



## **Findings from Galvanise 2019**

**Part of Brighton & Hove's Campaign to End  
Street Homelessness**

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## Overview

Galvanise Brighton & Hove is part of the European Campaign to End Street Homelessness, co-ordinated by World Habitat, and currently operating in 10 European cities. The project has seen over 1,000 volunteers survey rough sleepers in cities across Europe, from Valencia to London.

At the end of 2017, the first Connections Week was held in Brighton & Hove. One hundred and sixty trained community volunteers went out in small teams in Brighton & Hove and spoke to rough sleepers about their lives, hopes and aspirations.

At the end of 2019, Connections Week was repeated. The purpose was to ensure that the views of homeless people feed into solutions.

The data gathered from all the surveys carried out from Galvanise's Connections Week 2019 was inputted into an online survey tool, which automatically produced analysis of the quantitative and fixed multiple choice responses. Percentages given are of the respondents to each question rather than the full total, as not all people surveyed answered all questions.

Several questions in the survey were free text. These answers often contained many different elements of information in them - for example, there would be several responses to 'what do you do during the day?' These questions were 'tagged' for different themes that were present in each response and then the numbers of mentions of each theme were recorded.

The questions were grouped by various issues relating to homelessness, and summaries of both the quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented below.

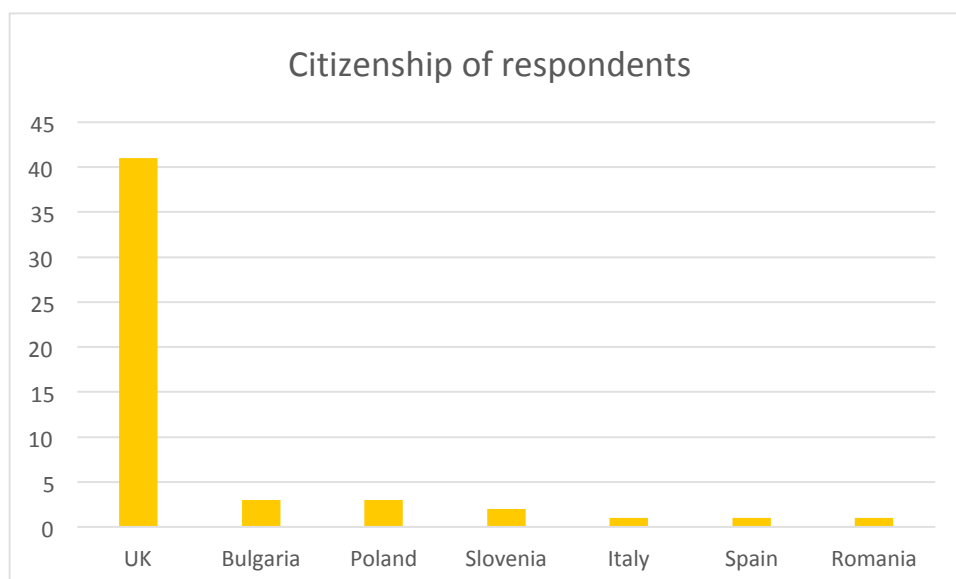
A key part about Connections Week is to raise awareness about homelessness, engage the local community in the issues and the people affected by homelessness, and come together to create solutions. This report also features some feedback from volunteers who participated in Galvanise 2019 to show the impact the initiative has had on some of the volunteers.

## 1. Demographics

The demographic questions found that the majority of respondents were male: 83% of respondents (49 people), compared to 14% female (8 people). One person selected male and female, but nobody responded that they do not identify as the same sex they were given at birth. Respondents primarily identified as being heterosexual (85%; 50 people), with one person identifying as gay/lesbian and three people as bi-sexual.

