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# Crisis Skylight

## Pathways to progression

### Second interim report

Joanne Bretherton and Nicholas Pleace

January 2016

University of York

Crisis

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## Acknowledgements

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## Disclaimer

The research reported here is entirely the work of the authors. Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of Crisis or the University of York.

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# Foreword

Through decades of experience, Crisis understands that helping people out of homelessness cannot be rushed, or forced. They want to learn, work and progress, but often face barriers that others might not – long-term unemployment, isolation from society, an entrenched lack of confidence or mental or physical health problems. Comprehensive support is needed to help our members* move towards independence, and away from homelessness.

Crisis' year-round services are designed to not only help people through housing support, learning and skill development, but to build confidence and social skills in a reassuring and inspirational environment – taking into account the individual needs and experiences of our members*.

While we have long believed that we transform the lives of the people we help, we are committed to demonstrating the impact of our work. We have commissioned this three-year longitudinal evaluation – one of Crisis' most important investments in our knowledge and probably unprecedented in the industry – to look at the impact of the whole service, not just elements of the Skylight model.

We know that when the project concludes in 2016, while the final report will review the successes of the previous three years, it won't provide all the answers. What it will do is provide the strongest evidence base yet in the UK on the value of support designed specifically to transform the economic and social position of homeless people.

For us impact is everything, and these interim results not only enable us to maximise the positive impact we have on the people we help through addressing the areas which need improvement, but also provide robust evidence which demonstrates that Crisis truly makes a difference.

**Jon Sparkes**
Chief Executive, Crisis

*A member is anyone who uses Crisis' year-round services.

# Summary


- Crisis Skylight is a service for single homeless people that focuses on promoting health and well-being, housing stability, social support and employment. One-to-one support in Skylight focuses on a process of *progression*, designed to positively transform the social and economic position of single homeless people. Skylight also offers arts-based activities, basic skills education, training, volunteering, support with health and well-being, support in seeking work and assistance in finding and sustaining housing.

- This report is the second interim report of a three-year, mixed-method, evaluation of the Skylight programme by the University of York. The evaluation covers three building-based Skylight services in London, Newcastle and Oxford and three outreach-based services in Birmingham, Edinburgh and Merseyside.

- This report focuses entirely on the initial results from large-scale qualitative cohort study which is one part of the mixed-method Crisis Skylight programme evaluation. The cohort study looks at the ways in which Skylight could bring positive changes in single homeless people's lives, also exploring the barriers that some single homeless people could face. A total of 158 Skylight members had participated in interviews during 2013, 2014 and spring 2015. A fourth and final round of interviews is scheduled for the autumn 2015.

- Self-reported support needs among the cohort were high. When interviewed, 53% of cohort members reported a history of mental health problems and 31% a history of drug and alcohol problems. 37% reported a limiting illness or disability.

- Work experience was limited among the cohort members and they often had low levels of educational attainment. When interviewed, all reported they were unemployed at first contact with Skylight and 41% said that their formal education had been incomplete.

- Skylight seeks to deliver progression to a transformed life in which health, well-being, social supports and housing situation are improved and someone is either in paid work, or actively moving towards paid work. Among the cohort members, three sets of pathways to progression were identified, which can be described as *regaining progress*, *moving forward for the first time* and *punctuated progression*. Case studies are presented in chapter three of this report.

- Skylight members in the cohort who had *regained progress* were people who had lost work, or experienced disruption to further or higher education, as a result of homelessness. In these cases, Skylight had enabled people to resume their former path, returning them to paid work and or to further or higher education.

- The Skylight members in the cohort who were *moving forward for the first time* had made only limited progress in relation to education, training or securing paid work prior to their contact with Skylight. For this group of cohort members, Skylight had brought them into education, training, volunteering and paid work for the first time, in some cases after sustained or recurrent experiences of single homelessness.

- The final pathway to progression found among the cohort members was *punctuated progress*. These members reported in their interviews that they had

made progress and in some cases had reached the point of getting paid work, entering volunteering, or further and higher education. However, a problem had arisen, such as work only being short-term or the recurrence of an issue such as a mental health problem, which had meant that their progress had been stalled or partially reversed. This group had returned to Skylight seeking help to resume their former progress.

- Skylight was only rarely criticised by people in the cohort. However, progression towards social integration could encounter multiple barriers, including external factors that it was difficult for Skylight to help some homeless people overcome. Local labour market conditions, for example, could mean that Skylight members to struggled to find full-time work that would enable them to afford their rent and meet living costs, without relying on welfare benefits.

- Skylight members in the cohort reported improvements in mental health and, when specialist support was provided by a Skylight, better access to treatment for mental health problems. Working with Skylight was widely reported by members of the cohort as enhancing their self-esteem and contributing to their social supports, both of which have potential benefits for mental and physical health.

- Some members reported they had been helped in finding housing and dealing with housing problems by Skylights. Support provided with housing by the Skylights was generally viewed positively by cohort members. However, there could be issues with the quality of some of the housing available in the private rented sector, which it was difficult for Skylights to always overcome.

- In interviews, a majority of cohort members reported that they had progressed towards paid work and also a better quality of life as a direct result of their contact with Skylight. Twenty-two per cent reported securing paid work as a result of working with Skylight and 13% had moved into further education, training or higher education. Overall, 88% of the cohort members reported having made at least some progress in their lives, directly resulting from working with Skylights.

- There is evidence from this research that Skylight has the potential to outperform other existing initiatives to bring single homeless people back into paid work, such as the Work Programme. In interviews, cohort members compared Skylight very positively with the other services they had used, with the skill and understanding of Skylight staff and the quality of services being frequently praised.

- Successes were achieved by both the building-based and outreach-based Skylights with members of the cohort. When interviewed, cohort members were most positive about the outreach-based services, but Skylight was generally praised.

- Skylight clearly delivers progression towards better health, social supports, self-esteem, education, training, volunteering, productive arts-based activities and to paid work for single homeless people. The cohort members often faced multiple barriers to paid work, education, training and volunteering. Almost all reported they had made progress as a direct result of engaging with Skylight.

- Skylight faces challenges. Based on the interviews with the cohort members, some people will experience punctuated forms of progression, with backwards as well as forward steps, creating a need for ongoing support on at least an intermittent

basis for some members. Equally, while Skylight can evidently help overcome the specific barriers to progression presented by homelessness and the consequences of homelessness, someone using Skylight successfully may still be in a situation of relative disadvantage in the labour market. The availability, quality, pay and security of paid work are all issues. Meeting housing and living costs while in paid work can be challenging, again potentially leading to Skylight members requiring some ongoing support.

- Skylight is clearly a success and is viewed very positively by the people who use it. It is also the case that Skylight, both as a programme and in terms of the individual services, has few weaknesses. Everything provided by the Skylights was valued and seen as having tangible benefits by almost all the people who participated in the cohort. It is important that the comprehensiveness and flexibility of Skylight as a programme, centring on recognising and adapting to individual needs using varied packages of arts-based activity, education and one-to-one support, is maintained.

# 1 Skylight and the evaluation

## Crisis Skylight

Skylight began operation in London in 2002 and currently operates in Birmingham, Coventry and Warwickshire, Edinburgh, London, Merseyside, Newcastle, Oxford and South Yorkshire.[1] The six Skylights covered by this evaluation are Birmingham, Edinburgh, London, Merseyside, Newcastle and Oxford. These Skylight services exist in two broad forms:[2]

- Building-based Skylight, which uses a dedicated building to deliver services, operating in London, Newcastle and Oxford. These services also each have an on-site social enterprise, the Café from Crisis, which provides training and work experience.

- Outreach-based Skylight, providing mobile services to homeless people in congregate supported housing, hostels, daycentres and other venues (Birmingham, Edinburgh and Merseyside).

Skylight is designed to counteract the poor social integration associated with homelessness. Skylight operates within a conceptual framework developed by Crisis, called the Crisis model of change, and seeks to deliver:

- Good health and well-being

- Achievement of housing stability

- Good relationships and social networks

- Employment and financial stability

Skylight is intended to counter the negative effects of single homelessness, including those beyond the immediately negative effects of a lacking of settled home.[3] The work of Skylights, centred on what is termed *progression*, seeks to improve physical and mental health, help promote housing stability, improve social integration and reduce worklessness. Preventing and reducing homelessness, particularly long-term or recurrent, homelessness, which are likely to cause most damage to individuals,[4] is at the core of what Skylight is intended to achieve.

Skylight targets homeless people, people at risk of homelessness within the next three to six months and those with a history of homelessness in the last two years.[5] People who use Crisis Skylight services are referred to as *members* of Skylight and this terminology is used in this report.

The key features of Skylight as a service model, working within the Crisis model of change, are:

- *Flexibility in response,* with an emphasis on listening to and respecting the opinions of Skylight members in terms of the routes to progression that they wish to take.

- A *respectful, non-judgemental, positive approach* to working with homeless people, emphasising their strengths and capacity, rather than focusing on limitations.

1 http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/what-we-do-crisis-skylight-centres-61897.html
2 For a detailed description of these services see: Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) *Crisis Skylight: An Evaluation, Year 1 Interim Report.* London: Crisis. A range of reports on individual Skylight services is also available at www.crisis.org.uk/
3 Jones, A. and Pleace, N. (2010) *A Review of Single Homelessness in the UK 2000 - 2010.* London: Crisis; Busch-Geertsema, V.; Edgar, W.; O'Sullivan, E. and Pleace, N. (2010) *Homelessness and Homeless Policies in Europe: Lessons from Research*. Brussels: European Commission; Dwyer P., Bowpitt, G., Sundin, E. and Weinstein, M. (2014) 'Rights, responsibilities and refusals: homelessness policy and the exclusion of single homeless people with complex needs', *Critical Social Policy* doi: 10.1177/0261018314546311
4 Pleace, N. (2015) *At What Cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK.* London: Crisis.
5 These are the current criteria, risk of homelessness and history of homelessness were not defined using time limits prior to January 2015. Cohort members were recruited prior to January 2015. These criteria are guidelines.

- *Positive encouragement without coercion*, Skylight is not a passive service, it seeks to enable and support single homeless people towards a situation of greater social integration, improving their health, well-being and life-chances.

Skylight seeks to *actively encourage* positive change in the lives of single homeless people, within a framework that respects and responds to the opinions and choices of those people who become members of Skylight. Skylight is flexible in two senses:

- Engagement can happen at multiple levels and in multiple ways. Someone who has sustained experience of single homelessness and high support needs may find it challenging – and actually impractical – to immediately start seeking work, they may also be remote from the experience of learning and training. Skylight can respond by offering arts-based activities that build self-confidence and esteem and get someone used to working in groups with others, which may in turn facilitate engagement with basic skills education, training and eventually job-seeking. If another homeless person, who is effectively work-ready, seeks help, then Skylight can respond by immediately providing support with job-searching and employability services.

- Multiple trajectories in progression can be supported in flexible ways. If someone can make a living from the arts, Skylight can and does support that form of progression. While examples are not numerous, full or part-time self-employment in the arts has resulted from contact with a Skylight, ranging from millinery and music through to appearing as an extra in a Hollywood film. The emphasis on understanding and responding flexibly to members' choices is central to Skylight. Someone can be supported to become a musician, actor, to sell their own textiles, or to be plumber, HGV driver, fork-lift truck driver, or work in catering.[6]

Skylight is best described as a suite of services working within a shared framework.[7] The services offered include:

- Participation and tutoring in creative and performing arts
- Education
- Training
- One to one support with progression
- Support with job-seeking
- Support with housing
- Support with health and well-being

Skylight services can be summarised as follows:[8]

- Arts-based activities; including both the creative and performing arts. Art is used to build self-confidence and esteem, to promote emotional literacy and to help those unused to working with others in a (relatively) structured environment. Alongside being an end in itself, arts-based activity is intended to enable engagement with education, training and job-seeking for those single homeless people lacking self-confidence and familiarity with working with others.

- Basic skills education; centring on English, Maths and Computer skills. All of which are accredited.

6 Examples of work secured by Skylight members, drawn from the cohort study which is described below.
7 For detailed descriptions of individual Skylight services see the detailed evaluation reports on Oxford, London, Birmingham and Newcastle at www.crisis.org.uk/ and the first interim report Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit. also available at the Crisis website.
8 There is some variation between individual Skylight services.

- Training qualifications; which in the case of London, Newcastle and Oxford can include work experience and training in the social enterprise Cafés from Crisis which share their buildings. Merseyside has also been able to offer training qualifications for building and decorating. Skylights also offer CSCS[9] cards, ECDL[10] and CLAiT[11] qualifications.

- Workshops, training and one-to-one support with job-seeking and all aspects of applying for jobs. This includes mock interviews, help with CV preparation and assistance with transport costs or ensuring someone has presentable clothing for an interview.

- One-to-one support with progression. Essentially this involves working collaboratively with Skylight members to help them pursue the activities, education, training and employment that they want to secure.

- Help with mental health issues is provided through specialist services in Birmingham, London, Oxford and Newcastle.[12] There is a plan to expand these services, while the one-to-one support designed for progression can also provide some practical and emotional support.

- One-to-one help with housing is provided through specialist staff, known as housing coaches, and by staff delivering support with progression. This can include help accessing the private and social rented sectors, support in dealing with local authority housing options teams and help with housing problems, including threatened eviction.

