



# FACING HOMELESSNESS



FINDING INCLUSIONARY,  
COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

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# **FACING HOMELESSNESS**

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## Research Justification

This scholarly publication is intended to contribute to an emerging body of knowledge on street homelessness in the South African context. The target audience comprises research specialists focusing on finding solutions for homelessness; however, it would be accessible to a diverse readership. It offers both conceptual frameworks and practical guidelines for a liberative and transformative response to homelessness. It brings together authors from a wide range of disciplines, fusing the rigour of researchers, the vision of activists and the lived experience of practitioners. This volume traces the causes and identifies the diverse faces of street homelessness in South Africa today. It critiques singular solutions and interrogates the political, institutional and moral failures that contribute to the systemic exclusion of homeless persons and other vulnerable populations from society. It then proposes various rights-based interventions as part of a radical re-imagining of how street homelessness can be ended, one person and one neighbourhood at a time. In 'facing homelessness', we face the other, and in facing the other, we face ourselves. Grounding this exploration in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas (1969:207), it is appropriate to recall his words: '[T]he Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me'. The political, institutional, moral and personal obligations that confront society in the face and presence of street homelessness, urban vulnerability and deep socio-economic inequality have to be considered, embraced and accounted for. However, these are not merely philosophical mutterings, as a liberationist framework prompts imaginative actions for change. The immersive and in-depth social analysis by the authors steer researchers in the direction of new ways of doing and being that could indeed demonstrate concrete, viable and sustainable alternatives to the exclusionary realities that are so visible in the face of street homelessness. 'Finding inclusionary, collaborative solutions' is therefore the sub-title of this publication, indicating its intention to contribute to solutions-based scholarship aimed at radical forms of social inclusion and achieved through broad based and creative collaborations by all spheres of society. Drawing on local and global lessons learnt and the specific lessons from successful and failed responses during COVID-19, possible solutions are examined and proposed. At its deepest level, this is a volume that calls for a reclamation of community in its most inclusionary, life-affirming and interdependent sense, asserting that we truly are well because of others, and we are unwell if others are. It is a call to reclaim our common humanity in the context of inclusive communities where all are equally welcome and bestowed with dignity and honour. The book is the result of original research, and no part of the book was plagiarised or published elsewhere. Where authors refer to other scholarly work, or to their own, proper methods of referencing have been followed.

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# Abbreviations, Boxes, Figures and Tables Appearing in the Text and Notes

## List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ARO	African Reclaimers Organisation
CBD	Central Business District
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CHW	Community Health Workers
CoF	Corridors of Freedom
CoJ	City of Johannesburg
COPC	Community-oriented Primary Care
COSUP	Community-oriented Substance Use Programme
CPA	Creative Participation Assessment
CRU	Community Rental Unit
CSP	Cities Support Programme
DA	Democratic Alliance
DPU	Displaced Persons' Unit
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
ESTA	<i>Extension of Security of Tenure Act</i>
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
FBO	Faith-based Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HUD	Housing and Urban Development
IAWG	Interagency Working Group

Abbreviations, Boxes, Figures and Tables Appearing in the Text and Notes

IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IGH	Institute of Global Homelessness
JDA	Johannesburg Development Agency
JMPD	Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department
JOSH	Johannesburg Organisation for Services to the Homeless
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer
LISA	Local Institutional Support Assessment
NDP	National Development Plan
NEET	Neither in Education, Employment or Training
NFP	National Freedom Party
NPO	Non-profit Organisation
OST	Opioid Substitution Therapy
PE	Port Elizabeth
PEO	Person–Environment–Occupation
PHC	Primary Health Care
PIE Act	<i>Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act</i>
RA	Residents' Associations
SANCA	South African National Council on Alcoholism
SAPS	South African Police Services
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDG	Sustainable development goals
SMME	Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises
SPLUMA	<i>Spatial Land Use Management Act</i>
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund

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identities. Tangentially, this led to developing an avid interest in religion as a lived experience. On a personal note, Rehana reads fiction and is an excellent and adventurous cook. Food, she believes, tells interesting stories about social life.

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# Preface

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## ■ Facing homelessness: Complexity, visibility and innovation

Street homelessness is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. It defies singular definitions and interventions. It results from societal, systemic and institutional failure and, sometimes, from personal choices. Whereas apartheid legislation curbed black urbanisation before the 1990s, the scrapping of such legislation meant increasing rural-urban migration after 1994.<sup>1</sup> The faces of street homelessness also changed dramatically as a result, because large numbers of very vulnerable and socio-economically disenfranchised people arrived in cities and towns in the hope that they could carve out a living for themselves and their families. Often their hopes were shattered, and they had to find means of surviving on the streets, with detrimental results for their health and general wellbeing.

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1. Data on rural-urban migration after 1994 are examined in an official report by Statistics South Africa. It provides insights into different forms of migration and also asks that migration be seen as a process. Reasons for migration and urbanisation can be many and as eloquently demonstrated in the report, do not necessarily translate into disaster narratives (cf. Kok & Collinson 2006).

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Even though it is impossible to feign ignorance about the realities and proximities of street homelessness in South African cities and towns, homelessness is often rendered invisible in government policy, societal practices and financial investments. Aside from heightened awareness around viral infections and the necessary health measures generated by COVID-19, the pandemic also created the conditions for street homelessness to be made more acutely visible – even if only during the hard lockdown in South Africa between March and September of 2020. When all others stayed at home and were able to practice physical distancing, homeless persons could only remain on the streets, visible for all to see. This evoked contrasting sentiments: some resorted to force and looked for ways to rid the streets and ‘their’ neighbourhoods of anyone who seemed dangerous, while others were moved to kindness and generosity and tried to find ways to offer support to homeless persons. The lockdown restrictions potentially made homeless persons more isolated and disconnected than ever before.

Although COVID-19 brought many fault lines to the surface in the way society engages street homelessness, it also offered opportunities for new and innovative responses. In some cities, remarkable interventions enabled safe accommodation and comprehensive support to be provided to large numbers of homeless persons. In some cities and provinces, new initiatives to craft policies and strategies to address homelessness or to ensure implementation of an existing policy, received much attention. Whereas these examples were marked by broad-based collaborations, there are also cities and towns where such collaborative approaches failed to materialise, mostly resulting in less impactful or sustainable interventions, and even highly contested interventions.

A number of innovative new responses to street homelessness also emerged during this time, and the gains made were formalised into longer-term approaches to address and overcome street homelessness. Some of these innovations are reflected on in this volume.

## ■ An invitation and a provocation

This volume is an invitation and a provocation. It is an invitation to face homelessness<sup>2</sup> in all its complexity and to face ourselves in the face of homelessness. It seeks to provoke the disruption of systemic, political and moral failure and in that way forge a new consciousness that recognises that homelessness is not an inevitability, that it could be addressed and overcome through collaborative approaches grounded in a deeply rooted political and moral will.

Street homelessness is a complex phenomenon that is at once a psycho-social, public health, spatial, housing, economic and a rights concern. It requires comprehensive and integrated interventions, tailor-made to the specific challenges faced by diverse homeless populations as well as individuals with unique life stories. Unless homeless interventions recognise homelessness as an expression of socio-spatial-economic injustice and a violation of basic human rights, such interventions might actually serve to perpetuate homelessness by keeping people trapped in a welfare system instead of finding ways out of it or only support an insignificant number of people into sustainable alternatives off the streets.

The chapters in this volume therefore call on all stakeholders in society, including homeless persons, to face the realities of homelessness anew. Different spheres of government, as argued in this volume, must be challenged to face political failure in the handling of street homelessness. In a similar vein, organisations deeply committed to serve homeless communities equally have a responsibility to engage in self-critique and ask themselves whether their interventions are liberating and transformative or sometimes lead to a perpetuation of the status quo.

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2. Homelessness as a social reality does not conform to a single definition. It is not confined to a roofless existence and can include economic depravity or even social exclusion. It is adequately explained in the next chapter and within the context of this manuscript.

Participation in platforms designed to make policy and shape interventions to overcome homelessness should be of such a nature that homeless and formerly homeless individuals are not only welcomed but central in deliberations considering alternative futures. The reliable and credible experts on homelessness are those who have lived and survived homelessness against all odds. In considering sustainable pathways out of homelessness, it would be prudent, just and good common sense to ensure the insights of (former) homeless people, who know what worked to help them out of homelessness and what did not, are heard.

It is our conviction that the chapters in this volume would invite and stimulate new conversations, new collaborations and new actions related to addressing homelessness. While some chapters are conceptual, others provide guidelines, frameworks or tools that could be considered for implementation or adaptation by different stakeholders and in different localities. This volume was not prepared for an academic or research audience only. On the contrary, it is our hope that it would find its way into the hands, minds and hearts of practitioners, policy-makers and activists, all facing homelessness from different perspectives, while informing an ongoing research agenda through generating new and deeper questions.

Ultimately, it is our hope that these chapters will contribute towards ways to shape a more liberating and hopeful narrative about street homelessness in South Africa, sparking different imaginaries that insist on ending street homelessness for all people.

In Chapter 1 – *Facing homelessness in South Africa: a moral, political and institutional challenge* – the authors examine the current reality of homelessness in South Africa, presenting it as a human challenge – with moral, political and institutional implications – that requires inclusionary and collaborative solutions. The chapter first provides a high-level view of street homelessness in South Africa today and then considers how facing homelessness forces us to face ourselves, our institutions

and our society in a critical way. It traces the absence of political and institutional infrastructure to deal with the reality of street homelessness decisively; it then goes on to describe the beginnings of a national movement to address this lack and outlines a number of imperatives that would help mediate sustainable alternatives for individuals or families currently finding themselves homeless.

Chapter 2 - *Facing homelessness: scales of spatial exclusion* - considers some of the reasons why people resort to sleeping in public spaces and argues that distinguishing causal factors are crucial to formulating appropriate interventions that help address needs. In particular, it applies an urban planning and spatial development lens to the analysis, explaining how city spaces and economies interrelate to contribute towards street homelessness. Drawing on a range of research done in Johannesburg, this chapter considers the built environment as well as socio-economic factors at different scales to explore how they shape such circumstances. The social and economic context of the country coupled with the history and geography of Johannesburg brings particular challenges to the surface, including the persistence of historic spatial patterns and how systems of transport, housing and low-paying jobs work in combination to stifle the possibility of decent living conditions. The chapter considers the extent to which selected projects, plans and policies in the city help to address these underlying factors and what alternative interventions could assist.

Chapter 3 - *The Rights Revolution in South Africa: how can the homeless benefit?* On the 25th anniversary of the adoption of South Africa's Bill of Rights in 1996, the author asks how it is that homeless people in the country access and benefit from most of these rights even far less than other poor people. He concludes that for only four of the 27 rights are homeless people at par with other citizens. He draws on his 6 years of experience at the Denis Hurley Centre, working on the front-line of support for the homeless in central Durban and also on what he has learnt as part

of South Africa's National Homeless Network. He uses a modified version of Görgens and Van Donk's concept of the 'Right to the City' to better understand this rights deficit and identify practical ways of responding.

Chapter 4 - *Taking care: an overview of South African case law on the constitutional right not to lose one's home and an argument for interpreting the notion of home to include street-based people.* This chapter considers the role of South African jurisprudence in protecting the rights of its most defenceless and marginalised people. It provides an overview and synthesis of South African jurisprudence on the right not to be evicted from one's home. The authors identify three themes that animate this jurisprudence: (1) that the right is in essence a right to be regarded; (2) that the right operates on the basis of an expanded, non-material notion of what a home is and (3) that the jurisprudence evinces particular concern with marginality and vulnerability. Against this background they then consider the decision of the Supreme Court of Appeal in *Ngomane* to exclude street-based people from the protection afforded by the right. We conclude that this decision does not square with the animating themes of the jurisprudence, is anomalous and should be reversed.

Chapter 5 - *Innovative housing solutions: making an end to street homelessness through housing-led approaches* - argues that housing should be a central component of well-designed strategies to end street homelessness. At the same time, it argues that a one-size-fits-all approach has never worked, and therefore innovative and diversified housing options need to be offered if street homeless people were to be served appropriately and sustainably. It critiques in particular a one-sided emphasis on temporary shelters, arguing for a housing approach that is much more comprehensive in nature, fusing a housing continuum (or a so-called 'staircase model') with a 'housing first' approach, contextualised for the South African situation. It makes specific recommendations for a housing-led approach to end street homelessness.

Chapter 6 – *A practical guide to providing health services to homeless persons using community-orientated primary care.* Homelessness is a complex phenomenon associated with poor health outcomes. In this chapter, the authors first argue that homeless persons deserve high-quality and compassionate care that is patient-centred and evidence-based. The authors offer a philosophical framework that focuses on collaboration that providers can use when providing care for homeless persons. They then describe an approach to health care that makes the care of homeless persons a specific part of the healthcare service. Using the COPC approach, primary health care (PHC) is tailored to meet the needs of homeless persons, which is more effective than standard care and is likely to achieve higher patient-rated quality of care and better health outcomes. The chapter further explores the role of local organisations in the development of care coordination and the collaboration between healthcare services and local organisations.

Chapter 7 – *Empowerment: finding sustainable solutions to homelessness.* Neighbourhoods across Cape Town are grappling with the question of how to sustainably end homelessness. Some try a security-based response, others a service-delivery response and a select few attempt a long-term empowerment response. This chapter unpacks an empowerment perspective and locates it within both the capability approach and developmental thinking. The key elements of a long-term empowerment approach are outlined: creating a healthy ecosystem, building autonomy and providing opportunities. The example of U-turn – an organisation working with people experiencing homelessness in Cape Town – is used to show how these key elements of an empowerment approach can be successfully combined. Approaches such as these need to be scaled up if homelessness is going to be ended in Cape Town, as an organisational or individual-level approach is not sufficient. More concerted efforts are needed to address the perpetual disempowerment of people experiencing homelessness as a result of unhealthy ecosystems and institutional injustices.

Chapter 8 – *Sharing the table: Reflections on the engagement of faith-based communities with homelessness in three South African cities.* Religious organisations in cities offer valuable services and social networks to homeless persons and often become the first point of contact used by homeless individuals in need of support. While acknowledging the support provided by such organisations, the authors of this chapter examine current faith-based interventions through a critical and appreciative lens. They argue for the importance of faith-based interventions as an essential part of the larger transformative project, which has expanded to address the structural causes of homelessness and transform the faith-based agenda itself. In their quest to highlight the place of interdisciplinary and integrated models, the authors examined the praxis of faith-based organisations and networks across the three South African cities of Durban, Cape Town and Bloemfontein and find a common thread of hospitality and human connection – what they call ‘sharing the table’ – that runs through their three contexts.

Chapter 9 – *Homelessness and South Africa’s smaller cities: unique opportunities to end street homelessness?* – attends specifically to street homelessness in South Africa’s secondary or smaller cities. It considers five smaller cities – Stellenbosch, Kimberley, George, uMhlatuze (Richards Bay and Emphageni) and Mbombela – through an online survey, media analysis and policy documents. The findings show that in four of the five cities, there are serious policy constraints; general discourses in these cities tend to blame homeless persons for being homeless and fail to consider systemic causes; there is a lack of centralised mechanisms for registering homeless persons or coordinating homeless services and most shelters that were opened as crisis measures during COVID-19 closed down after the hard lockdown. However, based on the significant contributions that secondary cities make in the South African landscape, the chapter suggests that such cities should be able to contribute significantly to ending street homelessness, considering the relatively small scale of street homelessness in these cities in relation to the size of

infrastructure and resource base such cities possess and that they could serve as models for other bigger cities

In the final chapter – *Building inclusive communities: street homelessness, COVID-19 and radical trans-disciplinarity* – the authors foster an imaginary of inclusive communities that find innovative ways to embrace – and overcome – vulnerability, instead of ignoring or displacing it. They do so against the backdrop of street homelessness in its global and South African expressions. Drawing from lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic, they highlight the importance of broad-based collaborations, consistent and deliberate integration and radical trans-disciplinarity, fusing imaginative (prophetic) pragmatism and constructive activism, in crafting durable solutions to end street homelessness. This calls for a reframing of our collective engagement with urban vulnerability – through the lenses of a critical study of street homelessness – bringing together the academy, civil society, government and vulnerable communities – with the shared aim of promoting and implementing socio-spatial justice and inclusive communities.

## ■ Locating this volume as bridging the gap between research, policy and action

Research on street homelessness in South Africa has at best been sporadic. Research outcomes are often just shared between academic peers and rarely find their way into policy or improved interventions. The language of academic publications is meant to reflect scientific research and is therefore not always sufficiently accessible to activists, practitioners or policy-makers. Such work may be read to deepen one’s understanding of homelessness, for example, but it serves to provide indirect information rather than as a driver to action or to transform policy.

Similarly, good practices often exist in isolation, are not well-documented and fail to be replicated or scaled in order to achieve

the optimum impact they can potentially achieve. Policy work gets done by officials or technocrats who unfortunately often operate at a distance from assessment of the outcomes of policy implementation on improving the lives of the people whom the policies are intended for.

The arguments presented in this volume are meant to facilitate further discussions and contribute reflections to bridge some of these gaps. Most of the contributing authors are people who find themselves in and between different publics, seeking to make changes in trans-disciplinary ways and to transform homelessness through transforming our own – and societal – understandings and responses to homelessness.

This volume builds on prior and ongoing research and seeks to locate itself in the conversation with local practices in South African cities, an unfolding National Homeless Network and connectedness to the Institute on Global Homelessness at the DePaul University in Chicago. In this way, homelessness is located as an international concern in need of urgent attention locally.

The book builds on, and is in conversation with, research spanning the period between 2010 and 2021. This includes research by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), consolidated in a research article titled *Skeletons at the feast: A review of street homelessness in South Africa and other world regions* (Cross et al. 2010), as well as research reports, journal articles and policy briefs emanating from the Durban office of the HSRC, authored by Rule-Groenewald et al. (2015), Desmond et al. (2016), Desmond et al. (2017) and Rule and Timol (2017).

In the City of Tshwane, researchers embarked on a project in 2015 titled *Pathways out of Homelessness*, which subsequently led to the first-ever Tshwane Homelessness Summit, and the drafting of a Policy and Strategy on Street Homelessness for the City of Tshwane, which was eventually adopted (cf. eds. De Beer & Vally 2015). This research project also played a key role in providing evidence-based research support and in documenting processes during the hard lockdown for COVID-19 in the City of

Tshwane (eds. De Beer & Hugo 2021). The *Pathways* project has already gone through two iterations and the third phase of this continuous research project, accompanying the implementation of policy and interventions to end street homelessness in the City of Tshwane, is currently being conceptualised.

In Cape Town, two recent bodies of research are important for consideration. U-turn, a community-based NGO, embarked on a critical journey to investigate public expenditure on street homelessness in the City of Cape Town, culminating in a Summary Report titled *The Cost of Homelessness in Cape Town* (Hopkins et al. 2020). In it, they show how 45% of public spending on homelessness in Cape Town is 'reactive or punitive', 39% is 'humanitarian' and 16% is 'developmental' (Hopkins et al. 2020:9).

As a result of the public outcry against the City of Cape Town's response to street homelessness during COVID-19, the city engaged civil society leaders, Melene Rossouw and Lorenzo Davids, to engage in pre-policy conversations to review the existing Street Homeless Policy of Cape Town. The Inkathalo Conversations became a safe space in which homeless persons and other stakeholders were able to provide inputs into reimagining responses to street homelessness, published initially in a *Prelude Report to the Inkathalo Conversations on Homelessness* in October 2020.

Until recently, when the Johannesburg Homelessness Network, the City of Johannesburg and researchers from two local universities conceptualised a joint research initiative in 2021, there was not a coherent research project on homelessness in Johannesburg. Sarah Charlton (2018) and Harriet Perlman and Charlton (2017, 2021) have published frequently on themes related to homelessness, consistently challenging dominant narratives, and they have helped to formulate a more consistent research-based approach.

There is also increasing clarity about the interface between harmful substance use and homelessness. Works by Marks, Scheibe and Shelly (2020), as well as by Marcus et al. (2020), are

invaluable as they help shape a new and respectful paradigm for engaging homeless substance users, both de-stigmatising substance use and offering alternative forms of intervention to what was traditionally mostly punitive.

In a similar way, more work needs to be done to highlight the relationship between homelessness and mental health and to explore innovative housing options, serving to reintegrate homeless persons viably into dignified, appropriate and permanent housing options.

## ■ Whither homelessness?

Homefulness<sup>3</sup> and homelessness are opposite sides of the same coin. Where homefulness brings safety and protection, homelessness brings fear and vulnerability. Homelessness in the vast majority of instances is the tragic reality of poverty and inequality. It could also stem from the fear or vulnerability of individuals in violent 'home' environments, displacing them in to a sense of homelessness, even if not physically.

It is strategically important to locate conversations and advocacy around street homelessness firmly within both the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Whereas the NDP 2030 is aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, it should have at its core the eradication of street homelessness, through fostering conditions for homefulness to thrive. Yet the issue of homelessness is implied, only in an indirect and silent way.

The social compact intended in crafting the NDP - to bring together government and civil society to direct the wellbeing of society together - should include homelessness much more

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3. See examples of 'homefulness' being used: 'a poor, people-led solution to homelessness' in Oakland, California - <https://www.poormagazine.org/homefulness>; or Jean-Michel Giraud's (2012) vision of 'homefulness instead of homelessness through designing economic solutions for homeless persons.

explicitly, purposefully and deliberately as a priority. Without a deliberate acknowledgement, coupled with concrete aims and objectives, the solution to homelessness will remain elusive. In contrast, including homelessness intentionally will serve not only to broaden our definition of citizens, including all those who tend to be voiceless or rendered invisible on the streets, but also to provide the necessary impetus to ensure national, provincial and local policy frameworks, strategies and budgets to reduce and even end street homelessness.

The impact of an inclusive social compact should be to achieve very concrete objectives, of which reducing and ending street homelessness could be a laudable and tangible one. Addressing street homelessness decisively will be one measure towards achieving socio-spatial-economic justice and could provide clues for tackling similar societal challenges.

In a similar way, by addressing street homelessness, a whole host of sustainable development goals (SDGs) are implied in the process. Recently, the Policy Unit in the National Presidency has shown interest in prioritising street homelessness through the lens of the SDGs, envisioning a platform for a national policy conversation. By fusing the aims of the NDP and the SDGs into concrete objectives to end street homelessness in South Africa, we might show the courage to be human.

Facing homelessness, and fighting it, is not only planning for a humanising future; it is about finding that humanity in each one of us and practising being human together.

Such an understanding of homelessness takes us well beyond stigmatisation or criminalisation. It acknowledges structural and intersectional causes of homelessness and starts to consider responses that are sensitive and attuned to actual realities. Homelessness is now regarded as a question of socio-spatial-economic justice and solidarity with homeless persons, an acknowledgement of our common humanity. Overcoming homelessness becomes an integral indicator measuring our collective wellbeing as a society.



# Facing homelessness in South Africa: A moral, political and institutional challenge

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## ■ Facing homelessness

Homelessness is not a rare social phenomenon affecting a negligible number of people, easily wished away or easily manageable. It cannot be regarded as specific to countries regarded as poor and unable to survive without international aid;

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nor can it be regarded as specific to countries in the global North where some are regarded as ‘human waste’ or ‘the waste of capital’ (Bauman 2003:5–6). As part of the global landscape of the 21st century, all governments and societies in all parts of the world are increasingly expected to provide a clearer understanding of the realities and causes of homelessness, and also muster the political and moral resolve to address and overcome the life-threatening indignities homeless persons face (cf. Farha 2014:1).

Street homelessness defies a single definition. In seeking to define homelessness, international organisations such as UN Habitat and various governments all convey the idea of having a roof over one’s head. The United Nations differentiates between primary homelessness and ‘rooflessness’ (United Nations 2008), while secondary homelessness could include various forms of precarious housing. Whether a structure resembling a roof is used or not, the notion is often used by governments and organisations to determine whether a person is homeless or not. Furthermore, the number of nights spent without a roof structure is also used to identify persons who can be regarded as homeless. In Bengaluru, a very simple but apt way to define street homelessness is to consider it as people ‘living under the sky’<sup>4</sup>.

In South Africa, as in other parts of the world where informal urban settlements are a growing reality, a distinction is often made between street homelessness or street-based persons, and people living in informal housing, with a roof over their heads, however precarious it might be. We should remember that the dividing line between people living on the streets and people in informal housing is fuzzy.

In 2010, the number of street homeless persons in South Africa was estimated at between 100 000 and 200 000 (cf. Cross et al.

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4. From an online conversation with Rajani Srikakulam of the Civil Society Forum for City Makers and Ramachandrappa Harumakanahalli Thimmarayappa of the India Community Development Service Society on 09 March 2021. They are both NGO leaders and homeless activists in Bengaluru, advocating for more coherent policies to address street homelessness.

2010:5–20), but the accuracy of this estimate needs to be tested through devising more innovative and reliable means of enumerating street homeless people. Establishing an accurate number of the homeless population is a difficult task. Certain groups of homeless people opt to make themselves invisible to all, searching for places that are hidden from plain sight and preferably off the radar.

Some working in the sector reckon that this is a conservative figure and that many more people are ‘living under the sky’. Others are of the view that this is an over-inflated figure and includes people who are not among the street homeless population. Individual cities like Durban and Cape Town did their own counts, which indicated that the 2010 number might in fact be higher than the numbers estimated on the ground. From one perspective, activists might think that a higher number would serve to gain political commitment more easily. From another perspective, a smaller number would enable more strategic and measurable interventions, and the possibility to show actual impact in reducing and ending street homelessness.

Until Statistics South Africa recently formalised homelessness as a separate category under ‘hard-to-count’ populations, and is now working towards improving the reliability of homeless counting for the 2021 national census, homeless persons did not feature as a specific population in the census. Being a complex endeavour, Statistics South Africa is now working closely with the research community and is keen to use the data and knowledge generated in different South African cities to inform their practices of counting ‘hard-to-count’ populations. Establishing better base lines would also help to better inform strategic interventions, policies and financial investments. A remaining challenge is to include smaller cities and towns more deliberately in the processes of identifying and enumerating street homelessness in South Africa.

‘Homelessness’ is not reserved for only the economically destitute, the victims of internecine and structural violence, and

those currently living on the streets. If the definition of a roof over one's head is used to define 'homefulness', then thousands of people who are not currently physically homeless also face becoming homeless. They are the ones who live precariously in overcrowded buildings or with friends or family in a temporary accommodation. Homelessness for them is often a greater probability than finding a home. Physical homelessness is just a few steps, or one crisis, away (cf. eds. De Beer & Vally 2015:5).<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the definitions organisations and governments use, and whatever the official or unofficial numbers of street homeless persons are, the harsh reality of street homelessness cannot be ignored. Our research in South African cities has convincingly demonstrated that beyond the juggling of figures and definitions, there are people who do not have homes and whose vulnerabilities are facts, and that society and its institutions have failed to face this reality in ways that can decisively address it.

The emphasis of this chapter, and book as a whole, is on facing homelessness in South Africa as a human challenge, or a challenge to our common humanity, which at once holds severe moral, political and institutional implications. How we face and respond to homelessness says something of our character as a people.

Facing homelessness is a choice – morally, politically and institutionally. For faith communities, universities and government institutions, the choice is whether to face the realities and challenges of homelessness in ways that will place the matter firmly on our collective agendas, on the one hand, or by choosing not to face homelessness, thereby choosing to displace homelessness from our collective consciousness.

Failing to affirm the homeless 'other' as a fellow human being, neighbour and citizen is to deny the sacredness of life in a person, thereby reducing the chance of an ethical response. Yet, the contrary is also true: in meeting the sacred in the 'other', and particularly in the homeless stranger, our defences will most likely be disarmed to

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5. Consider the description of 'near' homelessness in De Beer and Vally (2015:5).

the extent that we might start to choose compassionate, bold and ethical solidarity, expressed in our personal, moral, political and institutional choices and commitments.

## ■ Being homeless

In examining street homelessness, it is important not only to consider definitions, meanings or status of homelessness in a theoretical or technical sense, but also, and especially, to consider how homeless persons understand their homelessness, how people become homeless and the feelings and fears their homelessness evokes as they scrape the bottom to live.

## ■ Home

The word 'home' in any dictionary shows that it can be used as a noun, adjective, verb and adverb. The idea of home is essentially one that connotes safety and protection. Whether it is used as a noun to refer to a habitat, domicile, place of origin or as the social unit formed by a family living together, or as an adjective to describe an activity like home cooking, it conveys a sense of safety and protection. To be 'at home' also speaks of familiarity and belonging in a deeply qualitative sense. Hence, not having a home in the form of a habitat, or the security and wellbeing of family, or feeling at home anywhere describes the plight of homeless persons and raises questions about how homeless persons cope (cf. Centre for Faith and Community 2021).

## ■ Socio-economic exclusion

South Africa is a dual economy with one of the highest rates of inequality in the world (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank 2018:42–75), presenting both constraints and opportunities. Such inequality indicates high levels of exclusion and an emphasis on economic growth that is not necessarily pro-poor. Street homelessness in South Africa is an expression of socio-economic exclusion that has to be

understood in the context of such inequality. The prevailing pervasive poor social and economic conditions perpetuate poverty and the proliferation of human settlements that are informal and precarious.

Employment used to be accepted as a trustworthy mechanism against homelessness. A secure wage meant providing for self and loved ones as well as participating in collective social life. In a country where 32.5% of the population is unemployed (as of the fourth-quarter of 2020) (Mahlaka 2021), the personal mechanisms to remain homed and to provide for one's loved ones often become limited or even depleted. When the odds overtake personal capacity, people become homeless, falling outside collective social life and with serious constraints in as far as accessing opportunities to recover from homelessness are concerned.

In many societies, progress and stability are defined as having a home, and therefore a fixed address. The absence of home, in that sense, could then be regarded as a social crisis, often a consequence of structural causes. An example is the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States of America, which impacted the global economy (cf. Shiller 2008). It had to be addressed decisively to prevent large-scale homelessness. The defaulters were too many, and neither the banks nor the state could ignore them, or even consider making their defaulting on mortgage payments an individual issue. This had to be dealt with as a social and structural crisis, and with great urgency, if large-scale homelessness was to be averted. Similarly, all states have to engage with street homelessness as a structural crisis with severe social and personal consequences.

## ■ A denial of access to basic human rights

Street homelessness, in addition to being an expression of socio-economic exclusion, is a denial of access to basic rights that constitute wellbeing and dignity (cf. Farha 2014). Through the violation of such rights, homeless persons are exposed to multiple

forms of violence on a daily basis, and apart from the physical hardships of life on the streets, the trauma of being homeless – emotionally and psychologically – is not reflected upon enough.<sup>6</sup>

Access to food and ablution facilities – which are basic human rights and requirements for basic living – is not within obvious reach of homeless persons. They often have to rely on the goodwill and charitable gestures of individuals and organisations. In these relationships, secondary violations or trauma are often experienced as well.

Whether it be in India, the European Union or South Africa, shelter is regarded as a basic human right and housing in this context is an important source of shelter, comfort and social status (Sattar 2020). As security and protection, housing provides not only shelter against weather and climate, but also privacy and a sense of personal space.

For street homeless people, no home means no sense of belonging, no security and safety and an absence of dedicated social networks to draw from. Yet the desire to put together social networks is probably a human trait that brings people together. A major difference in the case of homeless people would be that their homelessness is possibly the most important trait that they share.

Homeless persons often do not exercise their political rights, partly because meeting their survival needs takes up all their time and energy. Very few organised homeless groupings exist in South Africa, and where they exist there is often a lack of continuity. In organising themselves, homeless movements could work with other social movements that are advocating for access to land and housing, or the roll-out of a universal basic income grant, or access to PHC, acknowledging the intersectionality of many of these exclusions. De Beer and Vally (2015:385)

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6. Cf. Chapter 4 (De Villiers & Brand) of this volume, considering the role of South African jurisprudence in protecting the rights of street homeless people as most vulnerable and defenceless people.

demonstrated how a domicile address is what makes the difference in exercising the right to vote, which is another important political right, although simple administrative arrangements could ensure that people are able to exercise this right.

## ■ **Community, dependency and neighbourliness**

All homeless persons, no matter where in the world, share the same difficulty of finding shelter. They drift from street to street as the shelters they find are temporary. This is the precariousness homeless persons share and which also brings them together. Their homelessness, their precariousness and their need to survive become the binding factors of their communal life. Their need to survive on the streets without a roof to call home turns them into a community that is either highly dependent on others, or they start to develop resilience in the face of homelessness together.

Street homeless persons often have no choice but to rely on the different kinds of assistance and acknowledgement that are available from non-profit organisations, government institutions, religious bodies, people living in homes or from passers-by in the street. They are often the recipients of good neighbourly intentions, through either charitable giving or the creation of dedicated social infrastructure, or – sometimes – more organised attempts to find durable solutions through petitioning local government structures to acknowledge the plight of homeless persons, their human rights and their right to basic amenities and shelter, for example.

Some non-homeless citizens choose to express solidarity with homeless persons by joining organisations or groups that seek to be in solidarity with homeless persons. Others face homelessness in their places of residence, not through any kind of engagement, but by virtue of the presence of homeless persons. Occasionally, there are those individuals who seek to practise neighbourliness

deliberately, through befriending a person living on the streets informally, or engaging more formally with services to support people living on the streets. Now and then, there are individuals who practise neighbourliness through deeper solidarity, helping to defend the rights of their homeless friends.

## ■ Stigma

Though many of our attitudes toward homelessness have changed, society at large, policy-makers and even religious people still attach a stigma to homelessness, blaming individuals for not having a home. The other side of the good-neighbourly coin is the bad neighbour. It is not totally inappropriate to say that neighbours in a house and with a permanent roof are perceived as ‘the good ones’, while homeless persons, unable to display the security of owning a roof over their heads, are regarded as ‘the bad ones’. Poverty then gets stigmatised and often even criminalised. And those who are poor, in this case homeless persons, experience varying forms of rejection.

In her fascinating study of two neighbourhoods in Paris, France, Loison-Leruste (2014) examines how well homeless people and their neighbours cohabit spaces in neighbourhoods and streets (Loison-Leruste 2014:87). The dominant discourse that emerged was one of negativity towards the presence of homeless people. Loison-Leruste differentiates between four forms of rejection: (1) ‘engaged rejection’, which is active and organised opposition to homeless persons and institutions; (2) ‘distanced rejection’, which is to experience discomfort as a result of the presence of homeless persons yet tolerating them; (3) ‘indifference’ to both homeless persons and their neighbourhoods in general and (4) ‘critical of rejection’, representing neighbours who are uncomfortable with fellow neighbours who practise ‘engaged rejection’ expressed in different forms of intolerance (cf. Maurin & Waine 2015).

In a South African context, there are those individuals in neighbourhoods who devise plans, very deliberately and

sometimes cunningly, to 'un-neighbour' homeless persons, promoting strategies that will displace them, instead of spending that energy on integrating them better. This is particularly true of suburban neighbourhoods where property owners seek to maintain property values and middle-class 'respectability', and who regard the presence of homeless persons as damaging to local property values, a threat to their children and generally detrimental to the neighbourhood. Such neighbourhoods seek to instil a distance between themselves and homeless persons, not wanting to have to face the reality of homeless existence. Goffman (1963) speaks of this as a stigma that is deeply discrediting to the point of disqualifying people from social acceptance, or even rendering people invisible or non-existent.

These neighbourhoods often display the inherent contradictions of society. On the one hand, they would go to great lengths to displace homeless persons who are perceived as damaging to their property values. On the other hand, some among them would gladly give food and blankets as acts of caring (similar to Loison-Leruste's 'distanced rejection'). Perhaps even such acts of caring need to be scrutinised for their failure to insist on proper access to shelter and other basic rights, and their continuation of socio-economic exclusion, except for occasional gestures of charity. Without ensuring the full integration of homeless people into communities, these contradictions, exclusions and distances will remain in place.

## ■ **Vulnerability and resilience**

It should be clear from the above description that homeless persons fall within the category of people experiencing an almost absolute sense of vulnerability and defencelessness. Without being organised among themselves, without being able to access services and facilities that could mediate possibilities of leaving the streets and without access to shelter that is secure and safe, such vulnerability will persist. Any interventions aimed at overcoming street homelessness need to

work in close collaboration with homeless persons to understand the extent and elements of vulnerability, and to create mechanisms – that is, services and infrastructure – that can help address and overcome such vulnerability.

It remains surprising, however, how homeless persons are able to survive and resist noxious conditions on the harsh streets, in spite of all the odds being against them. Individually and collectively, homeless communities often find ingenious ways to navigate life on the streets, building strength and resilience in the process, with and without the support of neighbours and organisations set up for the purpose of advocating for them. Colleagues in Bengaluru, India, prefer to speak of homeless persons as city-makers, recognising their regular contribution to the city in the form of menial, invisible and thankless jobs – as reclaimers, informal traders, day workers – without which the city would be much worse off (Srikakulam & Goswami 2010:7).

Instead of accepting the absolute vulnerability of homeless persons as inevitable, playing into the stigma that blames individuals for societal and structural failures, reducing and ending homelessness should be made an integral indicator to determine the wellbeing and success of a city and the collective happiness of its citizenry. This should start by building on the inherent resilience and agency of homeless persons, in spite of their deep vulnerabilities.

## ■ **Changing faces of street homelessness in South Africa today**

The face of street homelessness in South Africa today, as explained in our article '(Finding) pathways out of homelessness' (De Beer & Vally 2017:385-398), has changed considerably over the last 40-50 years. More specifically, since the end of apartheid, homelessness was no longer determined according to racial categories but rather as a socio-economic reality, that affected all persons equally.

We noted that until the middle of the 1990s, the average street homeless person was a middle-aged white man with harmful patterns of substance use. But this was not the total street homeless population, as female victims of violence or abuse, people living with chronic mental illness and young people running away from home also formed part of this reality (cf. Cross et al. 2010; eds. De Beer & Vally 2015).

Homelessness, like any other societal issue, is context bound. Sociopolitical changes play an important part in how such issues develop, are addressed and, where appropriate, resolved. The end of apartheid signalled a fundamental social contextual change. Previously, a person's identity and sociocultural affiliation were politically assigned through apartheid social engineering. This identity was non-negotiable and a pre-determinant to what people could achieve and accomplish in their lives. Homelessness was a stigma for white South Africans and a stain on their success. This did not mean that there were no homeless persons, but rather that it was treated as a stigma; it was socially unacceptable and an individual problem.

There is no single definition for homelessness and neither is there a particular sector of people who risk becoming homeless. Homelessness is a reality that can affect anyone regardless of their age. We have identified factors and reasons that could lead to homelessness and the next section presents some examples.

## ■ **Who are the street homeless populations in South Africa?**

Since the 1990s, the reality of homelessness has fundamentally changed. People's geographies and movements were also determined by the apartheid state, and legislation such as the *Influx Control Act* and the *Group Areas Acts* prevented mass immigration of black South Africans into what were regarded as 'white' cities. Our focus on street homelessness made us aware of how the new-found freedom of movement after the abolition of the *Influx Control Act* in 1986 made it possible for young (black)

persons from disenfranchised rural areas to migrate to cities in search of economic opportunities.

Today, the majority of street homeless people are *the economically homeless*. They are part of the 55.2% of unemployed young South Africans in the 15–24 age group who just cannot find work, often also as a result of poor educational opportunities when they were younger (Statistics South Africa 2019). The move from rural to urban areas fits with the global trend of growing urbanisation, where the world’s population living in urban areas increased from 30% in 1950 to 50% in 2018 and is projected to reach 60% by 2030 (Migration Data Portal 2020). The feelings of desperation that are a reality in light of such high unemployment figures are possible drivers forcing people to move, and in this instance young people to migrate to the cities.

The increasing number of *older homeless people* over the age of 55 is of concern as well (cf. eds. De Beer & Vally 2015:62–63). Older people who had in the past demonstrated support for extended family structures and acted as mediators of family wellbeing amidst precariousness are also becoming victims of rising unemployment.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the African family structure absorbing older people into the extended family when they become too frail to care for themselves has also become more tenuous. In addition, black South African communities, as a result of the strong emphasis on the extended family, historically lacked institutionalised care in the form of old-age homes. With older people unable to sustain any form of homefulness, they too migrate to cities, but their small government grant proves too little to access affordable and secure housing, steadily leading to older persons becoming a category of chronic homelessness that merits urgent attention.

