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# Paths to resettlement: understanding the interplay of work and other factors in journeys out of homelessness

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## Abstract

Paid employment has been viewed by successive governments in the UK as critical in making transitions out of homelessness, even when combined with problems like substance misuse, criminality or mental ill health. This article presents evidence from a study that sought to subject this belief to critical examination by exploring the relationship between promoting employability and other aspects of resettlement in the lives of a sample of thirty people experiencing homelessness and complex needs. Participants were interviewed twice at six to nine-month intervals to explore their changing motivations and perceptions of housing, work, relationships and hopes for the future.

Analysis used 'pathways' imagery to locate participants along an integrated pathway to understand how these factors related to one another in the pursuit of resettlement. We conclude that all respondents valued work, but its pursuit depended on the structural obstacles that participants faced. People's location along a resettlement pathway was

determined by their sense of control over circumstances, their success in overcoming barriers and the presence of significant others in their lives, and the pursuit of employment among homeless people needs to take account of progress in their resettlement journeys and the place of work in their aspirations.

**Key words**

Resettlement pathways, homelessness, employment, relationships, aspirations.

# **Paths to resettlement: understanding the interplay of work and other factors in journeys out of homelessness**

## **Introduction**

This article explores the relationship between promoting the employability of single homeless people and their long-term resettlement (McNeill, 2011). The research chimes with long-standing interest by governments in the UK in how best to achieve both these goals. In the UK, legislative measures to address homelessness as lack of accommodation that can be lawfully occupied date back to the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. It gave homeless applicants a right to accommodation provided they belonged to a priority need group, which excluded many single adults, many of whom still found themselves having to resort to rough sleeping. Various strategies to end rough sleeping have come and gone in the UK over the past twenty years (SEU, 1998; DETR, 1999; DCLG, 2008; 2011) with little lasting effect, and the past decade has seen a threefold increase of rough sleepers in England to its most recent figure of 4,266 (MHCLG 2020), prompting further legislative reform in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and a new Rough Sleeping Strategy (MHCLG 2018).

However, there has consistently been an additional interest in preparing homeless people for more lasting resettlement, in which a focus on tackling worklessness has been a vital component. For example, the New Labour Government's (1997-2010) 'Places of Change' initiative sought to transform hostels for homeless people into places where work may be pursued alongside meeting other 'support needs' (DCLG, 2006). The subsequent Coalition

(2010-15) and Conservative (2015-17) Governments continued this aspiration under the 'Homelessness Change' Programme (HCA, 2015), and recently introduced the different approach of placing homelessness work coaches in Jobcentres (MHCLG, 2018). Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions have not changed and this article subjects to critical examination the view that work or work-related activities serve to accelerate routes out of homelessness and associated problems.

The article draws on research that studied the relationship between homelessness, resettlement and employability among a group of currently or recently homeless people in a provincial city in central England. A key aim of the research was to understand how the pursuit of work relates to other priorities for homeless people as they seek to move towards more settled lives. The article seeks to unravel some of the tensions involved in moving towards work when simultaneously pursuing resettlement and other goals.

## **Resettlement and pathways out of homelessness**

This article asks how far 'resettlement' reflects homeless people's aspirations, what it means to them, and by what pathways it might best be pursued. In order to inform wider debates about the use of pathways in theorising routes out of homelessness, 'homelessness' is to be understood as a variable rather than a specified set of circumstances. The ETHOS categorisation (FEANTSA, 2005) has been used for the purposes of this research, as it includes not only situations of 'rooflessness' where people live in circumstances not appropriate for human habitation, but also situations that guarantee no security of occupation, such as hostels or temporary residence with friends and family. Progress towards resettlement may involve movement between a range of these circumstances before people reach what they would be

willing to regard as 'home'. Likewise, 'resettlement' is understood less in terms of the pursuit of the pre-defined goal of independent housing and more as a holistic process by which participants work out their own destinations in which housing may be combined with a range of other goals, including employment or other work-related activities. Resettlement for single homeless people has long been seen largely as a housing issue of sustaining independent accommodation (Vincent et al., 1995). Thus, the FOR-HOME study in which over 400 formerly homeless people were tracked over an 18-month period (Warnes et al., 2013) was primarily interested in the housing outcomes of satisfaction with accommodation, 'settledness' (Crane et al., 2011) and tenancy sustainment, measured by housing retention and stability. Involvement in work or training was only relevant as a positive predictor, not as an aspect of resettlement itself.

