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INSTITUTE FOR SOCIETY, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Getting Sorted Out: Vulnerabilities, Resilience, and Homelessness

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Distinguished Speaker Lecture

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Collaborators

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Getting Sorted Out in East London

➢ "Getting sorted out" I quickly realized reflects a complex process with important histories and anticipated futures

➢ It is a phrase used commonly in the UK, and particularly so, in my view, when it comes to important decisions and the lead-up to them

➢ "Getting sorted out" speaks to a place, a state of mind, a coming to terms, and a hoped-for new beginning

Quotes

➢ "If it weren't for them I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be sorting myself out."

➢ "And then they said to me, well, uhm, we're going to let you leave, keep yourself together and if you want you can come back in. So they gave me the trust to go sort myself out so."

➢ "My Gran has the same thing as me. It's all sorted out for her by medication but then there's me, my medication doesn't sort me out."

➢ "My Mom and Dad were big drinkers. That sort of put a blocks on everything because if I wanted to do something they'd always be too drunk to sort it out."

➢ "They want to get you somewhere where you can rest and sort your head out, although some of the people here are quite difficult."

➢ "She was just going to check up a little bit and said if you come back in an hour or so we'll see if we can sort you out."

Research Pathways

- ➢ **This study was initiated in 1999 though not thought of until 2006**
  - ➢ USAF Prevention Conference, Atlanta
  - ➢ Focus on building community capacity to support military families
- ➢ **Mancini and Milroy (RAF Program Chief) focused on vulnerabilities and resilience**
  - ➢ Ongoing conversations on prevention and intervention
  - ➢ Focused on homeless ex-service members
    - ➢ Initially at programmatic level
    - ➢ Eventually at investigative level
  - ➢ Decision that the conversation needed to change
    - ➢ Current research planned in late 2007 and early 2008
    - ➢ Research implemented with funding from the Dean's Research Fellowship Program, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech

Places, Texts, and Meaning

➢ "It is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. Every place has an excess of meaning beyond what can be seen or understood at any one time" (p. 17).

➢ Philip Sheldrake (2001). *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

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Stepney, East London

➤ Then and now, East London (East End) is where immigrants and others often locate to begin new lives, with the security of knowing they are with many others like themselves. The occupants of East London have changed: a church building became a synagogue which has now become a mosque. It is a place of transition.

➤ *East London Hostel* reflects the past and present of East London: Transition, searching, belonging, and getting sorted out. It is a fitting place for *getting sorted out*.

East London Hostel

East London Hostel

Conclusions

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➢ *Vulnerability* and *Resilience* are companions

➢ *Fragility* permeates early life and adult life

➢ *Living rough* begins years prior to experiencing life in the street or in a park

➢ *Relationships*, *Connections*, and *Networks* are primary elements in getting sorted out

➢ *Community* is a force for intervention and prevention

➢ East London Hostel is a *Staging Area* for getting sorted out and for staying sorted out

Study Purposes

➤ **Understand the ecology of homelessness**

➤ **Explore developmental antecedents and consequences, particularly in family life**

➤ **Chart social connections and relationship functions**

➤ **Identify individual and network vulnerabilities and resilience**

➤ **Contribute to human development theorizing**

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Theoretical Underpinnings

➤ **Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). Their view of human development and of communities includes belief that we fail to account for both needs AND assets, and for vulnerabilities AND resilience.**

➤ **Bronfenbrenner (1979). His contribution to understanding human development includes specifying layers and contexts, and more importantly, the intersections of these layers and contexts.**

➤ **Weiss (1974), and Cohen, Underwood, and Gottlieb (2000). Their guidance exhorts us to conceptualize relationships as having multiple functions, purposes, and outcomes.**

➤ **Mancini, Bowen, and Martin (2005); Mancini and Bowen (2009). Our own work explores social organization (community capacity, social capital, and formal and informal networks) as a lens for understanding contextual influences on individuals and families.**