In the last decade or so, research and action on the ground have made it clear that there is an increasing number of young

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7. During the AIDS period many older people took in AIDS orphans. The role of older family members that provide care and support to young children while their parents – mostly mothers – went to work is also well-documented.

men and women who find themselves on the streets as a result of *harmful substance use*. Though substance use is associated with complex medical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and socio-economic factors, users are often blamed and stigmatised. Homeless persons with problems of substance use tend to experience the worst forms of marginalisation and criminalisation, and interventions to support their re-integration into communities are often very limited (cf. Marcus et al. 2020).

A growing challenge on the streets of South African cities is the reality of *refugees, asylum seekers and other transnational migrants* (cf. Teweldemedhin & Roets 2015:41-42). They are the people who do not have access to safe and secure shelter, and many, if not most, among them do not have any legal documentation. Their legal status, even if they are legitimate asylum seekers, cannot aspire to acquiring a home and, like their undocumented fellow persons, are vulnerable. They are often the victims of unscrupulous landlords and, where they might have access to accommodation, it is often precarious and just tentative, with the result that the street is the only certain home they have.

The decision to deinstitutionalise mental health care in South Africa has often had adverse effects. Patients, who became ordinary citizens again and who could not be accommodated by family, friends or the state, found themselves without resources and on the street. Formal care for people with mental health issues was seriously compromised, and in many communities non-existent. Thus, the mental health policies that were intended to integrate *persons with chronic mental illness* into communities, while intended to destigmatising them, became another source of street homelessness and stigmatisation (eds. De Beer & Vally 2015:63).

In addition, our research shows that many homeless persons might be living with chronic mental illness, without a proper diagnosis and typically lack appropriate psycho-social or medical support. During COVID-19, with the emphasis on creating temporary shelters for homeless persons, many people who had

never been diagnosed before were diagnosed for the first time and given access to appropriate health support.

The dismantling of apartheid socio-spatial segregation has proved to be a daunting task. While social mobility is a democratic right, it seems to echo a Kafkaesque nightmare where especially the poor are expected to travel long distances to find and sustain employment and with very little opportunity to find affordable accommodation. Today, this finds expression in both the suburbanisation of homelessness and the increasing numbers of working homeless persons.

Over the past decade the *suburbanisation of homelessness* (eds. De Beer & Vally 2015:63–65) has become a feature of South African cities. A concentration of (perceived) economic opportunity – shopping malls, gated communities, construction sites, informal recycling or waste picking – leads to people risking their lives by seeking shelter in public places, like parks, along rivers, in open fields, under bridges or wherever they find space that seems relatively secure at night. Their primary consideration is proximity to the perceived opportunities.

A growing concern is that of the *working homeless*. Poor people still live furthest away from economic opportunities, generally speaking, and have to travel the longest distances to and from work at high cost and long hours. This proves to be destructive for family life and reduces their effective income because of exorbitant transport fees in relation to their low incomes. People then opt to live homeless, in backyard shacks or informally, in closer proximity to their workplaces. These could be people in employment – whether temporary or permanent – who do not earn enough to rent a home or pay for transport to commute to work. They are not unemployed and do not feature as a category in any statistics.

The spectre of homelessness looming over cities globally is further emphasised by the challenges students face in securing affordable accommodation. *Student homelessness* and/or *precarious student housing* were brought to prominence during

the #FeesMustFall protests (cf. eNCA 2017). Alongside student concerns about the reality of outsourced workers on university campuses, the urgency of decolonisation and language of instruction, the plight of students in relation to debt and exclusion could not be ignored. Students' financial situation, together with a serious lack of adequate affordable student housing, presents an enormous challenge. Etienne Van Heerden (2019) poignantly depicts the life of Jerome Maarman, a student at the University of Cape Town, living in Futsek, the name they give their abode on a pavement at a busy intersection, close to the University campus. Jerome had to navigate studies and homelessness, as a result of financial exclusion. This challenge is further exasperated by high land costs around University campuses, the lack of innovative social housing solutions and uncertain institutional commitment to address this pervasive challenge. How and where such students find accommodation can be uncertain and does not exclude the possibility of homelessness among them.

From the above it should be clear that a superficial analysis of street homelessness, without having engaged the unique narratives of individual homeless persons, often leads policy-makers, the media and society at large to come to simplistic and singular conclusions of why people are homeless and what the possible remedies for homelessness could be. It is vital to interrogate the complexity of street homelessness and the diverse socio-economic, psychological, health, spatial, structural and personal causes, if we are to make sense of this reality at some level. Even though international evidence is making it increasingly clear that structural failures are predominantly what causes street homelessness, it is also becoming clear in the South African context that living 'rough' has become an economic choice for some, defying the remnants of socio-spatial segregation and insisting on access to the city and its resources. For many, being on the streets is a form of exercising a right to the city and the city's economic, educational, social or health resources – even if individuals do not couch it in such terms themselves.

Conventional responses to homelessness therefore need to be revisited, to remove often pathologising or criminalising responses to homeless individuals, instead acknowledging structural causes in designing models built on the assets and agency of individual homeless persons. Finding more innovative and liberating responses to street homelessness could only happen once we confront homelessness, not as an abstract construct of dehumanising objects, but in the individual faces and names of women, men and children with real stories of struggle and hope.

## ■ Facing homelessness, facing ourselves: Our collective moral, political and institutional failure

It is impossible to ignore homelessness. Regardless of any scientific and other explanations and definitions we might use to minimise the number of homeless persons, or to debate whether the idea of homelessness applies philosophically to people who sleep on the streets, the sheer palpable reality is their current or chronic homelessness. To deny this is to shirk our collective civic responsibility.

Nowhere is the failure of our collective responsibility more evident than in our collective failure to reduce, or even eradicate, homelessness. Sporadic attempts to engage homelessness collaboratively are often through mitigated responses and not always conducted in the spirit of meaningfully addressing or even ending this unacceptable social reality. Instead, our experiences confirm responses and desires to remove homelessness from our immediate line of sight. This we do through different mechanisms.

The most obvious mechanisms are to use property value and issues of security as sufficient reasons to push homelessness beyond of our immediate vision. Increasing numbers of destitute persons in a neighbourhood, and particularly the suburbanisation of homelessness, reinforce the counter-attempts to make homelessness invisible.

Often, neighbourhood organisations, law enforcement agencies and private businesses would collude in devising the means to displace homeless individuals. Municipal by-laws prohibiting begging and sleeping outdoors are selectively used to push homeless people out of sight (cf. Killander 2021). In Cape Town, loitering, which is generally described as remaining in a particular public space without any apparent purpose, was made a criminal offence and subject to a fine or imprisonment. Thus, sex workers, beggars or ordinary people standing or dawdling around in public places without an apparent purpose, or who seemed to be engaged in some illegal activity, can be targeted by law-enforcement agencies. In 2019, the City of Cape Town started to fine homeless people, using 'vagrancy or nuisance by-laws' (Githahu 2019), prompting great outrage from many quarters. In the City of Tshwane there is a history of Metro Police officers harassing homeless people, and using loitering as one of the reasons to remove people from public places to dump them out of sight, sometimes at already overcrowded shelters (cf. Tlhabye 2017).

Laws in their different forms, and in line with the basic tenets of human rights and the Constitution of South Africa, are ideally meant to protect people and property from abuse. Yet the interpretation and implementation of certain by-laws are clear violations of people's basic constitutional rights and need to be rigorously tested whenever they occur. We noticed how officials and ordinary people often impressed on us their commitment to a human rights culture and the Constitution. The derelict state of No. 2 Struben Street in the City of Tshwane – a municipal-owned shelter – the forceful removal of voiceless people, the disrespect of their meagre belongings and regular physical and emotional abuse at the hands of law enforcement agencies made us acutely aware of the disjuncture between rhetoric and action.

Another way of rendering homelessness invisible is for politicians and government officials to engage in conceptual or philosophical debates about the meaning of homelessness, disputing who are truly homeless, but in the process simply failing

to protect and further the basic rights of human beings under their jurisdiction.

Despite the fact that South Africa has, according to the Gini index, the highest levels of inequality in the world, politicians tend to bicker about the meanings of home and belonging, perverting the philosophy of *ubuntu* by using it to question definitions of homelessness, instead of evoking and practising it in solidarity with all who experience homelessness. There is often an insistence that everyone has an ancestral home somewhere and this serves as a reason for government's inaction. We obviously do not dispute the reality of an ancestral home, but our concern is that the ancestral home or home of origin also fails at times to provide sufficient means of livelihood, security or belonging, which means people leave. There is often an expectation of the 'breadwinner' to earn income to support the family. Many young people then leave for the city in search for employment to honour their commitment to sustain their families, only to be met with unemployment and homelessness, and finding themselves often in downward spirals of vulnerability.

For civil servants in a local government to respond to homelessness as a non-existent or a non-admissible reality in dealing with the growing phenomenon of urban poverty is to use a rather narrow and reckless interpretation. In doing so, they brush aside the symbolic value of home and apply the idea of home as a literal space. This approach fails to acknowledge the fact that some people leave home in the hope of finding affordable accommodation so that they might earn money to maintain their ancestral homes: the places that migrants and civil bureaucrats consider as their symbolic and permanent home. Yet not all homeless persons fall into this category either – far from it.

Such a narrow interpretation of homelessness is highly problematic, as was evident from a meeting where a provincial policy on street homelessness was discussed. One official maintained that homeless persons should go back 'home', back to where they came from, if they could not productively contribute

to urban life. This echoed the sentiments of the 1922 Stallard Commission, which served as a precursor for apartheid spatial legislation. This Commission (Transvaal Local Government Commission 1922) stated that:

[T]he native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister. (n.p.)

Echoing similar language is to perpetuate an apartheid spatial consciousness that is completely untenable. Yet, somehow, politicians and officials are able to peddle such arguments without recognising how they continue an apartheid discourse.

Whichever strategies are employed to reduce the risk of falling into homelessness, the nature of street homelessness in South Africa has developed in such a way – and COVID-19 probably assisted in this regard – that these avoidance strategies have become increasingly difficult to sustain. In some communities it has simply become impossible to avoid the reality of homeless persons and their proximity. But this (illusion of) familiarity through sheer visibility brings another danger with it – leaving us either numb as a society, or it breeds contempt, or it creates a sense that we ‘know’ while never having actually entered the stories of those who have become the nameless characters in the backdrop to our landscapes. Because they have become characters on our urban stage does not mean we have confronted the reality of them. In the next section of this chapter, we will explore this more.

Our collective failure lies not only in how we seek to remove homelessness from sight, attempting to render invisible what is so visible. It also becomes evident when we start to consider the reality that there is little alignment between the depth and commitment of policies, strategies, budgetary investments or available property, on the one hand, and the extent of street homelessness, on the other. The structural causes of street homelessness are hardly taken into account by officials and policy-makers, still hiding behind notions of home that are

untenable in the context of homelessness, or blaming individuals for being homeless, without acknowledging structural causes and society's complicity.

The state of homelessness that people fall into is often the consequence of structural decisions, policies and arrangements on which they have had hardly any influence. The ethnographic fieldwork of Paul Farmer (2004:305-324) in Haiti brought together histories, policies, economic structures and the quotidian life of ordinary persons to demonstrate that we should not lose sight of how entrenched structures lie at the origins of prevailing social problems. Although nobody would disagree that homelessness needs to be addressed – even after all the attempts to render it invisible – instead of finding lasting structural solutions, we seem to favour temporary ones that seem to indicate a hope that homelessness would disappear on its own.

In terms of *government responses*, there is no coherent policy on street homelessness at a national level. Only the Western Cape has a dedicated budget towards providing homeless shelters, while in the Gauteng province budget allocations were made to fund homeless shelters for the first time in 2021. Whether this would become a standard budget line item was still unconfirmed at the time of publication, even though provincial government officials advocated for it. NGOs often have to work creatively within other budgets to make space for homeless persons, and sometimes small provisions are made by local governments, but usually on an ad hoc and largely unsustainable basis.

The Gauteng province, for the first time, has a draft policy on street homelessness. The province started to engage the Tshwane Homelessness Forum and Johannesburg Homeless Network in December 2019, demonstrating a keen interest to understand homelessness better, engaging homeless activists and researchers, and considering policy and budgetary recommendations.

In a similar vein, only three South African cities now have policies on street homelessness. The City of Cape Town has a Street People Policy that is now under revision. The City of Tshwane

adopted a Street Homelessness Policy in 2019, after being in draft form for four years, but attached no dedicated budget to the Policy. Stellenbosch, interestingly, also has an approved Policy for Street Homelessness.

Recently, during 2020, the City of Johannesburg indicated an interest in developing a homelessness policy and a collaborative process started between the City, the Johannesburg Homelessness Network and researchers from the Witwatersrand University and the University of Johannesburg. In Durban, early in 2020 a special purpose vehicle was provided by the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality in an attempt to develop a concerted effort to address street homelessness. Although this seemed a promising development, COVID-19 and the lockdown seem to have slowed down that process considerably.

In spite of some encouraging signs, as elaborated above, they remain limited to only some provinces and cities, and not nearly enough in evident in proportion to the devastating effects of homelessness. The complexity of street homelessness is still not taken sufficiently into account, in all spheres of government and in all relevant government departments, and as a result homeless persons – and those organisations working in solidarity with them – still fall through the fault lines of insufficient public policy – or no policy at all.

*The non-profit sector* – which tends to be at the forefront of investing time, intellectual and emotional capacity, moral commitment and resources to address street homelessness – often fails to implement what is necessary in optimal ways. The sector is often divided and therefore unable to advocate strategically as a collective. Instead of fostering a collaborative approach, sharing good practices, skills and resources, there often seems to be competition for scarce resources and this sometimes results in unhealthy and wasteful duplication of services.

Where good practices are developed over time, they are not always replicated or scaled because of limited resources.

Another challenge is the inability of the sector to articulate good practices, as well as identify bad or unhelpful practices, in ways that can inform policies and strategies affecting homelessness.

Homeless individuals, who are the primary beneficiaries of non-profit services, are not always included in programme design or evaluation, which often results in homeless persons expressing their experience of being patronised, of services being inappropriate, or of their inability to contribute as equal agents and participants in their own empowerment.

In addition, a real disabling factor is the perpetual dependence of these organisations on external resources to sustain their important work. In many cases, this results in the non-profit sector failing to put their convictions into practice independently and critically, as they are at the behest of the hands that feed them.

*Churches and other religious organisations* engage with street homelessness in many different ways. Some are apathetic, particularly in neighbourhoods where there was no trace of homelessness in the past. Others provide short-term relief, while still others contribute through long-term development interventions such as skills-development programmes, vocational preparation, access to health care and access to affordable housing. In rare cases, churches or religious organisations do engage with homelessness through advocacy or policy work, thereby having little political or systemic impact in terms of reducing the numbers of people facing street homelessness. Faith-based non-profit organisations tend to fare better in this regard than congregations, temples or mosques.

*Universities* can contribute to rigorous processes of knowledge generation, evidence-based research and policy-making, if there were dedicated researchers showing long-term solidarity with the homeless community. Instead, ad hoc research often based on community engagement projects that focus on street homelessness is the pervasive tendency. Sustained institutional

commitment to homelessness is rather rare, and yet it could have a significant impact were it to be developed and institutionally supported. Collaborating closely with homeless communities, service providers and policy-makers, tracking progress, informing policy and strategy and keeping government accountable could contribute to reducing or ending homelessness in measurable ways.

The *private sector*, on the rare occasions that it does engage with street homelessness in a committed way, fails to delve deeply enough to gain an understanding of the complex nuances and causes of street homelessness. Through their corporate social responsibility programmes they mostly contribute to a welfare approach that does not really have an impact in breaking cycles of homelessness or poverty, but merely alleviate the short-term symptoms of precarious living, even though that too is important. A different approach could be for companies to commit themselves to participate in strategies to reduce or end street homelessness in a specific neighbourhood or among a specific population, through well-crafted programmes, addressing the psycho-social, health, housing and economic obstacles that render people homeless. The private sector is uniquely equipped to support infrastructure that could mediate sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

*The homeless community* itself, which is nomadic and transient by definition, is different from informal settlement communities that often manage to organise themselves well. The homeless community is mostly disorganised, disparate and lacking a united collective voice, with some exceptions. In South Africa, homeless activism has not developed the sophistication of some of the land and housing movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo or Reclaim the City. Traditionally, these activist movements have not taken on board issues of street homelessness. A welcome new development, even though still tentative, is that new conversations and relationships are being forged between homeless activists with land and housing

activists, acknowledging that solidarity between them can be synergetic and mutually beneficial.

## ■ A human challenge: In the face of the other

A prerequisite for practising solidarity with the homeless community – as individuals, institutions and society at large – is facing this reality collectively. The reality of street homelessness should cause us to pause and reflect. Could street homelessness be a symptom of a failed society – morally, politically and institutionally? Is it not an indicator of our collective wellbeing or the quality of our humanity?

Elsewhere, De Beer is quoted as saying: ‘Homelessness is a window to our collective failure as a society’ (Perrier 2020). We argue here that facing homelessness, in a deep sense, is to face ourselves and our own limitations. In facing homelessness, we open ourselves to an invitation to acknowledge our proneness to vulnerability and, indeed, our common humanity. In that sense, facing homelessness is also an invitation into journeys of mutual liberation – both of those who live homeless and those who stand with them.

Facing homelessness is not an invitation to show pity or charity in a reductionist, patronising kind of way. It is, instead, an invitation to participate in deep solidarity, able to mediate freedom and justice, through relationships of mutual friendship and care, in which both parties find it possible to become free. We briefly evoke the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas to help us consider the idea of facing ‘the other’ as a human and ethical imperative.

Levinas (1969:207) wrote: ‘[T]he Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me’. It reminds us of the town planner in the City of Johannesburg who observed, upon reflecting on street homelessness, that she had failed homeless people at a personal, professional and political level. In facing homelessness,

our personal, professional and political commitment to help mediate radical change – not only for homeless individuals, but of the ways in which society works – is challenged. Facing the other implores us to act ethically and humanely (Levinas 1969):

The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity – its hunger – without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. (p. 200)

The situation is more complex, however. The intimacy of the gaze invites a response, but the response might come either in the form of violence, or in the form of humanity. Rarely does the gaze let us off the hook, feeling neutral (Levinas 1969):

The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill. (pp. 85–86)

It is precisely such tension that facing homelessness evokes in people and institutions. Violent responses can take the form of criminalising homelessness, dehumanising homeless persons through confiscating their possessions and legal documents or, more subtly, through systematically excluding people from participating fully in the life, or sharing the resources, of the city.

Snoek (2015) refers to disturbing research findings by Harris and Fiske (2006), indicating, in Snoek's words, 'that many people don't see homeless people as real human beings'. Based on brain scans recording responses in the medial prefrontal cortex of humans, which is activated by social cognition, they found that images of homeless persons did not activate similar responses in many of their respondents. This non-cognition might contribute, through prolonged socialisation, to the implicit or actual violent dehumanisation of homeless persons.

On the other hand, facing the reality of homelessness also leaves some unable to turn away, evoking compassion and a commitment in solidarity. Professional and political commitment can flow from locating ourselves in proximity to precarious and frail habitations, where we can no longer avoid the gaze of the other, even though we have the means to do so. Levinas (1969:198) says: 'the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation'.

Those committed to overcoming street homelessness could help facilitate spaces of proximity in which compassion and solidarity could be fostered as characteristics of public life. What is required is re-socialisation, recognition and re-membering, both of those who are homeless and those who are not, in a way that will contribute to our mutual re-humanisation.

At the same time, communities caring for homeless persons, and networks in which homeless persons organise themselves to take collective action, also have important work to do to overcome the indignities that were internalised over a long period, until their 'less than human' status is normalised. Snoek (2015) refers to a tweet by someone who was homeless for a long time that says: 'When I look back at my life, I see chaos, mistakes, suffering and sadness. When I look in the mirror, I see strength, lessons learned and wisdom'. In facing him or herself in the mirror, this person was able to see strength and wisdom in a way that helped overcome a dominant narrative (personal and societal) of failure. Spaces are necessary in which all of us, homeless and homed, can face ourselves and each other anew and, in doing so, be led to new places of shared humanity. What is required is a moral commitment – indeed, a conversion – to solidarity with homeless communities.

## ■ **Fostering political and institutional infrastructure**

If homelessness cannot be ignored, how do we deal with it? Should we not see it as part of a larger global reality and an economic depravity? How do we find ways out of homelessness without falling into traps of emotional mudslinging?

Once a moral commitment is made, it has to be translated into appropriate and responsive political and institutional infrastructure. Without concrete infrastructural interventions, homeless persons will still experience exclusion, criminalisation and marginalisation. And society at large will remain complicit.

The backdrop to this publication is a conviction that we can go a long way to reverse the current realities of street homelessness by mediating just, inclusive and sustainable long-term solutions to life on the streets. Such a bold imaginary can only be attained, even in part, through appropriate political and institutional infrastructure, matched by sufficient financial investment.

It requires broad-based collaborations between all stakeholders at local, provincial and national levels, and finding synergies in values, strategies, actions and resources. Where that occurs, long-term changes will become evident, not only in the circumstances of individual homeless persons, but structurally in the way a city creates the conditions that mediate access to viable and sustainable alternatives to street homelessness.

The mandates of different societal sectors differ. In facing homelessness, each sector should discern how best they can offer themselves – their own expertise, resources and commitment – to contribute to the greater good. As important as it is for these institutions to demonstrate the political and moral commitment to make the eradication of homelessness their priority, homeless persons themselves ought to demonstrate a similar commitment – concretely so – in overcoming practices and conditions that are dehumanising to them and their families. The role of former homeless persons in supporting such processes needs to be emphasised and called forth.

In the City of Tshwane we understood the power of policies and their influence on the everyday lives of people. We saw how laws and policies were used first to enforce and then to decriminalise segregation in South Africa. This confirmed our commitment that only a dedicated policy to address homelessness at all government levels would help to find structural pathways out of homelessness. This informed our discussions and efforts with the City of Tshwane as we demonstrated why a dedicated budget line to address homelessness is ideal. A budget line, we demonstrated, is accompanied by policy directives and creates

responsibilities and obligations to assist homeless persons in finding ways out of homelessness.

The absence of coherent government responses helped to inform the City of Tshwane's approach to homelessness, while civic organisations and researchers continuously demonstrated the advantages of a policy approach to address homelessness. The current approach in Gauteng, we argued, relied on NGOs finding resources to assist homeless persons. Local governments also found ad hoc resources to deal with homelessness as did community-based organisations (CBOs) and religious organisations. While such commitments provided much needed resources, they were not part of a sustainable approach. Such temporary alleviation had to be part of a much more consistent approach with clear indicators of how homeless persons could be reintegrated into an active life.

This was about influencing public policy at different levels. In doing so, it was important that all levels of government understood the complexities of homelessness and therefore the need for a dedicated policy strengthened with the necessary resources. Currently, many critical government departments have still not embraced the need to address homelessness as an important part of their own agendas.

The tenacious efforts of the Tshwane Homelessness Forum<sup>8</sup> showed that patience and resolve were attributes that influenced the City of Tshwane to adopt a Homelessness Policy in August of 2019. This adoption was a small but vital step in dealing with homelessness. A public budget line helps to link tasks with the resources required to achieve the aims. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that policy is not only a technical and managerial process, but it is also necessarily and appropriately political. Hence with sufficient political will, the adopted Homelessness Policy in Tshwane can grow teeth.

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8. The Tshwane Homelessness Forum is a platform for civic organisations – NGOs, FBOs and CBOs (former) homeless persons, researchers and city officials to develop a coordinated voice and advocate collectively with and on behalf of the homeless community.

## ■ An emerging national response

In 2017, a national network was established to address street homelessness more collectively. Part of the mandate of this network, known as the National Homeless Network (n.d.), is to advocate for infrastructure that will embody a political, moral and institutional commitment and priority. It is a collective endeavour with participants from NGOs, faith-based organisations, the research community, homeless and former homeless people and city-based networks, and includes, among others, members from the City of Tshwane, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, Durban, Cape Town, Buffalo City and Ekurhuleni.

In March 2020, on Human Rights' Day, the network was launched in a more formal and public way. The Network's mandate is fourfold: (1) to play a national advocacy role; (2) to share information on best practices and policies; (3) to build a shared research agenda; and (4) to liaise collectively with government (National Homeless Network n.d.).

Although there are still enormous challenges ahead, positive working relationships have started to develop. We refer to this network as part of this chapter, as it is an attempt to face homelessness collaboratively and self-critically; to mobilise different stakeholders to be in clearer solidarity with the homeless and their concerns and to shape policy and practices that could help to create sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

In the past few years, the Network has been pleased to work closely with some arms of government who do recognise the rights of homeless men and women. The Independent Electoral Commission collaborated with members of this network to ensure that eligible homeless people were registered as voters for the May 2019 election, and Statistics South Africa is committed to partnering with this Network to ensure that future Census processes accurately include the homeless (National Homelessness Network 2020).

Currently, the Network is seeking to establish a relationship with the South African Human Rights Commission to investigate and address the ‘systematic abuses of the rights of homeless people’ (National Homelessness Network 2020). At a provincial and local level, members of the Forum participate in task teams and stakeholder forums; engage in research, advocacy or awareness-raising activities to further an understanding of the complexities of and possible solutions to street homelessness or offer direct services to homeless people in an attempt to support and reintegrate people into communities. During COVID-19, the Network became a critical resource for members, supporting each other continuously through challenging months of lockdown.

## ■ A radically humanising approach

The challenge of street homelessness should not be dealt with as a legal matter of by-laws, a bureaucratic matter of complying with stringent requirements to determine who is ‘truly deserving’ of our services; or an institutionalised approach of professionalised care, avoiding intimacy at all costs. The challenge of street homelessness goes to the core of our humanity, raising questions about the soul, character and wellbeing of our society.

Facing homelessness is about facing ourselves and our common (in)humanity. An approach to address street homelessness should be fostered that is radically humanising, both of the homeless person and also of the service provider, policy-maker or legal practitioner facing homelessness.

If values and imperatives, such as human dignity, a right to the city, socio-spatial justice, radical inclusion, interdependence in community, human solidarity and the sacredness of all life and of every human being, are given centre stage, this will create the conditions for a truly humanising approach to street homelessness. If such values and imperatives form the foundation of public policy that seeks to address street homelessness, then the

political, institutional and financial infrastructure to help people overcome in sustainable ways would look completely different from what is currently in place. It is such alternative imaginaries to the current dominant reality of street homelessness in South Africa that this volume contemplates.

# Facing homelessness: Scales of spatial exclusion

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## ■ Introduction

Many people in Johannesburg are spending nights sleeping in public spaces throughout the city, sometimes overtly and sometimes more clandestinely. These include not only parks in inner-city locations (Middelman 2019) but also open recreation spaces in suburbs (Charlton 2019; Jubane 2018; Ndovela 2019;).

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This finding echoes research in other South African cities that flags the suburbanisation of homelessness in recent years (De Beer & Vally 2017). In addition to parks, other localities for homeless people include under bridges and on pavements, especially close to the inner city (Charlton 2014a; Middelman 2019; Tayob 2019), along major road reserves, on vacant lots (Khoza 2014), as well as in a long-established central city cemetery (Leuta 2019a, 2019b).

The work we draw on points to diverse causal factors and lived experiences which are often unhelpfully subsumed under the term 'homeless'. The term 'homeless' becomes a catch-all phrase that overlooks the different pathways into and the experiences of homelessness as well as the different intersectional factors which influence these experiences (Edwards 2020; Shelton et al. 2018). The lack of any distinctions means that universalised 'solutions' and policy responses are proposed that do not disaggregate between the different needs and experiences of homeless residents (Williams & Stickley 2011). Focusing on street homelessness, this chapter draws on a variety of sources including narratives from Johannesburg (including from the Homeless Writers' Project, and student and staff research) to convey the complexity of these experiences, the nature of the built environment and other factors, and the potential of urban planning-related interventions to assist in finding viable residential and livelihood interventions.

Using a predominantly built environment perspective, the chapter outlines the spatial and economic divisions embedded in Johannesburg, including in its housing, real estate and transport systems, which contribute to the phenomenon of homelessness. We briefly reflect on the macro-context of economic opportunity, state social support, household structures and gendered expectations, and ways in which these shape the experience of homelessness. Insights from a spatial perspective bring to the surface particular challenges the phenomenon presents. We briefly outline key housing, transport and social development

initiatives undertaken by the City of Johannesburg in recent years that potentially assist in mitigating some of the drivers of street homelessness, but which have limitations. Recognising the distinctions between these factors and the life circumstances behind them is critical. Although a number of factors are interrelated, paying attention to them individually avoids unhelpful conflation that conceal the differentiated responses they accordingly require. Thus, we end by flagging urban planning and built environment responses that could contribute to greater inclusivity and improved individual and societal prospects.

## ■ **The built environment and causes of homelessness**

### ■ **The housing and spatial mismatch**

The first built environment factor we note is based on the limits of physical infrastructure in the city coupled with the city's spatial organisation. The issue of distance and separation for poorer people as well as the lack of affordable accommodation is rooted in the history of the City and its obdurate physical structure. We start by briefly outlining the evolution of the city to demonstrate this point.

Johannesburg's history as a colonial and an apartheid city can still be detected in its contemporary morphology. Within a few years of the discovery of gold, Raandjeslaagte, the original farm on which Johannesburg was founded, had evolved into a full-scale mining town. It was complete with a financial district, professional practitioners, mining companies' headquarters and an array of services commonly associated with the bustle of a boom town: bars, brothels and hostels catering to single men from across the world (Frescura & Radford 1982). The original residential suburbs developed along the east-west axis following the line of the reef and providing accommodation as well as access to the main economic activity. Following this initial

development, the suburbs then spread northwards (Frescura & Radford 1982). The mine dumps and prevailing winds made the southern portion of the city cold, dusty and largely inhospitable. The northern portion of the emerging settlement was geographically kinder, with the ridges offering some protection from the noise and the pollution. The north-south divide that grew between the wealthier and poorer segments of Johannesburg society persevered for well over a century.

The city was not just segregated by class: early racial segregation was in effect, with most black mine workers living in mine compounds or in racially designated locations close to diggings, established contemporaneously with the establishment of the city. However, by the early 1900s the black, coloured and Indian communities were relocated further from the city centre, after a few spurious reports of plague. The wealthier and white inhabitants remained in the city centre or the northern suburbs. The relocations resulted in the moving of a large African community 16 km south-west of the city to the current location of Pimville, Soweto (Beavon 2004). Over the next decades separate 'locations' (as they were termed at the time) were built at various distances from the city centre: Soweto was expanded to the south-west, and Eldorado Park and Lenasia, also far south of the city centre, were established for the coloured and Indian populations, respectively. Between the 1923 *Urban Areas Acts* and the 1934 *Slums Act*, new town planning ordinances attempted to eliminate slums, separate racial groups and, under the guise of providing better sanitation, push poorer communities out of the city centre. Much of this effort was put on hold during the Second World War, but in the post-war period Johannesburg again attracted numerous migrants. However, the lack of sufficient formal housing led to the origins of some of the first informal settlements across the city (Stadler 1979). Expansion of peripheral settlements and the removal of black African enclaves intensified between 1940 and 1960, with the most significant being the removal of black households from Sophiatown to Meadowlands in 1955 (Petersen 2010). According to Todes et al. (2020):

Over the course of the next few decades and the institutionalisation of apartheid as the guiding principle of the National Party, which came to power in 1948, new legislation reinforced, influx controls [*which limited*] the numbers of black African people moving to cities [*and*] instituted racially based residential zoning, beyond previous policies of segregation. (p. 19)

The state's ability to maintain the strict racial segregation of high apartheid began to decline in the 1980s, as new informal settlements were developed and townships densified, and the apartheid project proved too difficult to enforce. The inner city and central business district (CBD), which had once been the hub of financial life in the country and continent, saw a massive decline, in the sense of losing many of its tenants and its business prominence to the emerging decentralised node of Sandton further north of the city. The inner city changed significantly, catering to a lower income population, with some buildings abandoned by owners now offering lower-order goods or transforming into cheap rental accommodation.

Thus, by the 1990s much of the city's current geography had already been set: a ring of relatively high-density townships and informal settlements mostly on the periphery of the city, oddly contrasted in some places, especially in the north, by very high-income golf estates and lifestyle enclaves; a wealthy set of northern suburbs housing the middle-class and the elite; a ring of older suburbs around the CBD that were in transition and which began to offer some shared and cheaper accommodation; and an inner city that was in economic decline.

Post-apartheid interventions have moderated some of these spatialities and embedded others. The land and property market has kept much of the north inaccessible to lower income communities and has meant that many – but not all – of the state-supplied housing projects have been located on the edge of the city. Although there have been significant attempts made to both densify the city and deal constructively with informal settlements, to a large degree poorer (and generally black) people are still

located on the periphery (see Figure 2.1), with the important exceptions of the CBD, Alexandra and, from a Gauteng city-region perspective, townships and low-income settlements in relative proximity to the economically important Midrand area (Charlton 2014b).

With the traditionally desirable parts of the city to a large extent remaining in the hands of the white minority, the land and property market thus remains highly exclusionary. Banks are reluctant to lend to the lowest end of the market, despite financial charters committing them to do so. In addition, poorer people have found few formal options for low-income rental. The state's social housing programme has historically catered for households earning above R3500 per month and, although that income-band has shifted a bit in recent years, much of the stock is still pitched at the higher rental level. In addition, there are only a very limited number of state-subsidised rental units. As consequence, for many households cheaper forms of accommodation are often some distance from where people can earn an income: there are almost no forms of very low-cost accommodation available in many parts of the city, and in particular in wealthy areas, unless this is tied to employment, mainly domestic work. For many people, finding cheap accommodation means having to travel some considerable distance. In addition, for some people on low or fluctuating income, the cost of even basic accommodation is unaffordable - even unauthorised, seemingly cheap dwellings in Johannesburg such as a backyard room, a shared space in a rented room (SERI 2013) or a dwelling in an informal settlement is not manageable (Charlton 2019). The combination of transport and accommodation costs becomes unaffordable for those with incomes too low, variable or uncertain to sustain daily travel along with regular rental payments. As one respondent in a study on park dwellers put it (Charlton 2019):

[7]he biggest challenge is that I can't afford to pay rent for a place to stay. I then decided to stay in the park. I know that being here is less cost because I don't pay for transport. (n.p.)

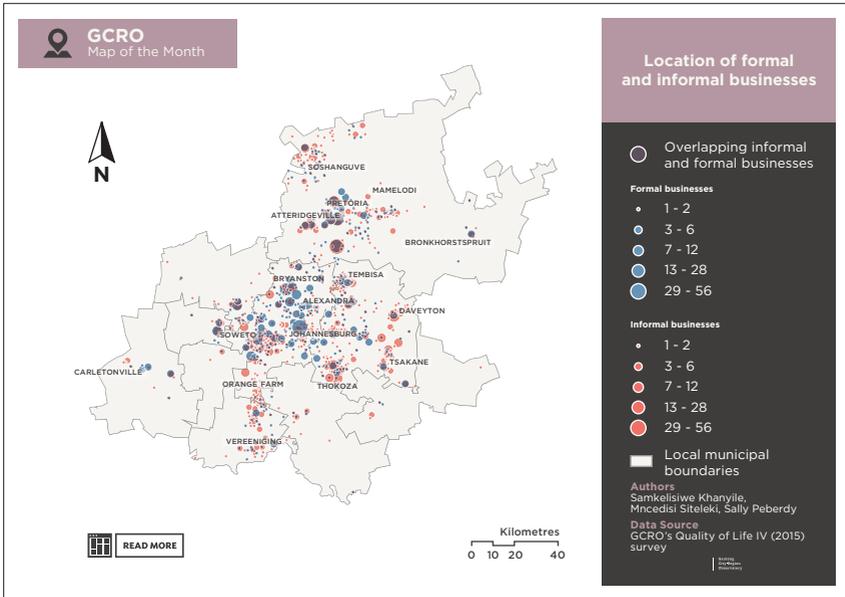
## ■ The high cost of transport and commuting

The location of informal settlements and townships in Gauteng is also closely correlated with unemployment and, as can be seen from Figure 2.3, with sites of informal businesses. It is also clear that state-provided housing is uneven in its location and proximity to economic opportunities. The City of Johannesburg has evolved into a multi-nodal urban form in which multiple nodes offer some economic activity and employment across the city. According to Gotz and Todes (2014), while the central business district contains the largest concentration of businesses:

Sandton has emerged as a major centre for the city, and there are also several nodes and economic concentrations along highways and main arterials, including the old east-west corridor through the CBD; a growing corridor along or close to main routes north of the CBD (e.g. Rosebank, Fourways, Midrand); and in north-western areas such as Randburg and Kya Sands [...] [*and while*] some businesses are locating in former township areas, especially Soweto, concentrations there are low. (p. 120)

Figure 2.1 clearly demonstrates the concentration of these formal business nodes across the city region. It should also be noted that although some of the informal settlements and state-provided houses are located on the periphery of the City of Johannesburg, they may have relatively good access to nodes and locations within the City region.

However, while some areas where poorer people live are relatively well located and have access to economic nodes, many others do not. This forces residents of these areas to spend disproportionate amounts of household income and time on transport. State-subsidised buses and trains offer a very limited service, and paratransit in the form of taxis are widely used but their fares are not subsidised. In some households earning the national minimum wage, transport costs can account for as much as 39% of income earned (PEJD 2019). Often this commute requires changing transport mode or route, sometimes several times. Given the distances that people have to travel, the time taken can easily mount up to many hours a day.



Source: GCRO (2017).

**FIGURE 2.1:** Location of formal and informal businesses, Gauteng City Region Observatory Map of the Month.

As such, transport and housing infrastructures have major limitations, echoing similar problems across many South African cities which result in 'long and costly commutes' (City of Johannesburg [CoJ] n.d.a:16). In some cases transport costs are simply too high for people to commute every day between a place where they can find accommodation and a place where they can earn income. One park dweller respondent described his situation by saying: 'I was staying in Soweto before I came here, but now it is far for me to travel every day, I sleep with other guys here by the bridge' (interviewee 27-G, from the fieldwork for Charlton 2019). Thus for some people under severe financial pressure, avoiding this burdensome transport cost becomes a reason to sleep in a public space within walking distance of work (Charlton 2019).

## ■ **Constrained income generation and livelihood production**

Aside from the micro-aspects of people's lives and the nature of the built environment in Johannesburg, the macro-context of economic opportunity, state social support, household structures and gendered expectations also help to shape the phenomenon of homelessness – not only the pathways into homelessness but also how it is experienced and expressed.

The South African economy has seen little growth over the last few years, averaging at about 1% since 2014. This means that there have been very few new jobs in the formal sector, while a number of sectors such as mining and manufacturing have lost jobs. The economy was badly affected by fallout from the 2008 economic global crisis and has been unable to recover; in the first quarter of 2020 there was an estimated unemployment rate of over 30% (StatsSA 2020).

The unemployment figure is considered to be much higher amongst the youth (15–34), with almost half of all youths unemployed. Aside from the more general issue of unemployment and a contracting or slowly growing economy, there is the question of how the South African economy is structured. Currently, the largest sector of the economy is services, which accounts for around 73% of gross domestic product (GDP), the most important of which are finance, real estate and business services (21.6%) and government services (17%); it is also these sectors that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic saw the highest rates of growth. Manufacturing accounts for about 14% of GDP and mining and quarrying for around 8% (Trading Economics 2020).

This means not only that there have been fewer and fewer formal jobs in general in the economy, but also fewer and fewer jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled workers, who are most often absorbed into manufacturing and other primary activities.

Where growth has occurred, although at low levels, it has been in the tertiary sector, which requires high levels of education and skill.

However, the education system has simply not kept pace with the demands of the economy and has not been able to provide adequate education for the majority of learners. According to The Economist (2017), South Africa is 75th out of 76 countries in a 2015 OECD ranking and has consistently demonstrated low levels of literacy and numeracy in international rankings.

