

THE NEW Narrative

**REAL
PEOPLE
REAL
STORIES**

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Some participants from group one of the journalism training academy receive their certificates from INSP. Credit: Jack Donaghy Photography

HOMELESS CHARITY SUPPORTS A DIFFERENT KIND OF JOURNALISM

A Glasgow-based global charity, the International Network of Street Papers (INSP), has recently completed the country's first ever journalism academy for homeless people. Titled *Changing the Narrative*, the project's dual aim was to support skills development for people who are homeless or have been living in poverty, and also to develop a new kind of journalism.

With support from other homelessness organisations, the project was able to recruit 24 students, all people who were interested in finding out more about how the media works and improving their skills. The first cohort of 12 trainees* joined regular training sessions in meeting rooms generously donated by Glasgow's Social Hub, a cutting edge co-working, hotel, café bar and conference space in the heart of the Merchant City.

Over five sessions, the group learned a bit about how the mainstream and digital media works, what you need to know to be a journalist and how to structure a story for print or broadcast.

There were lively discussions about the future of the media, truth versus fake news, and an opportunity to meet working journalists to hear about their routes into the profession. A common thread was that journalism, and the media, needs to do much more to be truly inclusive of all experience.

As well as learning about the media, each trainee produced an article for this edition of *The New Narrative*. The finished pieces demonstrate real talent with words but also a willingness to tell stories from different perspectives than those delivered by the often-privileged world of journalism.

This alternative approach to storytelling was one of the big successes of the project. Real voices and real experiences are often missing from media coverage of poverty and homelessness. Several of the trainees have chosen to write about their own experiences, whilst others took a more traditional journalistic approach, creating articles themed around an area of interest.

It's fair to say that these wannabe wordsmiths have demonstrated the scope for new perspectives and new kinds of storytelling. And who knows? Maybe the next Pulitzer Prize winner will come from this group of budding journalists.

*A second group of trainees are due to join *Changing the Narrative* in September.

Mairi Damer, Word Up Communications

Let's change the narrative

Welcome to the first edition of *The New Narrative*! For too long we've heard stigmatising language associated with people experiencing homelessness and poverty. "*Benefits scroungers*" and "*lazy*" amongst other language used, often gives unhelpful and inaccurate labels to people living through tough circumstances.

If we are serious about tackling homelessness and poverty, then we need to change the narrative around it. And fast.

This has been the driving force behind the new Changing the Narrative Journalism Training Academy, which has been piloted in Glasgow, Scotland, over the last few months.

I am fortunate enough to lead the charity behind the project – the International Network of Street Papers (INSP). My role normally involves working alongside our global network of street paper organisations – 92 in total including the UK's Big Issue, spanning 35 countries – but for this project, it has been quite different.

The academy has connected us with local grassroots and national organisations based in Glasgow (including Emmaus Glasgow, Homelessness Network Scotland, Ubuntu Women's Shelter, and the Simon Community Scotland) to recruit budding writers and news reporters. Journalism training workshops have been run for participants, who all have direct experience of homelessness and poverty, aiming to step-up their knowledge of what news is and how the media works.

The pages you are about to read have been written by our talented participants. Each article presents a new view on some of the most pressing issues we face today. Some articles are personal. Some are more objective.

It has been a tremendous privilege to work alongside every single participant in the academy so far. Together we have been curious. We have had some laughter. We have had some tears. I have learned a lot.

In my twenty odd year career, I have never felt so energised about a project as I do about this one. It has given me hope that we can make some changes for the better.

Thank you must be given to our funders for this project – The Robertson Trust, National Lottery Awards for All, People's Postcode Trust, Albert Hunt Trust and Endrick Trust – who have supported this project, as well as Glasgow's Social Hub, who generously provided us with a fantastic venue space enabling the creativity to flow.

Thanks also to Mairi Damer, our esteemed media trainer, who has steered our training group with a good dose of knowledge and humour. And thanks to our volunteer Brian Connelly, who has promoted the training academy far and wide on social media, as well as supporting the evaluation for the project.

While you read through the pages, think about what you can do to call out unhelpful language, and contribute to a new narrative. Be part of that change.

Mike Findlay-Agnew, CEO, INSP

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The power of psychedelics

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO RECOVERY

I would like to ask the Scottish government a question - but I'm asking for a friend, of course. This friend has been experimenting with psychedelics and studying religious plant use in all faiths.

Unfortunately, historic records are hard to come by - we burned our witches, and the Romans drove our traditional practices of worship with plants underground. The only places my friend can draw on for inspiration are other cultures which have preserved methods of connecting with the divine through plants.

