Homelessness in Hamilton

PATHWAYS TO FINDING A HOME

Case study report

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Contents

Introduction to the report

This report collates and presents the 9 conversations held with 6 individuals who have been rehoused with The People's Project, and who have stayed housed for a period of 12 months or more. Conversations took place during July – October 2018, and were primarily located at The People's Project office in central Hamilton.

The qualitative interviews are part of a wider Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) funded research programme into homelessness in Hamilton, involving a collaboration between The People's Project and the Universities of Otago and Waikato[1]. An overarching aim of the wider study is to contribute evidence to ending homelessness in New Zealand through an understanding of the Housing First approach to homelessness in Hamilton: the people served; the effectiveness of the approach; and the opportunities (or failures) regarding service engagement in the years leading up to registering for support[2]. Along with the case studies presented in this report, the wider project considers quantitative data at a local and a national level as well as specific impacts for Māori and other communities.

The People's Project is a Hamilton-based collaborative that takes a Housing First approach to homeless service delivery. This wrap-around approach aims to assist people into housing, and then work with clients to address wider issues such as mental health and/or addiction. Staff also provide advocacy and support to clients as they navigate the complexities of tenancy agreements and making a home after life on the street.

People experiencing homelessness are considered a vulnerable group, in that they are more vulnerable to violence, more likely to face abuse, and are too often taken advantage of by unscrupulous others. Subsequently, many are reluctant to talk openly with outsiders, such as researchers. In being sensitive to such vulnerabilities, we requested that The People's Project staff make initial contact with potential participants. If clients were open to further contact, the interviewer (Rebekah) made contact and arranged a time and place to meet. The interview rooms at The People's Project were offered as one such space to do so, and all bar one of the interviews were conducted there. These rooms were ideal, offering privacy and a safe space for both participant and researcher to talk. That participants chose to meet there is an indication itself of the reciprocal, positive, and high-trust nature of the relationship that People's Project staff have with their clients.

In this report we present each of the cases, and, in doing so, present the complexities of people's lives and the challenges they face in remaining domiciled. The perspectives of homeless and previously homeless people are easily overlooked by higher-income groups.

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[1] Ombler, J., Atatoa Carr, P., Nelson, J., Howden-Chapman, P., Lawson Te-Aho, K., Fariu-Ariki, P., Cook, H., Aspinall, C., Fraser, B., McMinn, C., Shum, R., Pierse, N (2018). Ending homelessness in New Zealand: Housing first research programme. *Parity, 30*(10): 5-7.

[2] Atatoa Carr, P; Pawar, S; Graham, R; McMinn, C; Nelson, J; Ombler, J., Pierse, N. (2018) Housing first in Hamilton: Who were first housed? *Parity, 31*(10): 56-58

Subsequently we have intentionally presented conversations in a way that highlights the experiences and perspectives of participants, with minimal interpretation. Where appropriate, interactions are summarized and explanations given. Overall, the aim is to highlight reality as experienced and perceived by participants. By choosing to present the cases in this manner, we centre the lived experiences of people, bringing their words front and centre.

Case Study 1: Buddy

Overview

Buddy is an older Māori man who has been off and on the streets for several decades. Transient in his youth, he has settled in Hamilton for the past while (10 years?). I first met Buddy several years ago (in 2014) at the Gateway Community meal. Since that time he has had another head injury/stroke, and subsequently found it quite difficult to communicate, which lead to increasing feelings of frustration. While his capacity to be understood has improved, at times he still struggles with his short-term memory, and to find the words he is looking for. During interviews Buddy was lucid, but prone to rambling and diverging onto other topics – he spoke at length about his efforts to keep public spaces free from hazards, as well as his efforts at reporting perceived hazards to Council staff.

Buddy is already a pseudonym that Buddy uses; he keeps his given name to himself and only shares it with those close to him, or unless absolutely necessary for legal reasons.

Experiences of The People's Project

When Buddy first came to The People's Project he was frustrated at not being listened to. This frustration spilled over into angry words and actions, and The People's Project staff have been instrumental in assisting Buddy to communicate his needs. Taking the time to listen to Buddy left Buddy feeling supported and able to manage independent living. Below Buddy discusses the impact of having someone to talk to, who could assist him in navigating everyday life:

> I've found that The People's Project have been quite understanding, there's not many people that would understand what I was trying to explain … we had an understanding between each other, and I could speak openly and freely and truthfully … a little bit of trust where I could mention something or bring something up and we were able to try and deal to the matter at the time whereas in years past, I had no idea in dealing with things like that, and it wasn't very healthy for the other parties or for myself.

Buddy has continued to keep in contact with The People's Project over the past 4 years. When he finds himself frustrated or struggling to adequately communicate with external parties such as landlords or neighbours, The People's Project staff provide a listening ear and a supportive environment alongside physical and practical support. Often this is as simple as a phone call to a landlord, or a mention to an unwelcome guest. Subsequently Buddy finds he is able to maintain a stable place to live.

