

# Rough Sleepers Survey



This summary was written in October 2020 and is based on a big report made by:

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## Why we did the survey

We need to involve people who have lived through homelessness as they are the ones who will be able to help us make the services we offer better. Hearing these voices means that we can see how rough sleeping can affect all areas of a person's life.

The survey this time was to help us understand how the COVID-19 pandemic changed rough sleepers' lives and health – of the body and the mind. We spoke to people who used services during lockdown and people who didn't want to use our services.

Thank you to Tracey Ford (Sheffield City Council DACT) for leading on this piece of work, the volunteers from the Hep C trust, Staff from START and officers who helped to make the survey a success.

## How we did the survey

We knew that filling in a survey online would not be the best way to go. A small group of volunteers went out into the community in pairs, and spoke to residents of the emergency accommodation (hotels and student accommodation). Sheffield City Council had been told to give accommodation to everyone who was rough sleeping, right at the beginning of lockdown.

We didn't give cash or vouchers to people who we talked to, we just had a conversation where people could open up about their experiences and we could really listen to them.

## How many surveys we did

We managed to do 28 full surveys, each took about half an hour. We also managed to speak to an extra 10 people found on early morning outreach, but for those people it was hard to fill in the survey where they were so we just chatted. Out of everyone we spoke to, 5 people agreed that we could share their stories. The stories are at the end of this paper.



We spoke to people at:



- Quality Hotel (Emergency Accommodation),
- Dalbury & Palmer Hotel (Emergency Accommodation),
- Egerton House (Student Accommodation)
- Victoria Court (Accommodation the council pays for),
- Salvation Army,
- Archer Project (Charity),
- On the street,
- The Greens (Recovery Accommodation),
- Outreach by a Police Community Support Officer.

As you can see from the graph above, we got a good mix of locations, although the tiny orange and pink slices of pie (Victoria Court and Egerton House) shows that we only got 1 survey done in each of those places.

# The good and bad parts of living in emergency accommodation

We opened up 4 places where over 100 rough sleepers could stay during lockdown.

For some people, being away from the city centre worked well and for others not so well.

COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation	
Pros	Cons
 <p>Being away from chaos and street culture</p>	 <p>Too many residents who cause problems</p>
 <p>Having my own space and it being nicely decorated</p>	 <p>Arguments or disagreements with other people in the accommodation</p>
 <p>Being treated like a resident by hotel staff and not a client (this was really important)</p>	 <p>Too far away from city centre services</p>
 <p>Having meals provided</p>	 <p>Lack of opportunities to beg or score drugs</p>
 <p>Treatment providers coming to us</p>	 <p>Someone said “what do they expect? Putting 35 people all in only one place”</p>
 <p>“Getting my leg dressed”</p>	

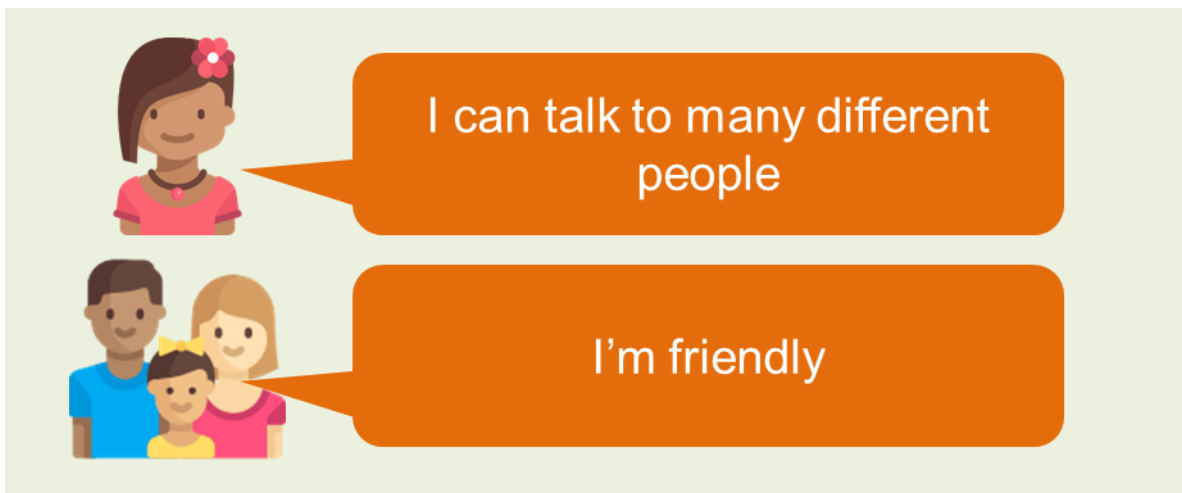
## This is what the people who answered our questions told us...