- Facilitating access to externally provided education and training and to further and higher education, which is arranged through one-to-one support with progression and employment.

- Support with well-being and life skills, which can include yoga, sport, trips, wellness groups, cookery classes and training in living independently in one's own home through 'renting-ready' programmes.

- Support with volunteering, both within Skylight and with pursuing external opportunities, which can potentially help with seeking employment and with self-esteem.

- The provision of grant funding for Skylight members, the *Changing Lives* grant can be used to fund external training or further education, or to buy equipment, or necessary supplies, for becoming self-employed.

## About the research

The University of York evaluation has a formative role, meaning that results are fed back to Crisis on an ongoing basis and through both the interim reports and a series of reports on individual Skylight services. Since 2013, the evaluation has made a number of recommendations that have been reflected in the subsequent development of Skylight services. Some of these recommendations inevitably, also, reflected Crisis's own management information and from the Skylights, meaning that the University of York evaluation provided external confirmation of changes in practice that were already being explored.

9 Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) see: http://www.cscs.uk.com/
10 European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) see: http://www.ecdl.com/
11 Computer Literacy and Information Technology qualifications see: https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/courses/typesoflearning/Pages/computerskills.aspx
12 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2013) *A Review of Crisis Skylight's Mental Health Services.* London: Crisis.

The changes in Skylight practice during 2013-2015, reflecting the earlier results of the evaluation, include:

- Greater recognition of the central role that unmet housing need could play in influencing the other key goals of Skylight, i.e. social integration, paid work and improvements to health and well-being. This led to an increased emphasis on supporting the housing needs of Skylight members, including more dedicated 'housing coaches' on Skylight staff teams and new life-skills courses, teaching members how to access and live independently in the private rented sector ("renting ready"). Expansion of housing focused support is ongoing at the time of writing.

- Exploring the possibilities of hybrid Skylight services that combine the successful elements of the outreach and building-based model. In Birmingham, the outreach based model was adapted to include a fixed-site classrooms/activity room and in Merseyside, which is also an outreach based Skylight, new office space to include private rooms for one-to-one and an activity room were secured. London and Newcastle, both building-based, were also considering experiments with outreach services.

The 2014 interim report[13] reviewed management information from Crisis and reported results from interviews and focus groups with external agencies, Skylight staff and volunteers and members of Skylight. The first round of qualitative interviews with a cohort of members, who were to be tracked over the course of three years and interviewed up to four times, were also reported.

This second report focuses solely and exclusively on the results from the cohort of Skylight members. The report looks at the results of the first three sets of qualitative interviews conducted in 2013, 2014 and spring 2015.

The cohort was designed to ensure good representation of the single homeless people and single people threatened with homeless or with a history of homelessness, who were using Skylight. Recruitment was focused on people who were actively engaged in Skylight, having at least one term (10 week period) of service use. The cohort was designed to reflect and understand the experience of actually using Skylight and to ensure strong representation of women and people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The cohort study was designed to look at the role of Skylight in pursuing each aspect of the Crisis model of change, i.e. good health and well-being, housing stability, good relationships and social networks and employment and financial security over three years.

A longitudinal qualitative cohort was employed to allow detailed analysis of the stories of individuals' contacts with the Skylights. This methodology was used for the following reasons:

- As individuals could potentially engage as members of Skylight at multiple levels and in multiple ways, capturing the nuance and complexity of how members were using Skylight was important in determining exactly how Skylight worked and the factors influencing the outcomes being achieved.

- The positive gains in housing stability, health and well-being, employment and

13 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.

financial security and social support could be measured more completely through qualitative interviews. Importantly, the cumulative effect of Skylight on well-being, life chances and circumstances could also be assessed. Crucially, this approach allowed for the *detailed* study of how contact with Skylight had made members feel about themselves, their health, esteem and life goals, over time.

When the cohort was being assembled, with extensive support from all six Skylights, it was found that most people in regular contact with Skylights had been using the services for several months. Only a few members had been in contact for only one term. While newer, engaged, members participated in the cohort, the bulk of the those who joined were people with a history of using Skylight extending *beyond* one term. The cohort was therefore largely composed of *established* members of Skylight who had typically been engaged for at least several months. One-hundred and thirty-five members were recruited for the cohort at the first round:

- 67% reported using Skylight for between several months and one year
- 18% reported using Skylight for 1-2 years
- 13% reported using Skylight for 2 years or more

Ethical approval for the research allowed consent for collecting those experiences and opinions that Skylight members in the cohort chose to share, providing their consent to be interviewed was free and informed. Consent did not extend to reviewing the records held on them in Crisis' management information systems (which would in effect reading Skylight's files on each individual, potentially containing sensitive information that they might not wish to share). This meant that precise data on the point of first contact, i.e. the actual dates, were not available as cohort members could not always remember exactly when they had started using a Skylight.[14]

There were also differences in the operational life of the six Skylight services. London started in 2002 and Newcastle in 2006, while Birmingham had begun operations in 2010, Oxford and Merseyside in 2011 and Edinburgh becoming fully operational in early 2013.[15] This meant that the potential for sustained engagement by members was obviously greater for some Skylight services than others.

There was the possibility of setting an upper limit on duration of contact when assembling the cohort, but in practice this was not desirable for two reasons. First, assembling a large cohort would not be possible if participation were confined only to members with up to three or six months engagement, let alone just one term. Second, members with more sustained engagement with Skylight could be among those who had benefitted most from Skylight, or needed the most support, and it was important not to exclude them (see chapters three and four).

The cohort, rather than being a study of the effects of Skylight participation on new members over time, became instead a large scale longitudinal qualitative examination of members who had generally been engaged for at least several months. This meant that each stage of the cohort, including the first set of interviews, involved collecting detailed qualitative data from members who had generally been in receipt of Skylight services for at least several months.

**14** Management information might also not be an exact guide, for example the interviews showed that first contact did not always result in immediate engagement, which might only begin weeks or even months later.
**15** Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.

In practice, the first interviews were sometimes retrospective, reviewing a process of engagement with Skylight that had already resulted in successful progression, such as engagement with further education, training or paid work. Some reliance on retrospective data about the difference Skylight had already made to someone's life was not ideal, but in most cases members were able to recall the extent to which Skylight had transformed their lives with a good deal of detail. For most of the cohort, at interview one, the process of progression was still ongoing.

The cohort had been designed to replace people lost between stage one (2013) and stage two (2014), again focusing on members who had been engaged for at least one term. Between stages one and two, 49 people were no longer able to participate, or chose not to do so, and 23 new participants were recruited. Of the 23 members recruited at stage two, 19 (83%) reported being engaged for several months/up to one year and four (14%) for one year or more, again there were only very few members who had been engaged for less than six months.

In summary:

- The members taking part in the cohort were mainly composed of *well-established* users of Skylight with at least *several months* of Skylight service use at the point of their first interview.

- Almost every participant, at every stage of the cohort fieldwork, was an established user of Skylight with experiences and views on Skylight services.

- Some members reported that Skylight had already enabled them to progress to further education, training, employment and volunteering and had experienced improvements in their health, well-being and housing situations at interview one. For most progression was still ongoing at interview one.

- Among all the participants in the cohort (69% overall) reported being engaged for up to one year at the point of their first interviews. Seventeen per cent of members reported being engaged with Skylight for 1-2 years at the point of their first interview and 13% for more than two years.

Of the 135 members recruited at stage one of the cohort, 86 took part in a second interview (64%) and 67 in a third interview (49%). Twenty-three new cohort members were recruited at stage two, undertaking their first interview and, of this group, 19 completed what was their second interview at stage three of the fieldwork (83%). In total:

- **One-hundred and fifty-eight** members of Skylight, almost all of whom reported being engaged with Skylight for at least several months at their first interview, took part in at least one cohort interview.

- **Three-hundred and thirty-one** cohort interviews were conducted between 2013 and the Spring of 2015, over the course of three stages of fieldwork.

- Overall, **68 cohort members** had been interviewed **three times** between 2013-2015, a further **37** had been **interviewed twice** and **53** had been **interviewed once**. Of the original cohort of 135 people, 50% had been interviewed three times and 13% twice (63% had at least two interviews). Among the 23 replacement participants recruited for their first interview at stage two, 19 (83%) had their second interview at stage three of the fieldwork. Table 1.1 summarises the total number of interviews by individual Skylight.

The researchers used the 'permission to locate' method developed at the University of York.[16] In this approach, researchers collect contact information from each participant,

16 https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2009/The%20Glasgow%20Hostel%20Closure.pdf

**Table 1.1 Cohort interviews by Skylight, 2013-2015**

| Skylight location | Interview one, 2013 | Interview two, 2014 | Interview three, 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Newcastle | 31 | 21 | 18 |
| Edinburgh | 11 | 9 | 6 |
| Birmingham | 18 | 16 | 12 |
| Merseyside | 16 | 11 | 9 |
| Oxford | 19 | 13 | 9 |
| London | 40 | 39 | 33 |
| Total | 135 | 109 | 87 |

Source: University of York research records.

including mobile phone numbers, current address and any social media contact details or email addresses. In addition, with the free and informed consent of each participant, additional permission is secured to contact the services they use and any friends or relatives who are likely to know where they are. Thus for each Skylight member participating in the cohort, several potential points of contact were available. This was combined with an upward rolling thank-you payment (starting at £10 and rising by £5 each time to finish at £25 for the fourth and final interview) and a prize draw (participation in the cohort gave a chance to win £50 or £100) were also employed to encourage participation. Alongside the efforts of the researchers, enormous support was provided by each of the six Skylights in helping to find and contact people at each stage of the research.

The initial interview reviewed each person's route into homelessness, experiences of homelessness, support needs, educational attainment, work experience and goals in life. Alongside this, the range of Skylight services they were using and their views on those services, were explored in-depth. The subsequent two interviews reviewed their progress, using the Skylight model of change as a framework, looking in detail at:

- Progress towards good health and well-being (including mental health)
- Achievement of housing stability
- Progress towards good relationships and social networks
- Progress towards employment and financial security
- The cumulative effect of their engagement with Skylight
- Any other benefits reported from engaging with Skylight

This report presents some of the findings from the cohort study statistically. The data used in this report are representative of the cohort, but *not* necessarily of Skylight members as a whole. The data are derived entirely from the results of the face-to-face and telephone interviews conducted with the cohort members. There is no use of administrative data collected by Crisis in this report.

The next chapter describes the characteristics of the cohort. Chapter three draws on the rich qualitative data from the cohort to describe their experiences

with progression with Skylight, illustrating the kinds of pathways Skylight members could take with individual stories and also looks at where and how problems could arise with progression. Chapter four looks at overall outcomes for the cohort, exploring positive changes in mental health, housing, relationships, social integration, the cumulative benefits of Skylight on well-being and gains in employment, education and training. The final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations.

# 2 Needs and characteristics

## Introduction

This chapter describes the characteristics of the cohort of Skylight members. The chapter begins with demographic information, drawn from the interviews, which is summarised statistically. The chapter then describes the experiences of homelessness among cohort members, their educational attainment and work history at first contact with Skylight and the support needs that they described to the researchers.

## About the cohort

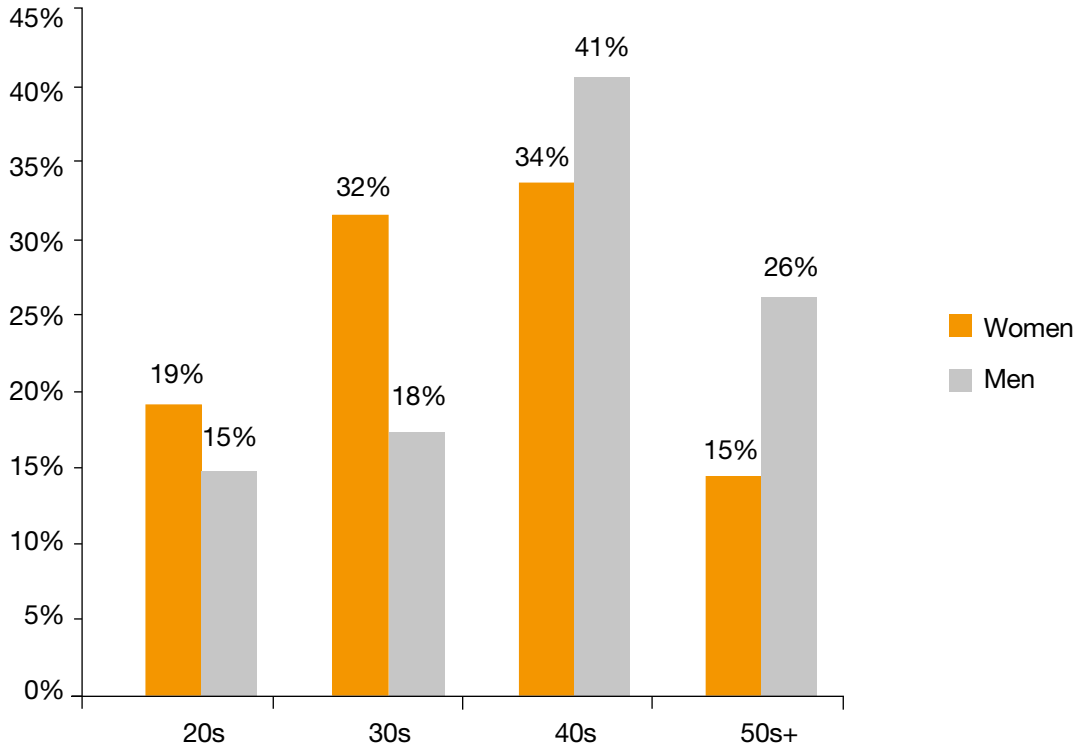
The research was designed to track a group of Skylight members over a three year period, beginning in 2013 and concluding in late 2015 (see chapter 1). Three sets of cohort interviews had been completed by Autumn 2015. The interviews took place in the Summer of 2013 and 2014 and the Spring of 2015. The fourth and final round is scheduled to take place towards the end of 2015.