➤ **Milroy (2009). He explores how homeless men transform their lives.**
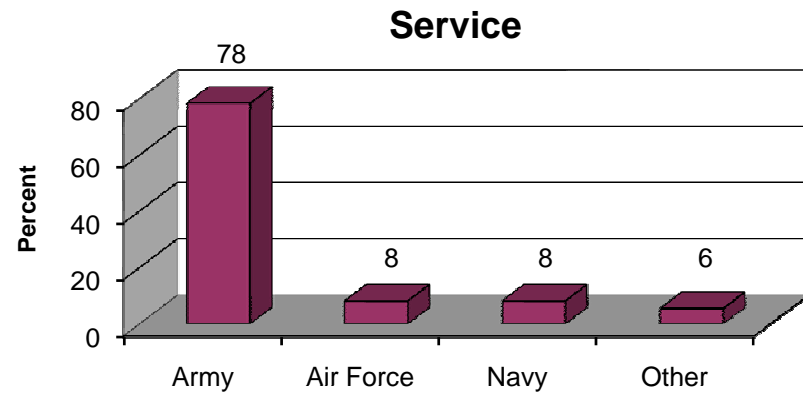
Concepts and Definitions

➢ **Resilience:** A dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.

➢ **Vulnerabilities:** Experiences, situations, or characteristics that expose a person to additional negative experiences and results.

➢ **Fragile:** A situation or condition that is tenuous, easily changed, weakened, or broken.

➢ **Networks:** Collections of individuals who are linked; they may be known for coalescing around a certain purpose; formal networks are organization-related, such as social services while others are informal and occur among friends, neighbors, and associates.

➢ **Social Provisions:** Functions (results) of relationships, that is, what they provide to individuals.

➢ **Community Capacity:** The sentiments of shared responsibility, as well as the behaviors of collective competence, that describe individuals and groups in a community.

➢ **Getting Sorted Out:** The process of constructing a new pathway for everyday life, that includes taking stock of the past, making new commitments to self and others, and changing a trajectory that has suppressed resilience and elevated vulnerabilities.

Study Methods

➢ Sample (n=37) comprised of volunteers residing in a hostel for homeless Veterans in the UK (East London Hostel); represents 70% of hostel residents; paid 10 GBP for participation.

➢ Brief structured surveys and face-to-face interviews conducted within hostel, and one on the corner of White Horse Road and Salmon Lane. Interviews recorded and transcribed.

➢ Study conducted on 6 consecutive days/evenings with residents and with 10 East London Hostel staff.

➢ Survey information analyzed with SPSS; narrative information analyzed with ATLAS.ti. Note: Thus far ATLAS.ti mainly used for general understanding (comment and memo functions) rather than in-depth coding and cross-classifications.

