

**Negotiating new realities:  
ethnographic narratives on the impact  
of austerity on staff and service users  
of a homelessness and resettlement  
service**

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## **Declaration**

The work presented in this thesis results from research undertaken by Ms Angela Daly of Edge Hill University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

**Angela Daly**

## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to my parents

Philomena Daly (née Dybell) and Patrick Daly

## **Abstract**

This thesis identifies the multiple ways austerity and welfare reform were experienced by staff and service users of a homelessness and resettlement service from 2011 to 2014. The research employs an ethnographic narrative and participatory methodology drawing on a critical feminist research paradigm. It draws on equality theory in research and community development theory in social action to offer a model of participatory equality studies as a way of working for social justice (Bourdieu, 1997; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005). Experiences and change in the lives of vulnerable people is examined through a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (May, Brown, Cooper and Brill, 2009) and co-researcher processes (Maguire, 1987; Baker et al., 2004). The research offers ethnographies of austerity at local level that document individual and organisational experiences, as workers and service-users negotiate significant change, within a broader neo-liberal context (Bourdieu, 1977; Okely, 2012).

Qualitative data were collected at key points over four years. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted; ten with senior management and policy staff, eight with front line services staff, and ten with service-users. Two ex-service users acted as co-researchers for a phase of the research focused on the lived experiences of service users. Team meetings were observed that provided reflective accounts of collective and organisational responses to a rapidly changing context. Two external and one internal public engagement events provided a space for the research findings to be contributed to a wider public debate on austerity. Findings are contextualized in a review of emerging critical literature on the impacts of austerity measures in Britain.

This thesis makes a contribution, as a critical ethnographic study of multiple and complex new realities for staff and services users as they contend with and understand changes in welfare and endeavour to negotiate changing discourses on the role and relationships between local authorities, individuals and charities. It reveals significant contributions and resilience in the day to day lives of service

users, but also intense pressures on people as they 'come up for review' and the personal impact of negative community, media and officials attitudes to vulnerability by revealing the lived experiences of austerity. Finally, seven key themes are identified that could be offered as a wider contribution to a commentary of austerity from a local level and are suggestive of an emerging common story in the caring services.

#### Keywords

Austerity, welfare reform, ethnographic narratives, homelessness and resettlement services, England

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction: ethnographies of austerity**

### **Introduction and context of the research**

This research was conducted during a period of substantial welfare reform in the UK. In 2010, the Coalition government's response to the economic deficit created a challenging context for organisations who work with some of the most vulnerable people in society. The site of this research was within a large charity that is a major service provider and employer offering a range of services for children and adults. It employs around 800 staff and 400 volunteers across an Archdiocese and surrounding areas in the North of England (The Charity, 2009). For this study, a small unit, providing homelessness and resettlement services within the charity, became a local level site in which to investigate the experiences of austerity and welfare reform as understood by staff and service-users. Using ethnographic and participatory processes data were collected from 2011 to 2014.

The Coalition Government's swift policy action and severe fiscal cuts in 2010 appeared to create a hiatus that left organisations and local authorities struggling to respond to new realities of significantly reduced funding for services, loss of projects and personnel, and a changed welfare system that both staff and service-users were unable to negotiate (Dodds, 2010; Homeless Link, 2011). Public sector funding was significantly reduced; welfare and benefits provision had been curtailed; and the localism agenda shifted the focus of partnership between local authorities and the community and voluntary sector. New Labour's welfare policies had led the way towards contracted out public services and shift of responsibility for provision from local authorities to the voluntary sector. The Coalition government introduced the notion of the 'Big Society', as a feature of austerity policy that suggested a significant roll-back of state responsibility for welfare and public services (Bunyan, 2012). The

capacities of the community and voluntary sector to form new ways of working across new relationships were, and continue to be, tested in this rapidly changing context (Vickery, 2013).

Statutory duties were redefined by the Welfare Reform Bill 2010 which was subsequently passed by Royal Assent in April 2012. Welfare services not protected by statutory duty included services for single homeless people and resettlement services (Bird, 2010; Bowpitt et al., 2011; Homeless Link, 2011; McDonagh, 2011). A lack of statutory duty for specified vulnerable groups, plus other punitive measures such as the so-called 'bedroom tax' had particular impacts on single vulnerable people, disabled people and those who were emerging from crisis homelessness support. Local authorities in the most deprived areas bore the greatest reductions in public sector funding (Hastings et al., 2012). Organisations felt an immediate impact on their ability to offer services due to reductions of project funding under the Supporting People funding strand and a subsequent significant impact on staffing levels. Community and voluntary sector organisations offering housing and resettlement support services faced an uncertain future with seventy five projects closing nationally by March 2011 (Homeless Link, 2011). National and local statistics showed that homelessness is increasing and expected to increase further, with regional disparities emerging as changes to Local Housing Allowance, accommodation size criteria for housing benefits and a cap to benefits introduced by Universal Credit restrict geographic or neighbourhood choice of abode (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2011; Liverpool City Council, 2011). As shifting populations seeking more affordable housing, considerable disruption was expected in people's lives as changes to Local Housing Allowances were announced (Homeless Link, 2012a).

It was in this context that the focus of the study arose during an initial meeting in 2010 between the researcher and a Trustee of the charity. Discussions arose about a perceived sense of crisis and a desire to understand 'new realities' and

possible implications of welfare reform and funding cuts as austerity measures introduced by the Coalition Government were rolled out (Dodds, 2010). There was a sense that the government had relinquished responsibility for supporting people with complex vulnerabilities, particularly in the area of homelessness support and resettlement services (Bird, 2010). In 2009, the charity derived 87% of its funds locally; 53% from one Local Authority (The Charity, 2009). Trustees of the charity, expressed concern at this state of affairs both from a social justice point of view and as it affected its own services and people it supported (Kelly, 2010).

The Trustees of the charity were keen to access research that would 'write the commentary' of the immediate impact on vulnerable people and to anticipate any longer term impact of the cuts and policy changes (Dodds, 2010). The researcher suggested a role for local level research as a space to observe, capture and make sense of experiences of austerity from the perspectives of staff and service users. In addition, contemporary research, it was posed, would support the organisation's mission to advocate on behalf of those they seek to support. This proposal was discussed with the director of studies as a focus for the substantive research as a Ph.D. level study. We discussed the value of local studies in making a contribution to a broader commentary of austerity. The director of studies suggested the underpinning of the researcher's experience in participatory research and equality studies would be relevant and useful for examining any insider researcher dilemmas that might arise. He also suggested the timeliness of conducting research over time as funding cuts and welfare reforms were implemented would be worthwhile. Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University under its Research Ethics Framework in 2010.

Further to a meeting with the chief executive of the charity, a proposal for research was discussed that could contribute evidence and a 'watching brief' on welfare reform and stories of people's lives as austerity measures rolled out (Pitt,

2010). This would be used to inform the advocacy work of the organisation. The researcher drew up a proposal to research and monitor effects of cuts in public spending and re-orientation of welfare policy as specific details and local arrangements emerged during 2011 and 2012. Naming the organisation in research outputs including the documentation for submission as Ph.D. was discussed with the chief executive and all respondents at the start of the project. This was important because the charity wanted to be engaged in the research as part of informing its advocacy work. In addition to the University's ethical approval, a research ethics and code of practice was developed between the organisation and the researcher in January 2011 (see Appendix 1). After further discussion with the director of studies at the university, the research proposal was accepted by the charity's Governing Body in February 2011 and was extended to gather further data in 2013 and 2014. Ethical considerations were important at all stages of this research and approaches to ethics are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3: Methodology and Chapter 6: Doing research together.

The concept of research as a watching brief was realised through the use of ethnographic narrative methods that derived at local level could be illustrative of wider impacts (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bold, 2012; Colley, 2012; Okely, 2012). Informed by feminist research approaches and equality studies the research was designed to examine inequalities and to surface local knowledge and perspectives from those least likely to be heard (Baker et al., 2004). Ethnographic narratives allowed voices of staff and service users of the small homelessness and resettlement service to be foregrounded in the research (Maguire, 1987). Participatory methods including the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, an asset based approach to analysing poverty developed by Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty, were used to enable lived experiences of change to be authentically captured as austerity measures were rolled out (May et al. 2009). The positionality of insider researcher and issues of power were openly acknowledged as important for building trust and was negotiated throughout the project (Freire, 1972; Maguire, 1987; McFarlane, 2009; Okely, 2012).

The participation and experiences of service-users was central to this study as they negotiated new realities in their lives brought about by welfare reform and funding cuts. The sense of crisis that emerged as welfare and funding changes impacted locally, and a desire to document, witness and understand what was happening, motivated the development of this research. The project, negotiated between the Trustees and researcher, draws on the researcher's way of working with equality studies perspective that is positioned within a transformative-emancipatory philosophy of research (Mertens, 2003; Baker et al. 2004). It endeavours to use feminist participatory research approaches to offer an educative and emancipatory space for unheard voices to emerge and be heard as a narrative of austerity in England today (Freire 1972; Maguire, 1987; Webster and Mertova, 2007; Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Okely, 2012).

Critical perspectives on austerity will be the focus of the literature review in Chapter 2. An updated review of policy and a timeline for the period of the research will also be included. Studies reviewed will include contemporary research on impacts of funding cuts, welfare reforms and changes to benefits affecting homeless people and a review of the status of resettlement services for those at risk of homelessness (Homeless Link, 2015).

## **Research aim, purpose, themes and questions**

### **Research aim**

As described above, the aim of the research arose out of discussions between the researcher and a Trustee of the charity. The main aim of the project was put simply:

- To examine how austerity is understood and experienced at local level.

The processes of carrying out the research offered a space for staff to reflect on ways it may be possible to 'negotiate new realities' that the organisation and



service users may experience in the context of welfare reform (Dodds, 2010) and to use findings from the research to express a concerned voice for social justice.

The research project's purpose then was two-fold:

- To understand lived experiences of cuts to public services and welfare reform as it happened.
- To advocate for social justice on behalf of the groups most adversely affected by changes.

These two purposes guided the study and findings were shared in the public domain at various points (see Appendix 9 for examples of public engagement and publications arising from this research).

### **Overall research question**

To achieve the stated aim of the research and to keep its purposes in mind during the life of the project additional research questions were developed. The overall research question, initially, was straightforward, and focussed on the experiences of service-users. As the research commenced, it was clear that changes within the organisation and perspectives of staff are also central to stories of the impact of austerity and needed to be documented, and the research question was refined to reflect this (Colley, 2012; Benozzo and Colley, 2012; Bunyan, 2012). That staff experiences were to be included in the research was subject to some initial resistance from some sections of the management of the organisation as will be explored later in the section on ethics and in Chapter 4: The workers' stories.

Overall research question:

1. How are funding cuts and welfare reforms understood and experienced by service-users and staff of the homelessness and resettlement services unit, within the charity?

## **Phases, themes and additional research questions**

To manage the research project, three phases of data collection were envisaged and associated research questions developed. These phases were broadly operational and chronological. However, the phases were also conceptualised as inter-linked periods of change, relating to the envisaged timeline of welfare reform and the roll out of the cuts to public services (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010). Themes of change and related questions could be iteratively revisited during the envisaged period of data collection. Phases, themes and research questions are outlined below:

### **Phase 1: Capturing Change (January 2011-December 2011)**

- i. What are the major policy and funding reforms that have a bearing on the services provided by the homelessness and resettlement services?
- ii. How are these policies understood by staff and service users?
- iii. What may be the impact of these on services?
- iv. How are these changes experienced by staff and service users?

### **Phase 2: Experiencing Change (May 2011 –January 2012; and July-August 2014)**

- v. What are the lived experiences of people accessing homelessness and resettlement services?
- vi. What is the impact of welfare reform and reduction in public funding on service users of the resettlement services?
- vii. How are voices of service-users included in the research and subsequent advocacy?

### **Phase 3: Influencing change (December 2011 – December 2014)**

- viii. In what ways does the charity respond to external and internal change?
- ix. In what ways can research findings contribute to advocacy?
- x. What are the limits and possibilities of working through a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work?

It will be noted that research questions vii and x raise methodological questions by implying the importance of participation in the design of this research. Research question x was more emergent, arising out of the researcher's deliberations on the process and value of participatory-transformative research in the context of this research project (Mertens, 2003; Baker et al., 2004). Findings relating to these methodological research questions will be returned to in Chapter 6: Doing research together and Chapter 8: Conclusion.

### **An ethnographic approach**

This research takes the form of an ethnographic study in order to address the stated research questions and to explore, through narratives, the ways in which funding cuts and welfare reforms are understood and experienced by service-users and staff (Okely, 1994; Bold, 2012).

As an ethnographic study it elicits and interprets narratives of lived experiences using interviews with service users, team meeting discussions and workshops as sites for research activity. Interviews and participant observation were used as the predominant ethnographic methods for data collection (Okely, 2012). Broadly participatory, the research was enriched by working with co-researchers with experiences of homelessness; 'ordinary actors' in the construction of new knowledge (Schostak and Schostak, 2008).

### **Role of theory in the research**

The methodological choices taken for this research have been informed by feminist theory and equality studies that position knowledge as multi-faceted and generative of multiple standpoints, and that research as praxis is a way of doing and acting in the world (Lather, 1986; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005). This study draws on a range of theoretical perspectives to define its methodological approach and to 'put theory to work' in engagement with data. Feminist theories of knowledge and power underpin the ethnographic methodology of this research. Participatory research relations can create unique

for space for unheard voices to emerge. Research approaches that informed this work include Maguire's feminist participatory study with Mexican women on their experience of domestic violence (Maguire, 1987). Okley's anthropological practice in fieldwork informed the act of collection of ethnographic narratives (Okley, 1994). Equality as a key concern for Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (Baker et al. 2004) informed the importance of linking equality theory and action in social research. Bourdieu's theories of power in social and community practice assist in framing and understand the changing contexts for staff and service-users as stories of spaces of change (Bourdieu, 1977). These resonate with the motivation for and way of working in this study.

### **Ethnographic data collection methods and contexts**

Ethnographic methods of interviews and a variant of participant observation are the predominant method used (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Okely, 2012). An initial e-survey with staff was offered with a follow up invitation to participate in interviews. In summary: twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were completed with sixteen staff and ten service users between 2011 and 2014. Team meetings were observed and two co-research team meetings were conducted as part of the research. Three workshops were held with two public audiences and one internal audience of trustees. Further detail of how data collection activity links with phases of the research will be provided in Chapter 3: Methodology.

To achieve the aim of this study, the research employed participatory approaches to engage with respondents during the lifetime of the project. As the research sought to capture experiences of change from the perspectives of service users, staff and service providers, an inclusive approach to enable participation in the research in data collection, analysis, and in sharing findings was adopted. Initially the research involved reviewing and discussing the impact of local authority cuts and welfare policy changes with staff and service users. Capturing and analysing the experiences of service-users, *with* service-users

were central to the project. From May 2011 a co-research team comprising the researcher and two co-researchers who have direct experience of homelessness was brought together to gather and analyse data. Emerging findings were discussed with co-researchers and staff and an advisory group was set up to support the development of the project.

### **Research Ethics**

As mentioned earlier, the University signed off ethical approval for the research. The researcher, the director of studies and staff in the charity discussed ethical approaches to the research at several points and outlined an agreed ethics protocol at the start of the project. The ethics protocol used as a starting point the mission statement of the charity (The Charity, 2000) and the BERA guidelines for Good Practice in Educational Research Writing (British Educational Research Association, 2004). A co-researcher group was established at the beginning of the project and was comprised of two service users who had experience of homelessness and the researcher. This group specifically worked together on interviewing service-users in 2011. Co-researchers discussed and considered ways of working and ethical approaches including writing an ethics protocol together for interviewing service users empathically and how to work together as a team. This built on the ethics protocol signed off by the chief executive officer of the organisation. In addition an advisory group was formed to discuss emerging findings of each stage of the research and to provide a reflective account to the Trustees as part of each report. This group included several staff, one Trustee, the chief executive officer, two service users, two external stakeholders and the director of studies from the university. Sharing the research findings with the advisory group and the homelessness and resettlement service provided reflective stages of further analysis. This ethical deliberation throughout the project complimented the more formal research ethics protocols developed with the chief executive officer and the ethics committee procedures at the university.

## **Framework for analysis**

A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach was adapted for the fieldwork to draw together experiences of service-users and to provide a framework for analysis (May et al., 2009). Briefly, a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach is a methodology developed in the global south and used more recently in the global north to examine people's lived experiences of poverty (Hocking, 2003). As a participatory methodology it enables individuals and groups to explore five areas of assets held by people themselves and examines how shocks and resilience hinder or build sustainable livelihoods (May et al., 2009). Assets are identified as the following: human assets including health and well-being; social assets including social and support organisations; physical assets including housing; public assets including community resources and services; and financial assets including access to income and benefits

The rationale for this approach is that service users depend on the charity in one part of their lives: a sustainable livelihoods approach explores many assets in the whole of a person or family's life and will give a rich picture of what is happening to people from 2011 to 2014. Approaches to analysis and writing up will be discussed further in the Chapter 3: Methodology.

## **Possibilities and limits of small scale equality studies**

Emerging ethnographic narratives from this study resonate with the changing nature of welfare in the UK. Framed as an equality study concerned with social justice, the narratives connect lives to social policy. The research focussed on the implications of welfare reform and funding cuts and the ensuing process of change at organisational level from the perspectives of service users and staff. Changing contexts for staff and service users within a small homelessness and resettlement service are linked to, and illustrative of, broader issues of neoliberalism and austerity in welfare (Bourdieu et al., 1999; Stuckler and Basu, 2013).

There are limits to the extent small scale research can define the full impact of structural socio-economic changes. While this study cannot offer a full assessment of the impact of austerity, it can offer a set of narratives of personal and organisational experiences under conditions of austerity that may be indicative of broader realities brought about by a changed welfare context.

The experience of conducting this research has raised further issues for consideration, such as to what extent can participatory approaches to research in England offer an emancipatory and transformative space for change or lay claim to a radical discourse as part of a broader equality movement (Baker, 2003). This research may not answer that fully, but it will make a contribution by providing a reflective account on the extent to which the original purposes of this research were fulfilled; that is to understand experiences of austerity and to use the research to advocate for social justice. This study is one of many conducted at a local level, and will add to an emerging body of studies of the impact of austerity on the caring services (Athwal, Brill, Chesters and Quiggin, 2011; Nichols, 2011; Benozzo and Colley, 2012; Daly, Anderson, O'Driscoll and Pitt, 2012; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015).

This research project does not claim to be a fully participatory research project. However, it is informed by the researcher's standpoint of what constitutes knowledge and truths in research, and a consideration of the extent to which people engaged in social research projects have a voice. Thus, it was important to the researcher that this project sought to capture experiences of change from the perspectives of service users and service providers. To achieve this, an inclusive and collaborative approach to enable participation in the research in data collection, analysis, and in sharing findings was adopted including setting up a co-researcher group and an advisory group. Learning from this approach will be discussed further in Chapter 6: Doing research together.

The relevance and contribution of this research to a broader emergent literature on austerity will be explored in the discussion in Chapter 7: Negotiating new realities and the concluding Chapter: Writing a Commentary of Austerity.

## **Outline of chapters**

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 provide an introduction and rationale for the research, a literature and policy review, and an overview of my research philosophy and approach including an outline of ethnographic narrative methodology employed in this study. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present and discuss findings from the research as ethnographic narratives of staff and service user experience and a reflective account of doing research together. Chapter 7 provides an overall discussion of the thesis and offers seven key findings arising from the research. Finally, Chapter 8 offers a summary of the thesis and my concluding thoughts on a potential role of participatory equality studies as a contribution to the narrative of early austerity in England 2011-2015.

Excluding the appendices and references the thesis will not exceed 80,000 words as per the University's regulations.

The following subsequent chapter outlines provides the chapter title and an overview of content of each chapter.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction: Ethnographies of early austerity**

This chapter provides an introduction to and context for the research. The study was conducted from 2010 to 2015, during a time of major change in welfare policy and funding for homelessness services in England. The rationale for the study is contextualised in critical literature on experiences of austerity emerging during this period. In addition the chapter presents the motivation for the study by the researcher and the charity. Feminist research and participatory methodology forms part of the approach to this equality study as a 'watching brief' and 'a commentary of austerity' at local level. It introduces the aims and



research questions of the study and provides a brief introduction to the ethnographic narrative approach taken. It provides an outline of subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter 2: Literature and policy review**

This chapter reviews a range of literature that locates austerity policies in England as part of a broader neo-liberal context (Leitner et al., 2006; Bunyan, 2012; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Statistical data are drawn from government data on homelessness (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010). Data from community and voluntary sector organisations and charities provide detail of the effects of funding reductions on organisations and local authorities providing homelessness and resettlement services (Homeless Link, 2015).

This chapter will document the significant welfare reform and changes to welfare policy as context for the research. Timelines of national policy, local strategies and key benefit changes that impacted on homelessness services and service users from 2010 to 2015 are provided.

Key themes of alienation and crisis are evidence in emerging literature on experiences of staff and service users of homelessness and resettlement services. Three contested spaces of local neoliberalism, embodied experiences of early austerity and possibilities for working in the margins are identified from the literature. These spaces of change are returned to in discussion of the findings of this research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter outlines the philosophical and methodological approaches to the research project as an equality study (Baker et al., 2004). The research aims and objectives are provided along with how the phases of research, research questions and public engagement formed part of the iterative processes of data collection and analysis. The chapter considers how a philosophical approach to participatory research has relevance as critical praxis and potential as an

educative space for internal and external deliberation on impacts of austerity on staff and service users of homelessness and resettlement services.

A critical review of literature on of emancipatory research evaluates claims of participatory practice. A discussion on the ethical positioning and challenges of ethnographic research that adopt participatory approaches is offered in this chapter. Drawing on feminist critiques of social sciences research a rationale for qualitative methods for gathering data including narratives, observations, semi-structured interviews, and reflective workshops are is given (Lather, 1986; Maguire, 1987). This research foregrounds interactions between those involved in the research, and “from that continuous encounter, the ethnographies emerge” (Okely, 2012:125). Drawing on research theory literature, a defence of participatory research is offered that explores the meaning of the centrality of equality in research relations and the nature of its capacity to influence social change (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004).

#### **Chapter 4: The workers’ stories**

This chapter focusses on the narratives of staff experiencing organisational change in a challenging context. It examines changes in national and local policy and welfare reform specifically affecting homelessness support and resettlement services at city level since 2010. It draws on primary data to investigate the perceptions of managers and staff on their experiences of a changed and changing welfare context. The capacities of the community and voluntary sector to form new ways of working across new relationships are tested in the rapidly changing context of welfare reform (Vickery 2013). During 2011 and 2012 significant changes in funding to programmes and staffing collide with significant changes in welfare reform and criteria for benefits. This created a context of perceived crisis by managers and front-line staff struggling to support service-users and to maintain services. In follow up interviews in 2014, staff reflect on a period of adjustment in a still changing context, the nature of resistance, and ways to inform and re-interpret contexts of their work.

The chapter presents narratives of reveals uncertainty as workers contend with and understand changes in the context in which they work. Concepts of silence and breach in relations emerge as trustees and staff endeavour to negotiate 'new rules of the game' and changing discourses on the role and relationships between local authorities, individuals and charities (Bourdieu, 1977).

### **Chapter 5: The service users' stories**

This chapter illustrates the realities of people's lives who have recently experienced homelessness and who were engaged with homelessness support and resettlement services.

The first section of this chapter draws on data gathered during May to October 2011, a period when funding reductions were being implemented at local level. A participatory research approach was used to gather data including working with two co-researchers; two people who have direct experiences of homelessness. A focus group discussion was held with the service-user forum to introduce the research. Interviews were conducted with five service users individually. In addition, interviews were conducted with support workers. A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach was adapted to provide a framework for the research questions, analysis and reporting (May et al. 2009). Life journey narratives illustrate the extent that interconnected five areas of 'assets' (financial, social, human, physical and public assets) may support sustainable livelihoods of vulnerable adults.

The second section of this chapter develops thematic narratives of 'coming up for review'; experiences of the new realities of welfare reform and benefits process at individual level. In 2014 data were collected through interviews with five individuals on their experiences of negotiating the benefit system. Findings reveal significant contributions and resilience in the day to day lives of service users, but also intense pressures on people as they manage during a period of resettlement post crises and the personal impact of negative attitudes to poverty and vulnerability.

## **Chapter 6: Doing research together**

This chapter considers the possibilities of working through a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work (Mertens, 2003; Baker et al. 2004; Ledwith and Springett, 2010). The chapter outlines a suggested model of a way of working in participatory equality studies that draws on community development and equality theory in research relations. It reflects on the extent to which a negotiated 'insider' research project can inform or transform the contexts in which staff attempt at different levels to articulate and advocate for social justice in the public sphere. It draws out principles of research relations and an assessment of the extent to which participatory research may lay claim to a radical or emancipatory discourse as a space for change.

The centrality of equality in emancipatory research relations is examined through the experience of this research. My experience suggests that participatory research is beyond method (Maguire, 1987; Lynch, 1999). Co-research practice is examined through dimensions of equality in research relations (Baker et al., 2004).

## **Chapter 7: Negotiating new realities**

This chapter presents and discusses the overall findings and key messages of the research. It assesses the implications of a shifting policy context on the experiences of staff and service users within a broader neo-liberal context (Bourdieu et al., 1999; Colley, 2012). The three contested and constrained spaces derived from the literature review of local experiences of neoliberalism, embodied experiences of austerity and possibilities for working in the margins are returned to here. These spaces frame the seven key messages of the research; a breach in relations between the state, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector, impacts of austerity on staff, ethics of care and resettlement services, and the need for promoting human dignity of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in public sphere.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion: Writing a commentary of austerity**

This chapter will summarise key findings from the research in relation to the overall research question: How is austerity understood and experienced by service-users and staff of the homelessness and resettlement service of the charity?

The chapter also suggests that this research makes a contribution to a wider body of knowledge about experiences of early austerity in England. A researcher reflection on participatory-transformative research as social justice work is offered as key personal learning from the implementation of this study. Finally, concluding thoughts on the value of participatory equality studies as relevant social research is offered.

### **Conclusion to the chapter**

This chapter provided an introduction to the study and the context of major changes in welfare and funding policy during the period of the Coalition government from 2010 to 2015. The impetus for the research was situated in uncertainty and fears about the outcomes of austerity on service users of homelessness and resettlement services. The research is an opportunity to make sense of effects of change through a broadly participatory approach. The research is contextualised in critical literature emerging during this period of austerity. Motivations for the study by the researcher and the charity were introduced in which the research process forms part of a 'watching brief' and 'a commentary of austerity' at local level. The aims and research questions of the study and a brief introduction to the methodological approach was introduced. An outline of the chapters give an overview of subsequent themes of the research.

The next chapter provides a review of the literature on experiences of austerity on homelessness and resettlements services. An overview of national and local

welfare policy and significant changes that occurred during the period of this research situates the study in the context of welfare reforms.

## **Chapter 2: Literature and Policy Review**

### **Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter provides a policy and literature review of the neoliberal context of austerity measures and welfare reforms in England. It provides context on policy changes affecting providers, staff and service users of resettlement and homelessness services including Supporting People and Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010). The review of literature includes national audits that monitor and capture material change affecting homelessness services, staff and service users during periods of recession and austerity (e.g. Bird, 2010; Homeless Link, 2011; Crisis, 2015); thematic studies including studies on multiple exclusion homelessness and experiences of single homeless people (e.g. Dwyer et al., 2012; Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014; Clapham et al., 2014) and small scale studies conducted in organisations providing homelessness services that illuminate response to a changing context (e.g. Whiteford, 2010a; Dobson, 2011; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012). Resonance with emerging literature positions this study within a broader body of research of early austerity in England during 2011-2015.

This review reflects the three broad phases of the research of capturing change, experiencing change and influencing change, and associated research questions as introduced in Chapter 1: Introduction. The literature and policy review addresses, in a broader context, the research questions under phase 1: capturing change. The research questions for this theme are:

- i. What are the major policy and funding reforms that have a bearing on the services provided by the resettlement services?
- ii. How are these policies understood by staff and service users?
- iii. What is the impact of these on services?
- iv. How are these changes experienced by staff and service users?

In addition, literature related to research question from phase 2: experiencing change, and the use of participatory methods and the role of research in advocacy will be explored in the review. The specific question related to phase 2 is:

- vii How are the voices of service-users included in the research and subsequent advocacy?

The review findings are first presented in three sections, followed by a thematic analysis and discussion section.

The first section begins by situating welfare reforms and austerity measures in a wider neoliberal context (Fergusson, Lavalette and Mooney, 2003; Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). A changing state of welfare and relations between the state, society and vulnerable groups is examined. The ideological underpinnings of Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) underlines transactional and conditional relations between the state and the individual (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009; Whiteford, 2015). Changes in relations between the state and local authorities, and local authorities and the community and voluntary sector are examined in the context of the first round of funding cuts to local authority budgets that began with the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010 (Bird, 2010; Hastings et al., 2012).

To provide a policy context for the research, this section also gives an overview of national welfare related policy and local strategies affecting homeless people and homelessness services encompassing the period from Supporting People, 2008 to The Care Act, 2014. A timeline of the roll out of benefit changes under Universal Credit (Department Work and Pensions, 2010) relating to homeless people is included and discussed. A policy timeline provides the context in which the experiences of the staff and service users of resettlement services in this study was explored. Summary tables of policies, local strategies and benefit changes can be found later in this chapter (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).



Data on the prevalence of homelessness in England is provided, with trends in statistical data noted, including changes in the numbers of single homeless people and young homeless people recorded (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015; Homeless Link, 2015c). An analysis of change, and direct and indirect consequences for homeless people is presented drawing on recent literature and national monitoring audits and surveys from 2008 to 2015 (Homeless Link, 2008; Homeless Link, 2014a; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015).

The second section examines emergent themes in the literature on experiences of change during austere times for homeless people and staff providing homelessness services. This section includes large thematic studies on the multiple and exclusionary factors that are determinants and consequences of homelessness (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and White, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2012). In addition small scale studies that research experiences within organisations providing homelessness services are included (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Whiteford, 2010b). Research into factors of multiple exclusion homelessness is provided to illustrate the contrast between the complexities of homelessness and the narrow policy approach under Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010; Bowpit et al., 2011a). Tensions and constraints experienced by homeless people and staff of homelessness services as they struggle to provide continuity of care in what may appear a careless environment is explored (Banks, 2011; Renedo, 2014).

The third section reviews the literature for participatory research approaches and highlights studies from the review that have been undertaken in a way to include voices of staff and service users in the research design, or with an intention of using the study for advocacy purposes (Abrahams et al., 2015). The ways in which participatory methods or promotion of the voices of service users and staff may be prioritised in research approaches will be explored in the literature.

The chapter concludes with a thematic discussion, arising from a reflection on the literature that presents the idea that staff and service users of homelessness services may occupy contested and changing spaces in times of austerity. The relevance of contested and constrained spaces as a way of understanding staff and service user experiences of early austerity will be returned to in the discussion Chapter 7: Negotiating new realities. Contested and changing spaces in early austerity are conceptualised from the review as the following:

Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy at local level

Embodied space in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity for staff and service users of homelessness services

Spaces for change: possibilities for the promotion of a critical voice and for working in the margins

The three sections of the literature and policy review are presented and discussed next.

## **Capturing Change: a changing state of welfare and homelessness in England**

This section situates welfare policy in a broader neoliberal context and examines the emerging impacts of austerity and recession on homelessness services. It also provides overview of welfare policy encompassing the period from Supporting People, 2008 to The Care Act, 2014. This section will include data on the prevalence of homelessness in England and a timeline of the roll out of benefit changes under Universal Credit (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) related to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

### **Neoliberalism and welfare**

Neoliberalism as political-economic ideology and practice prioritises individualism and entrepreneurialism within the context of social services policy

and practice. A premise of neoliberal political-economic theory is that the most efficient way of promoting human and social development and wellbeing is to shrink the role of the state and to encourage efficiency by the marketisation of public services (Harvey, 2007). In neoliberal thinking, the role of the state is to oversee economic growth by creating conditions for free markets and trade through deregulation in financial, private and public sectors. A principle neoliberal argument is that improvements in public services should also be encouraged by opening up market based opportunities in order to increase provision of a diverse range of services. This, it is argued, privileges individual rights and choice, with the caveat of increased individual responsibility, over that of collective or universal rights and desire for the common good (Harvey, 2007). In the UK, neoliberal politics led to promotion of internal markets within the public sector in education, health, welfare and housing, where it was suggested that 'the market would decide' the most effective and efficient ways to meet people's needs (Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). A further neoliberal premise is rooted in an idea that romanticises the role of community as the best provider of community needs; a hegemonic idea underpinning funding for area-based social regeneration, health and education programmes (DeFilipis, Fisher and Shragge, 2006; Bunyan, 2012). Roger (2000) defines the move from the welfare state to a welfare society as part of a broader shift to the right, and questions if the community and voluntary sector has the capacity, infrastructure or mandate to take on the role of major provider of social welfare (Roger, 2000). That a step back of the state would free up unrestricted space for local organisations to develop responses to local need without state interference ignores the material and structural determinants of poverty and social exclusion, and allows the state to abdicate responsibility for socio-economic and wellbeing contexts in which citizens live (Harvey, 2007; Bunyan, 2012). Market-driven approaches to welfare remove the state from the overall responsibility for public services other than creating conditions for competition and auditing of outputs and use of public money. As targets and monitoring mechanisms including

payments by results increase, accountability for welfare provision is shifted to those contracted to provide services. Outsourcing social welfare at local level puts local authorities and the voluntary sector in contractual relationships, with each having to report up a level in increasingly bureaucratic audits of public spending (Harvey, 2007). Banks (1998) observes the direct ways a new managerialism culture changes social work practice and provision. Job roles of social workers are increasingly specialised and fragmented in relation to categories of social work, such as mental health, older people, looked after children. An emphasis on service user participation can provide valuable feedback, but also presents challenges to the service user-professional relationship in the context of the rise of consumerism and transactional contexts for engagement. In addition, social work practice is increasingly monitored in relation to throughputs, outputs and resource management, and subject to performance measures, legislation and guidelines (Banks, 1998). Austerity, Banks (2011) argues, has increased tensions between two dimensions of ethical practice in social work practice. Ethics defined as accountability, she suggests is privileged as part of new public management. Ethical practice defined as ethics of care and in relational work between service users and key workers is under resourced during times of recession (Banks, 2011). Contradictory spaces are created for front line workers in homelessness and resettlement services. Renedo (2014) suggests that ethical practice needed for compliance and accountability inherent in new partnerships and commissioning relationships, conflicts with equally important ethical practice of care at relational level. Meeting the diverse needs of service users on an individualised basis may indeed be more difficult in austere times (Renedo, 2014). Market driven approaches to policy narrowly defines ethics of care and practice. Inflexible guidelines for practice and criteria that defines success as targets, that are measured through auditing processes, are increasing for caring services (Banks, 2011; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). These conditions create mechanisms of social control in the spheres of social welfare, employment, health, education and in community

relations (Banks, 1998; Banks, 2011; Harvey, 2007; Bunyan, 2012; Stuckler and Basu, 2013).

The retreat of the state from responsibility for provision of welfare, combined with the impacts of the global recession in 2008/2009, has resulted in a significant change in the state of welfare and homelessness services in England. The recession of 2008/2009 impacted greatly on local authority budgets for social services and on communities already experiencing deprivation, as is evidenced in two research projects (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009; Day 2009) commissioned by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2009. Tunstall and Fenton's (2009) research into the impacts on local authorities of the 2008/2009 recession revealed that reduced local authority budgets were directly linked to a reduction in spending on public and community and voluntary sector provision of services for vulnerable people, including homelessness services (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009). Reduced funding led to a subsequent significant loss of jobs in local authorities, with 20% of local authorities either making redundancies, or freezing jobs. At the same time it was reported by most councils that recession had led to an increased demands for social services (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009). Considerable job losses and reductions to services were also experienced in the community and voluntary sector which provided commissioned services on behalf of local authorities, with 75 homelessness services reported to have closed between January 2010 and March 2011 (Homeless Link, 2012).

Day's (2009) research examined the local impacts of the 2008/2009 recession on four deprived communities, and reported significant impacts on the social and economic wellbeing of communities, particularly for young people (Day, 2009). The research suggested that the downturn in the economy reduced the availability of work in the private, public and voluntary sectors at local level. Additional community based services that supported access to and benefit from mainstream education and health services were the most vulnerable to cuts (Day, 2009). Findings from Tunstall and Fenton's (2009) and Day's (2009)

research highlighted potential increases in demand for low-cost rented housing; an increased demand on homelessness services including from those in work; and gradual loss of public and community and voluntary services for vulnerable communities (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009; Day, 2009).

Experiences of the impacts of the recession of 2008/2009 led to local authorities expressing concern about the further cuts to public spending anticipated in the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010 (The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009; Hastings et al., 2012). From 2008 to 2015 significant trends in homelessness were noted during periods of recession and implementation of austerity measures and welfare reforms. An increased trend was reported from 2009/2010 of people accessing homelessness services. In 2011 this had increased by 30% on the previous year and by 38% on that reported in 2010 by 2015 (Stuckler and Basu, 2013; Crisis, 2012; Fitzpatrick et al. 2015). In 2015 those who sought homelessness support from in work households rose to over 228,000 cases (Fitzpatrick et al. 2015).

Central to the austerity measures introduced in 2010 by the Coalition government were the dual concepts of retraction of the state in provision of welfare and individualised responsibility for health and wellbeing. Austerity measures required severe cuts to welfare and public services, it was argued, as a necessary element in reducing the national debt. This argument was enshrined in welfare policy that had established in criteria the principle that those who drew welfare benefit from the state should not be exempt from their responsibility to make a contribution to alleviating the national debt through a reduction in their benefits (UK Treasury, 2010). The White Paper, Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) provided a blueprint for radical welfare reform in the context of broader austerity measures. The policy promoted notions of a 'something for something' and a 'responsible citizenship' approach to welfare, and firmly established the transactional nature of the relationship between individuals and the state

(Johnson and Vickery, 2011; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). An individualised policy approach is replicated at service provision level, including within community and voluntary sector homelessness services (Dobson, 2015). This is evidenced by studies that reveal new practices and transactional relationships between organisations and service users. Whiteford (2010b) highlights the relational tensions and oppositional positions taken by staff and service users in a charity that introduced charges for lunch at a homelessness support centre (Whiteford, 2010b). Dobson's (2011) study revealed competing values of staff that influenced their interpretation of criteria for discretionary allocations at drop in centres (Dobson, 2011). Scanlon and Adlam (2006, & 2012) researched the psychological impacts of consistent policy change on staff and service users in homelessness services (Scanlon and Adlam, 2006, & 2012). Their study in 2012 revealed that the increasing demands for compliance within narrowing eligibility criteria put service users and front line workers under specific duress (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012). Since the 1990s, the scale and pace of market based approaches to welfare has increased. Austerity measures and welfare reforms introduced in 2010 has changed the nature of the welfare system fundamentally (Ferguson, Lavalette and Mooney, 2002; Johnson and Vickery, 2011; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Notions of universal provision and entitlement had shifted to punitive conditionality, and notions of collective societal responsibility has firmly shifted to a deficit view of individual responsibility (Homeless Link, 2012a; Dobson and McNeill, 2011; Wharne, 2015).

Neoliberal welfare reforms shift the emphasis from structural determinants of poverty and vulnerability to a model of welfare that positions individuals as deficit. During the period of this research, 2010-2015, the state has retreated from notions of collective responsibility for welfare and has consolidated the individual as the bearer of responsibility for their own lives. Personal welfare is positioned as a matter of personal choice in policy discourse, with descriptors of worklessness, obesity, dysfunctional families, drug and alcohol abusers and other labels implying personal irresponsible behaviour increasingly used in

Government pronouncements (Cameron, 2011). A shift from the notion of collective to individual responsibility in policy means that individuals and families who require support from the state, must now show commitment to ensure their own welfare through engagement in employment and in health and wellbeing promoting behaviours, or otherwise face punitive benefit sanctions (Dobson and McNeill, 2011). A deficit discourse in policy language, echoed in some media, changes not only the relationship between the state and all of its citizens, but also changes relations between the state, society and its most vulnerable citizens (Harvey, 2007; Craig, 2011).

The policy Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) utilises a neoliberal organising principle of individual responsibility for personal welfare (Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). It has created a disciplinary welfare system under the auspices of reducing the national debt through austerity measures, accompanied by punitive sanctions for those who do not conform or comply to the new rules. Allocation of welfare benefits for vulnerable groups in society in particular has seen a significant shift from entitlement to conditionality. Participation in the Work Programme for example is tied to access to benefits (Dobson and McNeill, 2011; Homeless Link, 2002b; Renedo, 2014). Conditionality inherent in benefit criteria thus positions the individual as either compliant or deviant in their choices regarding their own welfare; in effect removing state responsibility from any association with personal material and social conditions (Day, 2009; Whiteford, 2010b).

Alongside welfare reforms, austerity measures resulting in year-on-year cuts to public spending budgets since 2010, have impacted on funding to local authorities, social services, and funding for homelessness services in particular. In 2012 analysis of cuts to local authority budgets in 2011/2012, commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, found that reductions in central funds to local authorities disproportionately affected those councils with greater numbers of vulnerable groups. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2012; Hastings et al. 2012).



Analysis by Hastings et al. (2012) exposed the extent of the variation in distribution of funding cuts to local authority areas. Analysis of impacts on local authority spending power in 2011/2012 revealed that the most deprived local authority in England, Liverpool, had lost 11.34% of its spending power, while the most affluent local authority in England, Richmond, had only lost 0.61% of its spending power (Hastings et al., 2012:15). Analysis of 25 local authority responses to managing the budget retraction in relation to social services remodelling showed two distinct approaches in 2010; local authorities that intended to remodel services from a universal to targeted provision for individuals, and local authorities that planned to focus on area-based and spatial approaches to services provision (Hastings et al., 2012: 37-39). A survey by Homeless Link in 2013, completed by forty-two local authorities, examined the impacts of welfare reforms on homelessness services within local authorities. This survey found that while many local authorities had an overview of welfare reform most felt unprepared. In addition, they lacked sufficient detailed information for planning and commissioning homelessness services going forward (Homeless Link, 2013a).

The free market logic of the Coalition government, 2010-2015, posed that those closest to communities in need, such as community and voluntary sector organisations, would rise up under the notion of a Big Society, to more effectively fill financial and service provision gaps left by a shrinking public sector (Cameron, 2010; Bunyan, 2012; Buckingham, 2012). A move to a market orientated welfare management at local authority level included the introduction of competitive commissioning. This had increased the involvement of community, voluntary, charity and faith based organisations in provision of homelessness services. Supporting People, as the main funding strand for local authorities, provided for commissioning of homelessness services from a range of organisations at local levels (Bowpit et al., 2011a; Hastings et al. 2012). Buckingham (2012:579-585) provides a useful typology of community and voluntary sector organisations based on how they engage with commissioning

and contracting of homelessness services in England. Four types of organisations are characterised by Buckingham (2012) as follows. Comfortable contractors are business-like in their tendering for and implementation of government contracts and there is no volunteer involvement or income from voluntary sources. Homelessness is not a major part of their operations, and many may be housing associations. Compliant contractors are also described as adopting business-like and professional practices. Mainly charities, these have become dependent on government contracts. Volunteer and voluntary income is minimal. Cautious contractors on the other hand have significant voluntary and charitable income often from their own faith or issue based constituencies, but additionally tender for some government contracts. Supported by multiple stakeholder networks, paid and volunteer staff may have limited capacity in meeting contractual requirements and auditing. Community based non-contractors rely on voluntary income and do not tender for government contracts. Volunteer staff are locally organised and may work from a faith, issues or values base to deliver community based services (Buckingham, 2012: 581-585). Commissions and competitive tenders under Supporting People were increasingly based on a range of contractual obligations leading to payments by results. These included provision of detailed auditing reports, target setting for reductions of street homelessness people and increase of numbers of people moved on from temporary accommodation (Bird, 2010; Buckingham, 2012; Homeless Link, 2013).