Thus, the combination of poor education and economic challenges makes formal employment difficult to attain, especially for black African youths, who have the highest rates of unemployment and the worst job prospects. Work is also highly spatialised across the country with the Gauteng City Region, the Western Cape and the area around eThekweni concentrating most employment opportunities. Secondary cities and many smaller towns have also seen a decline. The consequence has been significant migration into these economic nodes and out of the rural areas. However, most cities and urban areas have not been successful in providing employment and decent living conditions for the increasing migrant populations.

This is despite various attempts<sup>9</sup> to deal with unemployment, poverty and the structure of the economy. The state has a well-developed welfare system and spends billions of rand each financial year to roll out its social welfare programme. Spending on social protection will increase from R193.4 billion in 2018–2019 to R223.9 billion by 2020–2021, which constitutes 4% of South Africa's GDP (Mtanto 2018). There are a number of grants including child-care grants, disability grants and pensions for the elderly. There is also an unemployment insurance fund (UIF) for people who are retrenched, and the Expanded Public Works

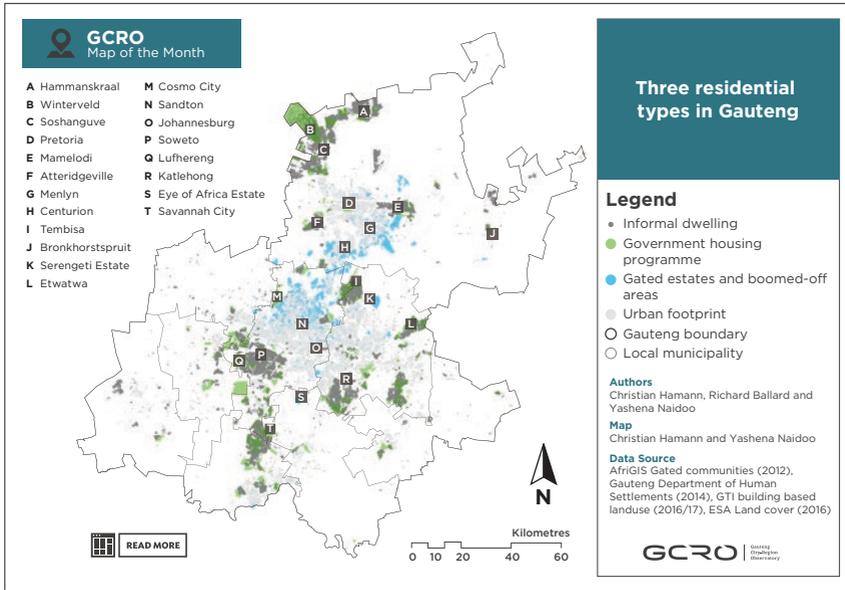
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9. The state has attempted to launch numerous programmes to address unemployment; these have included Growth, Employment and Redistribution: A Macroeconomic Strategy for South Africa (GEAR); the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) and lately the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), amongst others.

Programme which has sought to offer limited, temporary state employment to a number of households, claiming about 10 million work opportunities between 2004 and 2019 (South African Government 2019). In addition, there is free or highly subsidised public health care and a large-scale housing programme that seeks to provide free housing for poor households, and support to households with incomes up to R15 000 per month.

However, despite the significant scale of the South African system of grants (Ferguson 2015), there are a variety of problems with the welfare system: UIF is only paid for a maximum of 8 months, the welfare amounts are very low when taking the high cost of living into account, there is no welfare grant to assist the many jobless workers who have not been part of UIF contributions, and state-subsidised housing is generally not available to single people. In addition, there are long waiting lists for publicly-funded houses, sometimes up to 20 years, and an extremely slow roll-out of state-subsidised affordable rental accommodation. There are also concerns that the location of state-housing developments often continue to feed into existing spatial patterns, helping to restructure them only in limited ways (see Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3). The following figures indicate the continued spatial mismatch between where people choose to (or are able to) live informally and where there are economic opportunities and state-provided housing. Overall, the issues that have been mentioned mean that many people may not benefit or may benefit only partially from the state's welfare packages.

Given the dire shortage of formal, continuous or decent paying employment and the relatively limited welfare support, for many people available work is insecure, low earning and precarious. It often takes the form of 'piece jobs' – a day's labour, or perhaps a few hours' worth, here and there, for different employers. Some of this work is done in the suburbs, such as building or construction and gardening work. Alternatively, work can take the form of very low-margin self-employment: hawking second-hand clothes, sweets, cigarettes or food; walking the streets selling brooms, rakes and brushes in the suburbs or sorting through and



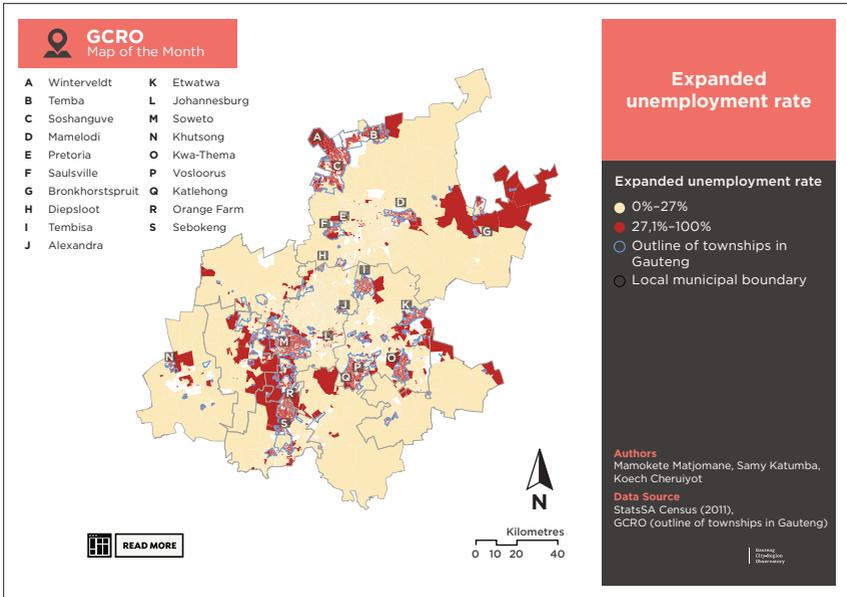
Source: GCRO (2018a).

**FIGURE 2.2:** Location of informal dwellings, government housing and gated communities in Gauteng.

reclaiming domestic or office waste for resale (Charlton 2019; Ndovela 2019). For some people there can be days with no income or wages at all, and when there are waged earnings, they are often shockingly low (Charlton 2019):

I got a job as a domestic worker. My boss-madam offered me a place to sleep in the back room. I could not afford to rent a place and transport to come to work. I used to get paid R300 per week and I would send some of the money home for my children [...] I worked there for 8 years and I was still getting the same amount of money. And one day I spoke to my madam asking for an increase, but she refused and told me that I'm not paying rent here and I'm not paying for the food that I'm eating. I had no choice but accept the situation the way it is. I mean I had nowhere to go or have an alternative place to work in. And every time I pack madam's kids lunch box I would think of my kids, wondering what they are eating. (n.p.)

Intermittent, insecure or low-earning daily wage jobs or self-employment can result from retrenchment, but it is also a reality



Source: GCRO (2018a).

**FIGURE 2.3:** Concentrations of unemployment across the GCR utilising the expanded unemployment definition.

that some people living on the street have never entered the job market (Gili 2019a, 2019b) because of the severe lack of job opportunities, limited skills and qualifications or lack of legal migrant status. Many working-age people find themselves part of the so-called ‘surplus’ population (Ferguson & Li 2018) that is outside of the needs of capital. For people in this situation, surviving off such irregular and minimal payments, their earnings are too low or too unreliable to support what might be termed a decent living and the infrastructure that accompanies this. Earlier fieldwork notes describe this situation (Charlton 2019):

Sometimes when interviewee 5-D gets a piece job he would get a room in a township that is closer to where he would be working. In between times, he lives in the open spaces along the Braamfontein Spruit. (n.p.)

The work of some low-income earners has a specific geography and specific space requirements. In particular, informal recycling or reclaiming of waste goods is linked to the rhythms of the city and the nature of the recycling industry (Charlton 2014a; Ndovela 2019; Schalit 2020). The activity articulates with formal waste-collection schedules in each neighbourhood (because that is when firms and households put out their waste for municipal collection); it depends on accumulating sufficient bulk of goods over time; on having space to sort items into categories, store them until the necessary volume is reached and then take them to be sold at the buy-back depots of formal recycling companies. None of these steps and requirements fits well with any available forms, or localities, of low-cost accommodation, and reclaimers are one of the significant groups of people making use of different public spaces for their work and living. In some parks, open public spaces and along the edges of roads in many parts of Johannesburg one will see signs of reclaimers living and working.

Jubane (2018) gives a specific example of this and highlights the futility of a response focused simply on eviction and displacement as well as the problems of institutional fragmentation amongst authorities. A portion of George Lea Park in Parkmore, near the heart of the Sandton financial district, became increasingly appropriated by homeless residents, eventually occupied by up to 400 people mainly involved in recycling activities in the neighbourhood (Jubane 2018).

The process of recycling is lengthy, time-consuming and requires substantial effort (Charlton 2010). It also requires large spaces to sort through the collected material and decide what to keep and what to on-sell. Jubane (2018) notes that the George Lea Park space was appropriate for the sorting, both because it was where the reclaimers stayed and because there was plenty of space on the south side of the park. However, discarded material was left in the park and that, together with the domestic activities of 400 people with no services or sanitation, led to high levels of pollution including that of the wetland. The situation was described

by one neighbouring homeowner: ‘solid human waste... I mean bloody kak [*fæces*] man, all along the stream, it was unbearable you know’ (Homeowner 2) (Jubane 2018:61).

In 2016, the large number of park residents, the pollution and the fact that the Parkmore Community Association and the Sandton Sports Club managed to obtain funding from private investors to upgrade the park (and specifically, to fence it) brought the situation to a head. In particular, because investment was conditional on the homeless being evicted or relocated from the park (Jubane 2018). The organisations contacted a variety of state agencies. The City of Johannesburg’s Department of Social Development’s Displaced Persons’ Unit (DPU) took a relatively constructive approach, working with the park residents, most of whom were Basotho without formal documentation. The idea was to work with the Lesotho Consulate to formalise their residence, and to reunite residents with their families in Lesotho. Over a 3-week period 227 of the almost 400 Basotho homeless residents were registered for the first time and received Lesotho identification documents. About 70 of the 400 who already had passports managed to obtain work permits to work in South Africa. However, the substantial progress that the DPU and Lesotho Consulate had made was disrupted by a parallel intervention, also involving city departments (Jubane 2018).

The Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department, Park Rangers working for City Parks and Zoo, PikiTup and the South African Police Service had also been approached by the Parkmore Residents Association and convinced by them to act, which they did, right in the middle of the DPU-Consulate exercise. Over a period of five days homeless residents were evicted from the park and their shelters were taken down and belongings taken away. According to Jubane (2018:67–68), this was justified by property owners:

[B]ecause it is never dignified for a public space to be used as a home by some people, and it wasn’t dignified for the homeless themselves to live at the park. (PCA executive 1)

As a result, the homeless residents left the park and simply moved to other spaces along the Spruit, the Field and Study Open Park north of George Lea and into adjacent Hurlingham. The DPU, highly disillusioned with the approach of their colleagues, noted 'It [the eviction] didn't help with anything, the same problem was just reproduced in many different areas because these people went to different areas' (DPU official 2 cited in Jubane 2018:69). Both the lack of coordination amongst institutions and the futility of removal from a particular open space are highlighted by this example.

## ■ Social and household changes

Returning to macro-patterns across the country, there has been significant social readjustment with higher dependency levels as a result of the economic downturn and the HIV or AIDS crisis of the last few decades. Concomitantly, there has also been a decrease in household size (StatsSA 2018).

This means that there are more people who have struck out on their own than previously, which, in turn, implies that many of the bonds of social and community support associated with living with other household members have been diminished. Thus these newly formed smaller and single-people households may not be able to call on the same social capital as previous generations.

Gender relations in South Africa have also been changing over time, but are still highly dependent on race and socio-economic position. Female-headed households now constitute 30% of all households nationally, although there is some sense that this an under-count as many men live only intermittently with their partners and children. In many poorer communities, the absence of men in daily schedules and programmes and the increase in female-headed households have led to discussions around 'crises of masculinity'. The loss of wage work, formal employment and the inability to provide for one's family have, according to some theorists, led to identity crises amongst men, unable to come to

terms psychologically with their loss of status in the eyes of partners and children. This has been used as an explanation for the increase in gender-based violence and child abuse as men attempt to reassert some form of 'control'. Such thinking inherently links the concepts of manhood and fatherhood, and constructs good fathers as men who are present and provide for their families. However, other studies have challenged the relationship between economic disempowerment and violence, demonstrating that absence and distance are often an equal response to this situation (Morrel 2001). The hegemonic form of masculinity which makes this equation between provision, presence and care, places an enormous burden on men's shoulders and when this cannot be attained, there is often a sense of social and familial failure.

However, some of the homelessness research from Johannesburg aligns with work that challenges the assumption that absent fathers are necessarily uninvolved fathers (Van den Berg & Makusha 2018). Some of those living in public space seek to live as cheaply as possible in the city by minimising their own daily living costs, including accommodation and transport, precisely so that they are able to use their meagre earnings to support their family living elsewhere (Charlton 2019). These people are bread-winners, or contributors to household earnings, but their incomes are not able to fulfil responsibilities as well as their own shelter needs. In other cases, people left the accommodation in which they were living with others in a household because of the pressures they experienced around not making a financial contribution to living costs and being seen as a burden. Unable to earn a reasonable amount and a regular income to adequately support their living conditions, they have ended up living rough.

Other people have been plunged into street homelessness through a catastrophic event from which they were not able to recover, or else they have chosen the inconveniences and problems of their rough circumstances over any potential repeat of the trauma of their previous experience; a key example from our

research was someone who fled from their former rental accommodation during violent xenophobic activities in the neighbourhood. He was too fearful to ever return to his rental room (Charlton 2019). For others, the nature of the catastrophe might have been linked to home and family circumstances. Some people left abusive or conflict-ridden households, but in the end were unable to become financially self-sufficient. In a few cases, living outside of a former home, even if this resulted in very precarious material circumstances and other insecurities, felt safer or freer away from a former situation (Khoza 2014). Others became homeless as a couple, as their combined circumstances deteriorated (Charlton 2019; Khoza 2014). Mental health difficulties may also be a reason to become street homeless, and dependence on alcohol or drugs is another causal factor (Tayob 2019), though this can also be precipitated by the harshness of life on the streets.

Importantly, most of those sleeping in public spaces encountered in our research were male, although in the past research from Wits has focused on women, a few of whom lived with their children (Khoza 2014). Ages ranged considerably, and respondents included those with backgrounds in large cities as well as those from much smaller localities or rural areas both locally and from across national borders.

## ■ **City of Johannesburg spatial and planning interventions**

The socio-economic context of the country coupled with the history and geography of Johannesburg create particular challenges presented by the phenomenon of street homelessness from a spatial and urban planning perspective. The picture we have painted also provides some pointers towards potential future responses. In this section, we start by outlining interventions already undertaken in the city that have made some contribution towards addressing the issues we have raised, but which also have limitations.

At various times in recent decades the City of Johannesburg has had an explicit focus on ways to include poor and marginalised residents. Notably, the 2006 Growth and Development Strategy advocated inclusion (CoJ 2006) and saw ownership of formal housing as a key route to this, although it did also note the need for rental accommodation. However, the mechanism for creating housing for ownership by poor households is the national state subsidy programme. These new neighbourhoods do not offer convenient access to work opportunities and do not have good transport connections (Charlton 2014a). State-sponsored home ownership may have some important benefits, including gendered aspects (Meth & Charlton 2017), but this tenure form does not necessarily overcome street homelessness, which as Charlton (2018) points out can occur simultaneously with home ownership, because of types of work and locational disconnects. In addition, the poverty-alleviating and potentially wealth-creating aspects of a property asset have had mixed results, and are not the straightforward route to prosperity as might be assumed by De Soto (2000) and other proponents. For migrants who retain a primary household base outside of Johannesburg, home ownership within the city along with its costs and responsibilities is unlikely to be the most appropriate solution.

Rental accommodation has been supported by the state through a national subsidy programme underpinning the creation of social housing flats, including in central parts of the city as well as in mixed-income new housing neighbourhoods. However, this is numerically a small programme with relatively few units, but more significantly for this discussion, it generally operates at rentals that are too expensive for very poor households and for those with fluctuating and very low incomes. A national policy to facilitate municipal-run very low-cost rental through the Community Rental Unit programme has floundered and shows very little progress. At the municipal level an inner-city housing strategy formulated in 2014 for Johannesburg specifically promoted forms of budget accommodation through both private and public supply (Rebelgroup 2016), but appears not to have

been taken up by the municipality to any significant degree. A few developments that offer relatively low-cost rooms for rent with shared ablution facilities by both state-linked institutions and a few private developers (McManus 2017) are very significant but very limited in number.

In the absence of formal options, alternative low-budget accommodation where many people with constrained affordability find an urban foothold receives variable and sometimes contradictory signals from the state. Backyard living space is a key form of this kind of accommodation (Rubin & Gardner 2013), with rooms for rent in the yards of individual landlords showing enormous growth over the last 20 years across the province of Gauteng (GCRO 2018a) and now accommodating significant numbers of people in a variety of typologies, conditions and rental levels. Both provincial and city governments have shown varying attitudes to this phenomenon, at times exploring ways to facilitate, improve or manage its effects on infrastructure and neighbourhoods, and at other times decrying it for altering the character of planned suburbs (Rubin & Charlton 2019).

A second important form of cheap accommodation can be found in the shared rooms and apartments in and around Johannesburg's central business district and several other localities across the city such as Marlboro near Alexandra. Here rentable units of space as small as the size of a bed, in a room shared with other households, enable a foothold for many people unable to access or afford bigger or more private spaces. These curtained or partitioned spaces can be rented under conditions that allow 'easy-in, easy-out' access, which is highly significant for people whose life circumstances may shift and change rapidly (Mayson & Charlton 2015; Zack et al. 2020). Although there is a significant amount of this accommodation in certain neighbourhoods in multi-occupancy houses and blocks of flats, as well as in appropriated warehouses, offices and a particular category of severely neglected residential buildings (Wilhelm-Solomon 2016), it is largely unsupported in policy or in practice

by the municipality, and this neglect can give rise to dangerous and hazardous conditions that can exacerbate vulnerability (Mayson & Charlton 2015).

While the above formal initiatives and informal practices are focused on residential accommodation, there have been other important urban and spatial planning interventions in the city, some with housing components. Recognising the spatial disconnects, limited transport, lack of housing and limited spatial transformation, the African National Congress (ANC)-run City of Johannesburg in 2013 introduced the flagship 'Corridors of Freedom' (CoF), an initiative intended to build on the existing bus rapid-transit system, the Rea Vaya, to create Transit-Oriented Development Corridors across certain parts of the city. Through the CoF the City intended to challenge and change spatial arrangements that were holding back 'many marginalised communities at the outskirts of the City, away from economic opportunities and access to jobs and growth' (CoJ n.d.b:9). The City intended to build mixed-use, mixed-income developments along the Corridors with higher densities and a greater intensity of land use (Harrison et al. 2019).

However, bus routes, along the CoFs are limited, do not include crucial decentralised east-west linkages across the city, and key components are still not in place. Furthermore, part of the plan included the municipality encouraging or itself directly developing affordable housing options along parts of the corridors. While some rental and a few social housing projects have been initiated, almost all of this is not particularly low in rental amount, and does not nearly match in affordability the unauthorised back rooms and shared accommodation already in the vicinity of some sections of the corridors. It has therefore not added the very cheap accommodation that might assist people with very low incomes discussed in this chapter, and ironically some initiatives might in fact have resulted in a shrinkage of cheap spaces and displacement of occupants and homeless residents through investment in new accommodation in formerly run-down areas

(Appelbaum 2017). Nevertheless, the CoF initiative is highly significant in Johannesburg and its practical and symbolic contribution should not be underestimated; however, it has encountered party political conflicts, was downgraded in importance during the Democratic Alliance (DA) administration of the city and was not able to achieve its full potential. What may happen under the subsequent ANC-led coalition and in the next election cycle remains unclear (Harrison & Rubin 2020).

Aside from the CoFs, the City has also instituted some key spatial policies to make the city more inclusive and better able to support low-income earners. In many ways, these policies were prompted by the *National Spatial Land Use Management Act* (SPLUMA), promulgated in 2013 (no. 16 of 2013), which sought to create a unified land use management system across the country and promoted principles of spatial justice and social inclusion. In the case of Johannesburg, its new unified land use scheme became more lenient in terms of certain kinds of land uses and supported the construction of small secondary units on properties. The idea was to regularise existing backyard accommodation and also to make it easier for new accommodation to be built and in doing so to reduce costs and make accommodation more affordable.

SPLUMA also clearly stated that there was an expectation that provinces would develop and implement an inclusionary housing policy. In 2018, the CoJ decided that was sufficient licence to develop their own document defining the incentives, mechanisms and regulations for a metro-wide Inclusionary Housing policy. Thirty per cent of all new developments of 20 dwelling units or more would have to have an affordable rental or ownership component in order to try and promote social and economic inclusion, and to contribute (albeit minimally) to the amount of affordable accommodation available in well-located sites (CoJ 2019). Depending on which policy sub-option the developers selected, the notion of 'affordable' in this context might not mean particularly low-income accommodation, but rather more affordable housing than the rest of the development – that is, it is a relative concept.

The CoJ also pushed what it called the Nodal Review (CoJ 2018), stemming from the SDF 2040 document (CoJ 2016) in which it intends to concentrate development around existing economic nodes within the city. The intention is to intensify land use and densify housing options and to allow for a wider array of land uses. The objective is to allow for more inclusive and mixed-income housing projects in well-located areas to make better use of existing infrastructure and restructure the apartheid geography of Johannesburg. The Land Use Management Scheme, Nodal Review and Inclusionary Housing policy are still very new, and although they are significant initiatives and there are some early signs that developers are engaging with them, there is still no certainty as to exactly how they might work and if they will be able to reach very low-income residents and workers who require cheap space to live and work in.

At an institutional level, the City's Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) has been important for facilitating pro-poor access in a number of ways, tasked amongst other things with 'restructuring the space economy to give poor households better access to well-located accommodation, jobs and markets', as well as improving mobility (JDA n.d.:n.p.). The JDA has been responsible for welcome public infrastructure such as inner-city parks with essential public toilets, though neither are geared to accommodate rough sleepers but rather to service the inner-city apartment population, including families and children. However, the JDA has been involved in a key initiative to develop public ablution facilities including showers at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein, which hosts various services for the homeless. Unfortunately this project has floundered because of an impasse on land-legal issues (JDA pers. comm., 2020). However, an older bathhouse in the dense inner-city neighbourhood of Hillbrow is reported to have been in active use prior to the COVID-19 lockdown of March 2020 (C. Lund [Madulammoho Housing Association] pers. comm., 24 June 2020), and the shower, toilet and washing facilities of non-governmental organisations such as Johannesburg Organisation for Services to the Homeless (JOSH) are rare but important (Mlauzi 2019).

The CoJ also has specific homeless policy and interventions. The CoJ's Social Development department has a section dedicated to issues of homelessness, called the DPU, and a policy document for the 'Assistance and management of people living and working in the street' (CoJ 2010). Since 2011 the DPU has run a centrally located overnight shelter with accommodation in dormitories and shared ablutions at 3 Kotze Street in Hillbrow, and in 2020 opened a second shelter in Windsor West, a more suburban locality. The facilities at 3 Kotze Street are generally accessed via referral from the City's assessment centre Governor's House, which also provides bathing services, food and clothes (Qinisile 2018). A minimal payment of R8 for Kotze Street will get someone a bed and a meal, but it is available only to those with a South African identity document; it must be accessed before 20:00 in the evening, it does not accommodate families or children and it may not be used for longer than 3 months (Qinisile 2018). These requirements alone would exclude a number of potential users.

City officials explain some requirements are needed to emphasise the intended temporary nature of the accommodation and that it should not be considered as a comfortable substitute for 'home' (Qinisile 2018). This reflects an overall approach at Governor's House which sees some people as homeless 'by choice', having left a home somewhere that they could choose to go back to (Qinisile 2018:58). In this sense, these people are 'displaced' and their homelessness is temporary (Manaka in Qinisile 2018). The City consequently uses the term 'displaced people' (CoJ 2010) and includes some interventions aimed at what are termed community re-integration and family reunifications (CoJ n.d.c).

By contrast some of those using 3 Kotze Street in Quinisile's research saw the notion of homelessness differently. One respondent saw her ability to pay the required fee as distinguishing her from those who are homeless: 'I am not homeless because I can afford to pay the R8 required by the shelter to use the services it provides, whereas someone who is homeless would not be able to pay the R8' (Anonymous A, 2018, cited in Qinisile 2018:58).

Others indicated that the notion of homeless could include being unemployed and needing money for accommodation. While someone in this situation might have a home elsewhere in their place of origin, it is by no means clear that they or their household is best served by going back there, a place that might be equally impoverished and now needing to stretch resources to accommodate one more person.

The Gauteng Provincial Department of Social Development provides some shelters but only for particular needs, namely survivors of gender-based violence and children (Gilili 2019a, 2019b), as well as supporting financially an overnight shelter with associated facilities run by a faith-based organisation in Rosebank, a decentralised node – one of the few shelters outside of the inner city (Ratsatsi 2018). As of 2020, the Provincial Department of Social Development has a draft strategy on street adult homelessness, which usefully identifies a range of housing and shelter support – from emergency accommodation to targeted social housing – as one of its three strategic areas (Gauteng Province: Department of Social Development 2020). Other non-government organisations run several other important facilities, such as for people grappling with substance abuse and feeding schemes, but overall there is a shortage of appropriate accommodation and support for those with little alternative but to live on the street.

## ■ Alternative approaches

In turning to possibilities for the future, we note that there are interesting potential responses from international and local cases that go beyond the provision of shelters and soup kitchens for homeless people, although these are also important and need expanding in Johannesburg, as we note. Innovations include relationship- and institution-building, through recognition and understanding of specific forms of homelessness as well as the possibility of shared rights to public resources. In addition, there is a clear need for a diversified and decentralised set of practical

interventions and services. However, the guiding principle needs to be responses tailored to and appropriate for specific circumstances, thus requiring a differentiated and sensitive overall approach in policy and practice to accommodate the diversity of needs and situations of homelessness. In the next section, we briefly flag a few recent initiatives from Johannesburg that offer some inspiration to build on.

## ■ **Mediating and facilitating – Intermediaries**

In contrast to the approach of fencing a park and displacing park dwellers discussed earlier, there is the alternative strategy of mediating between conflicting interests. The Skeemsaam project started as a collaboration between recyclers living and working in the James and Ethel Grey park in the prosperous suburb of Melrose, and the Melrose North Residents and Ratepayers Association. The project was initiated and facilitated by suburban resident Lisa Lowenthal in 2017, as she was concerned about issues of hygiene and security in the park and ‘realised she needed to collaborate with waste collectors to bring about change’ (Sandton Chronicle 2017:n.p.). Prior to the project, the recyclers faced sanctions from the surrounding community and park users, seen as ‘vagrants’ and undesirable with the usual unfortunate association of homelessness with crime and disease. The local private security companies as well as the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department and police harassed the men living in the park, chasing them away and confiscating their goods. The Skeemsaam intervention aimed to show the environmental benefit to all parties of recognising a role for recyclers in the area if they assisted with park cleaning while using part of the park for their reclaiming activities (Ndovela 2019).

Lowenthal convinced local businesses and residents to separate their waste at source, and arranged for buy-back centres to visit the park regularly to collect the waste and save the recyclers the need to transport their materials. Protective gear for the reclaimers was sponsored by the Dischem Foundation. The project reports a

range of positive outcomes for this and a similar initiative in the Parkmore area (SkeemSaam Facebook page).

There are some important lessons: Ndovela's (2019) research shows how dependent the mediation effort is on the endorsement of residents' associations (RAs) in order for them to work in an area – with Skeemsaam failing, for example, to take off in the similar area of Alberts Farm Park because it lacked the RA's approval. The case demonstrates the disproportionate power of property owners in determining who has the right to advocate for the use of public space in a particular neighbourhood. At the same time Ndovela (2019) argues that mediating CBOs need to have clear and identifiable constitutions, mandates and objectives, so that government, park dwellers or homeless groupings and other stakeholders can clearly understand the agendas and financial models underpinning their work.

## ■ Insurgent practices in neighbourhoods

A different form of relationship building can be found in Schalit's (2020) depiction of a form of insurgent practice by middle-class residents of the suburb of Bordeaux working in conjunction with the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO). The insurgency comes from residents choosing to recognise the legitimacy of ARO as an informal recycling collective, instead of the City's appointed recycling company, thus reinforcing the critique that the City's recycling approach has ignored and marginalised informal workers who have long been doing the hard labour of suburban reclaiming without recognition or support. While the issue of living in public space is little addressed in this research, the suburb's proximity to the Braamfontein Spruit and its linear park is noted along with the presence of reclaimers living and sorting there. Schalit (2020) raises the question of who is considered a legitimate resident of a neighbourhood under such circumstances, calling into question the conventionally understood gateway to legitimacy, namely property ownership or formal rental.

## ■ Shelters in the suburbs

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 several Faith-based organisations were successful in establishing a form of local ‘pop-up’ accommodation for people living rough in a neighbourhood. Like the mediation and insurgent examples above, several of these were in prosperous suburbs and represented a new extension and expansion of homeless services in these areas. A number of these initiatives had little government involvement, although the municipality also established several emergency response shelters during this time. However, one of the important aspects of the suburban faith-based organisation (FBO) shelters, as well as the mediation and ‘insurgency’ initiatives described above, is the strong involvement of actors outside the state, including that of established property owners. Although several of these shelters have since closed down (as premises were needed for their original purposes as lockdown eased), we see this involvement as significant in indicating shared awareness of and responsibility for aspects of homelessness, beyond the state and in particular amongst more privileged residents, albeit embryonically. This needs to be strengthened and expanded through broader conversations on this issue in city-planning initiatives, including finding ways for homeless people to participate and help shape such discussions.

At the same time, we recognise the limited degree of organised collaboration on homelessness across state and non-state actors in Johannesburg, particularly evident in the COVID-19 response and resulting in more fragmented, piecemeal and inadequate sets of interventions in comparison to other cities such as Tshwane and eThekweni. The establishment of the Johannesburg Homeless Network, a network of state and non-state parties interested and working on issues of homelessness has been an important development in recent years, though it needs capacitation and strengthening.

Key to all of the responses supported in the discussion above is the underlying position that homeless residents are legitimate

urban citizens with rights to the City. Some initiatives also work through clearly trying to extend income-generation opportunities and build on the agency of the homeless residents. They are also highly collaborative, either working with different agencies or with different stakeholder groups and homeless residents. However, it is also clear that there are many organisations who still take a highly punitive view of homelessness, desiring to evict and remove homeless residents, without being willing to engage with the systemic causes of homelessness mentioned above.

## ■ Conclusion: Shelters and beyond

Across the board in Johannesburg we see the need for recognition of the pervasiveness and dispersed geographies of a relatively unseen and overlooked population, and for acknowledgement of the likely persistence and expansion of low-paid, insecure, fluctuating forms of work – especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The transport and housing legacies and enduring constraints noted earlier are likely to become more difficult for more people, and we see a critical need for a range of responses.

Key amongst these are forms of very cheap accommodation to be developed and supported in diverse parts of the city. We see these as distinct from homeless shelters, though there also needs to be an expansion of ultra-cheap or no-cost forms of accommodation too, such as ‘Safe Spaces’ pioneered in Cape Town. However, we are pointing to the need in addition for low-budget yet stable, longer-term accommodation for the low and intermittently-earning poor. At the same time stand-alone facilities such as showers and toilets, clothes washing facilities, places to charge cell phones and lockers to safely store goods are all needed to support people needing to survive in diverse ways in the city.

Housing and infrastructure responses that start from an understanding of the drivers and experiences of street homelessness would thus need to be heterogeneous and innovative, raising the question of what policy instruments and forms of government support can underpin them. The range of

responses required suggest the need for relatively flexible funding sources, for institutional frameworks that facilitate partnerships between government and non-government organisations and for the state to contribute to the active networking, learning and mutual support amongst a thinly-resourced sector countrywide, such as through the National Homeless Network.

While the proposals we make here are at the neighbourhood scale, we argue that their implementation in localised environments is highly significant, both practically and also in terms of helping to shift the attitudes and perceptions of more privileged residents. Multiplied across a variety of localities, these interventions can collectively start to have a bigger effect on the wider urban environment, through breaking down some of the spatial and financial constraints and misconceptions affecting certain forms of street homelessness.

# The Rights Revolution in South Africa: How can the homeless benefit?

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## ■ Introduction

Lines of people waiting to vote – many voting for the first time. Mixes of colours, ages and religions. Everyone patiently waiting their turn as the queue snakes around the courtyard.

This could be a description of the iconic elections in South Africa in 1994. But instead, I am describing May 2019 and the queue outside the Denis Hurley Centre in central Durban. How was it that in the country's 6th general election, there were still

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people, in their 40s and 50s, voting for the first time? Why were they enjoying this hard-fought-for right only 25 years after it was first implemented?

At the heart of the South African struggle for liberation that culminated in the 1994, elections are rights. The right to vote and other rights were then enshrined in the Constitution approved in 1996. Now, 25 years on from the adoption of that Constitution, I want to ask how effective the Rights Revolution has been in improving the lives of the thousands of homeless men and women who are visible (and invisible) on the streets of our cities.

I will look at the rights promised in the Bill of Rights and grounded on my research in the field set out how few of these are fully enjoyed by the homeless. I will then use Henri Lefebvre's 1968 concept of the 'Right to the City' (as elaborated by Gørgens & Van Donk 2012) to unpack the particular rights failures; in each case, I will provide an example of how rights can be reclaimed. Finally, I will propose a way for stakeholders to work together to complete the Rights Revolution for the homeless.

## ■ Are homeless people enjoying their rights?

Before that, let me address a common misconception: that the homeless are not actually South Africans and so do not have rights anyway. This is wrong on two counts. A survey conducted by the Human Science Research Council in Durban<sup>10</sup> (Timol et al. 2016:14) found that only 10% of homeless people were foreign nationals (presumably a similar figure for other cities). This is because (1) homelessness in South Africa is typically triggered by unemployment and foreign migrants are strongly motivated to

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10. 'Durban' is used here to refer to the geographic location, while 'eThekweni' refers to the Municipality that covers the city of Durban plus a much wider area. The same distinction will be applied for Pretoria or Tshwane and Bloemfontein or Mangaung. There is no such distinction for Cape Town and Johannesburg. In all cases, 'the city' will refer to the locality and 'the Municipality' to the unit of local government administration.

make a living, whatever it takes; and (2) that foreign communities in South African cities generally do not leave a compatriot living on the streets.

But even for that small minority who are foreign, most rights do still apply. The preamble to the 1996 Constitution nobly states: ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity’. Although this has been highly contested, the underlying assumption is that, while political rights (principally the franchise) are reserved for citizens of the country, most other rights apply to ‘all who reside’. Unlike some other countries (e.g. the Gulf states), in South Africa the Constitution protects a foreigner from arbitrary arrest no less than a citizen.

Modern theories of rights – dating at least from the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 – do not easily allow rights to be conditional on anything other than just being human. Gone are the days when the right to vote was dependent on owning land or the right to a fair trial was dependent on having the money for a lawyer. Hence, the condition of ‘being homeless’ should not in any way diminish someone’s rights. This means that 90% of homeless people in South Africa should enjoy the full set of rights laid out in the Constitution and the remaining 10% should still enjoy the majority of those rights.

So, 25 years after the adoption of that Constitution, what can we say about the enjoyment of rights by the homeless? In the absence of a statistical analysis, I offer practice-based reflection from my interaction with thousands of homeless people in central Durban over the past six years, informed also by Timol et al. (2016) and the comments of my colleagues in the National Homeless Network.

## ■ Homeless people and the Bill of Rights

The ‘rights’ component of the Constitution is contained in Chapter 2 (s. 7 to s. 39), referred to as the ‘Bill of Rights’. Along with confirming to whom the rights apply (everyone, equally),

how they are enforced (by the courts) and the circumstances in which they might be restricted (very rare), this chapter lists 27 types of rights (cf. Table 3.1). Can the homeless be said to enjoy all of these at par with other South Africans?

Drawing on the grounded research of observing and talking to the homeless, I would argue that they can – but only in four cases: the right to freedom of belief (§15), the right to freedom of association (§18) and the right to exercise one’s choice of language or culture and belong to such a community (§30 and §31). Examples of homeless people consistently seeing these rights infringed do not readily come to mind. Sadly, in the case of the other 23 categories they do.

**TABLE 3.1:** To what extent are homeless people enjoying the rights promised by the South African Constitution?<sup>11</sup>

<b>Right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights</b>	<b>Enjoyed comparably to others</b>	<b>Infringed by economic or social situation</b>	<b>Infringed by government inaction</b>	<b>Infringed by government action</b>
<b>Equality:</b> You cannot be discriminated against			X	
<b>Human Dignity:</b> Your dignity must be respected and protected			X	
<b>Life:</b> You have the right to life			X	X
<b>Freedom and security of the person:</b> You cannot be detained without trial, tortured or punished cruelly			X	X
<b>Slavery, servitude and forced labour</b>		X		
<b>Privacy:</b> You cannot be searched or have your home or possessions searched				X
<b>Freedom of religion, belief and opinion</b>	X			

Table 3.1 continues on the next page→

11. Table 3.1 was drawn up by the author, based on his own grounded research, observing and talking to homeless persons.

**TABLE 3.1 (Continues...):** To what extent are homeless people enjoying the rights promised by the South African Constitution?

<b>Right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights (with chapter number)</b>	<b>Enjoyed comparably to others</b>	<b>Infringed by economic or social situation</b>	<b>Infringed by government inaction</b>	<b>Infringed by government action</b>
<b>Freedom of expression</b>		X		
<b>Assembly, demonstration, picket and petition</b>		X		
<b>Freedom of association</b>	X			
<b>Political rights</b>		X		
<b>Citizenship</b>			X	X
<b>Freedom of movement and residence</b>		X		
<b>Freedom of trade, occupation and profession</b>		X		X
<b>Labour relations</b>		X		
<b>Healthy environment</b>			X	
<b>Property</b>			X	X
<b>Housing</b>		X	X	X
<b>Health care, food, water and social security</b>		X	X	X
<b>Children</b>		X		
<b>Education</b>		X	X	X
<b>Language and culture</b>	X			
<b>Culture and linguistic communities</b>	X			
<b>Access to information</b>		X		
<b>Just administrative action</b>			X	X
<b>Access to courts</b>		X	X	
<b>Arrested, detained and accused persons</b>				X
<b>Summary</b>	<b>4/27</b>	<b>13/27</b>	<b>12/27</b>	<b>11/27</b>

Rights theorists – and the two UN Covenants – distinguish between social, economic and cultural rights (housing, health, etc.) and civil and political rights (voting, fair trial and so on). A distinction is also made between positive rights (the right to do or get something) and negative rights (the right not to be deprived of something). And there is a pragmatic concept of the progressive realisation of certain rights: people’s ability to

enjoy a right *de facto* is allowed to depend on the actions of government over time, taking into account economic circumstances.

Thus, there is the negative right 'not to be compelled to make a confession' (§35); the positive right 'to a basic education' (§29.1a) and a positive but progressive right to further education 'which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible' (§29.1b).

Consider what this looks like in relation to the 'Right to Housing' (§26), most relevant to a homeless person. There is a clear negative: the right not to be evicted without due process. There is a positive right but it is couched as 'the right to access to adequate housing' (authors' added emphasis), by implication not the same as 'the right to adequate housing'.

The distinction suggests that, if there is housing available, all people should have equal access to it, but that, if it is not available, there is no right to claim it from the government. This is further softened because even this right ('the right to access') is one which is seen as only progressively realised.