Sample Characteristics

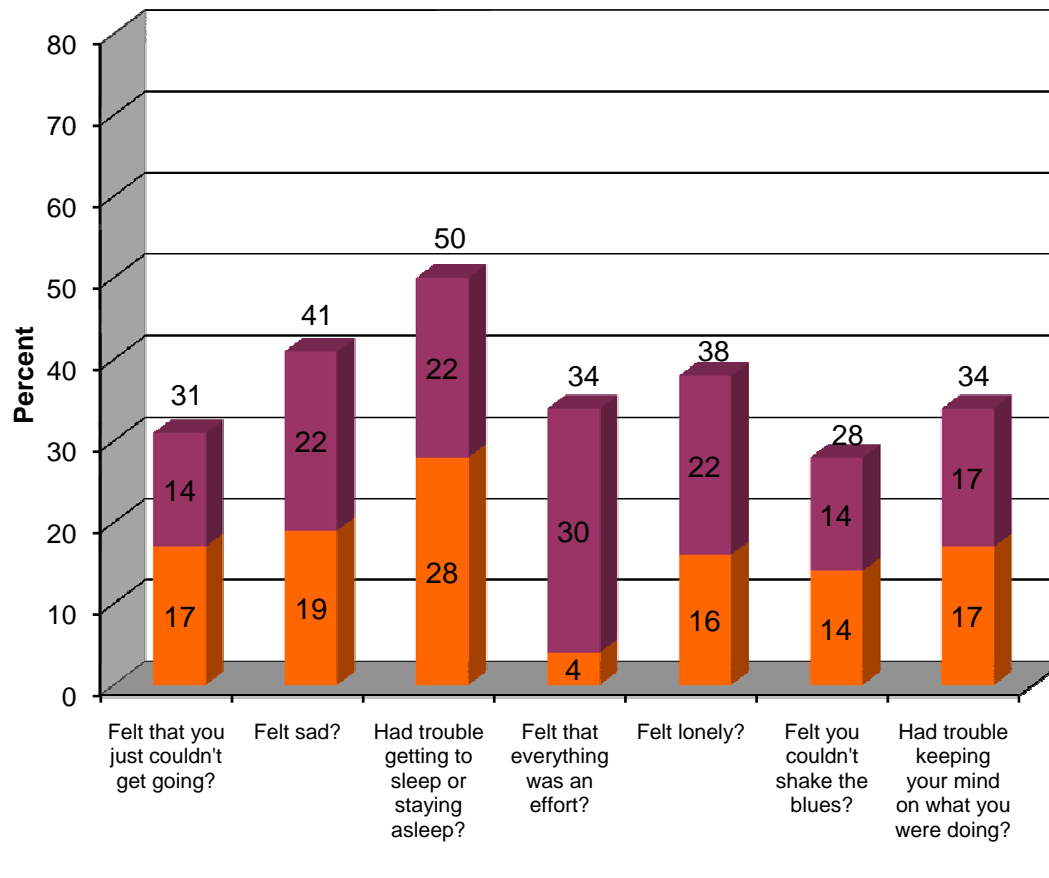| Variable	M	SD	n
Age (years)	41.7	13.0	37
Lived rough past year (months)	2.8	3.5	35
Time at hostel (months)	9.6	8.9	37

Health

Service

Descriptive Survey Results

➢ **Depressive Symptoms (CES-D). Provides window into manifestations that may impede everyday life activities, including getting sorted out (Mirowsky & Ross, 1992).**

➢ **Relationship Functions (Social Provisions Scale). Provides insight into the breadth and intensity of interpersonal relationships, and networks (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).**