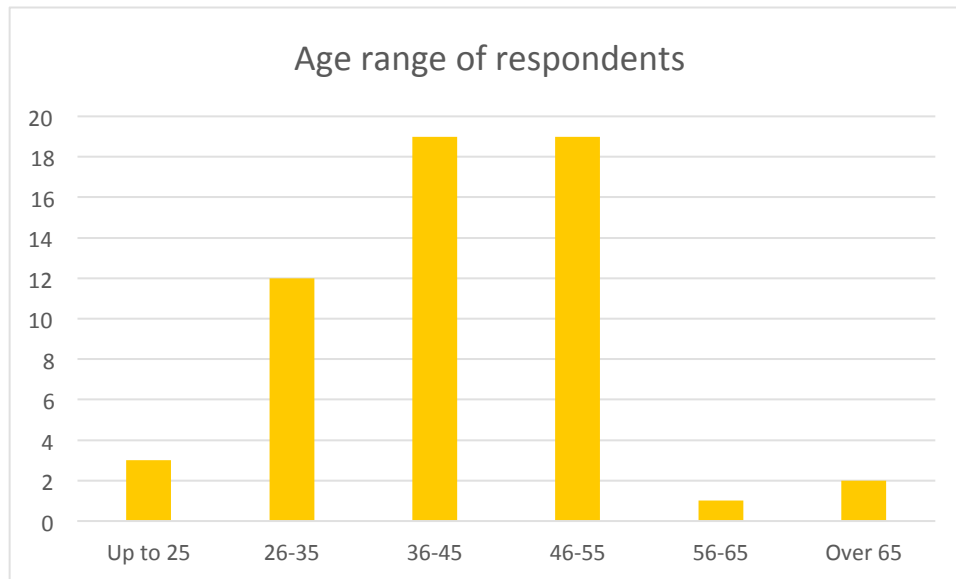
Having been in institutions can lead people to have had unsettled lives or troubling experiences. Twenty percent of respondents (11 people) had been in local authority care as a child, and the same number of people had been in the armed forces or territorial army.

The majority of rough sleepers interviewed for Galvanise were from the UK. Only one person had unresolved immigration issues.



Only 7% (3 people) had been in the UK less than a year, with 9% (4 people) being here between 1-5 years, and 12% (5 people) 5-10 years.

Whilst there was a wide age range of respondents, the people interviewed for Galvanise 2019 were predominantly in their mid-30s to mid-50s:



## 2. Causes of homelessness

When asked what the main issue that caused their homelessness was, respondents answered the following, in order of reason most frequently cited:

- A relationship that broke down (16 people)
- Leaving prison with nowhere to go (8 people)
- Any other traumatic experience e.g. domestic violence or some other kind of physical or emotional abuse (9 people)
- Because friends/family asked them to leave (6 people)
- An unhealthy or abusive relationship (6 people)

When asked what led to them becoming homeless the first time, similar themes emerged, with relationship breakdown again being the most common cause. Job loss was the second most common answer.

Bereavement was the third most common answer. Three people talked about their bereavements that led to homelessness when asked if they had anything further they wanted to discuss. One person's sister passed away, and one person's daughter passed away, and they then didn't go to work after that, which led to not paying the rent and subsequently being evicted. One person's mother passed away, who he had always lived with, and he struggled after that.

*"I didn't enjoy seeing my mum suffer. I could have waited for my own flat as I was in a 3 bed council flat but I just left. I can get angry when pushed so prefer to walk away and travel when challenged. People do harass, bully me to do things I don't want to do."*

Other causes of homelessness the first time that people gave included:

- addiction (5 people)
- debt or money issues (5 people)
- Being evicted was mentioned by 5 people, with 2 of these being linked to losing their tenancy because of other people coming to/staying at the property. These could have been experiences of 'cuckooing', a situation where others come to a property to exploit the tenant, often using the property for preparing or dealing drugs.
- parents kicking them out (2 people)
- prison (2 people)
- benefits issues (2 people)
- mental health (2 people)
- illness (2 people)
- lack of ID/needing documents to work (2 people)