In this country the law is clear about this form of spirituality - it's illegal. But my friend identifies with a "remembering" form of neo- shamanism, so why is he not extended the protection of Scotland's Hate Crime Act? His religious identity is persecuted by the state rather than being protected.

My friend views plants with reverence, treating them as a sacrament. Ceremony and ritual are methods used to hold these beautiful plants within a spiritual context. What threat does he pose to society by worshipping nature, or occasionally eating some mushrooms foraged locally to then pray, sing, dance, chant and cry?

This approach is in stark contrast to Scotland's more common drink and drugs "sesh" culture a culture which is often an escape into a spectacle of excess. Joining in with a sesh can lead to unmindful choices, often adding to the emotional

baggage we already carry. Plant medicine ceremonies encourage the opposite - unpacking your baggage, inviting those brave enough to be like the bison who charges headfirst into the storm knowing it will be first out the other side.

The prevalent culture of the sesh has left my friend with a graveyard full of amazing people gone to soon. Like in the movie Scarface - illusion interacts with our need to get smashed to escape the stark realities around us. Sadly, that illusion is often shattered by addiction and even violent state control.

Because of my friend's experience, I want to make a case for reclaiming nature's medicine as something we do to enrich community, rather than staying with the status quo which perpetuates Hunger Games-like narratives for the proceeds of crime. All that achieves is dirtier drugs, more death, violence, corruption and more non-violent offenders filling our already overflowing prison system.

Further, we currently have a system of individualised medicine managing the alienation of individualism. Causation and feeling the pain behind suffering has been lost to underfunding, replaced by CBT, RBT and other acronym

therapies and medication.

Alternatives to 10-minute appointments to discuss how the sedatives are sedating are needed. For my friend, a part of that solution is plant medicine in community. Dr Anna Ross, lecturer at Edinburgh University and co-founder of the Scottish Psychedelic Research Group, has put forward a vision to that end.

"I would like to see a network of churches and community centres right across Scotland offering ceremony using the liberty cap mushroom. This form of collective healing could help restore interconnectedness to our communities and nature."

One of the oldest treatment methods for substance addiction is the 12-step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous. This model was founded by Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith, but a little known fact is that Wilson used The Belladonna Treatment to get sober - a treatment made from the Belladonna or Deadly Nightshade flower. The plant contains the psychoactive alkaloids atropine and scopolamine. This plant medicine facilitated Bill's spiritual experience enabling him to create Alcoholics Anonymous. When Bill hit troubles in his recovery, falling into depression, he was in communication with the writer Aldous Huxley, who in turn suggested LSD. Bill found the LSD experience incredibly helpful and suggested integrating LSD into the 12-step programme. His suggestion was shot

down, on the grounds that it would be admitting that the programme doesn't work entirely by itself.

This fork in the road has recently been revisited, with the creation of the Psychedelics in Recovery (PIR) network. My friend attended Cocaine Anonymous in the past only to leave feeling dejected by the view that abstinence is the only path to progression. PIR helped him heal that hurt and make peace with a programme that has had a massively positive impact on his life. It also offers much needed peer support for those in recovery according to Kevin Franciotti, co-founder and Board President of PIR.

"Psychedelics in Recovery offers a vital bridge for people who are working to maintain or deepen their sobriety while exploring these powerful tools in a mindful, ethical, and spiritually grounded way."

For those who aren't in recovery from addiction, there are also in-person groups supporting psychedelic integration in both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

My friend and I weren't always friends. If I'm honest, we spent over a decade trying to kill each other. Now when we pass each other in a window or a mirror, we meet each other with a look of acceptance that recognises the pain of the struggle to be here today, sometimes even with a smile. We thank plant medicine every day for its part in allowing us to be able to feel that smile.

James Stampfer

The unkindness of strangers

Imagine wearing your best outfit ready to go to a friend's party and a man from nowhere shows up. This man, a complete stranger, spits on your feet and says, "What can you do about it?"

This nasty incident happened to me when I was waiting for a classmate to pick me up to go to the party. The first thing that came to my mind was what my dad told me when I was getting ready to come to the UK. He said, *"My daughter, remember where you are going there is no father, no mother, no brothers, no uncles, no aunties, no sisters; a different tradition and cultures, even different food, so take things as they come to you."*

I felt helpless, angry, sad and asked myself is it because of the colour of my skin, my religion or my gender? I wondered if the spitting incident was because of racism or hatred, but I still can't find the answer. That man's behaviour made it difficult to enjoy the party and afterwards I was scared to move around in case I met that type of man again. I wanted to ask one of my neighbours if this is something people of colour (as they call us), often go through in that in our area, but my instinct said not to ask as I was scared of the response that would follow.