➢ **Internal/External Orientation (Jessor scale, four first-person items). Provides insight into person's view of what they can control in their lives; significant for understanding transitions (Jessor et al., 1968).**
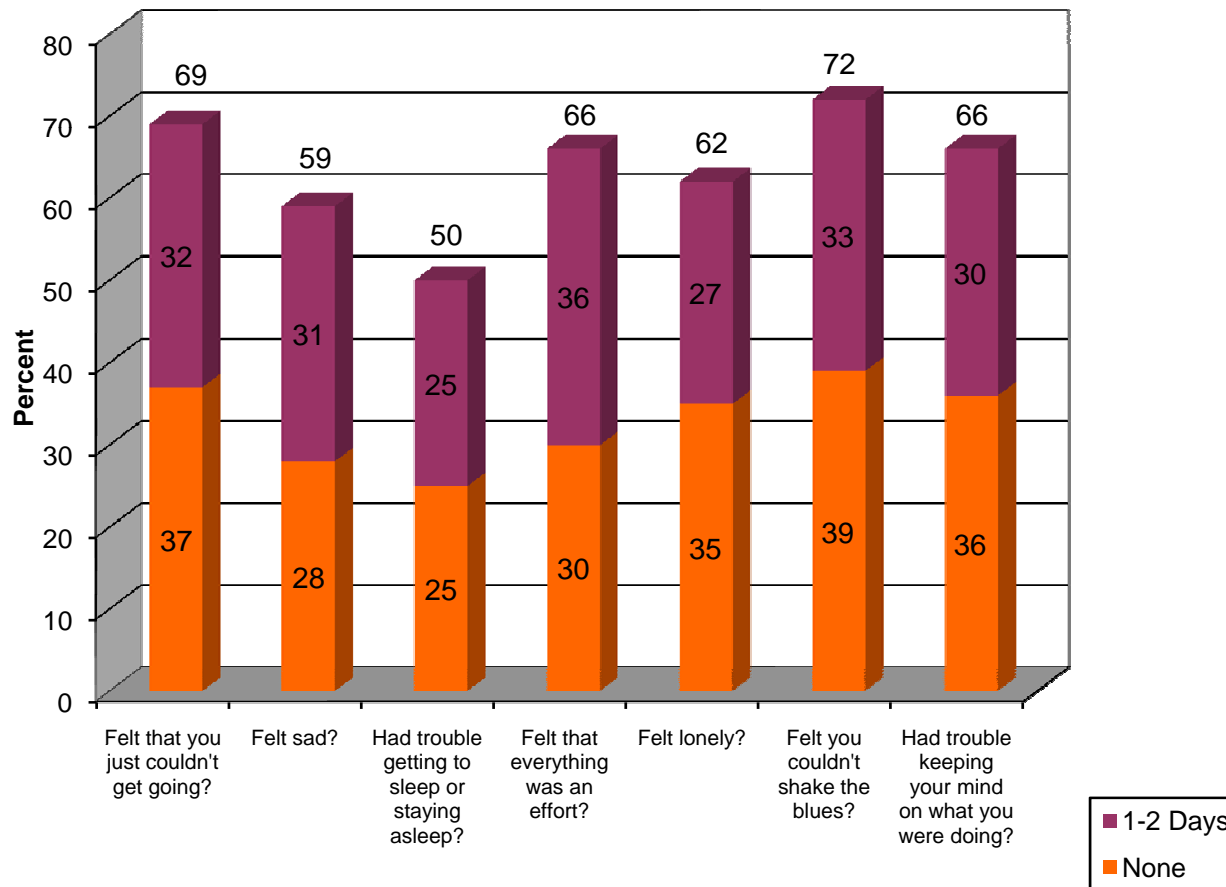
Depressive Symptoms Results

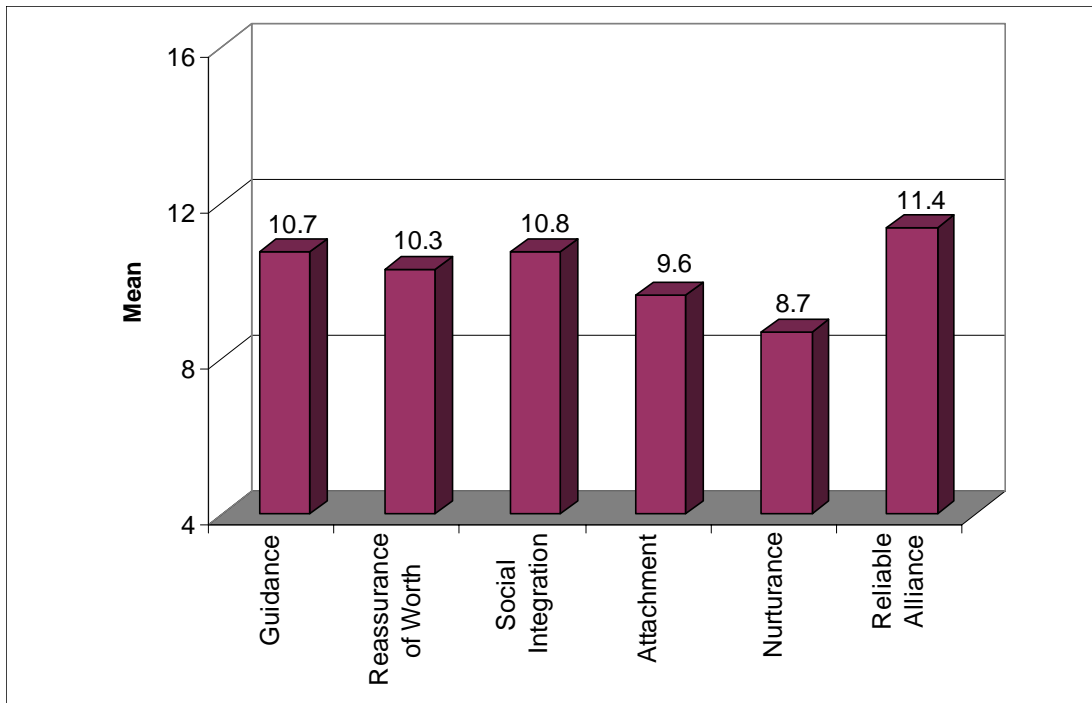**Percent Depressed Less Than Three Days/week**