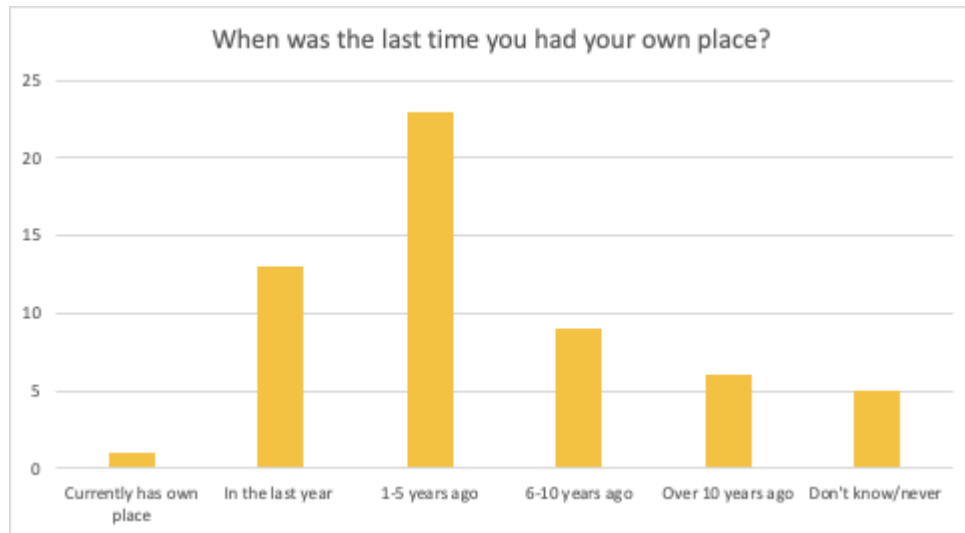
### 3. Homelessness experience

Several questions were asked to try to understand more about people's experiences of homelessness in Brighton & Hove.

The most frequent reason people gave as to why they are sleeping rough in Brighton & Hove is that it is their home or where they were living before they become homeless (13 responses). The second most frequent answer was because friends and family are here (12 responses). This indicates that predominantly, people sleeping rough in the area have some sort of a connection to the city. Seven people mentioned the services in Brighton & Hove attracting them to the city, seven people mentioned that it feels safe here, five people mentioned the soup runs, and two people mentioned the drugs market.



Of the people who have slept rough over two years, only three are currently in their longest period of sleeping rough. One person was homeless from 2012-2019 and was housed in Feb 2019 but is now sleeping out again. A majority of respondents (37 people, 61.7%) have slept rough before, then been housed, and then ended up back on the street.



It is striking that 9 people have not had their own place for 6-10 years, 6 people have not had their own place for over 10 years and 5 people do not know when they last had their own place, or never have.

#### 4. Physical health

The physical health questions showed that no female rough sleepers surveyed were pregnant. Almost a quarter of respondents (14 people) were not registered with a GP, and 55% of (31 people) said they do not find it easy to ask for help when feeling physically unwell. However, 47% (28 people) have attended A&E in the last 6 months.

It can be difficult to maintain routines when living on the streets: 32% (18 people) are not taking medication that they have been prescribed, and 21% of respondents (11 people) said that there are medications that they are prescribed but they do not take them the way the doctor prescribed.

Forty-one per cent of respondents (22 people) said that they have a serious or chronic health issue. Examples that were given showed a range of physical health issues that respondents suffered with:

- eczema
- brain operation
- high cholesterol/blood pressure
- diabetes
- arthritis
- asthma
- HIV+

- endocarditis
- having suffered stroke
- COPD

Housing options can be affected by health issues, however, only 4% reported having to leave a flat, hostel, or other place they were staying because of their physical health in the past, whereas 15% said that they have physical disabilities that would limit the type of housing they could access.

## 5. Criminal justice

In the last six months, 44% of respondents (12 people) reported having spoken to a police officer because they were the alleged perpetrator of a crime, and 22% (6 people) said that they have witnessed a crime. Police sometimes ask homeless people to move on from an area; 30% of respondents (18 people) reported that this has happened to them.