Buddy himself notes that having "somebody to talk to if I had problems" has resulted in him being able to manage events without escalation. In the quote below, Buddy discusses one such altercation that occurred, and how being able to come and talk with The People's Project staff meant he was able to de-escalate the situation:

> I've already had some problems, someone's kicking in my door …. all the threats and abusive language, I just ignored it and closed the door and he started kicking the door … I had to quickly shut myself down cos I would have reacted, and I had to shut myself down quickly because I...would have put him in hospital but I don't want to do that, not if I can help it!
>
> So it was great that I was able to [come here] cos it was a Friday night and I was able to come here Monday. So I came and notified this crowd [The People's Project] because I didn't want to cause any trouble. Not like I used to. I mean, I wouldn't have closed the door in the past, I confront the danger.
>
> I'm so used to just confronting the trouble. And quite often it gets quite violent. It was quite, it was very helpful to come here [The People's Project] and explain what was going on, to record it. Even took a photo of the damage on the door, and the party I spoke to at the Project here, he said he will go and have a look at the door when he gets a chance .. [I try] to show my respect for The People's Project finding me this place to move into. I would like to try and be at peace with anybody.

In this conversation, Buddy connects his increased capacity for self-control to the ongoing nature of the respectful relationship with staff at The People's Project, as well as his sense that People's Project staff are there to support him. Subsequently, he feels able to better manage his own responses to others. Such decreases in anti-social interaction are a positive outcome for all involved, and reflect the need for people such as Buddy to have trusted others who can assist them in navigating the complexities of real world interactions and expectations.

As well as tenancy-related interactions, Buddy also required additional support in managing domestic-related activities such as cooking with gas hobs. Mostly Buddy eats fast food such as Burger King, or provided community meals from local charities, or simple meals at home such as sandwiches and a cup of tea. He describes his first time using the gas hobs in his flat:

> Oh, I text [staff member] … I had a urge for, ah, craving for steak and eggs. One night, I don't know, about 7, after 7, I went to Countdown it's just down the road, about 10 minutes' walk, got me some steak, a couple of those eggs. Ever since I move into the place, I always tried to think to my mind that, before I play with any of the gas implements there, remember it's gas! I'm so used to like the electric stove or the electric heather or something, I won't touch the heater. But I was hungry for steak and eggs. So I was like, well, I'll have to try that gas stove! So I text, [staff member] and ah well, my first time having a go at this gas stove. Having a feed of steak and eggs. Ah gee, maybe 5 minutes or so, maybe more, that rump steak was nicely cooked. Rump steak nicely cooked, Eggs. Oh beauty!

Buddy thoroughly enjoyed his steak and egg meal, cooked with assistance from The People's Project staff. Such mundane domestic chores take on a new slant when considered through the lens of a life lived in transience. Stove-top cooking skills are one example of the type of taken-for-granted knowledge that those who are new to domiciled living require assistance with acquiring.

Everyday life

Buddy spends much of his day roaming around the city, either on the (free) bus or walking. He carries his backpack and assorted important items with him, and is well known locally by his black cowboy hat with assorted paraphernalia and interesting items attached (see Figure *1*).

Figure 1: Buddy's signature hat

Some of the items are memorabilia from events or places previously visited. Others have a more practical function. Buddy explains:

> It's a pouch where I keep chocolate. It's mainly for when I see little kids and the mothers having trouble trying to keep their kids stop crying or some problems, I go here [mimes giving a chocolate]. I give it to the mother, because I'm not sure if they're aware, if they can still remember the stranger danger, and so I give it to the mother, so the mother can give it to the child, and the child can go oh, thank you mum. And after a while they want another one. But at least they're quiet and calm. One chocolate there [point to small pocket on hat], and there should be a chocolate in this one [shows another pocket]. And that's a band-aid in case anyone gets hurt. Put a band-aid on, give them a chocolate. This is a little Easter egg…oh, I'd better load them up again. Ah, I just find that if I can help a little child, they're crying for something but they can't tell you what, so I give them a chocolate and they're happy.

Buddy's care for the well-being of young children and their mothers in the above quote starkly contrasts with both the construction of older (homeless) men as a danger to society, and the way in which mothers and young children are too often scolded when in public for "being a nuisance". The small act of carrying a wrapped chocolate to give to others is an act of humanity; the humanity of people like Buddy is too often lost in public discussions considering homelessness, transience, and mental health.

Case study 2: Allen

Overview

Allen is a cheerful, talkative middle-aged Māori man who drifted into Hamilton after the loss of his job and the death of his mother. With his ties to where he was living and to his family disrupted, Allen hoped to find work in the city. Instead, he ended up homeless and sleeping rough on the streets. Thanks to the gentle persistence of staff at The People's Project he is now housed in shared accommodation. He talked with me of his life on the streets, and his life now as a domiciled person. When I last spoke with Allen, he had been offered work "up North" and was looking forward to the next step in his journey, as well as reconnecting with wider family members.