Depressive Symptoms Results

➢ Areas of greater challenges for everyday functioning pertain to "feeling that everything is an effort", "feeling sad", "having trouble getting or staying asleep", and "feeling lonely". (percent indicating 5-7 days per week of symptom, ranging from 22% to 30%)

➢ Three of four have at least 1-2 days of "trouble getting to or staying asleep".

➢ Almost 40% report no difficulty "shaking the blues".

➢ A little more than one-third report no difficulty " feeling they couldn't get going", "feeling lonely", or "having trouble keeping their mind on what they were doing".

Social Provision Sub-Scales: Sample Items

➢ *Guidance*: There is no one I can turn to for guidance in times of stress.

➢ *Reassurance of Worth*: There are people who admire my talents and abilities.

➢ *Social Integration*: I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs.

➢ *Attachment*: I feel that I do not have close personal relationships with other people.

➢ *Nurturance*: I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person.

➢ *Reliable Alliance*: If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance.

Social Provisions Results

Mean Scores on Social Provision Subscales

Chart showing mean scores with vertical axis labeled "Mean" ranging from 4 to 16:
- Guidance: 10.7
- Reassurance of Worth: 10.3
- Social Integration: 10.8
- Attachment: 9.6
- Nurturance: 8.7
- Reliable Alliance: 11.4

➢ Note: For each of 24 items respondents were asked if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

➢ Subscale totals range from 4.0 to 16.0

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Relationship Functions Results

- ➤ **Across the six sub-scales relatively lower scores on Nurturance and Attachment**
  - ➤ *Nurturance* reflects roles a person would have as in caring for a child or a dependent adult; also the feeling of being needed in that relationship.
  - ➤ *Attachment* reflects a more generalized sense of intimacy and emotional connections/security.
- ➤ **Relatively higher scores on Reliable Alliance**
  - ➤ *Reliable Alliance* reflects having relationships in which people provide tangible support and instrumental assistance.
- ➤ **Nurturance significantly different from Guidance, Social Integration, and Reliable Alliance**
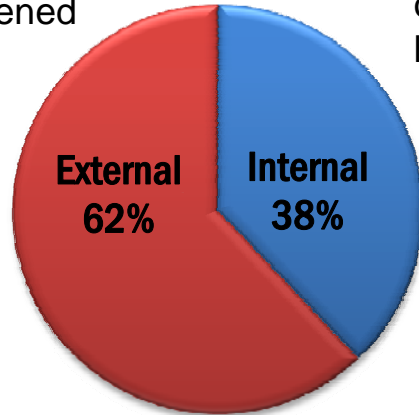
Locus of Control Measure

➤ **Choose one response from each of the four pairs of items:**

  ➤ Some of the good and some of the bad things in my life have happened by chance <u>OR</u> *What's happened to me has been my own doing*.

  ➤ *When I make plans I am almost certain that I can make them work* <u>OR</u> I have normally found that what is going to happen will happen regardless of my plans.

  ➤ I like to do things on the spur of the moment <u>OR</u> *I prefer to have things all planned out in advance.*

  ➤ Often I seem to have little influence over what other people believe <u>OR</u> *When I am right, I can usually convince others*.

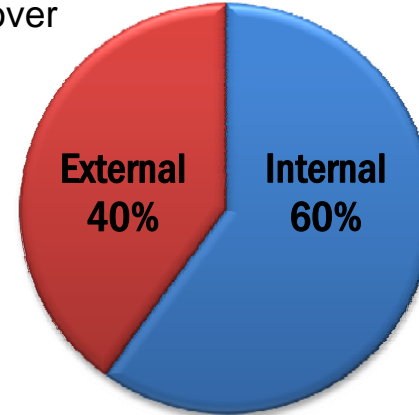 ➤ Note: Internally-oriented choices in *italics*.

