situation, the eastern edge of Sheffield has been designated part of the South Yorkshire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, developed in an attempt to counter housing market, and associated neighbourhood, decline, improve housing conditions, remove 'obsolete' housing and assist with regeneration objectives.

There are a range of specialist services targeted at the needs of homeless people in Sheffield, including drop-in centres providing advice, support, food and washing facilities and hostels (although there are few direct access bed spaces). Sheffield has also received support

through the Rough Sleepers Initiative to tackle rough sleeping in the city. Local agencies and front line officers, however, pointed to various inadequacies in local provision, in particular the shortage of specialist provision for minority ethnic people.

**Craven** is a rural local authority district in North Yorkshire, centred around the market town of Skipton and bounded to the south by Bradford Metropolitan District Council, to the east by Harrogate Borough Council, to the north by Richmondshire District Council and to the east by the administrative county of Lancashire. Much of the district falls within the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

The local authority's Housing Strategy (2002/2003) identifies homelessness as an increasing problem within the district, particularly since the extension of the priority need categories to include 16 and 17 year olds. This concern is not reflected in the official figures, however, only 13 households being recognised as homeless in the first quarter of 2003 and the official rate of homelessness and priority need standing at 0.0 per 1,000 households. It is, perhaps therefore, not surprising that there are virtually no specialist provision targeted at the needs of homeless people.

The local housing market is characterised by high demand and high house prices, compared to the regional average. The vast majority of housing in the district (76.8 per cent) is owner occupied and the average house price in the district in 2001 was £100,161. Wage levels, meanwhile, are reported to be below the national average and affordable housing is in short supply, the social rented sector (local authorities and housing associations) only providing 9.6 per cent of the local housing stock, according to the 2001 Census.

### The research process

The collection of new primary research evidence regarding the incidence, profile and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends in the three case study locations involved the research team in four key activities:

- *a review and evaluation of the evidence base*, involving analysis of the nature, scope and content of existing evidence regarding the incidence and experiences of homeless people staying with friends and relatives
- *telephone and face-to-face interviews with 74 front line service providers* across the three case study locations to explore awareness and understanding of client experiences of staying with friends and relatives when homeless
- *a questionnaire survey of 164 homeless people across the three case study areas*, conducted in a range of homeless and non-homeless services and with homeless people living on the streets. The sampling strategy involved the team targeting services known to work with particular client groups, in order to ensure the presence of these groups within the sample of homeless people interviewed. Through this approach a reasonably representative cross section of the homeless population was secured, including men and women of various ages currently living in a range of situations, with various personal challenges and problems and drawn from different minority ethnic groups (see Appendix 4 for a detailed profile of the full sample). The interview process involved the application of a pro forma designed to take the respondent back through the various situations they had lived in since becoming homeless, in an attempt to identify homeless people who had stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless, allowing this population to be profiled and compared and contrasted with homeless people who had never stayed with friends or relatives since becoming homeless. Questions were also asked about service use and efforts to escape

homelessness by approaching a local authority for help. Data was cleaned and entered into a data analysis package, allowing statistical analysis

- *in-depth interviews with 49 people*, identified through the survey of homeless people, who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless. These interviews focused on understanding in more detail the experience of staying with a friend or relative since becoming homeless. These interviews focused on understanding in more detail the experience of staying with a friend or relative when homeless, the pros and cons associated with doing so and the reasons for moving in and the reasons for moving out. These interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed and analysed.

### The structure of the report

The report is divided into four core sections:

- chapter 2 provides a series of basic facts and figures about staying with family and friends when homeless, including the incidence of staying with family and friends among a cross sectional sample of 164 homeless people and the role that staying with family and friends was found to play in the accommodation careers of homeless people
- chapter 3 provides a detailed analysis of the profile of the homeless people who stay with family and friends, comparing and contrasting their situations and personal characteristics with people who have never stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless
- chapter 4 draws on in-depth interviews with people who have stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless to explore in detail their reasons for moving in with a friend or relative and the role that staying with family and friends has played in their homeless accommodation career
- chapter 5 explores the experience of staying with a friend or relative, detailing aspects such as sleeping arrangements, positive and negative aspects of staying with a friend or relative and service use.

- chapter 6 provides a series of recommendations for policy and practice to consider suggested by the fresh evidence of the previously hidden experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends.

## 2. Staying with family and friends: basic facts and figures

**Summary**

- staying with family or friends is a common homeless situation
- some people stay with family and friends for the whole time they are homeless
- staying with a friend or relative is more common when first homeless
- the vast majority of homeless people staying with a friend or relative do not appear in the official homeless statistics

### Introduction

Staying with family and friends is widely acknowledged as a common homeless situation. Little is known, however, about how common it is for homeless people to stay with family or friends, how long visits usually last and the position, role and function of staying with family and friends within the accommodation careers of homeless people. This chapter attempts to answer these and other key questions by reviewing some basic facts and figures about staying with family and friends when homeless, drawing on the detailed homeless accommodation careers of a cross sectional sample of homeless people. The many issues raised will be addressed in detail in subsequent chapters.

### How many homeless people stay with friends and family?

Staying with family and friends is a common experience among homeless people. Over two-thirds (72%) of the 164 currently or recently homeless people questioned reported that they had stayed with family and friends on a temporary basis since becoming homeless. Only 28 per cent of the homeless people interviewed reported that they had never stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless.

Staying with friends was found to be a more common situation than staying with family members. Full homeless accommodation careers were collected from 79 homeless people who had stayed with family or friends. Three-quarters (75.9%) of these respondents

had stayed with a friend since becoming homeless and only one-quarter has stayed with a family member. Less than one in ten (7.5%) of these 79 homeless people had stayed with family *and* friends since becoming homeless.

### How frequently do homeless people stay with family or friends?

The majority of homeless people who had stayed with family or friends had done so only once. There was a clear difference, however, between the incidence of staying with a friend compared to staying with a family member. Almost half (43.7%) of the homeless people who had stayed with friends reported that they had done so on more than one occasion. In comparison, only 17.4 per cent of homeless people who had stayed with a family member reported doing so on more than one occasion (Table 2.1). An obvious explanation for this difference, is that people can make new friends in different towns and cities and at different points in their homeless career, as we will see in Chapter 4, but only have one family.

**Table 2.1** Number of times stayed with family and friends

Number of visits	Staying with friends % (n=48*)	Staying with relative % (n=26*)
1	56.3	84.6
2	22.9	7.7
3	10.4	3.8
4	4.2	3.8
5 or more	6.3	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* n = number of respondents

### For how long do homeless people stay with family and friends?

The length of time that homeless people stay with family and friends was found to vary from a single night through to, in a small number of cases, a number

of years. Typically, homeless people were found to stay longer with family members than with friends. The average length of residence with a family member was six months and the majority of stays lasted six months or less (Table 2.2). The average length of residence with a friend was three months and the majority of stays lasted for one month or less (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2** Length of stay with family and friends

<b>Length of stay</b>	<b>Staying with friends % (n=112*)</b>	<b>Staying with relative % (n=25*)</b>
Less than 1 week	25.0	16
1 week to 1 mth	33.9	16
2-6 months	29.5	24
7-12 months	8.0	16
more than 12 mths	3.6	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100</b>

\* n = number of stays for which data on the length of stay was obtained

### **When in their homeless career do homeless people stay with family and friends?**

Three common patterns of staying with family and friends were apparent within the homeless accommodation careers of the 79 homeless people who had stayed with family or friends and were able to recollect and detail all the places they had stayed since becoming homeless:

- family and friends as a first port of call - over two-thirds (57 or 72%) of the homeless people who had stayed with family or friends did so upon leaving their last home. Over half (36 or 63%) of the 57 people who stayed with family and friends upon first becoming homeless reported that they had only ever stayed with family or friends since becoming homeless, although the vast majority had moved between different friends and relatives. Almost half of these 36 people had been homeless for more than two years.

- reliance on family and friends in times of crisis – nine people reported that they had stayed with friends or family only after alternative accommodation options had fallen through. These alternative options included long term squatting, hostel accommodation and short lived independent and supported tenancies. Most of these respondents arranged alternative accommodation when staying with family or friends, eight out of nine reporting that they moved into a hostel, bed and breakfast hotel, supported accommodation or a tenancy upon leaving their friend or relatives
- staying with friends as and when the opportunity arises – 13 homeless people reported that they had stayed with friends at different points throughout their homeless career as and when the opportunity arose. In many cases, respondents moved in with friends to escape rough sleeping. Most of these respondents went back to sleeping rough or moved into hostel accommodation upon leaving their friend or relative.

### **Is staying with family and friends a common homeless situation across England?**

Sleeping with family and friends appears to be a common homeless situation across England, with over two-thirds of homeless people in each of the three case study locations (London, Sheffield and Craven, North Yorkshire) reporting that they had stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless. Staying with family and friends was most common in the rural case study (Craven), where 77 per cent of all homeless people had stayed with family or friends, compared to 72 per cent in Sheffield and 69 per cent in London. It was also far more common in the rural case study for staying with family and friends to be the only homeless situation that respondents had experienced, 65 per cent of all homeless people surveyed in Craven having only ever stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless, compared to 13 per cent of homeless people in London and 4 per cent in Sheffield.

### Are homeless people staying with family and friends counted in the homeless statistics?

The official homeless statistics issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on a quarterly basis are derived from local authority returns regarding the number of households recognised as homeless under legislation contained in the Housing Act 1996 and reasserted in the *Homelessness Act 2002*. To be recorded in the statutory homeless statistics it is necessary for a household to express a ‘felt need’ to the local authority, namely that they are homeless or threatened with homelessness<sup>7</sup>, and for local authority officers, acting under the homeless legislation and informed by the Code of Guidance and local policy, to determine that an applicant is ‘homeless’.

Over half (57.3%) of the homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless had approached the council as homeless in the last two years and 37.0 per cent had been recognised as homeless. In comparison, 42.1 per cent of homeless people who had never stayed with family and friends had approached a local authority and been recognised as homeless. Perhaps more revealing, however, is the fact that only half (48%) of the 27 homeless people *currently* staying with family or friends had approached the local authority as homeless in the last two years and only five (24%) had been recognised as homeless. The vast majority of homeless people currently living with family or friends were not, therefore, appearing in the official homeless statistics.

### Reasons for not staying with family and friends

In total, 46 (28%) of the 164 homeless people surveyed reported that they had never stayed with family or friends since becoming homeless. Asked why they never had stayed with family and friends, over three-quarters of these homeless people either reported that they had no friends or family they could stay with or that they were able to stay in an alternative/preferred situation (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3** Reasons for not staying with family or friends

Reason	Number*
No friends or family to stay with	13
Chose not to ask family or friends for help	5
Family and friends unwilling to accommodate	2
Alternative/preferred accommodation available	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

\*13 respondents failed to provide an answer

### Conclusion

The evidence revealed in this chapter leaves little room for doubt that staying with family and friends is a common homeless situation across England. Almost three-quarters of the 164 homeless people surveyed had stayed with family and friends at some point since becoming homeless. Although for many people friends and family provide a ‘stop gap’ solution to an accommodation crisis, for many homeless people staying with family and friends is a long term and ongoing experience. Visits can last many months, 15 per cent of all stays with family and friends detailed by homeless people lasting more than six months, and many homeless people know little else, 22 per cent of the 164 homeless people surveyed having only ever stayed with family and friends.

Staying with a friend or relative when homeless appears to be a particularly common homeless situation in rural England, over three-quarters of the homeless people in the rural case study having stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless and two-thirds having only ever stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless.

## 3. The profile of homeless people staying with family and friends

### Summary

- women are more likely to only ever stay with a friend or relative while homeless
- certain minority ethnic groups are more likely to stay with a friend or relative
- homeless people who stay with a friend or relative have a younger age profile than other homeless people
- the majority of people who stay with a friend or relative are single
- one in four homeless people staying with a friend or relative are in employment
- people staying with family or friends experience personal problems and challenges typical of the problems common within the wider homeless population
- a large proportion of homeless people who stay with a friend or relative were living with a parent(s).guardian before becoming homeless
- people staying with a relative of friend are less likely than other homeless people to approach a local authority for help and to be recognised as homeless
- the profile and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends varies depending upon location.

### Introduction

The previous chapter established that staying with family and friends is a common homeless situation experienced at one time or another by many homeless people. The aim of this chapter is to profile the people who stay with friends and family when homeless and to expose their particular and unique characteristics. In doing so, discussion will focus on the experiences of three groups of homeless people who had stayed with family and friends when homeless:

- the 118 people who had stayed with family or friends at some point since becoming homeless.

- the 36 people who had only ever stayed with friends and family since becoming homeless.
- the 27 people who were currently staying with family and friends.

At certain points, comparisons will also be drawn with the 46 homeless people who had never stayed with family and friends and relied instead on alternative accommodation settings, including hostels, bed and breakfast hotels and rough sleeping.

The chapter is divided into four key sections, focusing on the personal characteristics of people who stay with family and friends when homeless, particular problems and challenges they have encountered, their last home and any efforts they have made to escape homelessness by approaching a local authority for help.

### Personal characteristics

#### Gender

Two thirds of the homeless people who had stayed with friends and family since becoming homeless were men, reflecting the gender balance across the full sample of homeless people interviewed. Women were more likely to have only ever stayed with family and friends when homeless, almost half (47%) of the people who had only ever stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless being women.

#### Age

The majority of people who had stayed with family and friends were less than 35 years old (Table 3.1), although the picture varied between the case studies, the population being older in London and younger in Craven. Homeless people who had stayed with family and friends had a younger age profile than those who had stayed in alternative accommodation settings, only 11.8 per cent being over 45 years old, compared to 17.8 per cent of homeless people who had never stayed with friends or relatives. Homeless people who had stayed with family and friends throughout their homeless accommodation career had an even younger age profile, 75 per cent being less than 35 years old and only 8.3 per cent being over 45 years old.

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**Table 3.1** The Age profile of homeless people staying with family and friends

<b>Age band (years)</b>	<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=118)</b>	<b>Only ever stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=36)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=46)</b>
18 and under	9.3	16.7	6.7
19 to 25	29.7	22.2	15.6
26-35	31.4	36.1	42.2
36-45	17.8	16.7	17.8
46-55	5.9	5.6	15.6
56-65	5.9	2.8	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Ethnicity

One-third (32.8%) of the homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless were from a minority ethnic group. Homelessness is well known to be a more common experience among minority ethnic groups and this fact was reflected among homeless people who had stayed with family and friends, 54.5 per cent of people in London belonging to a minority ethnic group, 15.6 per cent in Craven (where only 1.4% of the total population belong to a minority ethnic group, according to the 2001 Census) and 15.6 per cent in Sheffield (where 8.8% of the total population belong to a minority ethnic group, according to the 2001 Census).