The combination of cuts to local authority budgets, and the reduction and removal of the ring fence to the Supporting People funds, raised concerns about possible restrictions in the availability, type and nature of community and voluntary organisations involved in provision of resettlement homelessness services. The community and voluntary sector, by the nature of its flexibility, offers a broader range of community based services to single homeless people that might include signposting to informal or non-statutory supports on offer at local levels. These include mental health and wellbeing support groups, community cafes, drug and alcohol recovery support, informal education

projects and welfare and tenancy advice services (Dwyer et al. 2012; Whiteford, 2010a; 2010b). In addition, the role of resettlement services is to support and signpost homeless people to access health care such as GP services and specialist mental health and drug and alcohol services (Homeless Link, 2014b). The complexities of commissioning and shift towards compliance, auditing and generalist provision of housing, rather than resettlement or homelessness services has resulted in contracts increasingly being awarded to larger organisations, often housing associations. While housing organisations characterised as comfortable contractors by Buckingham (2012) have capacity to operate on a business model and can evidence targets met in reducing the numbers of people in temporary accommodation who go on to be housed, they have less to do with offering broader resettlement services to homeless people or those at risk of homelessness (Buckingham, 2012). The range, availability and quality of services that might meet service user needs beyond accommodation and work programme compliance, is effectively curtailed. Paradoxically in the context of overtly neoliberal welfare reforms, this reduces rather than increases diversity, choice and quality in the welfare system (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Buckingham, 2012).

The extent of the seismic changes to the social contract and potential impact of welfare policy reforms was not underestimated in 2010 (Gelder, 2011). However the rolling nature of reforms created uncertainty and concern about the full impacts on local arrangements for homelessness services and provision to come in future years (Bird, 2010; Gelder, 2011). The speed and scale at which policies and reforms were implemented left many in the homelessness statutory and community and voluntary sector unprepared strategically and financially (Johnson and Vickery, 2011; Buckingham, 2012; Homeless Link, 2013a).

### **Policy reforms and homelessness**

By way of contextualising the period of fieldwork undertaken for this study, there now follows a section that provides timelines of and discussion on key

national policies (see Table 1), local strategies (see Table 2) and key changes to benefits (see Table 3) that have a bearing on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These are discussed in turn below.

The main national policies and key funding streams relating to a range of homelessness services and providers include the following: Supporting People; The White Papers, Universal Credit: Welfare that Works and Liberating the NHS; The Welfare Reform Act and The Health and Social Care Act and The Care Act. A timeline of key policies is summarised in Table 1 and implications for homelessness and resettlement services are discussed below.

**Table 1: Timeline of key policies**

2003	<b>Supporting People funding</b> Introduced in 2003, the ring fence for homelessness work was removed in April 2009
November 2010	<b>Universal Credit: Welfare that Works White Paper</b> Welfare reform policy 2010-2017 linked to austerity measures to reduce the national deficit
2010	<b>Liberating the NHS White Paper</b> Local commissioning opens up the possibility for joined up working on multiple exclusion homelessness and complex needs of homeless people
2011	<b>Welfare Reform Bill</b> Proposals for rolling out welfare reforms presented
January 2011	<b>Health and Social Care Bill</b> Services for homeless people not specifically included
2012	<b>Welfare Reform Act</b> Enacted in April 2012, this provided the context for the full rollout of changes to benefits and provision of Universal Credit
2014	<b>The Care Act</b> Implemented in April 2015. Focus on wellbeing may provide opportunities for homelessness services.

Supporting People was established in 2003 as a ring fenced fund to local authorities for the purpose of supporting very vulnerable groups of people including homeless people. Supporting People required local authorities to work through a variety of statutory and community and voluntary sector services to support vulnerable homeless people and those at risk of homelessness towards

independent living (Buckingham, 2012). Levels of support mirror life journeys of homeless people as they moved from crisis or street homelessness, stabilising services including hostels and moving on support, plus drug or alcohol referrals, to supported tenancy work. Supporting People allowed commissioning of a range of services from a variety of organisations. With recognition of multiple exclusion factors surrounding homelessness, a particular contribution was recognised from volunteer led organisations, sometimes including former homeless people, as service providers (Bowpitt et al. 2011a; Whitehead, 2010b).

In 2009, the ring fencing of Supporting People as a fund for supporting vulnerable groups was removed. By 2010, the Supporting People year on year allocations to local authorities had decreased by £0.5billion to £1.59 billion (House of Commons, 2012). Crisis and social care funds for homeless people previously allocated from central government as part of Supporting People was reduced and by 2011 devolved to Local Authorities as discretionary funds. Combined with a narrower definition of statutory duty, that excluded single homeless people, provision for resettlement and homelessness services and services for single homeless people in particular were subject to significant cuts in funding (Bird, 2010; Buckingham, 2012).

The White Paper, Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) set out the Coalition government's welfare reform policy for 2010-2017. It is linked to austerity measures to reduce the deficit by reducing central and local authority budgets. Universal Credit as a single benefit was introduced from October 2013 for working age people. The Welfare Reform Act, enacted in April 2012 provides the context for radical change to welfare and for the roll out of Universal Credit.

The White Paper, Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS (Department for Health, 2010) provided for local commissioning of area based services responsive to local needs. Policy consultation appropriated disability rights language particularly with the use of the phrase, 'no decision about me, without me'. It

aimed to expand the possibility for joined up working on health, welfare, and mental health needs, including the complex needs of homeless people.

The Care Act 2014, implemented from April 2015 provided a care and support function for local authorities and is the most significant overhaul of social care legislation since 1948. The wellbeing principle contained in the Act could provide an opportunity for community and voluntary organisations to access homelessness and resettlement services funds to support the wellbeing and social care needs of homeless people (Cornes et al., 2015).

A timeline of local strategies relevant to supporting homelessness is summarised in Table 2 and discussed below.

**Table 2: Local strategies**

<p><b>Local Strategies</b></p>	<p><b>Local Supporting People Strategy</b> Amended at local level in context of budget retraction to local authorities.</p> <p><b>Local Homeless Strategy</b> Strategies to meet targets at local level developed in the context of reduced funding and changed statutory duty for single homeless people.</p> <p><b>Local Mental Health Strategy</b> Developed in consultation with new health commissioning groups including GP services.</p> <p><b>Local Alcohol and Substance Misuse Strategy</b> Developed with multi-agency consultation including hospitals/GPs/Social Services.</p> <p><b>Local Personalisation Agenda</b> Local strategies to individualise relations between providers and service users as contractual with associated implications for allocating programme funding and payment by results.</p>
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Local strategies are often developed through multi-agency consultation between statutory services and community and voluntary sector provision in the context of budget settings at local authority level. Professionals concerned with homelessness from statutory or non-statutory sectors come together either in groups via open meetings chaired by councils or in bi-lateral meetings between commissioners and those organisations seeking to be commissioned.

A timeline of benefit changes relating to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness is summarised in Table 3 and discussed below.

**Table 3: Timeline of key benefit changes**

June 2010	<b>Review of Independent Living Fund</b> Homeless people with disabilities potentially affected.
February 2011	<b>Review of Disability Living Allowance</b> Homeless people with disabilities potentially affected.
April 2011	<b>Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes</b> LHA rates are capped at no more than the lowest 30% of local rents, whereas previously they were set at 50% of local rents.
April 2013	<b>Under Occupation Rule – ‘the bedroom tax’</b> People with one or more spare rooms will have their housing benefit reduced.
2013	<b>Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes</b> LHA changed to link with the Consumer Price Index instead of local rents and became a capped internal budget.
2013	<b>Annual up-rating of benefits limited</b> In-work and out-of-work benefits annual uprating capped at 1%, not at the inflation rate, in 2013, 2014, 2015. This did not affect Disability Living Allowance and the Employment and Support Allowance.
2013	<b>Council Tax Benefit abolished</b> Abolishment of council tax benefit. Supporting People funding reduced and devolved to local authorities for discretionary schemes.
2013	<b>Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants abolished</b> The Social Fund element of Supporting People reduced and devolved to local authorities for discretionary schemes.
2103 to 2017	<b>Universal Credit begins</b> A rolling scheme of Universal Credit began in 2013 and is due to complete in 2017. Universal Credit abolishes existing separate benefits (Jobseekers Allowance, Working Tax Credit, and Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance) and combines them into one monthly payment to one account per household called Universal Credit. Pilot pathfinder areas began in April 2014.
July to September 2013	<b>Benefit cap per household</b> Total weekly household benefit capped at £350 for single individuals or £500 for couples and families (the outside London rate). Households receiving Working Tax Credit, Disability Living Allowance or War Widow(er) Pensions were exempted.
April 2014	<b>Universal Credit pathfinder pilots begin</b> Pilot pathfinder areas began in four areas, with nationwide implementation planned by 2017.

2014	<b>Single Accommodation Rate</b> Single people must share accommodation up to the age of 35 (previously age 25) to be eligible for housing benefit.
2014	<b>Independent Living Fund changes</b> The Independent Living Fund finally closed in June 2015 affecting homeless people with disabilities. Responsibility devolved to local authorities.
2014	<b>Disability Living Allowance changes</b> The Disability Living Allowance changed to Personalised Independence Payments by 2015 for people aged 16 or over.
2015	<b>Working Tax Credit changes</b> Proposed reductions to Working Tax Credit challenged and policy under review. Disproportionate impact on families with children on low incomes, a risk factor for food poverty and insecure housing.

Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) set out the timeline for benefit changes culminating in a universal single benefit for working age people. Universal Credit is the major benefit change that impacts on all claimants. Introduced on a rolling basis from October 2013 it replaced means tested benefits of income-based Job Seekers Allowance, income-based employment and support allowance, housing benefit, income support and tax credits. The new benefit, Universal Credit can only be claimed via the internet. Universal Credit is paid monthly in arrears and paid directly to claimants via a bank account. This single payment includes an amount for housing costs. Claimants are expected to pay this directly to their housing provider or landlord. Difficulties arise with the single payment system for people who experience significant exclusions due to poor health including mental health, drug and alcohol issues, and who find it hard to access services consistently, or who find it hard to manage budgets (Rae and Rees, 2015). Although under certain circumstances and with specific criteria payments can be paid to landlords directly, this arrangement is not the norm. Single monthly income has impacted on rent arrears when people find it difficult to keep up rent payments. When a large amount of money available at one time, this may be



used for other household and personal expenditure including food, bills, clothing and payment of debts (Homeless Link, 2013b).

A second major change under the Welfare Reform Act related to housing is the under-occupation rule. Referred to as the bedroom tax, housing benefit is reduced if additional or spare rooms are available compared to occupancy. Single people or couples will receive housing benefit for one room only and are not affected if they live in a one bedroom flat or bedsit. Children under the age of 10 are expected to share a room regardless of gender. Children under 18 of the same gender are expected to share a room. Single homeless people with children not living with them do not get housing benefit for a spare room for children to stay over. The under occupation rule was relaxed in 2014 to allow households with resident disabled people to have a spare room for equipment or alternative sleeping arrangements for carers.

### **Homelessness data in England 2010-2015**

This section provides data on the prevalence of and nature of homelessness in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015; Homeless Link, 2014a; Homeless Link 2015a; Homeless Link, 2015c). Specific data and research relating to the two key groups interviewed for this research; single homeless men and women, and young homeless people, are examined (Bowpit et al. 2011b; Fitzpatrick, et al., 2012; Clapham, 2014; Homeless Link, 2014e; Abrahams, 2015; Crisis, 2015).

Homelessness is defined for data purposes as homelessness acceptances; that is, people who are in statutory priority need, including families with children and people who have not made themselves intentionally homeless (Homeless Link, 2015b). People considered in priority need and covered by statutory duty are those who live on the streets, who are pregnant, who have nowhere to go after leaving prison or hospital or who have been evicted. Those who have left accommodation where it is considered that they could reasonably and safely return to are considered intentionally homeless. While this group are not

eligible for local council statutory support, they may be eligible for prevention or relief support. However, they are not included as homelessness acceptances in official data (Shelter, 2015). A Supreme Court ruling on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015 challenged local authorities' interpretations of priority need and made provision for vulnerability to be interpreted more broadly (Homeless Link, 2015f).

Statutory homelessness measured as homelessness acceptances peaked at 52,000 in 2013/2014, up from 40,000 in 2009/10. (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). A small reduction of 2% in 2014/15 was reported. However, these statutory homelessness data do not include a further 228,000 applications for non-statutory homelessness prevention or relief granted at local authority levels in 2013/14 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). Homelessness data is gathered on numbers in statutory priority need, numbers of rough sleepers gathered through a national 'one night out' count, and numbers of local authority interventions to prevent or alleviate crisis homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012). In the second quarter of 2015 reasons given for the loss of last settled home included the following; loss of assured tenancy, no longer able to stay with relatives or friends, relationship breakdown, mortgage and rent arrears, and loss of other rented accommodation (Homeless Link, 2015c).

### **Single homeless men and women**

Single homeless people are often hidden in official data on two counts. Firstly, hidden homelessness includes single people who are 'sofa surfing', that is relying on friends or family for informal, and temporary accommodation (Homeless Link, 2011). Overcrowded households also conceal the extent of unsuitable living accommodation. In 2013, the number of households with concealed homelessness including single people, couples and lone parents was estimated at 2.23 million. In 2012 it was estimated that 3.1% of households in England were overcrowded (Crisis, 2015). It is estimated that in England 9% of adults have an experience of homelessness, including not having anywhere to sleep at least

once in their life. In any one year 185,000 adults experience homelessness (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2015).

Homeless people, particularly single homeless people, are at risk of being sifted out of the welfare system and potentially marginalised from health and social care services. Due to often complex needs, homeless people themselves are unaware of, or unable to access, services on offer (Dwyer et al. 2012). Services may also be patchy, and entitlement to services and benefits are particularly unclear as Universal Credit rolls out (Renedo, 2014). Families with children and very vulnerable elderly people are entitled to homelessness and resettlement services and safeguarding under statutory duty. Single homeless people, aged over 18 and regardless of their gender, are not covered by statutory duty, and therefore any services or additional funding is offered on a conditional and discretionary basis (Bowpit et al. 2011b).

A study conducted by peer research teams made up of formerly homeless people further examined gendered experiences of homelessness (Bowpit et al., 2011b). An under-researched area in the literature, Bowpit et al. (2011b) utilised a capitals and resources based approach devised by McNaughton (2008) to analyse men and women's respective experiences of becoming homeless and accessing services. Findings suggested that men and women's experiences of multiple exclusion homelessness were broadly similar. However, responses to their situation were mediated by gendered assumptions in service provision and day to day practice. Bowpit et al. (2011b) suggest men's experiences of homelessness are particularly governed by gendered assumptions, for example men's experience of violence, and suggest that their experiences require further in-depth research.

Data on the extent of women's homelessness suggests it is underreported in England (Homeless Link, 2015e). That women's homelessness is hidden may be due to a need or expectation of women with children to normalise family life, including staying with family or friends in times of crisis and homelessness

(Abrahams, 2015; Homeless Link, 2015e). However, a desire to draw on informal resources and assets and to externally present a persona of managing when becoming homeless is a feature of both men and women's coping strategies (Bowpit et al. 2011b).

### **Young homeless people**

In 2012 it was estimated that 8% of under-25s had experienced homelessness in the last five years (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2012). A survey conducted in 2014 with 211 homelessness services providers and housing services in local authorities revealed that homelessness among young people and young pregnant women is showing an increasing trend (Homeless Link, 2014a). The survey reported that 62% of homelessness among young people aged under 25 occurs due to family relationship breakdown, with young offenders and young people leaving care accounting for 13% and 11% of young homeless people respectively (Homeless Link, 2014a). Since the recession in 2008/2009 a trend of limited employment opportunities for young people with few skills and qualifications has been noted, particularly in deprived communities, leaving homeless young people vulnerable to multiple exclusions (Day, 2009; Bates and Freeman, 2014).

The 2014 Homeless Link survey also found benefit sanctions to be of concern to eight out of ten homeless young people. In particular the shared accommodation rule that only allows eligibility for Local Housing Allowance to people under 35 years of age if they are living in shared accommodation caused reported stress (Homeless Link, 2014a). Worries about benefit sanctions for young people are also reflected in a recent study conducted with young peer researchers with experience of insecure housing (Clapham et al. 2014). For example, changes to Local Housing Allowances also affect young people in households where their parent or carer is a claimant. Young people over the ages of 18 are classed as non-dependants. They either need to work or contribute their benefit income to the household, thereby affecting their parent or carer's benefits. A third option is to leave home (Clapham et al. 2014). From April 2015, young people who are full time students are not exempt from non-

dependant deductions to household Local Housing Allowance. They must prove they live at home for six months of the year, increased from the current rule of two weeks per year, if their family is to remain eligible for Local Housing Allowance (UK Government, 2014; Shelter, 2015). In addition, the availability and suitability of social rented or private rented housing that is appropriate for sharing by young people, particularly for those leaving care or for young offenders, is limited (Homeless Link, 2014a; Clapham et al., 2014).

### **Experiencing Change: homelessness and resettlement services staff and service user experiences**

This section reviews studies on homelessness and homeless services in the UK with a particular focus on experienced change and impacts of austerity and welfare reforms on organisations, staff and service users. There are different entry points and pathways to becoming homeless and accessing homelessness services (Clapham, 2003; Blackburn, 2012). Thematic studies on experiences of multiple exclusion homelessness and approaches to service provision for people with complex needs also revealed complex, rather than linear, causalities in people's lives (McDonagh, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2012). The section will consider notions of ethics of care, and how this may be affected under austerity (Ferguson and Lavallette, 2004; Banks, 2011; Colley, 2012).

### **Multiple exclusion homelessness**

Multiple exclusion homelessness is defined by the complex and multi-faceted factors that make up the lives of many homeless people and those at risk of homelessness (McDonagh, 2011). Physical and mental health issues including those arising from drug and alcohol use, relationship breakdown, and domestic and other violence are problematic in isolation, but are often interrelated in homeless people's lives. Social issues overlap with other issues in homelessness such as institutional care, experience of insecure accommodation in hostels or street living or sleeping rough (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and White, 2011). Chaotic or alternative lifestyles such as that chosen by wayfarers, or street living in

response to crisis and distress, may lead people to choose alternative supports to mainstream health and social welfare homelessness services. These might include faith based or community organised services (Whiteford, 2010a; Whiteford, 2010b; Wharne, 2015).

Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness experience acute health problems with generalised poor wellbeing affecting their quality of life (Homeless Link, 2002; Dwyer et al. 2012). Research conducted nationally in 2010 surveyed just over 2500 homeless people and revealed the extent of long term health problems in this group. Physical health problems were reported by 73% of people, while 80% reported mental health issues, of which 45% had received specific diagnoses. Drugs and alcohol addictions remain a health issue for around a third of homeless people, with 35% reporting associated visits to accident and emergency hospital departments (Homeless Link, 2014b).

### **Discontinuity of care**

That homeless people and those experiencing multiple exclusion are less likely to take up or consistently attend social and health services is well documented (Dwyer et al. 2012). There are a range of factors that impact on access to health, social, care and homelessness services for vulnerable groups. These include a general lack of awareness of the type and availability of services, compounded by poor communication and availability of services in locations and/or in languages that people use. Services are reported as very hard to navigate, and that fragmented and contradictory information is a confusing and frustrating experience for service users and staff alike (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Rosengard et al., 2007; Pleave and Wallace, 2011).

Continuity of health care for homeless people presents a challenge to homelessness workers and health services staff. Homeless people are more likely to seek health care and treatments for health issues of a critical nature which require immediate treatment at accident and emergency hospital services. They are less likely to seek health care and treatment from planned community

based or referral services (Rosengard et al., 2007; Dwyer et al. 2012; Whitehead and Simpson, 2015). More complex underlying health needs including poor nutrition and associated conditions, mental health needs and health issues arising from drug and/or alcohol dependency, rely on homeless people taking up referrals to planned health appointments (Hutchinson, Alcott, Albanese, 2014). However, chaotic or alternative lifestyles such as wayfaring may result in sporadic engagement with mainstream support systems and inconsistent treatment for more serious and ongoing health conditions (Whiteford, 2010a). While innovative work is being done in accident and emergency departments and hospital discharge systems to support homeless people to access services, take up remains challenging (Whiteford and Byrne, 2013; Rae and Rees, 2015).

Research revealed that gendered assumptions and attitudes may underpin services for homeless men and women with complex health needs, where assumptions about men and women's needs appear stereotyped (Bowpit et al. 2011b; Rae and Rees, 2015). A phenomenological study by Rae and Rees (2015) explored single homeless men and women's lack of take up of health services and their perceptions and attitudes to their own health care needs. Homeless people prioritised other social issues over their health needs. The study also found that gendered and negative attitudes towards homeless people from those working in health and related provision, formed a barrier to homeless people's initial and subsequent engagement (Rae and Rees, 2015). This was exacerbated if a person had recently left prison, was discharged from accident and emergency or a hospital stay, or if provision was accessed in various locations due to frequent accommodation changes; a finding corroborated in other studies (Rae and Rees, 2015; Whitehead and Simpson, 2015).

### **Contexts of care**

A conflicted professional space in caring services is explored by a number of studies (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2004; May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2006; Banks, 2011; Benozzo and Colley, 2012). Conflicted and stressful day-to-day spaces are

not unique to homelessness professionals; similar tensions are experienced among workers in wider health and social care statutory and community and voluntary sectors (Fletcher, 2011; Colley, 2012). Fergusson and Lavelette (2004) highlight alienating impacts that loss of control in everyday work has on social workers and service users (Ferguson and Lavallete, 2004). Values and ethics of care in social and caring work practice conflict with contexts of welfare under austerity (Banks, 2011; Colley, 2012). The speed of changes to emergency and drop in homelessness provision contributes to distressing workplaces (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2006; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012).

Exploring research into emotional learning in the workplace, Benozzo and Colley (2012) trace the influence of neoliberalism on changing relations between the public and the community and voluntary sector workforce, the policies that govern their work, and worker lived experiences of providing day-to-day services. Fletcher (2011) suggests that counter pressures arise for all welfare professionals between providing an individual and personalised response to individual service user needs, and expectations to implement standardised procedures as universal services. In the context of current welfare reforms, increasingly high caseloads and detailed and bureaucratic administrative work, leave front line workers little time to understand new policies and procedures. Resource constraints lead to less time available to focus on the quality of service they provide (Fletcher, 2011; Colley, 2012). For many welfare professionals a lack of in-depth understanding and training on new policy and expected implementation rules, combined and a high turn-over of staff at the front line leads to low morale, and a patchy, uneven experience for welfare service users (Fletcher, 2012). Stresses are particularly felt by homelessness and resettlement service workers employed in the community and voluntary sector, who are increasingly likely to be on short term and part-time contracts (Maguire, 2012; Renedo, 2014; Homeless Link, 2015).



Research into the specific experiences of resettlement workers and the impacts of austerity and neoliberal welfare policy on their practice is emergent. Studies on resettlement workers in the community and voluntary sector focus on self-concept during austere times (Dobson, 2011; Maguire, 2012; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014). Dobson (2011), Maguire (2012) and Renedo (2014) pose that front line workers in homelessness resettlement services, particularly those in the community and voluntary sector, are subject to specific dilemmas. Homelessness and resettlement professionals place great value on a developmental, personal and relational purpose of engagement with service users. The concept of a caring professional-service user relationship is tested in the context of the imposition of narrow conditionality criteria for benefits introduced under welfare reforms. Access to services or income and housing benefits are subject to engagement in, for example, the Work Programme. Criteria reviews include fitness to work and personal circumstances audits. Service users are subject to a range of benefit sanctions if they either knowingly, or unwittingly, do not comply, for example in participation in training programmes, or attending additional appointments (Fletcher, 2011; Dobson, 2011). Front line workers are expected to have knowledge of these criteria and to encourage service user compliance; creating tensions between caring for and control of service users. That implementation of policy may be subverted or reinterpreted at the front line is well documented in social work (Lipsky, 1980; Fletcher, 2011; Dobson, 2015). Administering control and compliance within services, through strict eligibility criteria, is likely to be counter to some therapeutic ways of working with service users. Managing the tension between making assessment of eligibility and acting to support service users according to their multiple needs may be further compounded by lack of training and support for non-specialist homelessness workers in resettlement services (Maguire, 2012). Dobson's research with front line staff at a drop in centre for homeless people whose lives are particularly chaotic, suggests the worker-service user relationship always involves aspects of behaviour change management. She

argues that front line staff relations with service users are characterised as being both compliant and nonconformist in relation to policy, and that front line staff hold a broad range of interpretations of conditionality and sanctions in assessing and implementing benefit regimes (Dobson, 2011).

The issue of self-concept of homelessness professionals working in the community and voluntary sector is raised by Renedo (2014). Her study involved researching how the self-identities of twenty four front line staff was developed through experiences of working on a contractual basis to provide services to particularly hard to reach homeless people. Renedo (2014) found that professionals working in homelessness services in the community and voluntary sector occupy conflicting spaces in relation to professionals in the statutory sector, including those they work in partnership with from adult social services or health services. Front line staff in the community voluntary sector framed their homelessness professional identities as relational and distinctively caring. They contrasted this caring self-concept, with a projected conception of statutory professional identity, which they characterised as uncaring and controlling, and concerned with targets, monitoring and policy implementation (Renedo, 2014). These views were partly grounded in a perception that the pressure to report on and meet targets related to programme funding was driven in part by top-down pressure from local authority staff. This type of performance monitoring and the pressure this entailed was felt most by those front line staff in the community and voluntary sector commissioned to deliver services on behalf of local authorities (Dobson, 2011; Fletcher, 2011; Renedo, 2014).

Homelessness workers in the community and voluntary sector are less likely to view themselves as trained or expert as health, mental health or social work professionals (Maguire, 2012). Renedo (2014:225) identifies two struggles related to self-concept that occupy front line staff in community and voluntary sector homeless services. The first, a struggle to assert a values-based practice in community based homeless services is echoed across public sector and caring

professions (Banks, 2011; Benozzo and Colley, 2012). The contention that caring practice is at odds with target driven models of practice is described by Cooper and Lousada (2005) as a borderline space full of anxiety for welfare professionals. A second struggle is described as a lack of recognition and respect for homelessness service front line workers employed in the community and voluntary sector, from health, social care and policy professionals working in the statutory sector (Renedo, 2014). The nature of partnership working is central to this relational struggle. A desire for recognition of distinctiveness of community workers is defined by their closeness to service users and their role as homelessness advocates. This positioning against statutory sector professionals is contrary to a practical necessity to participate in inter-agency working and a desire to have a role in policy and commissioning groups (Meade, 2005).

A further contradictory position exists between homelessness professional self-concept and their conceptualisation of a service user. A central tenet of their advocacy role is to gain public and policy support for people experiencing homelessness, and a broader understanding of the multiple factors that exclude homeless people from welfare, health and social service. They may do this by advocating for individuals as part of case work or through broader policy platforms such as commissioning groups, as trustees of other homelessness services or through national public facing campaigns, for example, Homelessness Week. To advocate effectively, at individual, policy or public engagement levels, homelessness professionals may act as experts and allies of homeless people, with homeless people's voice and presence presented as non-expert or non-agentive (Renedo, 2014). Workers report stress and feeling under attack from the system, however motivation and job satisfaction is also reported by volunteers and paid staff working to support homeless people (Renedo, 2014). Front line workers may politicise service user experiences and thereby gain value from this for themselves in advocacy contexts. Successful, meaningful relationships with service users add to workers motivation and morale and a positive professional self-concept (Fletcher, 2012; Renedo, 2014).

Stressful target driven or contract cultures in the workplace have personal impacts on the health, wellbeing and identities of homelessness professionals in both the public sector or community and voluntary sector (Homeless Link, 2011; Fletcher, 2012; Crisis, 2015). Cooper and Lousada (2005) identify spheres of care and spheres of fear as characteristic experiences of staff and service users in modern welfare systems. Scanlon and Adlam (2006; 2012) have researched the long term distressing effects, including mental health issues, on front line staff in resettlement services who work with people experiencing multiple exclusion and homelessness. While personal stress is undoubtedly related to being witness to the difficult circumstances of homeless people's lives, professional stress is also exacerbated when working in the context of relentless organisational and policy change (Scanlon and Adlam, 2006; Scanlon and Adlam 2012). These types of conflicts and contradictions between the values of those engaged in caring services across the public and community and voluntary sectors, and the conditions in which their work takes place is an emerging feature of the impact of neoliberal policy (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2004; Meade, 2005; Banks, 2011; Colley, 2012).

### **Influencing change: advocacy, voice, limits and possibilities**

The extent of inclusion of service user voice, and the role of research in promoting a critical voice on inequalities and austerity, is important in this study as will be discussed in the following chapter on methodology. Equality questions in methodological terms include the extent to which the voices of those who are connected to the studies are represented in the research, and how conditions for equality and subsequent use of research in advocacy have been considered by the researchers (Baker et al., 2004). Some of the research studies on homelessness included in this review specifically mentioned inclusive methodological approaches and the extent to which the research could be used for advocacy. These themes discussed below will be returned to in Chapter 6: Doing research together.

## **Advocacy**

Homeless people, and single homeless people, in particular, are considered in need of advocates in the social welfare sector, in private and public housing sectors, and in the public sphere including media and the general public (Bowpit et al., 2011; Rae and Rees, 2015). Front line staff in homelessness and resettlement services, by the nature of their work with homeless people with complex needs, can take on an advocacy role as part of their relational work with service users (Renedo, 2014; Abrahams et al., 2015). They represent service users in interactions with services, reviews, appeal and in some cases in court. Homelessness professionals, to the extent their position in the statutory or community, voluntary and faith sector allows, may also advocate collectively as a group on public campaigns, when lobbying statutory bodies and in responding to policy consultations. Brunwin (2015) highlights that research by homelessness organisations among their own service user group, or on their own agendas, is a rare practice. He points out that significant research into experiences of ex-armed forces personnel and their homelessness vulnerabilities, while valuable and insightful research, has remained unknown among those providing services to such groups. An alternative model, he suggests, is that organisations conduct their own research to better understand service user changing needs, and to use that research knowledge to advocate more broadly with policy and decision makers (Brunwin, 2015).

There are potential conflicts in the positioning of homelessness professionals as advocates. Renedo's (2014) study suggest that front line workers align caring relational identities as an intrinsic part of their work and that this enabled them to assume roles as experts in homelessness. Campaigns on homelessness, including those by homelessness charities, may include service user voice or images, however, often the homeless person may be represented as helpless and in a hopeless position (Renedo, 2014). Homelessness professional identities as expert advocates are often juxtaposed to that of the identity of an overly bureaucratic statutory sector. Maintenance of a distinct expert persona, may

mean that staff unconsciously position homeless people, as people without agency, and non-expert in their own lives and experiences. Thus presenting the service user as 'other' in campaign and advocacy discourses (Beresford and Branfield, 2006; Renedo, 2014).

### **Inclusion of voice**

Collective representation by service user groups may be a key point of reference for policy makers and service providers. Engagement in public and policy discourse with and by service users as a central part of engagement in resettlement services is represented in the literature that considers this a function of the role of service user forums (Beresford and Branfield, 2006). On a minimal level this can be restricted to giving feedback on services and gaining a consensus view on the challenges for services, for example in meeting targets and throughput of service users within defined time limits (Whitehead, 2010b; Renedo, 2014). Service users and those who stay involved by providing services as volunteers are considered experts by experience. At project and local level, service users as experts can be involved in advocacy and influencing action on homelessness (Whiteford, 2010b; Limebury and Shea, 2015). While service user groups are a common feature and have a long standing tradition in a range of social services, the practice of representation can often be a contested space for service users and staff, with power imbalances infusing relations (Diamond and Daly, 2011; Renedo, 2014; Abrahams et al., 2015).

Research on issues related to homelessness may involve participatory data collection methods and tools that reflect service user assessment such as the outcomes star (MacKeith, 2010). Qualitative research frequently represents respondents' views verbatim in presentation of findings as found in many of the studies reviewed here. A few studies reviewed acknowledged the contribution of joint work with peer researchers, including young people at risk of homelessness or previously homeless (Clapham et al., 2013), formerly homeless people (Bowpit et al., 2011b), women currently at risk of homelessness

(Abrahams et al. 2015) and ex-forces personnel with experiences of homelessness (Brunwin, 2015).

A recent study examining homeless women's long term health and social care needs included provision to train women with experience of homelessness and who were engaged in a support project to act as co-researchers (Abrahams et al., 2015). In addition to gaining valuable input and analysis for the research, the co-researchers' insights informed the subsequent development of a targeted programme to meet homeless women's health needs in the locality. The team's reflection on the co-research process suggested that effective and respectful research with service users requires building in sufficient planning time, use of appropriate language, and communication mechanisms (Abrahams et al., 2015).

The service user voice is clearly represented in research reports on homelessness issues. Established social work practice includes service user group engagement in feedback as part of reflective practice (Beresford and Bransfield, 2006). Peer researchers, including young researchers, are acknowledged and represented in some research reports in this review. However the extent of the role of research with, and by, service users in promoting voice and advocacy, and research on the processes of participatory research in homelessness studies appears more limited (Abrahams, et al. 2015).

### **Discussion: Spaces of change**

This literature and policy review is situated in the broader neoliberal and austerity context. The review reflects the iterative phases in this study: capturing change; experiencing change; and influencing change. This discussion section now develops concepts of spaces of change to provide a thematic analysis of key ideas emerging from the review. This will support the development of this research in subsequent chapters and will signpost themes that will be returned to for discussion in Chapter 7: Negotiating new realities.

The scope of influence of neoliberalism on social policy is global and systemic and local and particular (Roger, 2000; Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Neoliberalism holds power through diverse hegemonic practices which shape, as what will be described here, as three contested spaces of constraint and challenge. These spaces that homelessness services, staff and service users occupy in times of austerity are conceptualised as the following, and discussed further below:

Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy

Embodied space in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity

Spaces for change: possibilities for the promotion of a critical voice and for working in the margins

### **Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy**

Global and local manifestations of neoliberalism construct spaces of constraint and inequality within welfare policy and practice (Roger, 2000; Baker et al., 2004; Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). The global political-economic context of neoliberalism constructs and shapes local neoliberal political-economic contexts of welfare through hegemonic processes that promote common sense arguments for funding cuts, welfare reform and narrowing of eligibility criteria for benefits (Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Hegemonic arguments put forward by the Coalition government in 2010 claim systemic reductions in welfare spending should occur concurrently with reducing benefits at an individual level. Welfare reform is presented as a normalised action of sharing responsibility to reduce the national deficit. However, this ignores systemic and



multiple causes and conditions of vulnerability (Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Hegemonic processes operate through deficit models of policy language, managerial audit and control practices that promote a culture of surveillance and monitoring at local levels (Foucault, 1980; Diamond, 2004; Craig, 2011; Dobson and McNeill, 2011).

Reduced funding under Supporting People and impacts of the recession 2008/2009 has resulted in a competitive environment for providers and commissioners of services. Those with business-like operational procedures and capacity to manage in a payment by results system are most likely to thrive (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2005; Buckingham, 2012). The removal of statutory duty for single homeless people and reduction of front line homelessness staff is significant and has reduced the availability and quality of services for homeless people with complex health and social care needs and experience of other multiple deprivations (McDonagh, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2012; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). Resettlement services in particular are subject to meeting targets that construct success in restrictive auditing terms, such as monitoring throughput of people using the service within a given timeframe, reduction of the number of people moved off the streets, or reduction of people moved on from temporary accommodation. Homelessness service providers in the community and voluntary sector are increasingly compelled to work through narrow conditional and persuasive behaviour-changing relations in their support to service users in order to ensure they meet benefits criteria (Dobson, 2011). This undermines a values-base that front line resettlement workers bring to their relational work with homeless people and diminishes recognition of broader successes gained in improved confidence, quality of life, health and wellbeing (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Moore, 2010; Renedo, 2014). The value of community based provision of homelessness services run by volunteers and experts by experience is potentially lost in market driven approaches (Whiteford, 2010b; Limebury and Shea 2015).

Boundaries between welfare policy and welfare practice become sites for conflict and contestation (Cooper and Lousada, 2005). The role of the state, while appearing distant and in retreat, manages and exerts disciplinary power at local level through non-negotiable conditions for conformity. For those working in homelessness services constructed local neoliberal space is experienced through systems of performance monitoring and conditionality at project management and case work practice levels (Dobson, 2015). Identification of contested boundaries and analysis of mechanisms of structural neoliberalism as it operates through practice may offer spaces for resistance (Harvey, 2002; Baker et al., 2004; Diamond, 2008; Bunyan 2012). In the current context there is some evidence of local collaborative working regardless of, or as a result of, tight financial contexts (Bates and Freeman, 2014; Homeless Link, 2015d), reversals to welfare reforms may be too late (Bird, 2010; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). Neoliberalism and market approaches to social policy continue to construct controlled spaces of welfare policy and practice, with unequal and audit driven relationships between the statutory and community and voluntary sector (Buckingham, 2012; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). Any room for manoeuvre appears limited to day-to-day amelioration at local level under the guise of capacity building and partnership, rather than a prospective strategic challenge (Diamond, 2004; Meade, 2005; Dobson, 2011; Renedo, 2014).

### **Embodied space in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity**

Experience of working under conditions of austerity and welfare reform is characterised by alienation and hegemonic power that operates throughout the lives of homelessness service providers and service users alike (Benozzo and Colley, 2012; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014).

Contradictions and tensions are felt by front line homelessness workers who suggest an erosion of a values base in their work. While values among front line workers may not be singular and mutual, and are open to re-interpretation

(Fletcher, 2012), the caring for and relational aspect of work with service users is central and motivational (Renedo, 2014; Limebury and Shea, 2015). Conflict is experienced by those working in caring services as their roles may lack agency and become regarded as implementers of welfare reform at local level (Banks, 2011; Bunyan, 2012; Dobson, 2015). Organisations in the community and voluntary sector, are positioned as that of minor social rehabilitators, rather than major critics of state policies (Allen, 2003 in Meade 2005:360). In particular, front line workers in homelessness services occupy conflicted professional spaces. Ethical practices required to support efficiency, reporting and contractual accountability are valued as ethical professional practice. However, ethics of care, as ethical values-based work that shapes relational practice with service users, is particularly constrained by financial reductions to services (Banks, 2011; Renedo, 2014; Banks, 2016). Uncertainty of tenure can cause stress as front line homelessness workers often work for low pay and under project based temporary contractual arrangements (Maguire, 2012). In addition many homelessness workers experience burn out and mental health distress when working with marginalised groups (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012).

Conflict and constraint also embodies service user experiences. Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, particularly those experiencing multiple exclusions, are less likely to access statutory services such as health and housing support due to lack of knowledge of services and understanding of linkages between services (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009; Day, 2009; Bowpit et al., 2011a). Some seek alternative lifestyles, for example wayfaring, that are unintelligible to a market driven social welfare system based on compliance (Whiteford, 2010). People accessing housing support, and indeed front line workers who offer housing support advice, are compelled to make sense of a rapidly changing benefits and welfare system with little guidance or training, resulting in confusion and stress (Scanlon and Adlam, 2012).

Policy and funding criteria have changed welfare from a social service of entitlement to a system of conditionality and control, suggesting contradictory spheres of care and fear as lived realities for staff and service users of homelessness services (Cooper and Lousada, 2005; Renedo, 2014). Service users and staff are subject to symbolic violence of categorisation as deserving versus undeserving (Bourdieu, 1991). Service users are penalised depending on their status in relation to priority need and statutory duty. Staff and service users are subject to an audit culture of monitored outputs including targets set for reductions numbers of people off the streets or in resettlement services within a given time period. Service user lives are subject to surveillance and compliance within the benefits system (Dobson, 2011). Homelessness services front line staff, particularly working in the community and voluntary sector, are subject to further symbolic categorisation in their terms and conditions of employment (Benozzo and Colley, 2012), in project contract culture (Renedo, 2014) and experiences of burn out particularly associated with working with homeless people experiencing multiple exclusions (Maguire, 2012; Scanlon and Adlam, 2006; 2012).

### **Spaces for change: possibilities for the promotion of a critical voice and for working in the margins**

Research into the everyday lives of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, while an emergent research agenda, appears to remain a niche practice (Roger, 2000; Abrahams et al., 2015). Research into the experiences of homelessness has benefited from a multiple exclusion analysis thus allowing multi-layered perspectives to emerge (Dwyer et al., 2012). A limited number of homelessness studies identified working with service users as peer researchers. These include studies with formerly homeless people, ex-service users and young people with experiences of insecure housing (Dwyer et al. 2012; Clapham et al. 2014). The role of professionals has been explored with respect to advocacy on homelessness issues, and has revealed power imbalances with regard to representation and voice of service users (Renedo, 2014). Research on the

processes and experiences of participatory research with service users appears less visible in the homelessness literature (Abrahams, 2015; Brunwin, 2015).

The changing requirements of evaluation and monitoring in market driven contractual relationships appear geared towards generating quantitative evidence for payment by results rather than deeper understandings of the complexities of policy impacts and relational practices. Performance monitoring at organisational and individual levels places time and resource pressures on practice. These constraints may account for a potential decline or alienation from radical practice that promotes critical voice (Ferguson and Lavallete, 2004; Diamond, 2004; Ledwith, 2005). Alternatively it could suggest a need to create specific space for deliberation on the potential and possibilities for alternatives in democratic practice (Harvey, 2002; DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2006; Craig, 2011; Bunyan, 2012). While research on homelessness, austerity and welfare reform in England is emerging, the role of participatory research as emancipatory practice in this context, it appears, has yet to make a contribution to the literature.

## **Conclusion to the chapter**

As mentioned in the introduction, the overall aim for this study is to examine how austerity is understood and experienced at local level, by staff and service users in a small homelessness services unit. To contribute to this aim, this review has situated social welfare policy in a broader neoliberal context, and has examined literature on homelessness services during the current period of austerity and welfare reform. An analysis of neoliberal political-economic theory and the ways in which this shapes current welfare policy and practice at national and local level has been explored (Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013; Cornes et al., 2015). The current context of economic and policy change from the 2008/2009 recession to the austerity measures announced in 2010 and that continued during the life of this project have been examined to ascertain impacts on homelessness services in particular. The review provides a broader context

and starting point to situate and further examine findings of this local study which will be presented in subsequent chapters.

Studies on welfare reform and austerity measures affecting homelessness services in England from 2008 to 2015 reveal significant impacts on services and service users. In 2008, funding allocations as a result of recession reduced Supporting People funding for vulnerable groups including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Research provided evidence that cuts to local authority budgets in 2010 were found to be disproportionate across England, and funding reductions had the most severe impact on local authorities with the most numbers of vulnerable people (Hastings et al. 2012). The scope and culture of homelessness services provided by the community and voluntary sector though local authority commissioning had changed in response to a competitive and market driven context. Larger comfortable contractors who have the most organisational resources and business minded approaches are now best placed to tender for homelessness services (Buckingham, 2012). People experiencing homelessness and multiple exclusion will potentially have reduced access to a range of health and social services provision due to reduced individualised services of support that enable engagement. An increase in the complexity of benefit criteria and narrowing of eligibility criteria under Universal Credit (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011a) combined with changes to statutory provision is found to impact most on single homeless people, young people, and those under 35 years of age in particular (Homeless Link, 2014a; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015).

The review concluded with a discussion that identified and summarised key emerging themes of contested and conflicted spaces that provide a way of understanding early experiences of austerity. These are:

Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy at local level

Embodied space in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity for staff and service users of homelessness services

Spaces for change: possibilities for the promotion of a critical voice and for working in the margins.

In summary, this review addresses the specific research questions for this study. With reference to research questions i and ii, the review provides an analysis of major policy and funding reforms at a national level that have a bearing on homelessness services. These are further explored at a local level in this study and analysis will be presented in Chapter 4: The workers' stories and Chapter 5: The service users' stories. With reference to research questions iii and iv the review has provided an overview of emerging literature on ways change is understood by staff and service users in the wider sector more broadly, by drawing on the emerging research into the impacts of austerity and benefit changes on welfare services and homelessness services in particular. With reference to question vii, research that has highlighted the role of participatory research for advocacy and inclusion of voice of those affected by austerity, and for promotion of a critical voice in the public sphere, appears a limited yet emerging research practice; a theme that will be returned to in Chapter 3: Methodology and Chapter 6: Doing research together. Themes of contested and conflicted spaces identified in this review will be returned to in the final discussion in Chapter 7: Negotiating new realities.

Connections are made between this literature and policy review and analysis in subsequent chapters that present findings from the substantive fieldwork for this study. The review and primary data come together to inform the analysis of experiences of change evident in Chapter 4: The workers' stories, Chapter 5: The service users' stories and Chapter 6: Doing research together. The three themes of contested and conflicted space derived from the literature will inform and illuminate interpretation of findings in subsequent chapters and an overall analysis of experiences of austerity.