The most significant contribution to resettlement practice in recent years has come from Housing First by which homeless people have been awarded secure independent tenancies directly from the streets without needing to prove 'housing readiness', but the emphasis on housing has been balanced by the separate provision of holistic personal support services to address complex needs. Pioneered in the USA, Housing First has been incorporated into housing policy in many European countries since 2007 (Pleace et al., 2019), including England where a pilot programme has been funded as part of the Government's response to escalating levels of rough sleeping (MHCLG, 2018). Evaluations of early initiatives in both the USA (McNaughton Nicholls and Atherton, 2011) and England (Bretherton and Pleace, 2015) have demonstrated considerable success in not only tenancy sustainment but also management of complex needs. Moreover, tenancy sustainment has been shown to involve more than the management of risks that threaten accommodation but also the development of support networks and a sense of self-worth and value to the community (Bowpitt and

Harding, 2009). This finding has implications for the wider resettlement process and the role that work might play.

Understanding resettlement as a process has led writers to make prominent use of 'pathways' imagery in debates about the explanation of homelessness and resettlement. (See for instance Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Clapham, 2003; 2012; McNaughton, 2008; Ravenhill, 2008; Fopp, 2009; Mallett et al, 2010; Maycock et al., 2011; Marr, 2012; Somerville, 2013; Fitzpatrick et al, 2013; De Decker and Segers, 2014; Raitakari, 2019a). In debates about homelessness, a pathway has been defined as 'the route of an individual or household into homelessness, their experience of homelessness and their route out of homelessness to secure housing' (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000). The concept owes its origins to early attempts to resolve the tension between individual and structural explanations of homelessness by showing how personal circumstances and structural constraints interact in the narratives of homeless people. Clapham (e.g. 2003; 2005; 2012) sought to inject the concept with theoretical substance derived from structuration theory. Homelessness and resettlement are to be understood as episodes in a person's housing pathway, which in turn is a key component in 'life planning' pursued in the search for identity and self-fulfilment. However, in a recent review of its use in homelessness research, Raitakari (2019b) has shown how the way that this 'metaphor of movement' is used can imply either passive trajectory or active navigation, and risks imposing meaning on homeless people's own narratives if not used self-critically. This article will critically employ pathways imagery in analysing the factors that influence homeless people's navigation towards or away from resettlement, and how employability trajectories relate to this process.

Most writers have focused on the process of negotiating access to housing, with work and the pursuit of employability through education, training or volunteering being a valuable

fruit of resettlement, rather than intrinsic to the outcome (Maycock et al., 2011). However, Marr (2012) has shown that in welfare regimes such as Japan that rely on the protective role of the family, where this breaks down resulting in homelessness, labour market solutions are critical to resettlement. Meanwhile, McNaughton (2008) has criticised 'resettlement' as another metaphor with questionable implications as a pathway goal for homeless people, potentially consigning them to idleness and isolation. In the article that follows, we will use evidence from the evolving stories of homeless people as they negotiate structural and personal constraints in the pursuit of self-fulfilment and new identities to understand how housing, work, relationships and aspirations relate to each other in shaping pathway goals.

## **Barriers to employability**

Of particular interest was the role of employability in the pursuit of resettlement. 'Employability' describes proximity to the paid labour market that might be enhanced by a range of work-related activities including education, training and volunteering. Some have argued that opportunities to develop employability must be offered in the earliest stages of resettlement if a return to homelessness is to be prevented (e.g. Wooley and McNaughton, 2006; Shaheen and Rio, 2007). Yet it is unclear how employability might mediate the resettlement process for homeless people and for which groups.

Homeless people face personal and structural barriers in securing paid employment. This is true for the unemployed population in general, but homeless people experience these obstacles more intensively. Barriers include complex issues, which may be compounded by homelessness such as mental ill health, substance misuse and offending behaviour (Singh, 2005). However, for people at the extremes of homelessness, more immediate problems take

priority over their lack of skills, qualifications and training, such as somewhere to sleep, something to eat, or dealing with substance misuse problems (Bowpitt et al., 2011). A fear of returning to homelessness also prevents many formerly homeless people from taking on employment (McNaughton, 2008).