Unfortunately, being spat on was not the only time I've experienced racism in Glasgow. Other incidents have happened in ordinary places.

Once, I was in a queue at the post office and two ladies entered. Instead of joining the queue, they stepped straight in front of me. I looked at them with a confused face, which they didn't care about. The man at the counter asked them to kindly join the queue from the back, stating that I was there before them. One of the women responded that this is their country, they should be given priority over foreigners and that being the case, they will not go to the back. To my great surprise, the people behind me didn't say anything, which made me feel so alone and hopeless.

Another time I was at a bus stop with my flatmate, going to college with her for an interview. We were just sitting at the stop chatting away when two youngsters approached us saying, *"Fucking asylum seekers! Go back to your own fucking country!"*. This made us scared, but we didn't retaliate. We didn't want to show any reaction and when the bus arrived, we let the young people get on, and waited for the next bus, which made my friend late for her interview. Thankfully, the college understood when we explained and got us a taxi back home.

Sadly, the behaviour of these boys scared my flatmate, but she was even more worried about me. I was always on my own and when I was travelling around the city and to school, I was doing so in fear which would affect my concentration in class and daily activities.

Another time, on my way to the bus stop returning home from visiting someone, I heard a man behind me saying, *"Go home, go home!"* continuously. I just continued walking to the bus stop, but the man kept shouting, pointing at me. I worried that he might physically attack me, so in fear, I started walking back to where I came from. A lot was running through my mind, my colour is always going to be a risk factor for attack - I am always going to have to look over my shoulders just because I am black. The terror was overwhelming.

The next occasion was when a bus driver asked me how and where I got my concession bus pass. This time, I just laughed and responded to him saying, *"I got it the way your mum got it!"*, and sat down. During the journey, I asked myself why this keeps happening to us. I say us, because I know it's not only me who experiences it. It saddens me that the place I call home seems to be scared of me for no other reason than the colour of my skin and my hijab. Going through these horrible incidents is traumatising, and that has led to me needing antidepressants.

Recently, I was very excited to have the opportunity to go into further education despite my situation, but to my surprise I since again experienced discrimination, this time from classmates. When we were asked to sit in groups some people didn't want to sit with me or my migrant peers, until the lecturer realised and required the class to sit in mixed groups.

Despite all these happenings in my life, I am strong and moving on with good people supporting me. My message to migrants is focus, be patient, hopeful and strong.

Scotland is mostly a welcoming place, but we need more great, kind, helpful people around vulnerable people like myself to feel at home. And why not? This is home to all of us.

A Fleeing Woman

BROKEN BACKBONES BUT NOT SPINELESS

When a backbone is broken, the likely result is paralysis and immobilisation.

For me, the broken spine analogy extends beyond mere anatomy. Ever since I was young I've had an issue with the spines of books being broken. It's always made me uncomfortable in my skin.

When a book is in pristine condition something feels ideal, perfect and untouched - so when I recently broke the spine of a book, I got irritated automatically, scolding myself, but then I stopped. I began to laugh at the absurdity of this belief I was holding onto, a standard and expectation that was almost beyond understanding, this need for perfectionism at its finest.

I feel fortunate to have got to this stage, to have been given space for learning and looking inwards, to consider this attraction to perfectionism. In the past, I never thought I was capable or worthy, especially when life was at its hardest. Unlearning has been one of the most rewarding but difficult challenges I have ever encountered.

I was brought up in a dysfunctional home, my parents separated and toxic. There was alcohol and drug abuse, neglect, trauma and poverty. For years, I was plagued by the past, alcoholism, addiction, societal limitations, homelessness and other self-harm behaviours. I couldn't understand who I was, I felt so detached from myself and my reality, desensitised to the pain I was feeling and driven by, completely demoralised.

Books gave me a reality I could hold, feel, embed myself into. They offered a sense of peace and a form of escapism. Books knew no bounds - they gave me solace in imagination and dreams of a better future. But because of the complexities of my upbringing, my dreams did not always feel attainable or achievable, survival mode limited my commitment to a better different life. I can see that now, but I've had to learn and understand gradually.