## Demographics

### Age and gender

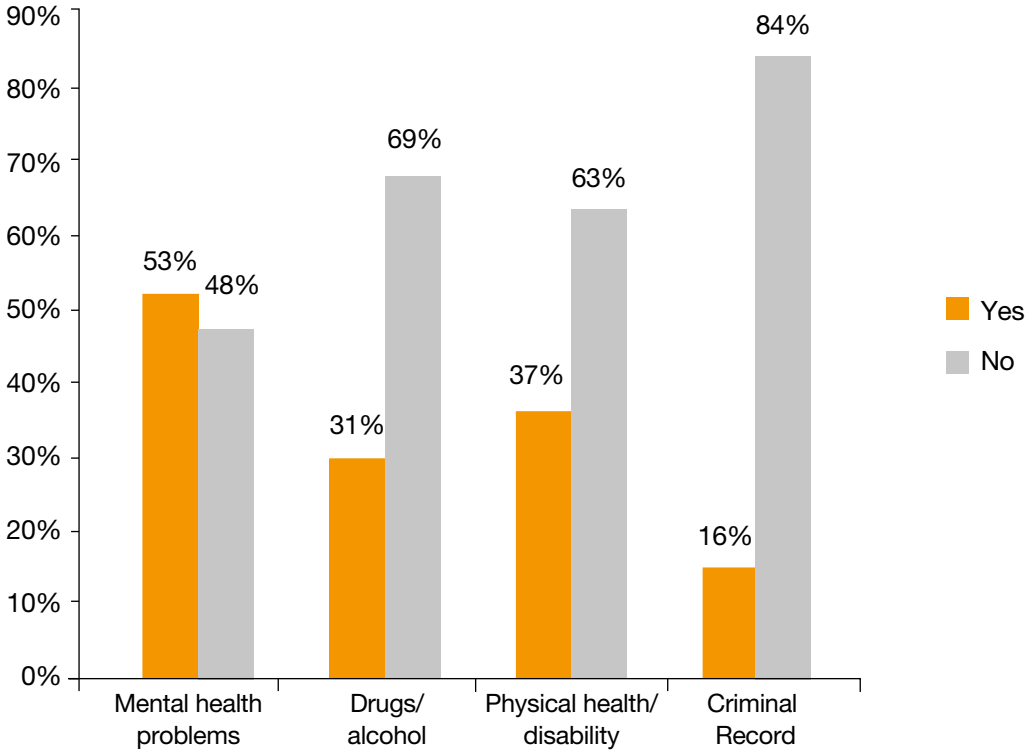
Graphic 2.1 summarises basic demographic information as recorded at the first interview. Women represented just under 30% of the cohort participants and men just over 70%. As graphic 2.1 shows, women were slightly younger than men, although the largest groups for both genders were in their 40s.

**Graphic 2.1: Age and gender of cohort participants (percentage)**




Base: 158 (47 women and 111 men). Source: University of York interviews with cohort members.

**Graphic 2.2: Characteristics of cohort participants**




Base: 158. Source: University of York interviews with cohort members.

Ethnicity among the members who participated in the cohort was skewed by the location of the Skylight. In Edinburgh, Newcastle, Oxford and Merseyside, over 85% of members in the cohort were White British. This fell to 64% in Birmingham and 37% in London, reflecting the much greater ethnic diversity of those two cities. A small number of homeless migrants were part of the cohort, they were divided into two smaller groups, one of homeless asylum seekers and refugees and one of homeless migrants from other EU members states.

## Support needs

Members participating in the cohort were asked if they had a history of mental health problems and if they had a current problem. This was not an exact measure of rates of mental health problems, or severe mental illness, as it was based on the member's own perceptions and whether or not they chose to share information about any mental health problems.

Overall, 53% of cohort members reported current or previous mental health problems in their interviews. A higher rate was reported among women (64%) than among men (48%). Women are generally more likely to both report and to be diagnosed with mental health problems, although the actual extent of variation in morbidity of mental health

problems between genders is the subject of ongoing debate.[17] Drug and alcohol problems were reported by more men (38%) than women (15%), which again reflects trends across the wider population.[18] Overall, 20% of cohort members reported comorbidity of mental health problems and problematic drug/alcohol use at their first interview.

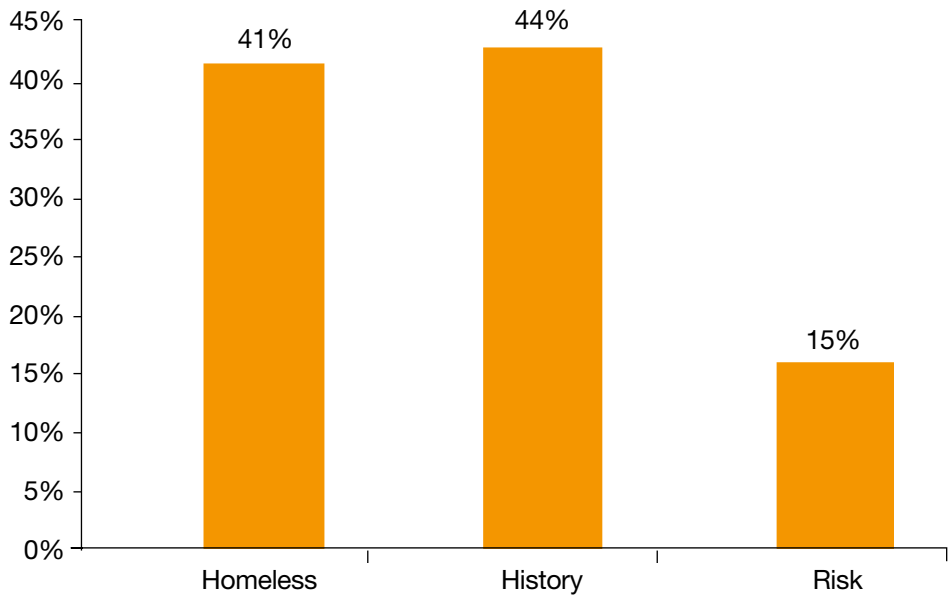
Poor health, limiting illness and disability were also self-reported at high rates by the members participating in the cohort. Again, this was not a clinical measure, being based on participants perceptions of their own well-being and whether they were willing to share information on the subject. Overall, 45% of women and 33% of men reported limiting illness, disability or poor health when interviewed (graphic 2.2).

A criminal record can also be a significant barrier to paid work, as employers can be unwilling to take on someone with a criminal record. Ex-offenders with high support needs can also experience homelessness at high rates.[19] Overall, 19% of men and 9% of women reported a criminal record (16% across both genders) during interview (graphic 2.2).

## Homelessness at first contact with Skylight

The criteria for accessing Skylights changed in January 2015. While functioning as guidelines, rather than absolute rules, someone generally has to have been homeless in the last two years, at risk

**Graphic 2.3: Homelessness at first contact with Skylight reported by cohort participants**




Base: 158. Source: University of York interviews with cohort members.

17 Kohen, D. (Ed) (2010) *Oxford Textbook of Women and Mental Health.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
18 Health and Social Care Information Centre (2014) *Statistics on Drug Misuse England 2014.* London: HSCIS.
19 Pleace, N. and Minton, J. (2009) *Delivering better housing and employment outcomes for offenders on probation.* London: DWP; Quilgars, D. et al. (2012) *Supporting short-term prisoners leaving HMP Leeds: Evaluation of the Shelter Prisoners Advocacy Release Team.* York: University of York/Shelter.

of homelessness within 3-6 months, or currently homeless to access Skylight. The cohort, recruited in 2013 and 2014, could theoretically have accessed a Skylight if their risk of homelessness was less immediate and have last been homeless more than two years ago. Graphic 2.3 summarises homelessness experiences, reported in interviews, among members who participated in the cohort.

The largest single group of members participating in the cohort study reported they had a history of homelessness at first contact with Skylight (44%), which in most cases was recent (with a year or less). A similar proportion reported being homeless at their first point of contact with a Skylight (41%), with a smaller number reporting they had been at risk of homelessness at their first contact with Skylight (15%). Some cohort members had sustained or repeated experience of homelessness.

> *I'm still homeless. Living with friends so far, sofa surfing and so on. Yeah, it's been going on a while.* Cohort member, interview two.

> *Three instances of homelessness where I had to go to a hostel and a few other instances where I had to go couch surfing.* Cohort member, interview one .

> *I've got my own place, but the problem is it's financial. I'm having major problems with benefits. I'm having major issues with the council. And again, it's the Crisis* [Skylight] *team who've kept me on an even keel, to be honest. With the mental health and with the educational challenge, I've been getting really good, positive support back from them.* Cohort member, interview one.

## Employment and education at first contact with Skylight

Employment at first contact with a Skylight was reported by the cohort members as zero, none had been working when they first started using a Skylight. Work experience was unusual, but not unknown, with a small number of cohort members reporting experience in the following fields:

- Plumber
- Electrician
- Security (venues, events)
- Warehousing
- Caretaking
- Retail

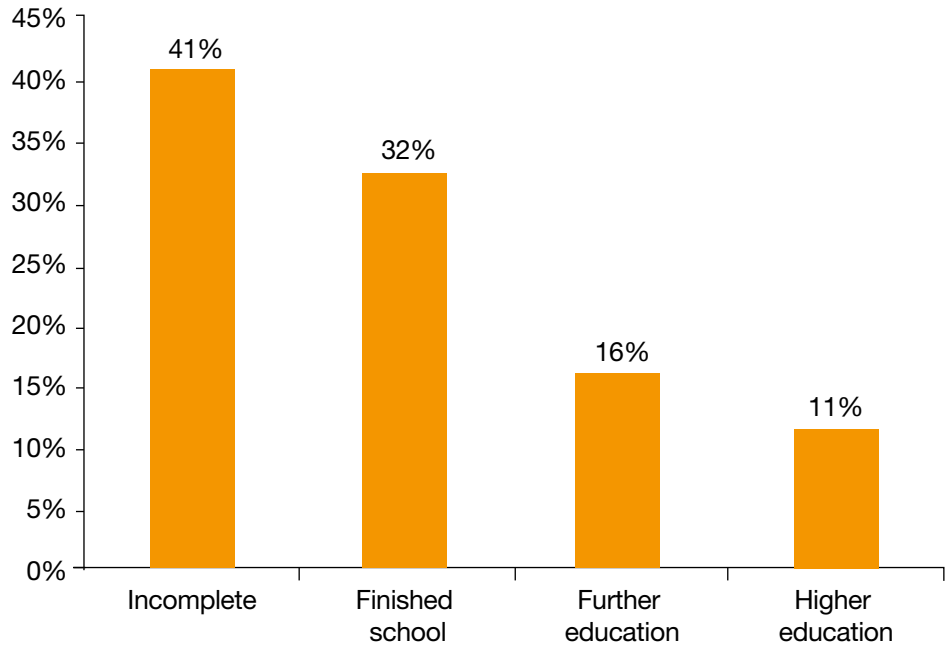
For a small number of people traumatic experiences, such as severe mental illness and, in a few cases, having to leave their original home country, had disrupted already significant socioeconomic progress, including:

- Taking a undergraduate degree.
- Working in a salaried role, such as an ICT professional, office administration.
- Owning a business, including bars and shops.

However, most the cohort members reported they had never been in work or that their experience of work was restricted and sometimes long ago. For many paid work had been, at most, an occasional experience, or something that they had not been involved in for some time.

Educational attainment at first contact with a Skylight was varied. Many members within the cohort reported that they had not completed

**Graphic 2.4: Reported educational attainment among cohort participants at first contact with a Skylight**




Base: 158. Source: University of York interviews with cohort members.

school, but there were also some people with experience of higher education. There was no variation by age. However, women in the cohort were less likely than men to report that they had not completed school (28% compared to 46% of men) at their first interview. Women were also much more likely than men to have entered higher education (23% compared to 6%), but there was only a small difference in respect of further education[20] (13% compared to 17% of men).

Reported drug and alcohol use were slightly more common among those reporting their schooling was incomplete at 44%, compared to 31% of all cohort participants. Drug and alcohol use were less common among those with experience of higher education (17%).

20 Defined as including professional or trade qualifications, e.g. being a trained chef or HGV driver.

# 3 Pathways to progression

## Introduction

The experience of progression with Skylight was varied for the cohort members. Among those who had progressed, several pathways existed that can be described as *regaining progress*, *moving forward for the first time* and *punctuated progression.* The problems that some members encountered with progression are described at the end of this chapter.

## Regaining progress

Some members could be characterised as having being knocked out of *normal* experience by homelessness. This was a group of people who had been in work, had a career or been in further or higher education prior to homelessness. Their experience of progression with Skylight was centred on returning to their former situation or *regaining progress.*

This group would often engage immediately with one-to-one support with progression and employment and also seek training qualifications. They were less likely to involve themselves in the arts-based activities provided by the Skylights.