Minority ethnic households appeared no more likely than White British households to rely on friends and family when homeless, 73.1 per cent of the minority ethnic people surveyed and 72.2 per cent of the White British people surveyed having stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless. The ethnic profile of people staying with family and friends was also similar to the profile of the homeless people who had never stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless. Table 3.2, however, reveals that certain minority ethnic groups appear more likely to have stayed with family and friends. These groups include

White Irish, White Other and Black Other (which included Somali) respondents, while Black African respondents were less likely to have stayed with family and friends. It should be noted, however, that certain key groups were not represented in the cross sectional sample of homeless people interviewed, despite the best efforts of the research team. No Pakistani households were interviewed, for example, despite their presence in all the case study locations.

**Table 3.2** Ethnicity of homeless people staying with friends and family

Ethnic group		Stayed with family & friends % (n=116)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=44)
White	British	68.2	68.2
	Irish	2.3	2.3
	Other	0.0	0.0
Mixed heritage	White and Black Caribbean	2.3	2.3
	White and Black African	0.0	0.0
	White and Asian	0.0	0.0
	Other	0.0	0.0
Asian or Asian British	Indian	2.3	2.3
	Bangladeshi	0.0	0.0
	Pakistani	0.0	0.0
Black or Black British	Caribbean	6.8	6.8
	African	9.1	9.1
	Other	0.0	0.0
Chinese or other Group	Chinese	0.9	0.0
	Other	3.7	4.6

### Marital status

The majority of homeless people who had stayed with family or friends since becoming homeless were single. Only one in ten respondents were married or in a long term relationship (Table 3.3). Homeless people who had only ever stayed with family and friends were even more likely to be single, 85.4 per cent reporting that they were single and less than one in ten being married or in a long term relationship. There was some variation

in the marital status of homeless people staying with family and friends across the case studies, over 90 per cent of homeless people in Craven being single, compared to 70.4 per cent in London and 79.4 per cent in Sheffield. This fact could relate to the younger age profile of homeless people in Craven and reflects the fact that the majority of homeless people in Craven were living with a parent or guardian before becoming homeless.

**Table 3.3** The marital status of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=115)	Only ever stayed with family & friends % (n=34)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=45)
Single	78.3	85.4	73.3
Married/long term relationship	10.4	5.9	11.1
Divorced	6.1	2.9	13.3
Widowed	1.7	2.9	2.2
Other	0.9	2.9	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Sexuality**

The vast majority of people who had stayed with a relative or friend since becoming homeless indicated that they were heterosexual. One in ten (10.5%) people who had stayed with family or friends indicated that their sexuality was something other than heterosexual. In contrast, only 4.4 per cent of homeless people who had not stayed with friends or relatives declared that their sexuality was something other than heterosexual (Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4** The sexuality of homeless people staying with family and friends

<b>Status</b>	<b>Staying with family &amp; friends % (n=114*)</b>	<b>Not staying with family &amp; friends % (n=45*)</b>
Heterosexual	89.5	95.6
Gay man	3.5	2.2
Lesbian	0.9	0.0
Bisexual	2.6	0.0
Other	3.5	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Employment status**

Almost half of the 27 homeless people who were *currently* living with family and friends when interviewed were unemployed and available for work. One-quarter were in full-time employment.

**Table 3.5** Employment status of people currently staying with family or friends

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Number</b>
Employed full time	7
Voluntary work	1
Unemployed and available for work	12
Permanently sick or disabled	2
Other	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>

**Personal problems and challenges**

Many homeless people have personal problems and challenges that contribute toward them becoming homeless or emerge as a consequence of being homeless. Homeless people who stay with family and friends are no different, many having experience of some kind of institutional life (prison, young offenders' institute, local authority care) and suffering from mental health problems and alcohol and drug use problems.

The incidence of personal problems was far greater among homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative in Sheffield (see Appendix 2). In fact, other than the reported incidence of learning disabilities in

London, all personal problems were far more common among the homeless people surveyed in Sheffield. The reasons for this are unclear, but one possibility is that, in the context of low demand and increasing actions under the homeless legislation, people homeless in Sheffield are increasingly likely to be those least able to take advantage of available opportunities to escape homelessness, because of limited cognitive resources or because of exclusion from social housing, for example, because of drug use problems. Whereas homelessness in London and Craven is driven, principally, by a shortage of housing, homelessness in Sheffield might be inferred to be driven by personal problems and exclusion from available opportunities.

**Learning disabilities and mental health problems**

A relatively large proportion of people who had stayed with family and friends reported having a learning disability. One in ten homeless people (11%) who had stayed with a friend or relative reported a learning disability and one in ten (11%) of the 27 people *currently* staying with friends and family reported a learning disability. In contrast, however, only 2.8 per cent of the homeless people who stayed with family and friends for the whole time they had been homeless reported having a learning disability (Table 3.6). The incidence of learning difficulties was particularly high in London, where 15.8 per cent of homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative reported a learning

**Table 3.6** Personal problems reported by respondents

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=118)	Only ever stayed with family & friends % (n=36)	Not stayed with family & friends (n=46)
Mental health problem	33.1	30.6	28.3
Learning disability	11.0	2.8	2.2
Drug dependency	23.7	13.9	30.4
Alcohol dependency	20.3	5.6	13.0
Probation	35.6	25.0	32.6
Prison/Young offenders' institute	36.4	25.0	28.3
Time in local authority care	22.0	13.9	28.3

disability, compared to just 4 per cent of homeless people who had never stayed with a friend or relative.

Homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative were prone to mental health problems, one-third (33.1%) reporting a problem. One-third (30.6%) of the homeless people who had only ever stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless also reported a mental health problem. In comparison, 28.3 per cent of people who had never stayed with family or friends since becoming homeless reported a mental health problem.

#### **Alcohol and drug dependency**

Problems with drug dependency were relatively common among people who had stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless, one-quarter (23.7%) reporting a problem. Problems with drug dependency, however, were less common among people staying with family and friends than among people who had stayed in alternative accommodation since becoming homeless, one-third (30.4%) of whom reported a drug dependency problem (Table 3.6). Reported problems with alcohol dependency were relatively common among people who had stayed with family or friends since becoming homeless, one in five (20.3%) reporting a problem with alcohol dependency, compared to 13 per cent of people who had not stayed with a friend or relative.

Drug and alcohol dependency were both far less common among homeless people who had only ever stayed with family and friends, 13.9 per cent reporting

a problem with drug dependency and 5.6 per cent reporting a problem with alcohol dependency.

#### **Involvement with the criminal justice system**

A large minority of people (44.9%) who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless had been in contact with the criminal justice system, more than one-third (35.6%) having been on probation and 36.4 per cent having spent time in a prison or a young offenders' institute (YOI). Homeless people who had stayed with family and friends throughout their homeless accommodation career were less likely to have been in prison (25.0%) or on probation (25.0%).

#### **Time spent in local authority care**

Almost one-quarter of people who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless had been in local authority care as a child. People who had stayed with family and friends the whole time they had been homeless, however, were far less likely to have spent time in local authority care, 13.9 per cent reporting having been in care as a child. In comparison, 28.3 per cent of people who had never stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless reported time spent in local authority care when a child. Almost one in five people (18.6%) who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless reported problems with literacy and 6.8 per cent reported problems with numeracy.

#### **Last home**

It is difficult to trace where and when an experience of homelessness begins or ends. Drawing a clear line

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between people who are and who are not homeless is difficult and debate is ongoing about who or what situations should be recognised as homeless.

Recognising but attempting to overcome these difficulties, a working definition of home, focusing on accommodation situations, was developed and homeless people were asked to identify their last secure, settled accommodation which they had an acknowledged right to occupy and where they had lived for at least six months.

The most common situations people were living in before becoming homeless were with a partner or with parents (Table 3.7). People who have stayed with a

The majority of homeless people were living in rented accommodation prior to becoming homeless. The most common tenure situations were council housing, residing in social rented accommodation as a licensee, reflecting the high proportion of young people in the sample, and private renting. Only a small proportion of homeless people were living in owner occupied accommodation before becoming homeless.

The majority (55%) of homeless people who had stayed with friends or family since becoming homeless reported that they were still living in the same town, city or district in which their last home was located. Homeless people who had never stayed with family or

**Table 3.7** Household situation before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=107)	Only ever stayed with family & friends % (n=36)	Never stayed with family & friends (n=34)
Alone	17.8	8.3	26.5
Partner	35.5	30.6	38.3
Parents	32.7	44.4	29.4
With friends	3.7	5.6	5.9
Family (not parents)	6.5	5.6	0.0
Other	3.7	5.6	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

friend or relative since becoming homeless were less likely than other homeless people to have been living alone prior to becoming homeless. Less than one in ten people who had only ever stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless reported that they were living alone before becoming homeless.

friends since becoming homeless were more likely to have moved outside the town or city where their last home was located, only 43.2 per cent still living in the same town or city.

Asked why they had left their last home, respondents gave a variety of reasons, but most common was the

**Table 3.8** The tenure situations of respondents before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=87)	Only ever stayed with family & friends % (n=25)	Never stayed with family & friends (n=25)
Owner occupied	13.8	20	12
Private rented	20.7	16	36
Council housing	28.7	32	24
Housing Association	6.9	12	4
Licensee	21.8	12	4
Other	5.7	8	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

breakdown in a relationship, either with their parents or a partner. The reasons for leaving their last home were not found to vary considerably between homeless people who had stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless and those who had not. People who had only ever stayed with family and friends while they were homeless, however, were more likely than other homeless people to have left their last home to seek employment or to have been evicted (Table 3.9).

### **Efforts to escape homelessness: approaching the council for help**

People staying with family and friends were far less likely than other homeless people to have approached a local authority for help and assistance since becoming homeless. Among the homeless people who had only ever stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless, only 50 per cent reported that they had approached a local authority in the previous two years, compared to 63 per cent of people who had never stayed with a friend or relative.

The apparent reluctance of people staying with a friend or relative to approach a local authority as homeless is not because people in this situation do not regard themselves as homeless. In fact, over 90 per cent of homeless people currently staying with a friend or relative self defined themselves as homeless. More relevant appears to be the expectation whether or not an approach will result in a positive outcome, a fact that helps explain the variable tendency across the case studies of homeless people to approach a local authority as homeless. In Sheffield, for example, where over three-quarters of approaches resulted in the applicant being recognised as homeless and one-third being awarded priority need for accommodation, 82 per cent of all people who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached the local authority as homeless. In contrast, in Craven, where only 50 per cent of applicants were recognised as homeless and only one-quarter were recognised as in priority need for accommodation, only half of all homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless. Finally, in London, where only 42 per cent of homeless people who had

**Table 3.9** Reasons for leaving last home

<b>Status</b>	<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=104)</b>	<b>Only ever stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=30)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends (n=35)</b>
Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents	18.3	10.0	20.0
Parents no longer able to accommodate	3.8	6.7	0.0
Relationship breakdown with partner	28.8	23.3	25.7
Dispute with other occupants (not parents)	2.9	0.0	0.0
Eviction	5.8	13.3	5.7
Financial reasons	10.6	0.0	8.6
Overcrowded	1.0	0.0	0.0
To seek employment	6.7	16.7	5.7
Got somewhere else	1.0	0.0	2.9
Other	21.1	6.7	31.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

approached a local authority had been recognised as homeless, only 44 per cent of homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless.

Across all case studies, people staying with family and friends were less likely to have been recognised as homeless by a local authority, compared to people living in alternative accommodation settings. Only one-third of the people who approached a local authority as homeless when staying with family and friends were recognised as homeless, compared to over half of the homeless people who applied when living in alternative accommodation, such as hostels, bed and breakfast hotels and sleeping rough.

**Table 3.10** Approaching a local authority for assistance when homeless

<b>Status</b>	<b>Staying with friends or relative % (n=18*)</b>	<b>When staying in other homeless situation % (n=29*)</b>
Recognised as homeless	33	55
Recognised as intentionally homeless	0.0	7.5
Recognised as in priority need	22	31

**Conclusion**

The profile of people who have stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless reflects many of the commonly acknowledged characteristics of the wider homeless population. There is an over representation of minority ethnic people, reflecting the acknowledged tendency for minority ethnic households to be more prone to homelessness (Harrison, 1999), the large majority of people are single and a disproportionate number have suffered relationship breakdown or estrangement from their parents, experienced some kind of institutional life (prison or local authority care), are suffering from mental health problems and have a problem with alcohol and drug use problems. There are, however, some distinct differences in the profile of homeless people who have stayed with family and friends and, particularly, in the profile of people who have only ever stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless.

People who have only stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless were found to include a greater proportion of women and more likely to be younger and single. These homeless people were also less likely to report learning difficulties, to have a drug or alcohol dependency problem, to have spent time on probation, in prison or a young offenders' institute or to have spent time in local authority care when a child. People who had only stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless were more likely to have been living with parents in their last home and to have left because of relationship breakdown, and were less likely to have approached a local authority as homeless, to have completed an application form and have been recognised as homeless.

## 4. Moving in with family and friends

### Summary

- most people stay with a friend or relative upon first becoming homeless. Reasons for doing so include the lack of alternatives (particularly in rural areas), limited awareness of available options and the immediacy of need, which can prohibit efforts to search out advice and assistance
- people who stay with a friend or relative as and when the opportunity presents itself are already homeless and living in various situations. Offers to stay are usually received from a friend (rather than a relative) and the majority from a friend that people get to know while homeless. Some people receive an offer from a fellow member of a group or circle of people with related interests (for example, drug or alcohol use)
- for many people staying with a friend or relative represents a last resort when all other options had been exhausted and sleeping rough is the only other alternative

### Introduction

Homeless people recounted various reasons for moving in with a friend or relative during detailed discussion of their homeless accommodation career and their experiences of staying with family and friends. Four key reasons, however, emerged as the principle determinants of why homeless people stayed with family and friends when homeless:

- family and friends as the only option
- an offer of help from family or friends
- family and friends as a preferred situation
- the failure of alternatives.

During analysis of these experiences, it soon became clear that there was a close relationship between the reasons why homeless people moved in with a friend or relative and the role that staying with family and friends had or was playing in their homeless accommodation career. To summarise:

- homeless people staying with family and friends as a first port of call upon becoming homeless typically regarded family and friends as their only option. Many of these people also regarded family and friends as a preferred option and had only ever stayed with family and friends since becoming homeless
- homeless people who had stayed with friends as and when the opportunity presented itself had rarely gone looking for help, only moving in with a friend following an offer of help
- homeless people relying on family and friends at a time of relative crisis in their accommodation career, because of the failure of other temporary accommodation options, typically regarded family and friends as a last resort to be approached when all alternatives had been exhausted.