The People's Project

Allen was initially resistant to accepting help from The People's Project. Below he describes his interactions with staff, and how they were instrumental in his returning to domiciled living:

> And then, [name], one of the people that work here, kept saying "oh come into The People's Project, come in The People's Project" cos he knew that I was back on the streets again, and I think it went on for like a month, I think, he kept seeing me all the time "come into The People's Project I'll help you", "nah nah nah I don't want no one's help." Y'know you get to that point where you sort of don't want no help from no one, you think oh I can do it myself but and in some ways, I'm so glad that I did it, that I did come in and see Sam and he got me into doing things for myself.

Throughout both interviews, Allen spoke highly of his interactions with The People's Project staff. He is aware that, without the support of The People's Project he would still be living on the streets today. A consistent theme was a sense that he could come in, any time, to talk with staff, and would be treated with dignity and respect. He also appreciated that they centred his needs and autonomy throughout, and took the time to listen to him when he needed support.

During our conversation it was clear that Allen very much enjoys domiciled life. People's Project staff found Allen a room in shared accommodation; he has his own room and shares a kitchen and bathroom facilities with two others. Being on the street, Allen had few personal items, no furniture, and little funds to purchase items required for domestic living:

> Ever since I been there, with them, with these guys, they help me a lot, cos I didn't have to buy no tv, no kitchen ware, no toiletries or anything, they all bought it for me, yeah.

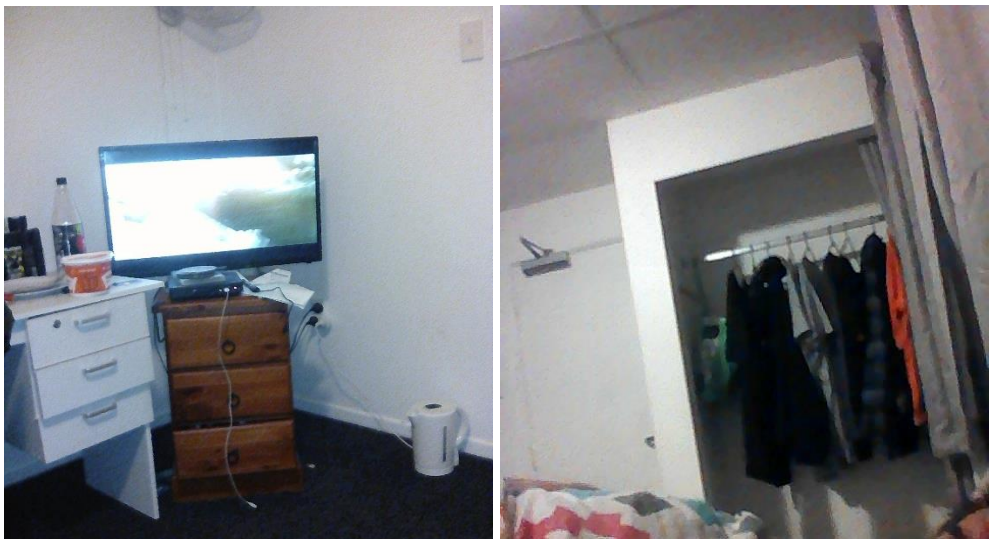

Figure 2: View of television from Allen's bed (left); view of wardrobe (right)

In this manner, The People's Project fulfilled an important practical aspect of housing rough sleepers: the provision of furniture. Allen took several pictures of his room (see Figure 2), and is very pleased with every aspect of it.

As well as the practical support in the form of furniture, Allen also appreciates their moral support when dealing with Work & Income (WINZ). Allen finds his interactions with Work & Income staff stressful and difficult, and at times he needs additional support to cope:

> [I] had problems with WINZ, getting a little bit angry at the WINZ people … I don't really want to get banned from there because I really need them. So for me to keep going in, I need someone to come in, so I don't get angry, so I can, y'know, concentrate on what I'm actually going in there for … you do get your people in WINZ who are there to help and they try to help you as much they can but then you get people that all they're looking for is denying you, not really helping the people where they should be helping all people … But you know [name] he's been good, he came in a couple times with me, said "oh just settle down ay" I said, "Yes, I know. Like be good." But no, coming in here for just something like that, y'know, or you just had a bad day and you just feel so angry and just want someone to talk to ... that's why I like coming in here…the people here, you know, you just come in and sit down if you've got a problem you can talk with them and they sort it out with you.

Work and income is the government department tasked with helping people like Allen. However, as noted in the above quote, the manner in which staff treat people such as Allen can leave them feeling worse off. In response, Allen requests that The People's Project staff accompany him to appointments. Their presence and capacity for advocacy leaves Allen feeling calmer and more able to manage. Additionally, knowing there is somebody there for him to talk to, helps Allen to cope with the stressors of everyday life.