A majority of people have spent one or more nights in custody (64% of respondents; 38 people), with 42% having been in prison before. Of these, 15 people said they have been in prison between 1-10 times, and 9 people said they have been in prison over 10 times (including 'too many to recollect', 'again and again', and one person who has been in prison more than 30 times). This shows an ongoing cycle of offending affects a proportion of Brighton's street homeless population, with 34% of respondents saying that they felt this is making it hard for them to find accommodation.

When asked 'where did you sleep the night you were released from prison?', over half of the respondents to this question (14 people) answered that they slept outside or on the streets. Additionally, three stayed with family members, two in hostels, and one in the airport.

Despite prison often being seen as a negative place to be, two people talked about how they liked prison and the structure and safety it offers them.

*"When I feel unsafe, I do a crime and go to prison. [I'm] never in for more than 4 months."*

## 6. Victim of crime

Whilst there may be public perceptions about homeless people committing crime, the reality is that homeless people are very often the victims of crime: 45% of respondents (26 people) said that they have been attacked or beaten up since they had become homeless/been rough sleeping. Homeless people can also be vulnerable to exploitation: 13% (8 people) answered that someone forces or pressures them to do things that they do not want to do. Additionally, 22% of respondents (13 people) reported that they do things that may be considered to be risky like exchange sex for money, run drugs for someone, have unprotected sex with someone you don't know, or share a needle.

Safety came up as a significant response in relation to asking why people chose the spot where they slept last night. The most popular response was safety, with 18 mentions. Perhaps linked to this, 4



people mentioned that their spot was hidden, and 8 people mentioned their spot was quiet. Safety also came up in response to another question, with seven people saying that they sleep rough in Brighton & Hove because it is safe here.

When asked if there were any further comments, many people showed concern for their safety. One person said that their biggest concern is around safety and that they feel vulnerable especially with other people around possibly using drugs/alcohol or violence generally. They also commented that people have shouted at the tents where people are sleeping.

*“I was seriously threatened and assaulted when I was 3 weeks homeless on the streets. This has significantly affected me and I am now healing.”*

*“I slept/stayed in toilets overnight if I could, locked up to feel safe, or stayed in toilets until they kicked me out.”*

*“I am at the moment waiting to be attacked as a vulnerable homeless person when asleep”*

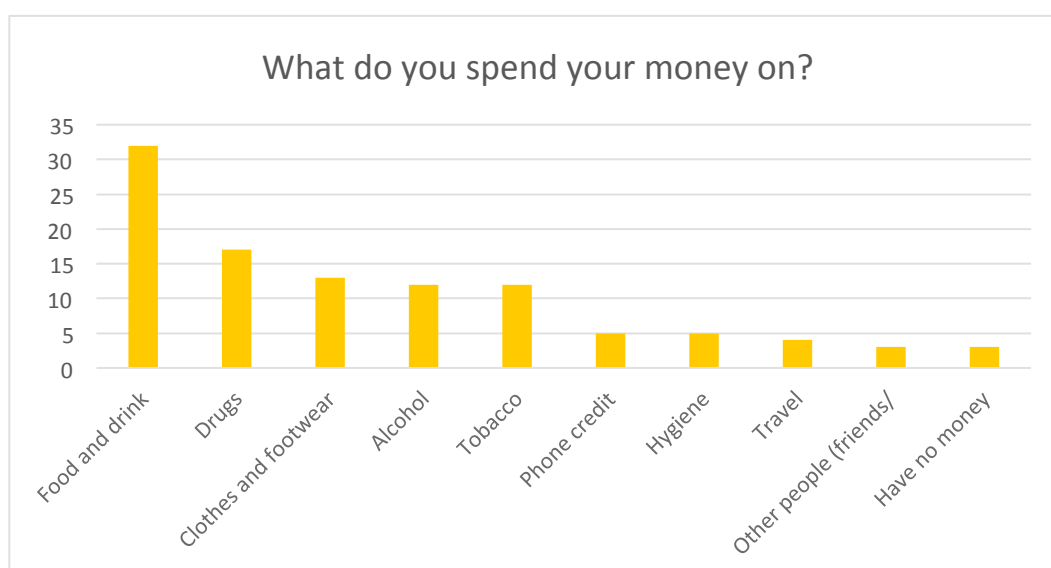
## 7. Finances

The financial questions asked showed that:

- 37% of respondents owe money to someone (21 people)
- 41% are begging (24 people)
- 64% are on benefits (38 people)
- 13% of respondents were in paid employment (8 people)

Whilst more people are on benefits than not, benefits issues came up frequently in responses around what would help people out of their homelessness situation (see section 11).