This chapter explores each of these pathways in turn, illustrating key issues, experiences and circumstances through reference to individual case studies.

### Family and friends as a first port of call

Most people who stayed with family and friends did so upon first becoming homeless. The main reason these people gave for staying with family and friends upon first becoming homeless was because they had no other option. The lack of alternatives to staying with family and friends was explained by a combination of factors, including the dearth of alternative accommodation options, difficulties accessing available options, often at very short notice, the perceived inadequacies of provision and limited awareness about what was available.

People who first stayed with family and friends upon becoming homeless had rarely attempted to access alternative accommodation. Many people appeared unaware of alternative options. In many instances this was because alternative options did not exist. No respondents in Craven reported attempting to access hostel accommodation upon becoming homeless, for example, because of the virtual absence of hostel accommodation in the district. One respondent in

## HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

Craven did report that a place in a hostel was arranged for him by the probation service but that he turned it down, because he did not want to move out of the district.

### **The lack of alternative options**

#### **Hayley's story**

Hayley is 19 years old and has been homeless three months, although she reported previous homeless experiences. Hayley recounted how her relationship with her mother and step-father had been deteriorating for some time but that one day, without warning, she was told to leave.

Hayley had approached the local authority when previously homeless and staying with a friend and had been recognised as homeless and in priority need. She reported, however, that the council had told her she would have to wait a number of years for a tenancy and were only able to offer her hostel accommodation outside the district.

On the basis of this experience, Hayley saw no reason to approach the council for help this time. She also had little time to seek advice or explore alternative options, receiving no warning that she would have to leave, so went straight to a friend for help:

*"My mum just told me to go, and I had nowhere else to go so I went to my friend's....she (the friend) was quite willing, she knows what arguments were like with my mum."*

Hayley has only ever stayed with friends since becoming homeless, although she did say that she would prefer to stay in supported accommodation or a hostel. Hayley was unsure, however, about what provision was available locally and how to access it:

*"I know there is an emergency room in Skipton...somewhere."*

### **Fleeing violence: the role of family and friends**

#### **Carol's story**

Carol is 35 years old and has been homeless one month. Carol became homeless after leaving her home to escape violence from her partner. Carol had been

experiencing violence from her partner for a number of years and had been in touch with the local Domestic Violence Unit, who had helped her arrange a bond payment to allow her to access private rented accommodation if and when she needed to. In the event, however, Carol had to leave in a rush in the middle of the night, following a violent assault from her partner. Escaping by climbing out a window, Carol went straight to a friend for help:

*"I just got out of the window and ran. I stayed with a friend over night...I just wanted to escape and I did not want him to find me."*

Carol recounted how her friend represented her only real immediate option, being able to provide immediate assistance in the middle of the night, offer support and provide a hiding place until alternative arrangements could be made. The next day Carol contacted the Domestic Violence Unit and the police, both of whom suggested she move into hostel accommodation, but she preferred to move in with her mother, commenting that she was in need of emotional and physical support that she was unlikely to get staying in a hostel.

A lack of direct access accommodation for people who received little warning before being made homeless was a particular problem for people in Craven and Sheffield and was a reason given by a number of women who left home fleeing violence for relying, in the first instance, on friends and relatives.

Some people appeared to lack the cognitive resources necessary to negotiate access to alternative accommodation when threatened with homeless. Young people, in particular, were often unfamiliar with access routes into the private and social rented sectors and unaware of available temporary accommodation, such as hostels and bed and breakfast hotels. Many were uncertain about the assistance available from the local authority and seemingly unaware that homeless people aged 16 and 17 year old and people aged 18 to 21 years old who are a former 'relevant child' (for whom local authorities have particular responsibilities) should now be automatically considered as in priority need. In contrast, people were aware of a friend or

relative who they could approach and who might be able and willing to let them stay, if only for a short time.

### **Awareness and understanding of available options**

#### **Sally's story**

Sally is 16 years old. Sally reported that she has spent time in local authority care but identified her last home as a two year period she spent living with her brother. Sally was 15 years old when she became homeless after being told to leave by her brother:

*"The police came round and raided my bedroom. They didn't find anything, but because the police had come round to the house and raided the bedroom he kicked me out."*

Sally approached the local authority social service department for help:

*"I went to Social Services. They said they could not really do anything until I was 16. They said I was really too old for foster care but too young to live somewhere on my own. I said I would stay at my mate's so that was that."*

Sally has been homeless over two years and has never approached the local authority housing department for assistance, even though aged 16 she is automatically in priority need.

The handful of people who had attempted to access accommodation upon becoming homeless had encountered various barriers restricting their access. Few respondents approached the local authority upon being made homeless, many people suggesting that the local authority was not able to help them, reasons given including the perceived consequence of having a history of rent arrears and the assumed treatment of single homeless applicants. The small number of people who did approach the local authority for assistance upon becoming homeless all failed to get a place to stay that night.

The most common focus of people's efforts to secure alternative accommodation upon becoming homeless was the private rented sector. This was particularly true in Craven, which has a relatively small social rented sector and large private rented sector. Problems

encountered centred around the blanket exclusion by many landlords of people claiming benefits and the requirement for new tenants to put down a deposit or bond payment.

*"Straight away (upon becoming homeless) I went out and looked at what was available to rent on the private market. Unfortunately, being out of work a lot of landlords would not rent out to DSS."*

Man, 32 years old, Craven

*"I looked in the paper and everything was 'no DSS' or 'Bond Required', so really I did not have a choice (other than friends)..."*

27 year old man, Craven

Problems were also reported providing the references required by some landlords:

*"I didn't realise how problematic everything was going to be. And I had a certain comfort zone in that I had some capital....It was a very false comfort zone. It soon became apparent how difficult it was to get private rented housing, because of lack of a track record... references."*

64 year old man, Craven

Finally, there were a number of people who moved in with family and friends upon first becoming homeless because they preferred staying with family or friends to the alternative options, in particular staying in hostel accommodation or a bed and breakfast hotel. For couples, staying with a friend or relative allowed them the opportunity to stay together, which would not be possible in hostel accommodation. In Ian's case his preference for staying with family reflects concerns about the living conditions in bed and breakfast hotels.

### **Becoming homeless – approaching the local authority for help**

#### **Ian's story**

Ian is 33 years old and has learning disabilities and a problem with alcohol dependency. Ian got into rent arrears with his private landlord in Doncaster and was issued with an eviction notice. He immediately approached the local authority for help, who offered him accommodation in a bed and breakfast hotel. Unhappy with the condition of the hotel, Ian

approached members of his family for help:

*"It was disgusting, sharing four to a room, so I went to dad's and kipped on the floor...I tried my brother and sister but no room, they've got their own families. I don't really have any friends to ask. Only dad left.... Staying with dad was the last resort."*

### **Staying with family and friends as and when the opportunity arises**

Homeless people who had stayed with family and friends as and when the opportunity presented itself had only ever moved in with a friend or relative after an offer of help and were already homeless and living in various situations, including hostels, bed and breakfast hotels and sleeping rough. All of the offers to stay were from a friend and in the majority of cases these friendships had been formed since becoming homeless, either while staying in a hostel, during visits to a day centre or whilst sleeping rough.

In some cases the opportunity to stay with a friend arose relatively frequently, but it was more common for a number of months or years to pass between staying with friends. Individual stays rarely lasted more than a couple of weeks at most.

Complete homeless accommodation careers were collected from 13 homeless people who had only moved in with friends as and when an offer was made. The majority of these 13 respondents had been homeless for more than two years and ten of the 13 had spent time sleeping rough. Over half had spent time in prison, over one-third had been in local authority care when a child and one in three had a drug dependency problem. Three principal patterns were apparent in the offers to stay with friends received by these homeless people:

**1. An offer of help from an old friend** – in a small number of cases, the offer to stay with a friend was forthcoming from an old friend, often following a chance meeting, as in Jason's story.

### **An offer of help from an old friend**

#### **Jason's story**

Jason is 28 and has been homeless 10 years. Jason viewed staying with friends as a last resort because he "don't like asking for help". Jason recounted that he last stayed with a friend a year ago, when he bumped into an old friend who he grew up with, who offered to help him out when he was ill. At the time Jason was sleeping rough:

*"Last time I stayed with friends was February last year...someone I grew up with and went to school with. I wouldn't go ask for help...I kept bumping into him. He thought I was homeless and I was getting iller. I ended up staying the night but it ended up being more than a night. I was looking rough. I just went back for a shower, then it ended up being longer and he was letting me stay because of how ill I was."*

Jason left his friends when he was taken ill and ended up in hospital, where he was diagnosed with emphysema.

Asked about trying to find alternative accommodation Jason recounted how he had been put off approaching the local authority:

*"I've been to housing (local authority) before. You have to be really at them for them to do anything. Always tell you to piss off straight away and because I didn't know what I was entitled to I couldn't say anything and went straight away. Put me off going back."*

#### **2. Mutual support from a group of homeless**

**friends** – in a small number of cases respondents detailed how they were a member of a group, such as a street drinking fraternity, who looked out for each other and accommodated each other as and when they had accommodation of their own. One respondent, asked why his friend offered to let him stay, responded:

*"It doesn't really work like that. We're all street drinkers and if someone has a flat and you need somewhere to stay you can go and stay there and it'll be OK."*

62 year old man, Sheffield

A similar pattern or mutual support was reported by respondents with a drug dependency problem. People also explained that they were reliant upon a mutual support network because other friends and relatives were reluctant to let them stay:

*"I have never stayed with anyone who was not taking drugs. Not by choice anyway. They would not have me, you know what I mean."*

38 year old man, Craven

**3. An offer to stay from a homeless friend** – the majority of offers to stay with a friend were from people that respondents had got to know while homeless, either while staying in a hostel, sleeping rough or when visiting a day centre. Having managed to access secure accommodation, these friends had extended an offer of accommodation to former homeless associates. Sam's story provides an extreme example of this pattern of staying with friends.

In some of these cases the offer of accommodation came with strings attached, particularly in instances where drugs were involved. Jim, who was 24 years old and had been homeless in Sheffield for a number of months, reported how his friend was keen for him to move in so he could help him get hold of drugs. Glen, meanwhile, described how a friend had used his need for drugs as a way of making him stay.

### Staying with former homeless friends

#### Sam's story

Sam has been homeless for more than four years, since leaving the army. Sam is currently living in London but has spent the last four years moving between hostel accommodation and circle of homeless friends across England:

*"Most of the friends that I've been staying with are people who've been homeless themselves and have been given council places so I've ended up staying on their couch because they know the situation I have been in for the last four years..."*

Sam went on to explain how people who have been in his situation are more sympathetic:

*"I suppose there is a real good bond because we*

*have shared the same things. And we've stood together and at together and we've found places to doss down together when we've been out on the streets and through that you become really good friends."*

### An offer to stay from a homeless friend

#### Glen's story

Glen is 21 years old and has been homeless more than four years. Glen recently lived for a year with a friend who he met while sleeping rough. Glen described how he was enticed to move in and stay with his 'friend' who supported his heroin addiction:

*"He was a friend I met. I didn't realise until I lived with for a few months he basically got me there to perve on me walking around the house in my boxer shorts. By the time I clicked I was stuck. He knew he got me 'cause I had nowhere else to go."*

Staying with this 'friend' was a last resort for Glen:

*"If I had anywhere else I would have gone there. He knew that so kept buying me heroin."*

Glen explained that he did not seek out alternative accommodation when staying with this friend, despite being unhappy, because of his reliance on his friend for the supply of heroin and because of previous experiences of alternative options:

*"No alternatives. Family don't think I'm trustworthy because of my heroin addiction; they're all posh and stuck up. Went to the homeless section but just putting me in shitty bed and breakfasts. Manager was a crack head knocking on my door at night, hassling me and trying to get money out of me."*

Glen finally moved out when his friend left the area. Glen is now staying in a hostel.

In a couple of more extreme cases, respondents with drug use problems, typically involving crack cocaine and heroin, reported how they were able to stay with acquaintances as and when they were purchasing drugs from them. Sarah's story provides an extreme example of such experiences.

### Staying with drug using acquaintances

#### Sarah's story

Sarah is 19 and homeless in London. Sarah moved to London from the south coast to stay with her boyfriend and his parents when her mother died. She stayed with her boyfriend for almost a year, during which time she developed a problem with drug use, and in particular crack cocaine. Her boyfriend, meanwhile, was taking crack cocaine and heroin. Problems developed with her boyfriend's parents and the two of them were forced to move out. Subsequently, they spent time squatting and staying in crack houses as and when they were buying drugs:

*"There's crack houses all over the place. There are certain crack houses we used to go to and as long as you had money and you were buying or smoking in there you could stay there. That's what we used to do."*

### Staying with family and friends at a time of crisis

A common refrain from many homeless people when asked about staying with family and friends was that doing so represented a last resort. In the rural case study family and friends often represented both a first and last resort, because of the dearth of alternative accommodation options. In London and Sheffield, however, many respondents reported preferring to rely on alternative options, including hostels and bed and breakfast hotels, whenever possible, only ever staying with family or friends when faced with an accommodation crisis and the possibility of sleeping rough.

Complete homeless accommodation careers were collected from nine homeless people who had only moved in with friends or relatives when alternative temporary accommodation options had fallen through. These respondents had been homeless, on average, for 18 months. Only two had slept rough since becoming homeless, the majority spending time in hostel accommodation. These respondents were less likely than other homeless people to report the various personal problems detailed in Chapter 3, only one of

the nine having been on probation or spent time in prison and only one of the nine reporting a problem with drug dependency.

Exploring the homeless accommodation careers of people who tended to only move in with friends and relatives when other accommodation options had failed, there appear to be two distinct paths leading to the accommodation crisis which drove people to approach a friend or relative for help:

**1. Limited awareness of available options** – some respondents had been assisted to access hostel accommodation, for example, by the local authority or the probation service. When forced to leave this accommodation, either because of problems with their tenancy, such as a record of arrears or violent behaviour toward residents or staff, or because the maximum period of residence had been reached, they were uncertain how to access alternative provision and, unless assisted to do so, turned to friends or family for help.

### Loosing hostel accommodation – moving in with a friend

#### Jenny's story

Jenny is 24 years old and became homeless upon leaving prison after an 8-month sentence. Before being sentenced Jenny had her own tenancy in Sheffield. Jenny reported that she had spent time as a child in local authority care, was suffering from mental health problems and was in receipt of sickness related benefits.