This formulation of 'access to' is repeated for a number of the social or economic rights; thus, it is not always clear what the right would entail. And the progressive nature of their realisation is a constant loophole for a government to say that, while they respect the right, they do not yet have the resources to deliver. The best way to look at these rights for homeless people is not in the absolute terms of whether they enjoy them, but in the relative terms of whether they are enjoying them less than other people in South Africa. The socio-economic situation of the country might legitimately mean that many people are not enjoying certain rights to the full; but are homeless people enjoying the rights even less?

There would seem to be 13 areas of rights where this is the case. Homelessness in South Africa is predominately an economic problem that has social implications: young men turn 18 and

come to the cities looking for work; when they cannot find it, they end up on the streets as they cannot return home empty-handed. As with other people desperate for work, the following rights are all regularly infringed: not to go into forced labour (§13), freedom of movement (§21), freedom of trade (§22) and right to labour representation (§23). I suspect that many homeless people would be surprised to hear they actually had these rights.

Moreover, other rights are enjoyed less by homeless people than others, because they lack either the economic resources or the social resources (confidence, contacts, know how) to access them. These would include freedom of expression (§16) and of assembly (§17); access to political rights (§19), housing (§26), healthcare (§27), education (§29), information (§32) and courts (§34) and the rights associated with being a child (§28). We further discuss some initiatives to try and unlock some of these rights.

More worrying are situations where government inaction means that homeless people's rights are violated (or denied). Even when it is hard to point to what causes the violation, the effect is clear. The failure by the government to put in place administrative measures responding to the specific needs of homeless people (as, say, with the disabled) means that the homeless consistently enjoy the following 10 sets of rights less than other people (as identified by Killander 2019:86): equality (§9), human dignity (§10), life (§11), security (§12), citizenship (§20), healthy environment (§24), housing (§26), healthcare (§27), just administrative action (§33) and access to courts (§34).

A simple test would be this: does the average homeless person enjoy the same dignity, life expectancy, healthy environment, housing or healthcare as other South Africans (even other poor South Africans)? From my time of working with the homeless, their constant experience of being rejected by society would make it hard for them even to imagine that they were entitled to enjoy these at par with others: they expect

to be at the back of the queue, to be overlooked, to be ignored, to be refused services.

Inaction is insidious but at least it is free. Even more shocking is when government spends money on actions that directly violate the rights of homeless people. A recent study showed that the City of Cape Town spent R335.3 million in 2019 on reactive or punitive responses to homelessness (Hopkins 2020:8). Security personnel funded by local government regularly use indiscriminate violence against homeless people, thereby undermining their rights to life (§11), security (§12), privacy (§14), just administrative action (§33) and just detention (§35). A particularly painful example is the ID documents of homeless people being destroyed by the police, directly undermining the right to citizenship (§20) when they cannot afford the R140 to get the ID replaced. As an ID is, in turn, key to accessing most government services, that means that this particular action by government violates a homeless person's right to freedom of trade (§22), property (§25), housing (§26), healthcare (§27) and education (§29).

This analysis points to the limitations of a rights-based approach to improving the lives of the homeless. They are certainly not lacking rights: most can claim the same rights as any other South African. Nor, in many cases, are they unaware of their rights. What they lack is the economic or social resources to access rights, or the government needs to take their rights seriously enough to have policies that enact them. Mammon et al. (2008) articulated this well when they pointed out that the rights to the city are only available for those who can afford to buy them (2008:8).

For example, the homeless person who builds a shack on public land has broken a similar law to the suburbanite who extends their property without permission: in the latter case, a judicial process will be pursued; in the former, I can expect the police to come and destroy my property without notice. The person who parks their car illegally might see it towed away and

receive notice of how to retrieve it. The homeless person who sleeps illegally outside lies awake in fear that the police will abduct them in the middle of the night, drive them out of the city and leave them at the side of the road. In both cases, the homeless person knows that their rights are being infringed ... but can they do anything about it?

## ■ Responding to the lack of rights enjoyed by the homeless

This problem was brought home to me when the Denis Hurley Centre started a project in 2018 with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)'s School of Law. Their Street Law project has an international reputation for educating people to understand how the law can help them (explained in Holness 2013:336). With great enthusiasm, fourth-year law students came to us armed with materials to teach homeless people about their rights. The homeless listened politely but somewhat bemused until one of them spoke up:

You think I don't know that *umaphuza*<sup>12</sup> do not have the right to beat me up? Of course, I know that. And I also know that if, while they are *klapping*<sup>13</sup> me at 3am, I start telling them about my rights, they are going to *klap* me even harder. (Homeless interviewee, gender unspecified, exact date unspecified)

Thus, the task is not to win judicial rights for homeless people – that was achieved in 1996. Nor is it to tell them what their rights are. Rather – and this is much harder – it is to look at the lived reality of homeless people and identify ways in which their rights can be activated in the real world. This approach, starting with ethnographic research, is the only effective way to help them transform their lives.

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12. South African slang for 'police officers' – literally 'those who want a cool drink' in reference to a way of asking for a bribe.

13. South African slang for 'beat up'.

## ■ Right to the City

In trying to navigate the set of rights that matter to the homeless, one framework that can be helpful is the concept of the Right to the City, a phrase first used in 1968 (Lefebvre 1968). In South Africa, it has been current for over 10 years and was used extensively, for example, in a 2011 report (Isandla Institute 2011).

The report is mostly focused on residents in informal settlements (who greatly outnumber the homeless), so there is not much that is directly applicable. Nevertheless, the concept is a useful umbrella term that encompasses a range of rights that will make living in the city (or in towns) fulfilling, viable and sustainable. It helps conceptualise the way we can respond to the rights failure of the homeless. And also the focus on the city makes sense, because homelessness as a phenomenon in South Africa is heavily skewed towards cities – where metaphorically, and almost literally in the case of Johannesburg, the streets are paved with gold.

‘The Right to the City’ project inspired a paper that sets out a useful schema for unpacking what rights are involved. It is written by Görgens and Van Donk (2012) who understand that ‘rights’ are not an answer to the question of injustice but rather a (potentially) useful way of framing the problems of injustice and mobilising responses to it. As they put it, this (Görgens & Van Donk 2012):

[P]otentially enables activists, organisations and institutions who engage with different aspects of the transformation of urban spaces and communities to share common reference points to begin a conversation about questions of policy and practice. (p. 4)

We do not improve the lives of the homeless by identifying what rights they lack. By looking at the gap between rights and lived reality, we can identify ways to intervene that might improve their lives.

Görgens and Van Donk identify eight rights as making up the Right to the City, put into three groups: the Rights to be in the

City, to access City resources and to participate in City-making (Görgens & Van Donk 2012:13). I like their schema and the sense of progression that it implies. But they have missed a very important step: the Right to *be seen* in the City. Invisibility is one of the greatest complaints of the homeless and one of the reasons their plight is so often overlooked.

I propose looking at how to address the rights of the homeless by using a version of Görgens and Van Donk's approach that takes the specific rights they identified and adds to them (indicated with \*) to create the following list of 12 rights:

- The Right to be in the City:
  - security of tenure
  - administrative justice
- The Right to be seen in the City:
  - portrayed in a positive light\*
  - not portrayed in a negative light\*
  - speaking for oneself\*
- The Right to enjoy the City:
  - land and infrastructure development
  - inclusive employment
  - accessible public services
  - safe and cheap transport
- The Right to influence:<sup>14</sup>
  - accountable democratic systems
  - participatory decision-making
  - driving the agenda\*

I intend to look at each of these areas and give at least one example of a way in which the right has been activated in the real world. Drawing on ethnographic observations, I can then draw some conclusions about best practice that point towards more ways of turning rights from theory into practice – and actually improve the lives of the homeless.

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14. This is a small but significant change from the original 'Right to participate in City-making'.

## ■ Security of tenure

This is the first of the ‘Rights to be in the City’ and the one most shockingly violated. Homeless people on the streets (as opposed to in shelters) spend each day seeking out a dry and clean place to sleep – a shop doorway or corner of a park. But by-laws in most South African cities define sleeping in any of these places as illegal, using the particularly harsh and mediaeval term ‘vagrancy’. In fact, the by-laws have been characterised by one human rights researcher as ‘Criminalising Homelessness’ (Holness 2020:468).

Even if they are not disturbing anyone else and not breaking any other laws, a homeless person spends the night with one eye open in fear that the police will raid the area even though they do not have an alternative place to provide. By comparison, you might be a keen hill walker and enjoy setting up your tent in an isolated spot. Although you are also effectively a ‘vagrant’ by doing this, you are unlikely to spend the night in dread of police action.

Moreover, it is not just the loss of a night’s sleep that the homeless fear but also the loss of personal belongings, essential documents (IDs, social security card, school certificates) and even the materials with which they have constructed a makeshift home. The HSRC survey reported that 68% of homeless people in Durban had suffered violence at the hands of the police (or municipality-funded private security firms) in the previous year (Timol et al. 2016:27).

Even those sleeping in shelters do not enjoy security of tenure. In Durban, most shelters are commercial operations designed to maximise profit for the building owner. Because homeless people generally can only pay for one night at a time, they do not enjoy any of the rights that regular tenants would – even if over a month the total amount they pay might be equivalent to a substantial rent.

Can we imagine a world in which the homeless do enjoy security of tenure? In fact, it actually happened for three months

during the ‘hard lockdown’ at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (April to June 2020). At that time, eThekweni Municipality, rather than sending the police in to disrupt the lives of the homeless, actually deployed the police to guard the emergency shelters where the homeless were sleeping; and those staying in private shelters enjoyed the same protection against eviction as other tenants. Clearly, it is not impossible for homeless people to enjoy this right – it has just not been a political priority.

## ■ Administrative justice

When the right to security of tenure is infringed, we would hope to have recourse to administrative justice. Again, if the non-homeless reader suffered at the hands of the police – such as illegal confiscation or destruction of personal property – you would expect to be able to hold the police accountable and receive some compensation or restoration. On suggesting to a homeless person that they might have such a right they would laugh. Even though they know that the police are not entitled to behave in this way, they assume that they have no rights of recourse.

The police claim they are confiscating the property of the homeless when they raid their sleeping places at night. But – even if they had just cause to do so – confiscation requires an administrative process of labelling the items, informing the owner where they are being taken, keeping them safe and returning them to the owner (unless there is just reason to retain them). As far as the property of the homeless is concerned, the police are not confiscating, they are destroying. They do not come with bags and tags – they come with rubbish sacks and dumpster trucks.

But again, an alternative is possible. A few years ago in Cape Town, after some media embarrassment, there was a change in practice. The City instructed the police that, when items were taken from the homeless, they had to be bagged and tagged and

the owner informed where they could retrieve the items later (unless they were illegal). While not always honoured, this at least recognised that belongings could not be taken from homeless people with impunity.

One of the other rare examples of homeless people being able to access administrative justice is a case brought by Lawyers for Human Rights on behalf of Steven Ngomane and 27 other named homeless people against the City of Johannesburg after an incident in February 2017 (case details in SAFLII 2019). Holness and Hicks (2019) in an article 'Challenging the Treatment of Homeless People', in *UKZN Voices*, describe this case as:

A group of people had been living under a bridge in the city for four years, and keeping their possessions and sleeping materials there during the day. The City, alleging the site was obstructing the pavement and enabling crime, conducted a clean-up raid, destroying the property of the homeless people living there. (p. 10)

The High Court in Gauteng heard the case in March 2017 and fought for the homeless and awarded damages to them. The City of Johannesburg appealed and lost: in April 2019, the Supreme Court of Appeal censured the City for its treatment of homeless persons. The court declared the conduct of the metropolitan police unlawful and unconstitutional. The court stated (SAFLII 2019):

[7]he conduct of the respondents' personnel was not only a violation of the applicants' property rights in their belongings, but also disrespectful and demeaning. This obviously caused them distress and was a breach of their right to have their inherent dignity respected and protected. (n.p.)

This case demonstrated not only that homeless people enjoy comparable rights to others but also that when those rights are violated, they can use their right to administrative justice. A similar incident in Tshwane in March 2018 also led to an action brought by Lawyers for Human Rights. In this case, the municipality settled out of court, agreeing to pay R1500 to each of the 24 applicants whose belongings were destroyed (as explained in Venter 2018 and Dugard 2019).

Every time the homeless are successful in asserting their rights against the misbehaviour of city officials; they prove that they can exercise their right to administrative justice and also make it less likely that their other rights will not be violated in future.

At the time of writing, the Denis Hurley Centre is exploring the possibility of a similar action against eThekweni Municipality for an incident of violation of property (details in Singh 2021).

## ■ Portrayed in a positive light

As noted above, I propose that when moving up from the Right to *be* in the City, the next step should be to assert the Right to *be seen* in the City. It is key not to overlook this, because it is the very habit of overlooking the homeless that results in the violation of their lack of rights on the ground. A good indication of this invisibility became clear when we introduced a programme to empower homeless people by having them sell newspapers at the traffic lights where they had been begging.

Speaking at a local church, the newspaper seller from their local street corner shared his story. He explained that he was not actually making much more money selling newspapers than he did when he was begging. But he was not disappointed by this because of the change in the way that people ‘saw’ him.

Lindani Mkhize explained:

I’ve been standing at these lights for years. And the drivers looked straight through me as if I was not there. Since I started selling papers everything changed. Now they look out for me: they hope that the lights will be red so they can stop and ask me how my day is going – before they would race through the green light to avoid me. And even if they do not buy a newspaper from me, they have brightened my day because they treat me as someone who actually exists. (Lindani Mkhize, male, exact date unspecified)

If you are homeless, the right to be seen is not one to take for granted.

To be seen positively is an even higher goal and I would suggest that there is a right here as well. Historically, the prejudiced depictions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people, people of colour and people with disabilities have all contributed to the violation of their rights. In recent years, the increasingly positive portrayal of them in the media has helped them assert their rights.

Because of this, we have pursued a number of media projects that promote the positive portrayal of homeless people. One recent example is the Street Dreamers article that was commissioned by the *Daily Maverick* (Chapman 2020). The result is a touching description of the hopes and disappointments of 10 men and women in Durban who just happen to be homeless. To quote from the story of Sandile Mkhize, known as 'Rasta' (Chapman 2020):

When I get time I write songs and poetry. I have these two notebooks full of my writings. In my poems, I talk about things I've been through [...] this song here is about feelings and addiction. (n.p.)

## ■ Not to be portrayed in a negative light

Claiming a right to be portrayed positively might seem excessive – after all many other kinds of people also fail to get a positive depiction in the media. But at the very least, the homeless can claim a right not to be portrayed negatively. This is done when mainstream media choose stories that show the homeless as drug users or thieves. But, interestingly, a review of online stories in the South African press reveals that there are also stories about the homeless as victims of crime and not just perpetrators. Moreover, in Durban, the term 'vagrant' is one used more often by the municipality's own newspaper (published by the political party that claims to side with the poor) than by the mainstream capitalist newspapers.

Sometimes, organisations that help the homeless also portray them negatively, even when they do not intend to. One example

is a video prepared by a Catholic parish in the centre of Johannesburg (Holy Trinity Church 2019). It is intended to raise awareness of the good work done by this church (as by many other churches) to feed the homeless and to provide primary healthcare.

Much is said in the video of the need to ‘see’ homeless people, to hear their stories and to recognise their presence in the city. And yet not a single homeless person is properly shown. Some are interviewed but their faces are always blurred as if they were criminals. They are not given full names so they have no real identity. And most who are shown in the video are in shadows or with a focus on their ill-shod feet or calloused hands. They are always portrayed as passive recipients of someone else’s largesse, incapable of doing anything for themselves. Repeatedly, the shots of homeless people have them sitting on the ground, while the viewer is literally and metaphorically looking down on them.

To make the contrast with the non-homeless even more acute, we have extensive interviews with the very well-meaning doctors and volunteers and priests who work on the project. Each one of them has a full name and often a title. They are shown being active, doing good, using their skills. Often, they are wearing the prestigious uniforms of a cleric or a medic, sitting in book-lined rooms or clinics to underline their professional status. The implied message – even if it is not the intended one – is that ‘they’ (the faceless, nameless, helpless poor) are able to survive thanks to the good graces of ‘us’ (the hard-working, identified, giving classes).

## ■ The right to speak for oneself

The examples outlined above refer to people speaking or writing on behalf of the homeless. They might do so positively or negatively, but the homeless are still reliant on someone else to tell their story. A clear right in a court case is the right to speak in defence of oneself – I would like to argue that homeless people have a right to speak for themselves in the court of public opinion that is our media.

The pioneer in this field has been the *Cape Argus* who from 2016 ran a column called 'Danny's Diary' to give a voice to homeless people in Cape Town. According to the editor (Charles 2020), the author, Danny Oosthuizen, was given permission to write on the subjects of his choice and to write in his own voice (without too much 'smoothing out' by sub-editors). The column was a huge success and only ended after the death of the eponymous author. But the newspaper's commitment to this kind of journalism is evident by the start of a new column from October 2020 written by another homeless man who explains how he is picking up the baton (Mesquita 2020).

Mainstream media are an important outlet for homeless people to be able to speak for themselves. To actually write a column and have it published might be a big ask and is not after all a right. But speaking for oneself on a TV or radio interview is much more achievable. A personal story demonstrates this. In the run up to the 2019 election (as described above), we were helping homeless people to register to vote. Three days before the election, the police raided an area of Durban and grabbed the property of homeless people and burnt it in front of them. Included among these items were the ID documents of two young women who were preparing to vote (see the story of Nosipho Magwaza in Perrier & Shoba 2019). When speaking on national radio on election night, I recounted this story. The presenter was so incensed by the maliciousness of the police and the bravery of the young women that he asked me to arrange for him to be able to interview them on air directly, which he did a few days later (interview accessible at The View Point 2019).

But these days a voice can be heard without having to wait for an invitation from an editor. The explosion of social media means that everyone with access to the internet can now publish what they have to say - although there is no guarantee that anyone will read! To take advantage of this, we are developing a project of creating citizen journalists among the homeless in Durban - people who are skilled and confident to write or film themselves and tell their own stories.

## ■ The right to inclusive employment

This is the first of the ‘Rights to enjoy the City’. The HSRC survey asked homeless people in Durban what would help them to stop being homeless. The expected answers of ‘Money’ or ‘Accommodation’ got low ratings of 9% and 5%, respectively; the highest response at 72% was ‘Employment’ (Timol et al. 2016:33).

However, what might ‘inclusive employment’ mean for the homeless? In South Africa, this is a term that has connotations of reversing the exclusive racism of the past. An inclusive environment would be one in which people of all colours are present. It should also extend to including people with disabilities in the workplace.

For the homeless, the ‘inclusiveness’ we are seeking is that of being included in the society in which one is working. For example, in South Africa, a huge number of people are domestic workers. On a few occasions, they do feel included in the families for whom they have worked for many years: joint social events between children or sharing transport. But many domestic workers feel excluded from the very homes and suburbs in which they regularly work – using public transport when everyone around is using private cars, relying on public health when their employers (and their pets) have private medical insurance, working on public holidays when everyone else is relaxing.

Although homeless people do want employment, the right for which we are looking for evidence is to inclusive employment. The legion of homeless people working as car guards do not, I suspect, feel ‘included’ by the communities they serve.

But let me give an indication of what inclusive employment could look like: we run a project called ‘StreetLit’ in which homeless men and women are deployed to sell second-hand books. The books are donated in great quantities and booksellers are deployed in various locations around the city (at least pre-COVID-19) such as churches, conference centres and entertainment venues (Waterworth 2019). For me, there can be

no better image of inclusive employment than watching Kagiso Pihlela at the KZN Philharmonic concerts at Durban City Hall discussing Trollope (Anthony and Joanna) with his regular customers – professors, doctors and lawyers (see Walford 2019).

## ■ The right to safe and cheap transport

The need for this right is especially evident in the more geographically dispersed cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg. Often, the places where homeless people might find work are far from the places where they live – or where the authorities allow them to live. Visitors to Cape Town who comment on the relative absence of homeless beggars in the city centre are unaware that this is because many of the homeless people have been removed from the city centre.

Most public transport in South Africa is privately owned and so ‘no pay, no way’ is standard policy. Although there are some subsidised public transport facilities, the poor still have to pay something for using them at least legally – whereas in some countries in Europe, for example, people who are registered as unemployed have the right to a certain amount of free travel (something for which COSATU once campaigned).

The cost of travel means that most homeless people are reduced to walking everywhere. This affects their ability to access not only work but also public services. For example, in Durban the only government hospitals offering free optical or psychiatric support are located at a two or three hour walk outside the city centre where most homeless people are. Thus, a service that they need and could get for free still remains inaccessible to them.

The lack of cheap transport may actually contribute to the homeless numbers in the first place. Many homeless people in city centres are actually from homes in the townships – the HSRC survey showed that 44% of homeless people in the CBD are from other parts of the eThekweni metropolitan area (Timol et al. 2016:14). They are not staying ‘at home’ because they cannot

afford the cost of transport every day to look for work: another hangover of apartheid geography. The legal obstacles no longer exist, but the economic ones still do.

In Durban, there is a particular example of this. The largest fruit and vegetable markets are in the heart of the city. Many of the women who work at those stalls sleep by them all night, because the cost and danger of going back to their townships late at night and coming in early the next morning is prohibitive. They are in effect on the street during the week and then stop being homeless for the weekend.

## ■ The right to accessible public services

Lack of cheap transport affects homeless people's ability to access public services. But, there are many other ways in which the homeless people have less access to public services than other poor people. The evidence we are looking for is of *less* access, as most poor people in South Africa have very limited access to useful public services anyway. The regular eruption of service delivery protests around the country is a reminder that there remains a big gap between people's expectations (and the promises made by politicians) and the experience on the ground.

However bad it is for the poor, it would often seem to be even worse for the homeless. There are three ways in which their access to public services is impeded: the exclusion of the homeless from services they can access; the difficulty of accessing services that would help them and the lack of services designed to suit their needs. Let me give one example of each.

In Durban, there are open-air public showers along the beachfront so that swimmers can wash off the sea water. Homeless people, inevitably, were using these to keep themselves clean. Consequently, the municipality introduced a by-law making it illegal for someone to use soap when using a beachfront shower – effectively criminalising an innocent (and publicly beneficial)

activity that was being pursued exclusively by homeless people. When homeless people came to me with an on-the-spot fine for using a shower, I would email it to the chief of police suggesting that he might find some more useful deployment for his hard-pressed officers.

One service meant to help the homeless and other poor people, but which failed because of its design, was the Social Relief of Distress grant introduced during COVID-19 (explained online at South African Government 2020). It is indicative of how desperate people are that the amount of R350 (or US\$20) per person per month would make such a huge difference to them. The only tests were that you had to be South African and unemployed, and so 90% of the homeless should have qualified. But even after the best efforts by us and other NGOs, we estimate that fewer than 20% of the homeless have ever received any of this grant. The problem of not having an ID had already been highlighted and this was one of the obstacles. But the main obstacle was that to access the grant, you had to be able to register using an email address or a smart phone.

Very few homeless people have phones, even fewer have smartphones, fewer still can keep them charged and almost none have access to data. A system that was meant to help the poor was designed by people who had no understanding of the poor. Perhaps, it was designed to fail – the government wanted to look as if it was helping but also wanted to limit how much money they actually had to give away.

Finally, an example of failure in the provision of a basic service is the most basic one of all: public toilets. Homeless people, more than anyone else, are dependent on public toilets. They can choose not to beg or not to take drugs; they clearly cannot choose – and none of us can – when they need to use a lavatory. There is an under-provision of toilets in central Durban anyway. Moreover, they are generally open only from 07:00 to 17:00 when markets are operating. Thus, when others have left the city centre,

and only the homeless are on the streets, there are no toilets available for them to use.

The introduction of a municipal by-law making it illegal to urinate in public gave us an opportunity to advocate for 24-hour toilets (Timol et al. 2016:42). To introduce such a law and not make appropriate provisions is forcing people to break the law: criminalising poverty. We suggested that if the then Mayor was determined to implement the law, then she would need to prove that she also did not need to use toilet facilities between 17:00 and 07:00. Her office did not reply.

Healthcare is the public service that we are most involved in: it demonstrates examples of all three of the failures listed above. The very fact that we have to provide a privately funded primary healthcare service for the homeless – seeing close to 1000 homeless patients a month (plus members of other marginalised communities) is indicative of the violation of the right of the homeless to access this critical public service.

There is a lack of services designed for their needs: we know from our experience that only healthcare that ‘treats the patient not the ailment’ is effective. ‘Take this medicine three times a day after meals’ is hard to say with a straight face to a homeless person.

The services that might be appropriate are hard for them to get to, either because they have to pre-book online or join a queue at a distant hospital early in the morning. For example, medication to help people with drug addictions to detox is now available in outpatient clinics, but not in a hospital close to the centre of town.

And finally, even when homeless people can attend government clinics and stand in line with others, they regularly report to us that they are made to feel unwelcome by staff (and other patients) at these facilities. They expect to be badly treated and they do not have the confidence to assert that they have the same right to treatment as anyone else in that queue.

## ■ The right to land and infrastructure development

It sounds as if I have nothing good to say about eThekweni Municipality – and if that is the case, it is sadly based on real experience. But let me in this section give a welcome counter example.

Homeless people who sleep without permission on public land are automatically committing the crime of vagrancy, because that is how it is defined. But redefining the space could change their legal situation. With this in mind, in 2018 the City of Cape Town introduced a ‘Safe Space’ for sleeping near the centre of the city (hidden under a road bridge). It is not a building (though there is some cover), it is not a shelter (though there are some toilets and showers) and it is not an NGO (though NGOs are encouraged to provide services such as meals). It is not intended to be a holistic solution, but it does address one pressing and practical need of the homeless: a safe and dry place to sleep. And because they have permission to sleep there, they are not breaking the law and are not at risk of police interventions in the night.

Officials from the City of Cape Town – at a learning event organised by eThekweni Municipality themselves – presented this idea in 2018 and the NGO community lobbied hard for it. The municipality owns plenty of suitable spaces, and the concentration of homeless people in the CBD would justify such a facility. Moreover, the local police argued strongly in favour, because they saw it as an alternative to punishing people with unenforceable by-laws. But the municipality kept delaying.

The announcement by President Ramaphosa in March 2020 of a nationwide COVID-19 lockdown suddenly forced eThekweni to create mini tent towns in the centre of Durban to provide a place for homeless people to stay (and accommodation for 1500 was created in 4 days). At the end of June 2020, when the restrictions were eased, some of these tented areas were allowed to continue

and designated as 'Safe Open Sleeping Spaces'. They have continued up to the time of writing (April 2021), and it is planned that they will operate until replaced by permanent outdoor structures.

In a parallel move, we had been campaigning for two years for a municipally owned building to operate as a shelter for women and children, the hard lockdown finally triggered the opening of this facility and it has continued to operate with government funding since the hard lockdown ended.

Both of these are good, if rare examples, of the needs of the homeless being taken into account in infrastructure development. It is possible that consultation with homeless people and their advocates can produce positive results. Even if bigger problems are insurmountable, there are practical measures that can make the lives of the homeless more pleasant. These projects should also have demonstrated that such steps need not be onerously expensive. Unfortunately, the incompetence or corruption of municipal officials meant that the measures were absurdly expensive and may contribute to a belief in future that it is too costly to help the homeless. This would be unjust because the benefits the homeless have received are considerably less than the money spent by eThekweni Municipality as was widely reported (Erasmus 2020).

## ■ The right to accountable democratic systems

The first of the rights to influence was mentioned right at the beginning of this chapter: the right to exercise a vote in a democratic election. For some homeless people, 25 years have elapsed between the legislative changes that gave them the right to vote and the practical changes that gave them the opportunity to vote.

Helped by a grant from the US Ambassador, the Denis Hurley Centre pioneered a project to identify what was preventing

homeless people from registering to vote and how those obstacles could be overcome. The issue of IDs has already been referred to: this was solved quite simply by accessing money to pay for replacement IDs, by providing a safe place where people could keep their new IDs so they did not lose them or have them confiscated again, and (hardest of all) agreeing a streamlined process with the Department of Home Affairs for issuing replacements.

What we had feared would be the greatest obstacle turned out to be the easiest one to overcome. Elections in South Africa are organised by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Uniquely among government-funded institutions, the IEC has a reputation for being responsive and efficient, and this indeed proved to be the case. When you register as a voter in South Africa, you register to an address (especially because many councillors for local municipalities are tied to local wards). Many homeless people assumed that they could not register because they did not have an address. (If they used their families' addresses, they would have to travel back to those towns to vote, which they probably could not afford to do). The IEC explained that the definition of an address was somewhere the person had slept for three of the previous seven nights; we were ready to create a mass sleepover at the Denis Hurley Centre so that could be claimed as an address.

But this turned out to be unnecessary. Over a million people in South Africa live in the euphemistically termed 'informal settlements' (or shanty towns). These do not have official street names. A judgement by the electoral court, anxious not to disenfranchise such people, ruled that GPS coordinates could stand for an address (because they are even more effective at pin-pointing where someone lives) (for more details see Russon 2017). The IEC extended this interpretation to allow for a homeless person to claim as their address the GPS coordinates of the doorway or park where they had slept. And this does not have to be proven but simply asserted.

Once this was explained to the homeless, the IEC spent several days at the Denis Hurley Centre armed with big maps of the city asking homeless citizens to point out where they had slept so that the coordinates of that location could be used to register their voting address. In the end, about 400 homeless people who had not previously been registered in Durban were on the electoral roll for the 2019 general and provincial elections (and should stay on the roll for future elections).

They were among those joyfully waiting in line to vote in May 2019 as described at the opening of the chapter.

## ■ **The right to participatory decision-making**

Throughout the voter registration, we stressed that democracy does not end there. After so much focus on the people's right to elect a government, it is a missed opportunity in South Africa that not enough time was spent asserting the people's right to influence and hold accountable the government they elect. In a small way, we tried to address this for the homeless.

We identified and trained a group of homeless men and women as democracy advocates – working with a specialist NGO, the Democracy Development Programme. They ran training courses explaining to the advocates how the voting system worked, the three different levels of government, the role of the courts and of political parties, etc. They also encouraged the homeless to think about their issues of concern in relation to different roles of government. These advocates then worked with other homeless people to pass on this information in a way that people were able to absorb.

The effectiveness of this was seen in a 'town hall-style' meeting held at the Denis Hurley Centre two weeks before the election. Senior representatives from the four largest parties in the Province (the ANC, DA, IFP and EFF – the NFP failed to show)

were given the chance to present their manifestoes to the 200 homeless people assembled in the hall and in turn answer questions from these potential voters. The politicians claimed to be humbled by the experience; the homeless people were certainly buoyed up by it and astonished that they could be talking directly with local political leaders.

This level of participation in decision-making had started a few months earlier when the then Deputy Mayor of eThekweni announced in October 2018 that she was hosting a public meeting at City Hall to discuss responses to the problem of homelessness. We made sure that a good number of homeless people were at the meeting (about 50 of the 200 present), and this helped ensure that a homeless representative, Bongani Madida, was appointed to the subsequent Homeless Task Team (his story is the first story in Perrier & Shoba 2019). Over the course of the next two years – including the period of the COVID-19 lockdown – this Task Team played a key role in decisions affecting the homeless, and Madida’s informed voice in that room was a major contributor.

We have considered ways of taking this to an even higher level and have explored the possibility of promoting a homeless candidate for the municipal elections scheduled for later in 2021.<sup>15</sup> Having looked at the cost of getting an independent candidate elected – and the lack of influence they then have in City Hall – we have decided against this strategy. But this at least shows that although it is difficult for the homeless to assert this right, it is a difficulty experienced by other groups as well.

## ■ The right to drive the agenda

That is why we are focusing on one final ‘Right to Influence’ that was not included in the Görgens and Van Donk list. We have termed this the right to drive the agenda. In politics there are so

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15. The exact date at the time of writing is uncertain because of COVID-19 restrictions, but elections are required by law to be held by November 2021.

many issues that could be tackled and so many voices competing for attention. Historically, the political agenda was driven by élite families or religious leaders (who had links to the rulers or owned land). In modern times, it has tended to be those with power and money – the combined forces of labour or capital – who have claimed this. But we have also seen the successful rise of groups with special interests who have driven the political agenda and persuaded others to support their aims. For example, we can look at the astonishing speed with which same-sex marriage or civil union rights have been established in 48 countries in just the past 32 years.

When looking at the rights of the poor and marginalised in modern South Africa, the effectiveness of campaigns for shack dwellers and street traders has been held up as a great example (as explained in Robertson 2014:187, 195).

Could one imagine a similar voice for homeless people? I think so. While there are plenty of obstacles and prejudices to overcome, the homeless also enjoy some advantages for public campaigning. First of all, they are visible as a group even if not as individuals – no one driving through a city can fail to be aware of the presence of homeless people begging at traffic lights. They are often supported by well-connected middle-class people in churches who get to know homeless people and care about them. Some of the solutions to their plight are not complicated – 24-hour toilets, a safe dry place to sleep – and speak to the basic needs and rights of every individual. And, by and large, measures that would make life more pleasant for the homeless would make life more pleasant for everyone in the city: the safe open sleeping spaces can be ‘sold’ to the average voter as a better alternative to having homeless people sleep in the parks near their houses.

With this in mind, we are planning, in the run-up to the 2021 municipal elections, a series of initiatives to help set a homeless agenda for the city and to persuade voters and politicians to support it. This would not be specific to any one political party or

candidate, but rather a challenge to all parties to adopt this agenda and, if not, explain what their alternative is. The idea is to create a broad national agenda but with specific goals for each city as the situations and needs vary.

In Durban, we would promote this through the churches, which are the natural support network for the homeless and where people look for ethical guidance on voting. We would develop the good relationships that we already have with local media, always open to sharing good news stories about the homeless. And we would train homeless advocates from among the community to be able to speak in person – at physical or online meetings – about the needs of the homeless.

This initiative would also leverage the project mentioned above to create citizen journalists from the homeless community who know how to use social media in an effective and powerful way to get their voices heard. None of this is rocket science, nor is it especially new. But it is new for a homeless community that, for too long, has been presented as victims and not agents, as people to be excluded from decisions that affect their city.

## ■ National Homeless Manifesto

At the time of writing, the details of this Homeless Manifesto are still being finalised with the homeless community in Durban and in consultation with the National Homeless Network. But, it is likely to make demands in the following areas:

- shelter
- primary healthcare
- sanitation
- economy (formal and informal)
- law enforcement (especially identity documents and security of property).

If this list looks remarkably like the list presented earlier of the ways in which the rights of the homeless are violated or

undermined, that is not surprising. Twenty-five years after South Africa adopted its inclusive and progressive Constitution, homeless people in the centre of our cities are still waiting to enjoy the inclusion and progress that that Constitution promised.

This National Homeless Manifesto will be a chance for politicians to demonstrate that they are truly committed to a Constitution that proclaims that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it', even those who live on the streets. The judicial promise of rights was made 25 years ago; now is the time for politicians, corporates, civil society - and the homeless themselves - to take the practical steps needed to make more of those rights part of the lived reality of the homeless. There is no single measure that can be taken; but there are a range of measures - sometimes small, not necessarily expensive and always very practical - that can put into effect the potential for transformation that was won one quarter of a century ago. I hope that the examples of good (and bad) practice discussed here will inspire all stakeholders to work together towards a genuine Rights Revolution for the homeless.



# Street-based people and the right not to lose one's home

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## ■ Introduction

This chapter takes to heart the invitation and provocation to face homelessness as a human challenge, or a challenge to our common humanity. A very basic requirement for this is to view and acknowledge street-based homeless people. The first chapter in this book frames the prerequisite for solidarity with the homeless community with reference to Levinas's ideas and

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in terms of facing 'the other' as a human and ethical imperative.<sup>16</sup> Our framing, in this chapter, relies on understanding the substantive right not to lose one's home as creating a participatory space. This means that it should also enable the participation of street-based homeless people. In the Introduction section, the authors call for homeless and formerly homeless people to be central in deliberations considering alternative futures. This cannot happen when street-based homeless individuals remain below the 'abyssal line', that is, individuals are relegated to the 'dark corners of society'.<sup>17</sup> In considering theoretical engagements with this place of exclusion, we respond to another central aim of this book, namely, to argue that homelessness should be understood as a spatial justice concern. An important difference between the eviction law under apartheid and our current eviction law is that the right not to lose one's home during apartheid was decided in formalistic terms and without having regard to those who were affected by it. We argue that this significant shift from a formal right to a substantive right corresponds with the distinction in spatial justice between abstract space and lived space.

We draw on notions of lived space, relationality, post-abyssal thinking and the right to the city. We connect lived space to inhabitation and abstract space to habitat, and argue that the constitutional right not to lose one's home as enacted in legislation and given effect in judicial decision embodies a shift from the abstract space to lived space. We argue that understanding the notion of home in the context of those who live their lives on the street should also follow this shift. We are troubled by the way in which the recent case of *Ngomane v City of Johannesburg* (*Ngomane* 2020) failed to consider home in this broader sense and missed an opportunity to extend (legal) understandings of

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16. Cf. Chapter 1, page 25.

17. See the section on 'The place of vulnerability, marginality and exclusion'.

home and the application of eviction legislation to street-based people. Even though the court ruled against the city in the case, the provocation to change the established understandings of home to incorporate street-based people's notions of home was not taken up.<sup>18</sup> We wish to provide an overview and synthesis of the South African case law on the constitutional right not to lose one's home and on what the term 'home' as determinative of that right means. In doing this, we look closely at South Africa's eviction jurisprudence.<sup>19</sup> We identify basic animating themes underlying the jurisprudence on this right, closely aligned to notions of care or attention, and concern for marginality. We link these to an approach to space as relational and lived, as opposed to abstract and mental. In our view, this encapsulates an ideal understanding of eviction law and we test our courts' recent decision to exclude street-based people from the protection of this right. We find that it is anomalous and should be reversed. The chapter unfolds as:

*Firstly*, we provide an overview of the right not to lose one's home. For this, we consider the law on evictions in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> This consideration takes place from a decidedly critical perspective, which means that we purposefully provide a transformative version, even a speculative overview, of what this right not to lose one's home might entail, rather than merely a descriptive account of it. It also means that we necessarily have an ideal eviction jurisprudence in mind against which we test our current jurisprudence.

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18. Contrast the more positive reading of *Ngomane* in Chapter 3, pp. xx of this book, where the author shows that 'this case demonstrated not only that homeless people enjoy comparable rights to others but also that, when those rights are violated, they can use their right to administrative justice'. In this chapter, we show that what was also before the court in *Ngomane*, was an invitation to interpret the notion of home from the perspective of street-based people. It was a provocation to the established jurisprudence on home and challenge to acknowledge and regard street-based people.

19. For a case-study overview, refer to Chapter 3 of this book.

20. To be compared with and completed by the case-study analysis provided in Chapter 3 of this book.

*Secondly*, we focus on what this right not to be evicted arbitrarily entitles us to do. We emphasise the right not to lose one's home arbitrarily as a substantive right to a participatory space. Here, we draw on the spatial justice theory and law's spatial turn to link the shift to a participatory space to the shift from an abstract space to a lived space and further link it to distinctions between house and home; habitat and inhabitation. This participatory space illustrates the caring ethos of our new constitutional order. We show how participation requires an ethics of care, and at a very basic level, the right not to be arbitrarily removed from one's home requires to be taken account of, to be seen or to be listened to and for the predicaments of street-based homeless people to be regarded with care. In the case of *Ngomane*, it required street-based people to be regarded in the shaping of the meaning of a concept that is at the very centre of homelessness, namely, home.

*Thirdly*, we ask who is entitled to the right not to be deprived of one's home arbitrarily and under which circumstances. We ask how time, place and position in a society have an impact on one's access to this right, in other words, how does the duration of occupation, understanding of home as nestedness and ideas about who counts in a society influence the right not to be deprived arbitrarily of one's home. Firstly, with reference to several court cases, we show that neither permanence nor the length of occupation of a home have an impact on the right. This is important in the context of homelessness where homes are not necessarily permanent structures. Secondly, and relying mainly on the *Port Elizabeth (PE) Municipality* case, we call for understanding the right in terms of nestedness, the place where one lives one's life and in terms of nested relations. This connects with our understanding of space as relational and framing homelessness as a spatial justice issue. Thirdly, we argue that one's place in a society does have an impact on whether one can access the right. This exploration of abyssal thinking is important in the context of homelessness and facing homelessness as an acknowledgement of the other.