### How to make it easier to get our services?

When asked what could be done to help people access the services they use, the top three answers were to **open services in the evening**, **open them at the weekend** and to **send appointment reminders** so that people remember what they said they would do. Another important thing that people told us was that it was important for them to speak to someone who understands homelessness.

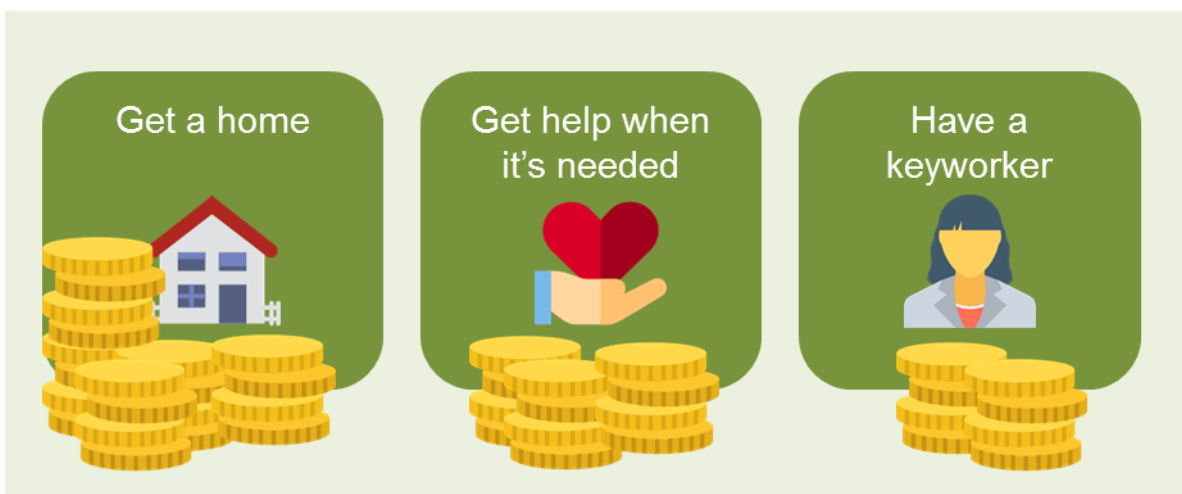
### What are your strengths?

We asked the people we surveyed what their strengths were. The top two were **communicative** – meaning being able to talk to different people, and **friendly**. These are important skills to have so this was good to hear.



### Where would you spend the most money?

Everything we do costs us money and we only have so much of it. We asked the 28 people to pretend they were in charge of our bank account. Where would they spend it?



The biggest amount went to **help people to get a home**, with **giving help when it's needed** and **having a keyworker** coming next. There were other answers too, like **helping people into work** and **helping people to get away from situations** that could trigger them.

## Themes from the survey

There were many things that were said by more than one person during our conversations. The more people talk about something, the more we need to listen and do something about it.



I need to get away from situations that draw me back to my old ways

It was good when workers and services came to me, so I didn't have to get to them. When I was in the hotel during COVID-19, it was good that I got food provided



I'm quite good at reading and writing but I need help with computers

I get bored and lonely sometimes



I struggle with my mental health, and it doesn't help when I can't find the right words to say to get what I really mean out.

I'm not so good at managing my money for bills



## What's next

The conversations we had with rough sleepers were turned into a big report which was discussed at some very high level meetings where managers from all over the city came.

We made some **recommendations** to the groups, which means we told them all about what the people surveyed said and then said "this is what you need to think about doing now".