Next follows Chapter 3: Methodology that provides a detailed overview of the phases of research, research questions and data collection tools used in this study. The chapter focusses on explaining the philosophy and methodological approaches underpinning this study as an equality study, including a justification for participatory and emancipatory approaches to social research. Equality questions in methodology such as the extent voices of those subject to or involved in the research and research relations are central to the methodology for the study. It has some resonance with other studies highlighted in this review that provide reflection on the role of research in advocacy and promotion of critical voice. Chapter 3: Methodology and Chapter 6: Doing research together will also consider the processes and relations of participatory research that go beyond method, and will outline the limits and possibilities of ways of working through a participatory model of research practice attempted in this study.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction to the chapter**

This research is framed as an ethnographic and local equality study and was conducted during a period of welfare reform and austerity measures from 2011 to 2015. Ethnographic narratives, from the perspectives of service users and staff in a small homelessness and resettlement services unit of a charity, are developed as ethnographies of austerity, (Denzin, 1997; Bold, 2012; Okely, 2012; Baker et al., 2004).

This study, I hope, embodies the values of an equality study, in that it prioritises experiences of those with the least powerful voices during a time of social change, and, through collaborative research relations, offers emergent knowledge arising from the research in order to promote human dignity in the public sphere (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004; Lynch, 2011). Ethnographic narratives, of individuals and groups of individuals, are at the centre of the writing up this research as stories of spaces of change within early austerity in England (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Schostak and Schostak, 2008). Research theory addressing themes of power and knowledge, participation and the centrality of equality research relations underpin all aspects of the research design (Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2009; Lynch, 2011).

This chapter outlines and gives a rationale for the chosen ethnographic narrative approach and methods used in the study. Using a broadly participatory and collaborative approach the research sought to capture, analyse and reflect on experiences *with* staff and service users, including working with co-researchers in gathering data (Magurie, 1987; Truman, Mertens and Humphries, 2000; Plano Clark and Creswell, 2007).

The chapter is organised in four sections as follows. The first section, builds on the context given in Chapter 1, and outlines the aims and purposes of the research, presents the research questions for the study and explains the broadly chronological phases of the project.

The second section introduces an ethnographic narrative research approach taken in this study to represent individual and collective voices from interview data. Development of individual and collective ethnographic narratives allowed perspectives and spaces of points of view to emerge over time during during the changing context of welfare reforms and funding cuts. Changes in relational space, which is between people and the organisational places they occupy relative to each other, the charity and the State is also explored (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Schostak and Schostak, 2008). Multiple perspectives of staff and service users are conflated to provide rich detailed, contextualised accounts of the early experiences of a changed welfare context during austere times. An analytical model, developed for the writing up collective ethnographic narratives of the workers' stories presented in Chapter 4 is proposed and explained. A rationale for using a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach as a framework for analysis for a set of service user stories presented in Chapter 5 is provided (May et al., 2009).

The third section situates methodological choices in a discussion of the role of research theory, and a gives a rationale for the research to be framed as an equality study. A reflective narrative of my own researcher experiences in applied social research is included, that identifies the influences of feminist theory and equality studies on my work. A researcher account is a way of locating values of the researcher in relation to the research process (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Bold, 2012; Okely, 2012).

The fourth section returns to the practicalities of the project and presents information about the organisation in which the research takes place, and discusses research processes and ethical considerations. Links between phases

of the research and research questions, and methods used for data collection is explained. How the overall research project had an external presence through related research and public engagement activity is noted.

The chapter concludes by summarising the ethnographic approach taken and the potential value of participatory research as a local equality study of early austerity in England.

## **Research aim, purpose and questions**

As introduced in Chapter 1: Ethnographies of austerity, the aim of the research arose out of discussions between the researcher and a trustee of the charity. The main aim of the project was to examine how austerity is understood and experienced at local level. The purpose was to understand lived experiences of austerity and to use the research to advocate on behalf of those affected. The process of carrying out the research offered a space for the charity to reflect on ways it may be possible to “*negotiate new realities*” (Carmel, manager, 2010) in the context of welfare reform and funding cuts, and to use findings from the research to express a concerned voice for social justice.

The overall research was to understand:

How are funding cuts and welfare reforms understood and experienced by service-users and staff of the homelessness and resettlement services unit, within the charity?

As mentioned earlier three phases of data collection were developed to manage the research project over time as changes to welfare and cuts to public services occurred. These phases were also conceptualised as inter-linked periods of change, allowing questions to be iteratively revisited over time. Methodological questions are included in the design of the project as a means to focus on participation and reflection on the research processes undertaken in this equality study. The phases, themes and research questions were outlined in Chapter 1

but are noted again here to provide context for the research methodological deliberations considered later in the remainder of this chapter.

#### Phase 1: Capturing Change (January 2011-December 2011)

- v. What are the major policy and funding reforms that have a bearing on the services provided by resettlement services?
- vi. How are these policies understood by staff and service users?
- vii. What may be the impact of these on services?
- viii. How are these changes experienced by staff and service users?

#### Phase 2: Experiencing Change (May 2011 –January 2012; and July-August 2014)

- ix. What are the lived experiences of people accessing homelessness and resettlement services?
- x. What is the impact of welfare reform and reduction in public funding on service users of the resettlement services?
- xi. How are voices of service-users included in the research and subsequent advocacy?

#### Phase 3: Influencing change (December 2011 – December 2014)

- xviii. In what ways does the charity respond to external and internal change?
- xix. In what ways can research findings contribute to advocacy?
- xx. What are the limits and possibilities of working through a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work?

### **Ethnographic narratives as stories of spaces of change during austere times**

Ethnographic narratives are central to the representation of voice in this study and provide rich and situated viewpoints on experiences of early austerity in England (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Okely, 2012). Throughout the study, several individual and collective narratives are presented that offer multiple perspectives

and stories of spaces of change during the period of welfare reforms. Narratives occur in the changing spaces occupied by staff and services users of the charity, and in the research relations and spaces for internal and external advocacy during austere times. Ethnographic narratives are presented throughout this study and include the following: the researcher's narrative (Chapter 3); the co-researcher team reflections on doing research together (Chapter 6); collective and individual staff narratives of change within the resettlement services, charity and wider policy context from 2011 to 2014 (Chapter 4); and individual and conflated narratives of homelessness service users on their life journeys and coming up for benefits review in 2011 and 2014 (Chapter 5).

The next section explains the development of a working model for analysis and writing up of the multiple perspectives of realities expressed in interview data with managers, front line workers and services users that are represented as ethnographic narratives in the workers' stories of Chapter 4, and the service users' stories of Chapter 5. Bourdieu's ideas on 'spaces of points of view' and Schostak and Schostak's ideas on 'representative thinking' aligned with feminist and equality theory and approaches to representation and analysis are put to use to inform the framing and process for my analysis of interviews (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Schostak and Schostak's, 2008; Okely, 2012). This is followed by a rationale for use of a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, a participatory approach for analysing poverty with communities, is given as a framework for analysis of the service users' stories and a consideration of how the ethnographies of austerity will be written up.

### **Bourdieu and 'spaces of points of view'**

In 'The Weight of the World', Bourdieu et al. (1999) problematize concepts of perspective and points of view by offering a 'face value' set of interviews with accompanying research notes as an ethnography of contemporary French housing estates and the policies and ideologies that produce lived experiences. Methodologically, this builds on Bourdieu's earlier reflexive sociology that moves

beyond a point of view that privileges the biographical narrative of the social, positional, and value of the researcher's own viewpoint, to offer analysis that creates 'spaces of points of view' that have multiple perspectives (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992). Of particular interest to me in *The Weight of the World*, is the idea of analysis of collective constructions of representations, and how this may inform an approach to analysis in my research and writing up of the workers' stories. For example in the Sections 'The Abdication of the State' (Bourdieu, 1999) and 'On the Way Down' (Pialoux and Beaud, 1999) the researcher notes and transcripts of interviews on housing policy and employment offer 'up-close' sets of narratives that work together to situate stories side by side, with multiple perspectives available to the reader (Bourdieu et al., 1999).

The extent to which this is an established feminist and anthropological way of working is raised by Kenway and McLeod's (2004) review of Bourdieu's concepts of spaces of points of view and perspectivism. They contend that the multi-disciplinary nature of critical postmodern and feminist research and methodologies in particular is, in essence, models already proposed by Bourdieu in his 'reflexive sociology' (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992). Kenway and McLeod suggest that de-traditionalised, biographical, individualist perspectives are often foregrounded in the politics of representation in research and these stances de-genders and de-classes biographies in an unconnected ontological void. They argue that a stronger form of reflexivity is present in feminist research in particular, that goes beyond autobiographical reflexivity of researchers to sociological reflexivity of structural, spatial, historical and relational multi and partial perspectives within the research 'field' (Kenway and McLeod, 2004:527).

Nonetheless, Bourdieu's concept of spaces of points of view has some value for me when considering competing and contradictory meanings of realities raised in this study. The extent to which narratives that are situated in the same moment, and voices of the workers, services-users and managers, resonate or create dissonance, becomes foregrounded when taking multiple, temporal, historical,

and power-relational perspectives of the players into consideration. A reading of interview data for this study showed variable perspectives by the same persons at different times and voicing of contradictions in organisational practices and intentions. Reflexive opportunities for collective action may be limited or not available to different players. In many ways, the narratives revealed organisational and individualistic self-reflexivity more often than structural reflexivity, however, local ethnographies of austerity could be combined with other stories to contribute to a critique of the broader context of change (Kenway and McLeod, 2004).

### **Schostak and Schostak and 'representative thinking'**

In *Radical Research*, Schostak and Schostak (2008) also seek to surface multiple viewpoints and offer a model to design 'representative thinking' into social science research processes (Schostak and Schostak, 2008: 232). To do this, they suggest, the researcher in working close-up with data, situates firstly individuals, then themselves in the centre as subject. In a multi-step process representation is constructed from singular voices to multiple voices, and issues, rules, positions and alternatives are experienced and inscribed as social realities emerging from data. They propose a model of voicing representation, described as a process involving individuals negotiating rules of the games and taking positions in relation to each other (Schostak and Schostak, 2008: 233) Individuals are located firstly as a single subject narrator. Individuals relate their viewpoints on strategic issues and debates, and strategies and rules they employ to 'play the game', thus setting out boundaries and bracketing of aspects of their viewpoints. In my study staff and service users' perspectives on austerity, funding cuts, welfare reform and organisational change form part of the structural and institutional boundaries in relation to which they present strategic positions and their understandings of the rules of the game.

Next, Schostak and Schostak analyse the subject's deeper relational experiences as inscribed social realities, the close-up personal boundaries and bracketing of

experiences including conflicts, challenges, and points of connection. Each, subject narrator, in mapping the strategic relations in the game can take multiple perspectives and comment on the sides they take. By mapping out the game, the rules, boundaries and points of connection, subject narrators may create space for reframing and critique. Managers and front line staff occupy spaces with relational and experiential boundaries that may allow ways of working in the margins that *“inform the context in which we work”* (Patricia, manager, 2013).

Finally, the researcher’s analytical role is to situate themselves as subject narrator to examine ‘up close’ individual subject and multiple narratives. This allows alternatives to emerge from narratives in what Schostak and Schostak call a creative space for radical critique and potential action (Schostak and Schostak, 234-235). Representative thinking provided an opportunity in my study to position the voice of the ethnographic researcher and to explore the idea of transformative-participatory practice in research relations (Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Okely, 2012).

Schostaks and Schostaks idea of ‘universalising the singular’ have synergies with phenomenographic depictions of multiple perspectives, characterised as distinct but relational outcome spaces of variations of experiences of phenomena (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998; Åkerlind, 2005). The risk of presenting disembodied voice that may occur in phenomenographic outcome spaces, I think, is lessened by taking an interpretative ethnographic approach to analysis of interviews (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008; Okely, 2012). Ideas from Schostak and Schostak’s model of *“Individuals, games and taking sides”* (Schostak and Schostak, 2008:234) can, I think, be adapted as a useful device to present my process of ‘representative thinking’ and analysis of individual interviews of trustees, management and front line staff. The model may be helpful to identify the multiple locations of players and the boundaries and surfaces of interactions with each other (Schostak and Schostak, 2008:234).



In this study, I feel, representation of individual and collective voices, with their conflicting and contested viewpoints, are authentically and relationally bound in the space and time of welfare reforms and cuts. Their voices, I hope are not disembodied, but come together as collective and individual narratives; ethnographies of austerity over time. My interpretation and representation of their voices as ethnographic narratives in this study is a contribution to the 'writing a commentary' of austerity. Approaches to 'representative thinking' has resonance with equality studies approaches to research as a way to explore data and contexts of research reflectively with co-researchers or participants. Baker et al. define five dimensions of equality in research relations as: respect and recognition; resources; affective care and solidarity; power and empowerment; and learning and working together (Baker et al. 2004:3-8). Dimensions of equality in relational conditions of research practice that seeks to understand lived experiences at a local level will be returned to in Chapter 6: Doing research together.

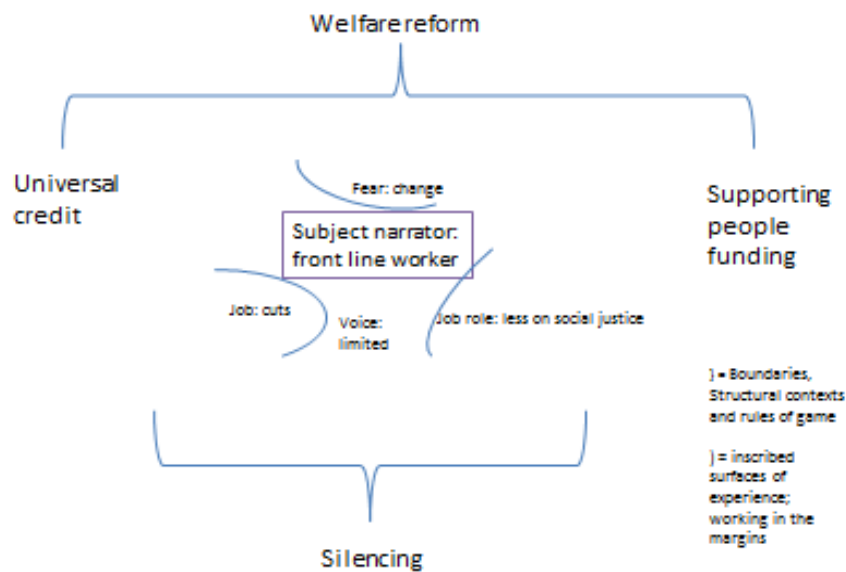
### **Towards an analytical model: interpreting ethnographic narratives**

Utilising Bourdieu's concepts of perspectivism, and 'spaces of points of view' and Schostak and Schostaks models of 'representative thinking' will be, I think, helpful to identify and unpick spatial, relational and organisational ambiguities and spoken and unspoken sites of conflict in Chapter 4: The workers' stories in particular. That multiple perspectives and viewpoints occur in readings of individual narratives, is likely as trustees, management and front-line staff occupy varying spaces in relation to each other, to the context in which they work, and those that use services of the organisation. Multiple perspectives of individual subject narrators will be at times presented alongside conflated narratives of variations of experiences. Examination of the data reveal links to the themes arising from the literature: neoliberalism and the contested and

changing state of welfare; embodied spaces in constrained and conflicted times; and possibilities for working in the margins.

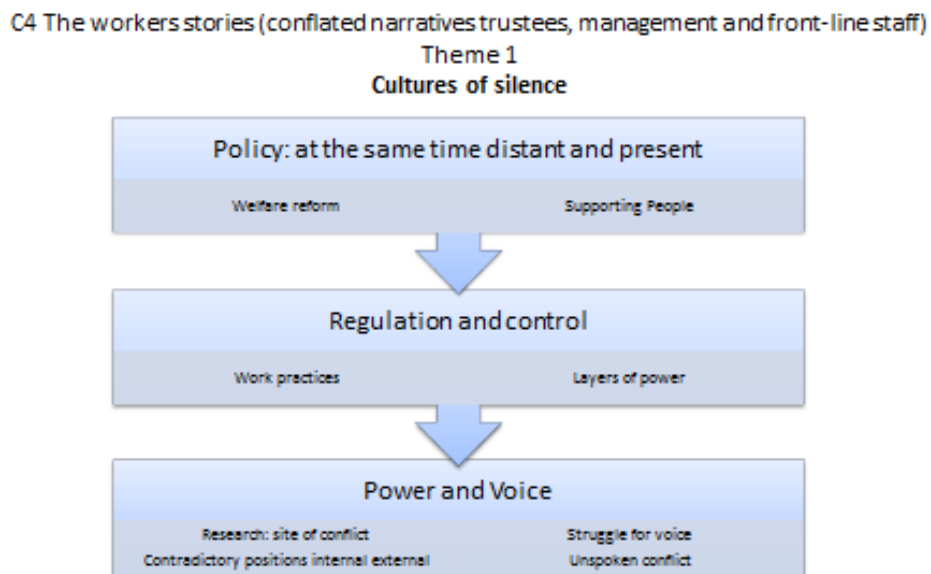
A working model, adapted from Schostak and Schostak (2008), was developed for this research, as a way of exploring 'perspectivism' and 'spaces of points of view' in interview data and 'representative thinking' in writing up interpretative, ethnographic narratives. A working model to examine interview data from front line staff is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The subject narrator is the front line worker, viewed as an individual or as a category. The boundary space they occupy is the neoliberal structural context of welfare reform characterised by changes to policy, Universal Credit, and reductions to funding streams for resettlement services, Supporting People. Their day to day experiences are represented as inscribed surfaces that represent both constraints and possibilities, including fear in the context of significant, radical policy change, diminishment of their social justice role, , material loss of employment related to cuts to funding. While space for voice of the front line worker is possible, it is limited, and further constrained by the structural boundaries of the rules of the game of welfare reform and austerity measures. The subject narrator of the front line worker enters a contested space of changing internal and external relations of power and their voice becomes subject to silencing.

**Figure 1: A working model for analysis of interview data and representation of front line workers' narratives (adapted from Schostak and Schostak, 2008:233).**



A second working model was developed to interpret conflated interview data from interviews with all staff. This was used to explore spaces of points of view and possibilities for multiple perspectives over time that could be represented as themes in collective narratives. Figure 2 below represents a working model for the development of collective narrative on the theme of 'cultures of silence'. Connections are made between global and local contested spaces. The national welfare policy space, itself in the broader context of neoliberal, market approaches to social welfare, is represented by collective staff voice as appearing both distant and present. The detail of the roll of benefit changes was viewed as distant, while cuts to Supporting People were felt in the present moment. The role of regulation and control in market approaches to social welfare were expressed as layers of power between and within organisations through transactional and performative work practices. Power and voice was variously expressed in contradictory spaces where staff struggled to articulate contested experiences.

**Figure 2: A working model for the development of analysis of collective narratives of the workers' stories.**



### **A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach**

A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach (May et al., 2009) was used for the interpretation of service user narratives presented in Chapter 5, as a way of making a link with existing participatory research in the UK on people's experiences of poverty. Methodologically a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach has been informed by research approaches developed in the global south (Hocking, 2003). Using an existing framework for analysis could suggest that data is subject to a priori coding and thematic analysis, rather than interpretative analysis. However, the use of a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis as a framework for service users' stories used in this study does not preclude an open-ended coding of data, as more typically used in a grounded approach, and is compatible with the interpretative approach to writing up of ethnographic narratives used in the study as a whole.

A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach enables people experiencing poverty to examine and give voice to their own perspectives on assets they have in their lives through the use of participatory research methods (May et al. 2009). It was therefore considered an appropriate framework for gathering and analysing service users' stories in this project. The approach has been used in similar studies in the UK by Oxfam GB and Church Action on Poverty, including highly participatory research projects with co-researchers involved at all stages of the project (Hocking, 2003; Orr et al., 2006; May et al. 2009; Athwal, Brill, Chesters and Quiggin, 2011). The participatory methods used in a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach were developed in the global south and appear to be beginning to have some influence on community based research globally (Krantz, 2001; Hocking, 2003). Methodologically, it also had resonance with my experience as a researcher in disadvantaged communities in the global south and the global north. Critics of the use of a Sustainable Livelihood Analysis approach suggest that it can be used as a technocratic development tool in the global south and international development (Brocklesby and Fischer, 2003; Solesbury, 2003). Participatory research, including a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach may be subject to co-option by local elites or top down planning processes. Participatory methods may offer an illusion of more radical community development practice at local level, but in reality may entail little meaningful participation or scope for change in the broader policy and political socio-economic spheres (Brocklesby and Fischer, 2003; Ledwith, 2005). Some participatory research approaches could be interpreted in practice as top-down or tokenistic (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The importance of, and potential clash of values in policy and practice cannot be ignored in using community development or sustainable development approaches to research (Arce, 2003; Reed et al., 2005). However, as my researcher narrative outlined later on in the chapter suggests, an emancipatory approach to participatory-transformative research is beyond participatory research methods only, and should also seek to

ensure that equality and voice is central to research relations and practice (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Daly, 2010).

Taking the above into account, a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach was adapted for the fieldwork in 2011 and 2014 to draw together experiences of service-users and to provide a framework for analysis of their stories (May et al., 2009). This adapted Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach, shown below, gives a framework for exploration of five areas of assets held by people themselves. It allows space for discussion and identification of 'shocks' and 'resilience' that hinder or support sustainable livelihoods. It also allows space for people to define values, and value contestations in relation to assets. The five assets pentagon of the Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach (May et al., 2009) was adapted as a framework for analysis in the context of this research. A research note based on discussion with the co-researcher team incorporates possible perspectives for this research and is outlined in Figure 3 below.

***Figure 3: Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis framework for interviews with service users 2011-2014 (adapted from May et al. 2009).***

<p><u>Human assets</u></p> <p>These include the health and well-being status of homeless people or people at risk of homelessness, and service users' own conceptions of well-being.</p>
<p><u>Social assets</u></p> <p>These include access to, and relationship with, social and support organisations that support the multiple exclusion factors of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.</p>
<p><u>Physical assets</u></p> <p>These include accommodation and household goods that make up a home, and social and emotional conceptions of 'home'.</p>
<p><u>Public assets</u></p> <p>These include access to, and terms of engagement with, statutory and community homelessness services and resources, and broader education, health and social welfare resources and services.</p>

### Financial assets

These include value of, engagement in, and access to paid and unpaid work, and financial flows including income and social welfare benefits, reserves and budgeting.

### Shocks

These include life events and consequences for the person including impacts on the five assets outlined above.

### Resilience

These include personal assets of the person that help withstand or ameliorate negative impacts on the five assets outlined above.

*(Research note, 2011)*

The rationale for using this approach is that while service users depend on the charity's homelessness and resettlement services, in one part of their lives, a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach explores the range of assets, shocks, resilience, and values in relation the whole of a person's life. Ethnographic narratives situated in a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis framework gave a rich picture of what happened to service users in the period of welfare reforms from 2011 to 2014.

### **Writing up**

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the approach taken to representing ethnographic narratives in this study allows for multiple and collective perspectives and rich stories of change to emerge over a particular time of austerity (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Schostak and Schostak, 2008).

Ethnographic narrative inquiry that tends toward grounded theory approaches to analysis, aims to bracket out prior theoretical positioning, and implies that meaning should be deducted from the data in isolation (Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1999). However, this research while acknowledging emergence from first-hand data, takes a pragmatic approach to analytical reasoning, and brings

together data, concepts and experiences with which to consider findings and elicit meanings (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Everyday ethnographies of particular local experiences, while re-presented by the researcher, can help shed light on how policy and practices may contest or confirm a range of discourses and concepts (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu, 1977).

Immersion in ethnographic data involves several iterative stages: familiarisation, writing about the data, organising and re-organising data, identification of themes and interpretation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Immersion in the data in order to draw out explanations, understandings and interpretations of contextualised narratives and to *“provide a faithful representation of people’s lives”* (Co-researcher team meeting, April 2011) was deemed important by the co-researcher group. The co-researcher group spent significant time exploring ideas and analysis by talking together during the summer months of 2011.

### **Methodological influences and choices: The researcher’s narrative**

Before continuing with the practicalities and methods used in this study, the researcher’s experiences of research practice are located within a discussion of research theory, as a background to the methodological choices considered for this research project. This section presents an autobiographical ethnographic narrative and positions my own space of point of view as a researcher within this study (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Bold, 2012; Okely, 2012).

The methodological design of this research, *Negotiating New Realities*, echoes the influence of equality studies and feminist research theory, on my thinking (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004; Colley, 2012). My research practice draws on my professional background in community development and educational work in its broadest sense. It is influenced by working with and learning from others using participatory research methods in the global south and the global north (O’



Neil, 1992; Okali, Sumburg and Farrington, 1994; Chambers, 1994; Debashish et al., 1998; Guijit and Shah, 1998; NOPEST, 1998; Daly, 1999; Ledwith, 2005).

This research takes the form of an ethnographic study in order to address the stated research questions and explore, through narratives, the ways in which funding cuts and welfare reforms are understood and experienced by service-users and staff (Okely, 1994; Travers, 2001; Bold, 2012). The influences on my methodological choices and a rationale for this ethnographic study to be framed as an equality study now follows.

### **Equality studies, research theory and participatory practice**

As this project progressed, my understanding matured around the potential for ethnographic research to illustrate the local and particular in ways that has significance for understanding impacts of broader social-economic conditions, including austerity (Bourdieu, 1977; Baker et al., 2004; Colley, 2012). Ethnographic writing could offer a space for traditionally unheard and subjugated voices, those of service-users and staff, to emerge as a “local character of criticism” in the context of wider social policy reforms (Foucault, 1980:78). Validity in my research is expressed through relational research processes that “invites reflexivity and critique” including collaborative ethical deliberations and working with service users as co-researchers (Lather, 1986:265). Narrative and participatory methods provide relatable and reliable texts that both tell the stories of lived experiences and hold potential to inform or transform organisational, policy and political contexts in which we work (Freire, 1972; Lather, 1986; Lynch, 1999). My role as the researcher in this study self-consciously became one of designer, listener, reflector, facilitator, narrator and insider within the project (Lather, 1986; Stanley, 1997). The research then took form as ethnography, situated in a case study site of a charity, which documented the experiences of service users and workers as they negotiated the new rules of the game implied by welfare reform, within a broader neo-liberal

context of austerity (Bourdieu, 1977; Baker et al. 2004; Bunyan, 2012; Benozzo and Colley, 2012).

My prior experiences of equality studies, engagement with research theory and participatory practice cannot be bracketed out of the influences on the design of this study. The following reflective discussion on research theory serves as a point of reflection - looking back in order to look forward - to locate my ontological, epistemological and value base as the researcher in this study (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Bold 2012).

As a student in the Equality Studies Centre in Ireland, I experienced an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach to teaching and research that made it vital for me to critique and theorise my professional practice as an educator and community worker in the context of local, national and global socio-political circumstances (Daly, 1998). Equality studies is a relatively recent intellectual framework that draws on major ideological and sociological debates including Rawls' Theory of Justice (1971), Young's Justice and The Politics of Difference (1990) Sen's Inequality Re-examined (1999) and Bourdieu's theories of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977) (Equality Studies Centre, 2014). In *Studying Equality* (1997:57) John Baker defines equality studies as an egalitarian discourse that is concerned with engaging debate on political and social reforms. He argues that sociological frameworks are failing to address the gap between empirical research findings and progress towards a more egalitarian society. Equality studies aims to link egalitarian politics to normative, analytical and interpretative traditions of social research as a means to voice and re-define basic rights, and bring equality theory and action within the realm of a broader cross section of society (Baker, 2003).

An egalitarian perspective on research includes a standpoint on a broader recognition of knowledge and viewpoints that are excluded from traditional positivist research practices. Equality studies has its roots in a feminist theoretical challenge to the traditional positivist and rational construction of

knowledge that has characterised science and social sciences research, including that used to inform social policy. Positivist research methods emphasise an analysis of scientifically observable and measurable trends. Such operational frameworks are problematic if they fail to take into account the social, structural, cultural, economic and political contexts of research findings. Feminist theorists Harstock (1983), Delphy and Leonard (1992), Harding (1986) and Walby (1992) challenge a patriarchal scientific method, used in social sciences research that is based on a technical and rational experimental method. They argue for a standpoint epistemology that is based on relational viewpoints and outlines a construction of knowledge that takes into account women's activity and experiences, in particular.

This study draws on a range of theoretical perspectives to define a methodological approach and to put theory to work in engagement with the data. Feminist theories of knowledge and power underpin the ethnographic methodology of this research. Participatory research relations can create unique spaces for unheard voices to emerge, for example in Maguire's study of Mexican women's experience of domestic violence (Maguire, 1987). Okley's anthropological practice in fieldwork informs the act of collection of ethnographic narratives (Okley, 2012). A key concern for Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh is the importance of linking equality theory and action in social research (Baker et al. 2004). These studies and approaches resonate with the motivation for and way of working in this study. Reflection on research processes throughout this research over time helped to frame and understand the changing contexts at local level (Bourdieu, 1977).

Feminist theory highlights gaps in research relations and processes that restrict the contribution of social science to understanding inequality in society (Humphries, 2000; Lynch, 1999). Positivist social science research positions the researcher as 'expert'; the authoritative voice in production of knowledge (Maguire, 1987). Such research relationships are characterised by power-over

and detachment from subjects of research by researchers for fear of 'contamination' of data and disruption of 'replicability'; key concerns of positivist research (Okely, 2012:8). Hierarchical relationships dis-empower 'subjects' of research by excluding people from knowledge generation and analysis, let alone formations of recommendations and planning of social policy/action. Gaps between researcher and 'subject' result in limited interpretations, and an alienation of the 'subjects' of research from research processes and purpose (Harding, 1986; Oliver, 1992). Furthermore, the knowledge of the academy is often privileged over the knowledge of subjects, subjugating the knowledge of lived experiences, resulting in an elitist stance on experience and rights to ownership of knowledge (Foucault, 1977). Critical approaches to research and knowledge generation expose the hegemonic power of expert over 'subjects' in research and seek methodologically to allow subjugated knowledge(s) of research participants and analyses of inequalities to emerge (Foucault, 1980; Denzin, 2009; Ledwith and Springett, 2010).

The role of research in addressing inequality, rights and ethics, become of central importance to defining the purpose of social research and its influence on social policy, societal norms and political vision. (Baker et al. 2004; Denzin, 2009). Lynch (1995) advocates a more holistic approach to sociological research and a new and more politically involved role for radical academics. Not surprisingly, these viewpoints continue to present challenges to traditional ways the academy (universities, its academics and managers) view the production of knowledge, the value of certain types of knowledge, hierarchies of knowledge producers, the dissemination of knowledge and roles for academics and students (Lynch 1995; Equality Studies Centre 2000).

### **Connections of power and knowledge**

Research that draws on feminist theorising of knowledge(s) provides a rich context for discussion of the nature of knowledge, power and participation in research (Lather, 1991; Guijt and Shah, 1998).

Heywood (1994) describes the influence of political power in three areas of action: the ability to make or influence decisions; the ability to set the agenda or prevent discussions, debate and decisions; and the ability to manipulate what others want or think. Political power seeks to organise society to conform in order to elicit stability, widespread acceptance and public support. Positivist research, as a dominant knowledge paradigm, can be used to legitimise the authority of political power, by using research 'truths' gained by detached research relations and research using largely quantitative measures to confirm ideological positions (Oliver, 1992). Mechanisms for appraising social policy and practice including education has increasingly included research approaches from the epidemiological and psychological sciences for example randomised control trials and quantitative analysis of variables to audit human experiences (Denzin, 2009; Blimpo and Evans, 2011). Largely statistical, analyses and findings suggest 'truth' is measurable and replicable, and that research operates within a-historical, a-cultural and value-free contexts (Okely, 2012). Social science that relies on the scientific method and reasoning of cause and effect reduces social policy informed entirely in this way to a laboratory experiment (Schostak and Schostak, 2008:163). Such scientific approaches disregard the proposition that knowledge generation and power are intertwined (Travers, 2001). Social researchers working through an emancipatory research framework work towards normative ideals of what society should or could be. They advocate for knowledge generation through a diversity of methods including quantitative and qualitative approaches and mixed methods in order to examine social inequalities (Baker et al., 2004). Statistical data is important to add to knowledge about the human condition by revealing trends in inequality. For example the United Nations Human Development Programme's Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014) employs quantitative statistical data about people's quality of life that gives deeper understanding to the material conditions of poverty than possible with standard Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Product measures. Statistical analysis of multi-national data sets have been employed to

great effect to uncover the health, socio-economic impact of relative inequalities between and more importantly within countries in the longitudinal equalities research conducted by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009).

Connell (1993) argues that power is socially organised in society. Legitimising power as an authoritative force of the powerful over the powerless requires justification by dominant groups in society including academics, social scientists, politicians and policy makers. Foucault (1980) concerned with political functions of power came to regard research in the public domain as value-laden with the ideological discourses of the powerful, serving the interests of dominant groups and perpetuating inequality (Foucault, 1980:109). Hegemonic power, a coercive dominant force of ideology that is produced and exerted by both the state and civil society through policy, institutions and the media results in widespread consent internalised as common sense in society (Ledwith, 2005:114). For oppressed groups in society, strategies that unify and encourage collective analysis, such as community work, plus access to knowledge, research, and the academy may challenge the hegemonic power of ruling groups (Ledwith 2005). Connell (1993) suggests that despite interpretations of power as a choice to challenge and resist, this interpretation must also be sanctioned by society, as all members of society are subject to power functions of control and rule (Connell, 1993; Foucault, 1980).

Taking this argument further, if access to and use of knowledge has important implications for how society is organised and ruled; contributions to an egalitarian society require forms of emancipatory knowledge generation and research paradigms that are acceptable by society. The unveiling of common-sense as a hegemonic power back-drop to society and social research, and the identification of inequalities is a project of egalitarian research and politics (Freire, 1972; Baker, 1997; hooks, 2003; Ledwith, 2009; Bunyan, 2012).

## **The nature of knowledge writing**

Oakley (1998) advocates a feminist research approach to enhancing knowledge and worldviews which includes an acknowledgement of the subject as both 'experiencer' and 'knower'. Harding's Marxist perspective states that knowledge is constructed out of experience, but what is capable of being experienced at that time is situated in "historical changes that make possible feminist theory and consequently feminist science and epistemology" (Harding 1986:158). Foucault (1980) envisages social research that takes account of changes to knowledge as social contexts are deconstructed and re-structured. Knowledge becomes a narrative of reality in its relational contexts rather than a static 'single truth'.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe ethnographic interpretive writing as progressing through several research periods, historically located in time, and with associated perspectives on truth and methodological validity. These periods include imperialist and colonial anthropological perspectives up to World War Two; a blurring of diverse methods up to the late 1970s; and a crisis of representation in ethnographic research up to the late 1990s (Denzin and Lincoln; 1994). Denzin (1997) re-appraises ethnographic writing/texts and its production, ownership and interpretations as being of common concern for researchers, 'subjects' of research and audiences. Observing emerging distinctive features of an experimental ethnography for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, he suggests that interpretative ethnographic texts (talk, narratives, written interpretations, performance, and fiction texts) are mutually creative and influential (Denzin, 1997:xii). Reflexivity in research, where no one account of social reality has privileges over another result in 'messy texts' that have value through surfacing diverse voices of experience that enrich and benefit understandings of the human condition, thereby promoting goodwill, response and action. Denzin usefully traces theoretical and purposeful options for interpretative ethnography. Citing Derrida (1981) and Clough (1984) (in Denzin, 1997:xvii) who propose that social theory equates to social writing he notes that

research cannot exist outside global cultures; and that co-authored and layered accounts form part of a new caring journalism or social scribing of which sociological research is part. Humanistic social research, to which ethnography or interpretive writing makes a contribution, is ultimately communitarian and political (Denzin 1997: xiv-xvii).

For post-modernists, knowledge is fragmented into 'multiple truths' defined by multiple perspectives. For Marxist-feminists the importance of knowledge generation and research in society is to raise critical awareness through reflection on the diversity of the human condition within historical and socio-political contexts of change. Habermas (1971) critiques post-modernist relativism as a block to the potentially transformative critical reflection. While he acknowledges it is impossible to be completely free of relative perspectives, he suggests it is possible to be critical while at the same time openly acknowledging research biases. Validity of knowledge(s), argues Lather (1986) is expressed by "the degree to which a given research project empowers or emancipates" (Lather, 1986:67). Inclusive approaches to social research allow for of a broader range of perspectives in critical reflection to be articulated (Oliver 1992; Denzin, 2009).

### **Possibilities of participation in research practice**

Participatory research is located within an interpretivist paradigm. Epistemologically participatory research draws on feminist theorising that views knowledge as multi-faceted and value-laden (Harding 1986; Ledwith, 2009). Heuristic analytical approaches are intentionally interpretative in favour of uncovering 'knowledges' and 'critical perspectives' of those engaged with research and to allow power relations within to surface and disrupt and add to understanding (Lather, 1986; Maguire, 1987; Chambers 1997; Holland and Blackburn, 1998).

The idea of conducting research in a 'participatory' way is widespread across disciplines and contexts and has many meanings. Participatory research crosses



discipline boundaries and contributes multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives and critique of socio-economic, cultural and political conditions. It also crosses research convention boundaries of method and analysis. In common with community development and community education processes of collective analysis, participatory research contextualises inquiry, findings and explanations at interconnected levels. Analytical frameworks are sought to illuminate the connection between macro and structural, and community and individual conditions. Thompson's Personal-Community-Social (PCS) Model (Thompson 2006, in Ledwith and Springett, 2010:26) reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory that connects macro, meso, exo, and micro cultural systems analysis at community level (Bronfenbrenner, 1971). Burns (2007) takes a systemic action research approach that combines organisational and participatory programme development with organisational learning (Burns 2007). Traditional methodological categories of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodological approaches may be formed and re-formed as part of pragmatic and purposeful inquiry (Burns, 1991; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Mertens, 2003; Chambers, 1994; Hammersley, 1995; Burns, et al. 2003).

Participation in research is not without its critics who suggest that a 'tyranny of participation' can prevail when participation is at a surface level and may not involve discussions on power in research relations, access to resources and involvement in analysis and who has voice in dissemination (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Frankham and Tracy, 2012). Ledwith (2005) suggests this may lead to co-option and domination rather than critical practice (Ledwith 2005). Nonetheless, participatory research as emancipatory practice has a long tradition in the global south, in feminist research and in disability studies (Lather, 1986; Guijit and Shah 1998; Beresford and Branfield, 2006; Okely, 2012). In participatory research, voices and perspectives of those not traditionally included in traditional research other than as objects, are foregrounded as knowledgeable actors rather than key informants (Freire, 1972; Guha, 1989; Farrington and Martin, 1993; Chambers,

1994; de Koning and Martin, 1996; Mertens, 2003; Baker et al., 2004; Beresford and Branfield, 2006).

### **Research as emancipatory and educative space**

Access to knowledge through key institutions of government, law and education shape, coerce or endorse acceptance of hegemonic power in society. To counter this, spaces in the public sphere for debate on social issues are needed for democratic societies to challenge dominant elites (Habermas, 1971; Freire and Fernandez, 1989). However, often uniformly conceived, some democratic forums can mask gender, race or class differences. A feminist argument suggests that while the public sphere should be ultimately universal, alternative and separate spaces are needed to enable the formation of the distinct opinions of diverse groups (Frazer, 1989; Lather, 1991; Frazer, 1995).

Emancipatory community education offers such space for transformative democratic learning in the public sphere. For example, Action Aid's education programme REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy in Community) draws on the radical literacy programme of Paulo Freire to combine literacy with empowerment in the global south, and more recently in the global north (Archer and Cottingham; 1996; Action Aid, 2009). Freire challenged learning as a 'banking system' of facts and advocated political education that draws on narrative experiences of oppression. This, he argued, would transform learning from a passive reception of knowledge to an active and critical engagement with issues of power inherent in unequal socio-economic conditions (Freire, 1972). Mezirow challenged binaries of correct/incorrect knowledge to develop adult education programmes that would build on and transform the existing knowledge of learners in pluralistic ways (Mezirow, 1990). Ledwith (2005) links community development and community education work as a site for participatory-transformative approaches. She argues that critical community education provides a space where community groups can come together to analyse how power and discrimination portrays 'others' as deviant from the

norms held by dominant views in society and uncovers the processes by which these may be justified as hegemonic common sense. She advocates a Freirean-feminist approach to using story and narrative as personal empowerment in the process of collective action for change. Ledwith suggests that a combination of Gramsci's analysis of hegemonic power and Freire's concepts of community education to problematise society can create a space for critical pedagogy where teachers and learners become co-learners and co-experts (Ledwith 2005:68). In 'Teaching Community' bell hooks views the role of the student/academic/researcher as working for social justice in 'classrooms without boundaries', where "our visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now." (hooks, 2003:12).

Making a connection between transformative education processes and participatory research processes offers potential for participation in knowledge generation, public sphere debate and social change. In community education, community work and in social sciences, critical research as a way of doing and acting in the world, positions researchers as facilitators in the construction of meaning through processes that elicit community knowledge(s) within an analysis of broader social, political and economic conditions (Freire, 1972; Lather, 1997; Denzin 1997; Burns 2007). Despite more recent adoption in the global north by community development practitioners, participatory and emancipatory research may remain on the periphery of academic practice due to the challenge to power relations it provokes; 'the academy' no longer holds or controls the pen or the word (Lynch 1999; Chambers 1997).

### **Feminist research and local equality studies: my philosophy of research and methods**

I situate my ontological position as a researcher with a feminist research paradigm that suggests that knowledge(s) about multiple human conditions are socially and historically constructed. My epistemological approach is underpinned by feminist research epistemology. Multiple methods and

interpretative analysis allows for critique to move beyond cynical observation of crises to possibilities for a more critical discourse for change with people, rather than about people (Bourdieu, 1977; hooks, 2003; Ledwith, 2005). Ethnographic narrative in the context of social change presents opportunities for inequalities to be examined over time and representations of silenced or alternative views to be heard (Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Okely, 2012). Equality theory and practice has influenced my philosophy of social research and has informed the research agenda and research methodological approach and practice for this study (Baker et al., 2004; Lynch, 2011).

This section has served to explain how research theory and participatory practice informed the design of the project. A reflection on this study as an equality study will be returned to in Chapter 6: Doing research together and the concluding chapter. The next section returns to the practicalities of this research study 'Negotiating New Realities' and presents the implementation of the research including methods used, ethical considerations and a framework for analysis.

## **Research approaches and methods**

In 2010, the Government's response to the economic deficit created a challenging context for organisations, such as the charity involved in this research, who work with some of the most vulnerable people in society. For this study, the resettlement services unit, providing homelessness and resettlement support services within the charity, became a local site in which to investigate experiences of broader austerity and welfare reforms as understood by staff and service users at a local level.

### **The site of the study**

The socio-political context of the organisation as a site for this research was introduced in Chapter 1. The socio-historical context of the organisation is important to note. The charity is a major service provider and employer offering

a range of services for children and adults. It employs approximately 800 staff and 400 volunteers across an English regional Archdiocese and surrounding areas. Established in the 19<sup>th</sup>, the charity is historically known for providing welfare services, initially to homeless and destitute people. The organisation traces its ethos to that demonstrated by a Catholic priest, who in the 1820s, organised support to poor citizens of the city living in inadequate housing, unhealthy conditions and at risk of poverty-related diseases such as cholera (The Charity, 2011).

In 2010, the charity's services included

- Residential and educational services for young people with complex learning/physical and mental health issues
  - Residential and community services for adults with learning/physical and mental health issues
  - Community resources and resettlement services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness including single people and families.
  - Welfare support and material aid to people experiencing poverty
  - Outreach support to deaf and hard of hearing people
  - Adoption services including inter-country adoption
  - Pastoral and spiritual services in community and residential settings.
- (The Charity, 2010).

In 2010, the homelessness and resettlement services unit included working with single men recovering from substance mis-use and families fleeing from domestic violence. Services included a tenancy bond scheme, resettlement services to liaise with people as they moved between hostels and housing and signposting to health and social care services. Material and welfare aid was also offered in crisis situations on a referral basis from a wide range of organisations across the region including provision of household goods, emergency funds and housing advice. By the end of 2011, this included crisis referrals for basic food parcels. In 2012 services were offered to marginalised and disadvantaged people and provided *“general housing advice and support to people who are homeless,*

*vulnerable to homelessness, or vulnerable in a variety of ways” (Patricia, manager, 2012).*

The staff of the resettlement service worked in partnership with a large local housing association, the private rented sector and adult and social care services of two local authorities. Further detail on the structure and activities of staff of the resettlement services unit will be provided in Chapter 4: The workers’ stories.