Everyday life

Allen initially struggled to adjust to the routines of domiciled life. He was used to the demands of the night shelter, which required being inside by 5:30pm and out again by 8am. However, he soon adjusted and enjoys the freedom of being able to come and go as he pleases:

> Where I am now, I'd rather be in the place now, at least I can go home and watch a bit of TV and have a shower or cook something. I don't have to go to people and ask them for money or, you know, try to beat them up for it and then you get yourself in trouble for it with the law and then, next minute, you're in jail, and then you come out and you go back to the same thing again.

In the above quote, Allen connects the difficulty of surviving on the streets with anti-social behaviour and prison time. He finds domiciled life calmer, without fear of prison or trouble, and very much enjoys socializing with his friends. His primary source of social interaction comes from the casino in town. Now that he is domiciled he can come and go as a legitimate citizen, without fear of being "banned" by casino security staff.

Allen spoke at length about his interactions at the casino with me. It is one of the few spaces where he can freely come and go without harassment or feeling out of place. With few public spaces for people to interact, the space of the casino fulfils the role of public meeting space. Allen comments:

> It's not a bad place to go to meet people, down there. I met so many people down there…over the year and a half I've been there. Ah, you get some people who don't care what you look like who you are where you're from, they just come down and sit by you and start talking to you and that's why I like it so much. Some of the people…they come in every week, oh every day and, every time they see me, they'll come down and sit by me and talk to me and, ah, sometimes, "oh, here's a voucher for you, go get something to eat", "oh okay, that's sweet as." "Well, it doesn't cost us nothing."
>
> I'll go talk to my cousin's girlfriend, she works on the tables, so I go talk to her when she's got no-one on the table with her, so I go spend a bit of time with her and then I go down., when my cousin does work at the transport place, I go down and see them, see him, spend a couple of hours with him then cruise on home.

The vouchers that Allen refers to are the ones provided to customers free of charge, to encourage them to come into the casino; they must be used that night. Through connecting with others at the casino, Allen is able to enjoy both social interaction and a low-cost (free) meal.

Case study 3: Terry & Diane

Overview

Terry and Diane came to The People's Project individually. They got to know each other during the course of their time staying in one apartment complex, and have since moved in together. Interviews took place separately, one with Terry at their house, and one with Diane at The People's Project. We have presented the two interviews here as one case study, given they are both living at the same address and aspects of the interviews overlapped.

Terry is quietly spoken, pensive at times, and cared deeply about the state of the world. Diane was more forthcoming in conversation, but both were reserved and careful about what they shared with me. While second interviews were scheduled, repeat cancellations were taken as a signal of non-consent.

The People's Project: Terry

Prior to his engagements with The People's Project, Terry, an older Pākehā male, had struggled through on his own. He wasn't doing very well, emotionally or mentally. Contributing to this was undiagnosed PTSD which affected his responses to people and situations. In the below quote, Terry glosses over the impact this has had on his life:

> You get some bad people walking around, that abuse you and stuff like that too you know. Any government buildings [where] I feel intimidated or assaulted, I'd react quickly, efficiently, and make sure they're [the threat is] eliminated.

When Terry first came to The People's Project he was living in a stressful boarding situation which exacerbated his struggles. Assistance from staff at The People's Project meant he was eventually able to move into a place of his own. Below Terry comments on the positives he's noticed from being in his own space:

> At the time I wanted my own space, that sort of thing … just to kick back and relax at home, without the worries of the world, pretty much. Yeah. I felt so happy, unwound, I can relax, sleep. I see less of the doctor. Just, many changes.

As Terry alludes to, it is the combination of social support, along with practical necessities that have left him able to sleep and in better health.

Despite his seeming reticence to talk in detail, Terry commented multiple times on the value of the support received from The People's Project:

> "they're good people…they're always kind to you";

> "they're pretty cool people. It's good team, you know, it's an awesome team, team works wonders. Yeah. Definitely. They've been awesome to me."

> "I'd be, sort of, lost without them. Yeah. Nah. They've been great. I can't say anything more."

Terry also appreciated the practical support in the form of being able to access computers and the internet, particularly when looking for a place to live. He doesn't own a smartphone, and subsequently no access to the internet. The public library had closed, leaving Terry without access to information regarding tenancies and rentals.

Past injuries and problems left Terry struggling to find his equilibrium and at a very low point in his life. His engagements with People's Project staff were significant in helping him find a way through: "I went through hell and back. I know there's help there now, so, yeah, The People's Project." Both the emotional support and practical assistance provided by staff at The People's Project have left Terry feeling positive and with a sense of hope: "The future looks great."