**We will work together with all service providers in Sheffield to make things better for homeless people and rough sleepers.**

Some people we spoke to also said that they would like to help us put what they said into action. We will be contacting them and using them as experts. After all, they are the people who know the most as they have lived through homelessness.

That's the end of this report. The next pages are life stories of people who have lived through homelessness and rough sleeping. You don't need to read them to understand this report, but you may find them interesting or useful to you.

**We'd like to say thank you to everyone we spoke to, and thanks to the people who said we could write their life stories down.**



# Life stories

## Person 1

1 was living with 'Friends' who were also his carers. Whilst in their 'care' he experienced physical, emotional, and financial abuse. Under their care he was introduced to Spice. 1 managed to escape and found himself homeless on the streets. The dependency on Spice took a hold and struggled at first to accept that he'd allowed himself to get into the abusive situation especially as he'd been in the forces for the previous 20 years. 1 has no family and refers to his ex-forces colleagues as family, although many have now passed, he feels he has no 'True friends or friends he can trust.'

He is 49 but, in his words, 'has a body of a 69-year-old' he suffers from COPD, emphysema, has an old leg injury so is unable to get around without the aid of a walking stick.

1 suffers from high levels of anxiety and often struggles to control his emotions, which results in him lashing out verbally at those around him. When his anxiety is under control, he is better able to converse and open up about how he is feeling, but more importantly he is able to hear and take on board offers of support from housing and healthcare staff.

The temporary accommodation at Victoria Court has offered him some respite from street life which he describes as 'being full of people who would rob their own mother for fix'. He claims that 'on the streets there is no moral code, there is no trust' and that 'you are constantly living in fear or fight or flight mode'.

1, is grateful for the tenancy but struggles with isolation and loneliness and finds it hard surrounded by other residents who are still chaotic.

On 24th April, he started a Spice detox, this was the second attempt and despite all the challenges of COVID he has done incredibly well

1 is now engaging with

- Housing staff
- Nova project ex-force's charity
- START Treatment services - is in receipt of methadone script
- PSI (psychosocial interventions)
- A clinical Psychologist
- Prescribed Olanzapine and Chlordiazepoxide to help with anxiety and PTSD
- Devonshire Green medical centre

1 is looking forward to moving on. A new tenancy has been identified by mental Health, and the only thing at the moment preventing that is COVID, but he recognises that this is 'Just how it is at the moment'

1 loves Lego and during lock down he has received kind donations from members of the public via Help us Help and a donor via project NOVA. He has built a 6-foot mounted display depicting a complex war scene made out of the Lego that has been donated. he plans to donate the plan to the local children's when he is rehoused.

1 has had clothes and a washing machine donated, via project NOVA and claims 'It feels good not to be living in just tracksuits anymore'

1 is looking forward to being rehoused, he would love to start breeding budgies, getting involved in an allotment and he is also keen to help others, by offering Peer support and would love the opportunity to stay involved in a focus group.

## Person 2

2 had never slept rough on the streets because he would normally have a girlfriend to go a stay with, but when he was released from prison in January 2020 he had nowhere to stay. On release from prison, he was offered a place at The Greens, he was doing really well, he liked the project, especially because it was abstinence based. He particularly enjoyed the group work sessions and being able to talk to staff. However, four months in a new resident joined and brought with him a quantity of heroin and crack, 2 is still angry with himself for giving into temptation. His release resulted in him being evicted, but he says “the last thing I needed was kicking out, I needed more help, but it’s been like that all my life. Staff engage and work with me whilst in prison, or probation are there until my probation orders finished then they back off too.”

2 had been sleeping rough for four months and rarely engaged with services, apart from Fitzwilliam centre for his methadone script and the Archer project occasionally for showers. He credits by name a worker from Framework for helping him off the streets, “had it not been for [named Framework worker] I’d still be out on the streets.”

2 has been in care since he was 14 years old and did his first prison sentence at 15 and has spent the majority of his adulthood in and out of prison. He suffers from extreme anxiety and is on medication, he has no family apart from his mum and dad and a friend. He has never had a bank account; all his payments go into his mum’s. He is worried that his parents aren’t getting any younger and worries about them worrying about him. He has never had his own place or paid a utility bill saying, “I wouldn’t know where to start!”