### **Ethical considerations and research relations**

The director of studies, the researcher and the CEO of the organisation discussed ethical approaches to the research at several points and outlined an agreed ethics protocol at the start of the project. The director of studies provided additional guidance and the project was signed off under the University’s research ethics procedures. An ethics protocol was developed for the research and was signed off by the CEO of the organisation (see Appendix 1: Ethics Protocol, January 2011).

The ethics protocol of the project used as a starting point both the mission statement of the charity (The Charity, 2000) and the BERA guidelines for Good Practice in Educational Research Writing (BERA, 2004). Statements from these documents together put human dignity at the centre of ethical research as illustrated below:

*The Charity, in progressing the inspiration of Father [name withheld] and Founding Pioneer, will continue its history and culture of being at the forefront of responding to, and representing people’s needs. We will provide quality services that ensure people’s rights, independence, inter-dependence, choice and inclusion are integrated into everything that we do. (The Charity, 2000).*

*The Research ethic of respect for persons requires researchers in reporting data on persons, to do so in ways which represents those persons as*

*fellow human beings with entitlements to dignity and privacy. (BERA, 2004:4).*

This project adheres to the professional codes of practice on the British Educational Research Association and the Research Councils UK in conducting and writing up research (BERA, 2000; BERA, 2004; Research Councils UK, 2009). Data and privacy protection in the research takes account of the Data Protection Act 1998 (UK Government, 1998). All data collected for the project, including voice recordings, transcriptions and interview notes are kept confidential and stored securely by the researcher. The researcher sought to be sensitive to contextual factors while being working inside the organisation for blocks of time including spending time with the team and being flexible for setting time for interviews. A room was available for interviews to take place beyond the team office.

Ethical deliberations throughout the study complimented the more formal research ethics protocols developed with the CEO and through the research ethics committee procedures of the university towards the start of the project. Ethical dilemmas such as gatekeeping, issues of power in research relations, gaining trust, representation and impartiality in reporting are continuous considerations for the ethnographic researcher (Okely, 1994; Wellington, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Atkins and Wallace, 2012; Bold, 2012; Okely, 2014). The extent to which I was an insider/outsider researcher and my relationship to the organisation was subject to discussion and reflection by all involved. Serendipity, through a personal discussion about 'austerity' led to the conception of the project (Okely, 2014: 155). I was motivated by my own participatory research interests and interest in conducting a project inspired by my understanding of equality studies and bringing equality theory and action together in research processes (Baker et al. 2004). I was subsequently invited into the organisation to conduct research that would elicit unique knowledge that was considered useful to inform and support their work (Atkins and Wallace,

2012:49). Building trusting relationships between staff and researcher and service-users were continuously negotiated and tested (Okely, 2014:77).

Ethical considerations, any dilemmas, my role and extent of insider research status, negotiation and access to the organisation and its people, and ways of working will be returned to in Chapter 6: Doing research together.

### **Research consent**

Wellington (2000:57) outlines eight rules for ethical educational research based on the British Educational Research Association guidelines for research (2004). These provided useful guiding principles for gaining access to and consent from respondents in this project.

Wellington's eight ethical research rules are incorporated below into guiding rules for access and consent for this project.

- Informed consent will be sought from all participants including consent for any intended publications.
- Safety of respondents is paramount, including respecting voice (recordings and interpretation) and there will be no pressure or coercion to participate from the researcher or management of the organisation.
- Those involved in the research (supervisors, advisory group, co-researchers, service-users) are informed on the nature and purposes of research and have a choice to discuss the research approach, to participate in it, or withdraw from the research.
- The research will not involve deception of participants
- Respect for privacy and respondents time will be taken into account with no unnecessary use of personal or professional time or resources of the organisation or respondents.
- Benefits will not be offered or withheld for participation in the research
- Openness, fairness, respect and honesty will characterise the research processes and relations
- Data will be kept confidential and all participants have the right to remain anonymous

(Adapted from Wellington, 2000:57)



Naming the organisation in research outputs was discussed with the CEO and all respondents at the start of the project. This was important because the charity wanted to be engaged in a critical research project on welfare reforms, and to use ideas and data as part of informing its advocacy work locally and nationally. This was agreed to in the spirit of participatory research. The extent research can be used as a space for critical voice is discussed in subsequent chapters, and in particular, Chapter 6 on the role of research in advocacy and doing research together. As mentioned above, ethical procedures undertaken at the start of the project, gave authorisation for this however, this was explained to all participants as part of the ongoing project. This may have affected people's decisions to participate in the project at all, either positively or negatively. All individuals who were asked to participate in the research were provided with information on the project, and asked for informed consent for data collection and for any subsequent reporting in the public domain. Options were given with regard to being identified in any research output or publications for example in any joint publications or public engagement activities. The only people to give this permission to be publically identified in publications, with an emphasis on co-authorship, were the CEO, the Trustee, and the two co-researchers. All other respondents are referred to as either staff, front line worker or service user or pseudonyms in any reporting. The issue of pseudonyms raised an interesting dilemma for the researcher. In the writing up phase, and for formal submission as an e-thesis, it was important to anonymise the charity and the respondents for the research. Having worked closely with the staff and service users, only using organisation and job related titles as identifiers such as service users, front line staff, or managers seemed to distance the writing from the personal and relational experience of the research. In my research notebook from the writing up phase, I had renamed all respondents with a name from members of my large extended family. This enabled me to maintain closeness to respondents and the data, as up-close research of stories of people's lives, and felt a good way to honour the people I interviewed who let me into their homes and work spaces.

At each stage of data collection the research was explained and consent elicited. A research information sheet and consent form was provided that was either verbally discussed or read by participants. Participants signed or gave oral permission that was noted by the researcher (see Appendices 2, 6 and 7 for Research Information Sheets and Consent Forms). Care for all participants, and particularly service users was taken into consideration with regard to representation or that the research may raise issues for some respondents. How the researcher planned to represent narratives in the study and any reports was discussed with all respondents in the study. For example, narratives would be combined in reporting to provide a composite rather than individual portraits of respondents and pseudonyms were used. In particular, interviewing within an organisation across levels of seniority required an approach that required building trust and that ensured confidentiality. As some of the respondents were service users, appropriate support was provided by support workers if any issue arose for them during the research process.

### **Co-researcher group**

A rationale for a co-researcher group was established at the beginning of the project based on the importance of including people affected by welfare reform in the research implementation. In April 2011 the co-research group involved two service-users who had experience of homelessness, and the researcher. This group worked specifically on the second stage of the research, interviewing service-users and meeting to analyse the data and compile the report; the researcher taking the role of scribe. Co-researchers discussed and considered ways of working, ethical approaches and values underpinning research relations (McFarlane, 2009). The group drafted its own ethics protocol to guide how to empathically interview service-users and how to work together as a team. This built on the ethics protocol signed off by the CEO of the organisation. The detail of this and ethical issues will be discussed further in Chapter 6: Doing research together. In brief the group articulated the role of the co-researcher as one who would be mindful of the facilitation, bringing people into the process,

representing people's lives in a sensitive way and supporting people if issues arose.

### **Advisory group**

An advisory group was formed to discuss emerging findings of the research and to provide a reflective account to the Trustees as part of reporting on progress of the project. This group included staff in managerial roles, a policy officer, project workers, one Trustee, the CEO, two service users, two external stakeholders from the Archdiocese and the director of studies from the university. Sharing the research findings with the advisory group and the resettlement services unit provided points for reflection and further analysis of findings. In addition, the narratives of the experiences of welfare reform were discussed in the broader context of the impacts of austerity including cuts to funding available from the local authorities and narrowing of statutory duties for provision of services. Collectively the advisory group informed and worked on actions for broader advocacy that was part of the project's purpose.

### **Methods and data collection**

As discussed above, ethnographic narratives of experience were gathered to explore and understand the context of welfare reform and funding cuts from the perspectives of service-users and staff (Denzin, 1997; Bold, 2012). This research employed a broadly participatory approach and sought to capture, analyse and reflect on experiences *with* staff and service-users, including working with co-researchers in part of data gathering (Magurie, 1987; Chambers, 1994).

The principal means to collect data relied on ethnographic methods including interviews and a variant of participant observation in that I attended team meetings and facilitated advocacy workshops (Geertz, 1973; Webster and Mertova, 2007; Bold, 2012; Okely, 2012). However, one senior staff member, after the project had been agreed, then rejected the validity of qualitative methods preferring a survey of staff views rather than individual interviews as a way of providing reliable data. This incidence of 'gatekeeping' was negotiated by

suggesting an e-survey be offered to all staff with knowledge of housing and community support services with agreement to follow up interviews with willing staff.

In summary data collected was as follows. A short initial e-survey was completed by eight staff. A total of twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted overall with eight managers, eight front line staff and ten service users. Two managers were interviewed twice. Three team meetings and two co-research team meetings were conducted as part of the research; and three workshops were held; two public audiences and one internal audience of trustees. Table 4 below summarises a timeline for data collection. In total data was gathered from 1 e-survey, 28 interviews, 4 team meetings and 3 workshops.

**Table 4: Data collected 2011-2014**

Year	e-survey	In depth interviews	Research notes
2011	1 e-survey (completed by 8 staff January 2011)	4 front line staff 5 service users 4 managers (January – December 2011)	2 team meetings (March; August) 2 co-researcher team meetings (April; November) 1 advisory group workshop (November)
2012			2 'What happens next?' workshops (January 2012; April 2012) 1 Trustees 'Advocacy' workshop (September 2012)
2013		2 managers (August)	
2014		5 service users (May-June 2014) 4 front line staff (April – July 2014) 4 managers (April – July 2014)	1 team meeting (May)
<b>Total 2011-2014</b>	<b>1 E-survey</b>	<b>28 Interviews</b>  8 front line staff 10 service users 8 managers (2 interviewed twice)	<b>7 Research notes</b>  4 team meetings 3 workshops

### *Sample of respondents*

Gaining access to a sample of staff from across the organisation to interview from those employed in front line services and those employed in management

or policy services was judged by the researcher to be important to get a range of staff views. An open invitation to participate in the research was given to all staff with knowledge of the charity's resettlement services, and staff respondents were self-selecting. Not all front line staff or managers engaged with the research. As mentioned earlier, access to a sample of service users was also important to include service users' voice in the research. Service users from the resettlement services were invited to participate in the research by their support workers who provided an outline of the study. Those that agreed to participate, were briefed again about the purposes of the research at a service user group meeting. Those that wished to participate liaised with their support workers and interviews were set up. Interviews with service users were conducted by the co-researcher team. Co-researchers were members of the service user group and agreed to work with the researcher on the project. Both had experience of facilitation and worked with the researcher to develop suitable questions and formats for service-user interviews. My background as a professional researcher, my role and status as an insider and volunteer researcher, and as a PhD student in this research project, was discussed in the team and the intrinsic power in these multiple roles was acknowledged.

### ***Conducting interviews***

Interviews or participant observation can provide rich data and are essentially methods for talking *with* people in a purposeful way (Geertz, 1973; Okely, 2012). However, degrees of structure, and degrees of flexibility and freedom are important for the researcher and the respondent in the interview process. When using ethnographic methods it is important for the researcher to encourage the respondents, lead the conversation, to allow diversions, to note and respect silences, to map out concepts for discussion and to return to earlier points made (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009).

Individual interviews were typically semi-structured. Further details are of interview schedules are provided in Appendices 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. The researcher

engaged in team meeting observation and, when invited into discussions, used open-ended prompt questions to elicit updates on policy and practice, views of staff on changes, and views of staff on organisational responses. The workshops employed a focus group data collection model and drew on a key question ‘What happens next?’ Interviews were recorded and written notes were taken at team meetings and advocacy workshops. Research notes were written up as soon as possible after each point of data collection and partial transcription was made of audio recordings of interviews by the researcher.

### **Linking research related and public engagement activity**

As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, three phases of data collection and themes of change were organised to allow for related research question to be revisited iteratively. Linking phases of research and the research questions (capturing change) to data collection methods (experiencing change) and related research activities that promoted debate (influencing change) provided a way of capturing how the research design sought to understand and voice the experiences of austerity at local level and to disseminate findings for advocacy purposes with a wider interested public.

Table 5 below, illustrates how the research questions, methods and research and public engagement activity related to each other across the timeframe of the project.

***Table 5: Linking phases of research and research questions, to data collection methods, and to public engagement research related activities***

<b>Phase and research questions</b>	<b>Data collection methods</b>	<b>Public engagement and research related activity</b>
<b>Phase 1: Capturing Change</b> (January 2011-December 2011) i. What are the major policy and funding reforms that have a bearing on the resettlement services provided by the	Team meetings with staff about research  E-survey of staff on knowledge of welfare reforms  Interviews with staff 2011	Research focus established with Trustees December – January, 2010  Advisory group established March 2010  Internal Report May 2011 <i>Protecting Front Line Services: implications of funding cuts to the</i>

<p>charity?</p> <p>ii. How are these policies understood by staff and service users?</p> <p>iii. What may be the impact of these on services?</p> <p>iv. How are these changes experienced by staff and service users?</p>	<p>Internal workshop presenting findings of research December 2011 (staff, co-researchers and advisory group)</p>	<p><i>homelessness and resettlement services of The Charity</i></p> <p>Internal Report September 2011 <i>Moving on: experiences of service users and resettlement services</i></p>
<p><b>Phase 2: Experiencing Change</b> (May 2011 –January 2012; and July-August 2014)</p> <p>v. What are the lived experiences of people accessing housing support services?</p> <p>vi. What is the impact of welfare reform and reduction in public funding on service users of the resettlement services?</p> <p>vii. How are voices of service-users included in the research and subsequent advocacy?</p>	<p>In-depth interviews with service users conducted by co-research team and using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (2011)</p> <p>Internal workshop presenting findings of research November 2011 (staff, co-researchers and advisory group)</p> <p>Interviews with staff (2011, 2014)</p> <p>Interviews with service-users ‘coming up for review’ (July-August 2014)</p>	<p>Co-researcher project established with two service users (April 2011 – December 2012)</p> <p>Report and Summary publication December 2011 <i>The Charity (2011) Negotiating New Realities: the impact of reductions in public sector funding and welfare reform on the homelessness and resettlement services unit</i></p> <p>Journal article publication: Daly, A., Anderson, J., O’Driscoll, D., and Pitt, K. (2012) From home to home: homelessness during austere times, <i>Housing Support and Care</i>, Vol. 15, Iss.3</p> <p>Coming up for Review research phased discussed by Trustees (January 2014)</p>
<p><b>Phase 3: Influencing change</b> (December 2011 – December 2014)</p> <p>viii. In what ways does the organisation respond to external and internal change?</p> <p>ix. In what ways can research findings contribute to advocacy?</p> <p>x. What are the limits and possibilities of working through a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work?</p>	<p>Advocacy and Social Justice Planning Workshop with Governing Body and Trustees – (September 2012)</p> <p>‘What happens next?’ workshops with external stakeholders (January 2012, April 2012)</p> <p>Interviews with staff (2013)</p> <p>Formal end of the project – meeting with CEO of The Charity (December 2014)</p>	<p>External public engagement with research</p> <p>Keynote presentation of Negotiating New Realities at The Charity’s AGM December 2011- 100 staff and civic and political representatives</p> <p>Launch of Negotiating New Realities first report at Archdiocese January 2012 – 120 representatives from Local Authority, CVS and civic bodies and political parties</p> <p>Housing Justice Day The Quaker House (February 2012, 2013)</p> <p>Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Assembly, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2012 – 80 representatives from Justice and Peace and SVP Parish Groups and Vincentians in Partnership</p> <p>Parliamentary Reception May 2012,</p>

		<p>May 2013 – research summary and updates made available by CARITAS</p> <p>ARVAC Research Seminar: Doing research together, March, 2012</p> <p>Co-researcher team input into Social Work &amp; Health and Social Care undergraduate programmes (2012-2015)</p>
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## Conclusion to the chapter

The aim of the study was to examine how austerity is understood and experienced at local level. This study offers rich ethnographic narratives that connect lived experiences of staff and service-users in a small housing unit to broader socio-economic circumstances (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu, 1977; Okely, 2012). The research builds on and makes a contribution to a broader body of emergent research on the impact of austerity measures and welfare reform in the UK. (NAVCA, 2014; Nichols, 2011; Daly, Anderson, O’Driscoll and Pitt, 2012).

The methodological choices taken for this research have been informed by feminist theory and equality studies that position knowledge as mutli-faceted and generative of multiple standpoints and that research as praxis is a way of doing and acting in the world (Lather, 1997; Baker et al. 2004). As an ethnographic study it elicits and interprets narratives of lived experiences using talking with service users, team meeting discussions and workshops as sites for research activity and interviews and participant observation as predominant methods for data collection (Okely, 2012). Broadly participatory, the research was enriched by working with co-researchers with experiences of homelessness; ‘ordinary actors’ in the construction of new knowledge (Schostak and Schostak, 2008).

The relevance of research in the local context and the contribution of this research as a mechanism to promote voice will be explored more fully in



Chapters 6 on advocacy and participatory research. Themes raised in the ethnographic narratives as the charity endeavours to negotiate new realities of welfare reforms will be returned to in the discussion Chapter 7.

The next three chapters presents and discusses findings from the research. Chapters 4 and 5 provide ethnographic narratives of austerity over time from the workers' and service users' perspectives respectively. Chapter 6 provides an ethnographic space for reflection on doing research together.

## Chapter 4: The workers' stories

### Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents ethnographic narratives as interpretations of workers' stories of change. These narratives capture and situate local experiences of austerity in the broader context of the early phase of funding cuts and welfare reforms in England 2010-2015.

The narratives are informed by interviews conducted between 2011 and 2014 with sixteen staff working at various levels in the organisation on operational issues, development and policy and in delivering front line homelessness and resettlement services. Data were collected at three significant periods during a roll out of welfare reforms and funding cuts: in 2011 – a period of uncertainty and realization as local authority budgets and welfare reforms were announced; in 2013 - a period of contestation and coming to terms with internal changes that had taken place; and in 2014 - a period of taking stock and reflecting on positionality. As discussed in Chapter 2: Literature and Policy Review, constructed and contested spaces as emerging features of local neoliberalism during this period, are apparent in the narratives presented in this chapter. Staff find their work-related values constrained and conflicted as they contended with the changing state of welfare (Roger, 2000; Harvey, 2002; Leitner, Peck and Sheppard, 2006; Benozzo and Colley, 2012; Stuckler and Basu, 2013).

Three thematic narratives of workers' experiences are presented as narrative 1: 'crisis and uncertainty', narrative 2: 'conflict and loss' and narrative 3: 'adjustment and change'. These ethnographies of austerity, situated in a rapidly changing and challenging policy and practice context, reveal how staff respond to *"informing, resisting and re-creating the contexts of our work"* (Carmel, manager, 2014). Bourdieu's concepts of 'perspectives' and 'spaces of points of view' and Schostak and Schostak's concept of 'representative thinking' are utilised to

organise multiple perspectives arising from the data. That multiple perspectives and viewpoints occur in readings of individual and group narratives is likely as front-line staff and managers occupy varying spaces in relation to each other, to the context in which they work, and to those that use the services of the organisation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Schostak and Schostak, 2008).

As raised in Chapter 1, the impetus for this research arose out of a sense of uncertainty noted by the trustees of the charity during a period of the imminent restructuring of welfare. This had implications at an executive level of the organisation in that in 2010 it derived 53% of funding from one local authority. The majority of funding for its homelessness resettlement and support work came from Supporting People, the government's funding stream to local authorities for preventative services (Dodds, 2010; Department for Work and Pensions, 2011c). The White Paper on Universal Credit: Welfare that Works projected a roll out of significant changes in access to benefits for homelessness service users from 2011 to 2017 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010; Church Urban Fund, 2011; Department for Work and Pensions, 2011b). While street homelessness had been reduced locally, an increase in the numbers of homelessness acceptances and people at risk of homelessness was reported nationally by 2011 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). Within the charity several impacts were anticipated at the level of service provision with consequences for employment of staff and possible closure of services. A changed system of supports and benefits suggested potential disruption in access to, or continuation of, services. Welfare reforms had implications for the resettlement service in that in December 2010 it provided homelessness and resettlement services for twenty-eight single ex-homeless men and forty vulnerable families. The combination of a reduced Supporting People fund, that part of their client group, single homeless men, were no longer entitled to support under statutory duty, and the complexity of information about benefit criteria changes, posed considerable risks to services. The

complexity and speed of change made “*rapid planning and implementation of resettlement services difficult for managers and front line workers alike*” (Tom, manager, 2011).

This rapidly changing and uncertain context positioned front line staff and managers in a conflicted space as they confronted the effects of recession and austerity in their professional lives (Maguire, 2012; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014).

### **Listening to workers’ stories**

As discussed in Chapter 3: Methodology, individual in-depth interviews with staff provided a rich source of ethnographic data. Interviews were conducted individually, but were analysed thematically and conflated to produce collective narratives. Narratives are presented as composite stories of change, and workers’ voices are presented in three collective groupings; voice of staff as a whole, voice of managers and voice of front line staff (Bourdieu et al., 1999). Occasionally, individual voices are represented, and in these cases pseudonyms are used as discussed earlier in Chapter 3: Methodology.

Narratives are interpreted as occurring in constrained and contested spaces, subject to power and control through external and internal policy, language and practices (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1980). Contradictions and tensions in external and internal contexts were also evident in the research processes. Of the sixteen staff interviewed, eight staff had managerial or supervisory positions, and eight staff were employed as front line workers in the homelessness and resettlement services unit. In common with other community and voluntary organisations, the impacts of recession and austerity were being noted in job losses; this impacted on the staff interviewed for this research (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009; Bird, 2010; Homeless Link, 2011; Johnson and Vickery, 2011). The four front line workers interviewed in 2011 no longer worked for the resettlement service by 2013. Four new front line workers were interviewed in

2014. Six of the original managers interviewed remained in 2014; two new managers were interviewed in 2014.

Access to front-line staff for interview was subject to initial internal resistance. After the project had been agreed with the CEO and trustees, one manager was uncertain about the value of interviewing staff and suggested the research should only focus on the experiences of service users. In addition the manager rejected the validity of qualitative methods, preferring a survey rather than individual interviews as a way of providing reliable data. This was negotiated by suggesting an e-survey be offered to all staff with knowledge of housing and community support services and agreement to conduct follow up interviews with willing staff. That staff experiences should be excluded or included in a study on the impacts of austerity, reveals internal tensions around the voicing of effects on staff, as is noted in emerging literature (Colley, 2012). Overall, sixteen interviews were conducted with staff; eight with front line staff in the resettlement service and eight with managers. An e-survey was circulated to sixteen staff at the start of the project from which eight responses were gained. Two team meetings were observed and research notes taken.

The remainder of the chapter is organised in the following way. Before presentation of the narratives, the context of the work of the resettlement service is provided. An overview of the charity's work on poverty and homelessness situates the work of the resettlement service in the socio-cultural historical values of the charity. The charity's founding purpose in the late nineteenth century was to support people in crisis and absolute poverty. The main focus of the charity shifted to health and social care, including residential services for vulnerable groups, during the 1960s and 1970s. Homelessness crisis services were not provided during the period of this research, although staff did signpost people in crisis to appropriate services, and did provide some material and welfare aid on a referral basis. At the time of this research the work of the resettlement service provided support to individuals and families with histories

of drug and alcohol use, or personal crises, who have moved on from temporary housing, and have begun to be resettled into longer term accommodation.

Following an overview of the charity's work on homelessness, is a section that presents workers' stories of change, interpreted as ethnographic narratives of 'crisis and uncertainty', 'conflict and loss', and 'adjustment and change'. Narratives document multiple perspectives, responses and positionalities of front line workers and managers to the implications of welfare reforms and cuts as experienced at local level. The three narratives as stories of change include sub-themes outlined as follows.

#### Narrative 1: Crisis and uncertainty

- Anticipation and change
- The known and not known of the changing state of welfare
- Welfare in the city

#### Narrative 2: Conflict and loss

- Deletion
- Staff vulnerabilities

#### Narrative 3: Adjustment and change

- Care, caring and values
- Changing relations

The chapter concludes with a discussion of staff experiences of early austerity as they occupy various spaces in constrained and conflicted times. Breach in relations, cultures of silences on the erosion of professional services and undermining of professional values and ethics of care feature as themes across the narratives. The findings of this research relate to emerging themes in current literature on the impacts of austerity and welfare reforms on homelessness services reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes by suggesting that staff stories are part of an emergent common story for public sector and community

and voluntary sector homelessness workers; however it is a story yet to be fully heard.

### **The charity's work on poverty and homelessness**

The charity has a long tradition of providing services to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. The charity's mission stems from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century local action on urban poverty and disease that had been exacerbated by overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions. Funds were raised from faith congregations to improve the lives of poor people, and delegations were made to local officials and parliamentarians to improve living conditions for homeless families and economic migrants (The Charity, 2011).

The charity continues the tradition of welfare and material aid into the present day in the form of emergency grants and household goods. It also offers professional social and community work services in the form of floating support workers assigned to individuals or families who have experienced homelessness. Services are provided through a mix of employing professional staff and volunteers including ex-service users. In more recent years the resettlement service has offered specialist services including welfare and tenancy support to people recovering from substance misuse and a history of offending, single vulnerable people including asylum seekers, and individuals and families who have lost their home due to domestic violence or alcohol or drug related issues in the family.

The charity is traditionally regarded as a faith based organisation with its historical origin and current support base linked to a regional parish demographic. Like many faith based organisations, its early days were inspired by a charismatic leader who advocated for action on social justice and poverty issues in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The charity distanced itself from its faith origins, in common with similar organisations, in the 1960s and 1970s, in order to attract funding and perhaps to fit in with a more secular approach to social services

(Devine, 2003). Today, in common with other similar organisations, the charity has an ambiguous relationship with its faith identity; one that minimises faith as an organisational characteristic on some social issues, and another that aligns with faith on issues of social justice and values concomitant to its mission (Russell and Devine, 2005; The Charity, 2011). The mission of the organisation, while present in the background, and alluded to at times, was not overtly referred to in the narratives of workers' stories. Individual faith perspectives of those interviewed were not known or articulated as part of the research, yet a connection with the charity's historical faith based action on homelessness and poverty permeated the values of the organisation.

The projects of the resettlement service are financed by a mix of charitable donations and public sector grants. Direct welfare and material aid is largely financed by charitable fundraising among its broader parish based network and empathetic corporate sponsors and donors. Direct aid, through its household aid scheme, forms a small but constant part of the charity's organisational practice, providing ad-hoc crisis resources. These include, for example, furniture, bedding and cooking equipment, and small amounts of emergency cash for school uniforms if children have transferred to new schools. As with many community and voluntary sector homelessness and resettlement work much of the programme is comprised of time-bound projects funded by grants from local authorities under the Supporting People funding stream. From 2008 to 2010 staff of the resettlement service worked with ex-offenders and drug users to help them secure and maintain a tenancy and live independently. This work was superseded by a single men's project and a bond scheme that worked with sixty single previously homeless men to support them to maintain stable tenancies. In addition a family project was developed to provide services for up to one hundred families over a three year project lifetime. On average, thirty-five families and twenty individuals were supported by the resettlement service each year.



### **Three stages: links between personal journeys and homelessness services**

Work with homeless people can be described in terms of significant stages of intervention that support people in crisis situations, attend to underlying problems and source emergency and secure accommodation (Groundswell, 2011). This resonates with life journey experiences of homeless people who often experience personal crises, for example, drug, alcohol or domestic violence as a preceding factor of homelessness. Addiction, safeguarding and mental health and other health issues arising from these crises need to be attended to before the person or family can move on to a more stable life (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and White, 2011).

For this research, and based on data gathered, life journey experiences of homeless people and stages of homelessness services have been combined and are described as three stages of crisis, stabilisation and resettlement as represented in Table 6 below. In this representation links are made between three personal life journey stages and three stages of service provision. The conditions and factors that may result in individuals or families requiring homelessness services and the types of services that may be offered in a given time are described under each stage of crisis, stabilisation and resettlement.

***Table 6: Three stages linking personal life journeys to homelessness support services***

<b>Crisis</b> (Immediate action)	<b>Stabilisation</b> (6-12 weeks support)	<b>Resettlement</b> (12 weeks to 24 months)
Insecure housing and/or social crisis situation - Eviction - Domestic violence or discord - Substance misuse - Loss of 'tied' accommodation e.g. to time-bound	Unstable family life and refuge or substance or alcohol misuse and rehabilitation - Specialist rehabilitation including residential - Safeguarding and family support and	Transition to moving on to a more settled life - Floating support services to guide transition - Accommodation and tenancy support such as managing rent payments or arrears - Welfare advice

employment contracts, to asylum processes, or with armed forces - Leaving hospital or accident and emergency services, or prison	mediation - Focus on well-being and managing next steps - Provision of hostel/short term accommodation support	- Access to GP and health services - Signposting to training or employment
Immediate action instigated and services provided by - Outreach at accident and emergency services - GP or social services referral - Domestic violence and refuge services - Asylum and refugee services - Safeguarding Duty - Police, Probation, Prison services - Self-referral	Services provided by - Specialist hostels - Short term emergency accommodation providers - Multi-agency teams - Social Work services - Specialist substance and alcohol misuse and domestic violence, abuse services - Specialist services to provide advice on welfare, health, asylum and refuge services	Services provided by - Resettlement support workers allocated to individuals and families - Social Work services - Multi-agency liaison - Specialist services to support people experiencing substance and alcohol misuse, domestic violence, abuse - Specialist services to provide advice on welfare, health, asylum and refuge services

The charity has worked with people at all three stages of life journeys and provided services at homelessness services across the three stages in various ways since its inception. As noted earlier, working with poor and vulnerable people at crisis point was part of its early mission. However, at the time of this research, the resettlement service worked with individuals who had prior drug and/or alcohol related issues, or families who had been in hostels and who were now at a stage to transition to a more stable life. The charity did not offer services in the crisis and stabilisation stages. During the period of this research, service user life journeys and progression through homelessness services were located in the resettlement stage. In December 2010 the resettlement service actively supported forty families and twenty-eight individuals through projects funded by local authority Supporting People funding.

## **Characteristics and value of resettlement services**

At the time of this research the charity's work operated within the resettlement stage of the spectrum of services, and offered supported housing services to people who had been or were vulnerable to homelessness. People who were referred to the charity's resettlement services had already come through the crisis and stabilising stages of their lives and had accessed interventions to assess and support their more acute needs such as crisis points arising from addiction, mental health or other health needs, domestic violence and other critical social needs. The resettlement service did not offer drug or alcohol rehabilitation, mental health support services, asylum and refugee services or domestic violence services. However, workers were able to signpost service users to these services. The homelessness and resettlement service engaged with individuals and families who are ready to 'move on' from crisis and rehabilitation interventions. Ready to 'move on' families and individuals were allocated a support worker for a period of up to two years, who helped them re-settle into a more stable home and community life and avoid returning to insecure housing or risk of homelessness. This provision in resettlement services is known as floating support (Groundswell, 2011). The front line workers in homelessness and resettlement services work with individuals and families to build up people's confidence and capabilities, in order to gain positive and sustainable outcomes for service users, as described by a front line staff member below.

*Staff hope and expect that coming to the exit point of a resettlement service does not mean that service users will not cope, but rather that they are equipped and confident to manage tenancies and seek support when necessary. (Joseph, front line staff, 2011)*

Front line workers offering floating support operate on an outreach basis with service users to build their capacities in areas such as managing a tenancy and understanding requirements of landlords in the private rented sector, and in maintaining connections to specialist rehabilitation, domestic violence or mental

health services. Floating support is flexible to the service user needs. Front line resettlement service workers provide guidance and support in settling into a new community, for example registering with a new GP or enrolling children in new schools. They may signpost service users, when ready, to projects and services that may enhance their quality of life, such as further education and community based projects. The household aid scheme of the charity augments floating support and resettlement services with provision of household goods and small emergency funds.

Front line staff and service users describe the value of resettlement work and floating support work as generating potential for long term stability in people's lives, as explained below.

*Success is seeing people settled, settled into their home, a furnished house, and that they are managing their tenancy. Some are working, their children are at school, and they are established in their community. (Katy, front line staff, 2011)*

*I wouldn't go out the front door, you know. It was a case of just pushing slowly towards things. (Liam, service user, 2011)*

*We are outcomes focussed. We are about helping people achieve an outcome. It may be small, but small may be massive for them. We revisit goals and revisit what we offer to support [the service users] to meet that goal for themselves. (Joseph, front line staff, 2011)*

*Everyone needs to enjoy the basics and some treats in their home. Through fundraising we can provide some furniture, some cooking equipment, perhaps a framed picture or vase. (Irene, front line staff, 2011)*

In a team meeting, the resettlement service workers described their work as "a community development approach to homeless services" (Tom, manager), that can be summarised as having the following characteristics:

- *Specialist resettlement services known as ‘floating support’. This involves outreach case work, welfare and tenancy advice and advocacy.*
- *Crisis and practical support. This involves sourcing crisis loans or grants and household goods to establish a place to live.*
- *Working through an empowerment model. This involves working with service users to manage tenancies and to extend capacities to engage in wellbeing, employment and community activities.*
- *Specialist expertise. This involves having knowledge and skills to support vulnerable people, to build trust with service users and build relationships such as service users groups to inform services.*

*(Team meeting research note, February 2011)*

This section has provided the local context of the services offered by the resettlement service. The next section now situates this work in the context of the 2008/2009 recession and welfare reforms implemented from 2010. Analysis of staff interviews reveal three thematic narratives of how staff, who were involved with the charity’s resettlement services, experienced change during 2011 to 2014. The three thematic narratives are presented as follows: narrative 1: crisis and uncertainty; narrative 2: conflict and loss; and narrative 3: adjustment and change.

### **Narrative 1: crisis and uncertainty**

*We feel a great vulnerability for our people. Where will they get services from? What will happen to them? (Patricia, manager, 2011)*

The initial period of the research was characterised by a narrative of crisis and uncertainty as staff of the charity expressed their concerns about welfare reform. A sense of insecurity prevailed, driven by uncertainty that provision of

services and access to welfare and benefits for homeless people was neither guaranteed nor consistent. The period leading up to the announcements of local authority budgets was marked by uneasy anticipation of various funding scenarios by many organisations across the city. Impending funding changes became a focus of informal and formal meetings between networks of people working in homelessness services locally. Meetings were held in various combinations with local authority executives and adult and social care teams, chief executives, staff and volunteers of large and small organisations of the community voluntary and faith sector. Discussions in team meetings ranged from exploring potential for sharing 'back office' functions in order to make savings, to sharing information about what local services were changing or closing, and tentative planning for 'handing over' services and service users to organisations that still had funding.

This narrative of crisis and uncertainty is a story of a changing context and changed relations between the state, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector. The narrative is explored through the following themes of; anticipation and change, the known and not known of welfare, and welfare in the city.

### **Anticipation and change**

Supporting People is a government funding stream to local authorities that provided preventative services and emergency grants for vulnerable people and socially excluded groups including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness (House of Commons, 2012). The charity received funds under Supporting People via the city council for the single men's project, the bond scheme and the family project. In March 2011, the budget for the city council was sent to the Cabinet for approval. Leading up to this, a period of reorganisation took place with various funding scenarios presented and consulted upon locally. Managers closely monitored changes for potential implications for existing services and new developments. Some current tenders were frozen and then reopened,

while some funding was reallocated between existing contracts. A change brought about by the previous government in April 2009, meant that funds specifically for homeless groups were not ring fenced under Supporting People (Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014). In 2011 Councils were able to allocate funds as they chose for services for vulnerable people and excluded groups. A change in statutory duty that prioritised crisis level support for older people and excluded groups meant that local authorities were no longer obliged to fund 'moving on' or resettlement services for homeless people (Homeless Link, 2013a).

In 2011 anticipated cuts to Supporting People created concerns about the implications for the resettlement services offered by the charity. Despite some forward planning in the charity, an atmosphere of uncertainty prevailed as explained by a manager:

*The funding streams that are most vulnerable are ones that are not statutorily required or ring-fenced. Our worst nightmare is that Supporting People takes a major hit – and the people that need these types of services will no longer get it. (Annie, manager, 2011)*

In March a city council budget 2011/12 and adult services event was held and the financial position of the Council was presented to recipient organisations. The overall allocation to adult services was reduced from £37 million to £26 million. The overall local spend from Supporting People for socially excluded groups was expected to be reduced by £5,084,685. While the city council strategy was intended to "shield services for vulnerable people, only those people with service needs defined under a statutory duty would have their needs assessed and met" (Bill, manager, 2011). With no statutory obligation to meet needs of single homeless people, news of the 2011 budget represented a severe blow for the resettlement service as staff realised the impending implications of national changes taking effect locally on their services.

Although significant changes to welfare funding had been on government policy agendas since the recession of 2008/2009, for many organisations the reality appeared sudden and dramatic (Homeless Link, 2013a). A breach in relations between the state and the community, voluntary and faith sector may have been considered inevitable as the impacts of the recession began to be realised at local authority and community levels (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009; Day, 2009). During the period of New Labour, the community and voluntary sector had been framed as an amenable and a largely compliant body of organisations. The community, voluntary and faith sector legitimised its role through technical and practice based skills and capacity to meet targets; the comfortable contractors and compliant contractors best able to operate in a market orientated welfare system (Buckingham, 2012). Community and voluntary sector organisations, perhaps empowered by their earlier partnership roles and demonstrated competencies were potentially enticed by the Coalition government's narrative of the Big Society. Many community and voluntary organisations envisioned a continued and resourced role for the sector to provide homelessness and resettlement services that, as has been implied in the Big Society, would best meet the needs of people locally (Bunyan, 2012). However, the extent of austerity measures outlined by the Coalition government in 2010, and the extent of funding cuts to local authorities and subsequently to the community and voluntary sector, resulted in a breach in relations between the state and the public community and voluntary sectors (Bourdieu, 1991; Buckingham, 2012; Bunyan, 2012). A further breach in the norms of relations between local authorities and community, voluntary and faith sector organisations was not expected locally in 2011. The charity considered itself comfortably part of a group of organisationally competent and compliant providers able to respond to and implement tenders for local authorities (Buckingham, 2012). Access to local funding and resources seemed secure in the short term at least despite a gradual *"realisation that more had to be delivered, for less money, and under the same terms"* (Moir, manager, 2011). In addition, in the early part of 2011, the



accepted norms of local relations included an expectation for a collective stand against the cuts. Managers and front line staff held out some hope for potential negotiations about funding for homelessness services at this stage of local authority budget cuts.

The following collective narrative 'emerging realities' represents perspectives of staff as they responded to the changing state of welfare conceptualised as both distant and close up in their day to day lives. Voices of staff are conflated into a narrative that reveals how the emerging crisis of funding cuts and welfare reforms positioned the charity in a space fraught with tension and uncertainty, with little room for manoeuvre, as captured during a highly anxious period of March and April 2011.

***Collective narrative: Emerging realities***

*We have to face the reality; this is about staff, service users and services, with implications for our organisation over a long time. What seemed distant policy is here and now. It seems the Council has an £11 million shortfall from central government in Supporting People and is reducing its Supporting People spend on 'excluded people' by £5million. These excluded people in the main will be people vulnerable to homelessness. We thought they could choose to ring fence funding for homeless provision. This city was doing really well, the 'homeless sleeper count' was down. Will this progress be reversed? There might be a challenge; maybe the political will of the city will make a difference?*

*Locally, Supporting People could be down but we can still provide a service, but for this year only. The resettlement service will not see that much of a difference this year. We have already stripped out the back office function to keep us going and to keep the front line homeless services. We can cut back on service costs etc. but we can't do that again next year.*

*The worst case scenario has happened. We had painstakingly planned for a 12.5% anticipated cut. However, this has been exceeded. The impact for us will be severe. Floating support services like ours are taking the biggest hit and we are losing the whole of our family service and half of our single men's service. Accommodation based support services are significantly less affected. This emerging scenario gives opportunity for us to real time track impacts for people, like in this research, if they will engage with us. This is the reality of the Supporting People budget, so far.*

*(All staff, March to April, 2011)*

Nationally, provision of homelessness and resettlement services was equally in a state of rapid change. Homeless Link's annual Snap Shot Survey of 2011 reported that the top issue concerning homelessness organisations was funding, whilst the biggest gap in provision was reported as in moving on or resettlement services. A 6% decrease in the number of projects funded by Supporting People was reported nationally. In 48% of projects, service users who were engaged also accessed probation services and these were also subject to funding reductions. This was a double impact on service users and limited the availability of multi-agency provision for homeless people with multiple exclusion factors (Homeless Link, 2011).

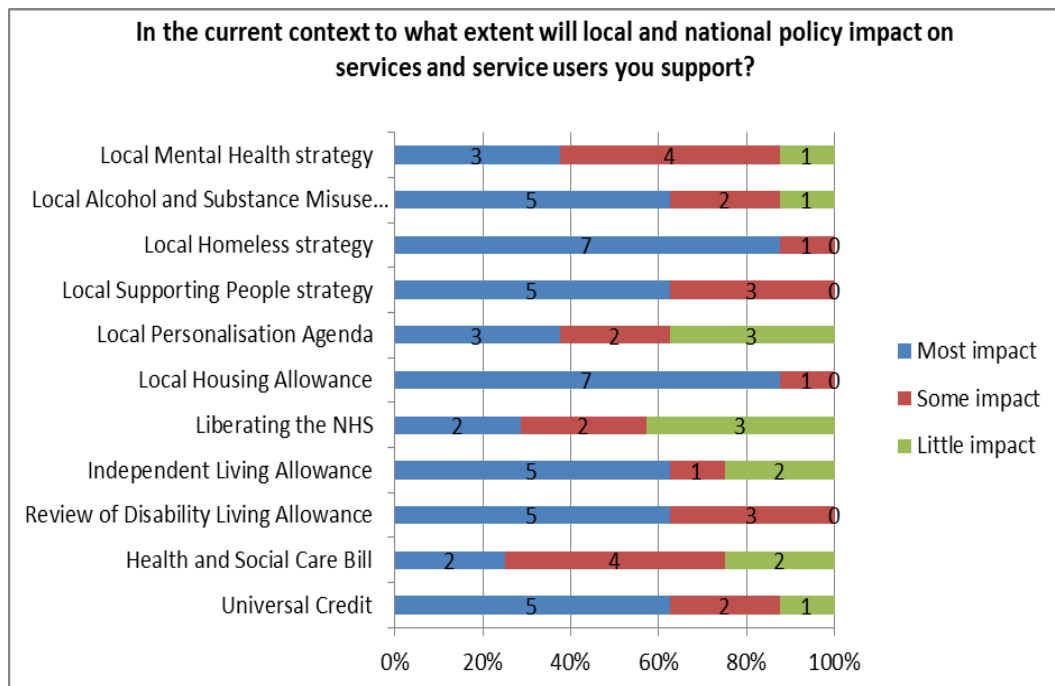
### **The known and not known of the changing state of welfare**

In January 2011 an e-survey was circulated to staff involved in management, development or delivery of services in the resettlement service (see Appendix 3). The purpose of the survey was to ascertain from staff what changes in national and local policies they saw as most relevant to the services they provide, and how, in their view, welfare reforms may impact on the lives of service users. Follow up interviews to discuss broader changes including funding arrangements for resettlement services that were taking place externally and internally were agreed as noted earlier. This section is informed by responses to the survey by

eight staff and follow up interviews conducted with staff from January to May 2011.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the proposed changes to welfare benefits were significant (see Tables 1, 2 and 3 for a timeline of key policies, local strategies and welfare benefit changes). Initially among staff there appeared to be a lack of clarity and knowledge of welfare reforms, details of policy changes and what these might imply for service users. Later, and perhaps as a response to initial discussions about the topic of this research within the organisation, interviews with staff revealed a growing awareness of the consequences of national policy at local level. The e-survey captured a snapshot of staff views on potential impacts of policy changes in early 2011. Figure 4 below reports data from a question related to national and local policy and impacts on service users in the current context. It reveals the prominence of impacts on local strategies, viewed as the most potentially disruptive to service users of the charity's resettlement services, in the current context of welfare reforms.