The People's Project: Diane

Diane talked at length with me regarding her journey to Hamilton. Reading between the lines, and summarising her story, there was a long, slow spiral downwards into poverty, debt, and difficulty. Diane did her best to manage, but rents were too steep, the price of food too high, and living costs simply too unaffordable for her to make ends meet. She approached Work and Income for help, but found them unhelpful and difficult. In the following quote, Diane contrasts their response to the support from The People's Project:

> They [Work and Income] just tell you to go into a shelter, and it's like, oh my gosh, they told me to go into a shelter, but I got three or four weeks I spent there, and I was working, but I was still coming back to The People's Project…WINZ just tells everyone, that's what I think, because I hear it from others, they just tell them, oh, there's a shelter there you know…It's not fair on people aye. All they want is housing, that's all. And that's why I think The People's Project is great for that.

As well as assistance with housing, The People's Project provided information on navigating the bureaucracy services, in particular Work & Income. Again, Diane had previously approached Work & Income for assistance, and been turned away. Again, it was The People's Project staff that provided and explained the much-needed information and support. Diane explains:

> They [The People's Project] explain it to you to, what it means. I was looking at some paperwork and it was to do with, my youngest son and his girlfriend was looking for a place but I didn't know how to go about it, asking WINZ, they just didn't want to give me any information … I asked [name] and she gave this form … I gave it to my son at the time and they were like, whoa! That was helpful cos they never heard of it, cos WINZ don't tell you stuff like that, really. That was the first I heard of it too, for young ones.

It is concerning that government departments tasked with providing support appears to be actively excluding people such as Diane from receiving the support and help they are legally entitled to.

Diane also appreciated the way in which The People's Project staff "gave me confidence like in the future to do things on my own, get out there and do it." Diane found managing the paperwork requirements overwhelming, and was highly intimidated by the entire process of finding a place to live. Having someone accompany her to viewings of rental places and assist her with the paperwork meant that Diane then felt able to manage such processes by herself. Central to this process was the way in which The People's Project staff treated Diane with dignity, valuing her autonomy, and respecting the time Diane needed in order to feel secure in managing her affairs.

> The People's Project [were] very helpful because I wouldn't have done it without them, I was quite, I had no confidence to look for myself. And even just going to the real estates and that, I needed some help. Like everybody else would have that confidence, and I just found it really really helpful. Had the computers there to look up on houses, the phone, just, the talking, very nice, [name] was very helpful, very nice people.

Diane's past experiences are textured with memories of being disrespected by others, both personally and by government agencies and those tasked with "helping" her. It is also likely that, given Diane's social status as an impoverished Māori woman with children, she has also had to endure institutional racism and demeaning treatment. Diane alludes to the difference in approach in the quote below:

> I've never really tried to ask anything! Far out, cos I like to help myself at times…it was the house that's all, it was just me looking for a place, I needed the confidence to go out there and [name] gave me inspiration to, that advice and everything to get out there and do it. Yeah.
>
> They're [The People's Project] not forcing you to do anything, but they're just there to help you, and make you feel comfortable and um yeah. Giving advice and stuff, that you want to hear.

Diane's mention of "forcing" is partly in reference to her prior experiences with CYFS/Oranga Tamariki. In particular, the way in which state officials mandate attendance at particular course in order for parents to be able to visit with their children that the state has removed. This form of coercive control by the state is documented elsewhere, and is markedly evident in interactions with government departments tasked with helping people. The absence of autonomy and removal of self-determination leaves a psychic scar; in Diane's case it erased her confidence in herself. Multiple positive interactions with The People's Project staff who prioritised her requirements and valued her autonomy resulted in a positive outcome regarding housing and in terms of restoring to Diane a healthy sense of self.

Case study 4: Henry

Overview

Henry is an older Māori male with a number of health issues. He has few teeth, is hard of hearing, short-sighted, and walks with shambling gait due to a historic car accident. Most notable on meeting Henry, however, are the multiple paint stains on his face and hands, and the not-so-faint whiff of solvents. Despite his rather shambolic appearance, Henry still has all his faculties and is reasonably well aware of his surroundings. With support, he is able to manage independent living, and can independently manage activities such as grocery shopping, attending the optometrist to get his eyes checked, and taking the bus to The People's Project. Nevertheless, Henry remains vulnerable. During our interview, his People's Project support person stayed in the room and assisted with questions and answers, until Henry felt confident to manage on his own. As Henry relaxed, he became more loquacious and happy to describe events in detail.

The People's Project

When Henry first came to The People's Project he had been living rough in a local park. He didn't particularly like living in the park "It's not very good in the park", but he had been banned from the local night-shelter, and he had nowhere else to go. Below he describes why he was asked to leave:

> Oh they kicked me out of the night shelter, I was staying there for about, oh ,2, 3 months, maybe a bit more. Had a bit of paint on my face, and um, the people on there, they…they got me the police. Yeah, there was paint on my face, something like that. I mean they give me a shower and everything, but um, and a bread, but there are others that living there, they not too thing about it, so they told me to not come back. It's like jail at that night-shelter. You get up at 8 o'clock and then come back at 5, half past five, mmm.