2 learned to read and write in prison and considers himself good, but poor when it comes to money and budgeting. He has never really had to food shop before, “even the thought of going into Iceland brings me out in hives, I need someone who can hand hold me and help me do the normal things that other people take for granted.”

2 says he thrived in Channings Wood prison where he was part of their recovery community, where he would facilitate group work sessions and was responsible for mentoring new prisoners, he was gutted when he was moved to Cat D prison. 2 underwent Hep C treatment over 18 months ago and would love to become a Hep C mentor (He applied that day after talking to the project manager).

He had a really good relationship with his drugs worker, but then they left and since then hasn’t seen the same worker, “the last two were rookies, hardly out of uni and really didn’t know what they were talking about [...] I’ve been in this game a long time, I need someone who gets me, I can’t be arsed going over my history or my support needs with someone different every time.”

2 says when he was on the streets, he tended to keep himself to himself, and couldn’t understand why half the people on the streets begged, especially when they had somewhere to stay.

2 knows a lot of people off the streets, but describes himself as a bit of loner, preferring being around smaller groups because of his anxiety. 2 is currently waiting to be rehoused, a referral has been made to Connect 3, which he is pleased about but is also very anxious if he will have to share with others, especially if they are using.

2 is hopeful about the future, he has applied to become a Hep C mentor and would like to be involved in any other user involvement opportunities with SCC.



### Person 3

3 had been using legal highs, from the age of twelve he is now 25, now smokes Spice but tries to smoke it in moderation. He had been staying on mate's couches when he could, otherwise he would sleep on the streets.

Originally from the south of Sheffield he no longer goes back to estate he grew up on because his family have disowned him and refuse to talk to him. He accepts why his family has disowned him, he freely admits he was a handful, but it hurts knowing he cannot speak to him mum. He shared 'last time I spoke to her, I admit it I lied, I told her he was in rehab because that's the only way she would have spoken to me'.

3 would like some help with his mental health but is wary of services, he claims 'I've been fobbed off too many times' he has a cracked tooth and is in a lot of pain and he isn't registered with a GP, but still refuses to access treatment 'cos I don't trust them'.

3 is worried about his mental health, he feels like crying a lot, he was really grateful to Tracey and the Hep C mentors coming to the hotel to have a chat 'with no agenda'.

3 loves art and says he's really creative and would love to get into drawing and help with reading and writing. After the interview 3 had a conversation with one of the hep C mentors and agreed to get a Hep C test, he also agreed for us to get in touch in the future to get involved in some activities / support groups.

### Person 4

4 has been sleeping rough on and off for the past 8 years. Up until COVID, 4 had been sleeping rough in a crematory near Encliffe Park, he would come into city centre for appointments leaving his belongings at the university where staff would look after them, so they weren't stolen. He used to enjoy popping into Addaction breakfast club and take some Gregg sandwiches with him.

During COVID 4 detoxed off methadone himself and occasionally uses Spice but had had more of a problem with drinking, although he says he's not been as bad of late. He's engaging with his drugs worker, but needs help sorting out ID as it got stolen.

During our visit 4 received a test for Hep C, he also suffers from depression and anxiety and has been diagnosed with personality disorder but doesn't currently receive any treatment.

4 used to be a carpet fitter but lost his job because of his drug use and his workmanship was poor, he would like to get back into some type of employment, but first needs to sort out a place, his benefits and his mental health.

### Person 5

5 has been on a methadone script for over 10 years, she got into a relationship and was introduced to Spice, which became problematic. She was sentenced in Jan 2019 and released March 2020, whilst in prison she completed Maths, English and got a certificate in commercial cleaning.

Upon release she was staying in a Nacro property whilst on tag but left because it was infested with mice. She was hospitalized and diagnosed with an infection after being bitten by a mouse.

5 has a long history of street working and has a good relationship with staff at SWOP and sang their praises for supporting her after being released from prison. She would like to have something to do, some activities or to volunteer helping others like herself.

5 agreed to Hep C test and also agreed to give contact details to stay in touch about any future user involvement activities.