Jenny has been homeless four months. Three of these months were spent in a bail hostel, where she was placed upon leaving prison. After three months, however, Jenny reported that she was forced to leave, as she was no longer on bail and no longer qualified to reside in the hostel. Jenny approached the council for help:

*"Council couldn't find me anywhere... There were no hostel places."*

With the council unable to help and unaware of alternatives, such as local hostels, Jenny took up a friend on his offer of a place to stay. The only other

options, she recounted was sleeping rough:

*“There was no one else I could have stayed with. If he hadn’t offered I would have had to stay on the streets. Staying with a friend is the last resort...the streets is the last resort.”*

Jenny has been staying with her friend for three months. He has said that she can stay as long as she needs to.

**2. Problems accessing alternatives** – a number of homeless people who had stayed with family and friends as a last resort appeared to be knowledgeable regarding local accommodation options, including hostels and bed and breakfast hotels, but had at certain times encountered problem gaining access. These problems included hostels being full or inaccessible because a respondent had been barred following a previous visit. Without alternatives and wanting to avoid sleeping rough, people had approached a friend or relative for help. A number of respondents in London mentioned problems accessing hostel accommodation because they were not sleeping rough or in contact with a CAT (Contact and Assessment Team) worker:

*“It’s murderous because if you’re not sleeping literally on the streets and you don’t see a CAT worker and get a CAT number than all the hostel spaces are reserved for people with CAT numbers so if you haven’t got a CAT number there isn’t many vacancies available.”*

24 year old man, London

Some people explained that they considered staying with family and friends to be a last resort because of their reluctance to reveal their situation to a friend or relative or because personal pride prevented them from asking for help:

*“The only times I wanted to go to my nan’s or my dad’s is if something good happens – like if I’ve got an interview I’ll go there before to say ‘yeah, this is happening’. But when nothing good is happening you cut yourself off from all the people that know, because it’s pride, innit. You’re ashamed...”*

22 year old man, London

## Friends and family as a last resort

### Tony's story

Tony is 32 years old and has been homeless just over a year. Tony’s last home was when he was living with his partner and her son in a council property in East Anglia. Tony’s relationship with his girlfriend ended when he was sent to prison. Upon leaving prison Tony returned to Sheffield, where he had previously been homeless and knew about temporary accommodation opportunities.

Tony moved into a local hostel and, after a number of months, into a move-on flat linked to the hostel. He reported struggling, however, with the tenancy and complained about the lack of support. Eventually he felt the need to give up flat and started to look for a bed space in a hostel:

*“I tried to find somewhere else. The Salvation Army are always full. I didn’t have anything else. I didn’t go to the council because I’m not priority need...I need help with an alcohol problem and knew they couldn’t provide it. I would have preferred to stay somewhere else.”*

Eventually, not wanting to sleep rough, Tony approached his mother and father. Initially they were unwilling to help, but agreed after he confessed his alcohol problem and agreed to seek help from a supported accommodation scheme specialising in working with people with alcohol related problems:

*“They were not willing (to let him stay). I had to tell them about my drinking. It was under her terms. She limited how long I could stay. I didn’t stay beyond that time. As soon as I got to her house I made arrangements to come to the (supported accommodation scheme). My mum is supportive about it now. She knew I got something lined up and would be staying with her for only a short period.”*

### **Conclusion**

Homeless people stay with family or friends for a variety of reasons, the precise interplay of which varies from case to case. This chapter, however, has revealed that these multiple reasons can be effectively categorised into four key explanations, the precise combination of which relates closely to the role that staying with family and friends plays in a homeless person's accommodation career and where the career is being experienced.

## 5. Living with family and friends

### Summary

- for some people staying with a friend or relative is a positive experience, especially compared to the available alternatives. For most, however, it is a difficult and problematic experience
- staying with a friend or relative typically involves sleeping on a sofa or the floor and people rarely have a room of their own
- staying with a friend or relative can place a whole host of restrictions on a homeless person, including when they can come and go from the property, access and use washing and cooking facilities, when they can go to bed and how they can behave in the property
- few homeless people are able to help their friend or relative with the costs associated with letting them stay
- many homeless people utilise homeless services when staying with friends or relatives, particularly if they have been homeless sometime and are more aware and experience regarding local provision. People recently made homeless and homeless people in the rural areas are more reliant on other service providers for help and assistance (colleges, probation, health care providers, Connexions officers, social services and such like)
- many people are choosing not to approach a local authority as homeless, either because of the treatment they expected to receive or because they misunderstood or are unaware of the local authority's responsibilities to homeless people

### Introduction

Staying with family and friends is a common homeless situation in which the majority of people appear to find themselves at some point during their homeless

accommodation career. Many homeless people spend the majority, if not all, the time they are homeless staying with family and friends and many people reported preferring staying with family and friends to other accommodation situations, such as living in hostel accommodation and bed and breakfast hotels. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the apparent popularity of staying with family and friends reflects the fact that doing so is a comfortable and problem free situation. The experiences of the homeless people surveyed reveal that is certainly not, problems ranging from insecurity and lack of privacy, through to safety concerns. This chapter explores the experience of staying with family and friends and seeks to shed light on the pros and cons of staying with family and friends compared to other homeless accommodation situations.

The chapter is divided into three sections exploring:

- living arrangements
- service use when staying with family and friends
- the positives and negatives of staying with family and friends.

### Living arrangements

#### Sleeping arrangements and associated concerns

Staying with family and friends when homeless is often referred to as 'sofa surfing'. Although this catchy euphemism risks trivialising the experience, it represents an accurate summation of the living arrangements when staying with friends or family of the majority of homeless people surveyed.

A total of 49 homeless people from across the case studies provided details of the living arrangements when they last stayed with a friend or relative. Only five of these 49 people reported that they had a room of their own and only four reported that they had a bed of their own. The most common situation, reported by 26 people, was sleeping on a sofa in the living room. Other common situations were sleeping on the floor, either in a friend or relative's bedroom or the living room, or on a camp bed. There were no obvious differences in sleeping arrangements between people

staying with friends and those staying with relatives.

The homeless people surveyed did not tend to complain too readily about these sleeping arrangements, most apparently grateful that their friend or relative was helping them out. Some people did talk, however, about the difficulties of getting a good night's sleep and sleeping on floors and sofas appeared to be particularly problematic for homeless people with health problems. Sam, for example, is 24 and has been homeless for more than four years. As discussed in Chapter 3, Sam has spent much of his time homeless staying with friends, but he reported that this was proving increasingly unfeasible because of his health:

*"I was always on the settee. I never had a bed. I've had beds in hostels and night shelters, but at my friends' I've always been on the floor or the settee, which is alright up to a point, but after a while... Sometimes it's good for me to go to the hotel coz a lot of the time I sleep on settees and on floors... I've got pains in my joints so it's not really feasible for me to sleep on the floor any more."*

As well as the problems of getting a good night's sleep once bedded down on the sofa or floor, people also pointed out that sleeping in the living room meant that they were not able to go to bed until their friend or relative had retired to their own room. This proved to be particularly problematic in situations where the friend or relative was working night shifts or returning home late, for example, from a night out.

Sleeping arrangements were reported by some people to change from night to night. In some cases people reported sleeping in a bed as and when their friend was away, for example, working a night shift or staying with their partner. Six people recounted staying with a number of other homeless people who their friend had also invited to stay. The majority of these cases involved a circle of associates known to one another through alcohol or drug use. Whether people slept in a bed, on the sofa or the floor was reported to depend upon how many other people were staying and who had priority over available beds and sofa, which could depend upon how long people had been staying, as

well as other more complex issues related to the pecking order within the group.

Many people complained about the lack of personal space or privacy associated with sharing a room or sleeping on a sofa or on a living room floor:

*"I had nowhere to hang my clothes, nowhere to put the few things I had, no privacy."*

49 year old woman sleeping on friend's sofa, Craven

*"...No privacy... I would keep all my stuff tidy and her [friend's] daughter would come home and mess it all up. I would get really stressed about it... I just did not have my own space."*

19 year old woman sleeping on friend's sofa

### **Limits and restrictions on behaviour and lifestyle**

Homeless people rarely reported that they had a door key when staying with friends or relatives. Their movements were therefore restricted, being reliant on their friend or relative to let them back in every time they left the property. This lack of control and independence is representative of the more general limits placed on people when staying with friends or relatives.

Often the limits placed on people when staying with a friend or relative were self imposed, people not wanting to get in the way or rely too heavily on their friend's hospitality. Some people therefore reported going to work early and staying late, in order to keep out of the way, while others spent time at day centres for homeless people, where they could get cheap food, wash and meet other people:

*"I get up and then I go to [day centre]. You get a full cooked breakfast and then you can get a shower and teas and coffees. And then I might make some phone calls and sit and have a coffee and sit down and chat, then come here [different day centre], then I go home. That's every day."*

20 year old woman staying with friend in London

Carol's story was detailed in Chapter 3. Carol fled her last home to escape violence from her ex-partner. She eventually moved in with her parents, after staying for one night with a friend. Carol talked about the "tension" between herself and her mum and how she

tried to keep out of way as much as possible, by staying out of the house during the day and in her room on an evening:

*"I used to get up before they did, so I could use the bathroom. I would get the children up and be giving them their breakfast when my dad came down. I would take them to school and nursery. A lot of friends were very good, inviting us for lunch and things because they knew the situation. Other than that we were trailing around until we picked [son] up at half three. Then I would go back and make tea for everybody... Then I would just be sat upstairs, I did not have a television or anything so I would just be sat in the room."*

Many people chose to stay out of the house during the day, even though their friend was not around and they were free to stay if they wanted to. Megan is 49 years old and left home fleeing violence from her partner. Megan reported being very concerned about putting on her friend, who she had not known for long:

*"I would have preferred to have stayed somewhere else on a temporary basis. It would have taken the pressure off me. I felt bad having to stay with Sonia and that added to my worries. I worried I had overstayed my welcome. I had no cash and I was depressed"*.

Megan therefore tried to spend as much time as possible out of the house:

*"I would get up and have breakfast, she would go out to work all day. I would have meetings with my bank or my councillor, or the job centre. Then I would just sit in the park. I would go back in the evening, cook, then we would chat together."*

The fear of imposing upon friends or relatives was a common concern among respondents. People were conscious that the security of their accommodation was dependent upon the goodwill of their friend or relative, which they were therefore keen not to test unduly. Leroy is 24 and reported staying with a friend for six months, *"sometimes sleeping on the couch, sometimes sleeping on the floor or if someone was out staying in someone's bed"*. Concerned about imposing on his friend and even though his friend was happy for him to stay,

Leroy reported always going out and about during the day:

*"Not wanting to impose I'd get myself up in the morning and go out... I'd get up, go around a friend's house, kill some time. Go and see some other friends, kill time, and just moving from friend's to friend's houses killing time....the same thing all day long."*

Sam, whose situation was discussed earlier, emphasised the importance of not making a fuss and keeping out of the way or leaving if his presence was likely to cause a problem:

*"We have a very good relationship but obviously some people need their own space, so I can go and spend time at my other friends for so many days but sometimes friends just want their own space and don't want you around, if they've got their girlfriend coming round. You have to respect it, it's not your place, it's theirs so respect it and say 'OK, thanks for letting me stay anyway'. They know I go without a fuss so there's not a problem and that's why a lot of my friends let me stay a couple of weeks."*

Gary, who is 27 and has been homeless for eight months and was so concerned about overstaying his welcome that he chose to move from friend to friend on a regular basis:

*"You don't want to put yourself on anyone. I felt really bad, they had no problem with me stopping, it was just me. I did not feel right, you know what I mean, and that is why I was only stopping for a couple of nights, even if they said I could stay another night...I would say 'it's alright, I have got somewhere for the next couple of nights but can I come back next week?', something like that...If you stop a week or so you start getting under people's feet, so that is what I was quite keen to avoid."*

Other people reported that they stayed out of the house during the day because they had no choice. In a number of cases people were staying with friends who were prohibited under the terms of their tenancy from having long term visitors and so either stayed in the room or flat all day or left early in the morning and stayed out all day. In such situations, people were often unable to use basic amenities, such as cooking and

washing facilities, and would visit local day centres for food, to take a shower and to wash clothes, as reported in Tim's story, below. Daniella was 18 years old and had been staying with a friend and her mother. Her friend's mother, however, said she could only stay for two weeks. After two weeks she continued to stay with her friend, sneaking in late at night and leaving early in the morning before anyone else was awake:

*"After my deadline for leaving was up I would, on a morning, stay the night, at about five or six in the morning I would sneak out and about an hour after Vickie's mum would normally get up, she would get up at about eight, I would come round and knock, as if I was just knocking for [friend]."*

Tim's story illustrates some of the problems that respondents reported regarding the use of facilities in their friend's or relative's house. Often concerned about getting in the way, people reported using the house in a way that minimised the consequences for their friend. So, for example, a number of respondents talked about getting up early to use the bathroom. Food preparation was a particular concern for a number of respondents. One respondent reported being told to leave his friend's after eating food his friend had bought with the intention of preparing a meal for his girlfriend. Other people reported preparing meals at different times to their friend so they did not get in the way, preparing meals for their friend, although in a number of cases this caused tensions, or attempting to avoid all problems by visiting day centres for cheap food. This latter option was not widely available to homeless people in the rural case study, however.

### **Living arrangements and day-to-day life staying with friends or relatives**

#### **Tim's story**

Tim is 18 years old and has been homeless for two years. Tim is currently sleeping on the floor of a friend's bedroom in a supported accommodation scheme in London. Tim has stayed with his friend for six months, apart from the odd night he has spent with other friends, who he stayed with to give his friend a 'break' from him and some 'space':

*"I take off for a couple of days to give him chance to do his own thing for a while."*

Tim reported that his friend should not have been letting him stay:

*"By rights I shouldn't even be living there. By rights he's not allowed to have people living there. He's allowed to have overnight guests but not people living there so I stay as an overnight guest."*

Tim was therefore restricted in his use of the facilities and the amount of time he could spend in the flat during the day, resulting in him spending time visiting day centres and walking the streets:

*"A typical day is you get up, go to the day centre, get your cloths washed, get a shower...and then just kill time by walking the streets, basically."*

Tim is not paying his friend to stay, but tries to contribute as and when he can:

*"If I've got money, I'll put money in for food and that, but he doesn't want digs, he doesn't want any money. Just for food and things."*

Tim was grateful to his friend for helping him out but was clear that he wanted a place of his own:

*"I don't mind staying there but I don't want to. I want my own things. I don't want to sleep on somebody's floor. I want to have my own key for my own door."*

An additional set of limits reported by people who had stayed with relatives and, in particular, parents, were explicit conditions placed on their stay and attempts to censor their behaviour. Tony's case was discussed in chapter 4, his parents only allowing him to stay on the condition that he sought help with his alcohol problem and moved out after two weeks. Tony also reported that his parents would not give him a key. He therefore had to either stay in all day or make arrangements for someone to be in when he got back from an appointment. In other cases parents did not necessarily issue specific preconditions before allowing a respondent to stay, but had heavily censored their behaviour during their stay. Mel, for example, is 28

years old and moved in with her mother after leaving fleeing from a violent partner. Mel recounted how she was banned from smoking in the house and forced to go to bed at the same time as her mother, who alarmed the downstairs of the property on a night. Hayley is 19 years old and has been homeless three months. Hayley recounted how staying with her parents was far more restrictive than staying with friends:

*"With my friends it was just easier. With my family I would go out to a night club or something and get back late and wake my mum up, we would just be constantly arguing about that. I wasn't allowed to have as many baths as I wanted, only about three a week and it was constantly tidying up if I dropped something and I was not allowed any of my friends in."*

Although few people come and go as they pleased, it would be wrong to suggest that all people staying with family or friends spent their days wandering the streets or visiting day centres. Many people did report spending their days in the house, watching TV or talking to friends. Some people also soon began to act like members of the household, eating with their friend or relative and getting their clothes cleaned in the family wash, for example. The precise nature of the day-to-day experience was found to depend very much upon the attitude and approach of the homeless people to staying with their friend or relative and the expectations and assumptions about the arrangement held by the person letting them stay.