The survey responses show a range of things that respondents spend their money on, linked to survival, addictions and relationships with others:



## 8. Mental Health

Mental health issues were only mentioned by two people when talking more about the causes of their homelessness but mental health certainly can have an on-going effect on people's ability to maintain housing and affect them whilst living on the streets. In the survey, 25% of respondents said that they have had trouble maintaining their housing because of a mental health issue or concern.

More people feel they have a mental health issue (61%; 36 people) than have had a diagnosis of a mental health or behavioural condition from a doctor or health professional in the last year (39%; 22 people). Furthermore, of the people who answered yes to having a mental health need, only 27% (13 people) said that they are receiving support or treatment. This suggests there is a potential gap in mental health support for rough sleepers.

When asked 'have you threatened/tried to harm yourself in the last year?', 23% of respondents (13 people) said yes, and 27% (15 people) said that in the last 6 months, they have received a service because of a crisis in their life (such as mental health, feeling suicidal, or domestic violence).

Suicide attempts were mentioned by three people when asked if there was anything else in general they wanted to talk about, including one person who stated that they have made multiple attempts in the past, and one who is currently feeling suicidal.

The answers here clearly show the high risk from mental health issues that is faced by people sleeping rough in Brighton & Hove, highlight the importance of assistance being provided.

## 9. Additional difficulties

- Four people have had trouble maintaining their housing because of a learning disability or difficulty, and an additional 2 people have had trouble maintaining housing because of an autistic spectrum disorder e.g. autism or Asperger's
- 17% (10 people) have had trouble maintaining their housing, because of communication issues/social interaction
- The open-ended question for any further comments showed that 2 people had volunteered the information that they have literacy issues and cannot read or write.

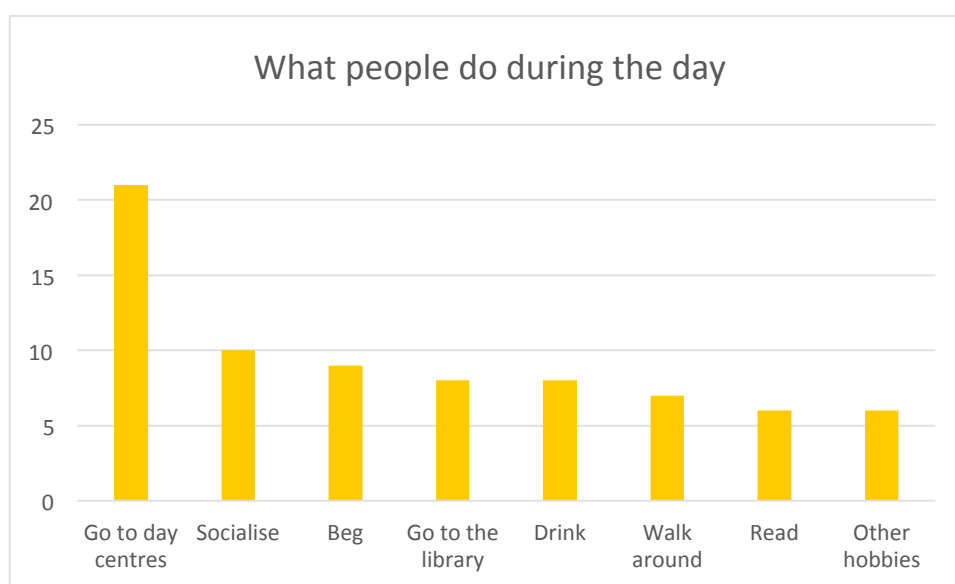
These answers indicate that there is a level of additional difficulties that people sleeping rough may face. The survey did not ask about literacy issues but it is interesting that these were raised by people sleeping rough themselves; not being able to read or write can have a significant impact on managing day-to-day, keeping appointments, claiming benefits, and on self-confidence. This may be something to explore further, along with the other effects of learning disabilities and autism.