Locus of Control

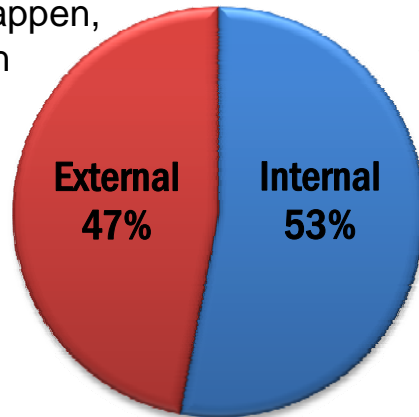
External: Things have happened by chance

Internal: I own what's happened

External 62% Internal 38%

External: Little influence over others

Internal: I convince others

External 40% Internal 60%

External: What's going to happen, will happen

Internal: I make plans work

External 47% Internal 53%

External: Do things spur of moment

Internal: I prefer to plan

External 41% Internal 59%

Control Orientation Results

➢ **Of the four pairs of items, only with regard to contrasting things "happening by chance" v. things happening of "my own doing", is the sample more externally-oriented.**

➢ **Otherwise reports indicate internal orientations.**

Interview Questions and Results

➢ *Everyday Life*: What is a typical day like for you in London? What do you do, where do you go, what people are you with?

➢ *Family*: (a) Think back to when you were a child and a teenager. What sticks out in your mind? Are there events you remember that were especially troubling and that you have remembered ever since? (b) Think back to when you first started living rough. How close did you feel to members of your family? Any particular difficulties? (c) Now let's focus on the present and your contact with family members. How much contact do you have and do you feel close to family members? Are there particular concerns you presently have?

➢ *Resilience*: Some people talk about what it takes to make it through the day. What or who helps you make it? What do you do to help yourself make it though the day? If you were to say, "I've had a great day, " what would that mean?

➢ *Connections*: (a) Who are the important people in your life? Why are they important? (b) What about charities, agencies , and other organizations? Which ones are helpful to you? What do you get from that makes them helpful?

➢ Note: Six respondents 'data are highlighted for the following chart of resilience and vulnerabilities.

Resilience and Vulnerabilities

Resilience Markers

- Positive memories of childhood
- Positive family connections now; sense of legacy
- History of occupational success
- Independent living track
- Management of mental illness and alcohol use
- Active friendships
- Connections with formal support systems

Vulnerabilities Markers

- Family disruptions, past and present
- Alcoholism in family of origin and in own life
- Violence in family and community
- Unresolved interpersonal conflicts
- Social isolation/exclusion
- Vague sense of future

- Note: To properly view the following slide you will need to be in the slide show. Then click on the first numeral for each case number for quantitative information (click again to leave it), then click on the second numeral for accompanying narrative information. You must leave the first digit before proceeding to the second digit. The information on the slide will not print; it will not be readable in other than the slide show function.

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Cross-Classifying Resilience and Vulnerabilities

➢ **The following grid is an initial attempt to map the nexus of resilience and vulnerabilities.**

➢ **We begin with data on six respondents, pointing to survey data information and selected quotes from their interviews.**

➢ **We eventually hope to develop a typology of resilience and vulnerabilities.**

Resilience and Vulnerabilities

10

12

04

33

16

15

Vulnerability

Resilience

General and Preliminary Themes

➢ **Our mining of these data so far has uncovered a number of themes and issues, raised more questions than answers, and leads to untold numbers of hypotheses and outright conjecture. I discuss just a few of them in some detail but list other points on the horizon of our analyses and discussion.**

Understanding Living Rough

➢ "Rough sleeping" is a term used to describe living on the streets, in parks or in stairwells, or anyplace outside of a dwelling.