#### **Contributing toward board and lodging**

Only a few people, most of whom were working, reported making a regular contribution toward the cost of board and lodging while staying with a friend or relative. In some instances there were also formal arrangements or an expectation that a person would provide food, for example, while staying with a friend or relative. The majority of people, however, reported making either cash payments or contributions in-kind only whenever able. Contributions in kind included:

- tidying the house, odd jobs and other housework activities
- providing food

- cooking meals
- offers of gifts, such as chocolates
- provision of drugs or alcohol.

Carol, whose story was discussed earlier, was staying with her parents after fleeing a violent partner. Carol was expected to provide her own food but also tried to contribute to the household by doing some cooking:

*"I did not pay board but was expected to pay for the food. I did not actually have any income except incapacity benefit...I tried to help. I would cook loads of meals. My dad actually said while I was there that he did not want me to leave because I did all the cooking."*

One respondent observed that many friends do not ask for any payment, in cash or in kind, and that, consequently, staying with friends and families allows him to stretch his limited finances further.

A small minority of people reported that their friend used their reliance on them for accommodation to make various demands. Sarah's case was discussed in Chapter 4. Sarah is 19 and homeless in London. Sarah and her boyfriend both had a problem with crack cocaine and her boyfriend was also using heroin. Sarah recounted how they often stayed with acquaintances in 'crack houses', who made various, often extreme demands upon her:

*"I had to do everything they wanted to do and in the end it got too much and I packed my stuff and I went... They wanted me to go out and get money for them and they wanted me to be with them all the time. I couldn't do what I wanted to do. They wanted me to go out working with the other working girls, prostitution, coz they didn't have no money coz they'd spent all their giro on crack."*

#### **Service use while staying with family and friends**

Homeless people were in contact with an array of service providers when staying with family and friends. Many of these agencies were not housing or homeless specific organisations, but working in areas related to respondents' wider needs or personal situation. These

included General Practitioners (GPs), hospitals, the probation service, further education colleges, advice bureaux, Connexions, domestic violence units, the job centre, benefits agency, social services, Age Concern and alcohol and drug support groups and rehabilitation services. People rarely reported seeking help with or even mentioning their accommodation situation when engaging with these services, a finding which helps explain the relative lack of awareness among more generic services about the incidence and experience of homeless people staying with friends or family, reported in Chapter 1. Generic, non-housing services had, however, played an important role in some people's homeless accommodation career. This was particularly true in the rural case study.

Homeless people in the rural case study reported a very particular pattern of service use when homeless and staying with family or friends. In particular, two specific differences were apparent in their service use, compared to homeless people in Sheffield and London:

- people in the rural case study were found to be more likely to have sought help and been assisted to access alternative accommodation and, in some cases, to escape homelessness, by generic, non-specialist, service providers. These services included hospitals, advice centres, the probation service and, in the case of two young respondents, college staff, who offered advice and referred them to a local YMCA project providing supported accommodation for young people. Both respondents subsequently accessed the YMCA project:

*"I did not know where to go. I did not even know the YMCA existed... The teachers put me in touch with YMCA. With the support of the teachers I found out about YMCA."*

17 year old homeless woman, Craven

- the principle point of contact among homeless people in the rural case study with homeless or housing specific agencies while staying with family and friends was direct contact with social landlords (local authority or housing associations). Many people had approached the local authority for help

and a large proportion had also approached a local housing association. This contact appears to have typically been driven by the respondent and rarely supported by an agency assisting or advocating on their behalf. Virtually no homeless people in the rural case study reported approaching a homeless specific agency, such as a hostel or advice service, reflecting both the apparent disengagement of people from such service provision when staying with family and friends and, perhaps more significantly, the relative dearth of such service provision in the rural case study.

Homeless specific services played an important role in the lives of many homeless people staying with family and friends in Sheffield and London. There was a distinction in the use of available services when staying with family and friends, depending upon the role that staying with family and friends was playing in a respondent's homeless accommodation career. In summary, day centres were important for many people in providing a place to obtain cheap food, shower and wash clothes, as well as meet people and chat, as has already been detailed above. This was particularly true, however, for people who had been homeless for longer periods and who had stayed in a variety of situations, prior to staying with a friend or relative. These respondents, who stayed with friends whenever the opportunity arose or when faced with an accommodation crisis, such as the loss of a hostel place, appeared to be more familiar with and willing to use homeless specific provision, and in many cases were already heavily reliant on the support provided by day centres, medical drop-ins and such like. Homeless people staying with family and friends upon first becoming homeless were less familiar with available service provision and, although recognising themselves as homeless, appeared to be more reluctant and reticent about engaging with homeless specific services.

### **Approaching a local authority as homeless**

Respondent attitudes and actions toward approaching the local authority Homeless Person's Unit (HPU) were found to fall into four distinct categories:

**1. Self rationing on the basis of cynicism about their likely treatment or pessimism regarding the outcome**

– many people recounted that they had not approached the local authority while staying with a friend or relative either because they had done so previously and had little success and saw no reason to do so again, or because they perceived that they were unlikely to have any success. Sam, for example, whose case has been detailed above, reported how a failed approach to a HPU a number of years ago had prevented him from approaching a local authority in the intervening years, during which time he had spent time staying with friends, as well as in hostels and sleeping rough:

*“I went to the homeless person’s unit in [south coast town] and they said because I wasn’t actually born there I had no right to help and I said ‘but my family lives down here so I have a connection to the area’ but they said ‘yes and you’re a single man and you don’t come from the area so there’s no reason why we should help you’. So that became very hard for me.”*

Sarah, whose case has already been discussed, reported a similar experience in London:

*“I went there [HPU] and they gave me emergency accommodation for three nights at [a hostel] and after that I had to leave. I didn’t go back because they told me they couldn’t help me. That’s what they said. They said they can’t help because I’m not in a needy situation.”*

Some respondents had never approached a HPU, perceiving that they had little chance of accessing temporary or permanent accommodation because they were single and were unlikely to be recognised as in priority need. Cynicism regarding the assistance likely to be provided by the HPU was found to be greatest in London, perhaps reflecting the pressures on the housing market in the capital and the restrictive interpretation of the homeless legislation enforced by London HPUs in an attempt to ration demand. Similar attitudes were encountered in Craven, although rather than cynical about the local authority’s response to homelessness, people had few, if any, expectations

about the help that the local authority might provide. In effect, it appeared that many homeless people were effectively absolving the local authority of their responsibility to tackle homelessness.

**2. Self rationing on the basis of misunderstanding or limited awareness**

– some, particularly younger, respondents had not approached the local authority while staying with friends because they had no idea why they should or how the HPU might be able to help them:

*“I did not know about it [HPU]. It was a case of I was naïve. I had never done this before, never tried to get a place before, so I did not know how to approach it. I was more scared of making a complete and utter arse of myself than anything else.”*

27 year old homeless man, Craven.

The people who reported they had not approached the HPU while staying with friends included respondents who fell into the new priority needs categories because of their age or history of time spent in care.

**3. Self rationing as a result of lifestyle**

– a large minority of respondents had a drug or alcohol problem. In severe cases, where drug or alcohol use was at the centre of their everyday existence, some respondents reported that the last thing they were interested in was approaching a HPU for help and assistance, particularly given the perceived likelihood that as a drug user they would not be offered assistance.

**4. An optimistic approach for help**

– some people approached the local authority, either optimistic of some form of assistance in accessing temporary or permanent accommodation, or because they wanted their name on the waiting list so they could access social rented accommodation at some future point when an offer was forthcoming, in the meantime finding an alternative solution to their problem.

### **The positives and negatives of staying with family or friends when homeless**

Homeless people were able to identify various problems associated with living with family or friends when homeless. Many of these problems have already been discussed and related to the restrictions placed on people's lives through their reliance on the goodwill of a friend or relative for a place to stay and the limited space and privacy afforded by sharing someone else's home. People were, however, able to identify numerous positive aspects of staying with family or friends when homeless, most of which were qualified through reference to the perceived or experienced inadequacies of alternative homeless situations and, in particular, to sleeping rough and life in hostel accommodation. Table 5.1 (overleaf) provides a comprehensive list of these pros and cons. Inevitably different people had different experiences and viewpoints, resulting in a degree of contradiction between the positives and negatives identified.

Some variation in the precise nature and balance of the pros and cons of staying with friends or family was identified according to the role that staying with family and friends was playing in respondents' homeless accommodation career. To summarise:

- people who had only ever stayed with family or friends since becoming homeless tended to be less critical and more positive, often pointing out that if a friend or relative had not helped they would have been sleeping rough, either because of the dearth of alternatives or their limited awareness of what alternatives were available. This was particularly true in Craven
- people who had stayed with friends on an intermittent basis as and when able emphasised the safety aspect of staying with a friend, compared to sleeping rough and living in hostel accommodation and, although they also pointed to the negative aspects of staying with a friend or relative, including the limited security and inadequate sleeping arrangements
- people who had stayed with friends or relatives at a point of crisis in their homeless accommodation career were

more prone to emphasise concerns about being a burden and imposing, as well as the insecurity, not knowing from one day to the next if they would be allowed to remain.

### **Conclusion**

Many people had positive things to say about their experience of living with a friend or relative when homeless. These positive comments, however, were often based on a comparison with the alternatives, which for many people was sleeping rough. Some people also reported that living with a friend or relative had been a comfortable experience that did not restrict their freedom or raise major issues regarding privacy. For the majority of people interviewed who had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless, however, the experience had been deeply problematic, restricting their freedom, providing little security, impacting on their lifestyle and undermining their health. None of the homeless people interviewed actually suggested that they actually preferred staying with a friend or relative to having a place of their own, be that living in a stable situation with a parent or guardian, in supported accommodation or a tenancy of their own.

**Table 5.1** The pros and cons of staying with family or friends when homeless

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to the comforts of home</li> <li>• familiar company</li> <li>• emotional support from friends or family members</li> <li>• living with people who care</li> <li>• being of some use by helping around the house</li> <li>• strengthening of the relationship with friend or relative</li> <li>• people to talk to in own language and from own culture</li> <li>• friends understanding of situation and difficulties</li> <li>• help from friends with problems</li> <li>• safety, compared to hostel accommodation and living on the street</li> <li>• cheaper than living on streets or in a hostel</li> <li>• safer than the street when drinking heavily</li> <li>• can choose who you are living with</li> <li>• living with friends rather than strangers in a hostel</li> <li>• friends willing to help when drinking or taking drugs</li> <li>• flexibility of the situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of privacy</li> <li>• limited security – never knowing when might be asked to leave</li> <li>• impact of insecurity on well being and mental health</li> <li>• inadequate sleeping arrangements</li> <li>• not having a fixed address, and subsequent problems claiming benefits</li> <li>• restrictions on lifestyle and behaviour when staying with family</li> <li>• limits on when can come and go</li> <li>• tensions and arguments and deterioration in relationship with friend or relative</li> <li>• studying and school work difficult</li> <li>• lack of sleep</li> <li>• difficulties keeping down a job</li> <li>• safety concerns and theft of property by other people also staying with the friend</li> <li>• feeling a burden</li> <li>• problems maintaining a healthy diet</li> <li>• difficulties being yourself and relaxing</li> <li>• injured pride having to rely on charity</li> <li>• exposure to drug use, from friends' associates</li> <li>• no home to bring new friends back to</li> <li>• need to move on regularly</li> <li>• lack of formal support or assistance</li> <li>• lack of independence</li> <li>• overcrowded living conditions</li> </ul>

## 6. Recommendations

### Introduction

This report has cast light on the previously hidden and neglected experiences of homeless people staying with friends and relatives. This chapter draws on these findings to provide a series of key conclusions regarding the incidence and experiences of staying with family and friends and to offer recommendations about how policy and provision might respond to this new body of evidence and more adequately address homeless people's needs which are currently being ignored or neglected.

Discussion is divided into six sections. Each section begins by summarising a key finding to emerge from the research, before outlining how policy and provision might respond to this new evidence base.

### Staying with family and friends is a common and problematic experience

Staying with family and friends is a common homeless experience, the large majority (72%) of the 164 homeless people surveyed in the three case study areas having stayed with a friend or relative at some point since becoming homeless. Staying with a friend or relative was most common in the rural case study of Craven, North Yorkshire. In fact, staying with family and friends was the typical homeless situation in the district; over three-quarters of homeless people in Craven had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless and two-thirds had only ever stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless.

For some homeless people staying with family and friends represents a positive experience and preferable situation, compared to available alternatives. For many, however, it is an experience characterised by problems and difficulties. These include insecurity (the length of stay being dependent upon how far the goodwill of the friend or relative will stretch), inadequate sleeping arrangements (the majority of people sleeping on the floor), limited privacy (with few people having a room of their own) and restrictions on behaviour and lifestyle (when they can come and go, limits on their use of cooking and washing facilities, what they can and

cannot do in the property and even when they can go to bed). In more extreme cases, staying with family and friends can expose people to hazardous environments and threatening situations, including violence and abuse. In London, homeless people staying with family and friends were often benefiting from the support and assistance provided by specialist homeless agencies. In Sheffield and Craven, people staying with family and friends were rarely engaged with specialist homeless provision.

#### Recommendation 1:

Local authorities, in partnership with housing associations and third sector agencies, must extend their interest in homelessness beyond people living in traditional homeless 'spaces' and ensure that appropriate provision is available and accessible to homeless people regardless of where they are living.