**Figure 4: e-survey question: In the current context, to what extent will local and national policy impact on the service users supported by the resettlement service?**



When interviewed later, staff identified several current policy changes to have the most likely impact on the quality of life of those at risk of homelessness. Changes to criteria for Local Housing Allowance and the provision of local homelessness strategy, including changes to statutory duties, were considered to potentially have the most impact on service users in the intermediate term. Change to the criteria for Local Housing Allowance was due to take effect from April 2011 for some claimants, and rolled out until it affected all claimants by April 2013. Local Housing Allowance is paid to people who live in private rented accommodation: a group that includes families and single homeless people supported in specific ways by the resettlement services unit. Local Housing Allowance only covers rent, not household appliances, bedding or furniture. A further change to Local Housing Allowance as significant, was the '25 to 35' age related rule as explained by this member of the resettlement services team.

*There are a number of changes to the Local Housing Allowance but the main one for us is that the allowance is based on needs i.e. a single room allowance. Increasing the age [at which this benefit can be claimed] from 25 to 35 years will have an impact on a few of our service users. It is potentially very subjective. If a person finds a one bed flat, the question could be asked by the assessor 'why do you need this, when a bed-sit will do'. If the person has children visiting, this might be tough for them and family life. (Hugh, front line staff, March 2011)*

At a team meeting in May 2011 staff discussion raised several possible, perhaps unintended, consequences of welfare reforms for people accessing resettlement services as follows. An overarching Universal Credit system while simplifying benefits to a single amount to be paid monthly, could increase risk for debt and non-payment of rents (Bird, 2010; Groundswell, 2011). Changes to Local Housing Allowance rules including age related rules, and employment related rules would link benefits available to contributions, and therefore could discriminate against younger people with a limited employment history (Clapham et al., 2014). The closure of the Independent Living Fund could impact on service users in recovery from drug or alcohol misuse by reducing independent access of local support services (Dwyer et al., 2012).

The following collective narrative, 'moved on' illustrates spaces of contested points of view as a link between policy change and neoliberalism seep into local narratives during January to March 2011. At this time of anticipated change, and in a space that begins to witness the effects of national policy at local level, staff voices articulate a struggle with their own uncertainty about the perceived 'common sense' of welfare reforms, conflicted rationales about rights and responsibilities, and concerns about the extent of potential local impacts of benefit changes on homeless people. As staff looked into possible futures, there was a sense that welfare reforms from 2011 onwards would mean moving on to

a completely new, if at this stage uncertain, set of criteria for provision of services and benefits.

***Collective narrative: Moved on***

*Well, the alleged positive effect is that people will have to live within their means, that is, on welfare benefits regardless of their situation. There is a move towards discretionary services and discretionary benefits.*

*People in private rented accommodation are the people most vulnerable and at risk of not meeting any shortfall brought about by changes to LHA and rents going up. Not everyone goes through a hostel, and people still need to be housed and this is where the private sector steps in. Our bond scheme gives the person a bond to take up a tenancy and a support worker to manage their rent and so on. This means we have built up a good relationship with the private rented sector who are willing to take people at the moving on stage. Three in ten private rented accommodations should be affordable to people on housing benefit, but rents are going up significantly.*

*Covering the cost of any shortfall between actual rent and LHA rate is a concern, compounded by the limited discretionary emerging funds to cover any additional living costs such as replacing household goods. It is hard to see how our service users will meet the shortfall. If you are on benefits the money is all accounted for. How can you make good any shortfall of even £5 a week? Landlords are not likely to reduce the rent, they can ill afford to either. Many are small business, with small property portfolios on buy-to-let mortgages and they can ill afford to reduce rents as their costs are also rising. This has shifted a problem across to the private sector. There is a real likelihood of people having to move and uproot if lower rents cannot be negotiated with landlords or accommodation found that meets the LHA limits for bedroom criteria. From January 2012 single people up to the age of 35 will only be entitled to the single*

*shared room rate meaning that single people currently in self-contained accommodation may have to move to shared accommodation.*

*(All staff, January to March 2011)*

Staff advocated for sharing information about funding cuts to projects with service users. However they also expressed concern about the extent of their own knowledge and service users' knowledge about changes occurring in welfare and benefits and in particular the detail of The White Paper, Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010). A sense of insecurity prevailed for staff in their role as advisors and advocates for service users as entitlements, conditionality and amounts of benefits were no longer certain and subject to change. With provision of services also in a state of flux, staff self-concept as experts in welfare appeared undermined (Scanlon and Adlam, 2006). Service users also appeared to lack awareness about the extent of welfare reforms, but did articulate concern as they came up against specific changes at a personal level (Bowpit et al. 2011). A sense of uncertainty in understanding and capturing changes to the benefit system was expressed by both staff and service users as noted below.

*These are test cases. Information on changes to benefits and eligibility are not fully known by us or service users until a review comes up, and then plans may have to be made quickly. Whereas before I could reassure people that it was just a regular review, much more is unknown about these changes and outcomes. It means I am holding back on reassuring or advising them on one or two possible outcomes. We just don't know the kinds of decisions that will be made. (Mary, front line worker, February 2011)*

*Cuts make a difference of course. Beforehand there was always a plan and today it's more like a wavering in the dark feeling. We know that planned cuts and changes in benefits are on the horizon. There is nothing*

*more frightening than not knowing where you stand. It affects you personally. We haven't got a lot of information yet on the changes, the professionals here are doing the work, it is they who are in the front line. (Charlie, service user, May 2011)*

*We need to be really clear to service users through the active service user forum. They should be aware of what is going on and potential changes to services. To discuss with them what the cuts might mean to them when some organisations lose their funding. (Annie, manager, March 2011)*

### **Welfare in the city**

The household aid scheme provided support to anyone in the city area suffering hardship, through advice and signposting to emergency crisis payments and provision of material goods for the home. Material aid included 'starter packs' of household goods including bedding (duvet, pillows, sheets and pillow cases), crockery (pans, cups and saucers, plates, cutlery) and other items that may be available to enhance a home environment (tea/coffee/sugar canisters, washing up bowls, tea towels, vases).

The scheme signposted service users and other referrals to other organisations that offered crisis food parcels or one off financial grants. Resources for the household aid scheme were sourced from donations of goods and fundraising. The project worker was core funded by the organisation. Between December 2010 and June 2011 observed changes included increased requests to the charity for starter packs and increased requests for food vouchers; this aligned with indications of material and food poverty increases noted nationally (Ashton, Middleton and Lang, 2014; The Lancet, 2014). Requests for household aid, food vouchers and starter packs were for families as well as individuals. These are considered emergency requests and viewed as very often a last resort for people as explained by this front line worker.



*We are worried about welfare in the city. There were forty-nine phone calls in one week mostly for starter packs. Requests are from individuals, but also increasingly from both voluntary and statutory organisations supporting homeless people. (Irene, front line worker, June 2011)*

Broader concerns were raised around getting the right information to service users about changes to benefits and sources of support. People with multiple exclusions can find it difficult to engage consistently with health and welfare services (Dwyer et al., 2012). Specific barriers resulted for people who had limited confidence in negotiating welfare and now lacked face-to-face advice about benefits. A shift to the use of remote telephone advice services at job centre offices or via a dedicated telephone number meant that it was difficult for service users to access welfare and benefits advice particularly when criteria and eligibility were changing. Despite a policy emphasis on personalisation, the most vulnerable service users with complex lives who are best served by an individual approach, were failing to access services (Moore, 2010; McDonagh, 2011). As this front line worker explained, access to services and good advice can mean the difference between managing and struggling.

*Anxiety for service users is at the point of accessing services. There are phones available in the Benefits Agency office but only if you ask to use one. Are internal 'cost-cutting' measures making this less known to people? Access to information by phone is especially problematic for those who use mobiles, which can be costly to make inquiries by phone. Contact is less personal, less one-to-one. One client was on incapacity benefit. It got suspended under the review process but it went to appeal. We supported him to take it to appeal. It was two months before it was resolved. It meant he was down £20 a week, really struggling to manage. (Mary, front line worker, February 2011)*

The link between mental health as both a cause and consequence of homelessness raised some fears about an increase in wellbeing and crisis

referrals to GPs, or relapse referrals to accident and emergency services (Homeless Link, 2014b; Rae and Rees, 2015). Community Care grants were replaced by new Locally Based Assistance in 2011 and this allowed discretionary emergency payments to be made by local authorities. However, decisions were based on eligibility criteria and assessments related to participation in the Work Programme (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011). Individual benefits information and participation in the Work Programme had to be shared between the local Benefits Agency and the local authority. Locally Based Assistance therefore was conditional and excluded those least able to access or fulfil work related criteria while in crisis situations (Whiteford, 2010; McDonagh, 2011; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). The Health and Social Care Bill provided for local GP commissioning consortia to plan for primary care including mental health and drug and alcohol services (Department for Health, 2011). With potentially larger budgets available, staff expressed fears that larger charities and private health organisations may dominate future provision and that smaller community and voluntary sector organisations or those offering niche services will lose out on possible funding to support those in resettlement services. In contrast to a possible increase in the availability of supports at local and community level, as suggested under the Coalition's Big Society narrative, a decrease in the diversity of organisations providing homelessness services provision, with smaller locally based organisations closing, was noted as a trend (Homeless Link, 2011; Buckingham, 2012). Locally, it was felt that effective multi-agency supports particularly for people in recovery were in place, but under threat. In addition, concerns about loss of local social networks that support homeless people or those at risk of homelessness was mentioned by several staff, as summarised by one front line worker.

*Service users have a ladder of coping strategies. There is a pressure about forcing people who are not capable of going into jobs. There is a fear that if people are in recovery, they may relapse. People go to AA every day at times. This is really important for them to keep going. A lot do voluntary*

*work, as a way to keep focussed and off the drink. They go out to support organisations to do classes, recovery meetings. If these smaller organisations, run by workers who understand homelessness and are often helped by volunteers, if these go it will make things quite difficult for people. (Hugh, front line worker, April 2011)*

This narrative of 'crisis and uncertainty', revealed how the implication of changes to welfare policy became significant for the resettlement services of the charity; a situation mirrored across the city and nationally as reported at the time by organisations supporting homeless people (Homeless Link, 2011).

The next narrative, Narrative 2: 'conflict and loss', focusses on how funding cuts impacted on homelessness projects that had been supported under Supporting People, and consequences for staff and service users.

## **Narrative 2: conflict and loss**

*People are not interested in homelessness and resistance to these cuts is not a priority for people. Non-statutory provision leads to reduction of services to a bare minimum. This leads to a further erosion and retraction of professional services. (Joseph, front line worker, March 2011)*

This narrative of 'conflict and loss' is a story of professional and personal impacts of austerity on staff involved with the resettlement services. Internal contradictions and symbolic power imbalances are revealed through language, silencing, and unspoken conflict. The impact on the reduction of commissioning of homelessness services locally appeared to divide relations within the organisation with regard to internal decisions about services, and in turn, about jobs (Foucault, 1980; Dobson and McNeill, 2011). This narrative of 'conflict and loss', draws on staff interviews conducted throughout 2011 and in 2013. Language became important to staff to contextualise change as is reflected in the themes of deletion and staff vulnerabilities discussed in this narrative.

## Deletion

The words 'deleted' and 'deletion' were used to itemise and describe the effect of budget line cuts. These included the cancellation of contracts that were due to end, or recent and new tenders that were cancelled before they began. As the word 'deletion' circulated in policy and budget conversations it prompted accounts from staff about what was to be lost regarding services. It was as if naming and re-stating the value of each project, as part of the research, could create a narrative of resistance, as a symbolic act against change, and of asserting professional value (Foucault, 1980; Fletcher, 2011). This provided a contrast to the sense of erasure felt by staff and served as a marker for what was inevitably going to be a changed internal context in terms of services and ultimately, jobs. The recounting of narratives, as expressed by front line staff, served as a reminder to the wider organisation of the scope of and the closeness of the work of the resettlement services to the mission and values of the organisation (Renedo, 2014).

Like many community and voluntary sector organisations, managers had already looked at ways of reducing costs since the 2008/2009 recession (Tunstall and Fenton, 2009). In the light of the spending review in 2010 managers in the organisation had made plans for savings of 12.5% for 2011-12. By March 2011 the resettlement service, *"thought in January to be in a relatively 'safe' area, following this cost cutting exercise, received severe cuts to funding of its services compared to other services in our organisation"* (Bill, manager, 2011). Despite awareness of national austerity measures and policy change, the implications at local level were perceived as a blow to the charity (Fletcher, 2011; Homeless Link, 2013a). The immediate impact was on staff; in a reduction in their hours of employment and a reduction in services provided, and therefore the number of people they worked with. The narratives below, about projects in the resettlement services most affected, note the immediate reality of 'deletion' as captured at team meetings and interviews held during 2011.

## **The family project**

*Many of the families are working through a major life event and we are trying to support them to become functional again – navigating the choppy waters of life. (Patricia, manager, 2011)*

The family project offered holistic support to families with a background of homelessness and multiple factors of exclusion. It worked through a multi-agency model with Social Work services and safeguarding teams to support families during difficult times of transition. The family project was established in 2009 with three years funding by city council, and was due to end in August 2011. The service supported up to fifty families at any one time. Families had complex lives and multiple needs both as a family group, and as individuals within the family (McDonagh, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2012). The family project allocated floating support workers to families to support them over a twelve month period providing liaison with housing and health services, access to placements in local support groups and ongoing signposting to available supports until the families are settled, often in new communities, and are able to manage their lives. The workings of the project was summarised by a member of the resettlement services team.

*It is a unique service. Around 95% of these families are mums with children; the remaining are families of dads with children. We work with unique families from the beginning. Some of the families come through the local hostel system. All are single parent families and have multiple support needs. The reasons for breakup of families include domestic violence and drug or alcohol use by parents. Prior to accessing the service, local authority social work assistants provided case work support with the involvement of a social worker for child protection purposes. We provide support in accessing benefits, tenancy support, or transitional support, for example helping the children move schools, registration with*

*new doctors and other services such as finding alcohol/drug services in the new area. (Mary, front line worker, 2011)*

In January 2011, the service operated with 4.5 full time equivalent posts filled by five people. In March 2011, notice was given that funding for the family project was 'deleted' as a budget line, with effect from April 2011, just a month later. Negotiations between management and the council resulted in partially reinstated funding to enable the family project to complete the planned programme of work under its original three year tender up to August 2011.

The following collective narrative is presented as a space to capture front line workers' reflections on the quality and successes of their work with families; a resettlement service that came to an end under early austerity funding cuts. The loss of 'a family home' of service users resonates with the loss of 'the family project' within the charity. The narrative serves to capture over time the ethos of front line day to day work with service users in addition to voicing staff fears for the immediate futures of families they were currently engaged with in the project.

***Collective narrative: Without a family home***

*Without a home, nothing else really falls into place for a family. We have had a lot of success. It is really rewarding to see people being settled, maintaining their tenancy successfully. Families are getting established in their community. It takes a few months. They do get lonely and can feel isolated for a few months. We support them for up to twelve months. They start to make friends. The children are at school. They are settled into a home, a furnished house. To have your own furniture is really nice as some have never had their own furniture. They may have got a crisis grant and spent it wisely building up the home. We get thank you cards and hear from people. This is people's lives, they have come so far now, allowed us in to help them, it takes some time but then they can manage.*

*We work with people for up to twelve months so we really get to know them. Some of these fifty families we have on our books are nearing exit. What about those who are not nearing exit or newly engaged families? What on-going support will they get and who will provide it?*

*(Front line workers, 2011)*

### **The single men's project and bond scheme**

The resettlement service supported homeless people to access and maintain tenancies in a number of ways, including working with private landlords to offer accommodation to homeless people, backed up by a rent deposit or 'bond', and work with service users to secure and maintain tenancies with registered social landlords. The single men's project and bond scheme are two interlinked projects that in 2010 and 2011 supported forty single men as explained by this manager.

*Both projects have been massively successful in working with private landlords – including working with those who are not Registered Social Landlords who are willing to register and offer housing to this group. This is a gap that we fill. We predicted that the lack of investment in social housing meant a need to look towards the private rented sector and to work with them to take on service users. (Tom, manager, 2011)*

In these two projects four front line workers provided floating support, advice and guidance to single homeless men over the age of 18 on housing, welfare and benefits. Service users in the project had or continued to have drug or alcohol misuse problems which resulted in their homelessness and current vulnerability. In addition to working with people to access and maintain successful tenancies, supports included signposting to mental health and drug or alcohol support groups. Like many projects working closely with a network of other community services, holistic support was personalised, was more than about housing, and

supportive of people to build a good quality of life while in recovery (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Please and Wallace, 2011). The 50% reduction of funding for the single men's project was announced in February 2011, to take effect in April 2011, causing immediate concern as this front line worker explained.

*We have 40 individuals we work with. This will drop to 20 individuals by 1<sup>st</sup> April due to lack of protection of front line services and a reduction in our staff. Who will take the other 20? They will have to be picked up by others but which organisations will be left? The Council will have to pick them up. (Joseph, front line worker, March 2011)*

### **Staff vulnerabilities**

The closure and reduction of resettlement services in the organisation presented a significant loss of knowledge and skills of staff with experience supporting people at risk of, or with experience of, homelessness. Funding reductions impacted on eleven front line staff. Seven staff were redeployed to other areas of the organisation in non-homelessness services roles, three staff had their hours of work reduced and one staff left the organisation. There were fears that expertise in floating support and resettlement services was in danger of being lost across the community and voluntary sector (Bird, 2010; Homeless Link, 2011). Of particular concern was a potential risk that vulnerable families and single people with multiple forms of exclusion would be unable to obtain secure tenancies and could lose out on unique 'floating services' that are not available elsewhere (Bowpit et al. 2011; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). An increase in homelessness had been noted nationally and in the city region between 2010 and 2011 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010; Department for Communities and Local Government 2011). Local experiences resonated with national experiences, as impacts on staffing levels reduced the quantity of resettlement services and decreased the availability of networks of supports and opportunities for engagement with service users (Homeless Link, 2011; Fitzpatrick et al., 2014).



The charity, in common with many homelessness professionals in the community and voluntary sector, took a position as advocates for vulnerable people in dealings with the statutory sector, and in wider advocacy networks (Fletcher, 2011; Renedo, 2014). The potential impact of the cuts on service users was beginning to be documented (Groundswell, 2011). Internally the charity emphasised the potential impacts of austerity measures and funding reductions on their service users, over that of their staff. However, the norms of internal relationships between front line staff and management appeared strained, as a perceived avoidance of acknowledging the impact of austerity measures on staff, in particular from front line staff, was experienced as symbolic silencing (Bourdieu, 1991). Front line workers were specifically vulnerable to reduced pay and job cuts. Front line workers suggested that managers had a limited understanding of front line resettlement services work, and that this led to managers failing to see their roles as part of the future development of the organisation. Managers perceived workers' roles as generic, and suggested protecting jobs involved *"moving people to fill posts on an ad hoc basis"* (Bill, manager, 2011). Discussion about including the views of staff on their own vulnerabilities in this research was met with some resistance as noted above. Stories of loss of services and impacts on service users became prioritised for advocacy in the public domain. This internal conflict remained unspoken externally, where staff presented a united front and joined with other organisations in housing justice advocacy actions that prioritised service user experiences of austerity.

A collective narrative presented below presents composite voices that reveal conflicting perspectives of role related spaces of change of front line workers and of managers. Notions of silencing infused interviews conducted during 2011, 2013 and 2014. This collective narrative of 'cultures of silence' highlights avoidance as a relational breach within the organisation, spoken of by both sides of managers and front line staff, but not heard by either.

**Collective narrative: Cultures of silence**

*We have been told not to do social justice work anymore.*

*Cuts to services means a loss of very specific expertise and we won't get that back. Can this work be done by volunteers who don't have the capacity to work with homeless people on their journey? But when people are out on the streets they are extremely vulnerable and that is a skilled job.*

*Our work was preventative as well. By providing caring and consistent support services after families or individuals have been in hostels, we help them move on and settle over time. Landlords have got used to us and trust us. We prevent homelessness by ensuring they can manage themselves. We break down any revolving door system. There is a prevention team, crisis grants and so on, but they will be stretched too and we can work with people before issues become really problematic.*

*(Front line workers, 2011-2014)*

*Yes, the skill base will be diminished. It is specific people providing floating support who are being made redundant. Hopefully some will move to the independent sector or other organisations. There is little work in the local authorities now for this kind of service.*

*We have to look at any opportunities we can develop in parallel with the potential of people losing their jobs. And there are a lot of people really scared out there. We will have to think more about central purchasing and trying to make savings that way. I know people depend on us for an income so we have to look for alternatives so that staff can be flexibly assigned to other areas of the organisation. We have to be pretty creative.*

*One of the reasons the tendering service works is that with a mix of organisations providing services through the local authority, we all have to keep*

*on our toes, not to be wasteful, but to provide a good service. Provision of services may be reduced to a basic or non-existent level if we can't finance it.*

*(Managers, 2011-2014)*

This narrative of 'conflict and loss' foregrounded the loss of resettlement services, and loss of staff knowledge and organisational expertise in homelessness services within the charity and across the wider sector. It also revealed staff vulnerabilities hidden in the stories of service user vulnerabilities. Conflict and unspoken tensions emerged over time as opportunities for continued support for services were perceived to have been missed or not prioritised (Renedo, 2014).

The final narrative of the workers' stories examines changes in perspectives from the emerging scenarios of city council cuts in response to the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010, to perspectives on organisational adjustments and change four years later. By 2014, the original front line workers had left the organisation and resettlement services delivery had changed to funded partnership work with social housing providers.

### **Narrative 3: adjustment and change**

*We are working through some tough times; resisting, informing and creating contexts in which we live and work. (Carmel, manager, 2014)*

This narrative of 'adjustment and change' straddles the period of research in which the charity and staff regulate and amend their practice within an externally changed market driven and audit context for their work (Foucault, 1980). From 2013 to 2014, staff at all levels of the organisation worked through a changed ethos for provision of homelessness services (Banks, 2011; Colley, 2012).

Two themes defined how internal and external relationships and values were framed and embodied in practices in this narrative of 'adjustment and change'. Firstly relationships of care were reflected upon, tinged with a sense that values underpinning of professional homelessness services were being undermined. Secondly, colliding and changing relations, brought about by an imposition of external contract culture, also resounded internally as decisions on funding, project and jobs were made by managers. Challenges to values and adjustments to ways of working are presented in this narrative under two themes of care, caring and values, and changing relations.

### **Care, caring and values**

Different perspectives were voiced on how new project work on homelessness could be framed and developed, as the combination of funding cuts and non-statutory duty for single homeless people impacted on the charity's capacity to provide such services. Front line workers presented contrasting views in what they saw as viable approaches, and how they viewed management decisions on development and funding choices. In 2011, front line staff expressed concern that specific project prioritisation, adjustments to services and funding decisions were too cautious as this staff member suggests below.

*Social problems can't be dealt with overnight, but it is our job to tackle them by working with people to set and reach their own goals, creating a sustainable life. The Council's homeless strategy is about families coming together and staying together. The charity had a very specific, and unique project for families in difficulty, holistically supporting and advocating for them. There wasn't a new proposal put forward by the managers for a service like ours. Not supporting families is being target driven and scared about tackling the real issues, or going for the easy work. That works against what we are about. We could have been given referrals from other agencies or social services. We are a successful team and have had just had a good evaluation. (Irene, front line worker, 2011)*

Front line workers also expressed a value base to their work, beyond contractual motivation, as this worker explains.

*We will not leave them; it is not a knock off at five job. Knowing there are some people that we could help still there and still struggling. I am worried that people might disengage – what are the viable options? We have let down the service users. It is as if they aren't worthwhile. (Mary, front line worker, 2011).*

By 2014, the charity had adjusted to providing services to other organisations in order to maintain its homelessness resettlement provision. Rather than being a lead provider, resettlement services were provided through partnership work with statutory and housing association groups, as this staff member explains.

*We know homeless people are at risk of a range of health conditions, and we already work closely with A & E and GP consortia. We know that homeless people are in and out of services. We know our people have a range of difficulties and need support in getting housed in the private rented sectors. We work with the statutory health and mainly the private and housing associations. These collaborations have not come about by the Big Society, but by working to promote human dignity and effective services (Betty, front line worker, 2014).*

Managers were conscious of making changes to current models out of necessity, while at the same time to try to hold onto the organisations' values, as expressed below.

*What we are in danger of losing here is a sense of accompanying people and a sense of social justice. This is rooted in our history. We have the ability to respond, to follow a story rather than follow the funding. We need to keep faithful to people and make sure we have enduring quality, although the model may change. There will be internal and external changes. But we must hold onto our values. (Carmel, manager, 2014)*

These tensions revealed that the centrality of care, caring and values as motivation for all staff in the charity was under threat (Dobson, 2011; Renedo, 2014). The following composite narrative of both front line workers and managers perspectives of notions of 'care' and 'caring for', derived from interviews 2011 to 2014, illustrate how staff embodied and strove to articulate care, caring for and values in their work during austere times.

**Collective narrative: Care, caring for, and values**

*There are two choices for [the organisation]. We could work for change and work together. We could be part of it, developing a positive response. Or we could follow the money and not change or challenge. I see these as two models; a care approach and an outcomes, or caring for, approach. We worked successfully in an outcomes approach, thinking about how the service has been led, caring for and celebrating people's achievement and empowerment. The policy or procedure approach is driven by targets, 'delivering care'. That ethos is not what we do. That is about numbers and costs and efficiency.*

*Our work is more community focussed. It is not to say it is not care, the care sector flows from one part to the other. Some services focus on providing physical care. We work on empowerment and helping people make choices. The new approaches and procedures here are about care, not care for, or caring.*

*All the team are caring people with values of their own that guide them in how they work. It is service user led, and about working alongside our service users. We are in the background, when they are taking small steps. It is going to be very hard.*

*The vulnerability of the people we work with, who now have to engage without having an identified support worker to navigate the changes in their lives and the system, may be increased. They need someone who helps them plan for the future and how to go forward. They will feel the impact on themselves and how*

*it affects their day to day life, rather than a 'loss of service'. They will describe it as a loss of 'people who care'.*

*(All staff, 2011-2014)*

## **Changing relations**

Despite the charity's ability to respond to cuts by internally financing some gaps in budgets, the impacts on the staff of the resettlement service was experienced on a personal and professional level. Discussion in team meetings in 2011 revealed concerns for services across the city region, and fears that homeless services provided by the voluntary sector were disproportionately affected by cuts to the Supporting People budget (Day, 2009; Tunstall and Fenton, 2009). The direct impact of relying on project funding to maintain core services was a concern for many community and voluntary organisations (Homeless Link, 2011; Buckingham, 2012). The changed funding context impacted in different ways on contractual terms and conditions for the charity and the terms and conditions for the charity's staff as explained below.

*Emerging terms are different as a direct result of the cuts. Existing terms of contracts and re-negotiations with local authorities are changing. We have always successfully bid for contracts as one of the largest organisations. Now we have to re-negotiate with local authorities (Bill, manager, 2011)*

*Terms and conditions for staff have been eroded. The charity along with other organisations contracted to provide homelessness services in the region are now operating on a reduced budget and reduced numbers of staff. Those that are left are reported as being stretched to capacity. (Joseph, front line staff, 2011).*

The pervasiveness of contract and transactional cultures were used to frame discussions about alternative ways of working, and revealed contradictions in what the charity had stood against and ways it might find itself having to work (Bourdieu, 1991). Making sense, it was suggested, was to accept as common sense the permanence of market driven welfare as one manager explained.

*Concomitant with a Big Society agenda is for the CVS to engage in a competitive and contractual relationship with each other. Increase in rents for community based premises and the levying of service charges to other CVS organisations is becoming more commonplace. (Annie, manager, 2013)*

Impacts on ways of working were framed in contrasting ways by managers and front line staff, echoing internal workings of a typology of third sector homelessness organisations and their responses to a contract culture suggested by Buckingham (2012). Managers focussed on the charity's organisational compliance and duty of care as transactional. Managers in their role as organisationally competent and compliant contractors expressed duty of care in terms of ensuring continuity of service. Service users, in the charity's projects that could no longer be funded, were 'passed on' or allocated to other services. That the charity needed to be seen as effective provider of services, despite a challenging funding context, was explained by this manager.

*There is an expectation that organisations provide viable services but on less money. The local authorities have a baseline for quality, and then they look for the cheapest option. Organisations working in non-crisis provision are taking a bigger hit. We will find ways to pass on our clients. However, we have no list of who will remain as providers of homelessness services in the city. (Maira, manager, 2011)*

Front line workers focussed on the value base of their work as quality and duty of care as relational (Renedo, 2014). Front line workers, in their role as cautious contractors and providers of homelessness services, expressed duty of care in



terms of the prioritisation of human interactions with people with complex needs (Buckingham, 2012). A sense of duty in providing continuity of service, and concerns about this, was expressed by front line staff over time. As explained below, in 2011 continuity of care was sought from working closely with other local community and voluntary organisations; in 2014 continuity of care was provided through partnership with housing associations.

*The journey of a service user towards a more stable and independently managed life is really important to monitor and encourage on a regular basis. Our team meet with service users and signpost them depending on their needs at that time. It may be difficult to signpost them if organisations are closing. Local volunteers and community based organisations may pick them up. We will have to monitor that. (Hugh, Front line staff, 2011)*

*We have good partnerships because we know each other. We provide the support now to people living in housing associations accommodation. They have to understand the regulations of living there. But the staff in the [housing association] give us some leeway if the person is going through a tough time. It gives us space to help them get their health, job seekers and benefits sorted. (Veronica, front line staff, 2014)*

Changing relations between the community and voluntary sector is typified by the following collective narrative, 'contract cultures'. The narrative positions managers' and front line workers' contrasting and critical perspectives on a new welfare culture, and associated changes in contractual relationships between the state, the public and the community and voluntary sector between 2011 and 2014.

***Collective narrative: Contract cultures***

*We seem to have moved into a contractual relationship with government and each other. Not a facilitative relationship. Organisations that offer advice, now*

*charge say £50 for that advice. If everyone has to charge for services to each other that is going to impact on smaller organisations.*

*The world has changed. If we focus on partnership we can deliver good services for people. We have to offer a specialist service to the big organisations providing housing to clients like ours. We do less work with the council and we are now contracted to housing associations.*

*The CVS has engaged in the project contract culture. They get the work, they do the work, and they deliver the targets. But I am not sure they provide a critique of themselves.*

*(All staff, 2011- 2014)*

This narrative, 'adjustment and change', revealed how the changed context of welfare policy and the funding for homelessness services presented challenges to values and ways of working of staff (Colley, 2012). Tensions and silences emerged over internal and external voicing of change and adjustment to the changed context.

### **Discussion: a common story in a changing context?**

The three narratives of workers' stories of change presented and discussed in this chapter offer a rich interpretation of the experiences of resettlement services workers during austere times. The findings in this chapter suggest that these staff stories may be part of an emergent common story for community and voluntary and public sector workers. The narratives trace the charity's responses to austerity and welfare reforms from the eve of crisis in 2011, through periods of loss and adjustment in 2013 and 2014. Three narratives of stories of change from the perspectives of staff have been interpreted as occurring in constrained and contested spaces, and were represented in the chapter as narratives of 'crisis and uncertainty', 'conflict and loss' and 'adjustment and change'. Findings

from the workers' stories resonate with emerging literature on experiences of austerity by staff in the caring services. As part of a commentary of austerity, the perspectives of staff revealed that the extent of welfare reforms and austerity not only impacted on the charity's services, but also on personal and professional values of homelessness services staff (Groundswell, 2011; Scanlon and Adlam, 2012; Renedo, 2014).

At the time of this research, managers and front line staff at times struggled to come to terms with the significant impacts of change, as the organisation entered a period of crisis and upheaval. External and internal relations were breached mirroring the increasingly conditional, compliant and transactional nature of welfare reforms and austerity measures (Bird, 2010; Buckingham, 2012; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). The charity's perceptions of the nature and value of homelessness and resettlement services work was challenged by the erosion of funding for and statutory value of such work. A sense of the ethical and relational caring roles between staff and homeless people or those at risk of homelessness was undermined (Fletcher, 2011; Benozzo and Colley, 2012). Breach in relations, cultures of silence on the erosion of professional services, and an undermining of values and ethics of care feature as themes across the narratives presented in this chapter. These themes will be discussed further in Chapter 7: Negotiating New Realities.

## **Conclusion to the chapter**

Literature on the experiences of austerity on homelessness and resettlement services workers is emerging, however it is a story yet to be fully heard. These narratives of staff stories of change during 2011 to 2014 contribute to that story.

Findings in this chapter contribute to the main research question by offering an overall picture of how funding cuts and welfare reforms were understood and experienced by staff within the charity. Findings also contribute to related themes and research questions set out in Table 5: Phases, themes and research

questions in Chapter 3: Methodology. The impacts of policy change on homelessness and resettlement services (related to research questions I, ii, iii) emerge through staff voices as a commentary on the cuts throughout the interviews. The representation of stories of spaces of change as narratives of 'crisis and uncertainty', 'conflict and loss' and 'adjustment and change' provide rich detail of the conflicted and contested spaces staff occupy under austerity (related to research questions iv and viii). Narratives illustrate tensions and contradictions in the ways the organisation responded to external and internal change.

This chapter represents internal facing perspectives of staff experiences of change and internal organisational responses to austerity. The charity's public response to austerity and advocacy in relation to homelessness will be discussed later in Chapter 6. Related to positioning of internal and external voice, the research process itself became a place of struggle for staff voice. On the one hand the research process was used by front line staff to communicate and explain to managers what the work of the resettlement service entailed, and what was about to be lost internally. While on the other hand, it was used by managers to inform an external voice on losses to services and service users, but remained silent on impacts on staff.

This chapter began with outlining the historical commitment to homeless people of the charity and an overview of its homelessness and resettlement services. The workers' stories of experiences of change directly link with service users' experiences during the early roll out of welfare reforms and austerity related cuts to services. The focus of the next chapter, Chapter 5: Service user stories will present narratives of change from the perspective of service users of the resettlement services at the charity during 2011 to 2014.

## **Chapter 5: The service users' stories**

### **Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter presents testimonies of the lives of people who have experienced homelessness and were engaged with housing support and resettlement services of the charity from 2011 to 2014. The charity's mission and expressed values stated that it strove to be at the forefront of responding to and representing people's needs. The staff of the organisation, in discussing the methodology and focus of this research, expressed a view that *"there is no better way of knowing the real context and effect than hearing it from the people most affected"* (Patricia, manager, 2011).

As discussed in the policy review of Chapter 2, changes to benefits as part of Universal Credit, Welfare that Works (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) were to be rolled out incrementally. The most significant issues that affected service users in this study were changes to statutory duty for single homeless people and changes to housing benefits and discretionary social or crisis funds. In 2011 Local Housing Allowances were capped to be in line with the bottom 30% of local rents, reduced from the bottom 50% of local rents. In 2013, an under-occupation penalty (also known as the bedroom tax) reduced Housing Benefit for those in social housing. Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants were abolished in favour of discretionary schemes such as Locally Based Assistance and were devolved to local authorities (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011a) Universal Credit phased in from 2013 combined benefits to one monthly payment to households, replacing separate benefit payments such as Job Seekers Allowances, Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefits. A benefits cap of £350 per single individual per week outside of London was introduced. Benefit changes coincided with reductions to local authorities and changes to the criteria of the

funding stream Supporting People. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, this had a significant impact on the staff and project resources available for resettlement services for single homeless people (Homeless Link, 2011; Homeless Link, 2013a).

This chapter presents and discusses service users' narratives captured during the period of welfare reforms affecting homelessness and resettlement services from 2011 to 2014. The chapter specifically addresses the second phase of the research, 'experiencing change' as outlined in Table 5: Linking phases of research and research questions to data collection methods and research related activities. The research on service user experiences of life journeys and coming up for review was organised in two stages with interviews conducted during May to October 2011 and during July to August 2014. A total of ten service users were interviewed as part of this phase of research; five in 2011 and five in 2014. Interviews were conducted with service users engaged in resettlement services of the charity, with the assistance of front line staff who facilitated access to service users.

The chapter is organised in the following way. Firstly a section expands on the methodology for this phase of research, including participatory practice and conducting research with service users, the use of a sustainable livelihoods analysis approach, and details on research questions and data collection tools.

An important part of the participatory research design for the phase 'experiencing change' involved working with co-researchers. Capturing and analysing experiences of service users *with* service users was central to the ethos of the research (Maguire, 1997; Beresford and Branfield, 2006). For data collected in 2011, a participatory approach included working with two co-researchers; service users who accessed the resettlement services of the charity and who had direct experiences of homelessness. They worked with the researcher and conducted service user interviews held at the resettlement service offices. For data collected in 2014, an insider researcher approach included the researcher accompanying front line staff on two of their outreach

days visiting service users in their homes. By prior agreement and with their key workers present, individual interviews were conducted with service users as part of the visits by the researcher. Both these participatory research approaches required a level of trust between the researcher, the co-researchers and the front line staff, developed through informal and formal spaces for reflection during the process of the research (Maguire, 1997; Beresford and Branfield, 2006; Bowpitt et al., 2011; Abrahams et al. 2015).

This is then followed by two findings sections that present and discuss data from 2011 and from 2014. These sections are presented as life journey narratives and narratives of the experiences of coming up for review.

The first findings section of this chapter presents life journey narratives of five service users engaged with the charity's resettlement services in 2011. This section draws on data gathered during May to October 2011, a period when significant funding reductions were first being implemented at local level (Dodds, 2010; Department for Work and Pensions, 2010). Initially, a focus group discussion was held with a service user forum where the research was introduced by the front line staff, and the researcher and co-researchers were present to provide details and answer questions about the research processes. For this stage of data collection a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach was adopted to provide a framework for research questions about service user experience, analysis and reporting of data (May et al. 2009). The rationale for this approach was that while service users may engage with the resettlement services in one part of their lives, a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach can explore many assets in the whole of a person's life (Orr et al. 2006). Five areas of assets are identified in this approach; financial, social, human, physical and public. These form a collective group of assets that may overlap to provide a supportive context for vulnerable adults. Different assets may be more prevalent at different times and strengthen people's 'resilience' when they experience 'shocks' in their lives. The five assets were used as a focus for

discussion and allowed service users to present rich reflections on their lives. In addition, using questions that allowed service users to discuss the past and present of their lives resonated with life journey methodologies, such as the Outcomes Star. This is often used in resettlement programmes is a familiar way of engaging service users in discussion (MacKeith, 2010).

The second findings section of this chapter presents individual narratives of a further five service users' lives in 2014. This section draws on data gathered through interviews conducted during July to August 2014, a period when changes to welfare and recalculation of benefits and protocols were being implemented and service users were in the process of *"coming up for review"* (Mike, service user, 2014). In these interviews, while discussions were framed around coming up for review and the nature of people's experience of the welfare system, service users also located their current experiences within their own life journey narrative. The nature of 'shocks' in people's lives that contributed to their current situation, and the extent of 'resilience' of service users in dealing with reduced circumstances emerged in their stories. Testimonies of service users provided rich life journey narratives and reflections on change in their lives, as well as accounts of their experience of housing and resettlement services and access to benefits at individual level.

A discussion section explores thematic resonances between narratives of service users from 2011 and 2014. While acknowledging and presenting the individual nature of narratives, common themes illustrate the salient experiences of vulnerability and intersections with welfare reform in people's lives (Dwyer et al. 2012). Findings reveal significant contributions and resilience in the day to day lives of service users. Changes to policy, experienced by service users as benefit changes can cause confusion and stress as they come up for review or engage with the welfare system. Themes from service user narratives align with, and illustrate further, themes that are emerging in the literature (Bird, 2010; Dobson, 2011; Limebury and Shea, 2015).



The chapter concludes that this research has generated evidence of four thematic areas of service users' experiences as captured during a period of austerity and welfare reform. First, homeless people, despite complex life journeys and crises, can develop and regain a good quality of life. Second, services users' experience of change encompasses direct impacts such as the rising cost of living, impacts of austerity on family life and a perceived increase in negative attitudes towards homeless people. Third, reductions to welfare budgets impact on the availability, quality and quantity of services. Fourth, rights to services are potentially being undermined by a narrowing of statutory duty, particularly with regard to single homeless men. The chapter ends by reflecting on the value of using service user stories to inform and influence advocacy, a theme then taken up in Chapter 6.

Before presenting the findings, a section on methodology for this phase of research now follows to give an overview of participatory and ethical practice in conducting research with service users, the use of a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach, and details on research questions and data collection tools.

### **Co-research and listening to service users' experiences**

This phase of the research employed a participatory approach for data collection, analysis and reporting. As mentioned above, this section of the research was conducted with two co-researchers; service users of the resettlement service who also volunteered and organised the service user group meetings. This provided an opportunity to discuss findings as they emerged through informal meetings, and more formal presentation of findings for discussion within the charity.

A participatory approach to the research meant taking time to build up trust and to find the best ways to work together (Beresford and Branfield, 2006; Somerville, 2011; Okely, 2012). This was done by creating spaces for reflection on the research as it progressed. Initially this meant meeting with five staff from across the organisation including management, policy, programme development

and practitioner areas, to develop and guide the research which was largely to be conducted internally but led by an 'outsider'; the author as a professional researcher working in a voluntary capacity as lead researcher. During the phase of the research focussed on service users' experiences, another space was created through the regular meetings of the co-research group comprised of the lead researcher and the two co-researchers. Here discussion on findings provided an opportunity for 'analysis through talk', and for reflection on the research process and how we were working together. In addition, an advisory group was established comprising the CEO, a Trustee, two people from supportive external organisations, and staff and service users who attended at various times. This group met four times during the life of the project and provided a space to consider the findings as they emerged, and to develop opportunities for advocacy.

The participatory approach centred on working with co-researchers: two service users nearing exit stage of the resettlement service and current editors of a service user group newsletter. The co-researchers were also respondents in the research. The researcher met with front line staff and the two service users to discuss the research in general and the process. Both service users agreed to be part of the research and revealed significant skills in facilitation with vulnerable groups. One of the co-researchers volunteered in a pupil referral unit and one had previously conducted social science research at college. A co-research approach was developed between the team, starting with a collective development of an ethics protocol for working together, for interviewing service users empathically and appropriately, and for representing respondents' views in reports faithfully. The ethics protocol for the co-researcher group can be found was discussed in the methodology and can be found in Appendix 2. The protocol drew on the organisation's mission statement and guiding principles, and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) good practice guides to research (BERA, 2004; The Charity, 2000). Analysis was conducted through co-research group meetings where interview data were discussed and considered in the

context of external changes affecting resettlement services and service users. A further stage of reflection was afforded through regular research briefings and debate with an advisory group set up to support the co-research team, and the development of, and potential use for, the research.

Listening to service users' testimonies was a central part of the methodological approach the research, and a narrative discursive approach to interviewing and analysing data was adopted (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Okley, 2012). Sets of open ended interview schedules were used in 2011 and in 2014 (O'Neill, 1992; Okely, 1994; May et. al. 2009; Bold, 2012). The development of open ended interview questions is discussed further below, and schedules are provided in Appendices 5 and 7. Service users had a diverse range of communication skills and English language skills. However all interviewed service users were able to express their opinions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Comments from front line staff interviews were included when writing up to highlight their observations of impacts of changes to services provision and benefits on service users.

This chapter primarily focusses on research questions relating to experiences of service users. As mentioned in Chapter 3 the data collection and methods to explore research questions were arranged in three broad phases of: 'capturing change', 'experiencing change' and 'influencing change'. These three phases and associated research questions have been iteratively explored throughout the study as previously noted in Table 5: Linking phases of research and research questions to data collection methods and related research activities, in Chapter 3. Research questions for this chapter draw on all three phases, with a particular emphasis on the phase 'experiencing change'.

In this chapter, the two sections present and discuss findings and the discussion that provides a thematic analysis of the findings relates to research questions (RQ) from phase 2 of the project: experiencing change. These are noted below.

Research questions for phase 2: experiencing change

RQ v. What are the lived experiences of people accessing homelessness and resettlement services?

RQ vi. What is the impact of welfare reform and reduction in public funding on service users of the resettlement service?

RQ vii. How are the voices of service users included in the research and subsequent advocacy?

In addition, findings from the experiences of service users are also relevant to research questions (RQ) concerning service users from phase 1: capturing change. These are noted below.

Research questions for phase 1: capturing change

RQ ii How are major policy and funding reforms understood by service users?

RQ iv. How are these changes experienced by service users?

An overview and rationale for the use of a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach for service users' stories is given next.

### **Using a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach**

As introduced in Chapter 3, a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach was adapted to provide a framework for the research questions, analysis and reporting for the research with service users. A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach is an asset based approach for examining individual and community experiences of living in poverty, and draws on methodology originally developed in the global south (May et al. 2009). As a participatory research approach, it has subsequently been developed and used in the UK by Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam GB to examine household poverty and household assets in the context of local and regional assets and economies (Hocking, 2003; Orr et al. 2006; May et. al. 2009).