When I was about six, my school went on a trip to the Museum of Childhood. I was in a burgundy sweatshirt and grey skirt, with a bowl cut and fringe. Normally, we were unable to pay for trips or anything extra for school, or sometimes they would make exceptions because of my mum's limitations. But on that day, my mum gave me a fiver, which was unusual. I was never asked to pay for the bus, so instead I bought myself Harry Potter: The Prisoner of Azkaban in the gift shop

When I returned home, I was met with misunderstanding and fury. I was treated as if I had committed the crime of the century - it really hurt my small self and soul. I was left

very confused - naturally I was too young to grasp my mum's difficulties with alcohol, drugs, mental health and lack of money. Those issues contributed to me developing a faulty perception from a young age, not being taught and nurtured in a 'healthy' sense. Only now can I see and understand this woman, my own mother, just didn't have the capabilities. She was far from perfect.

But what makes someone or something perfect? Nowadays, the word "broken" has negative connotations. By entering the world of healing and recovery, it has become impossible for me not to see how people become broken, how the world has shaped them. And that's where the parallel with books applies.

When a book has been appreciated and valued, it bears obvious displays of wear and tear, it might even have a broken spine. But broken spines still have strength, and can be repaired.

In myself and others I see broken spines. When I reflect on my life, I see someone who has persevered and has tried their hardest, no matter the circumstances. I see someone who is now allowing themselves to embrace new chapters. And that's important, we are not bound in the ways we believe. When a book becomes disused or worn and damaged, a bookbinder can be the saving grace and help to put it together again. Our understanding of what is in the inside can be changed and shifted; a story is what we make it.

My story has unfolded to allow myself a chance, a willingness to not be beaten for the rest of my life, to be open and accepting of things which show me how to grow, to move forward despite many mistakes and failures. The recent chapters of my life story have given me more inner peace and intuition, I can look at those pains and mistakes and trust myself to build my own story in different ways.

We are allowed to rewrite our whole life and create more than our dreams allow. I am deserving of love and compassion, and I freely try and embody and relinquish this to myself and others. The world can feel really heavy, it's hard to navigate and understand but it can also be a gift and exciting, something to walk towards with courage. Just because something is 'broken', doesn't make it spineless.

Jordan Methven

SOS: The size of stigma

I often wonder who else has experienced stigma? Stigma that comes as a result of bad experiences. Things like his/her fault stereotyping, generational and family problems, the Karpman drama triangle (a theory where destructive behaviour plays out between people), and last but not least, tall or small man syndrome.

From birth I've suffered from all of the above. I obviously didn't know that when I was young, but I learned it through time, that's for sure. If you know a bit about any of what I'm describing you will understand it, and if you don't, I can tell you for sure that there are many such things doing the rounds within the family, friendships, relationships, places of work and society all around the world.

And this stuff is serious; it has long-term effects. I have been homeless, I have mental health issues, and I'm suffering financial strain (so is everyone else I know - I'm not unique - but it still counts as a big issue in my life). I used to go and have fun with recreational drugs and alcohol to help me avoid/block out memories, but eventually it all caught up with me, causing lasting effects to my mental and physical health.

My story also involves trauma from my childhood – I was always treated as the black sheep in my family. The trauma

started in the house I grew up in, the house where you are supposed to feel safe, loved and protected, and I did at times, but it was the times I didn't feel safe, loved and protected that matter. It's about all the times I spent scared, hurting, crying - wondering why it was all my fault.

It's all your fault, it's all your fault. When the blows and the blame came down through the years, that's what was said.

"What's my fault?", I'd think to myself. I became numb to the physical pain, but not to the words – they really hurt. But why did they hurt so much, and why couldn't I get them out of my head? What's my fault, what's my fault?

It turns out being born was my fault. I love my family as family members should, but what if your family blames you for the family breaking up? That's what happened to me, even though I was only a child.

And blame followed me. Even when I was out of the house

and in the places where you're supposed to get educated and learn from, I felt blamed. I also felt stigma - at children's panels and in care homes. How can you expect a child to grow and thrive when the so-called mature people who expect respect are the very ones disrespecting and making judgements about you? Most of that was simply because of my size.

I'm 6'4" and reasonably well built, but what others see is a big guy or a "big yin", as they say in Glasgow. People have often made instant judgements because of my size, but they don't know me at all. Maybe like me, that's because they've got their own ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences).

It wasn't until I got into athletics and then football that I started to learn not to react to what I now know was triggers. I'd be triggered when certain people deliberately annoyed me or made me angry by talking about what I would be wearing or how I wasn't good at anything. Then they would talk about my family (my family who started it all) and I would react.

