

Talk notes:

Putting the lived experience of homelessness at the heart of Crisis campaigns – Steve Lee, senior campaigns officer, Crisis

- In the spring of 2017 Crisis had just been successful in our NOTA campaign to achieve the first major change in homelessness legislation in England in 40 years.
- PLEH (people with lived experience of homelessness) had been closely involved in the development of the campaign from the outset in 2014.
- Their experience had been instrumental in designing the 'mystery shopping' research – Turned Away - which launched the campaign.
- <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/turned-away-2014/>
- Eight aspiring actors with previous experiences of homelessness mystery shopped 16 local authorities to examine the quality of advice and assistance they provide to single homeless people
- Each mystery shopper took the role of a character to explain why they needed help with their housing. These were based around one of four characters which were drawn from real life situations that may cause an individual to become homeless: someone who has been forced to sleep rough after losing their job, a young person who had been thrown out of the family home, a victim of domestic violence, and a very vulnerable person with learning difficulties
- In 37 out of the 87 visits, local authorities arranged to accommodate mystery shoppers that evening, either through the provision of emergency accommodation or because they had negotiated for them to return to their previous address
- In the remaining 50 visits, most of which were at London boroughs, they received inadequate or insufficient help. It was common for mystery shoppers to simply be signposted to written information about renting privately or even turned away without any help or the opportunity to speak to a Housing Advisor
- The research provided a springboard for a call for a completely different approach to homelessness, focussed on prevention and rapid relief.
- The campaign built into something of a movement, with widespread involvement from across the homelessness sector in support of the private members' bill which became the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- PLEH were at the heart of making the case to legislators, from conventional story-telling and case study work, through to direct contact with their MPs.
- There were letter writing sessions in Crisis Skylights and other homelessness services across the country; open letters to ministers; letters to local newspapers; MPs invited to Q&A sessions at Crisis Skylights; meetings with MPs in their constituencies; and a huge

attendance from PLEH from services all over the country at a mass lobby of Parliament ahead of the second reading debate.

- The campaign fostered some enduring relationships between MPs, PLEH and homelessness services – but much of the influencing by those key players fizzled out after the campaign win.
- 2017 was also Crisis 50th year – but we were clear that this was no cause for celebration. For all that we'd changed the law, we had seen homelessness rising by all measures for more than 7 years and street homelessness had more than doubled in the same period.
- We determined that we would mark our anniversary by the production of a plan - based on evidence and knowledge – to end homelessness in Great Britain.
- A year long process included a huge consultation, with academics, policy experts, front line workers and crucially with PLEH. We set out with an ambition to ensure that the voice of lived experience was at the heart of the content of the plan – but as the scale and ambition of the plan itself became clear, we saw that the work we were doing was also giving PLE a significant say in setting the strategic priorities for Crisis policy and campaigns work for many years to come.
- We worked with Uscreates, a human-centred design agency, to design full-day workshops with people with lived experiences of homelessness (PLEH) that could be scaled across the UK, reaching many PLEH in different locations.
- These sessions aimed to better understand the causes of homelessness and its effect on people's lives, and find ideas to prevent and end it (from the perspective of those who have experienced it).
- After an initial workshop facilitated by Uscreates with PLEH, Crisis and Groundswell staff were trained to deliver a further 12 workshops at Crisis' 12 Skylight centres and 21 workshops conducted by Groundswell at homelessness organisations across England, Scotland and Wales.
- Uscreates helped us develop and adapt tools to map experiences, analyse causes, develop solutions, proto-type, critique and refine them into a powerful report: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238836/the-lived-experience-of-homelessness-report-2018.pdf>
- That report fed into a second phase of the consultation: a series of policy roundtables that combined this insight with findings from policy workshops and written consultation responses to develop consensus around a set of ideas.
- The findings from the PLE workshops were analysed under the lens of the three homelessness priorities from a policy context: preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place; responding rapidly so problems don't escalate; and ensuring long-term solutions are in place for those that need support with more complex issues.

- Those findings continue to inform the way we shape our own services, how we frame the way we speak about homelessness and how we advise others on how best to meet the needs of homelessness people.
- I am proud to say that much of the content and the themes generated by the consultation with PLE found its way into the final plan. *Everybody In*, even as a 600-page document has the stamp of lived experience voice right through it.
- The plan is effectively our big theory of change of how to move from where we are now to homelessness ended.
- We continue to work closely on the development of policy and campaigns with the PLE who are our members – through slots at local member forums at our Skylight services and regular workshops at our regional Experts by Experience panels.
- We are moving toward an activism based approach to our campaigning, complementing and building on our online activity, under which we will devolve power to work on our campaigns to our supporters.
- PLE have a massive role to play in this and we will support them to work with our Skylights, or other services, and with other activists to have a central voice in deciding strategies and tactics in their local areas, as well as delivering campaign activity.
- PLE are often among the most vulnerable people in our society, with multiple and complex needs. We are working with services to ensure that the infrastructure exists to support people in these circumstances.
- Our Skylights are set up to support and safeguard our 'members' to achieve their goals in a way that is both developmental and safe for them.
- Our activism strategy envisages journeys for PLE within the overall structure – using a circles of commitment model – from 'community' to core.
- We're also creating resources – including training - designed specifically with and for PLE, accessible to people with a range of abilities and needs.
- Where local campaigning groups develop, we will expect and support PLE to play a significant role in them and their work.