> *You understand what I mean by tickets, don't you? Like these cards that denote your qualifications and stuff like that...I'd been away I hadn't renewed it; it expired so Crisis paid for me to get a new one. It was about £750; it was a big chunk of money and I got the street works back. My street works is essential for me to go back to my old employer so that's just one of the ways they helped me.* Cohort member, interview three.

> *Oh, definitely because when I first started, before I got qualified for my* [] *post now, it was Crisis that helped me to get my* [] *and everything all sorted for the uni and everything else, yeah. So they've been very helpful.* Cohort member, interview two.

### Regaining progress, case study 1: "Edward"[21]

Edward had been in a hostel for homeless people for over a year when he began to engage with one of the three outreach-based Skylight services.[22] Edward was in his thirties, he did not have a history of drug or alcohol use, nor any history of mental health problems. He had been working prior to his homelessness, but had lost his job and housing as a result of offending.

Edward's two priorities were to secure housing and work for himself. To this end he had been trying to move out of the hostel and also to gain a qualification that would help him re-join the labour market. His initial contact with Skylight involved his asking to use one of their laptops to look for a home on a choice-based lettings website.

> *I was looking just to log onto [a] computer, look for a house; that's when she [Skylight staff member] introduced herself, what services and what help she can do. That is when we started…that was the real moment when I started working with her.*

Edward had got as far as trying to secure a qualification to work in security by himself, but had run into difficulties in finding money to pay for the qualification. His second experience with Skylight was

21 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.
22 See chapter 1.

their offering to pay for this qualification, so he could complete it. This experience of getting direct and immediate help with pursuing a qualification led Edward to talk to Skylight about seeking further qualifications and his ultimate goal, which had been to secure a driving job.

*I wanted…to get the security badge, of which that was only…well, I didn't think that they, you know, they could help… Then it opens the door for me. If this can be done…I had my own ideas which I put across…*

Skylight provided one-to-one support with developing his CV, in accessing relevant qualifications and in seeking work. At interview one, Edward had secured full time paid work as a driver and had also been able to secure a social rented home through the support of Crisis. By interview two, he had been in paid work for over a year and at interview three, had with the support of Skylight been able to secure an additional professional driving qualification which had allowed him to move into a better paid full time job.

Interviewer: *And do you think having contact with them [Skylight] has changed your view of your future?*

"Edward": *In a huge way. There was a time where I realised that no, this is not worth it. I just wanted to give up.*

## Regaining progress, case study 2: "Henry"[23]

Henry was in his mid-40s when he began working with Skylight, attending a building-based Skylight from temporary supported housing, having found himself homeless on leaving prison. Henry had been in an engineering role for some years. His physical health was reasonably good for his age, although Henry had a history of problematic drug use and mental health problems. Initially his attendance was only occasional, but over time his engagement began to increase, starting with computing and then moving into formal work related training. Henry valued the courses, rating the extent and nature of support he was receiving highly in comparison to some other services at interview one, at which point he had been engaged with Skylight for just over one year.

*I came occasionally at first and then I started to come more regularly because there were other courses that they were doing like IT that I started to get involved in. I was very lucky that I got sent on some courses…like CSCS[24] courses and things like that - construction stuff – to make me more employable and it was all through these people here. This is a completely different set up to what the Job Centre or anything like that; there's no comparison actually. I'm actually leaps and bounds and miles ahead of where I would've been if I had just relied on the Job Centre's services.*

At interview two, with the support of Skylight, Henry had secured temporary work with a construction company and had found a settled home. Henry reported that the qualifications he had secured with Skylight's help had been instrumental in allowing him to take up this opportunity. As Henry was now working full-time some distance from the Skylight, it was necessary to conduct his second interview over the telephone in the evening. He had maintained some contact with Skylight and had participated as a volunteer as part of *Crisis at Christmas*.[25]

23 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.
24 Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) see: http://www.cscs.uk.com/
25 http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/christmas.html

*Yeah. I've never met anybody like them actually, I've never come across anybody like Crisis* [Skylight] *before. And I think I was very, very lucky, to be honest with you, to be put in touch with them. Because, you know, I'd heard of them but they were just a homelessness charity to me. I didn't realise they'd done all this other stuff as well.*

At interview three, on his own initiative, Henry had secured a permanent job with another construction company and was in the process of seeking better paid work in a related profession. He continued to view Skylight and the help it had given him as fundamentally important to the positive changes in situation.

### Regaining progress, case study 3: "Susan" [26]

Susan, who was in her mid-20s, was living in supported housing for homeless women when she joined Crisis, following an experience of threatened violence from outside the home. She first had contact with an outreach-based Skylight service when Skylight visited her supported housing. When she started using Skylight, Susan had already completed some further education and her mental and physical health were not problematic. At interview one engagement with Skylight had already brought one-to-one assistance with securing social housing and support with accessing further education, Susan also reported enjoying the courses that were offered by Skylight.

*It gets you out to do something, so you are not looking out of the window. It's really good because they help you with updating or re-writing your CV and help you apply for jobs and can help with courses…they helped me with my* […] *course.*

At interview two, Susan had moved to social housing in an new area, away from where she had experienced problems, and was about to enter higher education. Susan described Skylight as being instrumental in securing her housing and in enabling her to apply for higher education.

*…it was Crisis* [Skylight] *that helped me to get my CRB*[27] *checks and everything all sorted for the uni and everything else, yeah. So they've been very helpful.*

Susan had maintained contact with the Skylight staff member who had been helping with her progression, but at interview two, described herself as being largely independent and reaching the point where she no longer required support from Skylight.

*So yeah, I'm still in contact with her and giving her updates and she's given me information about certain stuff as well. So I'm not completely away but I'm kind of independent but still always, yeah.*

At interview three, Susan was in paid work in the role she had been training for and her housing was suitable and secure. Engagement with Skylight had actually increased, with Susan opting to do a further course provided by Skylight that would further enhance her skills.

*How a lot can change, oh goodness.*

26 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.
27 Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check as to whether someone has a history of offending and in particular offences that would bar them certain kinds of work, while the terminology remains in widespread use, the system was replaced by Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks in 2012 https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/overview

## Moving forward for the first time

The second pattern of progression among cohort members was the experience of *moving forward for the first time*. For this group of people, paid work and structured activities had not been the norm in their lives.

This group of cohort members were more likely to have mental health problems, sustained experience of homelessness and, in some cases, a history of problematic drug/alcohol use. Engagement with a Skylights would quite often begin with basic skills education and/or an arts-based activity.

> *I actually, I've just found a job in maintenance, I've been doing construction training for the past few years, and I've dwelled in kind of all aspects of it, but I've never really stuck at something, so I just decided to now go into maintenance which is just that aspect of all construction, plumbing to electrics to carpentry… my progression worker, she just pretty much keeps me on track and tells me if there's anything upcoming or something that I might be interested in and works closely with me just to put like applications together and stuff like that. I found that* [job] *myself actually, yeah, she did...helped actually...motivated me because I fell off a bit and then I met back up with* [Skylight staff member] *and she motivated me and give me that push that I needed and I finally found something that I'll definitely enjoy now.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> *I got took on full-time about three weeks ago so things are looking good to be honest with you…More than helpful, they helped me to get my confidence back. I was looking for stuff and my head was in the sand to be honest with you, but since I got on board with Crisis, I'm not just saying this, but everything changed, I'm right where I want to be now.*
> Cohort member, interview three.

### Moving forward for the first time, case study 1: "Richard"[28]

Richard, who was in his 50s, had a history of severe mental illness and problematic alcohol consumption when he first contacted a building-based Skylight.[29] He was not homeless at first contact, but had a history of homelessness and was living in a room in a shared private rented house with other men. He had a criminal record and had been workless for much of his adult life.

Initially, Richard engaged with the arts based activity offered by the Skylight, enjoying the painting and other activities. At interview one, he reported that his quality of life had been improved by having something he found rewarding to do, which also gave him access to social support and built up his self-confidence.

> *Yeah it has, I'd recommend it to anyone really. Yes, yes I would say, I was pretty much a recluse…I was spending most of my time fishing, I never used to do much art work at home…it's got me out of my little room I live in, got me over here, got me mingling, because I never used to mingle, it's got me out my shell.*

With Skylight's support, Richard moved into basic skills training which improved his English, Maths and IT skills. He also began training in the Café from Crisis which the Skylight had on-site and completed courses in catering, which he reported as really enjoying at interview two.

28 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.
29 See chapter 1.

*They've got all computers over there and stuff if you want. Yeah, some things have changed. I'm doing a catering course here, which is okay with them…So on Monday and Friday since March, so I've done it for three months so far, just in the kitchen cooking…I love it, yeah…*

Skylight support helped bring him to the point where Richard could engage with a second, external service, which helped him with job-seeking. At interview two, Richard was close to securing work and at interview three, he was working in the catering industry.

*I feel I've done what I've needed to do in a fashion. I suppose it was only to get me out of the rut that I was in and get me back out amongst the people and go and do some stuff. So they have helped me that way.*

Richard had completed a journey from a situation of sustained worklessness, experience severe mental illness, problematic alcohol use and a history of offending to the point where he had been able to secure full time work. Much of the progress he had made he attributed to Skylight, and although another agency was also to become involved in helping him secure paid work, both the self-confidence and the qualifications that helped him secure work had were seen by Richard as coming from Skylight.

### Moving forward for the first time, case study 2: "Anne"[30]

Anne was in her mid-30s when her contact with a building-based Skylight began. Although her mental and physical health were not problematic, Anne had a history of sustained homelessness. At the point of her first contact with Skylight and at interview one, she was homeless.

*Not street homeless, because I live in a hostel. That still counts I guess as homeless and yeah I've lived there for about three years now.*

Anne engaged with the progression and education offered by Skylight, finding the education and one-to-one support with job seeking presented her with a positive way to fill her time. She contrasted the activity and sense of progress she felt was offered by Skylight with a rather bleak existence in the hostel at interview one. At the point of interview one, Anne had been engaged with Skylight for about nine months.

*Oh definitely, with living in a hostel… coming to Crisis it is chance to interact with others and you're out of that environment, and you also feel like you're doing well for yourself, you're bettering yourself, Crisis lets you do that…you feel like you are being proactive with yourself, rather than just moping about, thinking you can't get a job.*

At interview two, Anne had secured a temporary job, which had just come to an end and had, with the support of the Skylight, engaged with an external agency which was providing training. By interview two, Anne was becoming increasingly independent, but retained contact with workers at Skylight and continued to seek their advice.

*If I need any general advice, I still come here, like for example…I did ask in here for advice. I spoke to an advisor. So yeah, I come here from time to time.*

At interview three, Anne had moved to housing offering independent living with some support and had secured part-time work in the security industry. She had

30 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.
31 Ibid.

been seeking to work in construction, but had encountered some problems in getting suitable work, so had adapted her plans to work in another field. She retained her goal to eventually secure work in construction, drawing on the training that Skylight and external agencies had provided. Anne had moved from a situation of sustained homelessness and unemployment into a situation of quasi-independent living and paid work, after approximately three years of engagement with Skylight.

**Moving forward for the first time, case study 3: "Simone"[31]**

Simone was in her 30s, had not completed formal education and had a history of offending, homelessness and mental health problems. At the time of her first contact with an outreach-based Skylight, she had been released from prison on licence. She had no work experience. She had been living in social housing for about a year.

At interview one, Simone had been working with Skylight for around one year and had already achieved considerable progression, engaging with the education, training and the other support on offer. She had secured certificates in basic skills education and had one-to-one support in in pursuing what came to be her chosen career, working in catering.

*They've helped me get into education, find a college, which one of the Skylight workers helped me with…also my CV and my mental health as well.*

At interview two, Simone had progressed teaching classes in catering, usually on a volunteer basis. She had continued to train, including college-based further education, which had been facilitated by Skylight. She remained very positive about the support she was receiving from Skylight, emphasising how her self-confidence had been increased.

*It's really, now I've been out of prison now two and a half years so and the difference, I can even see the difference in myself from then 'til now… I only started seeing Crisis from last year and they've sort of built my confidence up and that.*

Simone's volunteering had, just at the point interview three took place, resulted in a part-time job offer, which Simone had accepted and which was to be her first experience of paid employment. Over the course of two and a half years of engagement with Skylight, Simone had moved from being in a position of lacking formal education, a history of offending, a history of homelessness and facing mental health problems, to being sufficiently qualified in a subject to be able to teach that subject as a paid job. She continued to engage with Skylight, which was providing ongoing support with career development and also one-to-one help with her mental health problems.

Interviewer: *So how do you think things are going?*

"Simone": *I think they're moving quite well, but I just need to sort out my mental health, which Crisis are helping me with at the moment.*

## Punctuated progression

Members who had reached paid employment, entered further education or externally provided training, could experience backward steps in their progression. This final group might be described as having their momentum stalled and as sometimes requiring further assistance from Skylight.

The reasons for disrupted progression could be external. For example, a job was secured, but was only a three or six month contract. In such cases, Skylight might be needed to help

secure another job.