*Fourthly*, we tie the different strands of the chapter together with the recent *Ngomane* case. We engage critically with the findings of the case, and in particular, its failure to fully regard street-based people in forging a notion of home. This case highlights the importance of holding on to an ideal eviction jurisprudence that places emphasis on a participatory space. It also brings together the spatial justice concepts such as relational space and inhabitation, and importantly illustrates the exclusion that takes place through abyssal thinking. In very simple terms, this chapter looks at a concept that lies at the heart of homelessness, namely, a home. While homelessness has been framed in terms of understandings of home,<sup>21</sup> home should also be understood from the perspective of the (supposedly) homeless.

## ■ A right not to lose one's home

The Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996a) contains a number of rights related to housing and so to 'home'. There are rights intended to enable and ensure access to housing: those rights that in some way involve land (rights to have equitable access to land) (s. 25[5]), to have land rights that were dispossessed under apartheid restored (s. 25[7]) and to have access to adequate housing (s. 26[1] and [2]), coupled with children's right to basic accommodation (s. 28[1][c]). There are also rights intended to protect the homes that we already have against the state and others: the right not to be evicted arbitrarily from our homes in Section 26(3) of the Constitution, coupled with the right to secure tenure on land in Section 25(6). In this chapter, we focus on this second set of rights – those intended to protect our homes and the land on which we have them against attempts by others to take them from us, or to take us from them.

Section 26(3) of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996a) reads: '[n]o one may be evicted from their home, or have

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21. The authors of Chapter 1 (in this book) would call this 'homefulness' (cf. p. 4, this volume).

their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances' and that '[n]o legislation may permit arbitrary evictions'. Section 25(6) determines, in turn, that (Republic of South Africa 1996a):

[A] person or community whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either to tenure which is legally secure or to comparable redress. (s. 25[6])

These two constitutional rights are given effect primarily in two laws: the *Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act* 19 of 1998 ('the PIE Act') (Republic of South Africa 1998) and the *Extension of Security of Tenure Act* 62 of 1997 (ESTA) (Republic of South Africa 1997). Although the *PIE Act* and ESTA apply to different groups of people – the *PIE Act* applies to those occupying land unlawfully (i.e. without consent or a right in law), anywhere in the Republic, while ESTA applies only to agricultural land and only to those occupying such land with consent – they do the same thing: they prohibit the arbitrary eviction of the people to whom they apply from their homes. They do so by regulating what an owner or person in charge of land upon which someone else lives must do in order to evict that person. First, both laws prescribe a process to follow, involving the giving of notice, et cetera. Second, both laws determine that an eviction may be carried out only on strength of an order of court, and that a court may order eviction only if it would be just and equitable under the circumstances. The core of our right not to lose our homes arbitrarily as given effect in these two laws is, in other words, that if our homes are established in or on someone else's property, we may not be removed from them unless the owner has obtained an order from a court, according to the prescribed procedure, that our removal is just and equitable under the circumstances.

A number of features of this described right are important for our contemplation of the legal protection afforded for the home interest of street-based people. The first such feature relates to

the content of the right what it entitles us to. The second feature relates to its scope of application when one is entitled to it. The third is a cross-cutting feature – the extent to which this right evinces a particular concern for vulnerability, exclusion or marginality.

## ■ What does the right entitle us to?

Our right not to lose our homes arbitrarily is not a right to receive a home. It is only a right not to lose the home we already have.

This right is also not a right never to lose that home. Section 26(3) of the Constitution and both the *PIE Act* and ESTA clearly contemplate that we may, despite having the right that they protect, sometimes lose our homes. After all, they do little other than set out the manner in which, if our home is on land or in a house belonging to someone else, we may be removed from that land or that house.

What then does this right entitle us to? The core of it is captured by André van der Walt's description of the right as a *substantive* right not to lose our homes arbitrarily (Van der Walt 2012:157). He emphasises that through this right, one's home is not only protected by procedure – by the fact that whoever wants to remove us must follow a certain, perhaps onerous, process that includes in the final instance approaching a court to obtain an order for our eviction. Instead, in addition to following this procedure, someone seeking to evict us from our homes must persuade a court on the basis of relevant facts and circumstances that it would be substantively just and equitable to do so (Van der Walt 2012:157-161).

Slight as it may seem, this feature of the right represents a most significant departure from the eviction law under apartheid. During that time, an owner of land on which someone was living unlawfully also had to follow procedures in order to remove them, which included – if they refused to go – approaching a court for an order for their eviction. However, before going to the court the

owner had to establish only two things: that s/he was the owner and that those occupying the land had no lawful right to do so. If these two facts were established the court had to grant the eviction order, irrespective of any other consideration offered by the circumstances of a specific case. In effect, such disputes were determined wholly in the abstract, on the basis of the existence of formal rights to the land in question, without any concern or regard for the people and the actual space involved.

Our substantive constitutional right not to be arbitrarily evicted from our homes turns this on its head by mandating (both requiring and authorising) courts to consider whether it would be just and equitable in the specific and concrete circumstances to evict us and not to grant the order if the conclusion is that it would not. In this sense, it entitles us to a 'participatory space' (Van der Walt 2012): it requires the owner of the land to account for the assertion of his interests against those who live on his land, within the specific context of their case and against the backdrop of broader considerations of substantive justice and fairness, and it makes space for those with their homes on the land to assert their interest and justify their presence, in the same context. It requires substantive, contextualised *consideration* of and concern for, yes the owner, but particularly for those with their homes built unlawfully on his land, who previously, because they have no legal right to the land, would have been rendered invisible – would have had no right to be considered.

This important shift from the abstract, formal rights-based process of apartheid eviction law to a required substantive consideration of the justice and equity of an eviction, in light of a particular and concrete context, reminds us of the distinction between abstract space and relational space, or in the context of our contribution, home understood in an abstract sense (habitat) or in a relational sense (inhabitation).<sup>22</sup> Law's spatial turn can be

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22. This can also be linked to a distinction between house and home. Compare Chapter 5 of this volume.

seen as part of a broader awakening to the importance of space in the social sciences and humanities (eds. Braverman et al. 2014; Butler 2012). This broader turn is often termed critical spatial theory (Tally 2013; eds. Warf & Aria 2009). A distinction between social space and abstract space underpins the work of French sociologist, Henri Lefebvre, on the production of space and informs radical geography, which lies at the heart of the spatial justice theory. Lefebvre (1991:298) condemns a false consciousness of abstract space. He also refers to the distinction as a split between mental space (Cartesian, mathematical and truth of space) and social space (lived, practice, real and true space) (Lefebvre 1991:299–300). Uncritical or positive knowledge supports abstract space, which is further strengthened by a capacity for violence and kept in place by bureaucratic force (Lefebvre 1991:52). We found hints of this appraisal of space in the apartheid eviction law described earlier. This move in South African eviction legislation can be described as a move to lived space, or ‘thirdspace’ (Soja 1996), from abstract space. It seems related to ‘thirthing’, which means another way of thinking about space, a new spatial imaginary. Lefebvre (1991) described lived space as:

This world [...] is situated [...], between the shadows and the light, between the conceived (abstraction) and the perceived (the readable/visible). Between the real and the unreal. Always in the interstices in the cracks. (p. 389)

An abstract approach to the notion of space and home misses the crucial point, emphasised by feminist geographer Doreen Massey (2005) that space is produced by interrelations and fails to open law to the (radical) spatiality of space (Phillippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2010:194). We also expand on the idea of home as nested relations. In this understanding, space does not exist *a priori* with bodies and entities positioned in the space afterwards; rather, the relationships between bodies and entities constitute the spatiality that forms part of them. Massey (2004:10) connected a relational understanding of space and place to a geography of collective responsibility. She highlights a collective responsibility, not just care on an individual level (Massey 2004).

It is important to note here, as we also emphasise later when looking at home as a series of nested relations, that when we refer to interrelations, these are relations of power. Similar to other authors in geography (McEwan & Goodman 2010; Dyck 2005), Massey connects geographies of collective responsibility with an ethics of care. An ethics of care can be traced back to the work of feminist psychologist, Carol Gilligan, and is based on the premise that we are relational and interdependent beings. She contrasts a masculine ethics of justice with a feminine ethics of care (Gilligan 1982). In the context of law, Karin van Marle (2004), relying on Drucilla Cornell (2005), challenges this dichotomy between an ethics of care and an ethics of justice, and calls for an ethical politics of difference. In formulating this ethical politics of difference, Van Marle draws on Simone Weil's ethics of attention (Van Marle 2004:248, with reference to Little 1998; Tronto 1993).<sup>23</sup> She relates this, with Drucilla Cornell, to the notion of a caring constitution (Cornell & Van Marle 2005; see also Van Marle (2003) that has been mooted by others too (Klare 1998:153; Van der Walt 2001:303). Van Marle links an ethics of attention to her other work on slowness (2003). If this then is what at heart our right not to be arbitrarily removed from our homes entitles us to: to be considered or taken account of; to be seen and listened to; for our predicament to be regarded with care, it illustrates for us this 'caring' ethos of our new constitutional order.

## ■ When is who entitled to this right?

Our substantive right not to be evicted arbitrarily from our homes applies only to eviction from our homes, not from other spaces or places. Section 26(3) of the Constitution explicitly protects only against arbitrary eviction from homes. Also, in both the *PIE Act*

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23. We do not engage in this piece the further distinction between attention (based on detachment) and attentiveness as developed in ethics of care feminism (Tronto 1998:17; Van Marle 2003:248).

and ESTA, although this is not explicit, it is clear that protection of both laws is against eviction from spaces occupied as homes. The *PIE Act* regulates only evictions from ‘a building or structure, or the land on which such building or structure is erected’, and a ‘building or structure’ is, in turn, defined as ‘any hut, shack, tent or similar structure or any other form of temporary or permanent *dwelling or shelter*’ (Republic of South Africa 1998). The *Extension of Security of Tenure Act* (Republic of South Africa 1997) protects only ‘occupiers’ against eviction and ‘occupiers’ are defined as persons ‘*residing* on land’, while eviction is, in turn, defined as an action:

[7]o deprive a person against his or her will of *residence* on land or the use of land or access to water which is linked to a *right of residence*. (s. 1[1])

In this light, it is important to determine what a ‘home’ is and what it is not, and when one occupies space as one’s home, and when not – it is the ‘button’ that activates our right to be considered, regarded or seen.

Two features of the jurisprudence on this notion of a ‘home’ are useful for our purposes. We view these as respectively connected to the time (pertaining to the duration of occupation) and space (understood as relational) of home and explore these features further.

## ■ Time

Firstly, it is now settled in the case law under the *PIE Act* that it matters not how long a home has been established on another’s land – as soon as it has been established, the protections afforded by the *PIE Act* apply to it, and its occupants acquire and may assert against any attempts to evict them from the substantive right not to lose their home arbitrarily (*Fischer* 2014 [WCC]; *Fischer* 2014 [SCA]; *Fischer* 2018 [WCC]). Of course, the duration of occupation is eminently relevant to other issues in the eviction milieu: whether, for example, granting an eviction order will be just and equitable under the circumstances. However, for the

question whether the substantive right not to lose your home arbitrarily accrues (whether, that is, you have a home that warrants its protection), the duration of occupation does not matter.

It also seems clear that permanence of occupation is not necessarily a requirement, that temporary or itinerant occupation is not necessarily excluded from Section 26(3)-related protection against eviction. In *Tshwane University of Technology v All Members of the Central Student Representative Council of the Applicant and Others* (TUT 2016), the North Gauteng High Court held that university residences, despite not being their occupants' permanent home, qualified as homes for the students occupying them for purposes of Section 26(3) of the Constitution, so that their occupation drew the protection of the *PIE Act* against eviction (TUT 2016:paras. 61-66). Wentzel AJ distinguishes this from the decision in *Barnett and Others v Minister of Land Affairs and Others* (Barnett 2007), where it was held that holiday cottages that were occupied only for short periods in the year for vacations could not be considered as homes drawing the *PIE Act's* protection against eviction. He does so on the following basis (TUT 2016):

[A]lthough [*students*] may not regard [*their university residence room*] from the point of view of their domicile as their permanent home [...] [i]t is the place where they stay for the majority of the year. (para. 65)

that they experience and regard as a 'familiar habitat', a 'zone of personal intimacy and [...] security' and a 'secure space of privacy and tranquillity'.<sup>24</sup>

## ■ Nestedness

Secondly, it is equally clear that a home is more than, and perhaps even something other than, the vessel inside of which it is constituted. The starting point is Sachs J's remark in *PE*

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24. The latter three passages quoted from *PE Municipality* (2004:para. 17).

*Municipality* that ‘a home is more than just a shelter from the elements’ (*PE Municipality* 2005:para. 17). With this, he most obviously refers to the spiritual, emotional or psychological aspect of the concept of ‘home’ (*PE Municipality* 2005):

It is a zone of personal intimacy and family security. Often it will be the only relatively secure space of privacy and tranquillity in what (for poor people, in particular) is a turbulent and hostile world. (para. 17)

The importance of this spiritual, emotional and psychological attachment to home, and the need for the law to take account of it in its protection of home, is best illustrated in the matter of *Mathale v Linda* (*Mathale* 2016). This case concerned whether an order of a magistrates’ court for eviction from a home may be executed pending an appeal against it is, despite being an interlocutory order, sufficiently final in its effect for it to be appealable. The respondents argued that it was not because the applicant could, if evicted pending the appeal, simply be allowed to return to his home later, should his appeal be successful. Kampepe J responds by relying on the Constitutional Court’s earlier decision in *Machele v Mailula* (*Machele* 2010) where it was held that the ‘indignity’ and the ‘trauma of losing one’s home’ in itself, irrespective of other material harm resulting from an eviction, constitute irreparable harm that the law should protect against. She holds (*Machele* 2010):

A home means more than just having somewhere to shelter your body. There is a cloth of dignity in calling a place your home as it is inextricably linked to one’s self-worth, esteem and dignity [...] It is this that makes the loss of the home irreparable. (para. 36)

Importantly, she holds that this is so irrespective of whether the house that one loses through eviction can later be returned – it is the trauma and emotional, spiritual and psychological disruption in itself that is irreparable harm (*Machele* 2010:paras. 29–30). To be rendered homeless, that is, is not only to lose a house or shelter but also to suffer the irreparable trauma and indignity of being taken from your home.

With his ‘a home is more than a shelter from the elements’ remark, Sachs J also refers to the idea that a home is the place to

live your life and not simply the place where you sleep at night. A house or shelter is a home not only because of its physical capacity to protect against the elements but also because it is nested in a web of social relations and lines of access to economic opportunity and basic resources, such as education, medical and social care and safety.

In *PE Municipality* (2005), in considering the justice and equity of the eviction sought in that case, Sachs J points out the importance of the extent to which occupiers are 'integrated [where they live] in terms of employment, schooling and enjoyment of social amenities' (*PE Municipality* 2005:para. 27). In the event, he concludes that eviction would not be just and equitable, in part because the occupiers, having lived on the disputed land for 8 years, had integrated socially and lived close to work and schooling for their children. Their eviction would destroy this life they had built for themselves and the municipality had not offered alternative accommodation that provided access to the same networks (*PE Municipality* 2005:para. 58). In this way, Sachs J recognises that this nestedness is as an important part of what constitutes a home. This is so not in the sense that nestedness is required in order for shelter to constitute a home. As stated earlier, the duration of occupation is irrelevant to the question whether a shelter is a home for determining whether the *PIE Act* applies. Instead, it raises the question of whether nestedness can mark something as a home that would otherwise not intuitively be regarded as one.

An important recent decision in which the extent to which nestedness marks a home is confirmed in potentially quite radical terms is the decision of the Supreme Court of Appeal in *Sandvliet Boerdery (Pty) Ltd v Mampies and Another* (*Mampies* 2018). *Mampies* concerned the question of whether an occupier who had her house on one farm had the right in terms of ESTA to bury a family member on an adjacent farm, where her family had buried their dead for generations. Sandvliet, the owner of the adjacent farm on which burial was sought argued that ESTA, in allowing burial rights to occupiers on the *land* on which they

resided afforded the right to bury only on the cadastral unit on which the occupier's house was situated. Maya P held that the determinative concept was not the land, the physical space on which the occupant lived. Instead, it was the concept 'reside' – whether it could be said that the occupant and the person she sought to bury *resided* on the land over which burial rights are asserted. In order to determine the meaning of 'reside', Maya P refers to the settled position that 'residence' means 'the notion of a permanent home' (*Mampies* 2018;para. 19). More importantly, she refers to a still pending amendment to ESTA in which the term 'reside' is defined as 'to live at a place permanently', to conclude that to reside somewhere means to live there – one's residence or home is the place where you live. Crucially, she then interprets the idea of 'to live somewhere' broadly to include everything one does as part of one's life there, not only occupying your house. On this basis, she concludes that Ms Mampies and her niece whom she wanted to bury had also resided or lived on the farm adjacent to the one on which their houses were built, as they had always exercised an aspect of their residing or living – burying their dead – on that farm. Accordingly, their burial rights extended to the adjacent farm.

Maya P's judgement suggests an understanding of the concept 'residence', and so 'home', not only as the habitat, the place where you lay your head down at night, but also as the space in which you live your life, where you are nested, the place you inhabit. In this sense, it raises the possibility that interference with your ability to live your life from that place (such as the attempted prohibition on burial at issue in *Mampies*) will constitute interference with or intrusion into your home, even if that interference does not trench on your house or shelter *per se*. As such, this kind of interference should draw the protection of the right not to lose your home arbitrarily, given effect in ESTA's and PIE's regulation of eviction.

This understanding of home as the space within which you live your life, where you are nested, connects to an understanding of home in terms of lived space, as opposed to abstract space,

explained above. Jennifer Nedelsky (2011) viewed rights in terms of nested relations. Being together in the world, for her, should be contrasted to (Nedelsky 2011:264, cited in De Villiers 2017):

[A]bstract concepts disconnected from time and space. Instead of the liberal individual, autonomous and independent self, she emphasises the relational self. She shows that relationships can enhance or undermine autonomy and thinks of rights in terms of structures of nested relationships. (p. 72)

Importantly, 'these relationships are not limited to familial ties or friendships and are not necessarily caring or good' (Nedelsky 2011:32, in De Villiers 2017:72). A large part of what the law does, she argues, is (Nedelsky 2011:76, cited in De Villiers 2017):

[7]o structure power relationships between strangers. Feminists are acutely aware of the possible dangers and destructive power of relationships and a relational approach is therefore not one that romanticises community or relationships. (p. 72)

This is particularly suggestive for our purposes in two ways: the 'nestedness' that marks a space as home for the application of our substantive right not to be evicted arbitrarily is not necessarily a wholly positive concept, that is, even if the life that you live from the space in which you are nested is a precarious, hard one, it is protected by the right, and the relationships that are regulated by the right by virtue of our nestedness extend particularly to those who own or are in charge of the space in which one is nested.

## ■ The place of vulnerability, marginality and exclusion

The third feature of the jurisprudence on our substantive right not to lose our homes arbitrarily is the leitmotif of vulnerability or marginality as determinative of the force with which the right comes to our aid which runs through the case law. The legislation and the cases show that although the relatively well-off are also nominally entitled to the protection afforded by this right, the more vulnerable or marginal one's position the stronger claim one has to the consideration that the right entitles us to.

This shows in the fact that the right is at the disposal of only those who have no rights in the traditional sense – ownership, a lease-related right, a servitude, etc. – to the space where they have their homes. The *PIE Act* protects only unlawful occupation of land (i.e. occupation without any right in law to occupy), and *ESTA* likewise protects against eviction only once whatever consent may have existed beforehand (whatever right allowed occupation before) has been terminated. Again, although there are certainly situations in which the relatively well-off would be in this position of ‘no-right’ (e.g. where a rental contract has been terminated and a wealthy lessor ‘holds over’ in his home because of a rental dispute with the landlord), by far the majority of cases involve the already otherwise vulnerable, marginal and excluded who would have no traditional rights with which to protect against removal from their homes.

The nature of the entitlement afforded by our right not to lose our homes arbitrarily – an entitlement to a ‘participatory space’ to be considered or taken account of – also indicates that this right is primarily geared towards the marginal and vulnerable, those who usually lack the consideration and regard that others take for granted.

This ‘bias’ in favour of marginality and vulnerability is also evident in a practical sense. In both the *PIE Act* and *ESTA*, in various ways, vulnerability of different kinds is specifically referred to as circumstances that must be considered and play a role in the determination of the justice and equity of an eviction. From the case law, it is clear that on a sliding scale, so to speak, vulnerability is regarded as a factor weighing against a conclusion that eviction will be just and equitable, that is, the more vulnerable those who face eviction are (whether because they are elderly, disabled, have among their number children, will have nowhere to go if they are evicted, or whatever else), the less likely would be a finding that their eviction would be just and equitable (unless, of course, there are circumstances that mitigate their vulnerability). That is, the more excluded you are, the more you are entitled to consideration, to a participatory space.

This requirement to be acknowledged or considered, indeed, requires a new knowledge. Here, we turn to the work of Bouventura de Sousa Santos. Santos's (2007:45–46) central argument entails the fact that there are distinctions made that radically divide the society into two sides, namely, 'this side of the line' and 'that side of the line'. This means that in society, whatever is on this side (the right side) of the line is visible, acknowledged, exposed, taken cognizance of, noted, counted, considered, cared about and accounted for, but whatever happens to be on the other side (the wrong side) is obscured, discounted, ignored, elided and 'non-existent'. The important point that he makes is that the line itself is invisible, the line is an abyssal line. This state of non-existence on 'that side of the line', he points out, is not just neutral but is actively produced (Santos 2007:45–46). He connects the concept 'non-existent' to his other work on the sociology of absences. The abyssal line constitutes epistemologies of blindness, unseeing, ignoring and overlooking. He has recently expanded on this and looks at post-abyssal epistemologies, post-abyssal methodologies and post-abyssal pedagogies (Santos 2018).

In a South African context, Tshepo Madlingozi links the abyssal line to Fanon's notion of the zone of non-being and relates this to Abahlali baseMjondolo's assertion that the impoverished people are relegated to the 'dark corners of society' (Madlingozi 2018:19). S'bu Zikode (2011:n.p.) made it clear that in our society not everybody 'counts the same'. In our contribution, we call not only for acknowledgement but for a new knowledge and reject an 'epistemology of blindness'. We call attention to the way in which a certain interpretation of the rights that protect a home interest in the South African Constitution can render street-based people 'discardable' and 'expelled from the social contract' (Santos 2007:60). Instead, we draw attention to those who are most vulnerable.

In light of these three features of our substantive right not to lose our homes arbitrarily – that its essence is a requirement to be considered, taken account of; that the concept of 'home' upon which it pivots is a non-material notion of the space from which

one lives your life and that the intensity with which the entitlement to be considered is determined by the degree of vulnerability of those who stand to be evicted – we now proceed to consider the position of those whose homes seem most vulnerable to interference and who seem most in need of consideration, street-based people.

## ■ Below the abyssal line – *Ngomane*

The substantive right not to lose one's home arbitrarily, as we describe it earlier, has been applied to the benefit of vulnerable people in a wide variety of contexts, from cases of people 'holding over' on other people's land (where they occupied that land initially by right, but that right was terminated or lapsed and their occupation became unlawful, by virtue of their having no right) to cases where land was from the outset occupied as a home without any right to do so; from people living on state land to those living on privately owned land, and across the spectrum of vulnerability; from people whose lives on another's land is relatively secure to those whose lives are wholly precarious. All these people have been deemed worthy of the consideration that the right requires and the participatory space it offers. Despite this 'broad church' of application of the right, one group with respect to which the right as mechanism to protect 'home' has as yet not been recognised is street-based people.

Street-based people brush up against the law in a myriad ways, usually unpleasant to them. They are brought within the purview of eviction law when they face the familiar call to 'move along' (Mulvaney & Singer 2018:1): when they are subjected to 'clean-up' operations usually executed by city officials with the assistance of the police. During these raids, informal traders and street-based people are removed from the visible spaces of the city where they live their lives. Until recently, such instances of the removal of street-based people from the spaces in which they live their lives have not been dealt with in our courts in terms of eviction law and the right not to lose your home arbitrarily.

Instead, litigation has focused on curbing the excesses during such removals; ancillary issues, such as the confiscation of people's belongings during a removal; and in the case of street traders, on the constitutionality of municipal prohibitions on informal trading in the city and the confiscation of goods during a removal. The outcomes in such cases have been a mixed bag; however, our courts have in significant numbers of cases issued robust orders in favour of street-based people. Nonetheless, what seems like the basic question in such cases – whether removal of street-based people from the space where they live amounts to an eviction regulated by the right not to be evicted from our homes arbitrarily – has not featured directly. This changed in the recent decision of the Supreme Court of Appeal in *Ngomane*.

*Ngomane* concerned a group of about 30 street-based people (the 'Ngomane group') who established their homes on a traffic island under a highway bridge in downtown Johannesburg and had been living there for two to five years. Most of them earned a small monthly income through collecting recyclable material; others survived on odd jobs, begging and scavenging. At night, they slept on and under cardboard boxes and plastic sheeting, using wooden pallets 'as temporary walls to demarcate each individual's space, house their belongings and provide them with some privacy' (*Ngomane* 2020:para. 2). The highway bridge served as their roof. In the mornings, they would dismantle their shelters and pack up the material and their other belongings, leaving them on the traffic island while looking for food and work.

In the words of Judge President Maya (*Ngomane* 2020):

On the day in question, JMPD officials descended upon the traffic island in a convoy of motor vehicles, which included municipal waste removal trucks. They hurled insults at the applicants, and kicked and sprayed some of them with pepper spray in a bid to drive them away from the location. They then loaded all the applicants belongings on the trucks and took them away. (para. 3)

In court, the JMPD said that they were acting in the course of a 'clean-up' operation in reaction to complaints of owners of

businesses in the vicinity and from members of the public about littering and public ablutions. The JMPD were not acting in terms of any court order authorising them to remove the group and their belongings. They also failed to engage with the group, even only to warn them of their intentions, beforehand.

The Ngomane group challenged their removal from the traffic island in the High Court on two grounds. Firstly, they argued that their removal from the place where they lived and the confiscation and subsequent destruction of the materials from which they assembled their shelters amounted to an eviction from their homes that was subject to their right not to be removed from their homes arbitrarily. As such, their removal was unlawful and should be set aside and remedied. Secondly, they argued that the conduct of the JMPD, in addition, amounted to a violation of their constitutional rights not to be deprived of their property unlawfully and to have their dignity respected. They failed with all these arguments but one. The High Court held that although their removal did not constitute an eviction subject to the *PIE Act* and the confiscation and destruction of their property were not an arbitrary deprivation, the manner in which all this was performed, was an affront to their dignity. However, crucially, the court failed to order their return to the traffic island and the restoration of their property, electing only to order the City of Johannesburg whenever in future it elected to remove people from the street to do so according to a set of fair procedures.

On appeal, the Ngomane group again raised two main arguments in challenging the High Court decision: that the confiscation of their materials and property was unlawful and unconstitutional, and that their property should be returned to them, or they should be recompensed for their loss; they also claimed that their effective removal from the traffic island on which they lived was an eviction from their home in terms of the *PIE Act* and was unlawful and unconstitutional because it had been effected without the prescribed procedures of the *PIE Act* being followed and without an order of court.

They succeeded on their first point, with Judge President Maya holding that the confiscation of their property and its consequent loss and destruction breached their constitutional rights to privacy and dignity and ordering that an amount of R1500 in constitutional damages be paid to each member of the group to vindicate the breach of their constitutional rights and recompense them for their loss.

On their second point, they failed. As we explained earlier, although the *PIE Act* explicitly declares in its Preamble itself legislation giving effect to the Section 26(3) constitutional prohibition on arbitrary eviction from a *home*, it surprisingly does not explicitly prohibit arbitrary eviction from one's home. Instead, it defines an eviction as depriving 'a person of occupation of a *building or structure*, or the land on which such building or structure is erected, against his or her will', and then defines a 'building or structure' as including 'any hut, shack, tent or similar structure or any other form of temporary or permanent dwelling or shelter' (Republic of South Africa 1996a:s. 26[3]). In dismissing the group's claim that their removal from the traffic island on which they lived constituted an eviction from their home Justice Maya did not ask, as one would expect, whether the traffic island was their home. Instead, she focused on the term 'building or structure' and asked whether the plastic sheeting, cardboard and wooden pallets confiscated and later destroyed by the JMPD could be seen as a 'building or structure'. On this question, she says (*Ngomane 2020*):

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a building or structure is a 'construction, edifice, erection or other object constructed from several parts or material put together [...] that has a roof and walls'. To 'build' envisages an act of 'putting up, setting together, assembly, creating or manufacture'. In this case, the JMPD officials found and took away a pile of loose wooden pallets, cardboard boxes and plastic sheets at the traffic island. Evidently, not even the most generous interpretation of the words 'building or structure', temporary or permanent, can lead to the conclusion that the material confiscated falls within their meaning. There were simply no buildings or structures that could be demolished and no demolition occurred. (para. 16)

As there was no ‘building or structure’ on her reading, the ‘occupation’ of which ‘a person’ could be deprived of, there was, therefore, no eviction in terms of the *PIE Act* and its protections against eviction did not apply (*Ngomane* 2020:para. 17). Abstracted from the facts of this specific case, the implication of this holding for street-based people is profound: all the people in our cities who live in a fashion similar to the Ngomane group do not have the right to be considered before their lives are disrupted through the destruction of their homes in the same way that everyone else, living anywhere else in South Africa, has in terms of the Constitution and the *PIE Act*.

We find this conclusion troubling. In simple, formal legal terms, the court’s reasoning is, with respect, flawed. Words or phrases in legislation must be interpreted in the first place in the textual context in which they appear: in light of the whole of the rest of the statute of which they are a part. In order to determine what the words ‘building or structure’ mean for the *PIE Act*, the court did not have to consider – should not have considered – the definition of these words in the Oxford English Dictionary. The court could and should have interpreted this phrase in line with its explicit definition in the *PIE Act* itself. It cites the definition in the *PIE Act*, but then takes it no further. The definition of the *PIE Act*, to our minds, indicates exactly the opposite conclusion to that of the court’s. It says that a building or structure is not only a ‘hut, shack, tent or similar structure’ with the ‘roof and walls’ that the Oxford English Dictionary requires. It also, explicitly, refers to ‘*any* other form of dwelling or shelter’ whether ‘temporary or permanent’. The related definition of ‘eviction’ in the *PIE Act* further makes it clear that an eviction occurs not only if you remove people against their will from a ‘building or structure’ but also if you remove them from the land on which such a building or structure stands.

Moreover, it is settled law that any legislation enacted to give effect to a constitutional right, such as the *PIE Act* and ESTA, should be interpreted both purposively and generously in such a way as to give the most generous effect possible to the

constitutional right in question. Although the court nods in the direction of this principle ('[...] even the most generous interpretation of the words "building or structure" [...]', in *Ngomane* 2020:para. 16), it seems to us to interpret restrictively and technically, with little (if any) regard for the purpose of the *PIE Act* and the need to give generous effect to that purpose. Instead of interpreting generously, the court seems to have looked for ways to exclude rather than to include people under the scope of protection of the Act. Instead of interpreting purposively, the court studiously avoids what is really at stake in determining the *PIE Act's* application (whether the removal from or destruction of a *home* occurred), in favour of the empty, abstract question of whether the group's bundles of materials and possessions constituted a 'building or structure'. Not once in its actual consideration of whether the *PIE Act* applies does the court use the word 'home', and although it cites the definition of a 'building or structure' that makes it clear that for purposes of the Act it is a 'dwelling or shelter' of any kind (i.e. a home), it disregards that point in its eventual abstract understanding of what a 'building or structure' is. This failure to interpret the *PIE Act* in light of its purpose is rendered particularly stark by the fact that the court, at the start of the judgement, acknowledges that the traffic island is the group's home, by saying that they 'made a home for themselves' on the traffic island and that they 'regarded the traffic island [...] as their home as they lived and stored their property on it'. Nonetheless, the court concludes that the *PIE Act*, the manifest purpose of which is to prevent arbitrary evictions of people from their homes, does not apply.

However, more important for us than the formal legal flaws in the judgement is the fact that it is at odds from all points with the general arc of our courts' jurisprudence on eviction and the themes we traversed above that animate that jurisprudence.

If for a moment, despite our pointing out the contrary earlier, we can assume that the court in *Ngomane* was working with a concept of home to determine whether the group's occupation of the traffic island was protected against arbitrary eviction by

the *PIE Act*, then it is exactly the reductive, impoverished, material understanding of home that we argue our courts in their eviction jurisprudence have so far been at pains to eschew. In order to determine whether the group qualified for protection under the *PIE Act*, the court focuses exclusively on the material characteristics of their shelter on the traffic island, on the fact that at the time their living on the island was disrupted by the JMPD there was no 'building or structure' but only 'a pile of loose wooden pallets, cardboard boxes and plastic sheets at the traffic island' (*Ngomane* 2020:para. 16). Although these facts were before the court and are acknowledged earlier in the judgement, the court in determining this question pays no heed to the extended time (between two and five years) they had been living there, to the mode and extent of community they had established there, to the refuge, however precarious and counterintuitive, that the traffic island offered to them in a dangerous and uncertain world, to the settled and structured routines of life they had established over the years and to the fact that the island was the base in which they lived their lives, looking for work and food, where they were 'nested'. In sum, the court seems to work with a far more limited notion of what a home is than the idea of a home as the space from which one lives his or her life that we argue above animates the current jurisprudence on home.

Furthermore, the court in *Ngomane* seems to operate unaware of the nature and scope of the entitlement that our right not to be arbitrarily evicted from our homes creates for people facing eviction and its significance, specifically for people like the *Ngomane* group. As we set out above, quite apart from the (very important) concrete and practical legal remedies that this right entails - the ability to resist an eviction and to remain in your home; the capacity, if you have been evicted in contravention of your right, to have that eviction overturned and to secure your return to your home - our substantive right not to be arbitrarily evicted from our homes at heart affords us an entitlement to be considered, to be rendered visible and to be seen and heard when someone wants to remove us from our homes. In *Ngomane*,

when the court commences its consideration of the group's claim that, through the confiscation and destruction of the materials for their shelter and their property, they were effectively evicted from their homes, it states that it is strictly speaking not necessary for the court to decide this question, as they sought no specific remedies in terms of the *PIE Act*. Although it does not itself say so, we assume that the court means here that the group did not ask for any concrete or practical relief in terms of PIE, such as that they should be restored in their occupation of the traffic island, should the court have held that they were, indeed, unlawfully evicted from their homes. In this case, the court is, of course, correct – the group, indeed, sought only a finding, an acknowledgement that they had been evicted from their homes, without any concrete or practical relief flowing from that. However, that in no way renders their claim in this respect academic, or as the court described it, as 'bear[ing] no relevance' (*Ngomane* 2020:para. 15). They are claiming and asking the court authoritatively to acknowledge the entitlement that Section 26(3) of the Constitution and the *PIE Act* confers on them: to be considered and taken account of as human beings when their homes are threatened in the same way that everyone else, living in different kinds of homes, are considered and taken account of. Coming from people like this group, who are usually seen only when they are experienced as a nuisance and are routinely treated as discardable, even 'surplus people', one can hardly think of a more important and more relevant claim.

This leads to our last point in this respect. The third animating theme we describe above is that our eviction jurisprudence and legislation evince particular concern for and sensitivity to vulnerability and marginality, with our entitlement to be considered that arises from our right not to be evicted arbitrarily from our homes applying with ever more force the more vulnerable or marginalised we are. Again, although acknowledging the peculiarly precarious position of the *Ngomane* group at the beginning of its judgement, the court fails to consider the acuity of their vulnerability and the precarity of the lives, and the

tremendous odds against which they have been able to establish and maintain those lives in deciding whether they are entitled to and deserving of being considered and given a participatory space.

The Ngomane group, in making the city their home, should be entitled to the participatory elements of the right to the city like everyone else. Even though the right to the city was conceptualised in a different time and place – 1968 in France by sociologist Henri Lefebvre – the notion has been taken up in the South African context. One of the most forceful and consistent claims to the right to the city comes from Abahlali baseMjondolo<sup>25</sup> (see also Huchzermeyer 2014). According to Fenster (2005:218–219), the gendered right to the city emphasises the ‘right to appropriate urban space in the sense of the right to use, the right of inhabitants to “full and complete use” of urban space in their everyday lives’ (see also Purcell 2003). This includes the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterise and occupy urban space. The gendered right to the city also has another component, namely, the right of inhabitants to participate and to play a central role in decision-making about the production of urban space. There should be participation at various levels of state, capital, metropolitan areas and, for our purposes, the city as a home (Fenster 2005, with reference to Dikec 2001). The city as a ‘participatory space’ entails more than merely complying with community participation requirements in policy and legislation. Power relations affect the possibilities of participation, which requires not only being counted but also being accounted for and ‘count[ing] the same in society’ (Zikode 2011:n.p.).

## ■ Conclusion

The substantive right not to lose one’s home arbitrarily has been applied in a broad range of cases in South Africa. These cases have explored the meaning of ‘home’ and have established a

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25. See <https://abahlali.org/>.

participatory space for those who are marginalised. The question of what constitutes a home for street-based people has, however, only recently been considered in the case of *Ngomane*. In this chapter, before discussing the narrow way in which home was construed in the *Ngomane* case, we trace the development of the jurisprudence on home and the application of the Constitution and relevant legislation in leading cases on eviction. We look at three important features of the substantive right not to lose one's home arbitrarily: the content of the right, the scope of the application of the right and a concern for vulnerability, marginality and exclusion. Through these features, we identify important themes related to concepts of spatial justice.

The content of the right not to lose one's home is in essence a right to participate. We link this to a shift from abstract space, the hallmark of apartheid spatiality, to an emphasis on lived space. Furthermore, we relate the participatory space produced by the right not to lose one's home to the right to the city understood as the right to both appropriation of and participation in the city. The scope of the right raises two significant themes pertaining to time and place. We show that, firstly, permanence of occupation is not a requirement for home and, secondly, home is more than just a vessel. Understanding space in terms of social relations calls for a notion of home as 'nestedness'. The third and final feature entails the fact that the participatory space, opened up by the substantive right not to arbitrarily lose one's home, is chiefly intended for those who are vulnerable and marginalised in our society. These themes – home as lived space, home as a participatory space, home despite the duration of occupation, home as more than just a habitat, the emphasis on those on the 'other' side of the abyssal line – all contribute to a trajectory in South African jurisprudence on home towards a constitution of care and a generous interpretation of the notion of home. We conclude the chapter by arguing that this trajectory and these themes in the jurisprudence on the right not to lose one's home arbitrarily should also be applied to street-based people. The case of *Ngomane*, which concerned a group of people who

made a traffic island under a bridge their home, unfortunately failed to give effect to this generous interpretation of home by finding that the *PIE Act* does not apply to this case because the materials used by the group to make their home under the bridge did not constitute a building or a structure. The case shows how interpretative practices can perpetuate abyssal thinking, where the vulnerable are still not accounted for in our society.

The features of South Africa's Constitution and eviction legislation present the possibility of a broad reading of home that can engender a jurisprudence of care. This means that the substantive right not to be arbitrarily deprived of one's home creates a participatory space for the benefit of those who are excluded and marginalised in our society. This requires a broad reading of the notion of home and should also be applied in cases to protect those who live their lives and make their homes on the street.



# Innovative housing solutions: Making an end to street homelessness through housing-led approaches

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## ■ Introduction

Homelessness, in a literal sense, means to be without a home. And yet, even those living in physical structures might lack a sense of belonging, which forms part of what constitutes 'home'. Here the point of departure and focus, to be more precise, is

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those who find themselves ‘roofless’ – lacking a physical structure to protect them from the elements, which most often includes a sense of detachment from broader society, exclusion from the city and its resources and not necessarily belonging socially.

This could be a temporary state because of a specific event that took place in one’s life, or a more chronic state, resulting from a combination of systemic failures and specific personal circumstances.

This chapter proceeds from a conviction that we can bring an end to street homelessness (rooflessness) through designing and implementing innovative housing solutions. This conviction is based, firstly, on a moral and political conviction that the reality of homelessness is an offence to our humanity, and therefore it is an imperative for it to be resolved, and secondly, on the basis of experience during COVID-19 that clearly demonstrated how a combination of political and moral will, and broad-based collaboration, enabled a city to house 40%–50% of its homeless population within only 10 days.