➢ For some men in our sample, rough sleeping and the disconnections it represents (from friends, relatives, employment, as examples) is but a present and visible example of other times in their lives when they have been in unstable , unpredictable situations

  ➢ Examples: Dad in prison; watching Mom get beat up; both parents alcoholics; experiencing hunger; Father disappearing one night; repeated beatings both as a child and as an adult.

  ➢ In effect, disrupted development (example of respondent who maintained he had a normal childhood and then described alcoholism, abuse, and abandonment in his family, as well as substantial neighborhood violence)

Understanding a Context of Getting Sorted Out

➢ Life in East London Hostel as unique

- ➢ Not easy to be admitted and not easy to be retained
- ➢ Promotes social inclusion
- ➢ Both caring and confrontational
- ➢ Immediately shows value for the person
- ➢ Provides support and expects responsibility
- ➢ Promotes informal support among Veterans
- ➢ Provides training and educational opportunities
- ➢ Individualized according to needs
- ➢ Prepares individuals for next steps; resource development
- ➢ Sustains involvement with former residents

Understanding Resilience

- ➤ Jason is an avid reader and intentionally focuses on improving his values and having positive beliefs; he considers himself very spiritual

- ➤ Sean was thrown out of East London Hostel several years ago for being drunk, angry, and violent. He returned five months ago, has stopped drinking and says he is committed to making something of himself.

- ➤ Dave recently "graduated" from East London Hostel and has his own flat. In his own words, "I mean to see me now you wouldn't have recognized me two years ago."

- ➤ Chris was living in a park and was a heavy drinker. What pushed him to stop drinking was a return to the park while at the hostel: "I sat there and I thought I couldn't go back to this. I couldn't go back to being like this." It took him seven weeks at the hostel before sleeping in his bed. "The floor felt safe to me."

- ➤ James recognizes that his continued well-being starts with consistently taking his medication prescribed for mental illness. "Because if I don't do that I find it very hard to get through the day."

Understanding Resilience

➢ Christy claims that East London Hostel is a Godsend. "You know, all I want to do is get a job and get back into work because sitting around is, you know, just sitting like tearing things apart."

➢ Michael has a history of getting into fights. He has a son he has not seen for eight months but is working with the East London Hostel social worker to prove his paternity and be a Father to his son.

➢ Adrian, now employed in the construction industry and in the process of transitioning from East London Hostel, is involved in a positive intimate relationship, and says of his life today, "Yeah, now it's completely different. One, because I like myself, but you know, I do genuinely like myself, yeah."

Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

➢ To what extent do non-normative ("rough") developmental experiences produce both vulnerabilities and resilience?

➢ How do nested and overlapping networks of family, school, neighborhood, and religious community interact in the early lives of people who are homeless?

➢ What place does loss have in the lives of the men in our sample? From a loss perspective, many have experienced multiple losses (cumulative loss) over their lives?

➢ For some homeless men transiency is a way of life, and something experienced for decades. What then are the barriers to change? What are elements that can further change?

➢ Family of origin disconnections seem common, yet they may not be dramatically different from those who never become homeless. It cautions against misattributing homelessness as cause or effect, or, for that matter, as a mediator or moderator of other issues.

Emergent Points and Unanswered Questions

➢ We have observed mainly positive network development at East London Hostel. But since we know that networks have their downsides, the question of those in the hostel environment is unanswered.

➢ In a number of cases there is evidence of being related but having no relationship. It is a sort of ambiguity that may contribute to uncertainty in family relationships. It also raises the question of the necessity of resolving family relationship issues as part of moving on to a more productive life.

➢ We will begin to examine the confluence of elements potentially contributing to homelessness in our sample. Lack of employment and having few resources is always lurking. However, personality and learned behaviors also come into play.

Places, Texts, and Meaning

➢ "It is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. Every place has an excess of meaning beyond what can be seen or understood at any one time" (p. 17).

➢ Philip Sheldrake (2001). *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

➢ And so we continue with our analysis of a community in East London that is home to homeless Veterans.

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  - Note: Pictures used with permission from East London Hostel

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