Moreover, homeless people are at very different stages in seeking work: some feel ready to enter the paid labour market unsupported; others only feel able to do so with support; and a further group consider it as simply unviable (Jones and Pleace, 2010). Those with multiple disadvantages may be at such a great distance from entering the labour market that formal interventions push them even further away. Furthermore, there is a danger of further exclusion by sanctioning people with multiple needs who are unable to fulfil statutory job-seeking requirements (Batty et al., 2015).

Many homelessness services work holistically to combine accommodation and personal support, with training, education and support into employment (McNaughton, 2008; Dobson and McNeill, 2011; Pleace and Bretherton, 2017). What many of these projects offer is 'meaningful occupation' for homeless people within a supported environment to promote self-esteem, confidence and well-being. Thus, homelessness services may be better able to provide support for people with multiple, complex issues than training and education institutions.

## **Designing a study of resettlement**

This article is based on evidence from a study undertaken in 2009 involving repeat interviews firstly with currently and recently homeless single people (the homeless sample) and secondly with a sample of service providers. This article draws on data from the former to illuminate

the motives and aspirations of homeless people. Although the research was undertaken over ten years ago, understanding homelessness as an aspect of multiple disadvantage is as relevant now as it was then (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2015), as is the role of promoting employability in achieving lasting resettlement (MHCLG, 2018).

The homeless sample consisted of 13 men and 17 women who at the time of initial interviewing lived either in temporary hostels (13 people) or in independent housing with tenancy support (17 people). All participants were recruited through a Housing Association that provides hostel and housing related support in the city where the research was undertaken. Interviews were carried out by the first author following independent ethical scrutiny with regard to voluntary informed consent. That is, participants were fully informed of the purposes of the study and that their anonymity and confidentiality would be safeguarded in all published outputs. They were further assured that they had a right to withdraw their data and that Housing Association staff would be available for independent debriefing. They were contacted again six to nine months later and 22 (9 men and 13 women) took part in second interviews to identify factors that facilitated or hindered resettlement. Of the 22, 5 were still in hostels and 17 were in tenancies, of which 4 had been in hostels at the time of the first interview.

Experiences of homelessness were diverse, with some participants in and out of homelessness, including rough sleeping, sofa surfing and periods in refuges and hostels. They were adults experiencing 'severe and multiple disadvantage' as understood by Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2015), including alcohol and drug misuse, mental ill-health, physical disabilities and past offending behaviours. Many had limited formal qualifications and the majority claimed unemployment or disability related benefits, apart from two in employment. Before the interviews, a short questionnaire collected information on personal characteristics to

ensure that the sample exemplified the diverse range of complex needs faced by homeless people. Interview transcripts were summarised to create pen profiles of each participant to record their stories through the two interviews. Resettlement pathways were constructed through thematic analysis by plotting patterns of experiences from the pen profiles that described changes in participants' views of where they lived, their motivations to work, support relationships and hopes for the future.

For the participants in this study, the path to resettlement was not straightforward and often involved complex movements in and out of housing, developing employability, building supportive relationships and pursuing other personal aspirations. Like building blocks, progress or setbacks in one aspect of resettlement could affect change in another. The study was mainly concerned with what facilitates resettlement and especially the role of work and employability in this process, but it also sought to explore the wider question of what shapes homeless people's priorities in their pursuit of a stable home, and the factors that might influence this process, especially feeling positive about the future or developing supportive relationships.

In what follows, participants are clustered according to shared situations, which can be located at stages on discreet pathways. Importantly, these paths to resettlement are not necessarily linear, unidirectional, or directed towards prescribed goals. Neither is it suggested that the pathways themselves carry explanatory significance. They are an heuristic device to locate participants' progress in moving away from homelessness and other complex needs, in order to frame causal processes as they moved between stages.

To understand the relationship between resettlement and employability, the findings first discuss housing and employability pathways. Participants are located on these pathways and movements between the two sets of interviews are described. Movements along each of

the pathways are then compared to find out whether progress along one was matched by progress along the other. It is at this point that evidence from other factors is introduced, especially the role of relationships and the pursuit of aspirations, in order to gain deeper insight into what drives movement along these pathways.