As mentioned in Chapter 3 a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach explores five areas of assets held by people themselves that support sustainable livelihoods. The five assets are identified as the following. Human assets include

individual health and well-being, as well as resilience in times of stress. Social assets include access to assets in the community such as community based organisations, support groups and an ability to engage with groups. Physical assets include housing and resources to enable a person to experience a sense of home. Public assets include welfare and education resources, and access to services provided by the state and those provided by the community and voluntary sector on behalf of the state. Financial assets include income and benefits and an ability to manage financially. A second dimension of a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach is that it allows an exploration of 'shocks' and 'resilience' in people's lives and their responses to current contexts.

The use of a Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach in this research enabled recognition and exploration of assets in the whole of a person's life with service users themselves. As a research methodology, it mapped onto a life journey approach often used in social work service provision, and had a familiar feel to methods used in services for reflecting on life situations (Penny and Owen, 2003; MacKeith, 2014). A rationale for using this approach in this research was that it allows a range of assets in the whole of a service user's life to be explored, rather than just their relationship to resettlement services of the charity (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Blackburn, 2012). It also allowed service users to reflect on 'shocks' and 'resilience' in their own life journey. This enabled a rich picture to emerge of what was happening in service users' lives from their perspectives in 2011 and in 2014.

The five assets and the notion of 'shocks' and 'resilience' identified in the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach was used to frame a starting point of the developing questions used in interviews, as well as analysis of data in 2011 and 2014. Questions used in previous studies (Orr et al. 2006; May et al. 2009) using sustainable livelihoods analysis approach were referred to and adapted for the interviews in this research. The five sustainable livelihoods assets (human, social, physical, public and financial) generated five broad questions used in the

semi-structured interviews with service users. The five interview questions and additional prompts used in 2011 in particular were:

Interview question 1: Tell us about your home, then and now? (Social and physical assets).

Interview question 2: What is your life like now? What was it like before? Tell us about your journey. (Social and public assets).

Interview question 3: How do you manage moneywise? What benefits, income, or living costs do you have? (Financial assets).

Interview question 4: Tell us how you organise your week? What activities or groups are you involved in? (Human, social and public assets).

Interview question 5: What Services have you accessed? Have they helped you or not? In what ways? (Human and public assets).

Visual motifs as well as written questions were used to facilitate the focus of the question, which appeared helpful for all service users, and particularly those for whom English is not their first language (See Appendix 5 for a visual representation of questions).

In 2014 a discursive open ended interview approach was used (Bold, 2012; Okely, 2012). A set of guiding questions was developed in preparation for the interviews. Service users discussed these iteratively throughout interviews. Interview questions included the following:

Qa: What is your life like now? What was it like before? Tell me about your journey.

Qb: How do you find your current accommodation?

Qc: How do you organise your week? Are you working or involved with groups?

Qd: How are you managing moneywise?

Qe: How do you find the benefits system?

Qf: What services have you accessed? Have they helped you or not? In what ways?

Qg: What other supports do you have?

## **Findings: service users' stories of experiencing change**

The next two sections offer findings presented as narratives of changing realities for people accessing homeless services as voiced by service users. The first section provides life journey narratives collected in 2011 and the second section presents narratives collected in 2014. As identified in the previous chapter, work with homeless people can be described in terms of a journey, relating both to the status of a personal journey and the tier of intervention the person is experiencing. The tiers of experiences/services can be described as crisis, stabilising and resettlement (Seal, 2005; Groundswell, 2011; McDonagh, 2011). The work of the charity relating to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness is within the resettlement services spectrum of services that follows on from crisis and stabilising services.

### **Life journeys: narratives 2011**

Life journey narratives of change are presented here as findings from the research that drew on data collected from May to October 2011. The service users who participated in the interviews in 2011 were all single men in various stages of the resettlement service, with support given to them on an individual basis out in the community. The men had experienced a range of single or multiple issues that had led to their homelessness, such as dependency on drugs or alcohol, mental health conditions, family breakdown, economic migrant or asylum/refugee vulnerability (Fahmy et al. 2009; Whiteford, 2010a; Bowpitt et al. 2011).

The men's narratives illustrate the personal success and challenges on their life journeys, and how they deploy or access assets to begin to create a sustainable life. Life journeys are presented below as short personal narratives illustrating the connection between a range of social, physical, financial, human and public assets identified by the Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis framework. Narratives are reported below using five themes related to the interview questions; notions

of home, journeys travelled, managing financially, a week in a life, weekly activities and reflecting on services.

### **Notions of home: Can you tell us about your home, then and now?**

Service users were asked to talk about their experiences of home. Their responses revealed notions of home as a relatively stable place to live, and that a sense of home is comprised of both physical assets and social assets that are built up with support as they move into resettlement services.

The following narratives describe people's experiences of home. One of the men had just begun to access the charity's resettlement service and felt he had no community. Another man was progressing towards a settled life and had some community networks to draw on. A third man was nearing exit of the resettlement service, and while he still accessed addiction support services, he considered himself settled at this time. The narratives below illustrate the men's relative experiences of resettlement and home.

#### ***A Vulnerable Life***

*My life was good before the accident. I worked in a factory for twenty-seven months, then agency could not get me any more work. I lived in [city] Park for three months. I got attacked with a metal bar and spent one month in hospital. I had no money. I stole fruit and other things and had a court case and got probation. Probation arranged for me to go to [crisis hostel]. From there, they helped me get in contact with [the charity]. I have a flat. I have no good clothes. I want to work. [The charity] help me and GP helps me with JSA [Job Seekers Allowance] papers. I want a job when I get my next operation. I am on my own.  
(Joey, service user)*

#### ***New life – new home***

*I came to this country eighteen months ago and went to National Asylum Support Service accommodation. I got my papers. I stayed in a friend's room, with people from my community. It was ok, but I had no key. I had*



*to wait for him to get home, sometimes late so I could not get in. I had to wait outside. Some friends got me in touch with [the charity]. I have a flat. They helped me with furniture. They visit me every week. It is expensive flat – £95 a week. I need a cheaper place when I get a job. I am going to college to get better English for a job. [The charity] will help me look for a council house. (Al, service user)*

### ***Re-settling home***

*I have resigned myself that I am going to end my days here in [city]. I have got a dog and I go out walking a lot! I have a lot of ties here. One of the great things was furniture. You know, [the charity] set you up with a few practical things and I managed to get a few things myself. I read, listen to music and watch cinema quite a lot so I have accumulated things over time, and they helped me get a bookcase, which was massive, and I was really grateful for that. (Charlie, service user)*

Home is more than a physical asset. Social relationships within the home and within the community make up a sense of home for these service users. Physical and social assets are built up over time. People described moving from a place of exclusion and disconnection to a place of safety and connectedness. Home is portrayed differently at different times (Whiteford, 2010a; Johnson, 2012; Blackburn et al. 2012). Home, in the sense of a place to live a life, prevails as a goal for these men, and a wish to move away from street life or transient accommodation arrangements. Reflections on home are related to work, to family, to treatment centres, to services and to different parts of the country or world.

Achieving a successful home life involved achieving security and feeling socially included. This was described as an absence of violence or racism, and increased feelings of stability and belonging due to growing familiarity with the area, with neighbours and the development of community links. Achieving self-reliance is an indication of the stabilising and resettling process particularly if managing

alcohol/drug use. Managing tenancies and understanding changes in welfare policy are important elements in supporting people in resettlement services in particular, as is achieving a sense of being settled. This included having household and physical assets that make a home comfortable, as well as familiarity with the area, with neighbours and the community (Limebury and Shea, 2015).

### **Journeys travelled: What is your life like now and what was it like before?**

The idea of using life stories and journeys as a common metaphor is familiar in engagement with people who have experienced homelessness (Whiteford, 2010a; MacKeith, 2010). The men were asked to discuss their views on what their lives were like now, and also to look back at what their lives were like at previous times. Narratives are constructed to portray 'journeys travelled' as the men talked about the positive and negative experiences throughout their personal journeys.

All men identified losses and gains of both social and public assets in their journeys travelled. Social assets included connections and esteem through career, family, income, home and community. Public assets included connections and esteem through services, employment, volunteering and education. For some of the men, employment had previously been an important part of their life and they expressed a sense of pride about their occupation. A sense of pride in their current contribution through volunteering was also mentioned, with most men involved in activities in their community via drug/alcohol rehabilitation and other community based services. However, the loss of work meant a loss of a professional community for three of the men who had previously been employed in public services and the armed forces. For another, employment as a migrant worker was insecure and uncertain, with accommodation tied to employment, and deductions for any housing or food taken from payments.

As different crisis points affected the men, public assets including rehabilitation services, hostels or mental health services were accessed. Several men talked about this being an intermittent connection particularly when in periods of drug/alcohol misuse, or when their mental health issues affected their ability to maintain contacts over a period of time (Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014).

A sense of community had been experienced within the workplace, within families, and between friends/associates for all of the men. However, communities and relationships were described variously as detached and distant or close and supportive. Healthy relationships were defined by some men as having family and friends, while unhealthy relationships were defined as having friends only as drinking partners. Two service users felt a sense of community was absent, and some experienced difficulty in finding support in new communities post-crisis.

The following narratives reflect feelings about changing sense of community at the time of the research and illustrate links between social and public assets at different times in a service user's life journey.

### ***Old life, new life, same person***

*I was living in digs. Basically they were not the best place in the world to live in; it was more of a dive if you like. You had your bedroom, you shared the kitchen, and you shared the bathroom. And some people weren't as hygienic in the kitchen as they should have been. You couldn't leave your food out- it would get pinched. I was living there. It was a supported house where you had everyone who was in the same boat. Some were coming off drugs, some were coming off alcohol, so therefore you were all just mixed together. And, you tended to just look after each other. If one lad was cooking a meal, he would say, "Would you like some of this?" If you asked people now – lots of people know me – the vicar, the luncheon club, the kids I work with, my neighbours – they wouldn't believe that was me. (Frank, service user)*

### ***Loss of community***

*There is suspicion in the community. I understand this, I am not known. When we came we worked together and lived together. But now I am also afraid because I know nobody well. (Joey, service user)*

### ***Loss and gain of social assets***

*I was in the Navy for twenty years and then after that worked in hotels. I could manage the place for owners really well. They trusted me. I was what you call a high functioning alcoholic. It came to a point when I lost everything, contact with children, the wife, and the jobs. At the worst point I was still 'managing the bar'. I'd knock on the lad's [hostel] doors at nine in the morning, "Right, the bar's open". Nowadays, I can still organise, but it is for better things, helping other people in the community. (Frank, service user)*

### ***Staying connected***

*Today I think I am fortunate in that I do a lot of voluntary work. I do work for Writers [voluntary group] and I actually teach poetry to one of their groups. I still maintain contact with [drug/drink project] as a client but also I give support to them when I can on a voluntary basis. Writing helped me find 'the way back'. It keeps me busy and straight. (Charlie, service user)*

Social and public assets may be variously lost or re-gained as people move through periods of crisis, stabilisation and resettlement (Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014). As their lives stabilised and they reconnected to services and groups in the community, some were able to use skills and talents they had excelled at in earlier times in their lives in new contexts. Having or re-developing a sense of worth and self-esteem and positive human relationships were key for the men (Limebury and Shea, 2015). Finding a sense of connection in new communities appeared to be an important element in maintaining self-esteem and a more stable way of living (Whiteford, 2010a).

### **Managing financially: How do you manage moneywise?**

At the time of talking with service users in May to October 2011 little detail was known by the men interviewed about potential changes to the welfare system. However, they were aware in broad terms that benefit changes were being proposed, and expressed a sense of unease about what that may mean for them in any upcoming benefit reviews.

Potential negative impacts of benefit changes were expressed, if not for themselves but for others, based on past experiences. For example, the men discussed the merits or otherwise of moving benefit payments to a monthly cycle. This may create an unsustainable financial management process if money is accessed as a larger amount at the beginning of the month rather than in equal, smaller amounts week by week. Managing a budget is one of the areas that all of the men found most difficult when they had used alcohol/drugs previously, as access to drugs and alcohol became a priority, rather than buying food or paying bills. Although now in recovery, managing a budget when on benefits was also described as very difficult and that choices were made between having sustenance (e.g. food and heat), maintaining self-esteem (e.g. clothes) or investing in the future (e.g. bus fares to go to college or community groups). One man noted a sense of achievement in managing a household budget, and identified this as a major outcome of recovery from his previous addiction. For those who needed daily access to services in order to remain clean or free from alcohol/drug use, or those who needed mental health supports, re-assessments regarding capacity to work, was a sensitive issue and caused uncertainty for service users. While they wanted to contribute to society, they were uncertain about the extent employers would be sensitive to their mental health needs or allow the flexibility required to access drug/alcohol recovery maintenance services.

The following narratives draw attention to these issues of being ready for work, handling of personal budgets and managing tenancies.

### **Ready for work**

*I used to get £97 a week. It was reviewed to zero because the hospital said I was fit to work. It was reviewed again to £67 a week. My GP says I need to recover after my accident. I want to work. It is hard to manage food and electricity for heat. I am sorry for the way I look and my poor clothes. (Joey, service user)*

*Getting people “ready to work” may have negative effects if little work is actually available. It is hard, you know if your nerve endings are gone, to manage full time work. People think you are alright because you are not drinking but the effects of long term drinking carry on in your life. (Will, service user)*

### **Managing budgets**

*When large amounts of money are available this may be spent on alcohol or drugs, or presents for the kid’s birthdays, and not on rent or bills, effectively trapping people who can’t put money aside. (Frank, service user)*

*Obviously, with not working I am not a rich man. But somehow, I didn’t think I would get to this stage of looking on living as having certain responsibilities – like paying for your utilities – which I never would do. I would drink the money. Somehow I used to get away with it in the past, even rent paying, but that isn’t an issue now of course. So whereas my life before was one of having to move out because I haven’t paid the rent, or I hadn’t done this that or the other, nowadays, I am managing. (Charlie, service user)*

As identified earlier in the literature review and interviews with staff, concerns that changes to the welfare system could compound service users’ difficulties, were noted (Bird, 2010; Fitzpatrick et al., 2012). Benefit changes were discussed at the local level when impacting on individuals or on the local management of homelessness services (Homeless Link, 2013b). Reductions to benefits and

reductions in access to local support networks could prevent people from 'moving on', that is to successfully manage a tenancy and to achieve independent living (Homeless Link, 2012). Reductions in benefits and allowances for example transferring those on Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance, or if deemed ineligible, to Job Seekers Allowance, were not directly understood, by service users or staff initially, as part of a larger policy change to Universal Credit (Fitzpatrick, et al. 2015).

### **A week in a life: Can you tell us how you organise your week?**

The men were asked what activities they were involved in during a typical week. Responses revealed that all had an active week that involved meeting people and engaging with public and voluntary services.

As mentioned earlier, their own knowledge and skills were offered as human and social assets in various activities including volunteering. People engaged with public assets and services, for example activities centred on support services to manage drug or alcohol dependency. Engagement with public assets included looking for work and engagement with the Benefits Agency; improving skills and engaging in educational activities; and making contributions to communities and neighbourhoods via support projects or community groups. Human assets include the skills and talents service users have themselves. For some, a lifetime's interest and life skills emerge afresh, for example drama and poetry or organising activities and teaching.

### ***Busy lives***

Responses to the question "What do you do in the week?" included the following responses from the service users:

- *I help with mathematics teaching and drama in an excluded pupils project*
- *On a Tuesday I prepare meals at an old-aged pensioners Luncheon Club*
- *I attended support projects and was sent by the GP*
- *Poetry Group*

- *Going to the Job Centre, and looking for work*
- *I walk to college to improve my English*
- *On my own*
- *A rest day*
- *I like reading*
- *Looking at shops or walking to the park*
- *Walking around outside*
- *Shopping*
- *I help out in a local community history project*
- *Volunteering in a charity shop*
- *Attend Housing and offices*
- *Meeting [key worker] at home*
- *Seeing friends sometimes*
- *Helping disabled neighbours if I can*

What emerged is a mixed picture of experiences of isolation and lonely times, alongside experiences of sociability and human contact. Time was taken with managing their situation as well as volunteering and making a contribution. Feeling connected to people was something that they considered important, but not all had experience of for some time (Lemos and Bacon, 2006). Some negative attitudes were experienced by all of the men at some point, as the following narrative illustrates.

### ***Attitudes***

*The community will not necessarily come to us. Why should they really, I was the drunk. And I am a man on my own. There is not much trust. But I do expect more from people in services. Sometimes, they really don't have much time for people like me, and although I agree partly, they may think my problems are of my own causing. They don't say it but they think it. But now I am making a big effort to give something back. (Will, service user)*

People from services and community groups are important connectors and help people develop a sense of belonging. For many, dealing with a crisis took up a lot of time and keeping busy was part of using time productively once the crisis



was overcome. For those in recovery, it is a part of maintaining a drug/alcohol free life (Whiteford, 2010a; Groundswell, 2011).

### **Reflecting on services: What services have you engaged with?**

When asked about the services they had accessed, the men referred to a range of public services provided by local authorities or through the community and voluntary sectors that supported them at different phases of their situation. The men talked about outcomes and what difference services made in their lives.

The human aspect of public services was identified as a key element of how valuable services were to them, and that key workers played an important part in successful outcomes derived from services. When asked to identify specific aspects of services to comment on, the empowering nature of flexible resettlement services, where people work with service users to find solutions to their difficulties, was highlighted.

The following narratives illustrate outcomes derived from services and the importance of relationships with key workers for building self-esteem while at different points of accessing services.

#### ***Outcomes***

*I have reached middle age now, which I didn't expect to. I was a hard drinker for more than thirty years of my life. (Will, service user)*

*I moved into this place with help from [the charity]. I had a bed to sleep in, a chair to sit on, and a kettle for my tea, cups and plates for my food, a table. I had a home. (Joey, service user)*

#### ***Floating services***

*I wanted to go straight, and I wanted independent living, to move on and that. But at the back of my mind I think what if something goes wrong, you know, working out utilities and all that, and I know I can always contact [ex-key worker in the resettlement service] even now. They are*

*doing it because you are worth it and that actually comes across. (Will, service user)*

### **Connected services**

*It's like this. The whole collection of organisations, from [crisis service], to [hostel], to [resettlement service] – all of them and the people in them have contributed to who I am now, to where I am now. And [the charity] has a particular kind of ethos – people will put themselves out to make other people happy. All of these services, it's all added up to something. (Frank, service user)*

*I am doing it now, giving back and volunteering in services for people who are going through what I went through. We are placed in a position of trust, respected and we are identified as people, not as the alcoholic or drug user. We are introduced as real people who do this and that for other people and make a contribution. You know it's great to live a contented life. (Charlie, service user)*

A sense of personal journey and progression was enhanced by interconnected support services that 'added up to something' enabling people to thrive. While resettlement services may be a point of progression and moving on from crisis, all services are considered important (Renedo, 2014).

The value of human relationships is noted within professional-client relationships and within service users' relationships (Abrahams et al., 2015). While power is acknowledged in these relationships, a sense of 'self-empowerment' was expressed by service users. The impact of kindness understood as beyond the more formal 'duty of care' when accessing services cannot be underestimated. A positive focus on the person was considered the principal factor contributing to successful services.

## **Coming up for review: narratives 2014**

This section presents findings of the second phase of the research as narratives of experiences of change that draws on data collected in July to August 2014. This section explores experiences of people accessing the charity's resettlement services, and experiences of the welfare system at individual level. At this time, key workers from the charity worked with male and female single people, service users who had recently left temporary accommodation. Interviews were conducted with five service users in this phase of the research. Service users discussed changes in their lives in the previous two years, by way of explaining their individual circumstances, and also reflected on their experiences of accessing services and welfare support. Interviews, as discursive conversations with a purpose, were conducted in people's homes with the front line staff present (Bold, 2012; Okely, 2012). People in this group of interviewees had also experienced a range of single or multiple issues that had led to a crisis in their lives, resulting in seeking hostel and housing services support. Crises included family breakdown, dependency on drugs and alcohol and debt (Fahmy et al. 2009; Whiteford, 2010b; Dwyer et al. 2012; Limebury and Shea, 2015). Testimonies presented here combine service users' and front line workers' reflections on service users' experiences in 2014.

## **Shocks and resilience**

The following narratives provided testimonies from five service users of their unique personal experiences in 2014. Reflecting two contextual themes identified in the sustainable livelihoods analysis approach, narratives reveal experiences of 'shocks' as well as 'resilience' in people's lives (Orr 2009; May et al. 2010). The narratives in this section foreground some risk factors associated with homelessness, and strategies that people use in periods of change, illustrated in the contexts of particular personal stories (McNaughton, 2008; Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and White, 2011). They also provide individual experiences of benefit review that may resonate with wider experiences of welfare reform (Groundswell, 2011; Clapham et al., 2014).

## Relationships

The shock of relationship breakdown was a key event in two of the five service users' experiences. One of many crises, the loss of a key relationship proved a catalyst that amplified or caused other negative changes in service users' lives (Dwyer et al. 2012). However, support networks of friends and front line staff of resettlement services proved a network of support after a time of crisis (Limebury and Shea, 2015).

The following narrative traces the impact of a relationship breakdown on a man who, although he had previously been living in two places, he had also been in full-time work and had considered his life to be fairly stable before the crisis.

*I was working, working full time and everything. And I was seeing someone and I was kind of staying between houses, spending some time between some friends and her. And that kind of all erupted, and then when that erupted everything else around me, kind of, erupted as well, and, soon after that, everything imploded. And, well, I lost my job, and, well, I was just making a few mistakes really. It was around that time that I broke up with my girlfriend. My head wasn't in the game, really, my head was elsewhere. At that time you, know it after it was fully broken up, it was about six weeks. I was completely, like you know, nowhere to go. I was staying here and there and everywhere else. I was staying with different mates. It was like sofa surfing, carpet surfing. That is what I was doing for the last four months really. I really did find myself going from having money and full time work, I am not saying living comfortably, but getting by, to not being able to get by, and not having a roof over my head... and not having all of those things, the safety units that I had. It all started to deteriorate and break away. And it was hard; my head was not in the right place. So I had to start again really. (Tony, service user)*

Later considerable resilience was revealed, for example through maintenance of key friendships and recognition of personal capabilities which enabled him to regain personal confidence and to build a strong supportive network.

*It was only until I got some advice from different friends you know, to go through different avenues. That helped me. I was just getting towards full time hours again some weeks and just trying to starting from scratch from there. And they did say that there can be some help sometimes, you know, in these predicaments. Because you know I had no real stability in where I lived. I was really unhappy at one point, and my friends and support workers helped me. I am slowly, slowly starting to feel better. I still have bad days and what not, but I am feeling better. I am an independent person, I am not lazy, but you know, I just found myself in a predicament and it spiralled out of control. So now I am really just trying to find myself and really trying to get myself back on track for me, as oppose to anyone else or anything else. (Tony, service user)*

### **Mental health and homelessness**

One of the service users interviewed was a single woman who had come out of prison who had been referred to the charity's resettlement services the previous year. She suffered with mental health problems and related health conditions. Having previously been evicted from a flat because of anti-social behaviour and rent arrears, she had been supported by the council's housing unit to move into a new property. The property was in poor repair but was located closer to her sister and a support network of friends. Front line staff had supported her and built up a good relationship with her over the last year. Accessing support for mental health needs of service users can be a key to successful resettlement in the long term (Read, 2008; Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014; Rae and Rees, 2015). This is a key priority for support workers who use considerable skill in encouraging and supporting service users to engage with GP and subsequent services.

*They helped me get settled into this place with basic household things. I have got some other bits and pieces like that cupboard there. I get cheap paint to paint flowers on them. Before I got this place they helped me when I was evicted and supported me at court appearances. I find it hard to be organised and have a lot of hospital appointments and with the GP. My friend here [front line staff] helps me note down the next appointments and we review them when we meet up. (Maureen, service user)*

The front line worker explained how mental health problems formed a barrier to service users' understanding of, access to, and navigation through welfare support systems that might be available.

*Ironically, she was not claiming any benefits. She was at a loss of what to do. The first thing was to get her into a stable situation after leaving prison. The next thing was to help her manage and find her way around the benefits system. All this has to be done by phone to the Benefits Agency. Now for someone with mental health problems and limited understanding of the system this is really hard and she often gives up. In a way she has been let down by the system. She failed to attend one sickness board and also failed to attend a review meeting. As she had been evicted from her previous accommodation, and housing boarded up her door, she was not getting her mail. She became depressed and very down. The CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) and us supported her successful appeal by providing a report to the Benefits Agency. The judge also sent a letter to the Benefits Agency to recommend she be re-instated on benefits. (Veronica, front line worker)*

### **In-work vulnerability**

Two of the five people interviewed were in part-time paid work, although on zero-hours contracts or short term employment contracts. Despite showing strategies for improving their situation, there was a sense that some work felt

exploitative and very insecure. This was compounded by conditionality of in-work benefits introduced in the work programme as part of Universal Credit (Department of Work and Pensions, 2014). By 2014, people in low paid work can only claim in-work top-up benefits if they are working for at least 30 hours during a seven day week. Conditionality was experienced by service users, to some extent as punitive, and less about moving on with their lives (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Homeless Link, 2012). The confusing and rapidly changing language of welfare reforms caused anxiety among service users who often relied on front line staff to help decipher new rules and processes.

The following narratives illustrate some of the tensions between managing lives materially and emotionally, and service users' experiences of welfare reform and accessing in-work benefits.

*I have been applying for work, but some of this work is really not kind of suitable. If I can be honest with you, I need to find something I can stay in for a period of time. I want to settle myself down... settle into a proper career. I think how they [the Job Centre] are doing it at the moment, it feels like a kind of cattle market, they just want to get the ring around you and sell you as quickly as they can. You know I do understand why they are doing that, because there are so many people, but at the same time though, it doesn't stop it, it builds the cycle, it doesn't allow it to change. And what they are doing, they are forcing people to try and get the quickest job they can, and within time, I'd say between 80-90% of those people will fall back out of work again, and will have to go back into the system. So what I feel is what you should be doing is help people trying to find, I am not saying the best job, forever, but to find a suitable job, that that person, that client can stay for a few years in and build themselves up. (Mike, service user)*

Another service user explained the role of work, education and aspiration in moving forward in life. Planning for the future is carefully aligned with managing a limited budget.

*Going forward, I would like to go back into uni, possibly, or go back into education. I had been to college, I did drama, but I need to start thinking about the right job; that allows me to go back into education. So there is like a cleaning job, that I would like to do, that I have got my eye on, and my mates are like 'a cleaning job' and I am yeah, well I don't mind, it will give me more money than what I was on working in retail. That is number one. Well what you can do is twelve hour shifts. One of my mates is in security and customer service at [local shopping area]. They are on about £7.80 or so, which isn't bad. I was only on about £6.40, the minimum. To do that isn't bad, four days on, four days off. But the cleaners I think are on £8 or £8.20, something like that. I feel like if I get into that I feel I would be able to manage myself, with that amount. Obviously, you would need to calculate that for the month, and then manage your rent and then still maybe have around £400 a month, for food and bills, and general things, that is after paying the rent and that. But, I have just got through the first step of the housing although I think that would be the best way forward for me. So I have kind of got a plan.*

*(Tony, service user)*

### **In transition**

Two service users were interviewed who were part of a family. They were engaged with social services after they had recently been relocated to a new area that was considered safe for them and had been allocated temporary accommodation. They had some contacts in the area but were living a quiet life and had not engaged much with new people. They had been referred to the resettlement service of the charity, and front line staff had been working with them for three months. The young man of the family had been diagnosed with a



mental health condition just before taking his post-16 examinations. His mum was determined that they could both make a new start, but was concerned that her son could continue with his education. The difficulty of coming to terms with change was foremost in her mind, and she expressed a sense of loss at having lived a different life, what only seemed a short time ago to her, compared to their lives now.

*I wouldn't have said we were well off or anything, but I can't believe it really, but only last year we had a nice life, I worked, we could go out for treats. Now, well, it is so different. (Maria, service user)*

Front line workers liaised with a local housing provider and managed to allocate the family two bedsit flats next door to each other where they can stay for up to two years. The support workers were supporting both to re-settle their lives and had particular connections to organisations to support young people with experience of homelessness (Clapham et al. 2014; Homeless Link, 2014a). For the young man, initial support involved supporting him and his mum attend the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service, and referring him to other young people's service to help him meet up with people of his own age.

*I have met with a youth worker, who has worked with a lot of people like me. We had a lot of disruption at home previously. We were in sheltered accommodation quite a bit which meant I missed a lot of school. I did pass my exams though – I got passes in three A levels, but I could have done better. My goal is to go to university to study sciences. First I would like to get back into education to improve my grades, and have a settled period at college. Well, a settled period in life really. I have met some nice lads at the youth service. (Patrick, service user)*

Front line staff worked with the family initially to ensure safe and appropriate living accommodation. They supported the mum through signposting her to welfare advice services and in discussing aspects of social services and the benefits system with her during visits.

*It's all so complicated. It is not that I don't know how to manage a home and bills, but I have never had to engage with the benefits system before and there is a complicated financial situation. So trying to sort this out, sometimes I don't know which bit to do first, has everyone got the correct information at the right time. And then I can only get access to my own information bit by bit due to moving here and not being able to go back. I do get a lot of help from [front line staff] and the Citizens Advice Bureau who guide me along the way. (Maria, service user)*

### **Discussion: working through change**

Common themes arose in interviews with service users and staff in 2014 that resonate with experiences of service users in 2011. Welfare reforms had been mostly implemented on a rolling basis, and front line staff and service users appeared more aware of the detail of changes taking place in the welfare system by 2014. However, new processes and access to information remained unclear. Service users experienced considerable uncertainty in their circumstances and the criteria that applied to them under welfare reforms. The particular role of resettlement services' staff was identified as a key support mechanism by service users.

### **Conditionality and change**

As in 2011, service users in 2014 did not identify individual benefit changes, but were aware of a general process of change. Service users engaged with benefit changes and welfare reforms at the point at which it affected them personally. They noted terms of conditionality when accessing benefits, for example in the need to increase hours worked, or the need to live in a certain size accommodation related to personal circumstances and age. Information about benefits was found to be confusing and difficult to piece together. Information and decisions about benefits from the Benefits Agency appeared to service users as uncoordinated and uncaring, or unknowing of the detail of individuals' circumstances. For service users uncertainty about what information is asked

for, or how to respond to official communication was problematic. Some service users at times appraised their current situation while keeping in mind their aspirations, as a way of keeping focussed.

*Everything has changed a lot. I am only just getting the grasp of it, the process, and some of it seems like it is helpful, you know, but some of it, I haven't grasped it yet. I am just looking to get my flat, somewhere to live and to get a full time job, and to get off benefits as quickly as possible.*  
*(Mike, service user)*

The application of size criteria to housing benefit, based on number of tenants and number of rooms and known colloquially as 'the bedroom tax' affects single people or couples in social housing who have more than one bedroom, or a spare room. This reduces housing benefit by an amount less than the amount paid for rent. It means that single tenants or couples with more than one room will need to make up any 'shortfall' in rent out of income such as benefits or wages. This is a particular source of worry for one of the service users who had been moved to a property which is now considered 'too big'. Fear of uprooting and moving to another area, moving from an established home, a lack of suitable alternative properties, and a potential build-up of arrears if the shortfall cannot be met is a major source of stress resulting from this reform. Front line staff are aware of the impact of day to day worry for several service users in this situation.

*The impersonal system lets people down. There is no one-to-one contact. It is difficult for people to keep positive and to settle down. Single accommodation units are being built by the private rented or housing associations, but it has not always got a community feel, or nearby to people's families. However, we do know one housing association that has converted small two bed flats into more spacious one bed flats. They have therefore kept the tenants they had if they were willing to move around during renovations. This was a great relief for our service users as*

*they are really beginning to establish a community in the area. (Gerard, front line staff)*

Four of the service users interviewed at this period were living in housing association bedsits which had advantages and disadvantages as this person explained.

*Their [housing association] houses are usually ok. I like security, I don't want to stay in a place where people can get in willy nilly and get in at me. It is nice here, it has got a proper front door and they do finish it to quite a high standard. You know the flat is nice and clean and you can keep it nice and presentable. If this had another room [it is a bedsit] I would stay here. It is really nice, and the location is great, fantastic, but I do, I would prefer, when the time is right, to have a one bedroom flat. Depending on what the rent is like. I am just really gearing up towards that eventually. This is perfect at the moment, for the time, it gives me some space. I can stay here two years, but ideally I want to get on with my life and get back, maybe in 3-6 months things will feel good. I can settle, and put my belongings around me and make it my home. (Tony, service user)*

The introduction of the Shared Accommodation Rate reduced the amount of Local Housing Allowance to single people under 35 (previously under 25) who are not in shared accommodation (Homeless Link, 2013b). Despite this, the value of having somewhere to live rather than move around between hostels or friends was noted.

*I didn't have a fixed abode and I went to explain my situation. I went to a temporary accommodation first and they helped me sort myself out a bit, and they said you can stay in that for a few weeks, and then I moved in here. Previously I was staying on my mate's couch. And the difference in sleeping in a bed, you know compared to a couch, is really fundamental. It's really quite a lot you know in terms of your mental state and that. So*

*now, just being able to sleep in a bed, or get a shower when I want a shower, or brush my teeth or make some food... you know these little things... that you might take for granted. Because obviously if you stay in someone's house you might be almost nervous a bit, you don't want to cause any upset. But my mates have been brilliant. I am 32, I like to have my friends around. Yeah, and [front line staff] being able to help me, put me in here. I have my own bathroom. There is the bed and there is room for a sofa and the kitchen area is in an alcove. It is really nice. (Mike, service user)*

### **Fragile circumstances**

Narratives illustrate a link between homelessness and poor health and well-being. Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness are more at risk of certain health conditions and vulnerabilities if leaving health or shelter settings (Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). A poor diet, lack of clean and safe accommodation, and the impact of substance misuse can lower a person's immune system increasing their vulnerability (Rae and Rees, 2015). Research into the health and well-being of homeless people found eight in ten homeless people had a physical health need, and seven in ten had a mental health need. In addition, one in four had been admitted to Accident and Emergency units of hospitals (Homeless Link, 2014b) .

Adjustment to reduced financial circumstances has resulted in some service users eating very little food. All service users interviewed reported eating less than two small meals a day on a regular basis; a situation also noted nationally (The Lancet, 2014; Ashton, Middleton and Lang, 2014).

*I am very grateful for the vouchers for food banks. This has been very helpful in between payments of benefits, or if my hours have gone down at work. I can cook. I have some breakfast and then something simple later on. (Mike, service user)*

## **Role of resettlement services**

The main focus of the charity's resettlement services had changed in the interim period since 2011. Previously there was an emphasis on supporting service users to manage tenancies in the private rented sector. By 2014 the emphasis shifted to new services delivered more through partnership with local social housing associations. Successful partnership work with social housing providers appeared to be due to front line workers' detailed knowledge of, and key contacts within other organisations and agencies (Pleace and Wallace, 2011). Relationships enabled front line staff to respond to specific service users' needs. Each case was unique and different levels of support were required. Service users presented different levels of confidence in their own capabilities to manage independently, with some feeling much more dependent on services than others (Whiteford, 2010b; Limebury and Shea, 2015; Rae and Rees, 2015). Support workers were aware of potential dependencies that may arise, but were also aware of the importance of building relationships in the early stages of resettlement work.

*One of the biggest challenges is getting clients to engage. Housing is just the hook. We can settle them in, help them build relationships with their landlords, and then build their confidence. We can then start to signpost them to other services. When they are reasonably stable in their living situation, we can suggest and encourage them to register with a GP, perhaps face up to some serious problems they might have with drinking or drugs. Some may have mental health difficulties due to crises and depression, to more serious issues. For others, accessing education again helps both with confidence and also finding a direction in life, for work, or building on interests and passions. Quite a lot end up volunteering with our organisation or others that support people like them. It gives them a focus, commitment each week and something to go forward with. (Betty, front line staff)*

All service users placed a high value on the role of support workers in talking through and negotiating the next steps on their journey, as this service user explained.

*[Front line worker] regards me highly as a person, despite my difficulties, and encourages me, without doing things for me, which helps me move forward. (Maureen, service user)*

### **Attitudes towards homelessness and homeless people**

There was a sense among service users and staff that negative attitudes towards homelessness prevail in the media, in some services, and is implicit in policy. Consequently, they feel there is little sympathy for homeless people when services or benefits are cut. There are concerns that basic needs of vulnerable people with no statutory duty will not be noted or met, and that as a consequence hidden homelessness may increase (Fitzpatrick et al. 2015). The importance of providing testimonies as narratives of real people's lives and illustrating how people have overcome adversity could help tackle prevailing 'who cares', and 'careless' attitudes towards homeless people as explained below.

*The dominant conversations are about other people, never about homeless people or substance mis-users or offenders. People are not interested, so we are fighting an already difficult battle. Homeless and rough sleepers are not high up on likeability with anyone, the media, Government, local and central services. There is disengagement when people talk about issues of homelessness. So it is really important to talk about the longer term benefits of supporting people back into society. (Katy, manger).*

*I know I was not particularly loveable when I was drinking a lot and falling into bushes. I can understand, particularly families and young people in the community being wary of me. I hope by staying straight and clean and keeping a low profile I will not offend anyone. But I know I would not*

*have survived without support of services. People need to know, professionals doing this work are vulnerable, that means people like me might never get a chance. (Charlie, service user)*

## **Conclusion to the chapter**

This chapter illustrates the complex life journeys of people who have experience of homelessness. The realities of the lives of a small group of service users during a time of significant change in public sector funding and welfare and benefit reforms contributes to an emerging picture of change at local level (Fitzpatrick et al. 2015).

Service users' narratives provide a rich picture of people's past and present lives, their personal histories and their hopes for the future. Taking account of this, these testimonies suggest that a connected range of services, operating through an empowerment model, promotes human dignity, as one service user explained.

*Actually being a human being and playing a part is important. The resettlement service works to support this; it is part of their ethos. (Frank, service user)*

Actions that promoted an empowerment model included: building capacity to manage tenancies and household budgets confidently; building confidence to make community links and new relationships; and encouragement of service users to contribute their skills and expertise in their communities and in services they engage with.

The narratives provide evidence that people who have experienced homelessness can achieve a successful life with support by drawing on their considerable life experience and personal talents. Findings reveal significant contributions and resilience in the day to day lives of service users.



However, what also emerges from these narratives is that people have experienced shocks in their lives that result in increased vulnerability. Shocks may appear isolated, such as relationship breakdown, or loss of income, but have cumulative effects affecting people's well-being and material condition of their lives. Rising costs of living, food poverty and insecure work underlie day to day uncertainty. For some, negative attitudes from others and feelings of shame due to poverty result in feelings of isolation. Service users did not express a view on broader welfare reforms, but only benefit changes that affected them. Engaging with the benefits system, housing and social services put people under pressure as they 'come up for review', and navigating processes or accessing information was confusing and complex.

The narratives provide testimonies of the impact of, and the value of, resettlement services and the role of front line staff as advocates. Potentially the availability and quality of services could be undermined by a narrowing of statutory duty, particularly for single homeless men and women. The findings suggest that front-line services should include resettlement as well as crisis and stabilising services in order to ensure people who have experienced homelessness can successfully move on with their lives.

Findings in this chapter resonate with issues identified in larger studies, including national audits of homeless services (Homeless Link, 2013a; Homeless Link, 2013b; Fitzpatrick et al. 2015), and large thematic studies and reviews (McDonagh, 2011; Pleace and Wallace, 2011; Dwyer et al. 2012; Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014). Resonance with smaller scale and locally based qualitative studies has also been highlighted (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Whtieford, 2010a; Rae and Rees, 2015; Limebury and Shea, 2015).

That small scale local participatory research, such as the research conducted for this project involving service users and staff, could contribute to a wider commentary of the impacts of welfare reform and funding cuts to homeless services is limited in the broader literature (Abrahams, 2015). The extent service

users' and staff stories of change played a role in influencing the charity's advocacy work will be a focus for discussion next in Chapter 6: Doing Research Together.

## **Chapter 6: Doing research together**

### **Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter presents findings related to the influencing change phase of the research and the experiences of doing research together. The contribution of this research to the promotion of a critical voice and advocacy by the charity will be explored, along with a reflection on participatory and co-research practice. I build on the discussion on methodological approaches discussed in Chapter 3, on participatory research and local equality studies. Mechanisms the charity used for public engagement with the research, and the value placed on narratives as spaces of points of view of austerity, are discussed (Bourdieu et al., 1999). As a broadly collaborative project, the research processes as spaces for those affected by austerity, to engage in emancipatory critique is examined (Schostak and Schostak, 2008). A reflective account is offered of my experience of doing this research with staff and service users, of research as praxis, and a way of working in the world (Lather, 1997; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith and Springett, 2010). Specifically this chapter poses that participatory research is beyond method, and that the centrality of equality in research relations have formed part of the conditions for this research as an equality study.

The chapter draws on two frames of reference that form a background to my work and practice in community education and participatory research, and that I have reflected on specifically when considering ways of working in this research. The first frame of reference draws on the practice of working through a community development approach to gain access and trust of participants, and the processes or steps to take account of, when outsiders work closely with oppressed groups (Twelvetrees, 2002; Ledwith, 2005; Lavan, 2008). The second frame of reference applies an equality studies framework to the research processes undertaken, in order to examine conditions for equality within

relationships, in this case, research relations that attempted to write a commentary of austerity, and to use that to challenge inequalities and to allow alternative voices to emerge (Baker et al., 2004).

The nature and importance of participation in the design of, and use of participatory research approaches, referred to in research questions vii and x in particular will be addressed. These are:

- vii. How are voices of service users used in the research and in subsequent advocacy?
- x. What are the limits and possibilities of working through a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work?

The remainder of this chapter is organised in the following way.

The next two sections present findings from this research study under the themes of advocacy and the promotion of a critical voice, and doing social research together. In respective sections, an overview of a community development approach and an equality studies approach as two frameworks that have informed my ways of working, is presented. My interpretation of the frameworks are applied to assist in a better understand the processes of doing a study on the impacts of austerity at local level. Each section provides findings from the study and explores the what, how and why for doing research in the public domain and within the charity.

The chapter concludes by suggesting that participatory research is more than using the range of participatory methods that are available, but is enhanced by being mindful of community development approaches to working with communities and of the importance of bringing equality into the centre of research relations. The facilitation of alternative spaces, made possible by participatory research, I suggest, is a valuable role for researchers to examine inequalities in society. As is the identification of local equality studies, with organisations outside of university, in order to support the promotion of critical voices.

## **Advocacy and promotion of a critical public voice**

*We would hope that people who hear of this research and read the stories have empathy with the situation of homeless people and become advocates for services and support. (Patricia, manager)*

As discussed in earlier chapters, the impetus for the research was to write a commentary of welfare reforms and impacts on the people in the homelessness and resettlement service unit. Alongside this was a desire by the charity to use findings from the research, stories of change, to advocate for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. The research project had a public engagement aspect to it that was led by the charity, but with contributions of research data or presentations by the co-research team.

A range of public engagement events, as part of advocacy action organised by the charity, and related research dissemination organised by the charity took place over the life of the project. A list of public engagement activity and publications discussed below can be found in Appendix 9.

External public engagement with the research was important for the charity. The first of these involved a presentation of the research at the charity's AGM in December 2011. The AGM was held in a city civic hall and was addressed by a regional Labour MP and a senior member of a Labour city council with responsibility for adult services. One hundred staff, volunteers and guests attended. The presentation of the research findings of the service user stories was delivered by the co-research team. A second major public event was a launch of the *Negotiating New Realities* report hosted by the Archdiocese in January 2012. One hundred and twenty representatives from adult social services in three local authorities, homelessness organisations from the community and voluntary sector and civic representatives attended. The co-research team presentation was about the service user stories. The charity published the report in hard copy and on its website, along with a four page

summary report, that was distributed to interested groups. A third major public event was held in April 2012 when the co-research team delivered a keynote presentation on service user stories to the Justice and Peace Assembly, of the wider Archdiocese. Eighty representatives from faith based organisations and local groups attended.