More recently I've been on my own road with recovery. That recovery didn't start until I nearly became homeless. Losing everything was something that was very hard to deal with, in fact, I now realise it was the hardest part of my life.

But as a result of that happening, I can honestly say my life has changed dramatically. From using the services provided in recovery, and by working with other volunteers and people with similar experiences, I now find myself in the lucky position of becoming a trainee with the Scottish Drug Forum (SDF) for nine months, a role which started in the summer of 2025.

I'm excited about the new role I will play in the team. I look forward to continuing my own personal development and working on my wellbeing. I also want to keep on helping others as I was helped, the ripple effect I call it.

Yes, it's hard at times with all that goes on in my head - the professionals call it mental health, but for me, it's all about emotions, so I'd prefer it was called "emotional health". When you are labelled with mental health issues, it just adds stigma, and people like me, black sheep people, we really don't need any more stigma in our lives.

So if you're one of us, then please reach out and talk to someone.

NS

MAKING A LIVING

The pros and cons of work and lived experience

I have *"lived experience"* of homelessness, currently living in temporary emergency housing after years of squats, caravans and sleeping rough. I've been registered as homeless for 3 years but refused emergency housing until recently.

I have been an addict since the age of 11, and clean since last summer. When I stopped using, I asked for temporary accommodation but was offered somewhere with many other addicts so said no. It was only when a homelessness charity advocated for me that I was offered suitable accommodation. I also received help from an addiction charity and one which supports homeless people to make a living.

Some of the friends I have been homeless with now work for charities supporting the homeless, and got these jobs as a result of their past. I know this has benefited them - it can be hard to find employment after a chaotic period, but the very experiences that made them unemployable elsewhere gave them access to a career. I know from these friends that sometimes their colleagues don't understand basic aspects of "street culture", a culture which is known well by those who have experienced it. Sometimes staff have been shocked by my experiences or just don't get it. For me, it can be a lot easier to talk to someone who has been there themselves.

When I started on the INSP's Changing the Narrative course I decided that I would write about how having lived experience helped employees do their job. I asked the three organisations who had helped me if they could put me in touch with staff members both with and without experience of homelessness who would be willing to talk to me.

Many staff, both with and without lived experience, said that having direct experience would help staff empathise with service users, but that objectivity was easier without it. Peter* who has been homeless himself told me, *"...having distance is important, you can get bogged down in individual decline vs systemic problems. However, [staff without it] can be clinical, which is necessary, but how a situation is handled where a service user is in crisis varies."*

Homeless people can have many other coexisting problems, and are individuals. No single approach will work for everyone and interviewees emphasised the danger of preconceptions. Una* said that staff, *"...may bring preconceptions to work with them, which can make it difficult for service users to be understood and supported."*

However, staff who have been homeless only have first-hand experience of their own homelessness - they can relate better to some things but lived experience can cause preconceptions of its own. Homelessness charity worker Tommy* says, *"I've seen in action when [staff with lived*

experience] have got out of it so assume others can."

The people I spoke to agreed that regardless of their experience, staff got a lot out of helping people but there were benefits specific to staff with lived experience. Peter* explains, *"There's an aspect of my work that's therapeutic. My work is a reminder of how much I've had to work to get where I am."* However, being reminded of your past can also be unpleasant or even directly damage your mental health. Una* is clear about the risks, *"Work that revolves around one's own traumatic lived experiences can be extremely emotionally challenging and can lead to burnout."* This is, however, a risk for all staff. As Erica said, *"All staff [either with] lived or non-lived experience can burn out."*

Of the three organisations I spoke to, two have homelessness as a core focus, and the third focusses on addiction. Many users can lose their homes during active addiction, whilst others can fall into addiction when homeless. Paul* who works for the addiction focused charity, and who has been homeless several times, told me that, *"Sadly, homelessness is a very common factor in the lives of [many addicts] so understanding the nuances of homelessness is extremely important"*.

All three employ staff with a range of other life experience, in particular the addiction charity which has a lot of staff who are recovering addicts. Erica* told me, *"Staff with no experience of homelessness may have experience of [a list of other traumatic events and disadvantages] ... [the] best teams I have worked in have been [the] most diverse"*. Paul went on, *"It's good to have a mix of staff with and without lived experience. ... [to avoid unconscious bias] we have a mixed team, who all use reflective practice."*

I believe that staff with lived experience offer a better service and charities working with homeless people need to make sure everyone is represented to balance staff teams. However, this kind of work can affect anyone's mental health and all workers, regardless of background, need to have their rights protected. Tommy* is clear this helps both individual staff and the homeless people they help, *"Employers have to look after staff as well as service users ... [for us] to be able to give the best service, because people deserve that."*

*not a real name

Robyn Woof

HOUSEBUILDING OR BURNING THE PLANET?