## **Paths to resettlement**

### *Housing*

Stable housing is often seen as an indicator of successful resettlement (Warnes et al., 2013). However, the relationship between housing status and 'settlement' is complex, making it difficult and perhaps misleading to identify a single staged pathway towards resettlement in which each stage is clearly distinguished by accommodation type. Instead, the complexity reflected in participants' situations is captured by delineating a pathway towards 'home building', with four stages.

These attempt to combine housing status with emotional dimensions of resettlement to position individuals at the time of the first interviews as a base for gauging change. In using the language of 'permanent home' to describe the final stage, a value judgement about the desired direction of change is implied, but these stages accurately capture the perceptions of participants. Permanent housing did not always signify resettlement, whereas permanent home captured this emotional aspect of 'settlement'. Thus, some participants described hostels as 'home' whilst others living in their own tenancies felt unsafe or unsettled. Setting these stages out in a pathway shows how individuals saw themselves as moving towards their ideal outcomes of resettlement, which included a sense of belonging, safety and a space to recover. Individuals' positions along the stages of resettlement were in part influenced by

how they came to be homeless, compounding issues in their homelessness and their experiences of homeless situations. The following describes in more detail the typical situations that characterised each stage for the thirty participants at the first interview.

### ***1 Temporary housing, not ready to move on***

Nine people lived in hostels or 'move on' accommodation but were not feeling ready to move into permanent accommodation. Some felt settled and 'at home', while others were unsettled and dissatisfied with temporary accommodation, but all shared an unwillingness to move on. There were seven male ex-offenders in this group and the two women had been homeless many times in the past. They were also not engaged in work-related activities within the hostels.

### ***2 Permanent housing, feeling unsettled***

A further nine were struggling to cope in their housing situations. Despite living in permanent and secure tenancies, people in this group felt unsettled or unsafe and this appeared to relate to experiences. Most of the men in this group had known long periods of homelessness and women's routes into homelessness mainly arose from domestic violence. More of this group presented with complex needs, typically arising from past trauma and transience (for example, childhoods in care, belonging to a traveller community, squatting). Additionally, some were struggling with debts, legal disputes or isolation.

### ***3 Temporary housing, ready to move on***

Four people were taking steps to move out of hostels into permanent accommodation and all were currently applying for tenancies. They were generally younger, and their experiences of hostels had been largely positive where they had developed skills for moving

into independent accommodation, had accessed resources and had started to overcome drug problems.

#### *4 Permanent home, feeling settled*

The eight people in this situation held tenancies in independent housing and one was a homeowner. They were generally satisfied with their accommodation which was currently stable and secure. Moreover, many said that they felt safe, settled and at home. The seven women in this group were older, had mental health issues and had experienced shorter periods of homelessness. The one man in the group was working and had overcome substance misuse issues. A tenancy sustainment team supported them in maintaining their homes.

Of the 22 participants interviewed a second time, nine made progress along the resettlement pathway, and only one regressed. The greatest strides were made by Finlay who was in a hostel when first interviewed, having experienced a cycle of homelessness and repeat imprisonment, but was settled in his own accommodation by the second. Another three of the nine had advanced from feeling unsettled to feeling settled in permanent accommodation. Two others in temporary accommodation had progressed in readiness to move on. Typical of those who had advanced towards resettlement was Eric, who moved from a hostel to a tenancy with his partner. *'It's been nice to move into a property and we can just sit down and it's like, "What's on TV? What would you like to eat?" And it's just about living again, kind of thing.'*

Only Lorna appeared to have moved backwards to feeling unsettled in her own accommodation. However, five participants made no progress. Thus, Fiona had been evicted

due to her son's anti-social behaviour and was living in new accommodation at the time of the first interview, but still felt unsettled at the time of the second.

"I feel like this could happen again.-I just keep thinking maybe the best thing is to not acquire anything in case I did have to move again ... So, I feel like a fish out of water really, not knowing anyone at all and living somewhere where you've never lived before." (Fiona)

### *Employability*

The next issue is how movement along the resettlement pathway (or not) related to employability. Once again, four stages of an employability pathway emerged from the analysis indicating different attitudes and motivations towards employment: 'non-work focused'; 'uncertain focus'; 'deferred-focused'; and 'work-focused'.