## 10. Using resources/ services

Several questions were asked about services and resources that homeless people have access to and how they spend their time. Routine and structure are things that often come with being housed and being in work but can be difficult to find when living on the streets: 49% of respondents (28 people) said that it is important to them to have structure and routine in their day. Two quotes, however, illustrate how this can be something to cling to or something that can be illusive when rough sleeping:

*"It's vital...can build up strength. Routine is the key to everything. It builds up discipline"*

*[routine and structure are] "sort of important but at the moment I don't see the point"*



However, when asked if they are involved in any planned activities, that make them feel happy and fulfilled, 33% (19 people) said yes. Answers included going to the library or reading (the most popular response), as well as volunteering, riding a bike, being in nature, and travelling. Only two people mentioned use of support services, which implies that people see support services as being about survival and providing a functional role in their lives, as opposed to being places that make them feel happy and fulfilled.

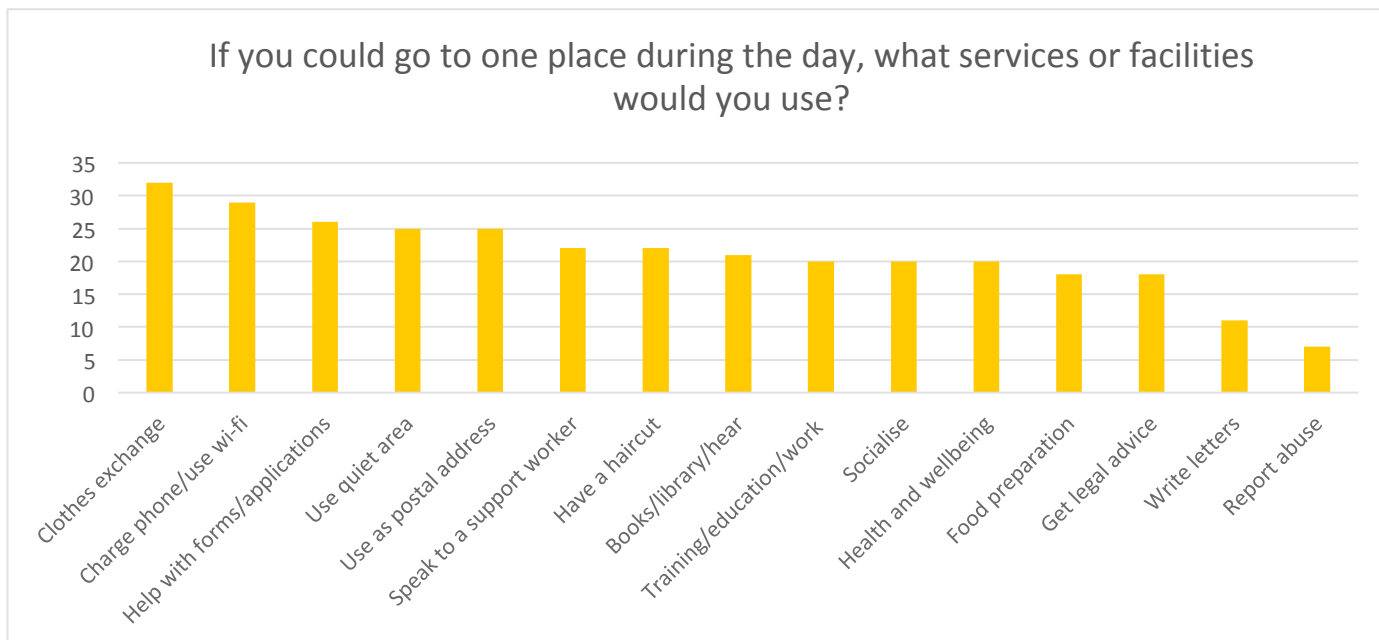
Predominantly, people are able to take care of basic needs (81%; 48 people). Most people are able to get food and water (90% and 91% respectively) but changing clothes and washing clothes are more challenging (78% and 66% respectively). Most people report using day centres to meet these needs, but others use restaurants/pubs/cafes, go to friends' houses, public toilets, or the library.