Henry's paint sniffing addiction meant that the night-shelter was no longer able to accommodate him. The paint on his face and hands, along with the strong smell of solvents, meant he was no longer welcome. Indeed, his heavy addiction would previously have precluded Henry from receiving housing support. However, thought taking a Housing First approach, Henry is no longer living in the park, no longer sniffing paint on the streets in full view of the public, and is no longer being admitted to jail on a regular basis.

Henry is much happier living in his flat, and, as he comments so are others:

> Anything is better than the park. I think the police will agree to that too! They were going to give me a bed but oh I kicked it. Their bed is in their cell! [Laughs] … You ever been locked up? The food they get is about this big, mince, little bit of potatoes, carrots, lots of carrots, that's your main course … I been in and out of jail so many times.

Henry needed assistance to manage getting into a rented flat, as well as "some furniture and some pictures for the wall." While he remains addicted to sniffing solvents, he very much appreciates the humanity of having his own place to sleep without harassment.

Everyday life

While on the street, Henry turned to solvents as a way to escape grim reality and to "keep warm". During our interviews he talked about his addiction, and how it has "taken over" without him realizing:

> Oh, they kicked me out because um, oh they didn't kick me out, they just didn't want come back because the other people, because, when I was on the streets, I used to be solvent abusive to keep me warm, and now it's turned into an addiction and so um, housing corp, this people as well as housing corp um, gave me the house so those people on the street, the police will be on that, like oh gee.
>
> What's your addiction?
>
> Oh at the moment, just solvents. Before it was alcohol but um now I can't afford alcohol, so it's just solvents to keep me warm and now it's got me addicted. And it's not an illegal thing, I don't mind doing it! [Laughs]. I mean the police don't want to see what you're been to hey, but um, as long as you're in your house you can, as long as you're in your house you can do it. I mean, not can do it, but um, your addiction's doing it, as long as you're not doing it in public.

After the interview, the People's Project support person informed me that this was the first time she had ever heard Henry acknowledge his paint sniffing as an addiction, and that it was no longer under his control, which was significant progress. Henry also makes a valid point regarding the social appropriateness of engaging in his addiction in public versus the private space of the home. Behaviours such as paint-sniffing are not considered appropriate in public, yet, when you have no home of your own to go, there is nowhere else to go to.

Henry requires ongoing support in the form of cleaning and meals. The cleaning is a contentious issue. Henry's physical disabilities are such that he qualifies for additional support in the form of cleaning services. However, his appearance and addiction means that he is not always seen as deserving of such support. Indeed, the contracted, government-funded support team has since refused to clean Henry's one-room flat. Due, in part, to the strong smell of solvents: it has been deemed a Health and Safety issue for the cleaning staff. Subsequently, The People's Project staff now regularly visit Henry's flat, opening up all the doors and windows to get a good stiff breeze going, and "smash out the cleaning". This small yet vital support means that Henry is able to continue living in his small flat and maintain a measure of dignified independence and humanity.

Regarding meals, Henry's local church delivers him hot meals each week, which keeps him fed and nourished. He quite likes hot meat pies, and, where finances permit, will purchase these from the supermarket. At the close of the interview, on receipt of his supermarket voucher, Henry was most delighted to be able to purchase additional food items:

> Oh, yes, I need some food. Oh choice, choice, can I have this? Can I use it as many times? Oh, oh thank you very much, will they rip me off and say oh, you spent the 50 and you only spent 10? Oh thank you very much I could do some shopping at home. What's the best Countdown? .. Oh they got some good pies there. But then you got to get them on special aye? Oh thank you very much for this.

Henry's comment about being "ripped off" alludes to his vulnerability and his previous experiences of people taking advantage. Vulnerable people such as Henry are in need of compassionate social services that support them to live as independently as possible.

Case study 5: John

Overview

John is an older Pākehā male who lives on his own. His health is poor, and he has numerous physical and psychological health issues. Subsequently, he tends towards cantankerousness and social isolation. His main connection with the "outside world" is via the internet. He particularly enjoys gaming online with others; one of his closest friends is a person he has never met in real life. While he has three children and six grandchildren, their relationships are fractured, with CYFS taking custody of 3 the grandchildren.

The People's Project

John spoke highly of his interactions with The People's Project staff, and the practical support he received:

> [Name] helped me find places that were in my allowable pay range…she took me to a couple of places to look at, because they were just so far out I couldn't get there … She also helped me get my 18+ plus card. Cos I had no valid current ID. So that was fantastic. Um yeah. I just come in here quite often, check on the computers and have a yarn with them and yeah no, they're really good, really good people. Really helpful. And not just for finding somewhere to live either, good people to talk too.
>
> I've done it many times here, I've just been in town and oh I'll pop in and say gidday and come in and have a chat for a few minutes and bugger off home again. Which is really good

As discussed further in the next section, John finds dealing with people challenging. That this self-confessed people hater now feels utterly comfortable coming into The People's Project offices just to "have a yarn" is hugely significant. John felt, and continues to feel, treated with dignity and respect, as though he has worth and value. This represents a substantial shift for John from the time he first came in to now.