Staying with family and friends is a common homeless experience, which for many people is characterised by a host of problems and difficulties. Homeless people staying with family and friends, however, are often disengaged from relevant and appropriate service provision. Policy and provision therefore needs to more actively strive to engage with and meet the needs of homeless people wherever they are living. Doing so will necessitate looking beyond the needs of people who are deemed deserving under the homeless legislation and extending support and assistance to people living outside traditional homeless settings (hostels, bed and breakfast hotels and the streets). This process might be facilitated by the appointment of specific staff, either by the local authority or through a local homelessness agency, to provide floating support, advice and assistance to homeless people residing outside and beyond the reach of current provision. Evidence from London indicates that when and where such services are more readily available they are regularly utilised by people staying with family and friends.

## The inadequate provision of temporary accommodation

Reliance on family and friends appears to reflect inadequacies in the nature and availability of temporary accommodation. In the rural case study, where two-thirds of homeless people had only ever stayed with family and friends, reliance on friends and relatives was indicative of the relative dearth of temporary accommodation within the district. In Sheffield and London, the reliance of almost three-quarters of homeless people on family and friends for a place to stay at some point in their homeless accommodation career reflects a more complex combination of factors, including limited awareness among some homeless people about available accommodation options, the unwillingness of some homeless people to utilise available provision and the inability of the hostel system to accommodate fluctuations in demand. Women, young people and certain minority ethnic groups were more likely than other population groups to have stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless, suggesting these groups encounter particular problems accessing suitable and satisfactory temporary accommodation.

### **Recommendation 2:**

Limiting the number of homeless people forced to rely on the help of friends or relatives requires action to improve the availability, accessibility and suitability of services for homeless people, including the provision of temporary accommodation, to the needs and requirements of different sections of the homeless population.

The reliance of homeless people on family and friends, despite the many problems and difficulties associated with staying with a friend or relative, suggests major inadequacies in the provision of temporary accommodation. Evidence suggests that many people are unaware of available options, particularly upon first becoming homeless, and instead approach a friend or relative for help and accommodation. Agencies might therefore consider better signposting of available

provision. Many homeless people are also reluctant to utilise available provision, calling into question the relevance and appropriateness of temporary accommodation. The over representation of women, young people and certain minority ethnic groups within the population of people staying with family and friends, for example, raises questions about the accessibility and suitability of local hostels, refuges and bed and breakfast hotels to the needs of these particular groups. Understanding and tackling these inadequacies should be an urgent priority, given evidence that reliance on family and friends can serve to isolate homeless people from support and assistance and limit their likelihood of being recognised as homeless and deserving of assistance under the homeless legislation.

### **Recommendation 3:**

Particular attention needs to be paid to the availability of advice, assistance and temporary accommodation for homeless people in rural areas.

The reliance of so many homeless people in the rural case study on family and friends for somewhere to stay, together with evidence that homeless people in rural areas are often forced to sleep rough as and when arrangements with friends or relatives break down, points to major inadequacies in the provision (extent, nature and accessibility) of temporary accommodation in rural England. An immediate first step should be a review of the extent and suitability of current provision, alongside a more rigorous review of the extent of homelessness in rural areas, which employs methods capable of reaching beyond the limits of official data sources and rough sleeper headcounts.

## Family and friends as a first port of call

For many people family and friends represent the first port of call upon becoming homeless, commonly serving as a stopping off point on a pathway toward other homeless situations, including hostel accommodation, bed and breakfast hotels and sleeping

rough. Homeless people staying with family and friends therefore tend to be in the early stages of their homeless accommodation career and beyond the reach of advice, assistance and support services for homeless people, although often engaged with service providers in other sectors (schools and colleges, probation service, social services, health care services and such like), reflecting the problems and challenges often encountered by homeless people. Some people do, however, stay with friends on an intermittent basis throughout their homeless accommodation career, as and when the opportunity arises, and some homeless people, particularly in rural areas, only ever stay with family and friends.

### **Recommendation 4:**

Efforts to tackle homelessness and limit the personal, social and financial consequences of ongoing exposure to homeless situations and lifestyles should be actively rolled out to homeless people staying with family and friends

Staying with family and friends represents the first port of call for many people upon becoming homeless. Interventions intended to cut short the experience of homelessness, limit the misery often associated with homelessness and reduce the costs associated with meeting the accommodation and support needs of homeless people should therefore be actively targeting their efforts at homeless people staying with family and friends. This approach will necessitate making visible this hidden population.

Many people rarely engage with specialist services for homeless people upon first becoming homeless and people staying with family and friends often fail to approach a local authority as homeless. Identifying people likely to benefit from advice and assistance aimed at limiting the experience of homelessness will therefore require developing working relations with agencies working with key groups known to be at risk of homelessness (such as the probation service, schools and colleges, mental health services, Connexions and

drug and alcohol support services). This would likely necessitate improvements in agency monitoring procedures, to allow the identification and referral of homeless clients to agencies more able to assist with their accommodation needs.

### **The vital role played by family and friends**

Family and friends are playing a vital role in assisting homeless people who often have no other place to reside and are faced with the possibility of sleeping rough. This is particularly true in rural areas, where the dearth of alternative accommodation options can mean that family and friends are the only available alternative to sleeping rough. It is also true in towns and cities in situations and at times when homeless people are unable to access temporary accommodation (hostel provision, bed and breakfast hotels and such like), either because of limited awareness of local provision, because available provision is unable to respond to their immediate needs or because demand outstrips supply and no bed spaces are available.

Family and friends are also introducing greater choice into the accommodation options of homeless people, many people being particularly grateful for the opportunity to remain outside the hostel system. The opportunity to stay with family and friends and access these benefits was found to reduce, however, the longer people had been homeless, most people tending to stay with family and friends earlier in their homeless accommodation career. This trend appears to relate, in part, to the stresses and strains associated with staying with a friend or relative, for both the homeless person and the friend or relative accommodating them. Homeless people raised concerns about 'putting on' their friend or relative and were often conscious about the impact of their presence on the lifestyle and behaviour of their friend or relative. There are also financial consequences associated with letting a homeless friend or relative stay, given that few homeless people are in a position to pay their friend or relative for putting them up, although some people do contribute in kind, providing food or helping around

the house. Letting a friend or relative stay can also lead people to break the terms of their tenancy and consequently risk eviction. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that over half of the stays with family and friends reported by homeless people lasted less than one month and almost one in four lasted less than one week. A small minority of people had, however, stayed with a particular friend or relative for more than six months, indicating that in certain situations friends and family can provide ongoing respite for people faced with an accommodation crisis.

**Recommendation 5:**

Central and local government should develop mechanisms for actively supporting people who are able and willing to accommodate homeless friends or relatives.

The containment of homelessness in civil society, through the accommodation of homeless people by family and friends, is easing pressure on temporary accommodation provision, limiting the incidence of rough sleeping and likely saving the public purse millions of pounds each year. The value of the role played by family and friends should be recognised and maximised.

For many homeless people staying with a friend or relative can be a traumatic experience, involving exposure to unsuitable living conditions, hazardous lifestyles and dangerous situations. Care should therefore be taken not to coerce homeless people into relying on a friend or relative for a place to stay. For some people, however, it is a positive experience which allows them an active choice in who they live with, provides access to the comforts of home and the emotional support of friends and relatives, isolates them from some of the more hazardous aspects of the homeless experience and allows them to live with people from a similar background or culture. Policy should therefore actively explore ways and means of supporting people who are willing to accommodate homeless friends and relatives and, at the very least, tackle the factors limiting the willingness of family and friends to help.

A key development would be the provision of some kind of allowance, which would limit the financial consequences of letting a homeless friend or relative stay and, perhaps, increase both the number of people able to accommodate a homeless friend or relative and the length of time that they are willing to let them stay. Possible initiatives include:

- awarding people accommodating a homeless friend or relative premiums on other benefits, to assist with the associated costs. This might operate in a similar manner to the carer premium, available to people with an underlying entitlement to Carer's Allowance. In some cases this premium can mean entitlement to Income Support, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit for the first time, or extra money if people are already in receipt of these benefits
- handing local authorities discretion to make payments to encourage tenants to accommodate a homeless friend or relative. Thought would have to be given to the implications of any such scheme for occupation densities and overcrowding. One approach might be to focus incentives on households occupying a dwelling that has more bedrooms than it requires, assisting social landlords to make better use of their housing stock
- assisting people willing to let a homeless friend or relative stay through the Housing Benefit system. Reform of the Housing Benefit system to permit payments to homeless people staying with a friend or relative is problematic, given that current regulations require that an agreement to reside is a commercial agreement enforceable in law and that regulations prohibit payment if a claimant resides in the same dwelling as a close relative. There are, however, opportunities for innovative developments to assist the people willing to let a homeless friend or relative stay. Rent restrictions, for example, might be lifted in situations where people are letting a homeless friend or relative stay, particularly in cases where restrictions have been enforced because the accommodation is considered larger than the claimant requires.

Family and friends might also be more willing to let a friend or relative stay if they know that assistance with support needs and help finding suitable accommodation is readily available to their friend or relative. In some districts, all that will be needed is wider advertising of help available through local day centres and specialist advice centres, as well as the local authority Homeless Person Unit. In other locations, however, there will need to be an active reorientation of provision away from the traditional focus on people deemed deserving under the homeless legislation and toward meeting the needs of homeless people whatever their status and wherever they live.

### **Recommendation 6:**

Central and local government and partner agencies should actively work to limit the penalties associated with accommodating a friend or relative.

Alongside the introduction of positive incentives to encourage people to let a homeless friend or relative stay, it is vital that the potential penalties associated with accommodating a homeless friend or relative are limited. For example:

- a fixed term guarantee might be provided, ensuring that Housing Benefit payments are not reduced if a claimant chooses to let a homeless friend or relative stay on a temporary basis. For example, people letting a homeless friend or relative stay should not be subject to 'non-dependent' deductions from Housing Benefit, which are made on the assumption that an adult living with a claimant will contribute to the housing costs
- a fixed term guarantee might be provided, ensuring that letting a homeless friend or relative stay on a temporary basis does not result in an increase in Council Tax payments. For example, the single person discount might be guaranteed for single people who temporarily accommodate a homeless friend or relative. Also people letting a homeless friend or relative stay should not be subject to 'non-dependent' deductions from Council Tax

Benefit, which can be made on the assumption that an adult living with a claimant will contribute to the Council Tax payments

- assured tenancies should include a tenancy term providing a right similar to the general right of secure tenants to take in lodgers, as long as doing so does not overcrowd the property. Encouraging tenants to let a homeless friend or family member might also involve offering reassurances or protection from the possibility of eviction as a result of the actions of the homeless friend or family member.

### **Approaching a local authority and being recognised as homeless**

Few homeless people staying with a friend or relative had approached a local authority and were not recognised as homeless, despite evidence that staying with family and friends can represent an insecure and unsatisfactory situation, characterised, for some people, by exposure to hazardous lifestyles and dangerous situations. In part, this reflects the failure of many homeless people staying with family and friends to approach a local authority for help; almost half of all homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative reporting that they had not approached a local authority as homeless in the last two years. Many people were unaware or uncertain about the advice and assistance provided by the local authority and saw no reason to approaching the Homeless Person's Unit for help, even though they might have a statutory right to advice, assistance or accommodation under the homelessness legislation. There was also a degree of cynicism among some homeless people about the help and assistance likely to be forthcoming from the local authority, particularly in London and Craven, where homeless people were least likely to approach the local authority as homeless. In contrast, in Sheffield, where the possibility of securing access to permanent accommodation was far greater, because of relatively low demand in the local housing market, the majority of people staying with a family and friend had approached the local authority as homeless.

Homeless people staying with family or friends were less likely than other homeless people to be recognised as homeless. Only one-third of the homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative and reported approaching a local authority had been recognised as homeless and people who had only ever stayed with a friend or relative were even less likely to be recognised as homeless. Once again, however, the experience in Sheffield was different, reflecting the very different housing market context, the vast majority of homeless people who approached the local authority being recognised as homeless.

**Recommendation 7:**

Homeless people staying with family and friends should be actively encouraged to approach their local authority for assistance. Even if their application is unsuccessful, the local authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance to homeless people and a corporate responsibility to assist people threatened with homelessness.

Homeless people will only be inclined to approach a local authority for assistance if they believe that help will be forthcoming. It is therefore imperative that local authorities actively advertise the full range of assistance available to homeless people. This is equally true in low and high demand housing markets. Even if it is highly unlikely that a homeless applicant in London or Craven, for example, will be offered a tenancy, the local authority might be able to offer valuable advice, serve as a point of referral to specialist agencies or offer more suitable temporary accommodation. Under the *Homelessness Act 2002*, local authorities also have a duty to extend their interest in homelessness beyond the delivery of assistance to people who fall into particular bureaucratic categories under the homelessness legislation and to strive to alleviate and prevent homelessness in all its forms.

**Recommendation 8:**

Central and local government should urgently attend to the discriminatory consequences of the reluctance of local authorities to recognise staying with family and friends as a homeless situation, which appears to be limiting the likelihood of people in rural locations, women, young people and certain minority ethnic groups being recognised as homeless and deserving of assistance.

The apparent reluctance of local authorities to recognise homeless people staying with family and friends as homeless under the legislation is discriminating against specific population groups and people in particular locations who are more reliant on the family and friends for accommodation. People in rural areas and women, young people and certain minority ethnic groups are more likely to stay with family and friends when homeless. They therefore appear less likely to be recognised as homeless and deserving of advice, assistance, a place in temporary accommodation or a tenancy offer. An urgent review of the institutional practices through which people staying with family and friends are being deemed undeserving of assistance under the homeless legislation is required, alongside analysis of the discriminatory consequences of current practice.

**Recommendation 9:**

Homeless people should not be regarded as intentionally homeless because they choose to no longer stay with a friend or relative.

A potential consequence of the reluctance of local authorities to consider staying with family and friends a homeless situation is that people who leave a friend's or relative's might be deemed, under the legislation, to be intentionally homeless. Even if unwilling to accept that staying with family and friends can represent a homeless situation, it is vital that local authorities recognise that staying with a friend or relative can be a difficult situation, characterised by inadequate and

unsuitable living conditions and exposure to threatening lifestyles and behaviour that rarely provides long term, secure or satisfactory accommodation.

**Recommendation 10:**

Staying with family and friends should automatically signal the need to assess the vulnerability of a homeless applicant

Homeless people staying with family and friends are often faced with personal situations and problems indicative of vulnerability under the homeless legislation, including time spent in local authority care, time spent in prison and mental and physical health problems. Staying with a friend or relative when homeless might therefore be usefully employed as a signal indicating to officers that they should pay particular regard to an applicant's vulnerability under the legislation. Even if a local authority is unwilling to consider staying with family and friends as a homeless situation and assist people under the homeless legislation, establishing vulnerability would ensure that people staying with family and friends are given high priority on the housing register and perhaps directed to relevant support and advice services.