#### *1 Non-work focussed*

There were eight people in the 'non-work focused' stage at the first interview; all had complex needs and developing employability was of little interest. They were either unlikely to work in the future or were far from the paid labour market. The men had often spent the longest time on the streets. The women were older, living in their own tenancies, and had severe mental health problems.

#### *2 Uncertain focus*

The ten people in the 'uncertain focus' stage were interested in working at some time in the future but had other more pressing issues and complex needs. They were unsure of their work preferences, or how to pursue them.

#### *3 Deferred focus*

The six participants in the 'deferred focus' group were mainly young people in hostels who were more focused on education, often re-taking courses to gain qualifications they had not achieved in the past. They had clearer plans to work and felt that improving their qualifications would help to realise them.

#### *4 Work focused*

Six people were 'work-focused', being closest to the paid labour market, for whom work, voluntary or paid, was important. They had greater ambitions to work as they had largely overcome personal barriers, such as substance misuse.

Participants' employability should be seen in context. They had limited experience of work or had been unemployed for a long period of time (12 years in one case). Moreover, they faced a complex mixture of structural and personal barriers to employment and other work-related activities that rendered the pursuit of employability unlikely to be effective at least until other resettlement goals were achieved. They reported numerous barriers that derived from employer reluctance to consider people who are homeless or living in hostels, or have enduring mental health problems, unresolved substance issues or criminal records, or who possess few qualifications and limited self-confidence. Furthermore, when first interviewed, most participants were preoccupied with issues of housing and other aspects of resettlement and most felt they had too much to cope with already to look for paid work. Unsurprisingly, only two participants moved anywhere along the employability pathway between interviews and Michael, who remained 'non-work focused', was typical of many. *'At the moment actually going to work would be the last thing on my mind until I get everything sorted.'*

This begs the question of the extent to which resolving resettlement issues might be essential to the successful pursuit of employability. Participants still had a positive view of the

value of work and many said they wanted to work in the future. Work offered choice in housing, structure to their days, and health benefits, and it gave participants a sense of self-worth and belonging. Of the ten participants who were in either of the more advanced employability stages at the second interview, six were in permanent settled accommodation. Typical of these were Lorna and Pamela, who were the only participants who remained in work throughout the study. The benefits they attributed to work could be linked to aspects of resettlement, as Lorna explained. *'I definitely want to go into some kind of work because I feel better. That's why I like doing that voluntary work as well. Coz you feel useful, you know.'* In Pamela's case, work distracted her from drinking. *'But I've calmed down a lot now you know, now I'm working and stuff; it's like off my mind ... so it's not a problem.'*

The implications are both that progress towards resettlement is essential to the effective pursuit of employability, but also that work-related activities may play a part in sealing the benefits of resettlement and making them permanent. To understand how this interaction operates, the roles of two mediating factors were explored: personal relationships and aspirations.

### *Relationships*

Participants' accounts of relationships with family and friends at the time of the first interview painted a bleak picture. Twelve reported having no-one who offered them significant support, and most had few supportive relationships, with many describing abusive or exploitative relationships with family, partners or friends. Evaluating the quality of relationships has complexities not encountered in the other two variables of resettlement and employability, making it inappropriate to locate people along anything like a 'relationships pathway'. There are several quite distinct criteria by which people's

relationships might be evaluated, including intimacy, supportiveness, resourcefulness, intensity, durability and mutuality. Thus, relationships might be close or distant, supportive or disruptive, resourceful or exploitative, intense or superficial, lasting or short-lived, mutual or one-sided. For instance, relationships with friends and support workers might be equally intense and supportive, but the latter might be more resourceful in mediating access to other aspects of resettlement. Moreover, respondents not only received support from family members, friends and partners, but also provided it. This suggests an inter-dependency and reciprocity of support, which has been described as 'mutual aid' (Lemos, 2010). However, what mattered to participants and to the research are the ways in which relationships motivated (or impeded) moves towards other goals, especially those associated with resettlement and employability.