At the public launch of the research and at the Justice and Peace Assembly, the co-research team facilitated on behalf of the charity a workshop type session at each event. Each group of round table guests were asked to complete a 'What Happens Next?' postcard. They were asked to discuss actions to support homelessness services locally and nationally and to make a note of three on the postcard and to share these with the wider audience. In addition organisations were asked to sign a pledge to support homelessness in the city. A similar activity was facilitated by the researcher at an Advocacy and Social Justice Planning Workshop with Governing Body and Trustees of the charity in September 2012. Responses were collated by the researcher for the charity in a short report. Responses from homelessness professionals in the statutory and community and voluntary sectors and responses from the broader faith based community were organised thematically into three areas of action. Firstly action to build understanding of what is happening including communication about the cuts and homelessness. This also included a call to include broader awareness of homelessness in education, health and other services, which the charity responded to in its fundraising work in schools that had a focus on homelessness in 2012, 2013, and 2014. Secondly policy action included advice including campaigning to restore the Citizens Advice Bureau to full capacity, working with landlords and city councils on housing provision. Thirdly individual or group political action was noted including raising homelessness as an issue with local MPs to more coordinated lobbying on aspects of welfare reform including the 'bedroom tax' and the link between poverty and homelessness. The charity engaged with political action by offering the report to wider political engagement events and parliamentary group meetings at the Houses of

Parliament in June 2012 and June 2013 organised by a national faith based advocacy network. The report was included as one of several delivered to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions along with an open letter from a Archbishop who stated a *“concern on new and planned government welfare policies. We fear that the cost of this may be felt by the most vulnerable families, whose support networks may rapidly disappear in the process”* (Nichols, 2011).

The research was also used as a source document in keynote talks by the CEO of the charity at other events. These included at Housing Justice Day at a Quaker House in the city in February 2012, and 2013 hosted by the city-wide Anti-Poverty Action Group and the charity. Up to fifty people from homelessness organisations and members of the public attended. The CEO delivered a key note talk on faith based social action at a conference of faith based organisations hosted at a local university in June 2013.

The co-research team, supported by the director of studies presented its reflections on the participatory research processes and ways of working. The team contributed to an Association for Researchers in the Voluntary and Community Sector Research seminar on the theme of ethics and co-research in March 2012. The research and co-research team have provided input into Social Work and Health and Social Care undergraduate programmes at two universities from 2012 to 2016.

The external public engagement events by the charity drew mainly on the service users stories from an internal report ‘Negotiating New Realities’, December 2011 and published by the charity in January 2012. In May 2011, an internal report ‘Protecting front line services: implications of funding cuts to the homelessness and resettlement service of the charity’ included staff reflections and early experiences of the changing context. However these findings were not prioritised in external public engagement. Other internal reports include ‘Moving on: experiences of service users in resettlement services’, September 2014 and ‘Coming up for review’, January 2015.

With the encouragement of the director of studies the co-research team and the CEO co-authored an article for a peer reviewed academic journal article 'From home to home: homelessness during austere times' which was the most downloaded article of the journal during 2012 (Daly, et al., 2012).

Using research as advocacy in the ways described above could be considered a 'public ethnography' where agendas often missing from public discourse can be brought to attention (Lynch, 2011; Mosher, 2013). Research in the public domain I suggest shares some of the benefits of partnership working. Learning from small scale participatory research could form part of local democratic processes in order to provide a critical oversight of local public services and hold policy makers to account (Rowe, 2007). In a small scale way, the experiential learning from our collective labour enabled us to make a contribution to a broader agenda in the public domain (Bourdieu, 1999; Lenoir, 2006).

The following sections provide a reflection on the research processes used in this study. My learning from the experiences of doing this study is considered as a model of a way of working in transformative-participatory research.

### **Community development approaches to promotion of critical voice**

This section gives an overview of how community development processes in working with neighbourhood groups, oppressed groups, or communities of practice could be used to explore the nature of working in a participatory way in research projects. Twelvetrees (2002) and Ledwith (2005) suggest there is a gap between analysis and practice in radical community development work. The process of community work, if defined as a space to enable communities to come together to collectively analyse and critique conditions and structural contexts of inequalities, should also enable communities to develop a voice on inequalities in social policy (Twelvetrees, 2002; Ledwith and Springett, 2010). In order to explore a potential for closing the gap between analysis and practice, through participatory research, steps to engage with communities in collective, critical



community work are applied to the steps and processes employed in this insider research. Twelvetrees (2002) and Lavan (2008) suggest several steps for working with communities that include; getting to know the organisation, planning and goal setting, bringing people together and building momentum, responding to opportunities, challenges, endings and leavings (Twelvetrees, 2002; Lavan 2008). These steps could mirror approaches to working on research projects with communities in a collaborative and participatory way. Aspects of a community development approach to research in this project are discussed below.

### **Building a momentum around the research as advocacy**

Getting to know the charity's social justice goals was facilitated by close working between the researcher, staff, service users, and advisory group in planning and reflecting on findings of the research. The CEO and Trustees of the charity were key driving forces for building a momentum around the use of the research findings as advocacy. Planning to use a critical voice of the charity in the public domain required careful consideration of goals and priorities, as this manager explained.

*This research is important for the wider community. We need to say to different groups we are part of, 'these are our findings'. We also need to reflect on our own position in relation to homeless services, what are our priorities here. This research is a way of us valuing individuals and expressing our values (Patricia, manager)*

### **Responding to opportunities and challenges in public engagement**

Managers who had policy and marketing roles were influential in creating public engagement events and saw the research as a way of promoting the social justice mission of the charity (Devine, 2003). One described it as part of a faith based motivation to working locally with community groups as follows.

*We have two cultures of care, to the people we work with on the ground, if you like. We can promote our research professionally, because we can*

*reach a wide network of people and can have some influence in the city and nationally. And we want to get real experiences of vulnerability heard, as is part of our motivation and mission. (Annie, manager)*

The voices of those most affected were considered the most influential aspect of the research. This manager suggested listening to people's stories would inspire other organisations in making decisions.

*Hearing the powerful words of peoples own stories could inform decision and policy making processes, and help give organisations, policy makers and decision makers the knowledge and the strength to make progress in difficult times. (Carmel, manager)*

However, the extent that the research could change national policy was tentatively suggested as unlikely, as suggested below.

*It is not the job of this research to fill in all the dots, but I do think the messages are clear, the evidence is clear enough. Then people can draw their own conclusions. There is a compelling story at local level, but I am not sure if on its own it will be enough to change what is happening. (Bill, manager)*

### **Leavings and endings: what happens next?**

The funding and policy context were rapidly changing and the full impact of changes on homelessness and homeless people remained to be fully understood. As this research project came to an end, next steps for the charity, in relation to future research and advocacy were considered, as explained by this manager.

*We seek to work with others to conduct additional local qualitative studies during the next three years to monitor the impact of welfare reform and austerity measures on services and service users. For us, accessing both statistical and qualitative data on the impacts of the cuts and welfare reforms will give us the full story; with this knowledge we can act in a*

*spirit of love and justice to make and hopefully influence decisions that benefit the most vulnerable in society (Carmel, manager)*

Spaces for promotion of critical voice can draw on the practice of community development to facilitate alternative spaces for local communities to develop their own analyses and critique. The charity used this research to create spaces to highlight experiences of austerity at local and national levels (Fraser 1995; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Lynch, 2011).

## **Doing social research together**

*We can bring people together for a good purpose to work together and be committed to this research. We should be able to tell an alternative story, with alternative vocabulary, to the prevailing negative portrayal of homeless people. (Irene, front line worker)*

This section offers an account of my experience of doing this research with staff and service users, and on ways of working as a researcher (Lather, 1997; Baker et al., 2004; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Ledwith and Springett, 2010). I reflect on the practice of ‘doing social research together’ in this local equality study and that emancipatory research, as a principle, should allow ‘ordinary actors’ to engage (Schostak and Schostak, 2008:219). Specifically, I will explore dimensions of equality underpinning participatory and emancipatory research relations (Baker et al., 2004). This reflective analysis on ways of working is an attempt to diminish gaps between theory and practice, and to inform my current position and future practice in participatory research (Ledwith, 2005; Berger, 2015).

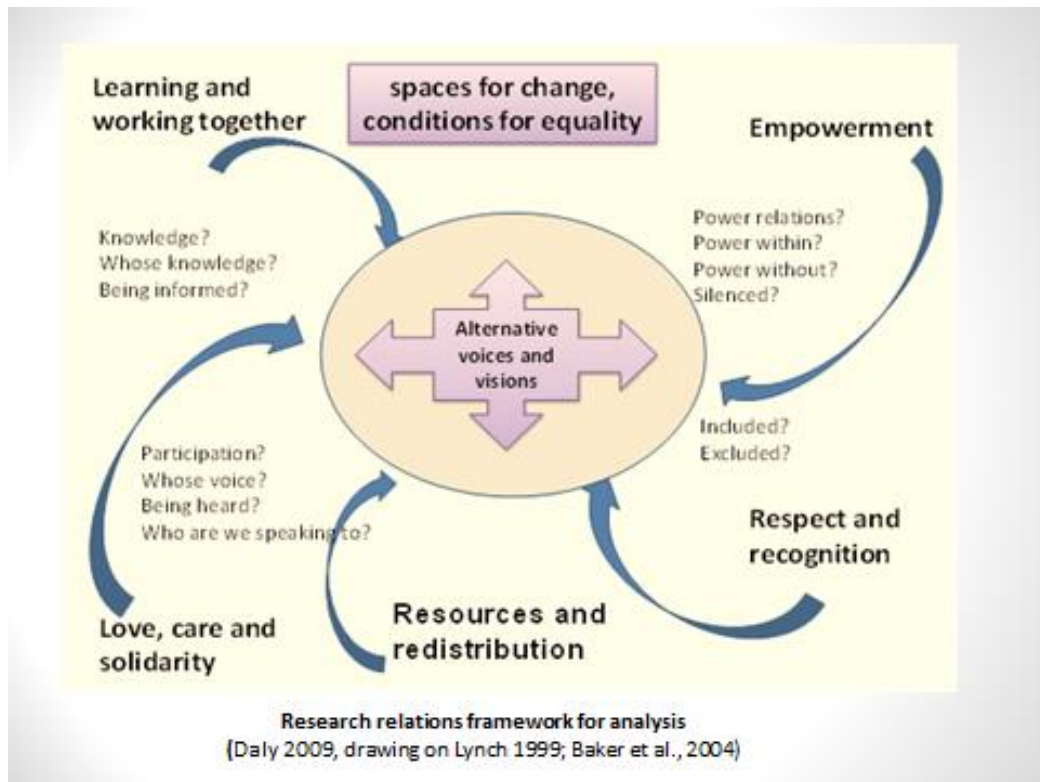
### **Conditions for equality**

My reflection on the research approach undertaken in this study was influenced by a framework to examine conditions for equality developed by egalitarian academics in the Equality Studies Centre in Ireland (Baker et al., 2004). Baker et al. (2004) outline five dimensions of equality that underpin and inform conditions

for egalitarian action (Baker et al., 2004). They argue that dimensions of equality are differentiated from a steps to equality model, traditionally conceptualised as a linear process, of basic equality to liberal equality. Steps to equality are defined as equality of access, equality of opportunity, equality of participation; and equality of outcome. While important in social policy terms, steps to equality are necessary but insufficient conditions to tackle broader inequalities of condition that persist in society (Baker et al. 2004:43). An alternative, they suggest, is to conceptualise unequal conditions as dimensions of (in)equality. As political themes, analysis of dimensions of equality as conditions of equality, can serve to support egalitarian goals in practice (Baker, 2003; Baker et al. 2004:16). The five dimensions or conditions of equality are respect and recognition; resources; love, care and solidarity; power and learning and working together (Baker et al. 2004:3-8). This concept of dimensions of equality, I suggest is, relevant for examining human conditions under welfare reforms, and the relational conditions of research practice that I have used to seek to understand lived experiences of austerity at a local level.

Early on in the process of thinking about this research, I developed a schematic to consider research relations was developed that brought together the five dimensions of equality, and equality questions about participation and voice in research (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004). As a feminist researcher, consideration of voice and representation was foregrounded in the research design. The feminist interpretative methodology in this study considered whose knowledge was valued, in what ways people could contribute, and how this would be represented and interpreted throughout the project (Lynch 1999; hooks, 2003; Ledwith, 2005). The schematic of what 'spaces for change: conditions for equality in research relations' could look like in this research is presented in Figure 5 below (Daly, 2009).

**Figure 5: ‘Spaces for change, conditions for equality’ A framework for analysis of research relations (Daly, 2009 drawing on Lynch 1999 and Baker et al., 2004).**



Organised around the five dimensions of equality referred to above, I used the schematic, with co-researchers and individually, as a point of reflection on the centrality of equality in research relations in practice in this study.

### **Spaces and relations: dimensions of equality in participatory research practice**

The five dimensions of equality as conditions of equality are reflected in the following discussion to illustrate the spaces and relations of equality in this study as participatory research practice.

## **Creating spaces for respect and recognition**

Working in a participatory way is not without its challenges (Abrahams et al., 2015). Power dynamics are present in all research processes and in participatory research in particular, as the position of the researcher moves between capturing and re-presenting lived experiences (Braye and McDonnell, 2012). Different understandings of what constituted research and different values put on quantitative and qualitative research methods were apparent and discussed as part of the process in this study. In addition, the extent to which the research should explore the impact on the staff and on front line staff in particular, as well as impacts on service users raised some tensions initially. An environment of respectful listening created a space of trust that allowed an openness to hear different personal standpoints on the broader context of the research and the research processes (Braye and McDonnell, 2012; Ledwith, 2016).

The charity had systems to gather data on projects and services, and while to some extent these included inclusive methods such as a forum to gather views of service users to provide feedback, notions of data gathering mainly fell into an auditing model of monitoring and data collection. The ethnographic and participatory research approaches proposed in this project was a relatively unfamiliar way of doing research for staff of the charity. As discussed in previous chapters, an ethnographic narrative and participatory research approach was negotiated as a way of interpreting stories of experiences of austerity at the start of the project. Tensions emerged initially between one of the managers and myself about whose experiences of austerity was to be included, and the forms of social research. I interpreted this as 'gatekeeping' over the research process and I felt it was important to create a space in the research for recognition of staff views as I noted in my research journal.

*Access to front-line staff for interviews was subject to initial internal resistance. After the project had been agreed with the CEO and trustees, [manager] was uncertain about the value of interviewing staff and*

*suggested the research should only focus on the experiences of service users. In addition [manager] rejects the validity of qualitative methods, preferring a survey rather than individual interviews as a way of providing reliable data. This was negotiated by suggesting an e-survey be offered to all staff with knowledge of housing and community support services and agreement to conduct follow up interviews with willing staff (Research journal, January 2011)*

That staff experiences should be excluded or included in a study on the impacts of austerity, revealed internal tensions around the voicing of effects on staff, as is noted in emerging literature (Colley, 2012). As the project progressed, I felt, an ethnographic narrative approach was justified, although the voices of staff was not used widely in public engagement as 'stories of austerity'. This struggle over the role of research in enabling voice, ethnographic versus statistical approaches, and this incidence of 'gatekeeping' referred to above, confirmed to me the importance of creating 'a space of recognition' for exploring staff experiences of austerity as a part of the project (Lynch, 2011).

### **Resourcing participation in research processes**

The participatory approach to the research meant taking time to build up trust and to find the best ways to work together (Beresford and Branfield, 2006; Somerville, 2011; Okely, 2012). Formal and informal reflective spaces were created as the research progressed, where different configurations of groups of people involved in the project, came together. Resources from the organisation were provided for the research processes over the life of the project. Time was allocated for research meetings. A vertical cross-section of staff, including managers, front line workers and service users, who would not usually meet, came together to discuss the project. The physical location for discussing research gave some credibility to the project; project and advisory group meetings were held in the board room or the office of the CEO, and the project was launched as part of the organisation's AGM. A small room was made

available for the co-researcher team to use, particularly in the extended period of data collection with service users in 2011. The co-research team felt welcomed in the large building of the head office of the charity. We were issued with volunteer badges and the service users valued their role in the research as described below.

*We are giving something back. It feels like we are promoting action through this research. We are a valued part of the organisation. (Charlie, service user)*

In the initial planning stage of the research, five staff from across the organisation including from management, policy and programme development and practitioner areas, met to develop and guide the research which was largely to be conducted internally but led by an 'outsider'; myself as a professional researcher working in a voluntary capacity as lead researcher.

During the phase of the research focussed on service users' experiences, another space was created through the regular meetings of the co-research group comprised of the lead researcher and the two co-researchers. In this space, discussion on findings provided an opportunity for 'analysis through talk', and for reflection on the research process and how we were working together.

In addition, an advisory group was established comprising the CEO, a Trustee, two people from supportive external organisations, and staff and service users who attended at various times. This group met four times during the life of the project and provided a space to consider the findings as they emerged, and to develop opportunities for advocacy and public engagement with the research.

The organisational, physical, time, status and personal resources enabled participation by a range of people, on the basis of equality and parity of esteem, in the research processes. This co-operation, as part of the daily life of the research processes, enabled us to provide an authentic understanding of and subsequent representation of people's lives (Ponzoni, 2015).



### **Solidarity in ethical research practice**

The co-researcher group in particular, developed solidarity of purpose through using participatory methods to establish our ways of working in the project. Ethical deliberations, from access to and engagement with respondents, to writing up and presentation of narratives, were considered throughout the study and discussed in depth by the co-researcher group. As part of developing the ethical protocols for the research the co-researcher group examined our respective and collective roles. We identified the role of the co-researcher team as facilitators, supporters of respondents, listeners and faithful narrators of people's lives. As mentioned in Chapter 3, we took as our starting point the ethical statements in the mission statement of the charity and the British Educational Research Association guidelines for research ethics (The Charity, 2000; BERA, 2000). Together, we established our own statement on what working together as a co-research team meant for us in practice, as captured in a research team note. This statement of co-researcher practice is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6: Co-researchers in Practice research note**

***Co-researchers in practice***

*In practice, working as a co-researcher means:*

- *To co-plan and co-facilitate a focus group/interviews with the service users of the charity.*
- *To gather individual stories and to signpost to follow up support to service users if necessary.*
- *To analyse data using the sustainable livelihoods framework to identify narratives of experiences during austere times.*
- *Co-researchers will reflect on together all aspects of the research and reports providing critical reflection, editing (Angie to scribe), and ideas for dissemination, alongside colleagues in the charity supporting the research.*

*The role of the co-researchers is to:*

- *Facilitate the research in a meaningful way for participants*
- *Have good chairing skills for the focus groups*
- *Provide subtle leadership*
- *Bring people into the process and encourage people*
- *Support people if issues arise*
- *Provide a faithful reflection on people's lives and feelings.*

*(Co-researcher team meeting, March 2011)*

Over several co-researcher team meetings, we developed a strong bond and at one meeting in particular the discussion focussed on an in-depth collective reflection on 'ethics in research practice'. We had identified some facilitation points, and articulated how we wanted the research process to be experienced by those who would tell us their stories. In the second year of the project, as a team, we were invited to speak at a local community and voluntary sector research seminar hosted by the Association of Researchers in the Voluntary and Community sector (ARVAC, 2012). This prompted us to reflect on how we had

analysed our participatory research practice as 'ethics in practice'. This formed the basis of a set of principles that we shared and discussed with participants at the ARVAC research seminar. These principles were captured in a research note that is provided as ethic in practice in Figure 7 below.

**Figure 7: Ethics in practice research note**

<p><b><i>Ethics in practice</i></b></p> <p><u><i>Voice</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Each contribution is valid</i></li><li>• <i>Everyone has a point of view</i></li><li>• <i>Ensure each is given the opportunity to speak out and that no individual dominates (good chairing skills required)</i></li><li>• <i>Everyone has a voice (if they want)</i></li><li>• <i>We acknowledge the right to be heard</i></li></ul> <p><u><i>Dignity</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Ensure support to service users is available from their key workers if required (if any issues raised cause unintended anxiety)</i></li><li>• <i>People will be respected</i></li><li>• <i>We ensure the dignity of human beings and their life journeys</i></li><li>• <i>We value people's experience</i></li></ul> <p><u><i>Research relations</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Participation in the focus group and/or interviews should have a feel good factor and be comfortable for service users at all times</i></li><li>• <i>Confidentiality will be maintained</i></li><li>• <i>Research consent to participate will be explained, sought and captured in an empathetic way.</i></li></ul> <p><i>(Co-researcher team research note, January 2012)</i></p>
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### **Power relations**

Power struggles in relation to the research process were evident in negotiated spaces, as highlighted above, when initially attempting to access and include staff views on their experiences of austerity. Front line staff in particular, used the

research as a space to link the wider discussion on funding cuts to their own position. At times, the research findings, levered a discussion internally on impacts of cuts on resettlement services within the organisation, and in particular impacts on terms and conditions of front line staff, and risks of job losses. Research meetings became spaces of struggle for voice, and revealed contradictory perspectives. Capturing experiences of service users in the wider contexts of welfare reforms, clashed with capturing their experiences of the closure of services within the charity. At times, front line staff felt their concerns were at risk of being silenced. However, research meetings were also a site for bringing the traditionally unheard voice of front line staff directly to the CEO and Trustees. A front line staff member and a co-researcher alluded to the opportunity for asserting the needs of front line staff, as part of the research processes, at an advisory group meeting as follows.

*What we need is a retrospective defence. Listening to service users' and staff voice and knowledge on the meaning of cuts in real lives is important. (Joseph, front line staff).*

*The key workers here are in danger of being in the same position as us, financially and job wise. (Frank, service user)*

### **Learning and working together**

My role and status as an insider researcher gave me permission to negotiate space for access to the organisation and its people. The role of the co-researcher team, and the internal and external profile of the project, gave people involved a stake and claim to the research (Schostak and Schostak, 2008:219). Issues of power in ways of working, ethical considerations and representation of findings were acknowledged and discussed, with time dedicated to reflect on research relations while carrying out the project (Braye and McDonnell, 2012; Abrahams et al., 2015). The research also created a new opportunity for the charity to recognise the valid role of service users as co-researchers and the use of qualitative research methods in advocacy (Ponzoni, 2015). Building trusting

relationships between staff, the researcher, the co-research team and service-users were continuously negotiated throughout the research processes (Okely, 2014).

Working in the organisation over time, I gained insights into the value of conducting locally based research within community and voluntary sector organisations. A sense of pride and ownership of the research was expressed by the charity, as this manager explains.

*Negotiating New Realities has been a real opportunity for us to find a voice together and get involved. The issues are so big that we can't remain silent. It has given us a space to think and to use our research in the public domain to influence debate (Carmel, manager, 2013).*

That the research was broadly collaborative, and participatory methods were employed in the research was valued by the staff. A Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis approach and the visual prompts to gather data with service users resonated with staff and service user experiences of the Outcomes Star life journey analysis (May et al., 2009; McKeith, 2010). The use of ethnographic narrative as a research method aligned with the charity's use of stories of their service users' experiences. This was initially counter to previous conceptions of research and an expectation of statistical analysis as a principal approach. However, spaces for discussion at various points in the research, allowed staff to become familiar with and to recognise the value of ethnographic research. The narratives as stories of spaces of change were used to represent unique and valuable knowledge, and contributed to the charity's desire to understand the impacts of austerity at local level and to advocate for social justice (Bold, 2012; Atkins and Wallace, 2012; Okely, 2014).

## **Discussion: beyond participation: the centrality of equality in emancipatory research**

When embarking on this research I considered the possibility of equality theory and equality action for informing conditions for equality in relations for participation in participatory and emancipatory research (Baker et al., 2004). Recognising the importance of 'voice' in research suggests that conditions to enable communities to articulate their own analyses and priorities should shape the methodological approach to the research (Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Nind, 2011). Drawing on feminist approaches to knowledge generation, questions of whose voice, knowledge, and analysis were to be elicited and re-presented, linked to the design of a broadly participatory approach for this research (Lynch 1999; hooks, 2003; Ledwith, 2005).

I found that participatory research is more than using the range of participatory methods that are available. The extended period of working with the charity closely was a space of collective learning, I think, as we worked together on planning the research, data collection and analysis. The use of the narratives in public engagement and advocacy events locally and nationally was part of I think, a contribution to a public ethnography of austerity, in co-operation with other interested groups (Lenoir, 2006; Mosher, 2013). In addition to developing researcher skills, the value of community development approaches to working with communities and the importance of research relations is a central to working as an insider researcher (Okely, 2014). Getting to know the organisation, building a momentum around the research and setting priorities for social action, and planning for endings and leavings are useful steps to consider in working closely with people over an extended period of time (Twelvetrees, 2002; Ledwith, 2005). Taking risks with new spaces and new relations could bring new understandings of equality, agency and critique in planning research for social action (Burns, 1991; Chambers, 1997; Baker et al., 2004; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Ledwith and Springett, 2010).

My experience of this research is that when conditions for equality are brought into the spaces and relations of research processes, there can be opportunities for researchers in the academy and colleagues in the community and voluntary sector to engage in research processes that allow alternative narratives on inequalities to emerge (Lynch, 1999; Baker, 1987; Baker et al., 2004). Ethnographic narratives that captured the lived experiences of staff and service users were discussed across different groups and through a variety of mechanisms within and external to the organisation. The collaborative and participatory research processes provided a space for those involved to learn and to work together on an analysis of impacts of austerity at local level, in a way I suggest, would not have been possible without the openness to situate the study as part of the organisation's social justice mission.

Participatory research methods and relations, creates space for 'collective analysis' and the promotion of 'alternative voices' in an analysis of unequal conditions. Local studies may be limited in the extent they can influence policy (Harvey, 2011; Mosher, 2013). However setting agendas for local research became part of a way of working by the charity involved in this research (Bourdieu, 1999; Lenoir, 2006; Lynch 2011). The charity was able to use the research to contribute a concerned voice at a local level and through its broader national networks (Crozier, 2003; Aldridge, 2014; Abrahams, 2015). With others, goals for longer term and collective advocacy and social action were established (Freire, 1972; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Ledwith and Springett, 2010).

Locally based equality studies could open up opportunities to bridge the theory/practice gap in radical practice and support community workers and academics to work together on collaborative and emancipatory research agendas (Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2016).

## Conclusion to the chapter

This chapter used community development and equality theory and practice as frames of reference to reflect on, and understand, conditions for equality underpinning ways of working, research relations and advocacy in this research (Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005).

A participatory-transformative approach to this research opened up possibilities for using research findings in social action by the charity (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2016). Voices of service users and staff were central to this research as ethnographic narratives of austerity. Participatory research processes sought to promote an equal enabling and empowering environment that enabled participation in the research development, implementation and analysis. Subsequent public engagement events offered spaces for staff and services users to engage in emancipatory critique of the impacts of austerity at local level (Schostak and Schostak, 2008).

From the experience of this research, I suggest that my participatory research approach included a reflection on dimensions of equality in research relations. This, I think, has been an important part of the conditions for this research as an equality study, and will inform future research that I may undertake.

The limits and possibilities of using a community development approach to participatory equality studies as a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work will be returned to in the conclusion Chapter 8: Writing a commentary of austerity from a local level.

The next chapter, *Negotiating New Realities* presents and discusses the overall key findings from this research. It will present seven key messages arising from this ethnographic study on the experiences of early austerity at a local level. Findings are situated in the three themes of contested and constrained spaces introduced earlier and conceptualised as the following.



- Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy at local level
- Embodied space(s) in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity for staff and service users of homelessness services
- Spaces for change: possibilities for the promotion of critical voice and working in the margins

## Chapter 7: Discussion, Negotiating New Realities

### Introduction to the chapter

*They took me into the detox wing, and then after five days they just said to me "You're going out" so I just thought "Going out where?" Now, well things are good. I have a bed to sleep in, a chair to sit on, a kettle for my tea, cups and plates for my food, a table. I have a home. (Frank, service user)*

*We are negotiating the new realities of welfare. We need to bring people together, and show commitment for collective advocacy. This is part of keeping a watching brief on this very changed context for homelessness services and people. (Patricia, manager)*

This chapter presents and discusses overall findings as seven key themes arising from this research. The study provides a commentary of austerity as viewed from the perspectives of staff and service users of a homelessness and resettlement service. Rich ethnographic narratives, presented as stories of spaces of change, offer a representation of experiences of early austerity from 2011 to 2014 during the specific time frame of the Coalition government in the UK. This chapter builds on the thematic analysis presented in earlier chapters to address the main research question of the study; to examine how austerity was understood and experienced by those most affected, that is, the staff and service users of the charity's homelessness and resettlement services. The themes arising at local level, I suggest, are illustrative of the impacts of welfare reforms and funding cuts more broadly, and may be part of an emerging common story of new realities of welfare across the caring services in the public and community and voluntary sector during austere times.

Twenty-eight in-depth interviews resulted in individual and collective narratives as spaces of points of view on the changing context, and were presented as ethnographies of austerity over time (Bourdieu et al., 1999). The worker and service user stories resonate with themes emerging in the literature on the impacts on homelessness services in a wider, neoliberal context of austerity and welfare reforms (Benozzo and Colley, 2012). The research design, with iterative phases of capturing change, experiencing change and influencing change, allowed local stories of change to be explored with staff, service users, and the wider public. The collaborative and broadly participatory research approach enabled the researcher and the co-research team to spend extended time inside the charity alongside staff and service users at work team meetings, service user group meetings and at advocacy events.

This study, framed as an equality study, became a space for the promotion of a critical voice to advocate for human dignity in homelessness and resettlement policy and service provision. The research also became a contested space as staff negotiated realities of change in the workplace.

Contested and changing spaces introduced in the literature review, are returned to now to frame my interpretation of the experiences of early austerity, of staff, service users and the charity. Three contested and changing spaces of early austerity are conceptualised as follows:

Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy at local level

Embodied spaces in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity for staff and service users of homelessness services

Spaces for change: possibilities for promotion of critical voice and working in the margins.

My interpretation of the overall findings of this study are presented as seven key themes within these contested and changing spaces. The themes include the

following: a breach in relations at two levels, impacts of austerity on staff, undermining of ethics of care, undervaluing of resettlement services, concepts of home and a continued need for advocates for single homeless people in particular. The final theme, research relations and emancipatory research offers a potential role for local equality studies in collective social action. I suggest these key themes resonate more widely with experiences in the public and community and voluntary caring services, and the challenging spaces they may occupy, during times of austere times.

### **Constructed and contested spaces of global and local neoliberalism: capturing political-economic contexts of welfare policy at local level**

During the period of fieldwork for research, 2011-2014, significant reductions in funding for projects and staff collided with substantial reform to the benefits system for service users. This changing state of welfare positioned front line staff and managers in conflicted spaces as they confronted implications for staffing and service provision. A sense of crisis and uncertainty ensued for the charity striving to maintain projects and continuity of support for service-users. A reduction in the availability and access to resettlement services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in particular was evident, locally and nationally (Groundswell, 2011; Homeless Link, 2011). Neoliberal approaches to welfare policy constructed local spaces of market-based control over provision and delivery of homelessness services (Roger, 2000; Harvey, 2007; Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Mechanisms of control through policy language and audit cultures of surveillance and monitoring served to embed a hegemonic and increasingly transactional nature of organisational relationships between commissioners and providers, and between front line workers and service users (Foucault, 1980; Diamond, 2004; Meade, 2005; Dobson, 2015). Hegemonic processes operated through policy and impacted on staff and service user experiences. The

ethnographic narratives in this study reveal everyday neoliberalism at work in people's lives. The worker and service user narratives illustrate that in 2011 changes to national policy were positioned as relevant but distant to their concerns, while changes to local policy were positioned as more close up and bearing down in every day experiences (Dobson, 2015). Progressively from 2011 to 2014, welfare and funding changes dominated every aspect of staff and service users' day-to-day lives and interactions with the welfare system (Bourdieu et al., 1999).

The local experience of a broader austerity context, can be conceptualised as a breach in relations at two levels. The first relational breach is located between the state, the local authority and community and voluntary organisations commissioned to provide homelessness and resettlement services at local level. The second relational breach is located within the charity, as the impacts of austerity on staff in the homelessness and resettlement services became subject to a culture of silence.

### **A breach in relations**

A breach in relations between the state, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector characterised the local experiences of austerity during the period of this study. National changes to Supporting People and disproportionate cuts to local authority budgets placed the funding for charity's homelessness services in an uncertain position (Hastings et al., 2012). As noted by Scanlon and Adlam (2012) and Renedo (2014), challenges to organisational identities and values ensued as statutory duty was narrowed to crisis provision and cuts to Supporting People resulted in a significant loss of jobs in homelessness and resettlement services (Groundswell, 2011).

Narratives of crisis and uncertainty told a story of emergent realisation and anxiety for workers at a time when the extent of austerity measures and implications for public services began to take effect in 2011. The emerging scenario of local authority funding reductions confirmed the changed context for

managers and front line workers of the charity. Under Supporting People, commissioning partnerships defined relations between the state, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector. The community and voluntary sector had been positioned as best placed and competent providers of homelessness services locally (Bowpitt et al., 2011). As cuts to local budgets and welfare reforms rolled out, transactional partnerships defined relations between the state, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector. By 2014 narrower criteria for entitlement to homelessness services, monitoring of through-put of service users and introduction of a payment by results system were taken into account in tendering and commissioning of services at local level (Bird, 2010; Homeless Link, 2013a).

Initially, details of the proposed roll out of welfare reforms and of the rapid changes to benefit were not clearly anticipated by front line staff, who then found it difficult to advise service users. Front line staff, employed in homelessness and resettlement services, are more likely to be on part-time contracts in short term funded projects, and have limited access to training on new policy and benefit criteria rules (Fletcher, 2011; Maguire, 2012). By the end of 2011 project closures, job losses, and changes to eligibility for support changed the charity's provision of resettlement services; a situation reported across the city and nationally in projects supporting homeless people (Homeless Link, 2011).

The changed state of welfare from entitlement to conditional and transactional appeared to be entrenched and irreversible, and signified a breach in relations between commissioners and providers of support services to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness (Bird, 2010; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015).

### **Impacts of austerity on staff**

A second breach in relations was manifested as a culture of silence on the perceived erosion of homelessness and resettlement services in welfare policy and within the priorities of the charity. Narratives of conflict and loss revealed

an apparent contradiction in the charity's resistance to austerity in the public domain, and its perceived public silence and acceptance of the consequences of austerity within its own domain.

The impacts of austerity on front line staff in the caring services, is an emerging story, perhaps yet to be revealed in full (Colley, 2012). The community and voluntary sector is placed within a contradictory position under new realities of competitive funding. A desire to maintain a strong organisational position among providers, while internally striving to manage the impacts of cuts on the charity's services, is reflected in studies of the realities of the contract culture in community and voluntary sector organisations (Dobson, 2011; Renedo, 2014).

The research surfaced tensions and became a site of struggle for an internal voice. Externally the charity used the research to fulfil part of its mission and to meet a stated desire to engage in a public challenge to austerity and the impacts on service users of homelessness services. Internally the charity appeared reluctant to acknowledge the research that revealed impacts of austerity on its staff, apparent in the reduced employment terms and conditions and low morale of front line staff.

A focus on service user experiences of austerity, at the expense of hearing experiences of front line staff in particular, was a point of contention and conflict between front line workers and managers. Some things were left unsaid or unheard between each group. A shift to compliance and conditionality that began to underpin the relationship between the charity and its funders appeared to be mirrored in the relationships between managers and front line staff (Buckingham, 2012). Silence emerged in the narratives as unstated conflict and was perceived as a mechanism of control by some staff, whose project budgets were at risk of deletion. This avoidance symbolised a relational breach between managers and front line workers (Bourdieu, 1991).

The narratives highlighted a sense of loss for the charity in a number of ways. The loss of funded resettlement services meant a loss of specialist staff

knowledge and organisational expertise. A potential loss of working with homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, or as it was referred to in the narratives, a loss of accompanying people, was perhaps significantly and subliminally tied to a potential breach with the charity's historical and social justice mission.

### **Embodied space in constrained and conflicted times: experiences of early austerity for staff and service users of homelessness services**

Every aspect of the work of the homelessness and resettlement service in the charity was affected by the funding cuts and welfare reforms. Narratives of adjustment and change illustrate how front line staff and managers made difficult decisions and adjustments to service provision and work practices in response to internal and external pressures from 2011 to 2014. An undermining of values in relational practice of public sector and community and voluntary sector front line work is an emergent theme in recent studies (Fletcher, 2011; Benezzo and Colley, 2012; Colley, 2012; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015).

#### **Embodied ethics work undermined**

Embodied ethics work was evident in staff and service user narratives. (Banks, 1998) suggests ethics of care is more than codes of conduct and professional ethical judgments. Ethics of care defined as embodied ethics work includes emotional work, identity work and interactive work (Banks, 1998; 2016). Market orientated approaches to provision of services overshadowed relationships between front line workers and service users. Experiences of austerity were perceived to undermine an ethical dimension of practice and values in relational service user-key worker encounters (Banks, 2011; Renedo, 2014).

Narratives voiced by all staff highlighted implications for practice as they made sense of changes of internal and external conditions during difficult and constantly changing times. Impacts of austerity were experienced in the



conditions posed by funding cuts as the charity strived to maintain services. This heightened apprehension within the charity about potential impacts on vulnerable people and implications for services and for jobs (Bird, 2010; Homeless Link, 2011). Changes to project contracts had consequences for practice; more service users were allocated to a key worker with less individual time allocated to each service user. Reduced time changed day-to-day relational ways of working between front line staff and service users. Front line staff expressed a distinction between provision of care, as a package to be delivered, and caring for a person, as a relational practice. The changed funding and policy context for homelessness and resettlement services undermines front line workers self-concept as providers of relational care (Dobson, 2011; Whiteford and Byrne, 2013). This resonates with emerging literature on a wider sense of loss of ethics of care, as embodied ethics work on a personal level, by front line workers in the community and voluntary, and public sectors more broadly during austerity (Benozzo and Colley, 2012; Banks 1998; 2016)

A changed broader context and ethos for provision of homelessness services is articulated in the narratives and noted in the literature (Dobson, 2011; Johnson and Vickery, 2011). The charity explored new ways of working with other organisations in the community and voluntary sector, and in the public sector across the city to maintain services and to protect service users at risk (Vickery, 2013). Narratives highlighted how staff struggled at times with contrasting and conflicted perspectives on ways to respond to a changed funding context for homelessness and resettlement services (Banks, 2011). In common with many community and voluntary sector organisations, the charity displayed characteristics of compliant contractors and cautious contractors in response to reduced availability of funding (Buckingham, 2012). The hegemony of an external contract culture was evident as internal decisions and changes to conditions of employment for staff in service provision not by protected by statutory duty were made. This self-regulation of practice exposed division in the organisation between front line and management staff (Bourdieu, 1991).

### **Resettlement services undervalued**

The value of resettlement services to people with experience of homelessness has been illustrated by service user and staff narratives expressing the importance of support at this transitional stage of people's lives (Dobson and McNeill, 2011). Resettlement services had been contracted out under Supporting People to the community and voluntary sector, who were considered to be closest to, and best able to provide to those in need of homelessness services. While a continued provision of crisis and safeguarding services is important to meet immediate needs, resettlement services, as longer term, relational and emotional work, is perhaps at risk of being undervalued and peripheral.

Reductions in public spending had an immediate impact on the availability, quality and quantity of resettlement services available to homeless people or those at risk of homelessness (Homeless Link, 2011). Welfare reforms also embedded a shift from entitlement to conditional access to benefits and services (Stuckler and Basu, 2013; Whiteford, 2010b). Progress already made on tackling homelessness was reported to be stalled nationally as front-line services become narrowly defined as crisis interventions. Provision of resettlement services for families with children was ensured under statutory duty, but conditional for single homeless people (Homeless Link, 2013a). Locally, access to services was reduced across the city. The charity was compelled to close projects and staff had their contracts reduced to part-time and project related hours.

The importance of the resettlement phase for those managing drug and alcohol misuse, and the role of skilled workers in preventing relapse and achieving lasting stability, were valued by service users especially those with experience of multiple exclusion (Bowpitt et al., 2011; Johnson, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2012; Vickery, 2013). Eligibility criteria for housing support includes engagement in employment or employment support, and when relevant engagement with recovery and detox interventions. As the charity's contracts were reframed towards housing support projects, conditionality of service users' eligibility for

services became foregrounded in the work of the front line staff. The basis of relationships between staff and service users shifted from a predominant focus on emotional and developmental support and to include ensuring service user compliance (Whiteford, 2010b; Lynch, 2011; Banks, 2016).

Worker narratives illustrated a sense of alienation that may be emerging as a common experience among front line workers during austere times (Ferguson and Lavelette, 2004). The way in which language was used to discuss local authority cuts, for example, the word deletion referring to removal of project budget lines, was internalised by staff as embodied austerity.

### **Spaces for change: possibilities for promotion of a critical voice and working in the margins.**

Reflective of the charity's mission, the research processes and the narratives enabled the staff to promote human dignity in the public domain. The research supported the advocacy work of the charity that used service user stories arising from this research to offer a critical voice, alongside others, on experiences of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness during welfare reforms and funding cuts (Abrahams et al., 2015).

Service user narratives from 2011 to 2014 represented in this research revealed changing conceptions of home in the life journeys of people who have experienced homelessness, and their positive life skills and knowledge that contributed to a new sense of home and community (Brown, 2010). However, homeless people and those at risk of homelessness remain in need of advocates. The research also revealed common themes of fragile circumstances compounded by new conditionality in benefits eligibility and insecure employment (Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014; Homeless Link, 2014). Particularly at risk of exclusionary benefit criteria are single people not covered by statutory duty and young homeless people (Clapham et al. 2014).

### **Home – crisis – stabilising – resettlement – home**

A Sustainable Livelihood Analysis used in this research had synergy with reflective life journey analysis with homeless people (May et al., 2009; MacKeith, 2010). Life journey analysis and service provision can be described as a journey from crisis to stabilisation to resettlement. Service user narratives from those who had previous experiences of homelessness illustrated that living a successful life again, post crisis, was achievable (Lemos and Bacon, 2006; Brown, 2010; Limebury and Shea, 2015). Narratives revealed that service users drew on their considerable life experience and personal talents during periods of crisis and instability, and were able to put them to use again to become re-settled. A personal conceptualisation of home was articulated by service users, even if their lives were not the same as before, or their home was not the same as in their previous experiences. Personal life journey stories acknowledge earlier experiences pre-crises, as well as future aspirations (Brown, 2010). Narratives revealed the person in the present, post-crisis, is the same person as before, and whose many personal attributes were still available to them as in their new situation. The significance of the resettlement phase is that it offered a space for change for service users to access support for a range of needs, from a specifically skilled network of support workers, during the moving on period to a new home (Dobson and McNeill, 2011; Pleace and Wallace, 2011). This research suggests that life journey stages and service interventions, could be reconceptualised as one of a broader progression from home to home, and not limited to crisis to stabilising to resettlement.

Despite progression from home, through crisis and resettlement, to a new home, service user experiences of austerity were governed by considerable uncertainty. The rising costs of living including heating, food and clothing costs were a source of constant worry for those on benefits and those in intermittent and low paid employment (Dwyer et al., 2012; The Lancet, 2014). The roll out of Universal Credit and changes to housing criteria placed people, particularly single people,

at risk of insecure or inappropriate housing, and susceptible to increased insecurity about their futures (Homeless Link, 2011; Clapham et al., 2014).

### **Single homeless people remain in need of advocates**

Single men and single women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are specific groups in society in need of strong advocates (Hutchinson, Alcott and Albanese, 2014). Single homeless people are not protected by statutory duty and those with drug and alcohol addictions in particular are at risk of losing valuable effective support (Bird, 2010; Homeless Link, 2011). Single people are particularly vulnerable to long term poverty and multiple exclusion (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and White, 2011; Homeless Link, 2015). The Supreme Court ruled on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015, that the interpretation of vulnerability, used by many local authorities to identify eligibility for homelessness support, as a situation where an 'ordinary homeless person' is not able 'to fend for themselves' is an excluding definition (Homeless Link, 2015). Instead the Supreme Court ruling made provision that vulnerability should be interpreted in the context of situations applied to 'an ordinary person who has become homeless'. Homeless Link (2015) suggest this ruling should result in more single homeless people being deemed as vulnerable and in priority need, and therefore eligible for homelessness support by local authorities.