Housing supply and environmental concerns have resurfaced in the news recently, evoking a sense of déjà vu. We faced similar challenges in 2003 when Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott launched the then Labour Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. In the plan, Prescott sought to "set out how the Government would work to create successful, thriving and inclusive communities across England".

Fast forward to 2025, and the question remains the same - how much progress have we genuinely made in resolving the enduring issues of infrastructure development versus protecting the environment? Across the political spectrum, these dual themes remain central in election manifestos. This is a clear sign that the UK's housing crisis and the growing threat of global warming continue to demand urgent attention.

Each year the same bleak reality repeats itself across the UK. House prices climb higher, social housing lists grow longer, homelessness becomes ever more widespread, and affordable housing options remain scarce. For many, the dream of securing a safe and stable home feels increasingly out of reach.

At the same time, UK households continue to contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Domestic heating, food, electricity and transport all play a part in the ever-deepening environmental footprint of everyday living, adding another layer to the nation's complex socio-environmental challenges.

As the present UK Government pledges to tackle both the housing shortage and environmental crisis, policymakers face a formidable challenge. The reality points toward a difficult trade-off, a classic case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Where one policy ambition advances, it risks serious setbacks to the other. This zero-sum equation threatens to deliver short-term relief while compromising long-term sustainability, leaving decision-makers caught between competing priorities with no easy solutions.

It is still too early to determine how many new homes have been completed or indeed how many qualify as Net Zero Carbon builds under the current Labour Government's ambitious targets - official figures are not due until November. What is clear, however, is the ever more pressing need for more affordable housing.

According to the Office for Nation Statistics, the UK's population is forecast to rise to 72.5 million by 2032. This exponential increase means that the demand for housing will continue to build too, adding yet more pressure on what charity Shelter describe as a housing emergency.

Indeed, homelessness in the UK has already reached unprecedented levels. According to recent estimates, more than 358,000 households in England have sought help from local authorities due to homelessness. And yet, that figure does

not account for the hidden homeless who are not statistically "visible" or known by local authorities. Shelter project that if current trends continue, the numbers of homeless could surge to a half a million by 2030.

Addressing the shortage of social housing has become an urgent political priority as stock availability has been in steep decline for decades. In the past decade alone, more than 200,000 social homes have been lost. At the same time, private renting has surged, vastly outpacing affordable social housing options.

Today, according to Shelter, there are 1.4 million fewer affordable social houses than in the 1980s. This dramatic drop underscores the ever-growing challenge faced by millions struggling to find secure, affordable accommodation. Ironically, despite housing shortages, under-occupation of property is at an all-time high, with an estimated 43 million spare bedrooms across UK households.

The current environmental impact of the average UK household is significant, with emissions exceeding six tons of CO2 annually. Taken together, UK homes are responsible for over 133 million tons of greenhouse gases each year—approximately 40% of the country's total emissions. The bulk of this footprint comes from domestic heating, electricity, food and transport.

The Government's ambitious plan to build 300,000 new homes annually over the next five years carries a huge environmental impact and exacts a heavy toll. Everything from the upfront supply of materials to construction contributes to the carbon footprint from housing developments. Over 50 tons of carbon emissions generated for every new home built, representing a massive 40% of the UK's CO2 emissions. Construction materials alone require intense heat and energy for baking bricks, firing glass, manufacturing plastics, forging steel and producing concrete.

Simply put, it's a no-win situation. We urgently need more housing, but we also need to protect and save the environment. Against this backdrop, the Government's ambitious house building proposal sparks urgent questions about the environmental toll such large-scale development will exact. Achieving the balance between infrastructure development and environmental sustainability will continue to be a pressing challenge for policymakers.

In the meantime, and no matter which political party holds office, action is needed on both fronts. Regardless of the scale of the problem, we must focus on clear, actionable measures that guarantee real impact and meaningful change. Everyone has the fundamental right to a safe and healthy home to support their wellbeing, but a roof over everyone's head must dovetail with policies which commit to leaving a greener, cleaner legacy for future generations.

Vincent Cai

Secret relationship leads to tragedy

Let's go back to October 2020, Ghana. Ama received a phone call from her boyfriend Kofi, arranging to meet at their usual hostel that evening. Later Ama would say that their conversation was affectionate, with Kofi asking her to perform a personal grooming ritual she often did for him.