Of the 22 participants available for both interviews, seven identified a person or people in their lives for whom they received sustained mutual support throughout the period of the study. These relationships tended to be with parents, siblings, partners, and close friends. Some spoke of how supportive people in their lives had stuck by them 'through thick and thin', despite rejections of their repeated offers of help. A further five identified their support worker as the most supportive person in their life, although many more spoke of that person's importance. However, in only two cases did that worker remain the source of the most valued relationship; the other three had transferred their allegiance to an informal source of support by the time of the second interview, possibly because of the time-limited nature of support worker involvement. A third group of eight participants who at the beginning of the study could identify no-one with whom they had a quality relationship by any of the above criteria made progress in their relationships by the time of the second interview. Of these, six people identified supportive relationships with new friends, or were

re-building former relationships with family. Some were transitory, such as relationships with other service users in hostels (Neale and Brown, 2016). Lastly, of those interviewed twice, only three were unable to point to anyone with whom they enjoyed a mutually supportive relationship by the time of the second interview. They felt 'stuck' in their journeys to build supportive relationships and felt support was out of reach for them. Breakdowns in relationships, rejection and loss were characteristic of their experience.

What role did relationships play in promoting or retarding resettlement? Of the nine participants who made progress towards resettlement between interviews, two enjoyed a consistent relationship with a partner or friend, another two benefited from the support of a valued key worker, and a further four were in the process of building relationships with partner, family or friends. In the case of only one woman did there appear to be no significant support. This might suggest that resettlement was facilitated for those with mutually supportive relationships, while those with difficult personal relationships encountered barriers, implying a connection between disruptive relationships and limited progress towards resettlement. However, the connection between personal relationships and resettlement was mediated by other issues that participants themselves prioritised, and the aspirations that they had for the future.

### *Aspirations*

How far did participants have aspirations beyond immediate preoccupations, where did resettlement, employability and relationships fit in their priorities, and how far were they prepared to invest their energies in the pursuit of these goals? When participants were asked what they hoped for in the future, some goals were more realistic. Respondents prioritised a range of issues in their lives, including supportive relationships, safe homes, better health,

well-being and happiness, and even meaningful employment. However, before exploring these priorities, the extent to which participants could be described as 'aspirant' - having an aspirational attitude - at the time of the first interview, will be assessed using the Outcomes Star (MacKeith et al., 2008) classification of five stages towards self-reliance.

### *1. Self-reliance*

Two respondents felt positive about the future, were clear about what they wanted to achieve and how they would achieve it, and were comfortable about how far they had come. Moreover, they had access to support and knew how more could be acquired.

### *2. Learning*

A further four respondents had a strong sense that they had overcome their experiences of homelessness and its contributing factors and felt confident to tackle whatever problems arose. They had a growing understanding of what works in pursuing particular goals and promoting self-esteem.

### *3. Believing*

The next group of twelve people had not yet overcome all their problems, but felt hopeful about their future due to both their engagement with support and some progress in dealing with complex needs, such as drug and mental health problems. Moreover, they had an increasing sense of direction in their lives.

### *4. Accepting help*

A fourth group of nine people were at the early stages of 'accepting help', but aspirations were uncertain and experiences of homelessness (and services) negatively affected hopes that their situations would improve.

### *5. Stuck*

Finally, three individuals appeared to be 'stuck' at the initial stages of developing trust and hope in the future, struggling to imagine a time when they would feel at home, happy and healthy. They were all men with multiple complex needs and in a repeated state of crisis.

Having distinguished participants according to their aspirational attitudes, to what did they aspire, and in what ways did they change between the first and second interviews? The two 'self-reliant' participants were Richard and Eileen. Unusually, Richard was already in a permanent tenancy and paid work at the time of the first interviews, and this had persisted by the second. He had moved into a hostel before his work aspirations and desire to restore lost family relationships began to develop, but there is no doubt that the desire to embed his resettlement gave him a powerful interest in work. *'For me I knew I wanted a job, coz I knew with having a job you get paid which makes it nice. I get to choose where I want to live.'* Eileen was also in a permanent tenancy and engaged in voluntary work when first interviewed and these had been sustained by the time of the second. Her interests were very much bound up with managing her mental health problems that had put her at risk of homelessness in the past. *'My main priority is staying well and maintaining my tenancy.'* It was in this context that the importance she attached to employability, stable housing and supportive relationships should be understood.

The three 'learning' stage participants who were available for a second interview all attached primary importance to resettlement as having a home of your own. They were all in hostels when first interviewed and two had realised their ambition by the time of the second. *'Finding a place what I'm comfortable with, where I choose to want to be, a place of my own, to call my own, my own home, my own front door.'* (Eric) However, all three had other interests, including employment, but these interests had been sullied by past negative experiences.