Single people, including young people, are at risk of losing out on significant benefits under Universal Credit and are particularly vulnerable to reductions in Supporting People funds and cuts to local authority budgets (Homeless Link, 2013b; Bowpitt et al. 2011b; Clapham et al., 2014). Many single homeless people, while having complex health needs, may not access services due to multiple exclusion factors (Rae and Rees, 2015; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). Service users who have moved on from the crisis stage may have little social connections and continue to need to access stabilising supports, such as rehabilitation or mental health services, and may continue to be in a very vulnerable state throughout a resettlement phase (Dwyer et al., 2012; Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

### **Research relations and emancipatory research**

Central to the idea of using research to know and act in the world, I suggest, is a re-framing of participatory research as an educative space for those involved. Frankham and Tracy (2012) suggest that participation in research is not unproblematic in practice. Participatory research could be interpreted as a mechanism of power to promote compliance and co-option, rather than critique and collective action (Meade, 2005; Ledwith, 2005; Braye and McDonnell, 2012). Spaces for reflection on difficult socio-economic contexts can surface tensions and conflict as people struggle to make sense of the impacts of austerity (Meade, 2005; Renedo, 2014). However, a focus on equality in research relations in all stages of emancipatory research processes can promote inclusive research practice (Baker et al., 2004; Schostak and Schostak, 2008). A community development approach to research is more than the use of participatory methods and can provide space for collective analysis and windows of understanding (Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Ponzoni, 2015). Involvement in agenda setting for the research can include setting goals for social action (Freire, 1972; Ledwith and Springett, 2010; Braye and McDonnell, 2012).

Academic researchers who take an emancipatory research stance, may meet resource constraints and permission controls as barriers within the academy (Lynch, 1999; hooks, 2003; Ledwith, 2016). However, the potential for participatory and emancipatory research, as a part of a more radical community and academic practice, could open up spaces for emancipatory critique, space for voices of those least heard to emerge, and opportunities for collaborative research on inequalities (Burns, 1991; Chambers, 1997; Baker, 1998; Baker et al., 2004; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Ledwith and Springett, 2010).

My experience of this research is that participatory and inclusive research methods facilitated participation of a broader range of people in emancipatory critique (Maguire, 1987; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Ledwith and Springett, 2010). A focus on questions of representation and participation in design of research endorsed equality in research relations and ownership of co-research

processes (Lynch, 1999; Crozier, 2003; Berger, 2013; Aldridge, 2014). Extended planning time and allocation of supporting resources were important and took into account of and built the co-researcher team skills, knowledge and practice (Aldridge, 2014; Abrahams et al., 2015). Co-production of knowledge was enhanced by engagement in research analysis, whether through informal feedback and reflection or through formal structured reporting and public engagement with the research findings (Baker et al., 2004; Lenoir, 2006; Nind, 2011).

A participatory-transformative approach to the research that I attempted to model, contextualised co-generation of knowledge, avoided expert-novice dichotomies, and explored possibilities for collaborative social action (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004; Lenoir, 2006; Ledwith, 2016). The role and contribution of participatory research, designed with inclusive methods and collaborative research relations, could be a way to bridge the theory/practice gap of radical research practice, and a way to support community and voluntary sector organisations in challenging inequalities in ways that matter to them (Ledwith, 2016).

## **Conclusion to the chapter**

This chapter presents overall findings as key themes on the impacts of early austerity on a homelessness and resettlement service of a charity attempting to negotiate new realities of welfare reform and funding cuts during 2011 to 2014.

Themes were presented within three contested and changing spaces of local manifestations of neoliberalism, embodied experiences of austerity and research as a space for emancipatory critique.

Seven themes were identified from the rich ethnographic narratives of staff and service users. Themes are; a breach in relations at two levels, impacts of austerity on staff, undermining of ethics of care, undervaluing of resettlement

services, concepts of home and a continued need for advocates for single homeless people in particular. The final theme, research relations and emancipatory research offers a potential role for local equality studies in collective social action.

The key themes presented in this chapter resonate with emerging literature on the impacts of austerity and may be illustrative of a common story across the public and community and voluntary sector caring services.

Findings from this research offer a commentary of austerity and contribute rich narratives of the changing realities for staff and service users of homelessness and resettlement services over time as summarised in the concluding chapter that follows.



## **Chapter 8: Conclusion, writing a commentary of austerity**

### **Introduction to the chapter**

This ethnographic study is set in a specific time frame of the Coalition government 2010 to 2015, a time of austerity policies including radical welfare reforms and significant cuts to social welfare budgets. The research emerged from a desire of the trustees of the charity, and the researcher, to 'write the commentary' of the changing contexts of welfare in England as they happened and over time, with a particular focus on implications for homelessness services and for social justice. To do this, the research was designed in a broadly participatory and collaborative way to explore how austerity was understood and experienced by those most affected by changes; the staff and service users of the charity's homelessness and resettlement services unit.

To 'write the commentary' the research developed rich ethnographic narratives, stories of spaces of change, from the perspectives of staff, service users, the charity and the researcher. The broadly participatory research approach allowed the researcher to be invited in to the organisation. From this privileged space insights and ways of working allowed a narrative to emerge on the limits and possibilities of transformative models of research, what this looked like in practice and what may be learned from this experience.

This research contributes a rich ethnographic commentary of the effects early austerity on local homelessness and resettlement services of a charity. It offers local knowledge and understanding of what happened to services and people when the state retreated and the broader context changed so significantly it affected every aspect of the service and impacted on staff and service users in multiple ways. Overall the narratives in this small study resonate with findings from an emerging body of research on the impacts of welfare reform and funding cuts. However, the funding and policy context is rapidly changing and the full

impact of changes on homelessness and homeless people remains to be fully understood. The findings from this research suggest that a common story is emerging of experiences of austerity in the community and voluntary and public sectors.

## **Summary of findings**

The aim of this study was to examine how austerity was experienced and understood at a local level with staff and service users of a homelessness and resettlement service. As a watching brief over time research captured change as it happened and to use findings to advocate for social justice on behalf of the groups most adversely affected by funding cuts and benefit changes. Ethnographic narratives are central to the representation of voice in this study and provide rich and situated viewpoints on experiences of early austerity for people experiencing homelessness and those that support them. The process of carrying out the research offered a space for the charity to reflect on ways it may be possible to “*negotiate new realities*” (Carmel, manager, 2010) in the context of welfare reform and funding cuts, and to use findings from the research to express a concerned voice for social justice.

The phases, themes and associated research questions of the research allowed an iterative approach to data collection and analysis. The phases of capturing change, experiencing change and influencing change enabled the researcher and charity to reflect on findings in relation to interlinked periods of change during the roll out of welfare reforms and cuts to public services 2011-2015.

Research questions in the capturing change phase sought to understand and capture the specific policy and funding changes that impacted on homelessness and resettlement services. The ways in which managers and staff perceived change related to the temporal and spatial unfolding programme of funding cuts and welfare reform at national and local levels. The workers’ stories as individual and collective narratives illustrate situated ethnographies of early austerity. The

findings of this research resonate with an emerging body of literature on the impacts of austerity on public services and specifically the availability and quality of homelessness services.

Research questions in the experiencing change phase sought to understand the lived experience of people accessing the charity's homelessness and resettlement services. Experiences of change of service users was captured in two phases as narratives of life journey stories and coming up for review. The service user narratives reveal considerable resilience and assets of those who experience homelessness. The space between these stages of data collection reveal a shift over time from entitlement to conditionality in welfare benefits. These narratives are situated in the broader literature and policy review on the narrowing of statutory duty and reduced funding for vulnerable groups and the impacts of this on the relational service user-key worker ways of working that support people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

Research question in the influencing change phase sought to examine ways in which the organisation responded to a changed and changing external and internal context and the ways in which participatory research could contribute to advocacy. That the research was a local study enabled the charity to explore the consequences of welfare reforms on staff and service users of its homelessness and resettlement services. The ways in which the organisation contributed to change was evidenced in its use of research findings in the public domain. The needs of homeless people and people who use drugs or alcohol do not always receive positive media coverage or evoke compassionate thought, especially during a time of austerity. The value of conducting a small qualitative study locally was use stories of the reality of people's lives as they negotiate change in order to illustrate the impacts of current context of funding cuts and welfare reform.

The experience of participatory research opened up a discussion about different ways of engaging ex-service users as volunteers beyond service user groups,

including as co-researchers. One of the managers reflected on the value of working with co-researchers in this project.

*The two co-researchers have presented the findings of the research on behalf of the organisation. This has been a powerful experience for all and has challenged stereotypes about homeless men. The stories that people who have faced these problems show the importance and value of offering the right services to support people to live to their full potential and the benefits that this offers to communities (Carmel, 2013).*

Along with other organisations the charity contributed findings from this research to local and national political and public engagement events, as part of a collective voice on the impacts of austerity. The charity has also begun to identify its own agenda for local research to support its advocacy and communication work. Ethnographic narratives and qualitative interpretative research is a valued approach as explained by this manager.

*Research stories are a way of sharing lived experiences of homeless people with decision makers and other influencers. For the charity, the research has been used as a resource for action (Patricia, 2013).*

Overall findings of the research were presented within three contested and changing spaces conceptualized as spaces of local manifestations of neoliberalism, embodied experiences of austerity and research as a space for emancipatory critique.

Seven themes were identified from the research that could be offered as key messages and contribution to a wider commentary of austerity. Themes from this study suggest a breach in relations at two levels as the retreated from welfare responsibility; an external breach between the state, local providers of services, and an internal breach as the community and voluntary sector manages impacts of funding on their staff and services. The impacts of austerity on staff entailed not only a loss of employment but also an undermining of ethics of care and an undervaluing of resettlement services, and this is perhaps an emerging

common story in the caring services. That there is a continued need for advocates for single homeless people in particular whose conception of home are overlooked in public discourses suggests a need for continued research in this area. The final theme, research relations and emancipatory research suggests a potential role and model for local participatory equality studies as collective social action.

### **Reflecting on a participatory-transformative research approach in social justice work**

My research worldview acknowledges that multiple human realities are situated within social and historical contexts suggestive of a feminist ontological and epistemological position. Epistemologically, I am influenced by feminist research theory, and take an essentially ethnographic interpretative methodological approach. The use of ethnography as methodological narrative and ethnography as collective learning and contributor to a critical voice has been a rich site of personal and political learning. My own research and practice has been underpinned by thinking about equality not only as an interdisciplinary focal point but also how equality forms part of the process and relations of conducting research.

By conducting this research as a local equality study, I continue to define my own researcher position and philosophy of emancipatory research. This, and other projects have enabled me to examine participation in research that is beyond inclusive methods; I have come to value the centrality of equality in research relations (Lynch, 1999; Baker et al., 2004; Lynch, 2011). Central to the idea of using research to know and act in the world, I argue, is to offer research as an educative learning space, opened up by participatory research practice that enable 'ordinary actors' to engage in emancipatory critique (Schostak and Schostak, 2008:219). My philosophy of research is expressed through research relations as praxis. Conditions for 'research relations as praxis' I defined in my research journal at the start of this research study as:

*Research relations, where there is a strong connection between community development collective analysis and educative space made explicit by participatory learning, reflexive practice and collective action, are conditions for research as praxis (Daly, 2010 Research Journal).*

The model of research I have brought to this project drew on community development and dimensions of equality to inform a way of working (Freire, 1972; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith, 2005). I recognise the limitations of scale in this study and the potential to affect change in dominant discourses of neoliberalism and austerity to any significant degree. However, the model we worked with created a space for participatory research as an educative space for those involved. I think the research processes had internal value to the charity and helped make sense of the significant changes taking place and impacts on its homelessness and resettlement services. The outputs of the research contributed to some success in the charity's approach to advocacy. While this may appear peripheral to mainstream change, I think the study became a successful model of a local policy study and a way of working in the margins to promote critical voice in the public domain.

As I endeavour to bridge the research theory/practice gap it has been important to me to keep in mind that while crisis create conditions for the questioning of inequality, social research as a critical discourse must involve more than a response to crisis with detached cynicism (Bourdieu, 1997; hooks, 2003). Participatory equality studies can be a transformative and purposeful way of acting in the world by providing the means to understand inequality, and a means to engage in the politics of recognition, particularly of those whose experiences are most marginalised from public and political discourse (Freire, 1972; hooks, 2003; Baker et al., 2004; Schostak and Schostak, 2008; Lynch, 2011).

## **Contribution of this research**

The research reflects the values of an equality study, in that it prioritises experiences of those with the least powerful voices during a time of change in welfare policy and public service provision. Collaborative research relations have enabled a rich understanding of experiences of austerity at local level and for these to be voiced and to promote debate in the public sphere.

While this study is conducted at a local level, this research will add to an emerging body of studies on the impacts of current economic conditions and austerity measures in England (Benozzo and Colley, 2012; Athwal, Brill, Chesters and Quiggin, 2011; Daly, Anderson, O'Driscoll and Pitt, 2012; Clapham et al., 2013; Renedo, 2014; Homeless Link, 2014; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). Emerging ethnographic narratives from this study resonate with the changing nature of welfare in the UK. The narratives connect lives to social policy. Emergent ethnographic narratives of lives touched by a broader social policy expose individual and collective themes such as 'cultures of silence', 'realities of coming up for benefit review'. Narratives of changing contexts for staff and service-users within a small homelessness and resettlement services unit are linked to and illustrative of broader issues of power and control inherent in neoliberalism (Bourdieu et al., 1999).

The experience of conducting this research raised further issues for consideration, such as the extent to which participatory approaches to research in the UK can offer an emancipatory and transformative space for change, or lay claim to a radical discourse as part of a broader equality movement (Baker, 2003). This research may not solve these issues fully, but it will make a contribution by reflecting on the extent to which the original purposes of this research were fulfilled, that is to understand experiences of austerity and to use the research to advocate for social justice. This research project does not claim to be a fully participatory research project. However, it is informed by the researcher's standpoint of what constitutes knowledge and truths in research,

and a consideration of the extent to which people engaged within social research projects have a voice. Thus, it was important to the researcher that this project sought to capture experiences of change from the perspectives of service users and service providers. To achieve this, an inclusive and collaborative approach to enable participation in the research in data collection, analysis, and in sharing findings was adopted including setting up a co-researcher group and an advisory group.

An approach to representing collective as well as individual ethnographic narratives as stories of spaces of change, over a particular time of austerity, and in a particular location of homelessness services, offers perspectives on the nature of and experiences of neoliberalism. The experience of doing this research has been an educative space and helped both the researcher and the charity understand the shifting contexts in which we live and work (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Harvey, 2000; Stuckler and Basu, 2013).

### **Concluding thoughts: arguing for participatory equality studies as relevant social research**

In this research I have sought to 'write a commentary' of austerity, from a local space, alongside those most affected by it, and without losing heart. Opportunities for egalitarian researchers to engage in these constrained and conflicted times are in the alternative spaces and interstices that allow for collaborative work on social justice (Lynch, 1999). This project has been inspired by people I have met, or whose work I have read, who challenge cynicism with hope and seek to offer research as an emancipatory space for social change. As concluding thoughts, despite challenges of the constrained space of neoliberalism I occupy in my own day to day professional and personal life, I would like to offer three arguments for participatory equality studies as a relevant critical social research.



Firstly, there is a feminist research argument. A feminist research paradigm that foregrounds the relationship between knowledge, power and inclusion argues for the continued relevance of alternative spaces for social research (Lynch, 1999). I argue that space is still needed for excluded groups to meet and analyse inequality for themselves, beyond mainstream research agendas. Spaces of points of view can reveal multiple perspectives of inequalities (Bourdieu et al. 1999). Collaborative research underpinned by conditions of equality in research relations and using participatory methods, allows alternative and inclusive research spaces that contribute valuable social knowledge(s) and understanding (Freire 1972; Harding, 1986; Connell 1987).

The second argument is for emancipatory social research as democratic and educative space. Partnership as top down policy may have taken over democratic processes and formal participative structures, with the effect of silencing alternative voices (Diamond 2004; Meade 2005; Bunyan 2012). The far reaching effects of neoliberalism produces embodied labour in contradictory space (Harvey, 1999). Neoliberalism is experienced in the contested and constrained spaces of the academy as much as in caring services (Lynch, 1999; Lynch 2011). I suggest that emancipatory research agendas can offer a democratic and collective educative space in common to critique the damaging effects of neoliberal discourses. To do this, research agendas that recognise and represent inequality should not present a “focalised view of the oppressed” as separated experience, but present lived experiences as part of the globalised “dimensions of the totality” of neoliberalism (Freire, 1972: 111). As a commitment to promoting social justice small scale studies allow for experiential learning in research processes that create space for a broader critique of public services and policy as part of democratic processes and potential social action (Baker et al., 2004; Rowe, 2007; Lynch 2011).

The third is a political argument for equality studies as a way of working for social justice. Equality studies allows for boundary crossing between those in academy

and community (hooks, 2003). Research paradigms and structures typically viewed as dualistic including notions of insider/outsider researchers, academic/community based research are not sufficient to develop critical discourses of inequalities (Bourdieu, 1997; Baker et al., 2004; Ledwith and Springett, 2010). I have experienced feminist equality studies as a space where researchers can challenge cynicism with hope and open up progressive and optimistic ways of thinking as part of progressive politics (Harvey, 2002; hooks, 2003; Lynch, 2011).

In conclusion, participatory equality studies are part of broader action for social justice. Situated in a feminist critical research paradigm it offers a democratic research pedagogy and practice for academics and broader communities to expose and to problematise inequalities through emancipatory research agendas and approaches. This study, *Negotiating New Realities* was conceived of an participatory equality study with the charity involved. Framed as part of the social justice mission of the charity, and of the researcher, the study became an educative space for the researcher, the staff and service users of the homelessness and resettlement service to collaboratively offer a critical response to the impacts of austerity in England.

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## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1:** Ethics and Professional Codes of Practice and participant consent forms January 2011

**Appendix 2:** Co-researcher Ethics Protocol and participant consent forms May 2011

**Appendix 3:** E-survey –February 2011 staff

**Appendix 4:** Initial research questions – staff

**Appendix 5:** Sustainable Livelihoods Approach – Service User Questions sheets May 2011

**Appendix 6:** Coming up for Review, research information, consent and questions – service users

**Appendix 7:** Coming up for Review, research information, consent and questions – staff

**Appendix 8:** Role of research in promoting social justice – information and interview questions staff

**Appendix 9:** Public engagement and publications arising from this research

**Appendix 1: Ethics and Professional Codes of Practice and participant consent forms January 2011**

**Research ethics and professional codes of practice for the research project:  
Negotiating New Realities based at [REDACTED]**

*Final: January 31<sup>st</sup> 2011*

*This document has been developed with the research team and signed off by [REDACTED] CEO of [REDACTED]. It will also be submitted to the Graduate School, Edge Hill University*

Signed by [REDACTED] CEO, [REDACTED] \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by Angela Daly, researcher \_\_\_\_\_

The ***Negotiating New Realities*** research project and research team based at [REDACTED] are guided by the BERA ethical guidelines for research, the Edge Hill University Research Ethics Framework and the professional codes of practice [REDACTED]. The purpose of the research is to explore with staff and participants of the [REDACTED] the impact of the current public sector funding cuts and welfare policy changes on the people [REDACTED] supports.

**How will research findings be used?**

Research findings will be used by [REDACTED] to inform the organisation about the experiences of those people they support and to develop advocacy and information about the impact of cuts and welfare changes to a variety of audiences including [REDACTED], the broader community, voluntary and public sectors and public representatives.

In addition, research findings, with permission of the CEO of [REDACTED] and members of the research team, will be used to inform Angela Daly's Mphil/PhD study with a working title 'Community development approaches to working for



equality'. It is envisaged the project will form a case study about community development approaches to participatory research.

Reporting will be conducted in ways consistent with BERA Good Practice guides and consistent with the values of [REDACTED].

*“The research ethic of respect for persons requires researchers, in reporting data on persons, to do so in ways which respects those persons, as fellow human beings with entitlements to dignity and privacy.”* (BERA Good Practice in Educational Research Writing, 2000:4)

### **Storing research data**

Research data will be secured confidentially and securely. Email of research notes and reports will be through our respective organisational email addresses. Types of data could include observational notes, interview notes, workshop materials such as flip charts, voice recordings.

### **Research ethics and research participation**

Wellington (2000:57) outlines eight rules for ethical educational research, summarised below. Based on the British Educational Research Association guidelines for research (2004) they provide useful guiding procedures for planning and thinking around practical ethical issues and are listed below:

- Informed consent must be sought including consent for any intended publications
- Safety of respondents is paramount, including respecting voice (recordings and interpretation) and no force or coercion to participate
- Those involved in research (funders, supervisors, participants) are informed on nature and purpose of research
- No deception
- No invasion of privacy or taking too much time
- No withholding of benefits (e.g. for control groups)
- Fairness, respect, honesty key characteristics
- Confidentiality and remaining anonymous

All of these may be regarded as common sense, but are really important in ensuring duty of care to participants in research. The case of remaining

anonymous is relevant in many research projects, but for some it may be that respondents wish to be associated with the project (Burns, 2007:160-164). In an equality study, this may be because they share the interest in the research question and could use the findings in their own work or related research. It may be that they are interested in co-production of knowledge and wish to become acknowledged as such. In each case, clarifying and negotiating types of involvement is important at the outset and throughout the project. The change I would make to Wellington's rules is that respondents are asked if they wish to be publically associated with the project and in what way, and then clarifying what is possible. For this project, this could include staff, participants [REDACTED] and members of [REDACTED] who may be interested and willing to participate in advocacy or information work. In the first instance data and analysis will be anonymised and appropriate labels used e.g. staff, participant, stakeholder, participant, worker A, family B, Organisation C and so on.

### **Research Consent Form and equality monitoring**

A research consent form is attached. Items from this will be incorporated into an e-survey. For people with disabilities research consent will be ascertained in the most appropriate way taking advice from [REDACTED]

*British Educational Research Association (2004) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* <http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/09/ethica1.pdf>

*British Educational Research Association (2000) Good Practice in Educational Research Writing* <http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/09/ethica1.pdf>

*Burns, D. (2007) Systemic Action Research: A strategy for whole system change, Bristol: Polity Press*

*Wellington, J.J. (2000) Educational Research; Contemporary issues and practical approaches, London: Continuum*

## Research Consent Form – Negotiating New Realities

This research project, [REDACTED] will explore the effects of public sector funding cuts and welfare policy changes.

It involves [REDACTED] staff and people who access the [REDACTED]. Research reports will be used for two purposes:

To support [REDACTED] advocacy, information and planning

To support the volunteer researcher's academic study

All research information will be stored securely and anonymously by the research team. The research interview / workshop may include recording your voice and transcription for quotes and/or taking pictures at workshops.

If you need further information about this research project, please contact in the first instance, Angela Daly, [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Please tick the box to signify that you have understood and agree with the following statements:

1. I have read the information note above and understand the information provided and my role as a participant
2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that any information used will be made anonymous unless I agree for my name to be used
3. I agree to participate in the above study

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1 Copy Researcher 1 Copy – Participant

## Appendix 2: Co-researcher Ethics Protocol and participant consent forms May 2011

### Negotiating New Realities: A qualitative research study at [REDACTED]

#### Co-researcher group Research Ethics statement

The *Negotiating New Realities* research project and research team based at [REDACTED] are guided by the BERA ethical guidelines for research, the Edge Hill University Research Ethics Framework and the professional codes of practice [REDACTED]. A research ethics and risk assessment protocol has been signed [REDACTED] and Angie Daly.

This document has been developed for the **second stage of the research** (May-Sept) which involves ex-service users acting as co-researchers to gather data for the project on the experiences of service users as indicated in the research proposal. This statement is informed by the research ethics and risk assessment protocol and is intended to guide and underpin our practice during this stage of data collection.

The co-researchers, [REDACTED] and Angie Daly met on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April to discuss this stage of the project and the ethical and research approaches underpinning the project.

In practice, working as a co-researcher means:

- To co-plan and co-facilitate a focus group session with the Service Users Group (SUG) of [REDACTED] on the topic of the research.
- To conduct an informal interview with service users to gather their individual stories (interviews are to be conducted by Angie and either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] but only if the respondent wishes two researchers to be present.)

- To analyse data using the sustainable livelihoods framework under the direction of Angie. (All data will be anonymised in advance by Angie)
- Co-researchers will reflect on all aspects of the research and reports drawn together by Angie, providing critical reflection, editing, and ideas for dissemination alongside colleagues in [REDACTED] supporting the research.

We considered research ethics and took [REDACTED] values and BERA Good Practice Guidelines in research as our starting points.

[REDACTED] *in progressing the inspiration of [REDACTED] a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Pioneer, will continue its history and culture of being at the forefront of, responding to, and representing people's needs.*

*We will provide quality services that ensure people's rights, independence, inter-dependence, choice and inclusion are integrated into everything that we do.*

[REDACTED] Mission Statement, [REDACTED]

*"The research ethic of respect for persons requires researchers, in reporting data on persons, to do so in ways which respects those persons, as fellow human beings with entitlements to dignity and privacy." (BERA Good Practice in Educational Research Writing, 2000:4)*

Our research ethics approach is grounded in the following principles and ways of working:

- Each contribution is valid
- Everyone has a point of view
- Ensuring each is given the opportunity to speak and that no individual dominates (good chairing skills required)
- Everyone has a voice (if they want)

- Participation in the focus group and/or interviews should have a feel good factor and be comfortable for the service users at all times.
- Support to service users will be available from [REDACTED] team if required (if any issues raised that may cause services users unintended anxiety)
- Confidentiality will be maintained
- People will be respected
- We acknowledge the right to be heard
- We ensure the dignity of human beings and their life journeys
- We value people's experiences

The role of the co-researchers is to:

- Facilitate data for the research in a meaningful way for participants
- Have good chairing skills for the focus group
- Provide subtle leadership
- Bring people into the process and encouraged people
- Provide a faithful representation of people's lives and feelings
- A research consent form will be given to participants explaining the research and asking for signed consent to participate. This will be stored confidentially and securely by Angie Daly

The Co-research team – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Signed:

[REDACTED] \_\_\_\_\_

[REDACTED] \_\_\_\_\_

Angie Daly \_\_\_\_\_

## **Research Consent Form – Negotiating New Realities**

This research project, conducted by [REDACTED] will explore the effects of public sector funding cuts and welfare policy changes. It involves [REDACTED] staff and people who access the [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]

The **purpose of the research** is to explore with staff and participants of the [REDACTED] the impact of the current public sector funding cuts and welfare policy changes on the people [REDACTED] supports. It will run between January and December 2011 with a final report to be submitted to the trustees in January 2012.

**Research findings will be used by** [REDACTED] to inform the organisation about the experiences of those people they support and to develop advocacy and information about the impact of cuts and welfare changes to a variety of audiences including the [REDACTED], the broader community, voluntary and public sectors and public representatives. **In addition**, research findings, with permission of the CEO [REDACTED], and members of the research team, will be used to inform Angela Daly's Mphil/PhD study 'Community development approaches to working for equality'. It is envisaged the project will form a case study about community development approaches to participatory research.

**All research information will be stored securely and anonymously** by the research team. The research interview / workshop may include recording your voice and transcription for quotes and/or taking pictures at workshops.

If you need further information about this research project, or if you need to talk about any issues raised in the interviews, please contact in the first instance, Mr



Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Please tick the box to signify that you have understood and agree with the following statements:

- 1. I have read the information note above and understand the information provided and my role as a participant
  
- 2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that any information used will be made anonymous unless I agree for my name to be used
  
- 3. I agree to participate in the above study

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1Copy – Researcher 1 Copy – Participant



Appendix 3: E-survey –February 2011 staff

**Impact study 2011**

**1. Impact of changes in welfare policy on service provision and service-users, ...**

[Redacted]

conducting a research project to consider the extent to which reductions in welfare policy impact on vulnerable people who engage with services provided by [Redacted]

To support this project we are seeking the insights of staff of [Redacted] and colleagues from among our partners who provide similar services especially to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

You are invited to comment on the impacts of welfare changes on service provision and service users through this questionnaire. Your comments will be made anonymous in all reporting and materials produced as a result of the research, using labels such as service provider, service-user rather than your name.

[Redacted]

If you are happy to participate in the research please continue to the next page.

**2. Research Consent Form**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Please tick the box to signify that you have understood and agree with the statements below.

1. I have read the information note above and understand the information provided and my role as a participant.

Yes  No

2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that any information used will be made anonymous unless I agree for my name to be used.

Yes  No

3. I agree to participate in this study

Yes  No

## Impact study 2011

4. Which area of work do you specialise in? (this will be kept anonymous in presentation of findings)

Please provide your email if you would like to be kept informed about the findings of the research at a later date

Area of work   
Name (optional)   
Contact email (optional)

## 3. About national and local welfare policy changes

We are currently experiencing rapid policy change in the UK that affects our work. Keeping up to date with changes as they emerge is a challenge.

1. In the current changing context, to what extent will changes in national and local policy and strategies impact on services and the quality of life of the people you support (Please tick as many as apply)

	Most impact	Some impact	Little impact
Universal Credit November 2010	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and Social Care Bill January 2011	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Review of Disability Living Allowance February 2011	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent Living Allowance abolished June 2010	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Libertising the NHS White Paper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Housing Allowance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Personalisation Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Supporting People strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Homeless strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Alcohol and Substance Misuse strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Mental Health strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Are there other policies or local strategies that will impact on the services you provide? Please identify the strategy and the extent of impact.

## 4. Effects of national policy change

Choose one of the NATIONAL policies that is undergoing change to look at in more detail.

From your perspective what changes in that policy/strategy will have the biggest effect on service provision and service users in your area of work?

## Impact study 2011

1. Name of NATIONAL policy.

How would you describe the changes implied by this policy?

2. What are the possible positive and negative effects of the changes on the service you provide?

3. What are the possible positive and negative effects of these changes on service-users you work with?

4. Do you envisage at this stage any indirect effects of these national policy changes on service provision or service-users?

## 5. Effects of local policy/strategy change

Choose one of the LOCAL policies or strategies that are undergoing change to look at in more detail.

From your perspective what changes will have the biggest effect on services you provide and service-users you work

## Impact study 2011

with?

1. Name of LOCAL policy or strategy.

How would you describe changes implied by this policy?

2. Please comment on any effects of changes to this local policy (positive and negative) on the services you provide.

3. Please comment on any effects of changes to this local policy (positive and negative) on service-users you work with.

4. Do you envisage at this stage any indirect effects of these local policy changes on service provision or service-users?

6. Livelihood Strategies of Service-users

## Impact study 2011

1. Have you observed any changes in livelihood strategies of service-users?

These could be changes in coping strategies, changes in demand on your services or other services, changes in sense of well-being of service-users etc.

Yes  No  Not yet  Don't know

2. If so, could you tell us about your observed changes in livelihood strategies of service-users?

3. What do you think are the reasons behind these changes?

## 7. Quality of life and access to assets for service-users

Changes to policy, legislation and strategies may impact on services-users' livelihoods strategies and access to assets in the ways listed below.

Please can you describe how people's quality of life may change in relation to access to services/other community assets? Please map to policy change.

E.g. Access to Affordable Housing

Uncertainty about meeting rent shortfall if rent allowance drops due to long term unemployment (Local Housing Allowance)

Please comment on as many or as few of the items that you think will be important to the service-users you work with.

1. Support towards employment

2. Access to education

3. Access to leisure services

4. Access to support for substance misuse

## Impact study 2011

5. Access to support for mental health services

6. Access to transport

7. Facilities in the community

8. Access to affordable housing

9. Access to credit

10. Benefits changes

11. Access to community groups

12. Access to information and advice

13. Access to family support

14. Other?

**8. Organisational responses**

## Impact study 2011

1. On reflection, what challenges are emerging for service provision in the current context?

2. On reflection, what new opportunities are emerging for service provision in the current context?

3. Is there anything else you would like to add at this stage of the research project?

Thank you for participating in this study.

## Appendix 4: Initial research questions – staff

### Initial Research Questions - Staff

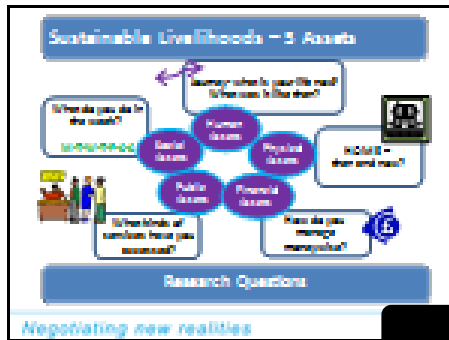
1. How are the effects of policy and funding changes experienced by service-users?
  - How do service-users understand and negotiate changes?
  - What are the benefits and challenges of changes?
  - Are there changes in service-users livelihood strategies? If so, how are these changes expressed and achieved?
  - What are perceived as the intended effects of new policies?
  - What are perceived as the unintended effects?
2. How are policy and funding changes experienced and understood at service provision level?
  - How do staff within [REDACTED] perceive current policy and funding changes and effects it may have on
    - Service-users lives?
    - Service provision?
  - What changes have taken place?
    - Organisational responses?
    - What are the anticipated outcomes of responses?
    - Observed changes in livelihood strategies of service users?
    - What are the perceived reasons behind changes?
    - What challenges/new opportunities have staff/units experienced in the current context?
3. What are the implications of policy changes:
  - What is the intended and unintended effects of policies relating to welfare and the community and voluntary and charity sector during 2011?
    - Impacts on service provision?
    - Impacts on service users?
    - Impacts on partnerships and arrangements between organisations/services?
  - What challenges/new opportunities for collaborative work has [REDACTED] experienced?



Appendix 5: Sustainable Livelihoods Approach – Service User Questions sheets  
May 2011

(screen grab)





**Home**  
Tell me about your home? Then and now?

**Journey**  
What is your life like now? What was it like before?

**Week**  
What do you do in the week?

**Benefits/Income**  
How do you manage money/wage? (In-cap/DLA/H Allowance)

Are there any changes to allowances/benefits?

**Service provision**  
Tell me about any services you may have accessed?  
What is good? What would be better?

Are there any changes to services that you are aware of?

## **Appendix 6: Coming up for Review, research information, consent and questions – service users**

### **Coming up for Review: the lived experience changing benefits**

#### **Introduction to study for interview respondents and participation consent**

##### **Aims and approach of this study**

This research follows [REDACTED] research which began in 2011 with a view to researching impacts of welfare reforms and service budget cuts on vulnerable groups they work with and programmes of support.

The aim of this study is to develop a thematic case study of the experiences of the welfare review process at individual level. Stories will be collected from up to six individuals on their experiences of negotiating the changes in their benefits such as incapacity benefit, job seekers allowance, housing benefit, bedroom tax and so on. Interviews will be conducted individually but all six stories will be conflated and analysed thematically.

**‘One story’ from many will be constructed to illustrate the salient experiences of welfare reform for vulnerable individuals.**

Analysis will build on the sustainable livelihoods framework employed in Negotiating New Realities that explores impacts on five assets in a person’s life (financial, social, human, physical, public). Research will be published on behalf of [REDACTED] but people interviewed will not be identified in the writing up of the research. The interviews aim to be conducted in a way that complements good practice in reflecting on life stories in social work practice and service-user research practice. Those conducting research will abide by the Data Protection Act and BERA Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice.

##### **Invitation to participate**

You are invited to be interviewed for this study. Your name will not be used in the study and all material gathered will be kept confidentially and securely.

Interviews will be conducted by co-researchers from Negotiating New Realities (interviewing and Angie scribing).

Interviews will take place at the offices of [redacted] will last for less than one hour. Interviews will be recorded for note-taking purposes by the researcher and all copies and recordings will be destroyed on completion of the study. [redacted] has processes in place to support potential respondents both before and after the research process.

**Consent for use of interview data in research**

The aims of the research have been explained to me and I understand the intentions, purpose of the research	Yes	No
I understand I have the right to withdraw at any stage by contacting [redacted] CEO [redacted]	Yes	No
I understand that this research will be published on behalf of [redacted]	Yes	No
I agree to be interviewed and to participate in this research	Yes	No
Signed	Date	

## **Appendix 7: Coming up for Review, research information, consent and questions – staff**

### **Coming up for Review - Research questions**

This research follows [REDACTED] Negotiating New Realities research which began in 2011 with a view to researching impacts of welfare reforms and service budget cuts on vulnerable groups they work with and programmes of support.

The aim of this study is to develop a thematic case study of the experiences of the welfare review process at individual level. Stories will be collected from up to six individuals on their experiences of negotiating the changes in their benefits such as incapacity benefit, job seekers allowance, housing benefit, bedroom tax and so on. Interviews will be conducted individually but all six stories will be conflated and analysed thematically.

**‘One story’ from many will be constructed to illustrate the salient experiences of welfare reform for vulnerable individuals.**

Analysis will build on the sustainable livelihoods framework employed in Negotiating New Realities that explores impacts on five assets in a person’s life (financial, social, human, physical, public).

The research will explore the following questions

1. What changes to welfare benefits are likely to impact on service-users of Nugent Care?
2. What changes to welfare benefits are likely to impact on ex-service users who are now in the resettlement phase?
3. During the last 12 months what benefit changes have been incurred by service users/ex-service users?
4. How are benefit changes notified to service users?
5. What access to information do service users have around benefit changes?
6. How do service users experience the ‘benefit review processes?
7. Are benefit changes negotiated by service users? If so in what ways?
8. What are the timelines for the review process?
9. What happens to day to day living during the review process?

10. What external/internal supports to people use during this process?
11. What are the impacts of the benefit review process on assets surrounding the person (financial, physical, social, human and public assets) (Shocks/Resilience)
12. What are the material differences for people during and after the benefits review
13. What are the intended consequences of benefits reform?
14. What are the unintended consequences of benefits reform?

Interviews with service users if possible will be open ended, few in number and incorporate visual motifs to explore and capture experiences over time, through change, feelings and shocks and resilience in relation to sustainable livelihood assets.

## **Appendix 8: Role of research in promoting social justice – information and interview questions staff**

### **‘The role of research in promoting social justice’**

Interviews -information and consent form

#### **Introduction and participation consent email for interviewees**

Angie would like to interview you about your perspectives on the role of research in promoting social justice including experiences [REDACTED] Negotiating New Realities research as just one example. Participation in this interview is requested as a reflective contribution towards Angie’s PhD on the role of participatory and emancipatory research and local studies in promoting social justice. One section of the interview is around respondents perspectives on the impact of welfare reform on [REDACTED] services from the professionals’ point of view. This will inform the ongoing work of Negotiating New Realities. Any reports and research articles will not identify the respondents individually, but will form a collective case study from the professionals’ point of view.

#### **Background to Angie’s research**

Angie’s study begins with the idea of research as an emancipatory and educative space. Central to the idea of using research to know and act in the world, she suggests, is an offering of educative learning space – opened up by emancipatory and participatory research practice and research teaching – that enables ‘ordinary actors’ to engage in emancipatory critique of social issues (Paulo Freire 1972; Schostak and Schostak 2008; Kathleen Lynch 1999). Participatory practice and collective analysis of socio-economic conditions are fundamental to community development practice to enable those engaged in social work to ‘act in awareness’ (Ledwith and Springett 2010) but at the same time being aware of potential for co-option and domination (Guijt and Shah 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001). This study aims to explore how participatory and emancipatory approaches to research may claim to support community development practice that enables an articulation of a “local character of criticism” to occur (Foucault 1980:78; Lather 1986). Negotiating New Realities is an example of this kind of local study that enables local critique and reflection. It was designed as a negotiated and participatory research project, with a focus on social justice and advocacy.

A small selection of interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders [REDACTED] who were involved in NNR to reflect on processes and outcomes of conducting local research and any changes that can mean for an organisation. A broader discussion on the role of research in promoting social justice will stem from this. These interviews will be analysed thematically and will contribute to a case study chapter in Angie’s study.

#### **Interviews**

With agreement of [REDACTED] interviews are requested with a small number of willing participants who have a view on the role of research in social justice and knowledge of Negotiating New Realities as part of [REDACTED] work in this area.

All individual contributions will be kept anonymous and confidential and you will not be named in the writing up of the research. Contributions will be analysed thematically and not by each respondent. [REDACTED] as an organisation may be identifiable as part of other existing and published work related to Negotiating New Realities. For the chapter in Angie's study the organisation may be presented anonymously as an organisation providing social services including community resources to homeless people. However, previously Nugent Care have been willing to be identified publically with this research.

Research may be published on behalf of [REDACTED] and/or academic journals as part of Angie's academic work but people interviewed in this section will not be identified in the writing up of the research. The interviews aim to be conducted in a way that complements good practice in research and adheres to the Data Protection Act, BERA Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice and Edge Hill University's research ethics committee.

Respondents will be interviewed for a maximum of one hour and the interview recorded to enable notes to be taken by the researcher at a later stage. These will be kept confidentially and destroyed on completion of the study. The interviews preferably would be conducted face to face but can be conducted by phone.

Questions will be open ended and reflective and centre on themes including, but not limited to the following:

- To what extent and how do respondents use research in their advocacy and social justice work?
- To what extent and in what ways may participating in research enable organisational learning and voice around social justice?
- What, are enabling factors and/or barriers to engaging in participatory research?
- What, if any, impact does social justice focussed research have on professionals and organisations?
- What impact, if any has Negotiating New Realities had on [REDACTED]
- What impact, if any has Negotiating New Realities had on [REDACTED] capacity and effectiveness for advocacy?
- Has anything happened as a result of conducting Negotiating New Realities? (Advocacy, other research, changes in organisational priorities?)
- What are the ongoing effects of welfare reform on the services and service users of [REDACTED]?
- What are the effects of welfare reform on professionals?



- What is the current status of [redacted] work with homeless people in [redacted] [redacted] Unit?

**Participant Consent form**

If you are willing to be interviewed for this research please acknowledge you have read and understood the following consent form to agree to give consent for participation in the research. Angie will bring this form to the interview.

**Consent for use of interview data in research – please complete form below**

The aims of the research have been explained to me and I understand the intentions, purpose of the research	Yes	No
I understand I have the right to withdraw at any stage by contacting [redacted] [redacted] CEO [redacted] or the researcher Angie Daly	Yes	No
I understand that this research may be published on behalf of [redacted] and may be published as part of Angie’s academic work.	Yes	No
I agree to be interviewed and to participate in this research	Yes	No
Respondents Initials and date	Date	

## Appendix 9: Public engagement and publications arising from this research

Daly, A (2011) *Negotiating New Realities: the impact of public sector funding cuts and welfare reform on the* [REDACTED] Unit of [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

- Full project report launched in [REDACTED] and short summary of findings briefing used for advocacy purposes in the city region, among the community and voluntary sector and at Westminster MP briefing organised by CARITAS in June 2011 and in 2012

Caritas UK/[REDACTED] (2011) *Parliamentary Reception on welfare reform.*

- *Negotiating New Realities* research report and summary presented to MPs at Westminster, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols (2011) *Open Letter to the Right Honourable Ian Duncan Smith MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.* 12<sup>th</sup> July 2011.  
(Researcher's copy)

- *Negotiating New Realities* research report provided as evidence

Daly, A., Anderson, J. and O'Driscoll, D. (2011) *Negotiating New Realities: findings of co-researcher project.* Keynote delivered at [REDACTED] AGM, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] 2011

Daly, A., Anderson, J., and O'Driscoll, D. (2011) *'Doing Research Together: a study of homelessness in Liverpool'*. Delivered at the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC) Annual Conference. Manchester. 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011

Daly, A., Anderson, J. and O'Driscoll, D. (2012) *Negotiating New Realities: Launch of Research Report.* The Archdiocese of [REDACTED], 27<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Daly, A., Anderson, J. and O'Driscoll, D. (2012) *Keynote talk 'Experiences of homelessness during a time of cuts'*, The Justice and Peace Assembly, The Archdiocese of [REDACTED], [REDACTED], 28<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Daly, A., Anderson, J., O'Driscoll, D. and Pitt, K. (2012) From home to home: Homelessness in austere times, *Housing, Care and Support*, Vol. 15. No. 3, pp 109-119

- Most downloaded article in the Journal of *Housing, Care and Support* in 2012-13
- Highlighted in Emerald 's mark of World Homeless Day (10 October 2012) as recent content from across Emerald's Health & Social Care Collection of journals on the topics of homelessness and social exclusion

Daly, A., Anderson, J. and O'Driscoll, D. (2012, 2013) *Power and research relations: the experience of co-research*. Lectures for 2<sup>nd</sup> year Social Work Students at Edge Hill University. June 2012, June 2013

Daly, A. (2014) *A Research Design Story: methodological approaches in Equality Studies*. Faculty of Education, Health and Community Research Seminar, Liverpool John Moores University. 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Daly, A. and Anderson, J. (2014, 2015, 2016) *Researching with community: ethical practice*. Lectures for 2<sup>nd</sup> year Health, Social and Community Care students at Liverpool John Moores University. February 2014, March 2015.