A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO REDUCING HOMELESSNESS: EMERGING FINDINGS FROM POSITIVE PATHWAYS

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HOMELESSNESS: THE CHALLENGE

- 78,000 households and families in temporary accommodation
- Rough sleeping up by 169% since 2010

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 gives local authorities in England a new duty to prevent and relieve homelessness for all people threatened with homelessness.

- Government agencies
- Secular charities
- Churches and faith-based charities

18% of Church of England churches are responding to homelessness in some form.

Source: CofE Mission for Statistics)
RESEARCH CONTEXT: POSITIVE PATHWAYS

• 5-year programme delivered through CUF’s Together Network and local partners
• Supporting 1440 clients at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Yorkshire
• Aiming to increase housing retention, social integration, emotional wellbeing, and participation
• Committed to providing a ‘relational’ approach to clients
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What does it mean to take a ‘relational approach’ to addressing homelessness?
• What, if anything, is distinctive about a faith-based approach to relational working?

• What are the impacts and challenges on the ground of adopting a relational approach to address homelessness?
• Overall, how effective is the Positive Pathways model of ‘relational working’ in addressing homelessness and wider well-being?
RESEARCH METHODS

• Five year evaluation of Positive Pathways (PP):
  • Monitoring system: data on referrals, activities and outcomes
  • Interviews with staff and other agencies
  • Interviews with people using the PP projects

• Review of relational working (reporting on here):
  • Narrative literature review
  • Telephone interviews with key stakeholders, including academics, policy makers and key service providers
  • Exploratory interviews with staff and people using PP
RELATIONAL WORKING IN HOMELESSNESS

• The role of the support worker helping to build networks/ acting as a proxy social network
• The role of volunteers and mentors, including peer mentor
• Potential benefits of social media/ on-line relationships
• Focus on interdependence, rather than independence
• Partnership working

*I think the question is less ‘relational’, as ‘what kind of relationship’?* (Stakeholder)
Whole system/framework approaches based on specific way of relational working

• Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)
• Trauma Informed Care (TIC)
• Relational social work
• Housing First
• Critical Time Interventions
• Strength based approaches
• Person centred approaches
• Navigator role

‘Relational working’ reflects overall direction of travel in tackling homelessness? (Stakeholder)
Research suggests that similarities of FBO approaches to other NGOs are greater than differences

- Some qualitative studies highlight greater focus on time/ company/ ‘presence orientated’ approach (Davelaar and Kerstens, 2012)

Acknowledging role of spirituality in people’s lives (Demos, 2006)

Theological underpinnings include:

- Open friendship (Duce, 2013)
- Grace and truth (Kurht and Ward, 2013)
- Caritas/ love (Caritas SAN, 2018)
- Sanctuary (Bowpitt et al, 2014)
SOME OF THE CHALLENGES...

• Managing professional boundaries/ risk of burnout

• How to/ if to mention faith

• Getting resources to support relational ways of working (intensity; length of time; over spaces - into communities)

• Balancing support and challenge

• Measurement: ‘...if we are going to talk about measurement and outcomes then love is the thing against which we have to examine our conduct, rather than a theory of change’ (Stakeholder)
EARLY EXPERIENCES OF POSITIVE PATHWAYS

Staff delivering the service emphasised:
• ‘Walking alongside’ people/ a ‘professional friendship’
• Safe community spaces, as well as integration into wider community
• Time and consistency needed to build trust
• Flexible working methods and hours

People using the service emphasised:
• Somewhere safe to relax and enjoy company
• Workers offering compassion/ unconditional support
• Benefits of specific well-being initiatives
• For a minority, value of volunteering or having a mentor
IMPLICATIONS

- Long-term funding/collaborative partnership arrangements so people do not fall between the cracks
- Need to reconsider area-based/community level approaches
- Need to track more holistic outcomes over time and capture processes of change but…
- Inherent tension in quantitatively evidencing outcomes of relational work
- Opportunity for further theological and practical reflection on strengths and limits of a specifically Christian relational approach
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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