For Simone, who had become homeless following a traumatic relationship breakdown, work was out of the question while living in a hostel. It was partly prejudice from employers when they discovered her address, but it was also

“Because you have to get up in the morning, you’re going to work, you’re going to be having stress at work, then you come back, then in the middle of the night when you’re trying to sleep somebody will set the fire alarm on and the noise is just too much. It’s like you’re in a mad house.” (Simone)

Nevertheless, employability was an intrinsic part of recovery for all three in this group, not just as a distant aspiration.

“A big thing is from being so occupied there [in hostel] I think it’s important now that we keep doing things, we don’t just become stagnant and fall into a rut, because obviously that’s when depression might start to set.” (Eric)

Moreover, for all three, their journey towards both resettlement and employability was impelled by a relationship with a newfound partner.

At the other end of the scale, three participants were ‘stuck’ in the early stages of resettlement, with few reasons for optimism about the future. All three had chronic multiple needs of various kinds and faced substantial employability barriers. Michael had a background of long-term homelessness and mental ill health, was heavily in debt and struggling to sustain independent accommodation; the other two were in hostels. Michael’s rent arrears acted as a deterrent.

“At the moment actually going to work would be the last thing on my mind until I get everything sorted. Because if I had to go to work now, I would have to earn roughly £500 a month! To pay my rent, to pay my arrears off my rent.” (Michael)

Curtis was currently unable to work because of a serious head injury, and like Simone, Brandon was put off pursuing work by hostel living. However, all three still had aspirations, but they were unable to pursue them because of circumstances. For Curtis, work had been a foundation of his sense of identity and masculinity, and he longed to be fit enough to return to it: *‘I’ve always done a bloke’s job. Like a man’s job is working on a building site and big machines; that’s all I know... I like to build stuff and then say, I built that.’*

The other two, however, had different priorities. For Brandon, what was most important were *‘Getting my life back in order, get my kids back and then after all that I can do what I want to do.’* Michael shared these sentiments: *‘I don’t care about myself, but the kids must come first. And if I can see my kids happy then I’m happy.’* Restoring relationships with children gave them hope in their quest for resettlement, but for Curtis restoring his capacity to work as he used to was what served this purpose.

Experiences affected aspirations but did not always condition them. Despite barriers to resettlement, most people felt hopeful. Those who felt ‘stuck’ had the least hope for the future, but hope appeared stronger where progress was made in resettlement more broadly and even small progressive steps were important. Therefore, positive aspirations and hopes for the future were important in resettlement and involved a number of cognitive processes, which facilitate personal changes in how people view themselves and their circumstances (Seal, 2005). Most people had ‘normal’ hopes and dreams like the rest of the general

population - leading happy, meaningful and healthy lives in safe homes with supportive and positive relationships surrounding them - but they faced abnormal challenges in realising them.

## **Towards an integrated pathway**

To understand the relationship between resettlement and employability, and the mediating role that personal relationships and aspirations might play, a composite pathway was constructed that combines all four variables (housing, employability, relationships and aspirations) to provide a summary of progress for the participants who were interviewed twice. Four stages are identified as 'stuck and dissatisfied', 'gradually progressing towards resettlement', 'markedly progressing towards resettlement' and 'stable and sustaining progress'.

### **1 *'Stuck' and dissatisfied***

For four individuals, aspects of their lives had not progressed or improved and for some had worsened. There was minimal progress against one variable but not others or progress on all variables was slow. This 'stuck' stage meant movement towards resettlement was restricted due to crises which could exacerbate mental health issues. Michael and Brandon were in this group, but the other two suffered mental and physical health problems and learning difficulties, constraining any work aspirations they might pursue. They were dissatisfied with aspects of their lives and felt a lack of control over housing and lacked supportive relationships. However, although trust and hope in the future were low, they were not without their aspirations, but work was not one of them for largely practical reasons.