Leilani Farha (2014), the former UN Special Rapporteur on Affordable Housing, made this very clear statement:

Homelessness is an egregious violation of human rights occurring in all countries, threatening the health and life of the most marginalized. Homelessness is the unacceptable result of States failing to implement the right to adequate housing. It requires urgent and immediate human rights responses by the international community and by all States. (p. 1)

Farha (2014:1), instead of blaming homelessness on those experiencing homelessness, speaks of it as the state’s failure ‘to implement the right to adequate housing’. Any strategy to address street homelessness in South Africa, void of a central component focusing on access to appropriate housing options, will fall short of mediating just alternatives to homelessness.

Most responses to street homelessness in South Africa have been limited to individualised, psycho-social interventions, based on an understanding of street homelessness as an individual

pathology, or choice, regardless of circumstances or possible structural causes.

In some contexts, street homeless persons are criminalised and the bulk of municipal budgets go into reactive or punitive measures, aimed at policing or excluding homeless persons (cf. Hopkins et al. 2020). In most South African cities, key officials and politicians tasked with housing and human settlements have failed to accept homelessness as a housing issue worthy of their commitment, strategic interventions and financial investments.

I have been personally engaged in issues of street homelessness for the past 30 years, as a faith-based practitioner, activist and researcher. I have witnessed how appropriate housing solutions facilitate sustainable pathways out of homelessness. I have also seen how (overnight) shelters could either be stepping stones into viable alternatives to the streets or used as dumping grounds by local governments and law enforcement agencies for 'unwanted' populations (cf. De Beer 2019).

What is required are *innovative* housing solutions, tailor-made for the specific challenges of particular street homeless populations. I propose a solution-driven approach to street homelessness, as this would be able to facilitate sustainable alternatives to street homelessness more than any ad hoc approaches.

Narrow policy frameworks that fail to promote or reward innovation are doing more harm than good. Instead, existing housing practices and housing innovations – however, small or tentative they are – that demonstrate sustainable re-integration of homeless persons into society, through viable housing alternatives, should inform policy and funding directives for them to be replicated at scale.

In the City of Tshwane, for example, a number of housing innovations were regarded as pilot projects by the provincial housing department over the past 25 years. In most of these cases, the innovation and impact that were displayed by these

so-called pilot projects were lost on technocrats. Without thorough evaluation and documentation of these projects, their potentialities to transform the housing landscape were never optimised.

This chapter advocates a position that asserts housing as a basic human right and homelessness as a violation of such a right. It then argues that political and pragmatic solutions have to be found, innovatively. Some of the housing types and examples mentioned in this chapter represent different forms such access to housing might take.

Although the street homeless population in South African cities and town is small in relation to a much larger population of people requiring access to housing, the fact that street homelessness represents one of the most extreme forms of precariousness suggests that it should not be relegated to obscurity, as so often happens, but rather be elevated as a priority population for decisive and comprehensive interventions to be made. In doing so, it will help incubate and demonstrate innovative housing solutions that will also benefit other vulnerable populations.

Finally, it should be asserted that the responsibility and mandate for housing homeless communities should not belong to the state alone although the state should be kept accountable for how it invests its resources to provide alternatives to homelessness for one of its most vulnerable populations. Private sector, religious institutions, faith-based organisations, non-profit organisations, local communities and social entrepreneurs all have a role to play in this regard.

## ■ Homelessness as a housing issue

Homelessness is certainly a housing issue, but it is also a psycho-social, public health and economic issue. In fact, any responsible approach to street homelessness aimed at ending it sustainably would ensure integrated interventions addressing psycho-social,

health, economic and housing challenges. This chapter is specifically emphasising the housing challenges presented by street homelessness but not in isolation from other important dimensions.

Where governments start to speak of homelessness, at least locally and provincially in South African contexts, it usually happens in the context of Departments of Social Development.<sup>26</sup> While it is important to have a lead department to take political and moral leadership on the issue, without which nothing might happen, the complexities and multi-dimensional nature of homelessness require all governmental sectors to collaborate.

In the City of Tshwane, the Department of Health became a key partner in addressing homelessness, and especially during COVID-19, the street homeless populations and those using substances became key focal points for them. A critical challenge, at all levels of government, is to ensure the increasing acceptance by the Departments of Human Settlements of the idea that any population that is without 'home' should be an obvious and central part of their agenda.

Restricting street homelessness to social development, as a welfare or charitable concern, is to deny the structural causes of homelessness, and the failure of government policies and practices to provide sufficient safety nets that will prevent homelessness. Instead, such a denial is often symptomatic of a mentality that lays the full burden of homelessness on the individual, blaming homeless persons for their situation.

If older persons only have a government grant to rely on, with no other income or social or family networks to fall back on, they require access to affordable and secure housing. In the absence thereof, homelessness could very well be their only option. If a person with chronic mental illness – who is unable to work productively, discharged from a psychiatric hospital and unable

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26. Ironically, at the level of national government, the Department of Social Development has failed to take similar political ownership, leaving a disturbing policy and budgetary vacuum.

to return to their family of origin – only receives a disability grant, they too require access to affordable and secure housing. These are only two examples of specific homeless populations that would no longer be homeless should appropriate housing products be made available to them.

The challenge is the dearth of housing options able to serve these populations, from the perspective of affordability, secure tenure and housing quality. Very few social housing companies – which are funded by the government to create affordable rental housing stock – are committed to provide housing at the lowest ends of the market and certainly not the kind of supportive housing that is complemented by psycho-social and health care.

Between policy that discourages institutionalised forms of housing for particularly vulnerable populations and a vision of vulnerable people being integrated into families, many fall through the cracks. Not only are institutionalised housing options not available, families are not always willing or available for the integration of vulnerable persons, nor are vulnerable persons always willing or able to be integrated back into their families. This renders them isolated and having to depend on their own meagre resources to survive. Often, this means homelessness.

Other groups also fall into these categories. Women who break free from an abusive relationship, or persons who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community and who had to escape stigma and even violence in their communities of origin often knock on the doors of temporary shelters to escape their dire situations. They are often unable to turn to family or friends, either because of stigma or because of shame, or sometimes, because their go-to-places lack the financial resources to welcome them.

For thousands of young people who come to the city to find employment and then find none, housing becomes an acute challenge. They eventually either live in overcrowded housing with many others or erect a shack or backyard dwelling somewhere in close proximity to where they try to access economic opportunities. But, often, young unemployed migrants

to the city find the streets to be their home. In recent years, a greater awareness of students who are homeless has developed, as there simply are not enough affordable student housing options available on or around the campuses of institutions of higher learning.

An additional layer of vulnerability that has become critical in recent years in cities across the country is the use of harmful substances. Many fall prey to this habit; sometimes robbing them of all they used to have, but at times it is also a form of self-medication to make life on the streets, or living with severe mental illness, more bearable.

All these scenarios have various challenges attached to them. Whereas psycho-social and health care are required in many of the scenarios, and many of the groups mentioned aspire to access to jobs or sources of income, the central thread that runs through all of them, though, is the lack of housing, either temporarily or permanently.

Over the last decade, the reality of the working homeless has become more evident, finding particular expression in suburban neighbourhoods, where people find a temporary space to live, often out in the open and extremely precarious, in order to be in closer proximity to their places of work. A combination of lack of affordable housing, affordable housing not being close to places of employment, the distances between places of residence and employment and the length of time of commuting, as well as the excessive cost of public transport, all contribute to people then opting to live 'rough' to save time and costs, for larger remittances to their places of primary residence. Without strategies that will address spatial inequities - enabling people to have greater choice in determining where they want to reside, as well as enabling options for affordable housing close to economic opportunity - people will continue to experience debilitating constraints that force them to 'choose' temporary homelessness.

Without the security and safety that shelter - meant here in the broadest sense of the word - or 'defensible life space', as

Friedmann (1992:67) describes it, offer, it is difficult for a person to consolidate and build their lives, to make life-affirming choices for themselves and their children, to adhere to medication or treatment regimes, to secure and sustain employment, to access identity documents or legal status in the country, to exercise their political right to vote and to dream and be free.

Access to decent, affordable and secure accommodation has proven to be a critical element for the psycho-social, physical and social wellbeing of people. All who are housed, including those who make the policies and determine the futures of human settlements, would resonate with this understanding. We make our choices of residence based on a range of factors, but all of them boil down to safety, security, affordability and good quality of life. Why then, when it comes to people who are currently homeless, do we fail so badly to understand the urgent imperative of housing as a basic right to be accessed?

## ■ Homelessness as a violation of human (and housing) rights and an imperative for action

If we accept street homelessness as a violation of human rights and acknowledge the failure of states 'to implement the right to adequate housing' (Farha 2014:1), then a much more concerted and deliberate effort should be made to end homelessness through housing. In South Africa, those who advocate on issues of homelessness need to articulate clearly how homelessness is indeed a violation of human rights and how the state has failed in its obligation to provide access to housing and care for some of its most vulnerable populations.

Homelessness has both structural and individual causes and, according to Farha (2014), states fail to respond adequately to both in specific ways, which she describes as:

[A]bandoning the responsibility for social protection in the context of unprecedented urbanization, implementing laws and policies that

discriminate against homeless people, failing to adequately regulate real estate markets, land distribution and private actors in keeping with human rights obligations. (p. 1)

Instead, the state has certain clear obligations and should implement several concrete interventions as expressions of their obligations.

Farha (2014:1-4) makes specific recommendations for what these interventions should include, which I summarise as (1) removing any discriminatory legislation, (2) enabling regulatory frameworks protective of homeless persons, (3) ensuring access to legal and other remedies for violation of rights, (4) ensuring access to legal and other remedies for the state's failure to address homelessness decisively and (5) adopting and implementing strategies to eliminate homelessness with clear goals, targets and timelines.

The efficacy of her recommendations will materialise in how they are worked out in practical terms, in realising the interrelatedness between recommendations and in the accountabilities put in place for the state to honour its obligations and regulatory and strategic commitments.

Her first two are two sides of the same coin. Whereas the first recommendation is reactive and the second proactive, both together will serve to create a regulatory framework that protects and furthers homeless persons' rights, and their full participation in the life of the city.

What is important, however, is that these two recommendations require not only a removal of legislation that serves to criminalise homeless individuals or to protect their basic rights in an individual sense, as that would be far too limited. Farha has something more far-reaching in mind, namely addressing regulatory frameworks in ways that will reach deep into the structural causes of homelessness.

She suggests that some of the factors causing homelessness that could be altered with appropriate government interventions

include discriminatory legislation, failure to regulate property markets, challenges with land distribution and allocation, forced evictions leading to homelessness and private actors failing to uphold human rights obligations. Her recommendations seek to address both public and private actions that serve to exclude persons systematically to the point of perpetual homelessness.

An example of the above could be to legislate against property practices that render people homeless. Forms of gentrification that allow for market forces to dictate housing forms and housing access should be countered in concrete and measurable ways. Zoning and land use regulations should not only make provision for affordability but require that of prospective land owners and developers. Provision should be made for social and mixed-income housing developments in strategic locations all across the city, and incentives be offered to developers willing to invest in such housing stock.

The Social Housing Regulator in South Africa could be much more progressive in how it integrates homelessness into its own agenda and in how it requires of social housing providers to diversify their housing stock, in partnership with homeless organisations and communities, and as a clear commitment to help address and end street homelessness. A huge failure is the inability of social housing to develop affordable housing pipelines that serve those at the bottom of the housing ladder, including older homeless persons, persons living with chronic mental illness, substance users and so forth. Enabling regulatory frameworks would cut across different government functions and need to articulate clear imperatives and guidelines with regard to psycho-social, health, economic and housing considerations.

Social housing, both in its regulation and implementation, can – and should – contribute more specifically to address street homelessness. This could be done through reviewing the regulatory framework; utilising existing mechanisms creatively and optimally, even reconsidering and widening them in terms of their scope; providing incentives and guidelines for those seeking to use existing mechanisms to address street homelessness and

building creative collaborations with homeless organisations and communities.

Municipal by-laws are often created, implemented or interpreted in ways that violate the basic rights of homeless persons and, when tested constitutionally, fail to stand the test of scrutiny. Here Farha's recommendations for legal and other remedies are important. She speaks of the possibility of a homeless ombud, ensuring access to legal representation, and recourse if people's basic rights are violated. Public interest law organisations such as Lawyers for Human Rights, Ndifuna Ukwazi and the Socio-Economic Rights Institute have done important work in this regard by creating legal precedents. More intentional and strategic collaboration between such organisations, grassroots activists and NGOs and the homeless sector, backed up by evidence-based research, could entrench the protection and furthering of access to basic housing rights even more.

A final challenge is the ad hoc nature in which many homeless interventions are undertaken, with little strategic consideration or rigorous assessment of impact. Farha (2014:2) advocates for the state to adopt concrete strategies with clear goals, targets and timelines that can be measured. In their absence, a lack of political will can lead to the relevant bodies manoeuvring themselves out of commitments to address homelessness, or a lack of strategic competencies can fail to optimise impacts that are possible. In many cases, such as in the City of Tshwane (2019), a good and rather progressive policy and strategy on street homelessness was adopted in 2019. But failure of the local municipality to attach clear targets, timelines and budgets to its implementation rendered this policy ineffectual at best and almost non-existent at worst.

## ■ Continuums of care and integration: a staircase approach

In many cities, 'continuums of care' have been designed to address street homelessness, often with large numbers of persons

moving from precarity to self-reliance. Some commentators speak of ‘continuums of care’ as a ‘staircase’ approach, gradually accompanying individuals from high levels of dependency to self-reliance.

The Centre for Homelessness Impact (2021) describes continuums of care as:

[A] community plan to organise and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and self-sufficiency. (n.p.)

Sometimes such ‘continuums of care’ are quite deliberately designed and strategically implemented. When this happens, people report successful re-integration into local communities. But not only individual organisations design continuums of care. Since 1959, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) promoted the idea of local continuums of care, designed and implemented by cities, rural towns or local neighbourhoods as their ‘community plans’ to end homelessness. The HUD viewed continuums of care as a strategic and systemic approach to end homelessness and other vulnerabilities through the provision of housing (cf. National Alliance of Homelessness 2010).

An example of such a continuum is reflected below, adapted from the model developed over a 20-year period by the Tshwane Leadership Foundation (cf. eds. De Beer & De Beer 2018) in central Pretoria. Part of the strength of their model lies in how it integrates access to psycho-social-spiritual care with access to different forms of housing as well as access to economic opportunities. Over the years, thousands of people, mainly women, have been reintegrated into communities as a result of the spaces created and linkages made in the various communities of the Foundation.

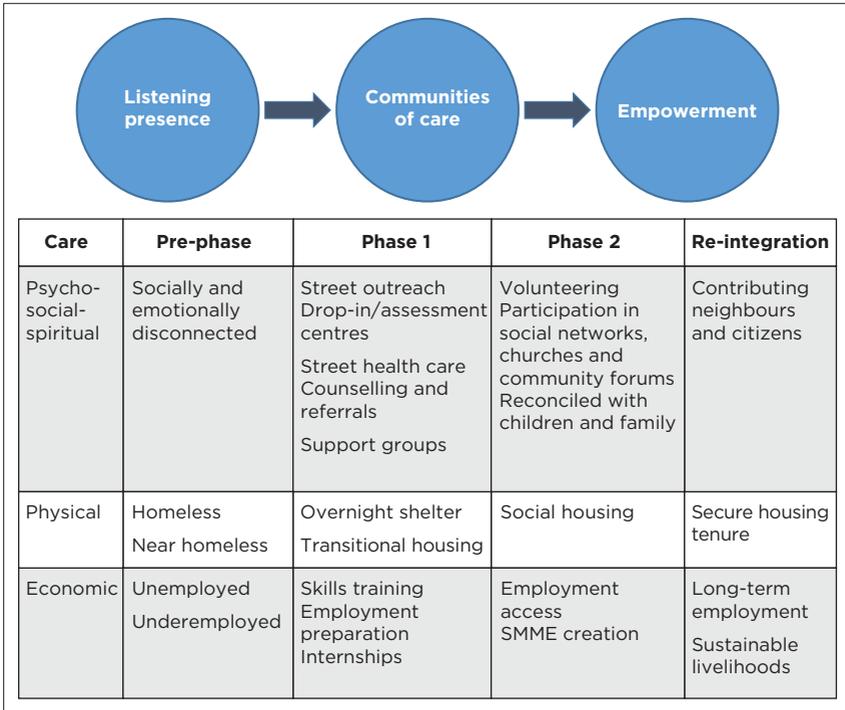
The three circles on top of the diagram are particularly important, as they represent three modes or postures of accompanying people. The model presupposes a listening presence on the streets and in communities to be able to discern the specific challenges faced by vulnerable communities. Through such a listening presence, it then

becomes possible to develop appropriate responses, tailor-made for the specific situations of diverse groups.

In the case of the foundation, they responded particularly to the realities of women and girl children who were homeless or risked becoming homeless, homeless older persons needing frail care or permanent housing; homeless persons in need of palliative care and people living with chronic mental illness who would be homeless were they not offered supportive housing by the Foundation and its sister organisation, Yeast City Housing (Martindale & Lewis 2018). In each of these cases, a community housing response was designed and implemented in which listening, care and support continued; furthermore, linkages were made to help people access different sources enabling their empowerment and increasing their sense of freedom (see Figure 5.1).

One of the advantages in the Foundation was the creation of a social housing company alongside the psycho-social and health interventions, which then enabled the development of purpose-built facilities, providing housing to particularly vulnerable populations. Recently, it has become clear that even this would fail to break cycles of homelessness if there was not a deliberate and strategic resolve to create a pipeline of permanent housing options that would integrate people sustainably into local communities. In certain instances – such as the Foundation’s programme with people living with chronic mental illness – residents become stuck in a transitional housing programme, because the roll-out of affordable units that are permanent and supportive is not taking place. This could be a question of delays in housing roll-out, poor planning or a lack of intentionality on the part of those leading the programmes.

The challenge with continuums of care often lies in the implementation and the institutional ethos or paradigms that guide implementation. Often, ‘progress along the continuum or up the staircase is also conditional upon acceptable behaviour and compliance with treatment/support programmes’



SMME, small, micro and medium enterprise.  
 Source: De Beer and Vally (2015:57).

**FIGURE 5.1:** Adapted from 'A Continuum of Care and Empowerment', developed by the Tshwane Leadership Foundation.

(Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:4), sometimes requiring unrealistic 'performance' of residents.

There are many cases in which organisations would speak of practising continuums of care, but in reality fail to design the whole continuum in detail or to implement the continuum in integrated and consistent ways or to (re)connect individuals in the programme to wider societal networks of resources and belonging (cf. Wong, Park & Nemon 2006:67-94).

The agency of the individual is not emphasised in this approach but rather rewarding individuals for compliance with the institution's requirements. Often in continuums of care, or

staircase approaches, people are left to their own devices after the initial phases of the continuum as affordable, permanent housing does not necessarily exist at the back end. This is partly caused in cases where shelter or transitional housing programmes have tight time frames linked to the different phases of the continuum. Instead of guidelines that are based on ensuring self-reliance, once a person leaves a shelter or transitional housing facility, programmes sometimes tend to be rigid, regardless of whether people can move on or not.

Here, I speak of the ability to move on not in the sense of 'housing readiness' but in the sense of availability of appropriate housing options at the back end of the continuum. Without the availability of appropriate housing units – that are permanent, affordable, decent, well-located and supportive in accordance with an individual's specific needs – there is the risk and possibility that people who might have 'graduated' through the continuum falling back into relying on precarious housing possibilities or even the streets.

If this is the case in the United States and other wealthier economies, which it is, how much more acute would the challenge not be in contexts such as South Africa. In a report of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2002), which assessed the impact of continuums of care for homeless persons, one of the key findings stated:

[C]ommunities faced a generally impossible rental housing market for many households with several earners, let alone homeless people. Ultimately homelessness will not end unless this country produces more housing and makes it affordable to very poor people, including single people with disabilities. (n.p.)

The same can be said in South Africa, particularly with reference to older persons, people living with chronic mental illness and student populations, all able to be absorbed well into decent, affordable and appropriate housing, if such were made available.

Certain populations of homeless people might also respond better to continuums of care than others. For young women

(and men) who do not face challenges with mental health or harmful substance use, for example, but who have fallen on hard times, either through economic exclusion and unemployment, or through a particular situation that forced them to the streets, temporarily, being absorbed into a continuum of care could be a constructive, transformative and empowering experience. They simply need a temporary safe space, with the right kind of support and stable foundation, from where they can then be able to access employment, and with their own incomes, access either social housing or housing in the open market.

A challenge with a continuum of care could be both the speed at which people are integrated into the continuum but also the ability to move through the continuum in a way that will facilitate real re-integration instead of being perpetually at the mercy of shelter systems.

The experiences of people who have become chronically homeless and who have been on the streets for prolonged periods are not always similar in continuums of care, compared to the positive experiences of some of the populations mentioned earlier. A person's health condition, disability or age might mitigate against the likelihood of productive or sustainable employment and, if that is the case, the rationale of a continuum of care does not make similar sense, as such individuals often need permanent and supportive housing from the onset.

The linear approach of continuums of care or staircase approaches disregards the fact that recovery from mental illness or harmful substance use does not occur in a linear way (cf. Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:5), does not often make allowance for relapses and might demand too much 'achievement' from people with complex needs. Similarly, Tainio and Fredriksson (2009) state:

The experience of the present system indicates that a staircase approach to homeless services can work well with those who have opted for substance abuse rehabilitation and can cope with shared housing. However, the insistence on service users being

intoxicant-free and able to take control of their life has proven to be an insuperable barrier for many homeless people with multiple problems. They face immense difficulties finding the motivation to receive care or change their lifestyles and need considerable support with everyday life. (p. 188)

Instead of experiencing a sense of liberation, they might be overwhelmed by the expectations put on them in linear systems, and the weight of expectation might become oppressive and counter-productive. Continuums of care could provide helpful spaces in which persons could slowly navigate themselves back into communities through the right kind of support, access to resources and linkages to opportunities. The impact of such continuums needs to be assessed critically through what it does for the people it was designed for – whether they experience greater freedom and integration into society as a result or not.

## ■ Different housing forms: From shelters and transitional housing to communal housing, supportive housing and permanent housing

‘Continuums of care’, ‘staircase’ approaches or ‘housing readiness’ programmes often include a number of housing options on the way to permanent housing. Sometimes, these different options, differentiation between them and the specific criteria or intentions of each option are well-defined, both by implementing agencies and government officials who are responsible for policy-making and distribution of funds.

In South Africa, different housing forms are often loosely defined, and terms are used interchangeably despite marked differences between these different forms of housing. This affects the integrity of every housing option, the impact it could potentially have as part of a continuum of care and whether people are benefiting optimally through long-term re-integration into permanent housing.

## ■ **Overnight, emergency or temporary shelters**

Most municipalities in South Africa, when considering homelessness in relation to housing, think of overnight, emergency or temporary shelters. There is seldom more strategic or critical thinking about continuums of care beyond the idea of temporary shelter. This is partly because homelessness is not regarded as a matter of housing rights and an imperative for affordable housing.

Through temporary shelters, people are offered a safe space with some form of care, from where they need to make ends meet (the dominant narrative would go), even if there is no or only a slow roll-out of affordable housing options in relation to the housing challenge in a particular municipality.

While some shelters would offer psycho-social and other support services, other shelters tend to be very basic and limited to overnight accommodation.

Overnight shelters typically serve people on a ‘first-come, first-serve’ basis, with no security in having one’s space for the night booked, resulting in a person sleeping in an overnight shelter one night, just to sleep on the street again the following night, either because the shelter space was already full, or because they were unable to source the fee for a night’s accommodation.

Some shelters require a small daily fee to be paid by the user, whether they have an income or not. This restricts access and means that a person might have access to shelter spaces on certain days and have no access on other days. This is problematic from different perspectives. To be required to pay a fee at a shelter, without having an income, forces people to either beg or to find some kind of a temporary day job, which is obviously not so easy to do. What is worse is that the total fees paid over the period of a month sometimes equals the amount it would have cost a person in a basic social housing unit that is self-contained with secure tenure, stability and a form of independence. The

reason mostly cited for requiring a fee from unemployed homeless persons is not wanting to create dependencies on the shelter system.

In both the Cape Town and eThekweni municipalities, a recent development is the creation of ‘safe spaces’ (Harper 2020; Hyman 2020), an alternative to the traditional overnight or temporary shelter. It provides basic protective living space, with access to ablution and sometimes storage facilities, and incentives to participate in psycho-social and vocational support programmes.

Temporary shelters are a slight step up from overnight shelters, not necessarily requiring daily check-in, but usually linking a time frame to the accommodation, encouraging people to do whatever they need to do to get on their own feet within that time. This is often unrealistic and once a person’s time has lapsed, they would move to a new shelter willing to accept them.

With the right management and programmes in place, even overnight or temporary shelters could assist people in adhering to medication, accessing psycho-social care or vocational support, reconciliation with families or taking the first steps into long-term alternatives to the streets. The reality of fee-paying shelters, lack of robust psycho-social programmes, lack of vocational support and a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach regardless of who the shelters’ residents are, all make shelters less than optimal spaces for recovery, empowerment and re-integration.

The greatest challenge that shelters face today is captured in the title of the book by Beck and Twiss (2019): *The Homeless Industry: A Critique of US Social Policy*. In some cities and for many individuals, shelter care has become something of an ‘industry’ as homeless persons are a stable source of income, and government spending on homelessness, where it indeed allocates budgets, focuses on shelters rather than permanent housing. Paradigm and policy shifts might close the tap on these sources of income, which means that many organisations serving homeless persons refuse to be critical of their services or of themselves.

This chapter is not meant to dismiss the possible importance of shelters as a first step of safety and transition for homeless persons, either into a continuum of care or into permanent housing. It does argue, though, that at the very least shelters should be embedded in a much more integrated, comprehensive and critically self-reflective housing approach representing only one possible (and temporary) housing intervention.

In international literature, a critical assessment of shelter care has been ongoing for some time already. It is a fairly new conversation in South Africa as many homeless interventions have been rather uncritically welfare oriented, not rights-based and fail to understand homelessness as a rights violation and permanent housing as a possible solution.

## ■ Transitional housing

Transitional housing in many contexts, in the United States, Canada and South Africa, was positioned between overnight or temporary shelters and permanent forms of housing. It is mostly longer-term than shelter care although still time-bound in most instances. It tends to be more service intensive, with clear 'structure, supervision, support (for addictions and mental health, for instance), life skills and in some cases, education and training' (cf. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2021a). In addition, transitional housing facilities tend to have more common spaces and less private spaces than in permanent housing, yet more private spaces than in shelters.

As part of more conventional continuums of care, this approach has been critiqued from a perspective of 'housing first', which I will introduce in the next section, and some transitional housing models have adapted by placing individuals in decentralised housing units, scattered across neighbourhoods. Individuals might be absorbed into existing permanent housing facilities immediately, while services are still made available but not in the same location as the housing, or made available in a mobile way by taking such services to where people reside, should their

circumstances make them less mobile personally (cf. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2021a).

A great challenge that still necessitates transitional housing programmes is the lack of adequate affordable housing units to move on to. In the absence thereof, it would be unthinkable to do away with transitional housing models. At the same time, in contexts such as South Africa, with a much more restricted budget-base, and street homelessness affecting a small population relative to the much larger population of people living in urban slums and informal settlements, it is probably realistic that transitional housing should remain an important part of the mechanisms to address and overcome street homelessness.

And yet, because shelters have been the dominant model to deal with street homelessness in South Africa, there are currently very few transitional housing programmes focusing on street homelessness. Apart from a number of transitional housing programmes nationally, focusing on victims of gender-based violence, at-risk youth, older persons or people living with chronic mental illness, there has not been a concerted effort to establish such facilities. While the National Social Housing Policy provides for Special Needs Housing, which was used as a mechanism to secure funding and establish transitional housing programmes in the City of Tshwane, for example, the Social Housing Registrar has not actively promoted this possibility, good pilot projects that proved their impact were not replicated elsewhere and social housing institutions have hardly invested in exploring the creation of such facilities.

## ■ Supportive housing

Supportive housing is a strategy that combines access to affordable, permanent housing with intensive services to offer some of society's most vulnerable populations stable and secure environments in which to thrive (Dohler et al. 2016).

Transitional housing differs from supportive housing in that supportive housing is permanent housing with a lease (Los Angeles County Housing Initiative n.d.), while transitional housing usually has a time-frame after which transition to permanent housing is required. In supportive housing, the tenant pays a percentage of his or her income for rent, which is not always the case in transitional housing. In both housing types, various support services are offered, either on-site or in proximity to the housing facility.

What distinguishes supportive housing, according to Dohler et al. (2016), are specific principles: permanence and affordability; intensive, multidisciplinary, well-coordinated services; social and community integration; emphasis on personal choice and low barriers to entry.

In the South African context, supportive housing exists, sometimes called by other names, for older people who can afford retirement centres, or people with severe disabilities who need intensive care. In addressing street homelessness sustainably, innovative models of supportive housing should become a much higher priority in policy-making and investment by those providing services to homeless communities, social housing institutions, as well as government departments dealing with social development, health and human settlements. Appropriate forms of supportive housing can go a long way towards ending street homelessness permanently for older populations, people with chronic mental illness or other forms of disability and even for people using harmful substances. This should become a core component of any comprehensive and integrated strategy meant to reduce and end street homelessness in South Africa.

## ■ Permanent housing

Permanent housing, in the context of this chapter, can take many forms, but the emphasis is on long-term secure tenure. Permanent housing options in the South African context generally include private ownership, cooperative ownership, government-

subsidised housing for ownership, long-term private rental agreements or various forms of social housing rental agreements.

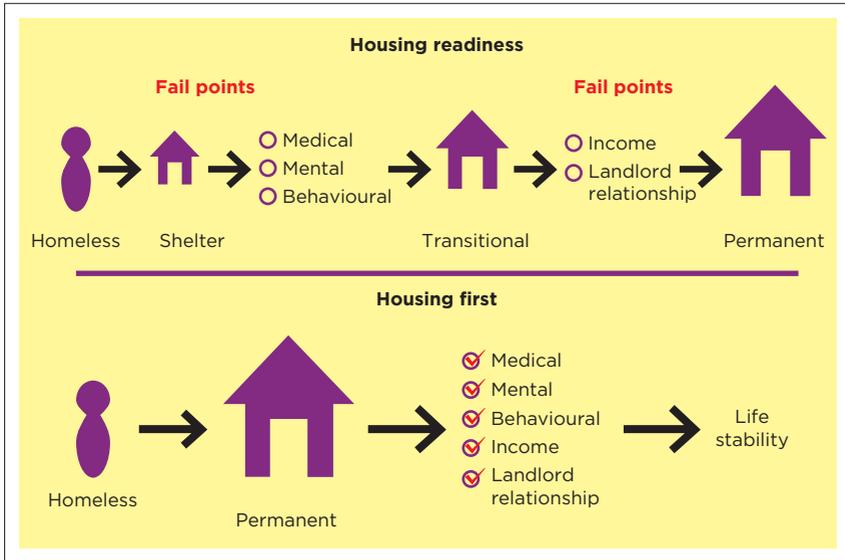
In general, one could assume that people who move from street homelessness to permanent housing would find themselves in a form of long-term social housing scheme, supportive housing or private rental agreements. In some cases, an individual might have been on a waiting list for a government-subsidised house, which, if processed, could become their own. Private ownership, eventually, should not be excluded, particularly in the case of younger homeless persons who transition from unemployment into secure employment. The next section focuses on permanent housing, not as the last stage of getting out of homelessness in the distant future, but as the first stage of getting out of homelessness (cf. Espinosa Ureta 2019). The kinds of such permanent housing might differ considerably, but the principle remains.

## ■ Housing first: Treating housing as a right and a solution

Much has been written about a ‘housing first’ approach to street homelessness in recent years. This is an approach that considers housing both as a right to be accessed, without many preconditions, as well as a solution to address the precariousness of homelessness rather decisively and, hopefully, permanently.

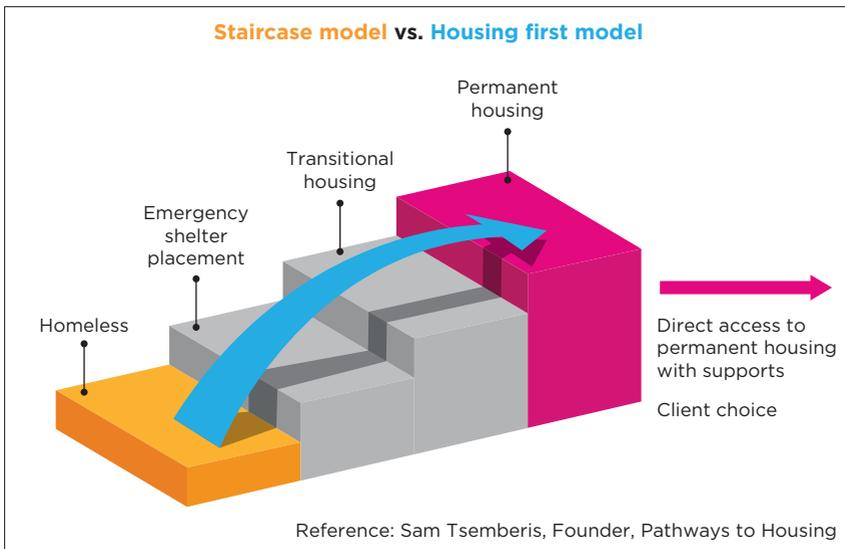
Whereas continuums of care emphasised ‘treatment first’, albeit in temporary housing facilities, the housing-first approach emphasises ‘housing first’, complemented by care services (Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:6).

Figure 5.3 shows this clearly. In continuums of care, staircase approaches or housing readiness (Figure 5.2) programmes people move gradually from the streets into shelters or transitional housing, with certain conditions to be met along the way, until they finally access permanent housing. The table speaks of fail points as those areas of possible non-compliance along the



Source: 100k Homes (n.d.).

**FIGURE 5.2:** Housing Readiness versus Housing First.



Source: Espinosa Ureta (2019).

**FIGURE 5.3:** Staircase Model versus Housing First Model.

way – medical, mental or behavioural – which might lead to people remaining in ‘welfare’ systems, because they are never ready to move into permanent housing.

In the ‘housing first’ approach, permanent housing is the first step, regulated through a normal lease agreement, providing a safe environment from where people can then access medical, mental and behavioural support.

The term ‘housing first’ was coined by Sam Tsemberis in their Pathways to Housing programme in New York City in the 1990s (cf. Padgett, Henwood & Tsemberis 2015). Their approach gained popularity in Canada and Europe, and its successful implementation in Finland, cutting homeless figures by more than 50% over a short space of time, made those in the homeless and housing sector take notice (cf. Tainio & Fredrikson 2009).

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2021b) says of Housing First approaches:

[/]n just a few short years the debate about whether Housing First works is over. The body of research from the United States, Europe and Canada attests to the success of the program, and it can now truly be described as a ‘Best Practice’. (n.p.)

In the Pathways to Housing programme, a particular focus was on the reality of chronic homelessness and, even more specifically, those living with mental illness. Instead of considering housing as a reward for good behaviour, as is often the case in staircase approaches, Tsemberis and the Pathways approach viewed housing as ‘a tool to help stabilise a homeless person’s mental health’ (cf. also Tsemberis & Henwood 2013).

In the Finnish example, Juha Kaakinen speaks of housing as ‘the secure foundation that makes it easier to solve your problems’ and therefore access to their ‘housing first’ model had to be unconditional (Henley 2019). Since the launch of their programme in 2008, Finland has become the only European country in which homeless figures are dropping.

Almost 4000 new homes were created as permanent housing for formerly homeless persons, complemented with the appropriate support services tailored for individuals' specific needs. Apart from creating new housing units, the number of evictions from municipal and social housing units was halved between 2008 and 2016, because of special teams supporting tenants in these units (Henley 2019).

Housing First as an approach differs from other approaches to ensure decent and secure shelter for people. Instead of 'staircase' or 'housing readiness' strategies in which people have to demonstrate their 'readiness' to live responsibly and well in permanent housing, the Housing First approach places access into permanent housing first, without requiring sobriety or adherence to certain conditions first. It views housing as a basic right to be accessed but, importantly also, as a harm-reduction strategy to end chronic homelessness. What is important, though, is that access to housing is strongly complemented by access to psycho-social and health services, supporting people to make their permanent housing experience optimal.

In this model, housing is the solution - providing 'the foundation, stability, and safety necessary for the chronically homeless to move towards recovery'. During the hard lockdown for COVID-19 in the City of Tshwane, it became clear that people's sense of security and safety in the temporary shelters that were provided ensured the kind of stability that enabled adherence to medication and treatment for chronic illnesses, enabled diagnoses of illnesses people were not aware of, provided a physical address to make securing employment and identity documents easier and, generally, supported people's emotional wellbeing, allowing for them to make sound decisions about their futures.

The Canadian Observatory for Homelessness (2021b) states five core principles as part of Housing First approaches:

1. Immediate or quick access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements. Usually people enter into a

- standard lease agreement ‘as opposed to mandated services compliance’.
2. Users of housing can exercise a measure of choice and self-determination in terms of location, type of housing and the services they require.
  3. The orientation of a ‘housing first’ approach is on recovery or restoration. The housing environments need therefore to be supportive of people’s integral wellbeing – socially and emotionally.
  4. It is an approach that promotes support that is individualised and tailor-made for a specific person. Different forms of housing could therefore form part of this approach, with an emphasis on solutions, not ‘one-size-fits-all’.
  5. Social and community integration are the ultimate intention, including de-stigmatisation of people and their housing; separating housing from services to assist in the de-stigmatisation, except where high levels of support and care are required; ensuring access to social, recreational and vocational opportunities.

Johnsen and Teixeira (2010:10) identified the most significant results of the shift towards a ‘housing first’ approach in Toronto, Canada. The retention rate in permanent housing was significantly higher than the retention rate in continuums of care. People in permanent housing paid far less frequent visits to hospitals or emergency rooms and seemed to have been in better health in general. Permanent housing was viewed as more cost-effective than continuums of care, partly because costs to health care systems and excessive ‘policing’ of homelessness are substantially reduced.

A challenge, cited by Johnsen and Teixeira (2010:10), though, is that beneficiaries of a ‘housing first’ approach in Toronto seemed to have access to all welfare benefits through the housing systems created, but almost 70% of the 88 respondents interviewed stated that they did not have enough money to live on after paying rent. The cost of permanent housing units – both

to landlord and to user – would make or break the quality of housing and quality of life of the user but also affect whether ‘housing first’ can be made viable and can find traction in a local context.

Within a ‘housing first’ approach there might be various permutations. Some favour a so-called ‘scatter-site’ approach, meaning integration of individuals into permanent housing facilities across the city, instead of all being concentrated in one location or neighbourhood. Others favour a ‘congregate/communal supported housing programme’ where ‘housing first’ principles are still applied, but people live in proximity of each other, either in the same building or in sites in the same neighbourhood, connected by a web of psycho-social and health support services (cf. Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:11). In general, those with more complex needs might preferably be accommodated in ‘congregate or communal supported housing programmes’.

## ■ Permanent supportive housing

What distinguishes ‘housing first’ from ‘continuum of care’ approaches is not the fact that there is less emphasis on psycho-social, health and vocational care in a ‘housing first’ approach. What makes care different is that such support is provided in permanent housing structures and the choice of services accessed is up to the users. Often the kind of care provided might be more intensive and extensive even than in ‘continuum of care’ models.

Permanent supportive housing should be seen as a possible expression of ‘housing first’. Gordon (2008:4) notes that ‘not all supportive housing uses a Housing First approach, and not all Housing First approaches use supportive housing’. Permanent supportive housing, as an element of a ‘housing first’ approach, would place emphasis on (1) providing safe, secure and permanent rental housing that is affordable and well-managed, and (2) providing complementary support in the form of psycho-social, health, vocational and recreational services, offered ‘by staff with

appropriate skills and expertise on-site or nearby' (Gordon 2008:4).