Dressed in her usual outfit of brown tights, a black shirt and a scarf, Ama brought her essentials along to their usual room 111 which Kofi had already booked and where he was already waiting. At first they simply spent time talking about his upcoming travel and her business.

As Ama later explained, she then prepared to groom Kofi as she usually did, and how he undressed and lay on the bed in readiness. She then described how a familiar situation turned dire when he became aggressive, attempting to force himself on her despite her protests. She explains how she felt panicked and in pain as he pressed down on her.

In a desperate bid to defend herself Ama reached for a razor blade that Kofi had brought for shaving. In her testimony, she explained that in the darkness she cut him without knowing exactly where, leading to a struggle that ended with Kofi seriously injured. She claimed that during the altercation Kofi banged her head against the wall and they both fell, continuing

to fight until she used a broken tile to stab him. Ama vividly described a scene of panic and confusion as she tried to attend to Kofi's wounds and called a friend for help. She says that her shock and inexperience with such a dreadful situation prevented her from seeking immediate medical assistance.

Kofi and Ama had known each other for years, they were childhood best friends, it was only later that they became intimate. Ama's father died when she was seven years old and her mum was pregnant with a second child at that time - her mother couldn't take care of Ama and her unborn child. At the time. Ama's mum was working as a maid in Kofi's parents' house and decided to give Ama up for adoption - she simply wanted a better life for her daughter than her own experience as a maid. She knew that with this new wealthy family Ama could go to school and be educated. The family already had two boys and a girl who were older than Ama, and life was great - they loved Ama like one of their own.

Kofi's love for Ama was particularly intense and unconditional. Although he was three years older than her they did everything together - going to school, eating and playing. Kofi was always overprotective of Ama, he loved her more than his own blood sister and would make sure that everything his parents did for him they did for Ama too. He would want to wear the same clothes as her and sometimes people called them twins.

Even when Ama finished school years later and had started working, Kofi would pick her up, take her out for lunch and buy gifts for her. It was at this time they both developed feelings for each other and fell in love. However their relationship had to be kept secret because the family would never allow them to be together. Such a relationship was taboo in their culture too - it was unacceptable to fall in love with your sister or brother. The only person who knew was Ama's friend, but she too was sworn to secrecy.

Because the need for secrecy, Kofi would always book a hostel where they would usually meet to talk about their lives together and how they would let their parents know about their plans to get married.

Just a few months later Kofi was offered a scholarship to go

and study abroad. It was a big opportunity but he didn't want to travel and leave Ama behind. By this stage Kofi had become obsessed with Ama to the point that he didn't want her talking or being close to any other men. He would get aggressive every time he saw a man around her - Ama became scared of him and his obsession with her. To keep things calm she would do whatever Kofi asked her to. Ama knew it was a bad situation but she was afraid to get help or talk to anyone about it because Kofi always asked her to keep their relationship a secret, and she always obeyed him.

The fight in the hostel room was the culmination of an increasingly difficult situation. Ama always maintains that she did not intend to kill Kofi, in fact she continued to express her love for him despite the turbulent nature of their relationship. She says that her love story was tragically cut short. For Ama falling in love with Kofi was like holding a candle. When it is aflame it lights up the world around you, but then it starts melting and hurts you. In the end finally it goes out and everything is darker than ever, and all you are left with is BURN.

Titti Chatty

HANDLE WITH CARE

The risks involved with real life experience

Real life stories are flavour of the month. In fact, in recent times, the integration of *"lived experience"* into homelessness services has gained considerable traction, lauded for its potential to offer authentic insights and empower individuals with a homelessness story.

While the intentions behind this movement are undeniably noble, a critical examination reveals a complex array of dangers and ethical dilemmas that, if unaddressed, can undermine the very services they aim to improve. The significant risks associated with an uncritical embrace of lived experience, including the potential for tokenism, the burden of emotional labour, the challenge of maintaining professional boundaries, the risk of generalising individual narratives, and the imperative to balance lived experience with professional expertise.

The people most at risk in this space are the people whose development years were overshadowed by trauma and adversity. They are often marched out onto the frontline, with little training or education and expected to fulfil a role in a space that was once reserved for degree educated multidisciplinary workers. The near certainty of vicarious trauma and the impact on people (who only a few short years ago were the client) is massive. As they connect with other people's trauma on multiple levels, the science says they are releasing toxins into their own bodies that will dramatically shorten their lifespan.