On reflecting on the support he's received from The People's Project, John becomes pensive and quiet. It is clear that his interactions with The People's Project staff have had a powerful impact on this otherwise irascible man:

> I'd actually be quite lost without them, to be honest. Yeah. I really don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for them. I know I would have lost everything I own, I know that, that would have been a guarantee. Yeah.

When he came to The People's Project John was at a very low point in his life. John is certain that he would not have survived living rough, and would likely have ended up dead, if it were not for the intervention of The People's Project.

Everyday life

John finds social interaction challenging. Indeed, subsequent to his interactions with the People's Project staff, he has been diagnosed with anxiety, social phobias, and depression. Having a diagnosis and treatment plan has helped John to understand himself, how his brain works, and how to better manage himself in the world. In the quote below John explains how he organizes this:

> I smoke it [weed] not just for recreational, it's medicinal as well. It does help with my anxiety, it does help with my depression. If I know I'm going to be coming into town or something like that, I'll have a cone or something before I come in, just to help take that edge off, like I did this morning when I come in.

John very much wanted to come into The People's Project and talk with me. He managed his anxiety in a way that worked for him, in order to enable him to cope with the challenges of meeting a stranger. When discussing informed consent, John made the insightful comment, that, if he didn't want to be here he simply wouldn't have shown up. In this way, John exerts his agency and autonomy in determining what events are worthy of his time and attention.

Having a name to put to his mental health condition has made a significant, positive difference to his sense of self. John comments below:

> I didn't know they were issues until a few years ago when I went to the doctor. I just thought it was all in my head, but then I found out that no, I've actually got these conditions and they are a legit condition. Yeah, one of them's anxiety, one of them's depression, and one of them is social phobias. I didn't know that! I thought it was all up here (points to head).

From John's perspective, the reason he was in a position to manage his mental health and speak to a doctor was because he was now in a stable and settled living situation. Prior to his engagements with The People's Project, John was not in a "position to really want to do something about it". While his condition hasn't changed per se, being settled and having a diagnosis has given John greater self-acceptance and increased capacity for self-management.

John very much enjoys gaming and connecting with friends via the internet. In the below image he shows me the set-up of his lounge, where he spends most of his days:

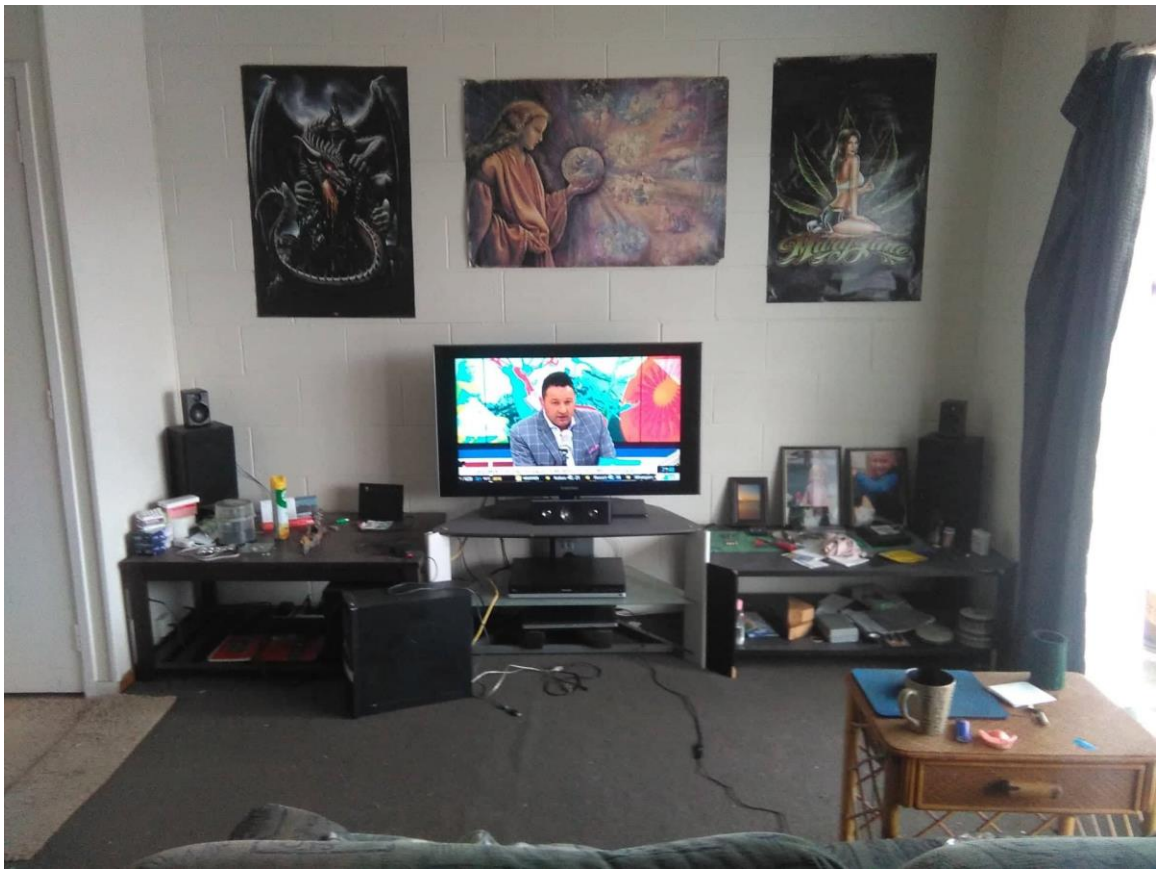

Figure 3: John's living room

John describes his set-up below:

> That's the lounge, that's where I park my butt, right there. And my teeth. And that cup, I only brought that last night because I broke my other one … That's my laptop right at the bottom there. Right down the bottom there, it's closed, and that's how I have it all the time. I play my game on that TV, everything runs through that TV. I'm on Skype with my mate in America, my laptop's shut, I've got no microphone, nothing, and he can hear me clear as day. But he has to use headphones on his. Go figure.

Having access to the internet means that, despite his physical and mental health challenges, he is still able to participate as an equal in social events and interactions. As John mentions, he games with his friend who lives half the globe away in another continent entirely. John's setup works to prevent him from isolation and keeps him engaged as a human being in the world, sometimes with humorous consequences, as in the below exchange where John describes his attempt at playing Fortnite (a popular internet-based game):

Interviewer: My son's into Fortnite

Oh, I had a look at [Fortnite] the other night, oh I couldn't work it out so I fucken logged out!! It was scary because when I first logged in, um, I was in a party with 5 people. It was me and 4 others. I never joined no party! What the fuck's going on here?! And then, I could hear 2 of them talking. I didn't sign up to any fucken voice chat. What the hell's going on here?! And then somebody was saying, oh, ask MadazKiwi (cos that's my name on the game, Mad As Kiwi); they were trying to work out what Madaz was, [laughs] and um, yeah, they go, ask him something and I didn't catch what they said and I was just like, ah, fuck, quit.

Interviewer: I don't know how my son does it, because they do it through the x-box…

Yeah, cos I log in there, I'm in a party of 5 with 2 people chatting ... What the fucks's going on?! … Tell your son, oh, saw a client today, he logged in. Didn't know what to do, logged back out again!! [Laughs] I landed on the ground and I didn't know what the fuck to do with that!

Being able to participant in ordinary interactions about aspects of everyday life, such as playing Fortnite, humanises John. In the above exchange he is not the recipient of charity, nor an ex-streetie, but rather the teller of an amusing anecdote. In the moment of re-telling his Fortnite adventure, John is no longer 'just' a research participant, but an active conversationalist, entertaining his audience. In the re-telling of a story, John moves us beyond the immediate present into both the past (logging into a game) and the future (tell your son), linking participant, interviewer and their respective lifeworlds.

For all his bluster and irascibility, John nevertheless continues to employ ways of seeking out human connection and interaction, exerting his agency by doing so in a manner congruent with his health needs.

Concluding remarks

Each of these cases highlight different aspects to homelessness, and the need for compassionate social services that provide dignity, humanity, and self-determination to people otherwise stripped of such treatment.

Buddy requires ongoing assistance to navigate the complexities of everyday life, especially social interactions. Allen needed a reason to leave street life, and practical help to furnish a home. Terry needed assistance with his health and a trusted advisor to talk to. Diane's confidence was eroded and she required encouraging support. Henry's addictions left him isolated, vulnerable, and alone. John was deeply depressed and socially isolated.

While all required various levels of practical support to navigate bureaucratic paperwork requirements and setting up a home, it was the compassionate and humanising treatment of The People's Project staff that left each of them feeling confident, valued, and worthy of a home to live in.

It was clear throughout that the government departments ostensibly set up to help people such as those described here have instead alienated them and made their lives more difficult than they need to be.

It is also clear that these are complex cases, requiring flexible and individualised support. A "one size fits all" approach is unhelpful. Rather, what is need is the ability to centre clients own aspirations and to meet their expressed needs as much as possible within provided limits. Additionally, being able to access ongoing support on an as-needed basis is a key part of enabling people like Buddy, Allen and Henry to remain housed.

In sum, these cases studies indicate that loneliness and social isolation, alongside poverty and lack of access to resources, are very real issues for people facing homelessness. The People's Project, through offering a non-judgemental space, personally detailed support, assistance with social service navigation, and humanising, kind interactions was able to meet their practical and social needs, leaving each housed as well as feeling cared for, supported, and more positive about their place in he world.