Most people (68%; 39 people) said they cannot access the services they need at the weekend. This was further emphasised when people were asked if there was anything else they wanted to contribute, with five people again mentioning the need for weekend services.

*“Weekends are a nightmare cos no help - no crisis support. 48 hours is a long time on your own”*

*“Sunday is difficult, they call it Suicide Sunday”*

The survey then moved on to look at what new facilities would be useful.



Eighty-seven per cent of respondents (40 people) said that they would like to see a place like this in Brighton.

There is an idea to set up information pods around the city where rough sleepers can get information, and respondents were asked what information they would find useful to be able to access easily and quickly. The following answers are ranked in order of popularity:

- Information about shelters - location/directions/opening times
- Soup kitchens/food outlets
- Streetlink
- Weather reports (plus additional seasonal-appropriate information)
- Contact emergency services
- Access to the council website
- Local news and weather reports (plus additional seasonal-appropriate information)

However, there were also two comments on the suggestion for information pods that it is not information that is needed but instead more help/action.

Access to fitness/gym and showers were also mentioned several times when given the opportunity for further comments. Other general suggestions for services included:

- There should be secluded area in Brighton for people to put up tents with security or small caravans as temporary accommodation.
- a day centre for hobbies
- want to know where dogs are catered for
- map and directions to services
- more information on SWEP
- need for internet access and charging points
- need for doctor and help with physical health issues

## **11. Vision for future**

The answers to 'what kind of housing would you like?' are ranked here by how frequently they were mentioned:

- a flat/1-bed flat (the most common response)
- anything (second most common response)
- a studio
- a house
- housing that includes support
- a bedsit or bungalow
- accommodation for older people
- three people would be happy to share and two specified that they wouldn't like to share.
- two people mentioned wanting a garden
- two mentioned wanting to live with a partner/friend
- one person wants to live in a castle.

When asked what three things would help respondents to access housing, the thing that was mentioned the most was having support to access housing (19 mentions, appearing in 37% of responses). This was closely followed by comments about the availability of affordable housing, including people who mentioned long waiting lists and a lack of council housing (this was 16 comments in total, appearing in 31% of responses). A couple of comments given indicate a lack of faith in being able to access housing.

*"There is no housing! It ain't happening"*

*"Advice for how to get housing... [I've] been through it many times, filled out the forms and nothing ever happens"*

Landlords who are fairer and accept benefits was mentioned six times. Having more money was mentioned by 11 people, and linked to this there were 5 mentions of having benefits and 4 mentions of needing a deposit.

Seven people said that having a job would help them, and seven people made comments about the difficulty of navigating the complex system to gain housing. Three people said that having a local connection would help them, and two people said that the council changing its attitude or improving flexibility would help. Two people need a National Insurance Number to help them, and three people said that if they could address their addictions, this would help. Other things that would help that were mentioned once each were addressing debt, volunteering, accommodation that takes dogs, being reconnected, and improving language skills.

*"No help for personality disorders. I am despondent as [I have been] let down in the past, always people refused to help me."*

The most common response to the question 'What do you want your future to look like?' included housing, including people linking being housed with having more stability in life. Thirteen people were able to express some wish for a good or better future, including things such as feeling happier, content, peaceful, and things being better than they are now.

Other things that were included in this answer were, in order of frequency mentioned:

- wanting a job
- wanting children or being able to see their children
- being able to engage in hobbies
- being safe
- being normal
- studying
- being in a relationship

Visions for the future that people gave ranged from broad concepts that generally could apply to people across much of society, to more specific individual dreams:

*"Nice normal life"*

*"Nice family, couple of kids, somewhere to live"*

*"Big plans to open an office and have [my own] firm"*

*"Goats, chickens, children, cottage and a van"*

Sadly, six people expressed either not having a future or not being able to think about the future.