Maintaining professional boundaries presents another significant challenge. Individuals with lived experience, particularly in peer support or outreach roles, may find it difficult to navigate the complexities of professional relationships while simultaneously drawing on deeply personal narratives. The inherent vulnerability in sharing one's own story can make it challenging to establish and maintain a professional distance, potentially leading to over-identification with service users, blurred lines in advice-giving, or an inability to enforce necessary rules and regulations.

While empathy is crucial in homelessness services, shared experience without professional frameworks can lead to a lack of objectivity, making it difficult to make impartial decisions or set appropriate boundaries for service users, which could ultimately hinder their progress towards stability.

The danger of focussing on individual narratives is a pervasive risk. While personal stories offer invaluable qualitative insights, they are by their very nature subjective and specific to an individual's unique circumstances. The lived experience of one person, however compelling, cannot be universally applied to the diverse and multifaceted homeless population. Factors such as gender, ethnicity, mental health status, addiction and the specific circumstances leading to homelessness create vastly different journeys and needs. Over-emphasising individual narratives without a broader understanding of sociological, economic and systemic factors can lead to misinformed policy decisions and service designs that fail to address the root causes of homelessness for a wider demographic. It risks creating a *"one size fits all"* approach based on anecdotal evidence rather than robust research and data.

We must move beyond symbolic gestures, provide robust support systems, establish clear professional frameworks, embrace a nuanced understanding of diverse experiences and, critically, ensure that lived experience works in concert with, rather than in place of, vital professional expertise. Only then can the invaluable contributions of individuals with lived experience genuinely enhance and transform homelessness services for the better.

David Pentland

TAPS AFF!

Scotland's surprise water shortage story

Despite the amount of rainfall we're treated to in Scotland, surprisingly, we are still vulnerable to water shortage.

There are several reasons why the wet stuff is sometimes scarce. There is a lack of water storage facilities, our population keeps growing as does the demand for water, industrial use and farming use accounts for high levels of water use, and of course, there is a lot of water wastage.

Ironically, our lack of storage is largely down to plentiful supply, with rainfall pouring into lochs, rivers and reservoirs. However, with demand for water greying steadily, Scotland will soon need more storage.

This population growth, whilst not as big as problem as it is in England, still presents a challenge for Scotland. According to the Scottish Public Health Observatory, the country's population is growing slowly, at just under 50,000 per annum, largely because of migration from overseas and other parts of the UK. More people means more need for water to wash, shower and bathe, and for washing machines and dishwashers.

Large amounts of water are still used in Scotland's industrial sector, particularly for manufacture of textiles, distilling and brewing, and in heavy industry, especially chemical plants and the Grangemouth complex. But it is agriculture which is the single biggest user of water in Scotland, with both crops and livestock requiring large amounts of liquid.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the rainfall we experience, Scotland has one of the highest per capita water consumption rates in the UK, and indeed of many European countries. This high usage, combined with periods of low rainfall, is leading to concerns about water scarcity, particularly in the east of the country. Scottish Water is actively working on solutions to protect the water system and encourage water conservation.

This conservation is critically important. Water consumption rates in Scotland is approximately 178 litres per person daily, notably higher than the average of 137 litres in England and Wales. Scottish Water estimates that unless we turn our taps off more often and enforce adaptation measures, by 2050 Scotland could face a daily water deficit of 240 litres. This is especially important for the eastern part of Scotland - an area which includes Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife. That entire area is particularly vulnerable to water shortages due to high population density and potential for extended periods of low rainfall.

Whilst most Scots are concerned about climate change, there's a lack of awareness when it comes to the link between water usage and its environmental impact. In Scotland, many people don't realise how much water they are pouring down the drain because, unlike in many parts of England where water use is metered, our water bills are included in our council tax.

To help prevent waste Scottish Water is actively working on solutions, including investing in infrastructure to manage water supply and encouraging conservation though public awareness campaigns. The organisation are also exploring initiatives like smart water monitoring and rainwater harvesting.

As individuals, there are several ways we can reduce our own water consumption. Everyone can take shorter showers, fix leaking taps and using water butts to collect some of the wet stuff that falls so regularly from our skies.

Barry Connell

International
Network of
Street Papers

The International Network of Street Papers (INSP) is a Glasgow-based non-profit dedicated to tackling poverty and homelessness globally. We do this by empowering people and street papers to tackle these issues locally. Right now, INSP represents 92 separate enterprises in 35 countries, and we provide peer-learning opportunities between street papers staff, as well as operating an international news agency for street papers.

Find out more: www.insp.ngo