> *Well,* [Skylight staff member]'s *been helping me a lot: she helped me with my job applications and stuff and she has been sending me like jobs that were coming up and stuff because I lost my contract at [.] so she helped me a bit with getting back into work…how to do the applications forms and such.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

Progression could also be stalled by a deterioration in mental or physical health. Members who experienced this could need further help from Skylight. The experiences of this group of members illustrated the complex reality of progression. There were people using Skylight who wanted to work, sought to work, but who were having to deal not only with the often harsh realities of the labour market, but with the effects of limiting illness, disability and severe mental illness.

> *Yes, that's just sort of something that I live with and it flares up and it can get harder and then it can be all right for a while. I think it's like if there is any big change or stress* [existing job came to an end] *then I started* [new job], *but it didn't really work out, and I've just decided that I don't want to continue with that…so that sort of impacted on my anxiety and sort of stress, and it can sort of flare up my anxiety and I think that's why I thought okay, it's not really working with this* [new job]*. I'm waking up feeling anxious, which you know, isn't a good sign, yes, so more sort of manageable* [with Skylight support secures another job].
> Cohort member, interview three.

### Punctuated progression, case study 1: "Daniel"[32]

Daniel was in his early 30s and had a history of homelessness, problematic drinking and offending at the point he was first in contact with a building-based Skylight. He had some history of working, but had not been in regular employment for eight years.

> *I've been through literally kipping outside in sleeping bags, tents or whatever, to basically going into hostels. I've been through that whole situation. Even bail hostels, I've been through all sorts…*

At the point of interview one, Daniel had been engaged with Skylight for almost three years and had completed basic skills education in English, Maths and computer use. Alongside wishing to pursue the courses, Daniel had been advised to try engaging with Skylight to help manage his problematic drinking by becoming involved in productive activity during the day.

> *…give Crisis a go to try and get off the…you know, keep yourself busy. Because it's hard enough stopping the alcohol as it is, and if you're sitting around with…if you're just sitting in the house doing nothing, then it just makes it harder, you know what I mean…*

In Daniel's view, Skylight, in combination with support from external specialist services, had helped him begin to manage his problematic alcohol consumption. Initially, Daniel's engagement with Skylight had been productive, but he experienced a relapse in drinking which caused problems with his engagement, disrupting his progress.

32 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.

*Yeah, because the end of the day, I wasn't even leaving the house. So, I mean, I was stuck in a rut. I went through different stages with Crisis. I went where I started first when I was off the drink, everything was going great. I went back on the drink, everything fell apart…*

At interview two, Daniel had reengaged successfully with Skylight and then moved into paid work, drawing on his experience and qualifications from working in the Café from Crisis which was part of the building-based Skylight. Securing paid work was a significant achievement by someone who had faced multiple barriers to paid work alongside their experiences of homelessness, achieved with support from Skylight.

At interview three, Daniel's situation had deteriorated, he had experienced mental health problems and, after around one year in employment, had lost his job. While Daniel reported ongoing issues with a decline in his mental health which were creating obstacles to securing paid work, he remained determined to secure further employment. He reported he was about to re-engage with Skylight, which he saw as a consistent and reliable source of support.

### Punctuated progression, case study 2: "John"[33]

John was in his early 50s at the point of his first contact with an outreach-based Skylight. He had lost his last job and been evicted from his accommodation when he could not pay the rent and had reacted to homelessness by camping for several months on end. At the point he came into contact with Skylight, he described his mental and physical health as reasonable and he was living in a hostel for homeless people. At interview one, John had been engaged with Skylight for several months and had received support in pursuing courses in his chosen career, including funding for some courses. He was in the process of seeking work and reported being very pleased and impressed with the help he had received.

*I wish I could help them as much as they've helped me. But I don't think I'll be able to pay back what they've done for me…Everything I've mentioned to them, they've found some way of helping…I mean you get some organisations, they do the bare minimum just to keep you on the books, but these* [Skylight], *the complete opposite, they go to the extremes…these will bend over backwards just to make sure it is done.*

At interview two, John reported that he had not been able to secure work in the field in which he had been pursuing training with the support of Skylight, but he had been able to secure another full-time job. This was not what he ideally wanted to do, but John reported himself as happy to be working, even if it was not in the field he had wished. His engagement with Skylight had ceased, as he was full time at work during the week and was volunteering with other agencies at the weekends.

By the third interview, John's situation had changed, he had lost his full time job, the result of the business going bankrupt. He had encountered problems in trying to re-engage with Skylight because Jobcentre Plus was requiring him to continually search for work. John thought it unlikely that Jobcentre Plus would allow him to work with Skylight, although he wished to receive further help.

*I have to do job search every day using the*

33 Recognisable details that might identify a specific individual have been omitted from these case studies.
34 Ibid.

*Universal Jobsite. If I don't there's a chance I'll be sanctioned, but everybody who's claiming Jobseeker's meant to do that…*

**Punctuated progression, case study 3: "Robert"[34]**

At his first contact with an outreach-based Skylight, Robert had been in a situation of homelessness for years. He was still homeless and living in supported housing at the point of his first interview. Robert was in his 40s and had been doing short-term seasonal work for some time, but for most of the year had no earned income. He had not completed his formal education. At interview one, Robert had been engaged with Skylight for three years and had completed much of the basic skills education that was on offer and was receiving ongoing one-to-one assistance in seeking work from Skylight.

*I've learned a lot through Crisis. I've got a lot to thank them for.*

At interview two, Robert had secured his first full time job in years, working in a factory setting, initially via an agency and then being taken on full time by the company. Robert thought that securing this work had only been possible for him because of the support he had received from Skylight. He had secured housing for himself using his earned income and had developed a relationship with a partner.

*I mean, Crisis* [Skylight] *has helped me over the years 'cause like, you know, when I first met them I wouldn't say boo to a goose. You know what I mean, but like it's Crisis* [Skylight] *who helped me make a... got me started, got me confidence back. And that, like, through Crisis* [Skylight], *that's how I got all my certificates, my IT certificate, Back to Work, yes, all my certificates, yes.*

At interview three, Robert was still in work, but he had faced some challenges in maintaining that position. His first full time job had come to an end after a few months, when he and many other staff were laid off. Through an agency, he had secured a few weeks of temporary work, then secured another full time job in another factory. Robert still sought advice from Skylight occasionally, but had maintained himself in paid work, was in a partnership and was in settled housing. Through his involvement with Skylight, which lasted several years, Robert had left behind a sustained experience of homelessness, secured work and then faced the challenges from the inherent precariousness that can characterise some of the paid employment available in the UK.

*I found Crisis by accident and I said they've helped me a hell of a lot. They've helped me on the right path sort of thing. I've got a lot to thank them for.*

## Problems with progression

Within the cohort there were members whose progression had been limited. A mix of factors influenced incomplete progression, ranging from a few instances of service failure within Skylights, through to external factors. Six broad problems with progression were observed:

- Service failure within Skylight
- Poor levels of engagement with Skylight
- Continued labour market disadvantage
- Low wage employment relative to housing costs
- Poor health, limiting illness and disability
- Members whose progression faced practical limits

Service failure by a Skylight was a rare

experience among the cohort members. Positive views of Skylight had, in a few cases, been radically reversed by what was perceived as service failure.

> *You know, that was the wonderful thing about Crisis* [Skylight] *was that you came in here and you left all that bullshit at the door. You were just a human being. And that was what was so refreshing about this place. And I really emphasised that last year… And that element of it has completely disappeared, and that's such a...it's just...it makes me feel really sad, really sad. I mean, not just from a personal point of view but from a general point of view, because it was such an amazing resource, and it's just gone down the tubes, unfortunately.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

Skylight provides structured activity that is intended to have a *tangible* outcome. This necessitates a basic discipline and means it is not acceptable to be intoxicated, anti-social or challenging when participating in activities. While Skylight is intended to work with people who may have high and complex needs, but a minority who were unable to modify challenging behaviour, who may have needed additional support, could sometimes struggle with the ordered environments that Skylights created in classes and arts-based activities.

> *…just like the thing of, like, how much they've just went into school. They need to be more laid back. It's not kids that come here, it's adults, but sometimes they're treat like kids. And I think that's the reason why some people don't come back.*
> Cohort member, interview one.

> *Yes. They've got a big thing about you not sitting around because you're homeless people and if you're sitting around it means your loitering. In any other student place people sit around…but because we're homeless it's like we're loitering. We're not in-between lectures, we're just loitering. I was quite annoyed by the attitude, 'No, we don't like people sitting around in between classes.' Well what else are we supposed to do in between classes?*
> Cohort member, interview three.

There were a cohort members who could be described as not engaging, because they were not interested in what Skylight offered,[35] these individuals were very unusual and unrepresentative of the cohort as a whole.

> *I know they did something with art and that but I'm not into art…you know what I mean, I'm... like I say; I'd have a look at the courses; see what they were...if I fancy any one of them, you know what I mean?...I don't ever need help, but now I can ring up anyway, so but I know I've got that there; it's there, to hand, you see, you know what I mean?*
> Cohort member, interview one.

Attrition, i.e. loss of members after only one or two contacts, was identified as an issue for Skylight in the first interim report.[36] Attrition will explored in more depth in the final report from this evaluation.

Remaining in a position of relative disadvantage in the labour market after engaging with Skylight was an issue for some cohort members. In these cases, particularly severe barriers to paid employment, such as a criminal record, were significant. In the less prosperous areas, Birmingham, Merseyside and Newcastle, constricted or declining labour markets, offering relatively few opportunities for work, could be an issue.

**35** See above and chapter 1.
**36** Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.

*Because I'm not, I don't, I haven't quite worked out, you know, how you progress from here, you know, in to the computer world. Because I know the big computer companies in* […] *and stuff like that, so you know I'm not – it's quite how you bridge it. I haven't – the tutor's not too bad, the computer tutor's not too bad. I just haven't quite worked that out, the bridge. How you bridge those two?*
Cohort member, interview three .

*It doesn't feel like that sometimes, I'll be honest, it's nothing to do with the* [Skylight] *at all, it's nothing to do with them, it's to do with the fact is these employers do really take me as a big joke I think sometimes because the thing is because of the learning difficulties and that, and just shove you to one side and you get fed up with them doing that. And what's this, it was equal opportunities, it's meant to be equal opportunities whilst in jobs now, they can't do that, they're not allowed to discriminate you from any type of background really even if you've got a conviction, unspent conviction. But mine's not that serious so why do people make a big deal out of minor offences, it's not like I've robbed someone.*
Cohort member, interview two.

*Besides my criminal record seems to stop me in everything I do, it's been that way since being a kid. Well it's been that way because I didn't get qualifications, which I feel is pretty much none of my fault. I was dragged up rather than brought up, I was drinking at the age of eight, chucked out of school from ten. I had no option.*
Cohort member, interview three.

Some members reported that they could not realistically take on a low paid, full-time job and continue to meet their housing costs, e.g. when renting from the private sector in Oxford and London. For others, there were concerns about taking on private rented housing when their paid work was only likely to short term. There could be serious obstacles to buying a home, again centred on level and reliability of income.

*I'm a janitor at […] but I'm about to be made redundant. Yeah, and they reckon in four maybe five months the site I'm at will be shut down completely.*
Cohort member, interview two.

*Yes, to get a deposit, really, and try and get my own place, but at the moment it's - the deposit they want is - it's crazy. I'm nowhere near that. But I can just keep trying; that's all I can do. Well, I don't really want to rent…because I feel if I rent then I'm just throwing money away, do you know what I mean? So I just want to get a one-bedroom flat somewhere, a decent one-bedroom flat and then instead of paying rent just pay the mortgage. Yes. To get on that ladder it's - and they say the government's helping people, but - well, they're not helping me* [laughs].
Cohort member, interview three.

*Yes. I would be grateful if I could find like a housing association or something like that. Even for a room, I can afford it and then I can pay the rent and everything. Where it's quite easy to stay independently for a long while. It's quite expensive this area. It's pressure. If I don't get any solution in the coming three, four months, the only thing is to leave and then go either to find another place or I don't know, I don't know how to do it.*
Cohort member, interview three.

*I've been there every day since, doing like 40 hours a week, but it's only down side is...I can't afford full-time, because the flat's £225 a week and I'm kind of stuck, yeah?*
Cohort member, interview two.

*My hours are going down and down and down. They started off pretty well, it was like 40 odd hours a week. Now I'm on 20 something. So it's not going to be able to*

*pay my rent. Luckily the Housing Benefit pay half of my rent.*
Cohort member, interview two.

Poor health and disability could limit labour market opportunities for some Skylight members. There is innovation in creating jobs specifically for homeless people, such as is supported by *Business in the Community*[37] and in using social enterprise for homeless people.[38] However, labour markets may not always provide suitable opportunities for someone with limiting illness or disability.[39]

*It's been ongoing for four years...Yeah. I'm really in a bad place just now because of that specific setback. It's not the end of the world. My* [health] *situation hasn't got any worse but it certainly hasn't got any better. So it's sort of like in a limbo place, you're not getting any better, you're not gonna get any worse until the procedure is done.*
Cohort member, interview two.

A small number of long-term Skylight members were actively engaged in activities but showed very limited evidence of any progression. There was an overlap here between people who faced ongoing barriers to paid work. This could be a challenge for Skylights, as a few individuals, who could only realistically progress to a certain level, placed great value on what had become long-term relationships with Skylight.

*…and I got started and the rest, as I say, is history because I just fell in love with the place* [Skylight]*…About seven years ago. Well I did a food hygiene course, I did a computer course...I did...I'm doing art courses... and I was doing...and I also do craft as well.*
Cohort member, interview two.