## Quotes

A few quotes have been selected in addition to those included in the sections above to further illustrate how people feel about their situations:

- "I do not see things improving in the near future. So much pressure on services."
- "I can't go into the future. It doesn't look rosy. My mind is telling me is going to be shit."
- "If times get harder I'll try to kill myself again."
- "We become outcast, it is easy to become stereotyped and become 'boxed' into categories. You become isolated and have to fit in and are outside mainstream society."
- One person, who was abused at age 9 by close family, suffers from PTSD and was sectioned at age 19 said "I don't think I ever grew up"
- "I need rehab but have to wait 6 months before help as not got a local connection. I need help now, I could die in 6 months"

However, there were also quotes that show resilience and how people keep a positive attitude:

- "I always smile"
- "I make myself better. I release all my fears and build back the pieces and recuperate. Heal the emotions."
- [I want to] "be a good influence on other people and help others in a profound way"

## Volunteer experience

As part of the aim of Connections Week is to raise public awareness about homelessness and engage the wider community in solutions, views from volunteers who participated in Galvanise 2019 were sought. There were 4 responses: 3 from people who had participated as survey volunteers, and one from a team leader.

For two of the four volunteers, it was their first time working or volunteering with homeless people. All of them said they found the experience very interesting and that their understanding or knowledge about homelessness has improved as a result of participating in Galvanise.

One person commented that they found the myriad of services and how they all interlink to be unclear. This echoed some of the views of homeless people themselves who asked for help to navigate the complex systems. Another said that they were amazed at the services that exist as they had not previously been aware of how much there was available. One person felt that there was much to do around educating the public – both in terms of why people become homeless, and in terms of what support exists.

All 4 said their response to homeless people around Brighton & Hove has changed; two said they feel more confident interacting with homeless people and one person said they are more empathetic and understanding of the situations that can lead to homelessness.

All feel the community has a role to play in ending homelessness in Brighton & Hove. Two people talked about the community's role in making sure that more services and support are provided, and one talked about the ongoing need for changing people's attitudes and improving wider understanding of homelessness. In particular, the prevailing views that alcohol and drug use are the causes of homelessness was felt to be important to combat, so that the community can be more empathetic and understanding towards homeless people.

All 4 said that they would recommend participating in Galvanise to other people, showing that they felt it was a worthwhile experience to be part of.



## Summary

- Brighton & Hove's rough sleepers are predominantly males from the UK in their late 30s-mid 50s. They most often answered that they are sleeping rough in Brighton & Hove because they were living here when they became homeless, or because they have family or friends here.
- One fifth of the people sleeping rough spoken to during Galvanise had been in local authority care as a child.
- 18% of people cited a relationship breakdown as the reason for becoming homeless the first time. Other common reasons for becoming homeless were traumatic events such as abuse, coming out of prison with nowhere to go, and job loss.
- People want jobs but last time and this time shows that homelessness still happens to people who are working.
- Many people surveyed experience cycles of going in and out of prison, and experience cycles of being housed and returning to the streets. This suggests a need for more consistent ongoing support and further examination of how to break these cycles.
- 40% of people said they have a serious or chronic health issue and almost a quarter are not registered with a GP
- Whilst some people have chosen to sleep in Brighton & Hove because it feels safe, safety is a real concern for many rough sleepers and 45% have been the victims of violence since becoming homeless
- 61% of people feel they have a mental health issue but only 27% are receiving support or treatment for this. Additionally, a few people expressed having made suicide attempts or having thoughts of suicide, indicating the severity of risk of untreated mental health.
- Day centres and the library are really relied on and valued by rough sleepers
- There is a real demand for more weekend services and many suggestions for additional services that would be useful
- Unsurprisingly, the main things that people want help with are support and housing. However, the availability of housing is a concern for rough sleepers, as is the difficulty in navigating housing systems and finding landlords who will house them
- The desires that people expressed for the future are much the same as many people: wanting somewhere to live, stability, a family, a job.