One of the ground-breaking examples of supportive housing that exemplifies 'housing first' principles, almost to the letter, is the story of Common Ground in New York City. They recognised that their eligibility criteria for homeless persons to access their housing were 'insurmountable' (Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:14). In order to make housing accessible, they then changed their criteria, including exempting people who were recently evicted, no longer requiring sobriety for an extended period, nor compliance with mental health treatment. Through what they called a 'Street to Home' programme, they were able to reduce street homelessness in the 20-block Times Square Neighbourhood of New York City by 87% within 2 years of changing their approach (Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:14).

What distinguishes their model is the combination of permanent accommodation complemented with on-site support. People with special needs are integrated with people in need of affordable accommodation who do not necessarily have any special health or psycho-social support requirements. What makes permanent supportive housing critical is the fact that for some people who are currently homeless, fully independent housing might not be the ideal or realistic solution (Johnsen & Teixeira 2010:14; cf. also Busch-Geertsema 2005; Culhane & Metraux 2008).

Busch-Geertsema (2005:221) cites age, health problems, addiction problems as well as structural problems in the labour market as reasons why some would remain excluded from mainstream employment opportunities, and, in such cases, 'relative integration and relative autonomy', if achieved, should be regarded as indicators of a more inclusive city as well as highly valuable to those being integrated in these ways.

During the hard lockdown for COVID-19, two new permanent supportive housing facilities were opened in the City of Tshwane for older homeless persons. In the Inn, 36 older persons who came from homelessness or precarious housing conditions were

integrated into a 54-unit social housing development, contributing a percentage of their social grants towards rental and being supported with a range of social services.

At the Tau Village, a 19-bed supportive housing programme was opened for frail older persons in need of ongoing daily care. At the Inn, the older tenants function independently as part of an integrated social housing project but have access to support services. At Tau Village, the frail older persons live in a communal housing space with private rooms but communal facilities, forming part of a larger social housing complex.

### □ **The challenge: Foregrounding housing, without comprehensive social protection packages**

What is asserted in this chapter might remain elusive for the largest percentage of homeless individuals if the provision of affordable housing is viewed in isolation from securing more comprehensive social protection packages. This is indeed a challenge not only in South Africa but for the majority of populations in the global South.

Elsewhere in this chapter, it is shown how older persons, for example, through a combination of their social grants and an innovative housing product, can access permanent housing. The introduction of something like a basic income grant (cf. Naidu 2021) – if rolled out at the higher bracket of proposals being made – could potentially enable low-income people in general, and unemployed and street homeless persons in particular, to access forms of housing formerly out of reach. This assumes the fact that the housing sector itself will have to be responsive in the design of housing products correlating with what would probably still be limited grants, should it eventually realise.

Although the proposal for a basic income grant was under debate for many years in South Africa, the combination of COVID-19's devastating economic effects, with political upheaval, large-scale looting and violence taking place during

July of 2021, brought new urgency to this debate (Davis 2021). The relationship between housing solutions and more comprehensive social protection packages requires further deliberate exploration.

## ■ **The politics of gender, occupation as political strategy and other immediate challenges**

There are other challenges that are also immediate and related to housing and homelessness. Here, I will briefly touch on two such issues, both of which warrant much more space for reflection, research and innovative action.

### ■ **Gender: A challenge to hospitality and inclusion**

The issue of gender plays itself out uniquely in relation to street homelessness (cf. Bretherton 2017:1-22). In known cases in South Africa transitional housing programmes that became known as good practices for addressing and preventing street homelessness, welcoming victims of gender-based violence and supporting women and their families towards re-integration into communities were forced by provincial governments to focus their intake of residents exclusively on victims of gender-based violence. If these programmes did not comply, they risked losing their government grants. At first glance, such a directive might make sense, seeing the scourge of gender-based violence in South Africa. On closer inspection, however, this is hugely problematic, as in some cases it erased the possibility for any homeless woman (who did not report gender-based violence) to find access to safe shelter or housing; it underscores the ignorance of policy-makers or implementers of policy when it comes to street homelessness and it fails to diversify investment in transitional housing programmes that will address multiple vulnerabilities.

Any homeless woman (and man) is perpetually vulnerable to severe forms of violence on the streets. By disabling their entry into transitional housing or other support programmes, the likelihood of their being violated, if they have not been already, is greatly increased.

People identifying as part of the LGBTIQ+ community have particular challenges (cf. Fraser et al. 2019). They often experience stigmatisation from a range of service providers, both public, private and faith based. Many religious organisations working in this space hold firm convictions about matters related to gender and sexual orientation and allow for these convictions to affect the ways in which they welcome, affirm and support individuals. People not complying with heteronormative orientations might find living in shelters challenging. The matter becomes particularly complicated when a transgender person seeks accommodation. Creative work needs to be carried out, in collaboration with homeless persons from the LGBTIQ+ community as well as organisations representing this community, to create inclusive, safe, affirming and hospitable spaces in which they will sense the freedom to be.

## ■ **Occupation: A strategy that resists homelessness**

Contestations over space often result in vulnerable people losing their homes. This might be the result of illegal evictions or gentrification that sees property prices rise to levels of unaffordability. A prime example is the Cissie Gool House in Cape Town (cf. Hirsch 2021; Robins 2021). Tenants of houses in the Woodstock and Salt River neighbourhoods, who lived in those houses for four or five generations sometimes, are forced out by urban renewal programmes not meant for the urban poor. At some point, a group of people who were forced from their homes organised themselves under the banner of the Reclaim the City movement and occupied the old Woodstock Public Hospital.

Earmarked for social housing, Reclaim the City asked the City of Cape Town to provide them with information on time frames and budget allocations for the hospital's conversion into social housing. Because the city could not provide this and showed little commitment to providing any form of social housing in the central parts of Cape Town since 1994, the occupation of the hospital – as a place-holder until such time the city got its house in order – became a political strategy of a displaced and 'near' homeless group of people to resist homelessness.

In many buildings in cities across South Africa, this scenario is starting to play itself out, sometimes in rather ad hoc and disorganised ways, but in the case of Cissie Gool House, through political organisation, conscientisation and connection to larger social movements, that are committed to creating radically inclusive cities.

It is very possible that strategies are implemented to address and overcome homelessness, on the one hand, while the processes of capitalism force new groups of people into homelessness. It is probably time for those working in these different spaces – those seeking to address the realities of those who are currently homeless and those seeking to resist more people falling into homelessness – to establish alignments between their cries, challenges and strategies. Historically, those seeking to address the issues of people who are currently homeless tend to be more service oriented and often dependent on government support. Those seeking to prevent people from falling into homelessness, such as the leaders of Cissie Gool House, are more politically oriented, resisting the collusion between the government and private sector to displace still more people. These two groups, broadly defined, have much to gain from collaborating, learning together and strengthening their mutual aspirations for a society in which everyone will be homed.

Addressing homelessness is to address a diverse range of socio-spatial injustices, violations and exclusions.

## ■ Housing-led solutions to street homelessness

If homelessness is indeed more structural than personal – because those who are in the middle and upper classes live with chronic mental illness or use of harmful substances, do not become homeless – and if the acute lack of affordable housing forces many to the streets, then housing-led solutions to street homelessness require serious consideration.

I deliberately opt to speak of *housing-led solutions* for three reasons: firstly, as a corrective to approaches that seldom or never regard housing as part of the solution, viewing homelessness as a welfare matter and homeless persons almost automatically as ineligible for housing; secondly, as a rights-based imperative requiring collective efforts to find and incubate solutions and, thirdly, as an opener for ongoing conversation and debate, even if contested, that might help give birth to new possibilities. Fourthly, I also use housing-led solutions in the sense of the ‘housing first’ approach, suggesting a serious review of dominant models dealing with homelessness in South Africa today, and, instead of religiously following a staircase approach, considering the possibility of promoting entry into housing as a first step in re-integrating homeless persons into communities.

The Central European conversation is helpful in this regard. The Ways out of Homelessness Partnership in Central Europe brought together homelessness organisations from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania) as well as FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with homeless persons (Fehér et al. 2016:1). The Ways out of Homelessness Partnership speaks of housing-led or housing-based interventions in homelessness and considers ‘supported apartments, facilitated access to social housing and personal capacity building’ as important innovations in breaking cycles of homelessness in Central Europe. These interventions together with an increase in affordable housing units are starting to have an impact not seen before (Fehér et al. 2016:9–16). Some of the

interventions include 'housing first' approaches, but not exclusively so. Their emphasis is on interventions and innovations that will help homeless persons break out of being stuck 'in a dead-end staircase system' (Fehér et al. 2016:10).

I propose a housing-led approach that is flexible, contextually appropriate and rigorous in its commitment to break cycles of homelessness through permanent social and communal re-integration of homeless persons. Such an approach in the South African context should combine continuums of care, 'purer' 'housing first' approaches and organic, bottom-up solutions that might not be strictly either continuums of care or 'housing first' approaches. There are lessons to be learnt from all these approaches: local contexts and different homeless populations should help inform the most appropriate responses in a local context and more often than not it is likely to be a fusion of different approaches.

'Housing first' approaches should be given particular consideration in the case of chronic homeless populations – older persons, persons with chronic mental illnesses or disability. In the South African context, this also seems more viable as people in these categories qualify for government grants. Housing products should be designed that can be affordable enough for people who only receive government grants. Uncreative housing responses are currently an obstacle. If chronic homelessness can be ended through access to permanent forms of supportive housing, which is a realistic enough vision, more energy can be spent on crafting innovative alternatives to street homelessness for the remaining homeless population.

In the case of people using harmful substances, a 'housing first' approach of a certain kind also needs to be explored. During the hard lockdown for COVID-19, the ability of substance users to live in temporary COVID-19 shelters, with access to opioid replacement therapy and related support services, enabled many users to find alternatives for themselves. However, in most cases, this population is not eligible for social grants, which makes affording immediate

access to permanent housing options quite challenging. Innovative approaches that could combine immediate access to housing (even if sheltered or transitional) with psycho-social, health and vocational support, with an emphasis on harm reduction, recovery and integration, might enable people to break free from harmful choices and either enter the formal labour market or engage in small enterprises of their own.

The large number of unemployed young persons who make the streets their home, because of economic exclusions, might not benefit from 'housing first' approaches in the purest sense of the word. Access to temporary housing forms – be they temporary shelters, safe spaces or transitional housing, complemented with access to a range of support services – might enable them to feel safe and secure, while consolidating their lives, and enabling them to navigate their way into some form of employment.

Elsewhere I wrote (De Beer 2019):

There is enough local and international evidence that demonstrates the powerful link between diversified housing solutions and sustainable pathways out of homelessness. Dismissing this is politically convenient, but morally inexcusable. (n.p.)

Both morally and politically, it is inexcusable to consider some people as 'un-house-able'. And yet, a much larger percentage of South Africa's population than the street homeless population have to fend for themselves through self-help housing in the form of informal dwellings. A universal income grant could assist in this regard, if housing providers can be innovative in creating housing units affordable enough for people whose only income is such a grant. Burton (2020) proposes that we start at least with all unemployed people between the ages of 18 and 59 years.

## ■ Concluding thoughts and recommendations

In most South African cities, the injustice towards homeless people is quite visible in the mismatch between a vast number of

empty government-owned buildings and vacant land parcels, and the number of street homeless people unable to access accommodation. In some instances, prominent private companies leave high-rise buildings vacant for years earning tax benefits, while the occupation of such buildings by poor and disenfranchised people is seen as a crime. Similarly, churches and other religious organisations collectively own vast tracts of land and property that are often poorly utilised. We also witness in different cities the successful recycling of church properties to include, amongst other uses, access to affordable and supportive housing for people who would otherwise have remained homeless (cf. De Beer 2019).

What is required is the clear political and moral will to mobilise available resources to bridge the gap between homelessness and sustainable housing. A number of recommendations will conclude this chapter:

1. Cities should commit themselves to end street homelessness by 2030, through concrete housing-led strategies (cf. Farha 2014:3) and budgets.
2. Discriminatory laws, measures and regulations that disable homeless persons from re-integration into society should be reviewed and repealed, effective remedies put in place should homeless persons' rights be violated and legislative frameworks and policies adopted which emphasise the full integration and protection of homeless persons (cf. Farha 2014:3).
3. Cities should embrace 'housing' first approaches to end chronic homelessness, combined with staircase approaches clearly demonstrating sustainable pathways out of homelessness, with an emphasis on optimised and flexible access.
4. Available housing options for street homeless communities have to be diversified and tailor-made to address the specific reasons that led to people's homelessness, including transnational migration.
5. Integration of people who come from homelessness should occur in neighbourhoods all across the city, ensuring strategic

social housing investments in well-located areas and contributing to the socio-spatial transformation of the apartheid city.

6. Social and private housing developments should be incentivised to include good-quality special needs and supportive housing.
7. The quality of shelters and transitional housing facilities should be regulated with minimum requirements to prevent overcrowding and enhance re-integration.
8. In order to do so, cities should build robust social compacts between a broad range of stakeholders with end users playing a central role in formulating housing objectives. This could take different forms, including strategic partnerships, special purpose vehicles and incentive schemes.
9. Housing strategies aimed at ending homelessness should be built on accurate baselines with clear goals, targets, development pipelines and indicators for how to end homelessness amongst specific populations.
10. Finally, in addressing homelessness through housing-led strategies, cities should (1) provide fair and differentiated access to physical structures that are decent and affordable, (2) ensure full inclusion of formerly homeless persons and a sense of belonging and (3) do so in conjunction with homeless persons as the experts on their own experiences and the agents of lasting change (cf. the three-dimensional definition of homelessness of Farha [2014:1]).

In considering the socio-spatial transformation of South African cities and towns, the ways in which we embrace, house and integrate people who come from homelessness will be both a measure of success, as well as a clue for how to address multiple other forms of (urban) vulnerability.

# A practical guide to providing health services to homeless persons using community-oriented primary care

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## ■ Why is health care for homeless persons important?

Walking through the city centre and entering territories considered 'dangerous' and 'dirty' brings out that the street is not only a place of passage and circulation, it is also a place of permanence and residence, repression and resistance.<sup>28</sup>

(Hallais & De Barros 2015:1501)

Homelessness is complex and multifactorial, as are the health issues homeless persons face. Homelessness is strongly associated with poor health. This association can be described as circular: poor health can predispose people to poor and difficult living conditions that can contribute to homelessness, and homelessness can contribute directly to poor health through physical factors such as exposure, lack of shelter or systemic and lifestyle factors and lower levels of personal safety.

Homeless persons in general have the same baseline population risk for non-communicable diseases for people their age and socio-economic status, but are at much higher risk of mental health problems, substance use disorder, physical disability and infectious diseases such as TB, HIV and hepatitis, as well as of violence and injury (Hwang & Burns 2014; Seager & Tamane 2010). These conditions are often co-morbid and have compound health effects, complicating their management.

Another significant factor contributing to poor health outcomes experienced by homeless persons is access to care.

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28. The text was translated using Google Translate.

The stigma of homelessness and the associated health-related issues (such as substance use disorder or mental health issues) lead to homeless persons being easily recognisable, often facing discrimination from the health care services. People who are homeless, consequently, often become reluctant to access care, and when they do, they receive suboptimal care without the necessary continuity and coordination of care.

As homeless persons have to spend much time and effort in meeting their most basic needs, what is normally considered appropriate help-seeking behaviour in the housed population is often a lower priority. Practically this might translate to late presentation with a complicated disease, non-adherence to treatment or appointments and loss to follow-up.

We recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing homelessness, as the phenomenon of homelessness is heterogeneous in terms of demographics, causes and family relations. Hwang and Burns (2014:1546) accurately state that '[h]omelessness is ultimately the result of the convergence of individual vulnerabilities and structural factors'. Therefore, an appropriate health care response recognises the individual and structural problems, and implements special care measures to include homeless persons and keep them in care.

In this chapter we describe an approach to care that makes the care of homeless persons a specific part of the health care service. Primary health care tailored to meet the needs of homeless persons might be more effective compared to standard care and is likely to achieve higher patient-rated quality of care (Hwang & Burns 2014:1543) and better health outcomes.

## ■ Who provides health care for the homeless?

The South African Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the *National Health Act* designate to the State the responsibility to provide access to health care services. This means that public

health services have to provide care for people who cannot afford access to private pay-for-service providers or health insurance.

Homeless persons have a higher burden of disease than the general population and hence, being some of the most disadvantaged individuals in society, an equitable approach to healthcare for homeless persons is needed. We argue that in a healthcare system that aims to provide universal health coverage using a PHC model, the state not only has the responsibility to provide access to healthcare for homeless persons, but should prioritise their care.

The experience of homeless persons with the public healthcare system is contrary to what is set out as the ideal in the relevant legislation. Homeless persons lack access to healthcare, as the healthcare system discriminates against them because they are homeless, or the treatment guidelines do not include homeless-specific interventions. To address this lack of access and the gap in the healthcare system, non-governmental organisations fill the gap by providing healthcare to homeless persons. These organisations usually fall into the following categories:

- Organisations that provide a service for which there is a health need, but the specific service is not offered in the public health system. Such services include, but are not limited to, harm-reduction services such as opioid substitution therapy, needle and syringe programmes and hepatitis C treatment programmes.
- Organisations that offer services to people who might have difficulty accessing existing health care services (even though the service may already be offered in the public health care system): pre-exposure prophylaxis, antiretroviral treatment to key populations, PHC to undocumented migrants.
- Organisations that may not deliver health care services directly, but do advocacy and linkage work for people who have difficulty in accessing the public health services. These include organisations

that provide meals, training and housing to homeless persons, linkage to care and advocate in the public sphere.

- Organisations that provide care and living space for homeless persons who are ill. These organisations may hire or depend on volunteer health care workers, but are largely dependent on the public health care services for long-term follow-up, medication and supplies.

No one service can provide all-inclusive holistic care to any patient. Homeless persons make use of all levels of the public health care system: mobile clinics when they are available, PHC clinics, district and tertiary hospital care if necessary. Therefore, all of these types of organisations need to be able to link, collaborate and use existing public health services to ensure coordination and continuity of care.

We therefore argue that health care for homeless persons should be seen as a function of primary care and district care, rooted in the public health care system. In the context of South Africa's district health system, we believe that it would be prudent that each district health service approach provision of care for the homeless according to the principles of COPC, as they would for other identified at-risk populations.

The health service proposed in this chapter, and to an extent the current practice of the authors, make use of the current PHC package of care typically available throughout South Africa. While human-resources for health remain a challenge in the broader landscape in the public health care sector, the interventions described further mostly make use of existing systems and persons or organisations who additionally work towards equitable health care services for homeless persons.

## ■ **Community-oriented primary care**

Coordinated COPC provides a structured approach for health care in general and care for homeless persons in particular.

Bam et al. (2013) describe COPC as follows:

Briefly, COPC is grounded in the notion that people's health is determined by their social environment. This means that individual and population level improvements in health cannot be achieved without simultaneously changing the social determinants that shape health more generally. COPC has been summarily described as 'the merger of front-line clinical medicine with public health'. As such, COPC addresses individual health needs in the collective context of family and community. COPC is characterised by local specificity that derives from the behavioural, cultural and social characteristics of people who live in particular places. (p. 1)

In COPC we are aware of problems at home and in the person's health. It is at the home where disease symptoms first show, and where care continues to happen (dressing of wounds, safe keeping of medication, adherence, rest).

In the comprehensive care of people there is a role for the clinic, the hospital and the home. Often the home and the family are the most important parts of a care plan. With people who are homeless, the home, and more often than not the family, are absent, or do not exist. That means that a significant part of caring for a patient is absent. It is like a three-legged pot with only two legs - extra attention and special resources will always be needed to produce favourable health outcomes. A major part of the difficulty of providing health care to persons who are homeless is the lack of a home.

The ideal solution for the care of homeless persons is the provision of a home or shelter. Where that is not possible, an alternative plan needs to be made through networking and collaboration. A special emphasis must be placed on substituting the home with some form of housing or shelter, accompanied by a community of care for the individual.

COPC is guided by five core principles (cf. *COPC Principles* n.d.; Marcus 2018) as shown in Table 6.1.

**TABLE 6.1:** Core principles of community-oriented primary care.

Principles of COPC	Explained	Specific activity related to health care for homeless persons
Local health and institutional analysis	There must be community-based assessment of the problem and the solutions in specific geographical areas. The programme takes responsibility for homeless persons in an identified geographical area in a city. Homelessness is assessed in that area by going into the community and assessing the number and nature of homeless persons as well as the network of care that is available. This assessment informs and monitors interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each subdistrict or health catchment area should assess and quantify homelessness in its area of responsibility. This will mean a geographic representation of the number of homeless persons and where they usually sleep.</li> <li>• What are the health needs of homeless persons?</li> <li>• How do homeless persons access health care?</li> <li>• Which health care services do homeless persons regularly utilise, and are they at an appropriate level?</li> <li>• Are these needs being met (treatment for substance use, etc.)?</li> <li>• Where do homeless persons gather and sleep?</li> <li>• Where are homeless shelters and how are they managed?</li> <li>• Are there organisations that cater specifically to homeless persons?</li> <li>• Does the health care service have a relationship with these organisations?</li> </ul>
Comprehensive care	Comprehensive care means that all the relevant conditions and factors are identified and handled in a comprehensive manner. Attention is given to the preventive and promotive care, curative care, rehabilitation and palliation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care workers should be attuned to the realities of homelessness. Delivering comprehensive care is improved when providers are aware of the abilities of their care recipients (what they can and cannot do).</li> <li>• One way to improve comprehensive care is to employ peers as care workers similar to community health workers.</li> <li>• Providing a home is the most important part of comprehensive care.</li> </ul>

COPC, community-oriented primary care; PHC, primary health care.

Table 6.1 continues on the next page→

**TABLE 6.1 (Continues...):** Core principles of community-oriented primary care.

Principles of COPC	Explained	Specific activity related to health care for homeless persons
Equity	This principle in itself makes the care of homeless persons important as they are the people with the most needs and least resources in society. We also need to identify those amongst the homeless with the most needs and ensure that they have access to appropriate care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care to homeless persons should not only include delivering services at existing facilities, but, as this is a population with decreased access to health care, the provision of care needs to occur as close to their lived experience as possible. We therefore recommend provision of care through a mobile clinic that routinely visits sites that have a high concentration of homeless communities to deliver PHC, with integration into the whole gamut of health care services.</li> <li>• ‘Home visits’ should be done to homeless shelters, organisations that care for homeless persons and areas where homeless persons gather and sleep.</li> </ul>
Practice with science	This means that care should be informed by the best evidence available, delivered by a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral team and care should be monitored and adapted. A proper information system is part of this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research on homelessness and healthcare is ongoing and care providers need to be up to date with current treatment guidelines and advocate for their implementation.</li> <li>• The public health treatment guidelines should be updated to include the latest healthcare practices. For example, the current public health sector treatment guidelines do not cover opioid substitution therapy (OST), even though OST is considered the most effective treatment for opioid use disorder.</li> <li>• Reporting on the health and health care of homeless persons should be a specific element of the district health information system.</li> <li>• Each clinic, hospital and subdistrict or health catchment area should document, assess and adapt the care of homeless persons in its geographic area of responsibility.</li> </ul>

COPC, community-oriented primary care; PHC, primary health care.

Table 6.1 continues on the next page→

**TABLE 6.1 (Continues...):** Core principles of community-oriented primary care.

Principles of COPC	Explained	Specific activity related to health care for homeless persons
Service integration around users	Care should be coordinated around people and families. This requires person-centred care coordinated to include the homeless person and those he or she lives with.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care for homeless persons needs to be integrated; from involving the patient themselves in their care, utilising services not necessarily pertaining to health care, and coordinating care with the rest of the healthcare system. Central to this needs to be a person-centred approach that considers the patient's agency and a respect for their wishes.</li> <li>• Coordination of care of homeless persons is a particular challenge and a clear system of coordination between the health services, social services, shelters and organisations needs to be developed and maintained.</li> </ul>

COPC, community-oriented primary care; PHC, primary health care.

## ■ Emancipatory care

In this decolonizing perspective, welcoming refers to an emancipating care that is based on the recognition of the diversity and autonomy of the subjects, thus allowing the transformation of the patient-passive subject into the participatory agent of their health, disease and care process. This condition also enables and enhances the approach and dialogue between health professionals and users, reconfiguring doctor-centred relationships that preserve (and even recover) the life histories and knowledge of the individuals under treatment.<sup>29</sup> (Hallais & De Barros 2015:1502)

Emancipatory research engages issues of social justice and power relations. It seeks to transform the power relation between the researcher and the researched, that is the research is guided by the researched and the research belongs to the researched, not the researcher (Swartz & Nyamjoh 2018:1). Using the same

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29. The text was translated using Google Translate (<https://translate.google.com>).

principles of emancipatory research, emancipatory care seeks to transform the power relation between the patient and the healthcare system by providing support to vulnerable and oppressed groups 'to identify and act on social policies and practices that keep unequal power relations in place' (Kramer-Roy 2015:1211-1212). Furthermore, Hallais and De Barros (2015) posit that the diversity and autonomy as well as the needs of the individual must be recognised, and that people should actively participate in the process of their care. They are transformed into participatory agents of change in the health-disease process.

The autonomy of homeless persons is important. Often their homelessness is related to a sense of their own autonomy, but homelessness also makes them vulnerable and susceptible to be dominated by health care workers who often approach them as individual failures. In the process of caring for homeless persons, the actions and interventions must allow them to fully participate in the development of a care coordination plan for themselves, as this will acknowledge and respect their autonomy, and enable them to reclaim their dignity, agency and humanity.

The patient, the one cared for, actively participates in the continuum of care, participating in the decision-making process with the health care teams about their own health, and taking responsibility for their own and their community's health. The healthcare team provides the patient with multiple intervention options, and the patient has the responsibility to choose the option that they know will work for them. The individual, knowing themselves and their environment the best, will know which of the options will work.

Emancipatory care becomes political care. Political care addresses how care is conceptualised and, as Hoppania (2015:167) argues, that 'the politics of care' also consists of 'a struggle over recognition, redistribution and representation'. It challenges a

model of care that is based on hierarchy and economic factors. It seeks to break with 'biopower' (medicine's focus on the strictly biological): care must absorb the unexpected, the unplanned and the non-prescriptive, with the development of new research and innovative solutions. It also recognises the fact that the streets are the territory of the homeless communities, and that we are required to ensure care inside that ecology: Where the caregiver might slow down, and place themselves next to the recipients of care. It requires the caregiver to not only understand and view the territories of the homeless persons (i.e. the streets) as 'dangerous' and 'dirty', but to 'a place of permanence and residence, repression and resistance' (Hallais & De Barros 2015:1501).

This also means that respect and confidentiality need to be maintained. This kind of relationship-building requires more time than the healthcare provider is used to devoting to treatment, as well as requiring the provider to meet the patients where they are.

One ethical dilemma that the care provider might be faced with is that it might be more beneficial to focus on building the therapeutic relationship and forego certain interventions that the patient might not be interested in at that time.

**BOX 6.1:** Patient story.

A middle-aged man visited the homeless clinic seeking treatment for an eye infection. During the consultation, the health care provider realises that the patient also has a mental health disorder, with delusions and behaviour that, while not necessarily dangerous to himself or others, limits his functioning. The patient is adamant that the thoughts and behaviours are not a problem, and he only wants treatment for the eye problem. Through repeated contact and follow-up with the health care provider and other service providers, the patient was later placed in a care centre, and only then started on mental health treatment when he decided it was the correct thing to do.

## ■ Clinical care

Clinical care of homeless persons needs to take their specific situation and needs into consideration. Standard treatment guidelines and procedures are often inadequate and inappropriate for homeless persons. Continuity of care is often difficult and special measures need to be negotiated and put into place to provide quality care and achieve the aims of care. In practical terms, this means that completing standard courses of antibiotics or attending appointments might not be possible for homeless persons. With support from a homeless peer, this becomes a much more achievable task for the individual.

A positive interpersonal relationship with homeless persons is essential; this is effected by maintaining respect for the individual, upholding the person's dignity, building mutual trust and showing warmth and care (cf. Hwang & Burns 2014):

- We propose the following practical guidelines to transform clinical care practices that will seek to address the specific needs of the homeless communities (see Hwang & Burns 2014).
- Adapted clinical guidelines are available to help health care providers adjust their practice to better meet the physical and mental health needs of patients who are homeless.
- Physicians working with homeless individuals in emergency departments need to develop systems that ensure appropriate follow-up in the community.
- When homeless persons are admitted to a hospital, proactive two-way communication between hospital-based and community-based providers is essential to ensure smooth transition of care.
- Provision of health care should include collaboration between organisations with active outreach to homeless persons who are difficult to engage; health care teams that can provide general medical care, mental health care and addiction treatment and housing services. When care is provided to a person living with mental illness, the individual should be connected to local services rather than being matched to a specific programme.

## ■ Street medicine

‘Street Medicine is a systematic approach to the provision of health care to the unsheltered homeless’ (Operation Safety Net n.d.:1). According to Jim Withers, the founder of the Street Medicine Institute, Street Medicine is a ‘radical attempt to create a care relationship on the terms of those who have been largely excluded from our system of organized health care’ (Withers 2011:1). The Street Medicine Institute (n.d.) coordinates an international network of people involved in street medicine. The Institute also provides training, support, resources, guidelines and an annual international symposium.

The concepts of Street Medicine are not new to South Africa, as there are many overlaps between the philosophy and principles of street medicine and those of COPC. At the core of both Street Medicine and COPC is the building of a relationship with vulnerable people, and engaging them where they are and on their terms (cf. Operation Safety Net n.d.:1). Furthermore, both seek a holistic approach to providing health care to vulnerable communities using the best available evidence base.

Howe, Buck and Withers (2009:242) note that there are four best practice categories to ensure quality care in the implementation of street medicine:

1. ‘use of mobile clinic vans’
2. ‘development of Street Medicine-specific electronic medical records (EMRs)’
3. ‘collaboration with community clinics and providers from these clinics’
4. ‘provision of comprehensive social support by establishing links to resources such as housing, sources of income, and insurance’.

Important elements of Street Medicine include the fact that it involves peers, entails street outreach and street rounds and ensure effective referrals, and follow-up and coordination of care.

In South Africa the theories and practice of street medicine inform the specific health care for homeless persons as part of the district health system. Street medicine should not be regarded as something special outside of the health service, but as an integral part of the health service.

## ■ Embedding peers or community health workers

Community health workers (CHW) play an important role in ensuring that people have access to health and continue to access health care. Homeless peers play a role similar to that of CHWs (cf. Scheibe et al. 2020). Just as CHWs are recruited from the communities that they serve, so are homeless peers recruited from the communities they serve. Scholars have noted that ‘peer involvement [...] is widely promoted as essential to effective responses to health, social, and political challenges’ (Chang et al. 2021:1) in vulnerable communities and key populations, and that peers ‘have an important role as members of the health care teams for homeless person’ (Hwang & Burns 2014:1545). They know the streets and bridges, the people that live there, the politics and dynamics of the communities and the realities of their lives. They are in a unique position to relate to the broader homeless communities and build trust between the health care teams and the homeless communities. The peers are able to translate the concerns, ideas, fears and expectations. Peers are also trained to participate in the assessment and care of people. During street rounds and outreach, peers lead the way. Peers play an important role in the care of the community, yet despite the recognition of their meaningful contribution, Chang et al. (2021:1) state that ‘in practice there is a consistent lack of funding and political support’ to ensure the full participation of peers.

Miller et al. (2020:14) propose a number of guidelines for embedding peers or CHWs in services (Table 6.2).

**TABLE 6.2:** Guidelines for embedding peers or community health workers.

Marker	Guidelines
Role description	Clear description of role or job needed to prevent peers from assuming extra responsibilities beyond their contractual tasks, overworking and burnout.
Compensation	Transparency must be ensured in terms of compensation for the service provided so that peers can make informed choices regarding their terms of engagement. Recognition of the complexity regarding compensation and social welfare or security issues is needed. Low-waged work should be challenged especially where peer roles are demanding and complex.
Support	Support services must be available so that peers can feel emotionally supported, given the difficult nature of their roles.
Development	Training and development opportunities must be available to ensure career progression.
Value	Value and recognition of peer workers must be ensured. Peers should feel welcome and included in their workplace and by other colleagues.
Accommodation	Workplace accommodation should be in place as required by each individual's responsibilities.

Source: Miller et al. (2020:14).

## ■ Setting up care coordination for the homeless

Care coordination is defined by Lindeke et al. (2002:291) as the '[p]rocess of assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, support, and advocacy to facilitate timely access to services, promote continuity of care, and enhance family wellbeing'. Matlow et al. (2006:85) suggest that when there is '[p]oor coordination' of care, it 'can have severe impacts on the health of the individual and community' that can in turn lead to 'increased medical error, morbidity, and mortality'.

Coordination of care is required to work on three levels: (1) community level; (2) PHC clinic or community health centre and (3) hospital level:

- **At the community level:**
  - *Peers and CHWs:* Peer educators who are from the community that they deliver care in have been shown to be effective at improving health outcomes and positive

behaviour change. Peers are a necessary non-judgemental link between patients and health care workers. Peers and CHWs chosen from the community can deliver topical health-promotion messages, provide basic health care, as well as liaise with professional health workers. Peers and CHWs are essential in building relationships, trust in the health care system and ensuring continuity of care. Peers need to be part of a community health team with a team leader supported by a doctor. The team leader can be a nurse or a clinical associate. A deputy team leader from amongst the peers or CHWs is necessary.

- o *Mobile clinic:* A mobile clinic that can visit homeless persons at the site will improve access to care, improve adherence to treatment and treat minor medical problems before they escalate. The mobile clinic team should consist of peers or CHWs and a professional who can be a clinical associate, professional nurse or a doctor. This team needs to be supported by a doctor at the clinic or the hospital. The mobile clinic can be administered from a local clinic, and its supplies would be dictated by the local health analysis, specific to the community they are serving.

- **PHC clinic or community health centre:**

- o Every effort should be made to create a welcoming and non-judgemental environment at the clinic. Health care workers should acknowledge the fact that patients might need more frequent follow-ups, adherence support and might not be able to meet appointment bookings. Linking up a patient with a peer or CHW could improve adherence. In areas where there are significant numbers of homeless persons, it will be best if one of the peers or CHWs is placed at the clinic permanently to facilitate access and care coordination of homeless persons. This person is the link from the community team to the clinic and vice versa.

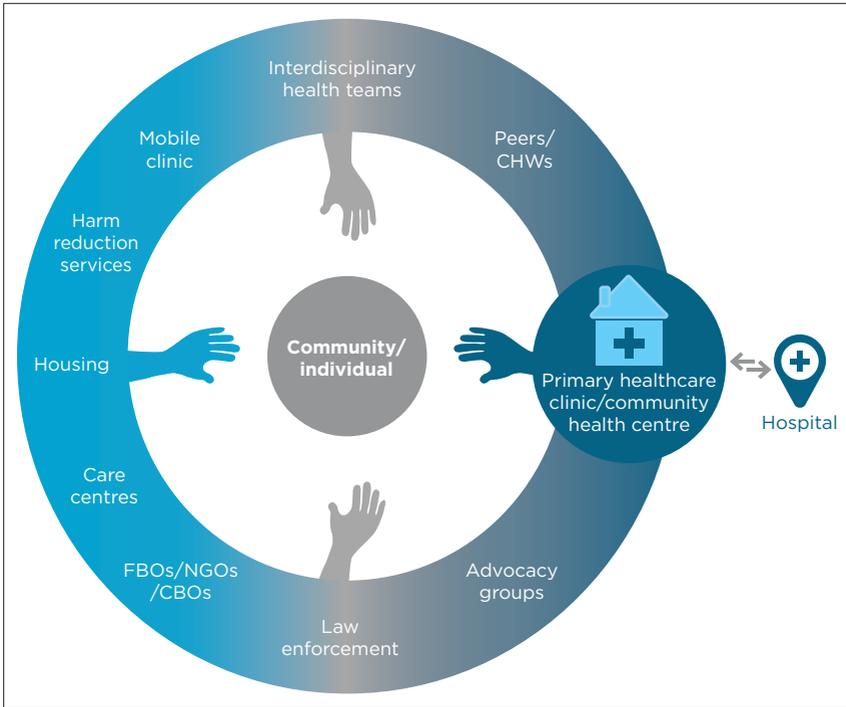
- **Hospital services:**

- o Being homeless is a risk factor for high-frequency emergency department use. Linking patients with local

services can prove effective in reducing high-frequency emergency department use. Homeless persons are also admitted for longer than the housed population. Evidence suggests that discharging patients to shelters or care centres or half-way houses reduces readmission rates. In areas where there are significant numbers of homeless persons, it is best if a team in the hospital is available to facilitate access and coordination of care of the homeless persons. This team can be led by a family physician or nursing manager in the hospital. Peers or CHWs and/or a team leader needs to be allocated permanently in the hospital to take care of this task. People from relevant NGOs and shelters also need to be part of this team. In the emergency unit, where homeless persons mostly come for care, a specific protocol needs to be in place which guides care and care coordination. A similar arrangement is needed for the OPD and wards. A regular ward round needs to be done by this team with the ward staff to identify and manage the care coordination of homeless patients.

Coordination of care must be a multidisciplinary team approach (Figure 6.1). The COPC principles of coordinated, collaborative care require those in the space of caring for homeless people to connect with each other and to build relationships that facilitate this kind of care coordination. This generally boils down to a referral pathway that can be used to up-refer or down-refer patients. On its own, a referral document in the hand of the patient who already has internalised stigma, poor communication skills and perhaps a substance use problem is worthless. What does work, however, is if a phone call is made or the person is accompanied by a peer or a CHW to facilitate the access and the outcome of that particular referral.

Out of the need to network and build these relationships, a multidisciplinary team and an important monthly meeting were born. Apart from the agenda items where we discuss common challenges in this sector, networking is promoted and strengthened. From peers to professors, NGOs to government hospitals, all



Source: Figure developed by the authors, designed by Robinne Renkin, published with permission from Robinne Renkin. CBOs, community-based organisations; CHWs, community health workers; FBOs, faith-based organisations; NGOs, non-governmental organisations.

**FIGURE 6.1:** Coordination of care.

involved interact in this forum and many solutions have been sought together, often from the ground up. In any work involving homeless people, the most important person in the multidisciplinary team is the patient.

A social media platform also allows people to interact between meetings. Many questions and requests that have been made there were solved by the collective. The patient also benefits from this dynamic and clear feedback is then given to the referee. Of course, one needs to be respectful of the patient's identity and patient-clinician confidentiality is very important for trust to be maintained. Another tool, for example, is the Road to Linked Care book, a patient-retained record developed by UP Family Medicine

(cf. Hugo et al. 2020:4), which remains with the patient or the primary caregiver and is a patient record of all the multidisciplinary care the patient is receiving. These are merely tools to improve patient outcomes and continuity of care for homeless people.

## ■ The role of local organisations in providing healthcare for homeless persons

Although the primary responsibility of providing health care to people (including housing and social security) and especially vulnerable communities lies with the government, the Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa 1996:ch. 2) that sets out these responsibilities ‘doesn’t only apply vertically (from the state downwards, to its citizens) – it also applies, where applicable, horizontally (between one citizen or private body and another)’ (Constitutional Court of South Africa n.d.). Therefore, there is also a responsibility that rests on other institutions, organisations and individuals. The responsibility in care for the homeless community takes the form of collaboration and partnerships. It is not only a vertical process, but also a horizontal one.

Grassroots organisations (NGOs, FBOs, CBOs) play an important role in the continuum of care for the homeless. Within the COPC approach, grassroots organisations have been used to host health posts and ward-based outreach teams. This has been deliberate, as they (Bam et al. 2013):

[H]ave historically established structures and links in the communities. Their familiarity with local people and practices provides a base for COPC and shortens the time it takes to develop acceptability and mutual trust. In addition, their knowledge of the communities makes a significant contribution to planning and intervention. (p. 2)

In the next section we will outline practical guidelines for local organisations and communities in terms of the collaboration in providing care to the homeless, with a specific attention to health care.

