Meeting Homeless People's Needs: Service Development and Practice for the Older Excluded
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Contents list

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1 The needs of older homeless people

PART I WORKING WITH OLDER HOMELESS PEOPLE
2 Service and practice responses to single homeless older people
3 Providing basic help for older rough sleepers
4 First-stage accommodation and meeting basic needs
5 Specialist help and the rehabilitation of daily living skills
6 Resettlement and continued support

PART II ESTABLISHING SERVICES FOR OLDER HOMELESS PEOPLE
7 Frameworks for service development and support
8 Appraising local provision and developing services
9 Good practice in service provision
10 Overview and recommendations

References
List of contributors
Contact addresses of provider organisations

Publisher's Announcement
Homelessness is a cause of ever-growing concern, but the needs of older homeless people are often overlooked. Meeting Homeless People's Needs: Service Development and Practice for the Older Excluded aims to raise awareness of the problems and needs of this seriously disadvantaged group.

Drawing from the experiences of over 20 pioneering projects working with homeless people in the UK, USA and Australia, Meeting Homeless People's Needs is a guide to delivering practical and effective help. The book examines and evaluates the services presently available to older homeless people and makes evidence-based recommendations for future development. These insights are complemented by its numerous first-hand accounts, which give examples of innovative and successful working practice.

Meeting Homeless People's Needs will be indispensable for statutory and voluntary groups, social services, community carers and local government agencies working with homeless people. Its principles and lessons are universal and can be applied to all age groups of homeless and marginally housed people.

Preface
Aims
This book is intended as a guide to effective ways of helping older homeless people. We hope to raise awareness of the problems and needs of a generally neglected group of seriously disadvantaged people, to demonstrate that contrary to a widespread assumption many of them will accept and respond to help, and to provide evidence-based advice on the delivery of practical help. The emphasis is upon the development and the delivery of 'second-stage' services. These are distinguished from the interventions and forms of help which meet people's basic needs for food, clothing and shelter and are available on the streets or from temporary or 'first-stage' hostels. 'Second stage' interventions aim in contrast to make a fundamental difference to the health, morale, attitudes, aspirations and long term housing careers of a homeless person. They address deep-seated problems and disaffection and therefore commonly require sustained contacts, great patience, and sensitive assessments of a person's attitudes, mental state and problems, and they normally have to be provided in an individualised and intensive way. The overall aim is to encourage and enable the individual not only to aspire and prepare for a return to conventional accommodation but also to be equipped mentally, materially and in their living skills to adjust to a housing setting that is carefully matched to their needs and abilities.

Why older homeless people?

The focus of this manual on the older or, by extension, any mature adult homeless person needs explanation. It is partly because we came to the issues as gerontologists with an interest in (conventionally defined) older people, partly because older homeless people have distinctive problems, and partly because recently in Britain the emphasis of policy and services has been on young people. If thirty years ago the stereotypical homeless person was an itinerant or transient labouring man, today's tabloid stereotype is of a young adolescent who is vulnerable to pimps and drug dealers. The government's perspective is firmly if not exclusively focused on ending the social exclusion of young homeless people. The reasoning is that each day they spend aimlessly on the streets is another that deflects them from acquiring job skills and work habits, and the longer they are homeless, the more likely they are to waste their lives and to become a long-term charge on the public exchequer.

However estimable this concern, an unfortunate effect may be further to marginalise older homeless people. Because they are unlikely to acquire new job skills, their social exclusion has no simple remedy and the policy urgency is low. But as the following chapters show, they have special problems, some associated with the exceptional duration and 'entrenchment' of their homeless state. Older rough sleepers are exceptionally disadvantaged, and no other social group has higher rates of morbidity and lower life expectancy, nor are more detached if not wilfully excluded from social and health services.

Neither this manual nor our programme of research seeks exceptional help for homeless people over a certain age. We fully support the overall goal of preventing homelessness at all ages, and we recognise that homeless adolescents are exceptionally vulnerable and that society's response should be fast, protective and tenacious. One way to reduce the number of people on the streets is to shorten the duration of 'episodes' of homelessness so as to get people of whatever age into accommodation as quickly as possible. Another way is to encourage, help and support formerly homeless people for moves from hostels into 'permanent' accommodation, and to maximise their settledness and chances of not returning to the streets. This requires more than finding housing vacancies or putting 'roofs over heads'. More understanding of homeless people's problems and a more systematic approach to resettlement preparation and continued support is required. Many of the principles and lessons to which we draw attention are applicable to all age groups of homeless people and to other marginally housed people. It is however an account which focuses on over twenty innovative projects which have explored and implemented ways of helping into conventional housing and lives people who characteristically have been in and out of homelessness for decades or have deep-seated mental health and addiction problems. Many of the lessons can be applied more widely: it
is our and our collaborators’ long term goal to discover and to disseminate effective ways of helping homeless people of any age.