It is important to note that those in contact with a Skylight two years also included people who *had* progressed significantly, usually from a situation of sustained or recurrent homelessness. Sustained contact with Skylight could not be conflated with someone making only limited progression (see above). In a handful of cases, there were complaints from someone who felt they had been moved on from Skylight before they were ready.

*Yes, I felt I was being moved on, yes. And that's what a lot of my colleagues, friends that have been already housed, did feel like, this is a place for homeless people, we support them during the period of time when they're homeless and for a short time afterwards. By that time we expect you to have sorted yourself out…it doesn't always work like that… It often goes in cycles… People need support for a long time afterwards.*
Cohort member, interview two.

**37** http://www.bitc.org.uk/issues/homelessness
**38** Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2012) *New Growth for Emmaus. York: Centre for Housing Policy*. Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2014) A*n Evaluation of the Broadway Skills Exchange Time Bank.* London: Broadway.
**39** Trotter, R. (2014) *A million futures: halving the disability employment gap.* London: Scope; Inclusion London (2015) *UK Disabled People's Manifesto: Reclaiming our Futures* http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/UK-Disabled-People-s-Manifesto-Reclaiming-Our-Futures.pdf

# 4 Outcomes

## Introduction

This chapter explores the support cohort members had received from Skylight and their progression. The chapter begins by exploring support with health and well-being, moves on to look at support with housing and then explores how Skylight can support relationships and social networks. The final part of the chapter looks in detail at progression towards paid work, covering both work related activities (education, training, arts-based programmes) and the attainment of paid work.

## Mental health

An earlier evaluation examined the Mental Health Coordinator services operated by Skylights and reported positive results.[40] Among the cohort members, 21 had been assisted by a mental health coordinator.

There was further evidence that the mental health coordinators were successfully providing direct support and, importantly, facilitating access to the NHS services for some cohort members.

> *So, at the moment, you know, thanks to Crisis, you know, we managed to get a care plan…when we went there and we did a few apologies from the psychiatrist and, you know…I got help from their centre and, you know, I could be stable in my life and more independent and, you know, it's…it was quite a battle since last time I see you.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> [Mental Health Coordinator] *referred us back to see the psychiatrist, and is writing to my doctor, to get things referred to the psychiatrist, because there's possibly underlying issues that they haven't been diagnosed yet, but I just think my depression and anxiety is a lot worse than what they are seeing. Because the post-traumatic stress masks the other symptoms a lot, because you sort of disconnect from things.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> *Yeah and like skills like, cognitive behaviour and therapy skills and social skills and emotion stuff. Like the other day my bank card got swallowed, I was just stood there...I just put, like to draw out like a big amount of money, I thought, is it going to come out? Ok standing there, I went to the bank quickly it was two minutes past five, the bank closes at five. She was stood there, she wasn't going to open the door, but I didn't get angry or anything. I said it's an emergency, like through the window, she pointed to the number, I wrote the number down. I came walking here* [Skylight], *I said I need to use the phone. They said I'm bit busy are you ok on your own? Yeah, yeah. I done it, myself rang them, told them, got a new card sent out.. but I tell you a year ago would have been like the end of the world… and that woman in the bank not opening the door, I would have gone crazy.*
> Cohort member, interview one.

Improvements in mental health, both in the sense of diagnosed problems and in terms of lessening self-report reported stress, was also linked to other aspects of Skylight services. When one-to-one support from Skylight dealt with a problem, cohort members sometimes reported associated improvements in mental health. Examples included Skylight one-to-one support resolving disputes with landlords and Jobcentre Plus.

40 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2013) op. cit.

## Social support and health

Skylight could have benefits for the health and well-being through bolstering the social supports available to members. Social support, as is strongly evidenced by medical research, can have broadly positive effects on physical health which are interrelated with positive effects on mental health.

While the positive effects of social support are not uniform, it is generally accepted that good social supports can both 'buffer', i.e. have positive effects, when someone is confronted with illness and stress, and/or have a 'main effect' benefit, in which good social support has a constant, positive effect on health and well-being.[41] A core goal of Skylight is to improve their access to social support (see chapter 1). Social supports can be classified as *esteem support*, information that a person is esteemed and accepted; *informational support*, help in defining, understanding and coping with problematic events; *social companionship*, spending time with others in leisure or recreational activities and *instrumental support*, the provision of financial aid, material resources and needed services.[42]

While not a systematic examination of the health and well-being of the cohort members, there was evidence of members of the cohort reporting improvements in esteem support, informational support and social companionship. The fourth form of social support, instrumental support, described much of what Skylight did for members.

> *So it's basically building up my confidence and just getting lesson plans and things done so they've encouraged me with a lot of that as well, plus I'm doing some voluntary work with them as well in the cooking classes*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> *Like I suppose this place is like a springboard, it sort of helps you to get back on your feet, gain your confidence, get a bit of self-confidence because doing the courses here gave me more confidence so that I go out and do this course that I wanted to do, this fitness accreditation.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> *With the drama, that's been amazing for my confidence and my trust in people and all that sort of thing, so those things are really, really, really helpful and really good in terms of me moving forward…*
> Cohort member, interview three.

> *…having the support of* [Skylight staff member] *has been really helpful. And, yeah, like I said before, it's built my confidence so that I could go on and do a course outside here.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> *It* [Skylight] *brought me out of my shell, this time last year I was kind of confined, but they've really brought me out of my shell in terms of communication and socialising and stuff like that, so they give me that push I suppose to go out there and reach for something.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

> *So, yes, it helped with my confidence in the sense that I've been able to come back or it's contributed to help me come out of my shell back to who I was and even be a better person.*
> Cohort member, interview one.

The cohort contained a handful of members who were longstanding users of the Skylights in London and Newcastle. This very small group had experienced what they perceived

41 Cohen, S. and Wills, T. (1985) 'Stress, Social Support and the Buffering Hypothesis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 98, 310-357; Callaghan, P. and Morrissey, J. (1993) 'Social Support and Health: A Review', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, No.18, 203-213; Wills, T. A., and Ainette, M. G., (2012) 'Social Networks and Social Support' in Baum, A. Revenson, T. A. and Singer, J. (eds.) *Handbook of health psychology.* New York: Psychology Press, pp. 465-492.

42 Cohen, S. and Wills, T. (1985) op. cit.

as a reorientation in these two Skylights, which had been the first two services to begin operation, and regretted the loss of what they saw as a kind of social role.

> *…when it first opened, it wasn't qualification courses, it was just free, you could come in and do any of the classes you wanted, and just have fun, which I enjoyed. But now it's more a learning centre, and that's not for me.*
> Cohort member, interview one.

> *Crisis as an organisation haven't done anything wrong, it's just that the direction they're going in is not the direction I want to go in…It's like with the art, we were quite happy just to come in and do art and it was great to catch up with people and talk…*
> Cohort member, interview two.

## Housing

> *…so I come into Crisis. And as I was walking in the door, the progression coach that I'd met on the training was walking out the door. And she asked us what was the matter. And I just said I've been like living at my mum's for like nearly a year now. I've got three kids. I can't get a house. I haven't got the money to get a private one, even though I didn't really want to get a private one. So she said to us, come in, I'll help you.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

Thirty-six members in the cohort reported receiving one-to-one help with housing from a Skylight. The help took three main forms. The first was finding housing. This could mean engaging with social landlords and local authorities to support the case that a member was making to get themselves housed. Equally, and particularly in London and Oxford where social housing is especially scare, it meant trying to help someone secure adequate, affordable and reasonably secure private rented housing.

> *Well, they've helped us with housing… they helped us fill all the forms out, they spoke to the council on the phone for us, because I hate speaking to people on the phone. And all I really done was went and bid, they set everything else up for us.*
> Cohort member, interview one.

> *Yes. The housing coach was a real help, they helped me with the papers for Housing Benefit, they contacted me with the landlord; they worked on my behalf with the* [private letting] *agent. And we had some choice of properties, they showed me all the properties necessary and I could choose one.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

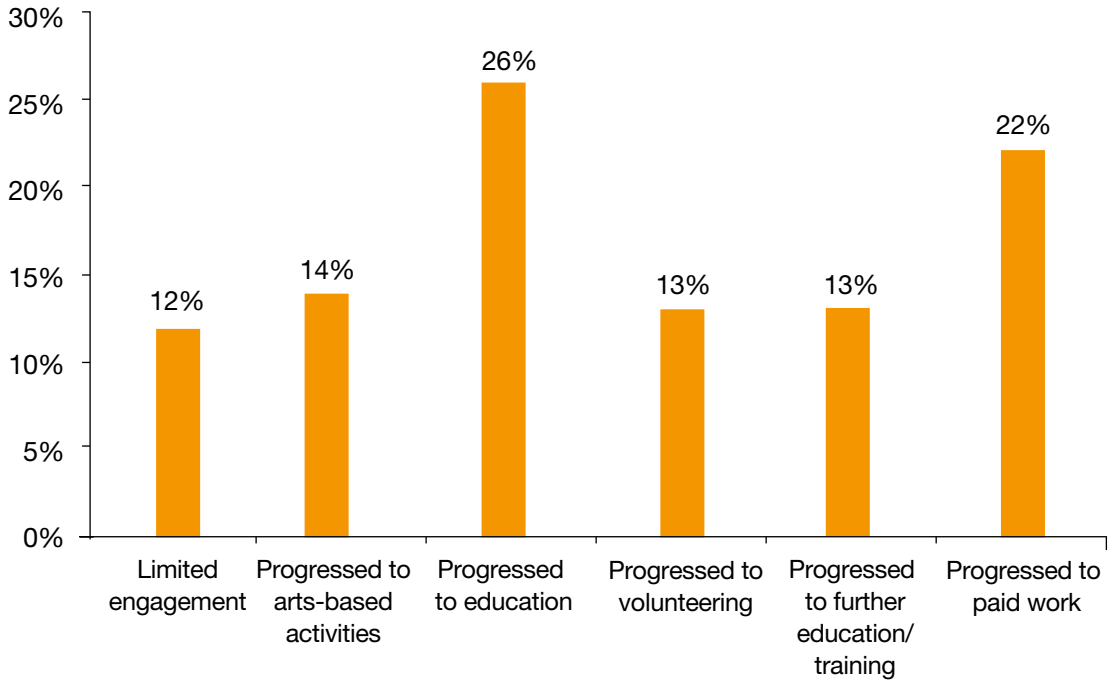
Skylights could also help when someone had been forced to leave existing housing. This could involve helping when someone had to make a sudden move, arranging help and access to emergency accommodation if required.

> *I was lucky enough to rescue some of my possessions. One major storage was underneath a friend's basement and Crisis* [Skylight] *helped with that. They provided a van and we got some of the stuff out.*
> Cohort member, interview two.

The second form of help centred on rent arrears for existing housing. Arrears could occur because someone had unmet support needs, but among the members of the cohort the most common cause was changes in, restrictions to and removal of benefits.

> *Since they* [Skylight] *helped me sort out my arrears, I'm just paying off I think it's an extra £7 on top of what I have to pay now. So that's a great help because they stopped my benefit for a few months and it made my service charge build up. They helped me, my progression coach, we applied for certain grants and loans and we got one I think from the church. They subsidised a bit and then I had to pay the*

**Graphic 4.1 Progression of cohort members as at last contact**




Base: 158. Source: University of York interviews with cohort members.

*rest so it brought it down. It's a lot better. I ain't got to worry about finding the money.*
Cohort member, interview two.

*They have actually, because when I got this horrible letter about rent arrears* [Skylight team member], *bless her, she phoned someone from the housing department. No one knew what they were talking about and* [Skylight team member] *got to the bottom of it, so one minute I'm in these massive rent arrears, well where did these come from? The service charges when the increase went up. 'Why didn't you tell me?' So now I'm in arrears, but I'm paying it off weekly by direct debit.*
Cohort member, interview three.

Skylight staff were however dealing with a sometimes harsh set of realities. Jobcentre Plus decisions around benefits, including sanctions and removal of entitlement, could be difficult to challenge and to reverse.[43] Standards in both the social rented and private rented sectors could also be poor.

*No, they're not okay because I tried getting that PIP* [personal independence payments]*. They've said no, and now I've got to go to an appeal court because they said no again. So I've got to go to court for it. You see on the telly, that's what annoyed me the other week. I saw it on the telly, and they're saying it did take a long time, but now we're trying to make it a 14-week maximum. Well, mine has been going*

43 Beatty, C.; Foden, M.; McCarthy, L. and Reeve, K. (2015) *Benefit sanctions and homelessness: a scoping report.* London: Crisis.

*on - where are we now, March? Nineteen months.* Cohort member, interview three .