### **The implications for research and evaluation**

Research and monitoring has largely failed to recognise that staying with family and friends is a common homeless experience, often characterised by problems and difficulties that can impact on health and well being. Driven by policy concerns, monitoring and evaluation has tended to focus on actions taken under the homelessness legislation or on the experiences of homeless people resident in accommodation situations that are either more visible (rough sleeping) or the provision of which has a direct and readily quantifiable impact on the public purse (bed and breakfast hotels). Evidence generated through the application of the innovative, but relatively straightforward, method employed in this study has revealed that important insights can be gained through the application of

alternative techniques capable of revealing the experiences of homeless people whose needs have traditionally remained hidden and neglected.

**Recommendation 11:**

Local authority Homelessness Reviews should strive to appreciate the full range of situations and settings in which homeless people are living. Methods should be developed that are capable of illuminating situations, such as staying with family or friends, which have traditionally remained hidden but are often no less traumatic than more visible manifestations of homelessness, such as staying in bed and breakfast hotels or hostel accommodation.

The *Homelessness Act 2002* requires that local authorities formulate a homeless strategy, informed by a review of homelessness in their district. Chapter 7 of the Act declares that homeless reviews must involve the local authority in analysis of the current and likely future level of homelessness in their district. People who, for one reason or another, leave long term settled accommodation, are unable to access and maintain alternative secure accommodation and become homeless reside in a range of situations, at various points in their homeless accommodation career, for different lengths of time and with variable consequences. It is vital that homeless reviews recognise this fact and, rather than focusing merely on the visible and readily quantifiable homeless population, employ methods capable of capturing the incidence of homelessness experiences, such as staying with a friend or relative, which have traditionally remained hidden. This report illustrates how the application of an innovative, but relatively simple, method can illuminate a wide spread and common situation (staying with family and friends) which has typically remained hidden and neglected.

**Recommendation 12:**

Estimating the incidence and understanding the experiences of homelessness in rural areas demands that particular attention is paid to the situations of homeless people staying with family and friends.

Staying with family and friends was the most common accommodation situation among the homeless people surveyed in the rural case study. Rural homelessness is contained within civil society, largely because of the relative dearth of targeted support and accommodation. Conventional methods of estimating homelessness have proved unable to expose and quantify these experiences and have subsequently underestimated the scale of the problem, thereby justifying the limited provision of targeted support and accommodation in rural areas and forcing homeless people to rely on family and friends. Breaking this cycle of denial and neglect demands that research, evaluation and analysis employ methods and techniques capable of capturing the homeless experiences, such as staying with family and friends, that have remained beyond the reach of traditional methods and counts.

**Recommendation 13:**

The level of reliance among homeless people on family and friends for accommodation provides a useful insight into the availability and adequacy of temporary accommodation within an area and should be integral to any assessment of local needs informing the development of local authority's homeless strategy and the planning of temporary accommodation provision.

Homeless people tend to stay with family and friends when they are either unable or unwilling to access alternative temporary accommodation. The incidence of homeless people staying with family and friends can therefore serve as a useful proxy indicator of the availability, accessibility and suitability of temporary

accommodation in an area and should be the focus of efforts to understand the extent and likely future level of homelessness and evaluate the suitability and appropriateness of service provision for homeless people.

**Recommendation 14:**

Research is urgently required to understand the apparent indifference of the homeless legislation and its application by local authority Homeless Person Units to the plight of homeless people staying with family and friends.

The relatively small proportion of homeless people staying with family and friends who do approach a local authority for help are commonly failing to be recognised as homeless under the legislation, despite often residing in situations more insecure, physically hostile or hazardous than more commonly acknowledged homeless situations, such as staying in hostel accommodation or a bed and breakfast hotel. Despite evidence that homeless people staying with family and friends often have personal problems (mental and physical health problems or illness) or experience of situations (local authority care and time spent in prison) that are often indicative of vulnerability, they are regularly being excluded from the advice and assistance, not to mention the possibility of access to temporary or permanent accommodation, provided to applicants recognised as homeless under the legislation. In response, there should be an urgent review of local authority interpretations of their duties under the homeless legislation, focusing on their justification for the effective exclusion of homeless people staying with family and friends from the benefits associated with being recognised as homeless under the legislation.

# Appendix 1 – London: summary of findings and key tables

## Summary of findings

- the majority of homeless people in London (69%) had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless, although homeless people in London were less likely to have stayed with a friend or relative than homeless people in other case study areas
- staying with a friend or relative in London was more commonly an intermittent experience throughout a person’s homeless accommodation career, either at times of crisis or whenever the opportunity arose
- less than half of the homeless people in London who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached the local authority as homeless and only 15% of homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative had been recognised as homeless
- the age profile of homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative in London was older than in other case studies, reflecting the profile of the full sample of homeless people surveyed in London
- homeless people in London were more likely to have moved into the district since becoming homeless
- homeless people in London were more likely than in other case studies to be in contact with and utilising services for homeless people
- homeless people staying with friends and relatives in London reported a relatively high incidence of a number of personal problems and challenges, compared to people in other case studies, in particular learning disabilities

## How many homeless people stay with friends and family?

- 69.5 per cent of the 82 homeless people in London had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless
- 13 per cent of homeless people in London had only ever stayed with friends and relative since becoming homeless

## Are homeless people staying with family and friends counted in the homeless statistics?

only 44.6 per cent of the homeless people in London who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless

## Reasons for not staying with family and friends

over half of the homeless people who had never stayed with a friend or relative explained that their main reason for never having done so was that they had no friends or relatives to stay with. One-third reported being able to stay in a preferred alternative situation

## Gender

one third of homeless people in London who had stayed with a friend or relative were women and two-thirds were men

- 68 per cent of homeless people in London who had never stayed with a friend or relative were women and 32 per cent were men

## Age

**Table A1.1** The age profile of homeless people staying with family and friends

Age band (years)	Stayed with family & friends % (n=57)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=25)
18 and under	10.5	4.2
19 to 25	31.6	12.5
26-35	21.1	37.5
36-45	22.8	20.8
46-55	7.0	20.8
56-65	7.0	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Ethnicity

**Table A1.2** Ethnicity of homeless people staying with friends and family

Ethnic group		Stayed with family & friends % (n=52)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=23)
White	British	50.0	54.5
	Irish	13.5	4.5
	Other	0.0	0.0
Mixed heritage	White and Black Caribbean	3.8	4.5
	White and Black African	0.0	0.0
	White and Asian	0.0	0.0
	Other	0.0	0.0
Asian or Asian British	Indian	0.0	4.5
	Bangladeshi	1.9	0.0
	Pakistani	0.0	0.0
Black or Black British	Caribbean	11.5	13.6
	African	3.8	13.6
	Other	0.0	0.0
Chinese or other Group	Chinese	0.0	4.5
	Other	15.4	0.0

## Marital status

**Table A1.3** The marital status of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=54)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=24)
Single	73.1	70.8
Married/long-term relationship	13.5	8.4
Divorced	11.5	0.0
Widowed	0.0	20.8
Other	1.9	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Sexuality

**Table A1.4** The sexuality of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=52)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=24)
Heterosexual	86.5	95.8
Gay man	7.8	4.2
Lesbian	1.9	0.0
Bisexual	1.9	0.0
Other	1.9	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

### Personal problems and challenges

**Table A1.5** Health related problems reported by respondents

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=57)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=25)
Mental health problem	28.1	28.0
Learning Disability	15.8	4.0
Drug dependency	15.8	28.0
Alcohol dependency	19.3	12.0
Been on Probation	28.1	40.0
Prison/Young offenders' institute	35.1	32.0
Time in local authority care	21.1	36.0

### Last home

**Table A1.6** Household situation before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=54)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=18)
Alone	24.1	38.9
Partner	27.8	38.9
With friends	3.7	5.6
Family (not parents)	3.7	0.0
Other	3.7	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A1.7** The tenure situations of respondents before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=46)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=13)
Owner occupied	4.3	15.4
Private rented	28.3	46.5
Council housing	6.5	15.4
Housing Association	8.7	0.0
Licensee	41.3	7.7
Other	10.9	15.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A1.8** Reasons for leaving last home

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=55)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=17)
Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents	25.5	17.6
Parents no longer able to accommodate	1.8	0.0
Relationship breakdown with partner	20.0	35.3
Dispute with other occupants (not parents)	3.6	0.0
Eviction	7.3	0.0
Financial reasons	9.1	17.6
Overcrowded	0.0	0.0
To seek employment	10.9	11.8
Got somewhere else	0.0	0.0
Other	21.8	17.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A1.9** Location of last home

<b>Status</b>	<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=53)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=18)</b>
Same City/Town/Borough	54.7	55.6
Elsewhere in region	3.8	5.6
Elsewhere in UK	26.4	33.3
Elsewhere in Europe	13.2	5.6
Elsewhere in World	1.9	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Efforts to escape homelessness: approaching the council for help**

- 44 per cent of people who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless in the previous two years
- 52 per cent of people who had never stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless in the previous two years

**Table A1.10** Approaching a local authority for assistance when homeless

<b>Status</b>	<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=25)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=13)</b>
Recognised as homeless	36	53.8
Recognised as in priority need	32	30.8

## Appendix 2 – Sheffield: summary of findings and key tables

### Summary of findings

- the majority of homeless people in Sheffield (72%) had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless, but few (4%) had only ever stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless
- homeless people in Sheffield often moved in with a friend or relative upon first becoming homeless, but a number of homeless people did stay with friends and relatives on an intermittent basis throughout their homeless accommodation career, either at times of crisis or whenever the opportunity arose
- in sharp contrast to the situation in other case studies, the vast majority (82%) of the homeless people in Sheffield who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached the local authority as homeless and over half had been recognised as homeless
- the age profile of homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative in Sheffield was relatively young, almost three-quarters being less than 35 years old
- homeless people were often in contact with and utilising services for homeless people, although whether or not they were in contact with specialist agencies was found to vary depending upon factors including how long people had been homeless
- homeless people staying with friends and relatives in Sheffield reported a very high incidence of a number of personal problems and challenges, compared to people in other case studies, including time spent in prison, time on probation, drug use problems and time in local authority care.

### How many homeless people stay with friends and family?

- 72.3 per cent of the 47 homeless people in Sheffield had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless
- 4 per cent of homeless people in Sheffield had only ever stayed with friends and relatives since becoming homeless

### Are homeless people staying with family and friends counted in the homeless statistics?

- 82.4 per cent of the homeless people in Sheffield who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless, compared to 84.6 per cent of homeless people who had never stayed with a friend or relative

### Reasons for not staying with family and friends

- the most common reason, given by one-third of homeless people, for never staying with a friend or relative was because they had no friends or relatives to stay with. One-third reported being able to stay in a preferred alternative situation. Other common reasons were that people chose not to ask a friend or relative or were able to access alternative accommodation

### Gender

- 29.4 per cent of homeless people in Sheffield who had stayed with a friend or relative were women and 70.6 per cent were men
- 15.4 per cent of homeless people in Sheffield who had never stayed with a friend or relative were women and 84.6 per cent were men

## Age

**Table A2.1** The age profile of homeless people staying with family and friends

<b>Age band (years)</b>	<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=29)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=13)</b>
18 and under	0.0	7.7
19 to 25	26.5	15.4
26-35	44.1	53.8
36-45	20.6	7.7
46-55	2.9	15.4
56-65	5.9	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Ethnicity

**Table A2.2** Ethnicity of homeless people staying with friends and family

<b>Ethnic group</b>		<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=32)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=12)</b>
White	British	84.4	83.3
	Irish	0.0	0.0
	Other	0.0	0.0
Mixed heritage	White and Black Caribbean	0.0	0.0
	White and Black African	0.0	0.0
	White and Asian	0.0	0.0
	Other	0.0	0.0
Asian or Asian British	Indian	0.0	0.0
	Bangladeshi	0.0	0.0
	Pakistani	0.0	0.0
Black or Black British	Caribbean	6.3	0.0
	African	3.1	8.3
	Other	0.0	0.0
Chinese or other group	Chinese	0.0	0.0
	Other	6.3	8.3

## HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

### Marital status

**Table A2.3** The marital status of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=33)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=13)
Single	81.8	61.5
Married/long term relationship	12.1	23.1
Divorced	3.1	7.7
Widowed	3.0	7.7
Other	3.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Sexuality

**Table A2.4** The sexuality of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=32)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=13)
Heterosexual	88.2	92.3
Gay man	0.0	0.0
Lesbian	0.0	0.0
Bisexual	5.9	0.0
Other	0.0	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Personal problems and challenges

**Table A2.5** Health related problems reported by respondents

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=34)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=13)
Mental health problem	41.2	30.8
Learning disability	11.8	0.0
Drug dependency	35.3	38.5
Alcohol dependency	29.4	15.4
Been on probation	47.1	23.1
Prison/Young offenders' institute	52.9	30.8
Time in local authority care	23.5	15.4

### Last home

**Table A2.6** Household situation before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=28)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=10)
Alone	17.9	10.0
Partner	57.1	50.0
Parents	10.7	40.0
With friends	3.6	0.0
Family (not parents)	3.6	0.0
Other	7.1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A2.7** The tenure situations of respondents before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=28)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=10)
Owner occupied	25.0	10.0
Private rented	10.7	30.0
Council housing	57.1	40.0
Housing Association	0.0	0.0
Licensee	0.0	0.0
Other	7.2	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A2.8** Reasons for leaving last home

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=29)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=12)
Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents	10.3	16.7
Parents no longer able to accommodate	3.4	0.0
Relationship breakdown with partner	55.2	25.0
Dispute with other occupants (not parents)	0.0	0.0
Eviction	0.0	16.7
Financial reasons	3.4	0.0
Overcrowded	3.4	0.0
To seek employment	0.0	0.0
Got somewhere else	3.4	0.0
Other	20.7	41.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A2.9** Location of last home

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=28)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=11)
Same City/Town/Borough	53.6	72.7
Elsewhere in region	21.4	27.3
Elsewhere in UK	25.0	0.0
Elsewhere in Europe	0.0	0.0
Elsewhere in World	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Efforts to escape homelessness: approaching the council for help**

- 82 per cent of people who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless in the previous two years
- 85 per cent of people who had never stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless in the previous two years

**Table A2.10** Approaching a local authority for assistance when homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=28)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=11)
Recognised as homeless	65	55
Recognised as in priority need	27	27