## *2 Gradually progressing towards resettlement*

There were small incremental changes in the lives of six participants. Four were at the 'believing' stage in their attitudes to aspiration. Whilst their housing situations often stayed the same and there was no further movement towards work or changes in personal relationships, there was a sense that small changes pushed them in the direction of resettlement, especially increasing hope for the future. Once again, these six faced substantial obstacles in accessing the labour market. For instance, Alice's debts were a major preoccupation that barred access to rented accommodation, Noreen had never worked, and Fiona had substantial mental health problems. Yet none of these participants were averse to pursuing employability and Alice was developing basic skills at the hostel where she lived. Neither were they devoid of aspiration. Alice was looking for ways to clear her debts; Noreen was focused on improving the condition of her accommodation; and Fiona was working on moving nearer to family and friends. However, paid work was currently neither a priority nor a realistic aspiration.

## *3 Markedly progressing towards resettlement*

Eight people's lives had changed considerably and positively from the time of the first interview in terms of secure housing, improved support networks and recovery from health issues. Whilst there were some small steps in developing employability, such as starting a new course or improvements in decision making, what appeared more important was a sense of home and supportive relationships. The eight were quite varied in their attitude to aspiration, but the variation reflected not so much the intensity of their longings as the different points on the road to resettlement from which they started. Nevertheless, what they had in common was a degree of success in their efforts. We have already noted the experiences of Eric and Simone. We have also seen how for Lorna work-related activities helped to sustain her

progress towards resettlement. However, Isabel's primary interest lay in caring for her newborn baby, and her progress can be attributed to more secure accommodation and a new partner, but work was out of the question. On the other hand, for Victor, an ex-offender with a history of violence and substance misuse, moving to a new hostel was valued for its potential in realising a more holistic recovery that included permanent accommodation, a new partner and the pursuit of work opportunities.

#### *4 Stable and sustaining progress*

For four people there was little change in their situations, but they had sustained progress they had made previously. They had already at the time of first interviews made considerable progress towards resettlement. All had stable housing which felt like home, had supportive relationships, worked or volunteered, and felt positive about the future. This group included Richard and Eileen whom we saw were 'self-reliant' in their aspirational attitudes. We have also seen how, for Pamela, work was an intrinsic part of her alcohol recovery, taking her mind off the desire to drink. However, for Jean, ongoing mental health problems would always mean that sustaining accommodation and current volunteering was all she was likely to achieve.

## **Conclusions**

This article has explored the role of employability in the resettlement pathways of people recovering from the effects of homelessness and complex needs and how far distinct pathways can be discerned. Some tentative points are offered by way of conclusion. The first is that all our participants without exception saw the value of work and felt a sincere desire to 'give something back' in response to the support they had received on their road to

resettlement. However, secondly, giving expression to this desire remained a distant dream for many facing structural obstacles, which might include chronic mental and physical health problems, indebtedness, and employer discrimination. In this context, the combination of the hostel environment and high hostel rents effectively debarred hostel residents from employment, even though hostels provided good opportunities for developing work-related skills. This effectively meant that, thirdly, independent accommodation was a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the realistic pursuit of employability. It is at this point that understanding participants' attitudes to aspiration is of critical importance. All our participants had aspirations of some kind, but for those who were 'stuck', aspirations were little better than pipe dreams. All others shared an aspiration towards resettlement, and the substance of their aspirations varied according to where they were along their resettlement pathways. Thus, for those facing the greatest obstacles, managing or overcoming those obstacles was the primary motivating force in their lives. However, for those who had progressed further, secured independent accommodation, found new relationships or restored lost ones, or were managing mental health or substance misuse problems, the pursuit of employability became an intrinsic part of a more holistic recovery of identity and self-worth.

Earlier, we noted Clapham's (2003, 2005, 2012) coining of 'pathways' imagery in an account of homelessness that relates individual and structural factors dynamically by identifying episodes in people's search for home. We have sought to explore how far this concept can be extended to understand how the pursuit of home might relate to work and other aspirations in the resettlement of a group of homeless people with multiple needs. If our findings are to have any significance for policy and practice, they presuppose a potential to guide people along a pathway that can relate home, work, relationships and other

aspirations in ways that are meaningful to people in pursuit of resettlement. In the integrated pathway, we have tentatively identified staging posts that are distinguished by degree of control over circumstances, the measure of success in achieving self-identified goals, and the presence and support of significant others in their lives. The driving force is a desire for belonging and self-worth and the overcoming of obstacles to their realisation. Work only becomes meaningful when it can find a place within these longings and not conflict with them.

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