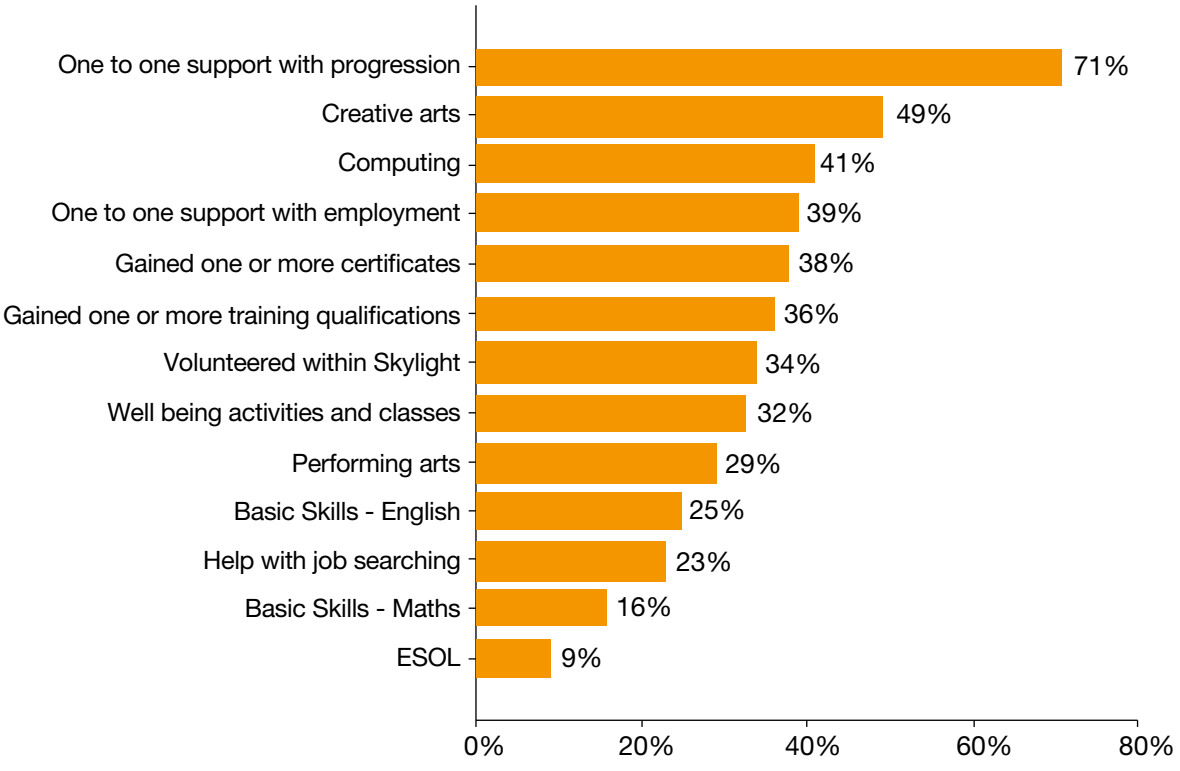
[mice infestation] *it's coming only from one corner, always the noise, I can't sleep, it's like what is eating something, it's horrible...but I don't see any chance now; that woman who came to change the flat, from the council, she said maybe I can get another one; but since this time, it was the end of April, she didn't say anything; not possible to catch her by phone, my progress coach* [Skylight staff member] *he tried to call her, left messages and email, but not possible to get her and I don't know how to continue… It's not because of him; he try.*
Cohort member, interview three.

## Progression to education and paid work

For most cohort members, there had been some progression towards paid work as a result of contact with Skylight (graphic 4.1). Some notable successes had been achieved:

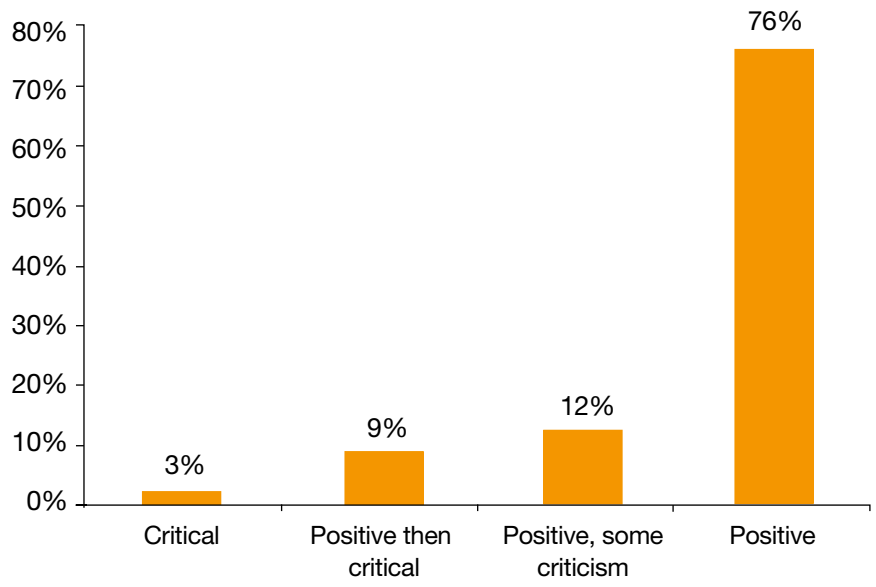
- 22% of cohort members had secured full or part-time work as a direct result of their engaging with Skylight.
- 13% had not yet secured work, but had progressed to further education and/or training provided by colleges and other agencies which had been facilitated through members working with Skylight. In a handful of cases this involved members

**Graphic 4.2 Percentages of cohort members who had used different Skylight services**




Base: 158. Source: University of York interviews with cohort members. As at last contact with research team. ESOL stands for English for speakers of other languages. Members could participate in any number of these activities.

**Graphic 4.3 Summary of cohort views on Skylight services**




Base: 158. As at last contact with research team. Source: University of York interviews with cohort members.

moving into higher education.

- 13% of members had reached the point of volunteering, either within a Skylight or externally.
- Just over one-quarter of members of the cohort (26%) had progressed into education provided by a Skylight.
- 14% had progressed into one or more arts-based activities.

One small group were characterised by limited engagement (16 members, 12%). This group had not really connected with a Skylight even though they had all been in contact for at least one term (graphic 4.1).

The range of Skylight services members had engaged with is summarised in graphic 4.2. Engagement with one-to-one support is summarised here, as exact arrangements for one-to-one support varied between the Skylights (see chapter one).

Broadly speaking, those members who had progressed furthest were also those who had engaged the most with Skylight:

- Overall, 71% of those members who had progressed to paid work had received one-to-one support with seeking employment, as had 48% of those progressing to further education/externally provided training. By contrast, the total receiving one-to-one support with employment across the whole cohort was 39%. One-to-one support with progression was also more common among those who had moved into further education/externally provided training (95%) and among those who had secured paid work (88%), compared to the cohort as a whole (71%).

- Progression was also associated with participation in internally provided training and basic skills education.[44] Members of the cohort who had found paid work had participated in education and training provided by the Skylights at high rates (65%) as had those who had moved into further education/externally provided training (81%).

- There were also connections between participation in arts-based activities and progression. Those who had progressed into further education and external training had participated in performance art and/or creative arts at a higher rate (76% compared to 57% across the cohort as a whole). However, members who had secured paid work were less likely to have become involved in any arts-based activity (44%).

These findings, along with the results of the analysis of different pathways to progression presented in chapter three, highlight the often important role that could be played by one-to-one support. There was evidence from the cohort that one-to-one support with progression and seeking employment, was important in securing and enhancing progression across the Skylights.

Those with lower levels of progression were less likely to remain in contact with Skylight and with the research team. Of those characterised by limited engagement with Skylight at interview one, only 16% completed at least one further interview. By contrast, 91% of those who attained employment and 90% of those who had moved into further education/externally provided training, remained in contact with the researchers for at least two interviews.

## Views on services

### Quality of services

The importance of the ways in which Skylights deliver support was highlighted in the previous interim report[45] and a series of reports on individual Skylights.[46] In summary, these findings, which have been echoed throughout the fieldwork to date, are:

- The importance of being treated with respect and understanding by Skylight staff for members.

- Support in developing a career path that the member wished to pursue, rather than being expected to simply take any job that might possibly be available, including support with self-employment.

- Capacity to respond with a high degree of flexibility to members. A Skylight can enable someone with talent to move into employment in the arts, facilitating a move into self-employment as a musician and composer, as writer or as a creative artist selling their own work. Equally, if someone wished to be a plumber, security guard, work in the building industry, drive an HGV, become a short-order cook, the Skylight had the capacity to support these options as well.

- Provision of education, training and support that were highly rated by the members of Skylight.

- The importance of one-to-one support, both in terms of general progression and in respect of specialist one-to-one support with mental health problems, job-seeking and housing.

44 http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Sanctions%20Report%202015_FINAL.pdf
45 As is described in Chapter 1, this involved English, Maths, computing and various forms of training, including catering in the three Skylights with cafes and training related to decoration and construction in Merseyside. Recognised qualifications in computing, such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) were also provided by the Skylights.
46 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.

As noted in chapter one, the cohort study that this report describes is broadly representative only of individuals who had engaged with Skylight for at least one term. The results are not generalizable. Nevertheless, the cohort represented a sizeable group of members of Skylight and it is interesting to summarise their overall views of the services they were using (graphic 4.3).

Views of Skylight were overwhelmingly positive, with 76% of cohort members describing Skylight in only positive terms. There is a caveat to these data, which is that not everyone undertook a second or third interview and therefore those whose views might have turned more negative is necessarily represented (9% reported initially positive views that became more negative at second/ third interview). Not all were unconditional in their praise for Skylight, with 12% reporting some criticisms within a generally positive picture, but only few cohort members were wholly critical from the outset (3%).

*...it's good, yes, yes, very good to...I've got so many certificates now and I know that need a lot of them so, yeah.*
Cohort member, interview one.

*I think it's brilliant actually, I think they're very positive, all the tutors are helpful and encouraging, they understand that people have different problems in life, they're very accommodating and supportive, I've just grown so much, without them I wouldn't have grown as well I have, definitely.*
Cohort member, interview two.

*Crisis* [Skylight] *have been a really good back-up for me, you know. They've been like…I'd describe them as a cushion; when you fall, you sort of drop gently because they're there to sort of support you and lift you back up, you what I mean. I'm really grateful for the ability to sort of work with them anyway, so…*
Cohort member, interview two.

*Yeah, yeah, it's good. That's why I wanted to sort of…if I do some voluntary work, I want to do some voluntary work for Crisis. Sort of pay back what they done for me like.*
Cohort member, interview two.

*Yes,* [Skylight staff member] *was really helpful. Not just with the work front either. If I needed to talk to anyone* [Skylight staff member] *be there.*
Cohort member, interview three.

*I got in touch with Crisis and they were brilliant, they sent me to loads of things, as I say. They'd get me on courses...very, very helpful and positive, you know. They were very positive...*
Cohort member, interview one.

*…it's there when it's needed, it's there when it's needed which is good to know that I can just pick up the phone and say, look, this is happening or I don't know if you can help me out with this or this?*
Cohort member, interview two.

## Comparisons with other services

Skylights were often compared favourably with other services by the cohort members. Particular criticism tended to be focused on Jobcentre Plus, which was often seen as inflexible, ineffective and on occasion as unnecessarily aggressive and harsh in approach. The focus of the Work Programme, perceived as forcing an individual into any work that might possibly be available and, particularly, in having a highly unsympathetic, even aggressive, attitude to anyone claiming benefit, was often seen in negative terms by members.

*…they work with you on a one-to-one basis, and they're working on a one-to-one basis you have that whole confidence. Like the Jobcentre, they don't do that. They only give you an appointment and give you only about a five or ten minute appointment and that's it.*
Cohort member, interview one.

*…the good thing about Crisis is they listen to you, you know, whereas all the… government departments are just - phew - wave you off, 'I've heard it all before', you know what I mean?*
Cohort member, interview three.

*…they make an enormous difference, long term, you know what I mean, long term. Not little things, not stupid little things like the government do, like these patronising and insulting courses that they send you on. You know, Crisis is far more substantial.*
Cohort member, interview two.

### Changing Lives grants and other financial support

The flexibility of the Skylights was illustrated by the use of *Changing Lives* grants, which could pay for courses, support progression to self-employment and pay for professional training to enter specific careers. Overall, 24 of the cohort had benefited from *Changing Lives* grants or from a Skylight facilitating applications for financial support from other sources. The support offered by these grants was often seen as instrumental by members in enabling them to progress.

*Obviously, when I first come here, you know, it was a build-up of everything, it was the housing situation, I wasn't on the right benefit so I couldn't get myself into college. I mean, I got a Changing Lives grant, so I went to college and I'm now an NVQ assessor*.
Cohort member, interview three.

*I'm going to start a course with the […] adult education, something on mental health. I'm going to do Level 1 and 2. Yes, because I said I wanted to do something like that and they said I could go through this* [supported by Changing Lives grant]… *they've been a fantastic help for me.*
Cohort member, interview three.

*So sort of from Crisis I've sort of been handed over to lots of different organisations. Which is great, because it resulted in me getting £4,000 for my business, so.*
Cohort member, interview two.

*Yes, they* [Skylight] *helped me with some courses, the self-employment course and a grant I got off them for some tools…Yes, it's going very well, better than I expected to be honest.*
Cohort member, interview three.

## Testing for bias in service delivery

In the UK, Northern Europe and North America, single homelessness is characterised by small populations of long-term and recurrently homeless people with high support needs and larger populations with lower support needs, who are often socially and economically marginalised.[47] Equally, while most Skylight users tend not to be very well qualified or to have much work experience,[48] there are some single homeless people with professional qualifications and extensive work experience. Homelessness itself can be experienced at different levels and for varying periods of time.[49] Skylight is not presented with a consistent set of needs, it has to adapt and respond flexibly to a diverse population, if it is to truly provide a service for all single homeless people.