# Appendix 3 – Craven: summary of findings and key tables

## Summary of findings

- the vast majority of homeless people in Craven (77%) had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless and a large majority (65%) had only ever stayed with a friend or relative
- it was most common for homeless people to move in with a friend or relative upon first becoming homeless, many people then moving between different friends and relatives during the course of their homeless accommodation career
- only half of the homeless people in Craven who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached the local authority as homeless and only one in five of homeless people who had stayed with a friend or relative had been recognised as homeless
- homeless people staying with a friend or relative in Craven were younger than people in other case studies
- homeless people in Craven were less likely than in other case studies to have moved into the district since becoming homeless
- reliance on friends and family for a place to stay appeared to be linked directly to the virtual absence of alternative temporary accommodation options in the district
- homeless people in Craven were less likely than in other case studies to be in contact with and utilising services for homeless people, reflecting the relative dearth of specialist services in the district, and were instead relying on the assistance provided by other services (college or school, probation, health care providers and such like)
- homeless people staying with friends and relatives in Craven reported a relatively high incidence of various personal problems and challenges, including time spent in care, mental health problems, involvement with the criminal justice system and alcohol and drug use problems

## How many homeless people stay with friends and family?

- 77 per cent of the 35 homeless people in Craven had stayed with a friend or relative since becoming homeless
- 65 per cent of homeless people in Craven had only ever stayed with friends and relatives since becoming homeless

## Are homeless people staying with family and friends counted in the homeless statistics?

- only 51.9 per cent of the homeless people in Craven who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless, compared to five of the eight homeless people who had never stayed with a friend or relative

## Reasons for not staying with family and friends

- the most common reason for never staying with a friend or relative was because they were able to stay in a preferred alternative situation

## Gender

- 37 per cent of homeless people in Craven who had stayed with a friend or relative were women and 63 per cent were men
- half of the eight homeless people in Craven who had never stayed with a friend or relative were women and half were men

## Age

**Table A3.1** The age profile of homeless people staying with family and friends

<b>Age band (years)</b>	<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=27)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=8)</b>
18 and under	22.2	1
19 to 25	25.9	2
26-35	37.0	3
36-45	3.7	2
46-55	7.4	0
56-65	3.7	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8</b>

## Ethnicity

**Table A3.2** Ethnicity of homeless people staying with friends and family

<b>Ethnic Group</b>		<b>Stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=27)</b>	<b>Not stayed with family &amp; friends % (n=8)</b>
White	British	25	8
	Irish	2	0
	Other	0	0
Mixed heritage	White and Black Caribbean	0	0
	White and Black African	0	0
	White and Asian	0	0
	Other	0	0
Asian or Asian British	Indian	0	0
	Bangladeshi	0	0
	Pakistani	0	0
Black or Black British	Caribbean	0	0
	African	0	0
	Other	0	0
Chinese or other group	Chinese	0	0
	Other	0	0

**Marital status**

**Table A3.3** The marital status of homeless people staying with family and friends

Age band (years)	Stayed with family & friends % (n=27)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=8)
Single	92.6	8
Married/long term relationship	3.7	0
Divorced	0.0	0
Widowed	3.7	0
Other	0.0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8</b>

**Sexuality**

**Table A3.4** The sexuality of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=27)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=8)
Heterosexual	100	8
Gay man	0.0	0.0
Lesbian	0.0	0.0
Bisexual	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8</b>

**Personal problems and challenges**

**Table A3.5** Problems reported by respondents

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=27)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=8)
Mental health problem	33.3	2
Learning disability	0.0	0
Drug dependency	25.9	2
Alcohol dependency	11.1	1
Been on probation	37.0	2
Prison/Young offenders' institute	18.5	1
Time in local authority care	22.2	2

**Last home**

**Table A3.6** Household situation before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=25)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=7)
Alone	4	1
Partner	28	1
Parents	48	3
With friends	4	1
Family (not parents)	16	0
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7</b>

**Table A3.7** The tenure situations of respondents before becoming homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=13)	Never stayed with family & friends % (n=2)
Owner occupied	24	0
Private rented	15	0
Council housing	46	0
Housing Association	15	1
Licensee	0	0
Other	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table A3.8** Reasons for leaving last home

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=20)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=6)
Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents	10	2
Parents no longer able to accommodate	10	0
Relationship breakdown with partner	15	0
Dispute with other occupants (not parents)	5	0
Eviction	10	0
Financial reasons	25	0
Overcrowded	0	0
To seek employment	5	0
Got somewhere else	0	1
Other	20	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>

**Table A3.9** Location of last home

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=24)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=6)
Same City/Town/Borough	71	1
Elsewhere in region	17	4
Elsewhere in UK	8	1
Elsewhere in Europe	0	0
Elsewhere in World	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>

**Efforts to escape homelessness: approaching the council for help**

- 52 per cent of people who had stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless in the previous two years
- five out of the eight people who had never stayed with a friend or relative had approached a local authority as homeless in the previous two years

**Table A3.10** Approaching a local authority for assistance when homeless

Status	Stayed with family & friends % (n=14)	Not stayed with family & friends % (n=5)
Recognised as homeless	6	3
Recognised as in priority need	3	2

# Appendix 4 – Profile of the 164 homeless people interviewed

## Gender

- 67.7 per cent men
- 32.3 per cent women

## Age

**Table A4.1** The Age Profile of 164 homeless people interviewed

Age band (years)	%
18 and under	8.6
19 to 25	25.7
26-35	34.4
36-45	17.8
46-55	8.6
56-65	4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Ethnicity

**Table A4.2** Ethnicity of homeless people staying with friends and family

Ethnic		%
White	British	67.5
	Irish	5.6
	Other	0.0
Mixed heritage	White and Black Caribbean	1.9
	White and Black African	1.9
	White and Asian	0.0
	Other	0.0
Asian or Asian British	Indian	0.6
	Bangladeshi Pakistani	0.6
Black or Black British	Caribbean	6.9
	African	3.8
	Other	0.0
Chinese or other group	Chinese	0.6
	Other	5.6
Missing		5.0

## Marital status

**Table A4.3** The marital status of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	%
Single	78.4
Married/long term relationship	10.8
Divorced	8.3
Widowed	1.9
Other	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Sexuality

**Table A4.4** The sexuality of homeless people staying with family and friends

Status	%
Heterosexual	92.9
Gay man	3.2
Lesbian	0.6
Bisexual	1.9
Other/Not Sure	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Personal problems and challenges

**Table A4.5** Problems reported by respondents

Status	%
Mental health problem	31.7
Learning disability	8.5
Drug dependency	25.6
Alcohol dependency	18.3
Been on probation	34.8
Prison/Young offenders' institute	34.1
Time in local authority care	23.8

### Last home

**Table A4.6** Household situation before becoming homeless

Status	%
Alone	19.9
Partner	36.2
Parents	31.9
With friends	4.2
Family (not parents)	5.0
Other	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A4.7** The tenure situations of respondents before becoming homeless

Status	%
Owner occupied	13.4
Private rented	24.1
Council housing	27.7
Housing Association	5.0
Licensee	14.2
Other	9.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table A4.8** Reasons for leaving last home

Status	%
Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents	18.7
Parents no longer able to accommodate	2.9
Relationship breakdown with partner	28.1
Dispute with other occupants (not parents)	2.2
Eviction	5.8
Financial reasons	10.1
Overcrowded	0.7
To seek employment	6.5
Got somewhere else	1.4
Other	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Approaching the council for help

- 58.6 per cent had approached the council as homeless in the last two years
- 38.4 per cent of the 96 homeless people who had approached the council for help had been recognised as homeless
- 20.3 per cent of the 96 homeless people who had approached the council for help had been recognised as in priority need

### Length of time homeless

- 52.9 per cent more than two years

### Case study location

- 50.0 per cent London
- 28.7 per cent Sheffield
- 21.3 per cent Craven

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We would like to make clear that this report is based on research undertaken by the authors and that the analysis and comment contained within do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Crisis or the Countryside Agency. Of course, we accept all responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions in the text.

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October 2003

# About the authors

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The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) is an institute of Sheffield Hallam University. The Centre includes a Housing Research Team who specialise in analysis of various aspects of housing policy and homelessness. In the last year the Housing Team have undertaken research projects for the ODPM, Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Corporation, Countryside Agency, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and local authorities.

# Other Crisis publications

## Homelessness Factfile

Tony Warnes, Maureen Crane, Naomi Whitehead, Ruby Fu  
ISBN 1 899257 51 9 2003 208pp £12.50

This second edition of the *Homelessness Factfile* provides comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about homeless people in the United Kingdom, and policy and service responses to homelessness and its prevention.

The *Factfile* is however more than a directory, for it also reviews the current scene, and critically examines some of the most vigorously debated current policy and practice development issues. It is an invaluable resource with links, references, case studies and sources for further research. There is plentiful information about homelessness in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Updated and up-to-the minute information that supplements the printed version, can be found in the Factfile Online at [www.crisis.org.uk/factfile](http://www.crisis.org.uk/factfile)

## Publications in the Hidden Homelessness series

There are hundreds of thousands hidden homeless people in Great Britain living in emergency hostels, B&Bs, squats or on friends' floors. A series of publications have been commissioned to map out their experiences and highlight their plight.

## Home and Dry?

Samantha Howes  
ISBN 1 899257 50 0 2002 40pp £7.50

Homelessness and substance misuse are two of today's most pressing social concerns. Both are clearly linked to social exclusion and are closely associated with one another. Despite this and the notable practical work that has been carried out there is still a serious gap in knowledge to guide service delivery and policy development. *Home and Dry?* fills these gaps by exploring the nature and causes of substance misuse and looks at some of the ways that we might begin to tackle these problems. Based on interviews with 389 homeless people and dozens of service providers it is a

powerful and comprehensive piece of research, unflinching in its investigations, it has few qualms in drawing the necessary conclusions.

## Hidden but not Forgotten

Oswin Baker  
ISBN 1 899257 49 7 2001 32pp £7.50

This ground-breaking report examines the life of over 50 hostel residents. By mapping their experiences not only within the hostel system but also before they became homeless, we have been able to build up what is perhaps the most detailed picture of hostel life today. The report will be required reading for anyone who wants to help shape the response to homelessness in the next decade.

## Publications in the New Solutions to Homelessness series

Crisis' New Solutions research programme is dedicated to identifying the major problems facing homeless people and suggesting innovative responses, designed to enable practical, long-term responses to homelessness.

## Trouble at Home: Family Conflict, Young People and Homelessness

Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown  
ISBN 1 899257 48 9 2001 58pp £7.50

Family conflict is the main immediate cause of homelessness amongst at least two thirds of homeless young people. *Trouble at Home* looks at the causes and the scope for intervening to prevent young people from becoming homeless. Based on case studies with 12 organisations and structured interviews with 150 young people this powerful report identifies opportunities for the development of crisis intervention services, highlighting the role that can be played by the government initiatives. The report goes on to look at the benefits of mediation services and calls for the implementation of a nation-wide network of family mediation services.

## **Healthy Hostels: A Guide to Promoting Health and Well-being Among Homeless People**

Teresa Hinton, Naomi Evans and Keith Jacobs  
ISBN 1 899257 47 0 2000 40pp £7.50

This is the first guide to comprehensively explore health promotion work with homeless. It outlines how housing, resettlement and health workers can promote the health and well-being of homeless people and the most effective ways of working and what resources are needed. The report is a unique attempt to bring together the experience and knowledge gained through current work, with ideas for developing future work with this population. It contains a wealth of material and information and practical examples of health promotion activities. It also outlines the principles of good practice and offers valuable insights into how housing providers can gear up and become more effective in this area.

## **Lest We Forget – Ex-servicemen and Homelessness**

Scott Ballintyne and Sinead Hanks  
ISBN 1 899257 46 2 2000 36pp £7.50

In 1999, up to one in five hostel residents and nearly one in three rough sleepers have been in the Armed Forces. What have the Armed Forces done to stop ex-squaddies put their training to sleep rough into practice? Have the dozens of ex-Service organisations been able to weave an effective safety net? And does the homelessness sector even recognise someone's background in the Forces as a relevant factor? Lest We Forget plugs this information gap and points the way ahead to close down, once and for all, one of the most well-recognised routes into homelessness.

## **Walk on By... Begging, Street Drinking and the Giving Age**

Simon Danczuk ISBN 1 899257 45 4 2000 34pp  
£7.50

Few issues spark controversy more than begging and street drinking. Should you give? Should you walk past? Should you feel guilty? Or scared? Or angry?

When all is said and done, should people really think that they have the right to beg? Drawing on interviews with hundreds of beggars and drinkers, and on dozens of case studies from all over Britain, Walk on By shows how new and imaginative thinking can be translated into lasting solutions both for the community and for the people literally helped off the pavements.

## **Homelessness and Loneliness – The Want of Conviviality**

Gerard Lemos  
ISBN 1 899257 43 8 2000 20pp £4.50

Homelessness is about many things – but it is isolation, loneliness and despair which perhaps leave the most damaging legacy. This report seeks to explore this overlooked area and proposes new ways to rebuild people's social networks through mentoring, befriending and family mediation. Ultimately it looks towards the establishment of 'the convivial life' as the key to any successful reintegration into society.

## **A Future Foretold – New Approaches to Meeting the Long-term Needs of Single Homeless People**

Gerard Lemos with Gill Goodby  
ISBN 1 899257 35 7 1999 48pp £7.50

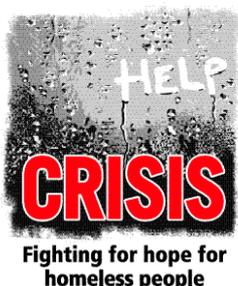
This influential report states that homelessness is the symptom of a multitude of life problems rather than people not having anywhere to live. The author argues that, although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, its causes, characteristics and consequences change frequently and that work done by the Government, and voluntary agencies needs to reflect this changing landscape. The authors argue that multiple causes can make homelessness a future foretold for some people. It makes recommendations to address the barriers currently facing single people in housing need.

**HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS:** **Your Place, Not Mine**  
The experiences of homeless people staying  
with family and friends

Efforts to tackle homelessness have focused on reducing the number of homeless people living in bed and breakfast accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough. Yet the vast majority of homeless people are living in alternative situations, such as squatting, staying with family and friends or living in hostel accommodation. Recognising and responding to this fact, this ground-breaking report profiles the incidence and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends.

Drawing on interviews with over 150 homeless people, the authors reveal that staying with family and friends is a common homeless situation, in which the majority of homeless people find themselves at some point in time. The reasons why homeless people stay with friends and relatives are explored and staying with friends or family is revealed to be a highly insecure homeless situation characterised by unsuitable and hazardous living conditions. Recommendations are made about interventions required to limit the reliance of so many homeless people on family and friends, as well as how friends and relatives might be better supported to provide suitable and secure accommodation when able and willing.

*Your Place, Not Mine: Homeless People Staying with Family and Friends* is essential reading for anyone concerned with understanding homelessness in the 21st century – policy makers, housing and homelessness professionals, lecturers, teachers and students in housing and social policy.



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