It is theoretically possible for Skylight to cherry-pick, i.e. to select single homeless people whose support needs are low, who

47 Available at www.crisis.org.uk/
48 Jones, A. and Pleace, N. (2010) op. cit.; Busch-Geertsema, V. et al. (2010) op. cit.; Benjaminsen, L. & Bastholm-Andrade, S. (2015) 'Testing a Typology of Homelessness Across Welfare Regimes: Shelter Use in Denmark and the USA', *Housing Studies*, DOI:10.1080/02673037.2014.982517; Kuhn, R. and Culhane, D.P. (1998) 'Applying Cluster Analysis to Test a Typology of Homelessness by Pattern of Shelter Utilization: Results from the Analysis of Administrative Data', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26( 2), 207-232.
49 See Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit. and chapter two.

have higher levels of educational attainment and a recent history of paid work. *No* evidence was found suggesting that Skylight was cherry-picking:[50]

- Overall, 41% of cohort members were homeless at first contact with their Skylight. The figure for those who had progressed to paid work was effectively identical at 44% and was higher for those who had progressed to further education/ externally provided training at 52%.

- Rates of self-reported mental health problems were lower among people who had secured paid work than among the cohort as a whole (38% compared to 53%), but were higher among those who had progressed to further education/ externally provided training (62%) and those who had engaged with in-house training and education provided by the Skylights (59%). Half of the people engaged in volunteering also had a history of mental health problems (52%).

- Overall, 31% of cohort members reported a history of problematic drug/alcohol use, the rate among those finding paid work was marginally higher at 38%, although rates among those entering further education and externally provided training were lower (10%).

- Educational attainment was higher among those entering further education or externally provided training (only 19% reported their education had been incomplete at first contact with Skylight), but the level among members securing paid work (37% reported incomplete education) was similar to that across the cohort as a whole (41%).

- Three-quarters of the cohort (74%) had engaged with a Skylight at least to the extent of securing certificates for basic skills education or in-house training. Beyond this, 48% had progressed from Skylight to further education/external training or paid work.

## Contrasting the Skylights

Skylight is not a single model,[51] but a suite of related services that work towards the same goals within the Crisis model of change framework. One of the key differences that can exist between individual Skylight services is whether they follow a building-based or outreach-based approach (see chapter one).

The first interim report of this research,[52] based on the data available at the time, concluded that both outreach and building-based Skylight had advantages. Outreach services could go to where single homeless people were and engage with them directly, rather than requiring them to come a building. Building-based services offered a hub from which multiple services and activities could be easily accessed and offer a potentially greater range of activities. There was also some evidence, reported in last year's interim report, that building based services might have a greater depth of engagement with Skylight members.

At the time at which the cohort was recruited, the Skylight services in London and Newcastle were relatively larger and more members were recruited from those services. However, it was still possible to contrast the views and experiences of those using these two building-based services and the third, Oxford, with the outreach-based services of Birmingham, Edinburgh and Merseyside (see chapter one).

**50** Pleace, N. (2015) op. cit.
**51** See also chapter 1.
**52** See chapter 1 and Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.

Within the cohort, 44%[53] of those using outreach-based services reported they had been homeless at first contact with Skylight in their interviews, a marginally higher but very similar figure to the 39% of members of the building-based Skylight services. Self-reported drug and alcohol problems in cohort interviews occurred at near-identical levels (31% building-based, 32% outreach) and rates of self-reported mental health problems in interviews (54% building based, 50% outreach) were also very similar. However, the building-based Skylights were, within the cohort, supporting more people who reported poor health, a disability or limiting illness in their interviews (41% compared to 29%).

Levels of engagement reported in interviews were also found to be broadly similar, i.e. it was *not* the case that cohort members in building-based Skylight services were more actively engaged than those using outreach-based services. While the activities of the cohort members are not necessarily representative of Skylight members as a whole, they were a substantial group of people (see chapter one). Interview results also showed very similar outcomes across the two broad models of Skylight, with two partial exceptions:

- 21% of building-based Skylight members had secured paid work, compared to 22% of outreach-based members.

- 25% of building-based members had engaged with in-house education and training, compared to 28% of outreach-based Skylight members.

- 16% of building-based Skylight members had progressed to further education and external training, but the figure for outreach-based members was lower at 7%. It is currently unclear why this was the case or if it were part of a wider trend, this will be explored in the final report.

- Outreach-based Skylight members were almost overwhelmingly positive about the service they used (93%), but those in building-based services, while still positive overall (67%), were more likely to raise criticisms.

Whether complaints about services in building-based services were higher among cohort members than among Skylight members, as a whole, requires more investigation. The first interim report found criticisms in relation to having to travel to buildings, meeting travel expenses and having to leave buildings between classes or activities.[54] Criticisms from some members using outreach services in 2013,[55] centring on a lack of dedicated private space for one-to-one sessions and space for classroom-based sessions, had faded by 2015. Birmingham and Merseyside had both secured additional, fixed-site, space between 2013 and 2015.[56]

Members in London progressed to paid work most often (33% of cohort members). This was followed by Birmingham (26%), Edinburgh and Merseyside (both 20%), with lower levels at Newcastle (8%). Limited engagement by members (see graphic 4.1) were under 10% everywhere except Merseyside (15%) and Newcastle (26%). By 2015, Skylight had a greater concentration on current, recent or imminent homelessness. Newcastle had originally been recruiting on a wider basis than other Skylights.[57]

53 Ibid.
54 All statistics are drawn from interview responses with University of York researchers.
55 This was described in the first interim report, see Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.
56 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.
57 See chapter 2.

# 5 Conclusions and recommendations

## Delivering progression

### Progress towards work

Skylight is, in many ways, a very considerable success. The most striking finding from the cohort study is the extent to which progression has been delivered for single homeless people who face multiple, significant, barriers to employment.

It is not easy to get single homeless people into work and they can also face significant barriers to education, training and volunteering. Apart from the very real barrier of the stigma that attaches itself to homelessness as a barrier to employment, there are often other serious obstacles, lack of experience, lack of qualifications and fairly often poor mental and/or physical health, limiting illness and disability.

In enabling access to paid work for more than one fifth of the single homeless people who were members of Skylight and participated in the cohort study, the available evidence suggests that Skylight has the potential to outperform the DWP Work Programme in securing work for single homeless people by a considerable margin. One caveat is that the members who were participants in the cohort were individuals who had engaged with Skylight for one term or more and as noted elsewhere in this report, attrition (the loss of members after only a few contacts, without progression being achieved) was an issue for the Skylights.[58] This is not the only success, there is general evidence of progression among the cohort of Skylight members during 2013-2015, with only a minority of 12% not really engaging.

Putting this another way, nearly nine out of every ten members of Skylight in the cohort exhibited at least some progression in terms of education, training, volunteering and working towards and securing paid work. Collectively, just over one third had reached the point of paid work, further education, higher education and externally provided training (35%). That this was from a population, of whom 53% reported a history of mental health problems, 31% problematic drug and alcohol use, 37% limiting illness, poor health or disability and who were homeless at first contact with Skylight in 41% of cases, serves to heighten the achievements of Skylight.

There was also clear evidence that Skylight was delivering progression to all members, not just those with lower support needs. This is an important finding, Skylight was not successful because it was focusing on those homeless people who were easier to progress.

### Gains in health, social support and housing

There are obvious benefits from the mental health coordinator service within the Skylights and it is clear that the results of earlier specific research on this aspect of Skylight have been replicated in the current study. The potential importance of gains in self-esteem, self-respect and social support for all aspects of health and well-being should also not be underestimated, people using Skylight often feel a sense of direction and purpose combined with having a sense that they are valued and deserve support. All of which potentially beneficial to physical and mental health as well as to life chances.

The housing role of Skylight is something that is still developing. At the point when the research began in 2013, specific support focused on housing, in the form of housing

58 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2014) op. cit.

coaches, was confined to London, but the role and a focus on meeting housing need is now becoming a core function of Skylight. It is evident that there are successes for Skylight, but as earlier work around access and effective use of the private rented sector[59] and access to the social rented sector[60] has shown, finding the right housing, which is adequate, secure and affordable, is a challenge.

### Quality of services

The cohort members were people who were very often impressed by Skylight and pleased with what it had done for them. Alongside the evidence of success, there was clear evidence that Skylight is a service model engaging with single homeless people in the right way.

Another key finding is the *quality* of outcomes that Skylight seeks to deliver, within the Crisis model of change, that seeks to promote positive progression across a single homeless person's life. Alongside being flexible, respectful and cooperative rather than coercive, Skylight ultimately seeks to promote a *better life* for single homeless people. Some approaches that seek to respond to homelessness and other extremes of social marginalisation by using coercion to maximise access to *any* employment, with little regard for the well-being of the individuals concerned.

Skylight does not seek to create a working, but still *homeless* population, as exists in countries like the USA.[61] Skylight is ultimately a humanitarian service model, designed to deliver progression that respects individuals and seeks to holistically improve their lives. Importantly, this approach appears integral to the successes Skylight has achieved and in the level of engagement and positive attitudes towards Skylight found among the cohort.

## Challenges

Clearly there are limits to what Skylight can achieve. External factors and individual events like a sudden deterioration in mental or physical health are not something that Skylight can be expected to control. Skylight cannot improve the supply of adequate, affordable, secure housing, nor can it increase the supply of full time, adequately paid, secure work. Skylight can limit, or remove, the specific disadvantages associated with homelessness and help counter poor labour market position, but guaranteeing paid work as an outcome for most Skylight users would not be logical.

There are also the challenges of the contexts in which Skylight is operating when the successes are achieved. There is a reality of expensive, poor quality, restricted housing options that may be difficult to afford, if working full time at a wage level that makes someone ineligible for welfare benefits. If only part-time work can be secured, finding enough income to make life sustainable may be difficult. Equally a Skylight member might progress into work that is only temporary, or offers unpredictable hours, again making planning even in the medium term difficult.

What this means is that Skylight will need to provide intermittent support to some members on an *ongoing* basis, as was shown in the 'punctuated progression' discussed in chapter three. Someone may again need help when an employment contract ceases, or when further or higher education or a training programme is completed and further help is

59 Sanders, B. et al. (2013) op. cit.
60 Smith, M.; Albanese, F. and Truder, J. (2014) *A Roof Over My Head: The Final Report of the Sustain Project.* London: Crisis.
61 Bretherton, J. Hunter, C. and Johnsen, S. (2013). '"You can judge them on how they look…": Homelessness Officers, Medical Evidence and Decision-Making in England', *European Journal of Homelessness*, 7.1; Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2011) 'A Difficult Mix: Issues in achieving socioeconomic diversity in deprived UK neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies 48*(16), 3433–3447.

required to look for work or other productive activity. For some cohort members, when progression had been interrupted or reversed, by circumstances, a deterioration in health or just ill luck, the capacity of Skylight to respond to their needs had been very valuable.

## Recommendations

- The current pattern of Skylight service provision, which can respond flexibly to individual needs using varied combinations of education, training, one-to-one support and arts-based activities, is effective in meeting the often diverse needs of single homeless people. Future developments in Skylight need to bear this finding in mind, ensuring that either direct service provision, or effective case management, is in place to retain the capacity of Skylight to recruit, support and progress single homeless people in multiple, flexible ways.

- All aspects of Skylight service provision have positive impacts, these impacts range from the achievements in securing paid work, through to harder to measure but nevertheless evident gains in self-confidence, social support health and well-being.

- There is scope to further enhance some Skylight functions. The role of one-to-one support, both in the sense of general support with progression, but also with regard to specialists working in mental health, housing and employment, was often instrumental in delivering positive outcomes. Progression was often positively associated with one-to-one support. Consideration should be given to ensuring the opportunity for one-to-one support with progression is universally available, possibly including a requirement to attend a one-to-one support session at registration. Skylight has been enhancing support focused on housing during the period 2013-2015 and proven beneficial. In the context of the planned abolition of social housing as a widespread and as a secure tenure, and ongoing reductions and restrictions on welfare benefits to help pay rent, the challenges that single homeless people face in securing a home are only likely to increase. There is extensive research evidence that a settled home remains fundamental to promoting true social and economic integration.[62]

- It is clearly the case that both the building-based and outreach-based models of Skylight can be effective and the results of the cohort study do not indicate marked differences in progression or other gains in well-being. Nevertheless, earlier research in this programme evaluation suggests that the two models have different strengths and limitations, which means there continues to be a case for further experimentation in the design of Skylight services. In particular, the possibilities around core and cluster/hub and wheel services that combine the advantages of a building with outreach services could be further explored.

- There is clear evidence that even after progression to the point of a life being transformed has been achieved, hazards and difficulties remain that may mean someone requires at least some ongoing support. Beyond those Skylight members needing assistance with *punctuated* progression, the time that some members will take to progress must be acknowledged. The cohort contained individuals whose progression was the

62 It has been estimated that 44% of the US homeless population are in employment, but remain homeless because their wages are insufficient to afford housing. Source: National Coalition for the Homeless http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/employment.html

result of years of contact and it was this group who tended to have travelled the furthest. It is important not to conflate sustained engagement with a failure to progress.

## About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives. We measure our success and can demonstrate tangible results and value for money.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

We have ambitious plans for the future and are committed to help more people in more places across the UK. We know we won't end homelessness overnight or on our own. But we take a lead, collaborate with others and together make change happen.

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