## ■ Understanding the context

As homelessness is a complex issue, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach and solution. What is required is a context-, individual- and community-specific response to address the issues of homelessness. Therefore, it is important to know and understand the context of homeless communities and individuals within the organisations' context. Models such as asset-based community development (cf. Mathie & Cunningham 2002; McKnight 2017), local institutional support assessment (LISA) (cf. Honiball & Marcus 2020; Marcus, Reji & Ngcobo 2020), pastoral or praxis cycle or cycle of praxis (cf. Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991; Holland & Henriot 1983; Peterson 2018; Torres-Sánchez 2016) or community mapping (eds. Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014:146) can be used to gain a holistic understanding of the community and the context. The above models work within the principle of including the homeless community as active participants, and acknowledging their agency in the development of pathways out of homelessness.

The individual is often the victim and blamed for being homeless. Yet the mere existence of homelessness today is the consequence of structural and institutional failures. Without an adequate understanding of the context of the community and individual, the claim that the individual is responsible for their homelessness can be perpetuated. The solutions to homelessness must thus be both systemic and individual, that is the solutions need to address the systemic issues that perpetuate homelessness, but it must also address the needs of the individual.

## ■ Outreach and building relationships

Homeless communities are continuously being excluded from mainstream life and pushed to the margins and fringes of society. Homeless communities are, as Cross et al. (2010) state, the:

[P]roverbial skeletons at the feast, the excluded poorest who enter unobserved and stand by gaunt and starved, terrifying to the invited guests but deprived of any capacity to join the party. (p. 18)

It is therefore important to understand their context, acknowledge their own agency and build meaningful, long-term trust relationships (cf. Operation Safety Net n.d.; Torres-Sánchez 2017). We should not be waiting for people from the margins to come to the centre of cities to know them. We should go and meet them where they are and within their own contexts.

Local organisations are immersed in the context of homeless communities, and this means that for many homeless communities the local organisations will be the first point of contact and introduction into the continuum of care. Therefore, the outreach- and relationship-building work of local organisations play a critical role.

As health care will be one aspect of the continuum of care, grassroots organisations with a long-term trust relationship with the homeless communities will be either connecting them to other stakeholders that feed into the continuum of care, or providing care themselves.

## ■ Know people by name

For the solutions to be person-centred, it is important to understand that although homelessness is a systemic failure, the burden of homelessness falls on the individual. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and therefore each homeless community member must be known by name (Community Solutions 2018:9). A by-name list allows for person-specific data and information that would enable tailored approaches in terms of pathways out of homelessness for each person.

## ■ Developing communities of care

A part of COPC principles is coordinating care around the families. Many people who are homeless struggle with a breakdown of their networks, families and communities. They either become part of a transient community with other people who are homeless, or find themselves alone. A new community of care

needs to be developed where a person can find a sense of belonging, care and support, and participate in communal life. Communities of care are important in the continuum of care process.

## ■ Building a continuum of care

To address the complexity of homelessness holistically, a continuum of care is required. Roux (2007:326) states that 'a continuum of empowering care for destitute people will undoubtedly call for continued and combined efforts by many role-players' and that it requires various stakeholders and role-players, including the 'destitute themselves' (Roux 2007:217).

A continuum of care process must not be developed in such a way that it creates unnecessary hurdles, too complicated or cumbersome that it no longer serves the intended purposes. It enables access to healthcare, ensuring that it is also geographically accessible. The continuum of care includes the coordination of health care, as the continuum of care goes beyond health care.

## ■ Housing

For as long as people remain homeless and cannot access adequate, secure housing, their health and quality of life will constantly decline and dissipate. In COPC we are aware of the importance of the home and the household in healthcare. A major part of the difficulty in providing healthcare to the homeless communities is that the 'home' or 'house' is absent. It is in the home where one rests, dresses wounds, keeps medication safe and, with the support of others, adherence is observed. This deficiency needs to be addressed specifically and that is why special care is needed. One important leg of healthcare will be addressed if the home can be replaced by either re-integration, communities of care or housing.

A model such as the Housing First model is required to make a significant difference in the long-term health care for vulnerable populations, and specifically homeless persons. The Housing First model 'gives homeless persons "housing first" before it does anything else' (Pleace 2012:3). Ensuring homeless persons have access to secure housing would not only improve their health and general quality of life, but will enable them to reclaim their dignity, and humanity (Operation Safety Net n.d.:13).

## ■ **Networking and participating in local structures**

Collaboration is integral in providing holistic care to vulnerable and marginalised communities. Collaboration has to be based on common goals, sharing of information, transparency, trust and commitment. It has to be an intentional process, as many organisations and institutions work in isolation and sometimes compete for the same funding.

If no local networks or structures that promote collaboration, coordination and integration of care exist, such structures need to be developed. These structures must ensure they include all relevant stakeholders (such as clinics, hospitals, community development workers, health workers, NGOs and FBOs) as well as representatives from the community itself. The participation of stakeholders must be on an asset-based principle: not what you can take from the collaboration but what you can contribute to the collaboration. Collaboration works on trust and trust is built over a long, sustained period of time.

In Table 6.3 we set out practical examples of how NGOs and/or CBOs can build partnerships with health services and participate in care.

**TABLE 6.3:** How the NGOs or CBOs build partnerships with health services and participate in care.

<b>Examples</b>	<b>Building partnerships</b>
Understand the context	Do sensitivity training for health care workers on the needs and ways to working with homeless persons Provide training and support peers or CHWs
Outreach and building relationships	Be the liaison between the patients or community and health care team, and organise time and place for street consultations or appointments Provide a place and time for health workers to do home visits in the shelters or institutions Provide structure for peers or CHWs who work with the health services
Know people by name	Be available 24/7 to assist health workers in the placement and caring of homeless persons
Developing communities of care	Participate in the care of homeless persons: keep medication, supervise treatment, assist with dressings, support and counselling, safe-keeping of patient-retained records Keep phone contact with the health care team in terms of caring for specific patients or people
Building a continuum of care	Participate in coordination of care between the different services and facilities, for example attend coordination of care ward rounds, act as a contact for health services to reach homeless persons Accompany homeless persons to health care facilities and provide transport Provide a structure for the homeless community to participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of health care to the homeless persons
Housing	Provide accommodation to peers or CHWs
Networking and participating in local structures	Develop and maintain a database of services and resources that can be accessed for the care of homeless persons Advocacy: Engage health and other authorities, managers and clinicians to ensure that homeless persons have access to care and quality of care at facilities Involve health care services in the planning and implementation of projects and institutions Provide remuneration for peers or CHWs if this is not done through the state

CBOs, community-based organisations; CHWs, Community health workers.

## ■ Conclusion

The health of homeless persons can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness. Poor access (because of individual and systemic factors) to health care often leads to disease that is complex with high rates of morbidity and mortality. Homelessness is projected to increase, especially in larger urban centres, and this should be a cause for concern for those managing and planning health services. As homelessness is a result of systemic failures that affect individuals in the most unjust and often irreparable ways, great urgency is needed in using evidence-based interventions that are equitable, effective and executable.

Homeless persons therefore need to be identified as an at-risk population that requires specialised care and interventions.

As we propose in this chapter, this can be in the form of housing provision and specialised health care services targeted at homeless persons using the principles of COPC.

While one might consider such targeted primary care as an expensive endeavour, it should be noted that the economic case for providing primary care has the following advantages (cf. Anderson et al. 2018):

- Primary care improves health outcomes, not just increasing life expectancy, but also improving mental health outcomes.
- It makes for a more efficient health system as it reduces hospital admissions and other expenses.
- It makes the health system more equitable, as it provides access to care to more people, closer to where they are situated.

Providing PHC to homeless communities should be the responsibility of the government, but it will be hard to execute without the assistance and collaboration of other organisations. These types of collaborations have been shown to transform into communities of care that are able to make a marked difference in people's lives.



# Empowerment: Finding sustainable solutions to homelessness

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## ■ A tale of three approaches

Three neighbourhoods in Cape Town are struggling with growing homelessness in their midst. There are continual complaints from residents and local businesses, daily defecation and mess that needs to be cleared up and the sight of human suffering lining every robot and under every bridge.

One neighbourhood has some scattered services available, including a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter and some field workers to encourage people to go to the shelter, or transport them back to stay with a relative. However, these approaches do not appear to be working; so residents have employed private security to stop people begging in their area and law enforcement officers give out fines for minor by-law infringements, confiscate belongings and force people to move out of the area. This simply passes on the problem to another neighbourhood to deal with.

A second neighbourhood is applying more resources including field workers, a soup kitchen, social workers, access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation, sheltered accommodation and sheltered employment opportunities. However, they are frustrated and dejected because they often see candidates drop out, referrals fail, successes turn into disappointments as relapses occur and good investments go to waste. The enthusiasm that once motivated them to step in and help needy citizens in their area is steadily being replaced by cynicism and even despair, fearing that it is 'impossible' to help the homeless. So little is achieved with the resources that are applied, that future funding is in jeopardy. The neighbourhood wants to avoid these programmes coming to a grinding halt because they feel that doing so leaves only punitive law enforcement based approaches that instinctively do more harm than good.

A third neighbourhood is also taking a proactive approach using largely the same building blocks as the second, but they are seeing lasting change. People experiencing homelessness are successfully moving off the streets, getting trained up and consistently securing work in the open labour market, with 80%

of those that complete the training remaining successful in the long term.

So the question is: How do we ensure that a precious investment of time and resources achieves a long-term outcome? Why is it that despite the same building blocks, vastly different results are achieved? How can we systematically ensure that these successes can be repeated again and again?

The answer to these questions is taking a long-term empowerment perspective to overcome homelessness. This chapter unpacks this empowerment perspective and locates it within both the capability approach and developmental thinking. Then, using the example of U-turn – an organisation working with people experiencing homelessness in Cape Town – key elements of a long-term empowerment approach are outlined, namely: (1) creating a healthy ecosystem, (2) building autonomy and (3) providing opportunities.

## ■ Facing homelessness in Cape Town

There are over 14 000 people experiencing homelessness in Cape Town and the average time on the streets is 8 years 7 months (Hopkins et al. 2020:20). The same study found that 71% have been on the streets for more than 1 year, 6% disclosed they have a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, dementia, bipolar disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder and 64% have a current drug or alcohol addiction (Hopkins et al. 2020:21). Fifty per cent are chronically homeless as they have experienced homelessness consistently for at least a year – or repeatedly over several years – while struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder or physical disability (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2020). This is significantly higher than other parts of the world where figures range between 10% and 25% (Housing Executive 2019; National Alliance to End Homelessness 2020) showing that existing programmes to help people experiencing homelessness to leave the streets are not sufficient or effective enough.

In Cape Town, four broad responses to homelessness can be found (SAHRC 2015:69; Hopkins et al. 2020:11; Payi 2021). The first is a *punitive response*, which is focused on the use of police, law enforcement or private security to stop people from being on the street. Tactics employed include breaking down structures, confiscating belongings, physically moving them out of the area or criminalising the homeless through fines and arrests for petty offences. The second is a *humanitarian response*, which focuses on the provision of relief, such as food or cash handouts provided by residents and non-profit organisation to those who are begging. Nothing is expected in return for these handouts and the motivation is primarily compassion. The third response is a *developmental response* that supports people sleeping on the streets with access to shelter, social support, substance use disorder rehabilitation and skills development and economic empowerment. The fourth response is a *rights-based response* that focuses on policy and structural changes that will both prioritise homelessness in the city and ensure the rights of the homeless are recognised and upheld.

A 2020 homelessness costing study in Cape Town calculated that the total cost of homelessness over a year in Cape Town is at least R744 million (Hopkins et al. 2020:23). This is equivalent to R51811 per person per year or R4318 per month. These costs include handouts given to homeless people on a daily basis by concerned local residents as well as urban management and law enforcement costs faced by community improvement districts and local government, and criminal justice costs borne by the government. They also include the costs borne by local government, provincial government and non-profits of providing direct services to the homeless such as 'shelter, food, ablutions, social support, skills development and economic empowerment' (Hopkins et al. 2020:4). According to Hopkins, Reaper, Vos and Brough (2020), this:

[/]s a conservative figure as there are many costs not included in this total, such as the costs of healthcare, substance use disorder rehabilitation, private security and government grants to individuals. (p. 8)

As a society, what we choose to spend our money on provides a clear picture of what we value versus what we say we value (Richards 2015). The costing study revealed that out of the total, 45% was spent on *reactive activities* such as cleaning up urban spaces and *punitive activities* such as the incarceration of people experiencing homelessness (Hopkins et al. 2020:4). The average homeless person in Cape Town is 11 times more likely to be arrested than any member of the general population (Hopkins et al. 2020:25). The reasons for arrest given in the study are primarily related to minor offences such as drug possession, by-law infringements and antisocial behaviour – a security-based response. International research – for example in Toronto, Canada – shows that a law enforcement-based approach to homelessness, such as issuing fines for begging or sleeping in public spaces, is expensive and counter-productive (Gaetz 2012:12). The first scenario in the introduction shows the impacts of a punitive, law enforcement-led approach.

Thirty-nine per cent was spent on *humanitarian activities* such as compassionate support from the public giving handouts directly to people experiencing homelessness (Hopkins et al. 2020:4). A humanitarian approach does not lead to an effective exit strategy from the streets, but instead it can actually exacerbate chronic homelessness.

Sixteen per cent was spent on *developmental activities* to meet the daily needs of a person facing homelessness as well as activities to help them leave the streets (Hopkins et al. 2020:4). Providing effective support to people experiencing homelessness to help them leave the streets sustainably requires a broad range of services, including food, shelter, drug rehab, psycho-social support, economic empowerment and access to appropriate and affordable housing options (Cross et al. 2010; Omerov et al. 2020). However, when responding to homelessness, just having the different building blocks in place is not sufficient, as shown by the second scenario in the introduction. It is not just *what* services are provided that is important, it is also *how* these services are provided that leads to a lasting difference.

A sustainable solution to homelessness requires a long-term empowerment approach to provide a sustained pathway off the streets (FEANTSA 2009:4; Tshwane Homelessness Forum et al. 2015:55).

Before exploring the key elements of an empowerment approach to homelessness, it is vital to understand the causes of homelessness, as the complexity of the causes shows the need for complex solutions.

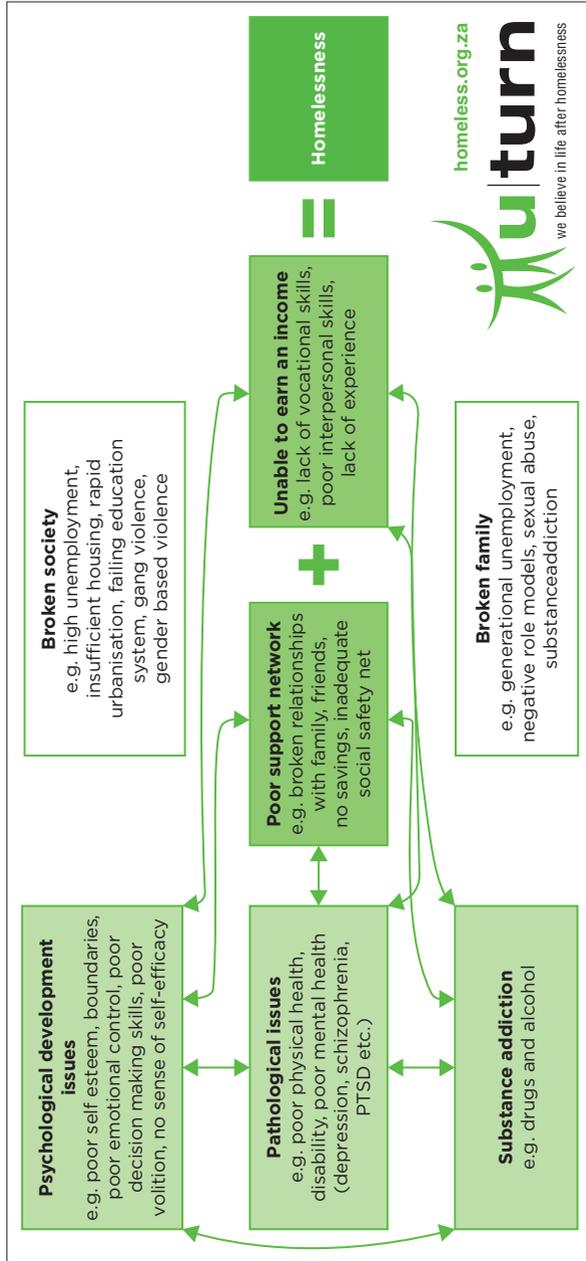
## ■ Causes of homelessness in Cape Town

The causes of homelessness are complex and far more than a simple ‘bad decision’ or a ‘bad attitude’, and the exact causes differ for each individual person living on the streets. There is also not one factor that leads to homelessness; it is when a variety of individual and systemic issues combine that they tend to lead to homelessness (see Figure 7.1).

### ■ Individual level

If an individual is unable to earn an income and they have a poor support network, it is very likely that they will become homeless. On an individual level, an inability to earn an income is driven by a lack of vocational skills or education, poor interpersonal skills or a lack of experience. A poor support network arises when family or friends are no longer willing or able to economically support an individual who is not contributing, and the individual has no savings to fall back on and there is an insufficient social safety net (De França 2018). It is when these two conditions coexist at the same time that a person is at greatest risk of becoming homeless.

These two factors in an individual’s life are themselves influenced and exacerbated by a complex array of individual-level issues such as psychological development, pathological problems and substance use disorders (addiction) (Anderson



Source: Diagram created by Sam Vos while working at U-turn, published with permission from Sam Vos.  
**FIGURE 71:** U-turn's model of the causes of homelessness.

et al. 2006:4; Hwang & Burns 2014; Seager & Tamasane 2010). Psychological development issues include low self-esteem or poor boundaries, weak emotional control, poor decision-making skills and a low volition and sense of self-efficacy. Pathological issues include poor physical health such as a disability or poor mental health such as depression, schizophrenia, bipolar etc. These factors make it harder for someone to get and retain employment and they also break down support networks because of the higher levels of care and support required. Living on the street also leads to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other mental health issues (Morrison & Mcilduff 2007). Finally, a common factor involved with homelessness is substance use disorders, which often either lead individuals into homelessness as a result of addictions spiralling out of control, or become a coping mechanism to survive the harshness of street life (Tenai & Mbewu 2020). In Cape Town the main drug of choice varies by area, but across the city the most common are tik (amphetamine), alcohol and heroin, with multiple drug use common (Dada et al. 2020:1).

## ■ Systemic level

Exacerbating individual-level causes of homelessness are a number of systemic, environmental, societal and structural issues outside of an individual's control which contribute to street homelessness. These factors not only lead to homelessness and marginalisation, but they also keep people homeless through stigmatisation and criminalisation.

From an economic perspective, the number of low-skilled workers is far outstripping the supply of low-skilled jobs and this is only going to be exacerbated by a number of macroeconomic factors such as the fourth industrial revolution. This is the trend towards automation, with certain roles being at higher risk such as food preparation, construction, cleaning, driving and agricultural work (Change Recruitment, n.d.) – that is this applies to many of the current low-skilled jobs in South Africa. This is

coupled with a poor education system that is not sufficiently preparing people to transition to the more highly skilled jobs that automation technology could bring about (Tenai & Mbewu 2020).

A lack of affordable, adequate housing in South Africa is worsening homelessness (Cross et al. 2010; Obioha 2019; Schenck et al. 2017). In 2018 there was an estimated housing backlog of 2.1–2.3 million housing units. This increased from 1.5 million in 1996 (Obioha 2019). Spatial separation of housing and employment – a consequence of the apartheid-era *Group Areas Acts* – exacerbates this problem (Tshwane Homelessness Forum et al. 2015). For example, the forcible removal of over 60 000 people from District Six in 1968 – within walking distance from the city centre – to the Cape Flats meant they were now over 25km away (SAHA 2010). Rapid population growth in urban areas as a result of high levels of rural-to-urban migration has placed extra pressure on housing availability and thus affordability. This is driven primarily by people looking for employment. Individuals migrating to urban areas – such as Cape Town – do not always have places to stay, so they therefore end up living on the streets (Schenck et al. 2017).

Domestic violence and relationship and family breakdowns are additional perpetuating factors in homelessness, as they drive individuals onto the streets, including an increasing number of women and children (Tenai & Mbewu 2020).

## ■ Summary

It is the combination of ‘poor support network’ with ‘Inability to earn an income’ that leads to homelessness and these conditions are caused by a myriad of complex individual and systemic reasons. These reasons often coexist and influence each other. Thus, when responding to homelessness, a complex response is required which works with each person for overcoming individual-level challenges, and also works to address the systemic, societal and social factors that lead to homelessness and keep people facing homelessness. This requires an empowerment approach that is discussed in more detail in the next section.

## ■ Poverty, homelessness and empowerment

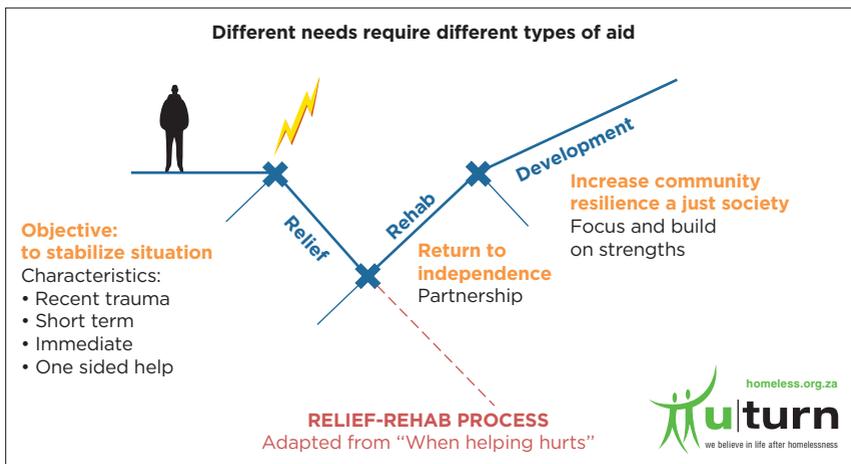
Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked and one could argue that homelessness is an extreme form of poverty (Johnsen & Watts 2014:1). Much has been written on empowerment and development from a perspective of poverty (Friedmann 1992; Sen 2000) and this link can clearly be made when discussing sustainable solutions to homelessness. Poverty is often defined in terms of income levels – or economic deficiency (Mowafi & Khawaja 2005). Homelessness is caused by more than just a lack of income, similarly, poverty cannot be reduced to economic deficiency and a broader perspective is needed. Amartya Sen defines poverty as a state in which people are deprived of the potential ability or power to act as humans. This does not mean that a higher income does not matter, rather it should be just one measure of improvement rather than the goal (Sen 2000). John Friedmann built on this by bringing in an empowerment perspective, seeing poverty as a form of social disempowerment – both institutionally and systematically. In his (dis)empowerment model, Friedmann identifies eight fundamental needs that people in poverty are deprived access to, four are basic foundations (life space, spare time, social organisation and social networks); and four are foundations for development (education, information, productive tools and financial resources) (Friedmann 1992:67). Taking both approaches together it could be said that poverty robs people of the ability to make choices.

These perspectives clearly resonate with the causes of homelessness outlined earlier and it is the perpetual disempowerment through the lack of access to sources of power, lack of opportunity and unhealthy or restrictive ecosystems that lead to people being stuck in homelessness. However, despite the above, a large proportion of activities that work with the homeless are often more ‘harmful’ than good. The next section explains why.

## ■ Moving from relief to development

Achieving empowerment as defined earlier at an individual level requires moving away from an approach that sees people as mere recipients of charity to an approach that emphasises the rights and autonomy of people. The importance of this shift in approach is clearly explained through the relief-rehab process outlined in Figure 7.2.

When working with homeless people, the first step is to determine whether they need relief, rehabilitation or development. *Relief* is the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis and the receivers are largely incapable of helping themselves at that time (Fikkert & Corbett 2009). Relief activities might include handouts of free food, clothing, shelter or even money. In the homeless space, relief was needed during the first lockdown in response to COVID-19 from 26 March 2020, when overnight street people's support networks disappeared, especially access to food. However, when this 'charity' or 'humanitarian' approach continues beyond when it is needed – instead of supporting



Source: Fikkert and Corbett (2009).

**FIGURE 7.2:** The relief-rehab process – adapted from 'When helping hurts'.

people on their pathway out of homelessness, these services are disempowering by making people even more dependent and sustaining their homelessness (FEANTSA 2009:4).

*Rehabilitation* seeks to restore people to their pre-crisis condition (Fikkert & Corbett 2009). It should begin as soon as the initial emergency is over. With people facing homelessness, the continued provision of free food or handouts actually makes them more dependent on these handouts. They are being kept in the state of homelessness with little or no power to change their situation.

*Development* is a process of ongoing change (Fikkert & Corbett 2009) that improves the quality of life and ability of the street homeless person before they were even on the street and builds resilience against future life shocks that could once again lead to homelessness, such as losing a job.

Acting only from an individual perspective, however, is not enough for development because of institutional and systemic disempowerment (Friedmann 1992). Korten's four generations of voluntary development action add another layer to this perspective. He states, 'The aspiring development agency almost inevitably becomes...merely an assistance agency engaged in relieving the more visible symptoms of underdevelopment through relief and welfare measures' (Korten 1990:113). This is the predominant experience seen in the homeless sector in Cape Town with most service provision meeting the basic needs of food or temporary shelter. For Korten, relief and welfare are a first-generation strategy. A second-generation strategy is one where the focus is on developing the capabilities of people to meet their own needs through self-reliant local action (Korten 1990:118). This can also be described as community development where individuals are mobilised and upskilled. In the homeless sector, this can be seen through organisations that work to ignite a person's desire for change and then work with them through skills training and economic empowerment programmes. Organisations conducting rehabilitation and development in terms of the Fikkert and Corbett model generally fall into this category.

Where Korten differs is adding a focus on transforming structural constraints and addressing systematic inequalities through third- and fourth-generation strategies. A third-generation strategy looks beyond the individual to seek changes in specific policies and institutions at the local, national and global levels that are systematically keeping people in poverty (Korten 1990:120). The achievement of just, sustainable and inclusive development outcomes depends on accomplishing such changes. Organisations working in this space are catalysts for change, such as the group of rights activists taking the City of Cape Town to court over the fining of homeless people for by-law offences (Kretzmann 2019:n.p.). A fourth-generation strategy according to Korten (1990) is people's movements. These are driven not by budgets or organisational structures, but rather by a vision of a better world. In Cape Town, while still in its early days, an example of this is the emergence of the Homeless Action Committee – a self-organised group of people experiencing homelessness that formed at the lockdown temporary accommodation provided by the City of Cape Town in the suburb of Strandfontein (Nowicki & Stent 2020:n.p.; Thebus 2020:n.p.).

Therefore, development from a street homelessness perspective, requires more than relief services. A focus on development from both an individual and a systemic perspective to overcome structural constraints is necessary. If a pure 'relief' model is used, this can cause more harm as it 'disempowers' an individual and does nothing to address the underlying causes that led to someone being vulnerable, becoming homeless or the factors that are keeping them on the streets. In looking for solutions to homelessness, there is one more layer that needs to be added to create meaningful, sustainable and lasting change – this is capability domains.

## ■ Empowerment and capability domains

Empowerment of people experiencing homelessness can be described as a process by which individuals and groups enhance

their capacity to be informed, take choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (FEANTSA 2009:3; Kabeer 2005). The status quo of perpetual disempowerment of people experiencing homelessness needs to be broken. This perpetual disempowerment includes a lack of access to sources of power, a lack of opportunity and unhealthy urban environments that are designed only for a wealthy minority (Kuddus, Tynan & McBryde 2020).

There are many different domains in life where this (dis)empowerment can take place. Classic empowerment domains include (Tanekenov, Fitzpatrick & Johnsen 2018:141):

- *Economic empowerment*, which focuses on the acquisition of skills, experience and competence through employment which may enable financial betterment and raise confidence (Larson, Walker & Pearce 2005; Rosenheck et al. 2006).
- *Socio-psychological empowerment*, which focuses on the development of positive self-esteem, self-efficacy and dignity through the building of social networks (Peterson et al. 2005).
- *Educational empowerment*, which includes the importance of education, skills and competence enhancement as a source of self-determination, critical consciousness and sense of individuality (Freire 1973; ed. Kincheloe 2008).
- *Political empowerment*, which highlights collective participation of vulnerable individuals in the decision-making process that can increase the power of their voice and challenge structural power imbalances as well as address systemic injustices such as lack of access to affordable accommodation or secure tenure (Croft & Beresford 1993).

The fruits of empowerment are building agency and creating capacity for those experiencing homelessness to be able to overcome the individual and structural constraints that are keeping them on the streets. To overcome this state of disempowerment requires developing capabilities – in other words, a person’s ability to have the ‘freedom to lead one type of life or another’ (Sen 1992:40).

A capabilities approach – especially as conceptualised by Martha Nussbaum (2000) – expands on the traditional empowerment literature to also look at an individual’s opportunities to achieve a variety of functions (Hick & Burchardt 2016). It enriches the conceptualisation of traditional empowerment, which is of particular relevance to the most disadvantaged groups, such as people experiencing homelessness (Tanekenov et al. 2018:142). First Nussbaum adds two key domains:

1. *Bodily empowerment*: Encompasses having reasonable physical and mental health, safe and secure living circumstances and the ability to meet other fundamental physical needs, such as access to food and basic healthcare.
2. *Creative, intellectual and self-development*: Includes activities aimed at developing a person’s capabilities in relation to developing their own ‘true self’, such as learning, play, spirituality and inner development (Nussbaum 2000).

Secondly, Nussbaum states that each of these core human capabilities is a separate component that is independently important. This means that a deficit in one area cannot be compensated for by a surplus in another. It also means that the empowerment process should thus be pursued through enhancing individuals’ capabilities in all relevant dimensions (Fitzpatrick, Bengtsson & Watts 2014; Tanekenov et al. 2018:143).

Thirdly, and especially important when working with people experiencing homelessness, everyone is different and will not need exactly the same input to achieve the same level of functioning (Nussbaum 2000; Sen 2004). Thus a ‘cookie cutter’ approach will not be effective, especially as some people will require access to a higher level of resources and over a longer period of time in order to achieve the same level of ‘functioning’ (Tanekenov et al. 2018:143).

Taken together, it is clear that a multi-dimensional approach is required to address homelessness – one that empowers people experiencing homelessness by enhancing their capabilities across the economic, psycho-social, educational, political, bodily and

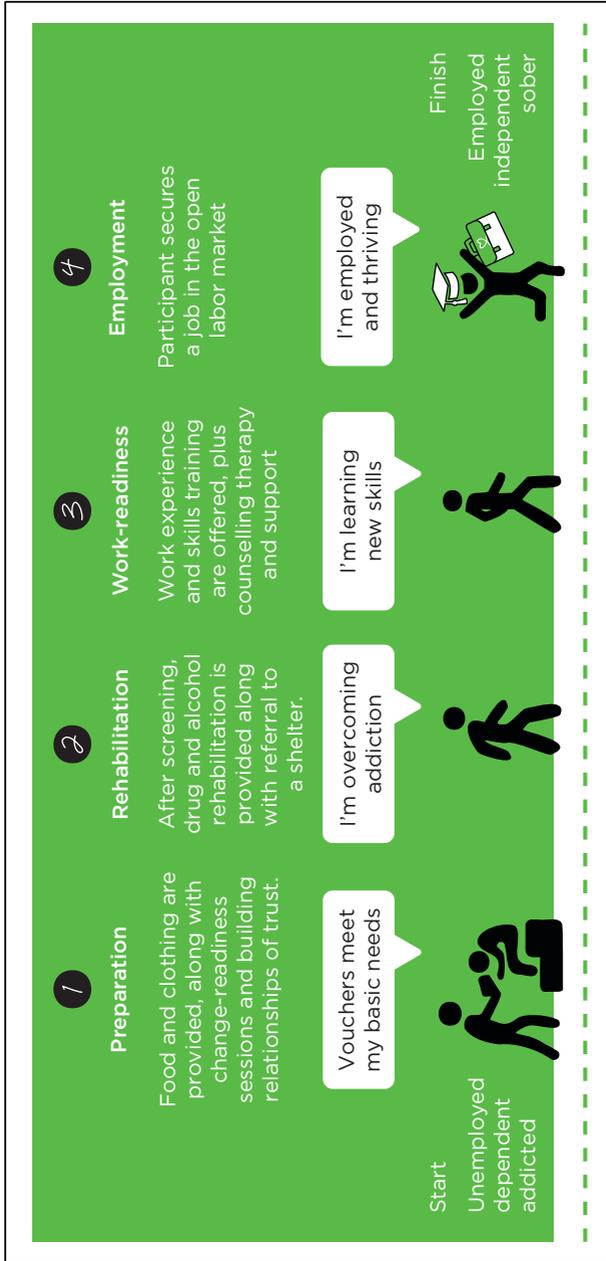
self-development domains. This kind of empowerment needs to focus not only on the individual level, but also have a structural perspective to overcome institutional and systematic disempowerment. This understanding of homelessness has been used by a non-profit organisation called U-turn to design a solution to resolve it sustainably – the remainder of the paper unpacks the U-turn model and highlights the key components that lead to its success.

## ■ U-turn: Using an empowerment approach to solve street homelessness

Three approaches to homelessness in Cape Town in three different neighbourhoods were shared at the beginning of this chapter. Only one neighbourhood manages to successfully help people experiencing homelessness to move off the streets in the long term. This is because of the work of U-turn, a non-profit organisation in Cape Town that has been working since 1997 to equip people experiencing homelessness with skills and work opportunities to overcome homelessness.

The U-turn model works across four distinct phases (see Figure 7.3) (U-turn 2021:3):

1. *Preparation*: Individuals currently living on the streets have their basic needs for food and clothing met in exchange for a voucher, which they are either given by a member of the public or earn at a U-turn Service Centre. Most people experiencing homelessness come to a U-turn Service Centre in basic survival mode and this is often accompanied by a substance use disorder. U-turn's first response is to restore dignity through therapeutic spaces and services, and meeting the individuals' basic needs such as food, shelter and building a readiness to change. They are then prepared to start a journey of change.
2. *Rehabilitation*: When a desire for change has been ignited, the rehabilitation phase begins with referral to shelter and, if



Source: Diagram created by U-turn staff, published with permission from U-turn.  
**FIGURE 7.3:** The U-turn journey to employment.

needed, drug and alcohol substance use disorder rehabilitation. Shelter fees and transportation are sponsored during this time and psychosocial support is also provided.

3. *Work-readiness*: On-the-job experience is provided in one of U-turn's eight charity stores or the clothing distribution centre. Vocational and life skills training are provided along with psycho-social support through weekly sessions with an occupational therapist or social worker. To build autonomy and resilience a solid foundation is built by working on fundamental concepts such as emotional regulation and stress responses, while specific attention is devoted to establishing a wider support network for the individual. This phase continues until the individual has mastered the skills they have been developing. This mastery develops through various self-study modules as well as work site training, which is accompanied by multidisciplinary support.
4. *Employment*: Once an individual shows mastery and has built a strong foundation of stability and resilience, they graduate into open labour market employment.

To check if the interventions have successfully empowered an individual and has built resilience, U-turn measures three outcomes on exit and then again 6 months later in order to check if the individual has been empowered and maintained their resilience. The three outcome measures are employment, stable accommodation (in bricks and mortar accommodation that is outside the shelter system) and continued recovery from a substance use disorder.

For U-turn, 6 months after an individual has completed the work-readiness programme, 83% are still under employment and recovery, and 77% have a stable accommodation – this was the average between January 2017 (when this measure was introduced) and December 2020 (U-turn 2021:3). In comparison, the 6-month follow-up data for those who chose to leave the programme early shows that 23% were employed 6 months later, 60% were still in recovery and 47% had stable accommodation.

It is the occupational therapists and case workers – in collaboration with the individual – who decide if they are ready to graduate and these data show the importance of the input of the multidisciplinary team, led by an occupational therapist, in determining readiness for exit from the programme.

At the foundation of the U-turn empowerment approach is the use of occupational therapists in the design and running of the programme. Occupational therapists provide exactly the right mix of professional expertise and skills in order to effectively set up and run an empowering rehabilitation journey for people with a history of homelessness. They are trained to assess the needs of the individual and facilitate an intervention plan whereby the service users are equipped with the skills they need, have established their support network and solidified their recovery in such a way that they display the resilience and stability to transition from dependence to independence (Marshall, Lysaght & Krupa 2018).

A key theory underpinning occupational therapy is the person-environment-occupation (PEO) model that allows for flexibility and responsiveness to changes within the empowerment domains (Baptiste 2017:143). According to this model, the interplay between the individual (person), the activity they find meaningful and fulfilling (occupation) and the environment they are engaging in determines the occupational performance of an individual. An occupational therapy approach continually reassesses the role played by each of these domains, as well as their effect on internal factors such as wellbeing, in order to facilitate optimal occupational performance. It should be noted that an occupation is any activity a person finds meaningful and fulfilling, and should not be confused with ‘an occupation’ in the sense of employment. Another aspect that the PEO Model speaks to is occupational load – this is expanded within the section on ‘Task-person fit’ discussed further.

It is noted that the U-turn programme is structured in a particular way (i.e. four phases) to address the specific causes of

homelessness in Cape Town; therefore, this model is not necessarily directly transferable. However, from the U-turn experience, some key building blocks for a sustainable empowerment approach to solve homelessness are clear, namely: (1) providing a healthy & stable ecosystem – none of this is possible if the system is disempowering or if the person is still concerned over meeting their daily survival needs such as food, shelter and safety; (2) taking time to build the autonomy and resilience of each individual; and (3) creating opportunities for learning and employment.

## ■ **Creating a healthy ecosystem**

A healthy ecosystem includes the various factors in the environment that can enable freedom and empowerment. It can be seen at an organisational level – particularly in the way programmes and services are conducted – and a systemic level addressing areas where people experiencing homelessness are excluded, stigmatised and marginalised.

## ■ **Organisational ecosystems – Consistent provision of resources required for daily survival**

The adage goes, ‘you cannot teach a hungry child’. In adult homeless spaces, it is equally important to address basic daily provisions before one tries to address more substantial behavioural and economic factors. As a first port of call of creating a healthy ecosystem, we therefore invest considerable energy to ensure that our service centres are strong enough to provide the things needed for daily survival.

A service user needs to realise that they no longer need to worry about daily food, neither at present nor as they contemplate further rehabilitative steps that the organisation is offering. The best way to create this realisation is through consistent service delivery that is not subject to whimsical and unpredictable rules.

The rules must be clear and applied consistently. As far as humanly possible, disruption to services must be communicated several days in advance so that people can plan.

Service users should also feel safe to spend time in the physical space where the services are being offered. This involves having clear boundaries, having a zero tolerance of threatening behaviour, even providing security where needed (always leaning on fairness and the published rules). Only once these are in place will an individual be able to consider the options being held out to them.

## ■ **Organisational ecosystems – Creating therapeutic spaces and services**

Key to providing services to people experiencing homelessness is ensuring that the spaces where services or work experience is provided are therapeutic, in other words, they are empowering. A key part of this is treating people with dignity and respect. For people experiencing homelessness, more important than the actual provision of support is sometimes the feeling of being heard and respected as an equally important and valuable person (FEANTSA 2009:6). Creating a dignified environment can be as simple as providing a meal around a table with proper cutlery and plates rather than one handed out in takeaway cartons to eat on the street. It is also about being aware of power relations between staff and service users, and giving people time. Many people experiencing homelessness have had bad experiences with support services and it takes time to rebuild a relationship of trust.

It is not just the way services are designed that is important, but also every interaction that staff have with a service user and ensuring it is not disempowering. For example, from something as small as giving people the choice whether to have sugar in coffee or not, all the way through to discussing work placements, giving a service user choice in decisions – especially those that affect their life is very important. Being conscious about this avoids taking power away from service users (i.e. disempowering them) by making decisions on their behalf (FEANTSA 2009:7).

In the U-turn work-readiness programme, participants are given responsibilities based on trust, such as handling cash in one of the U-turn retail stores. This often surprises the participants as they wonder why trust is placed in them given their past and this is because the therapeutic team sees their potential when they themselves do not yet.

Creating therapeutic services includes the language used to describe those accessing services. U-turn calls everyone on the work-readiness programme 'Champions' – or 'Champs' for short. Equally important is not saying 'the homeless', or 'vagrants' as these labels dehumanise. Person-first language should be used instead, for example, 'people experiencing homelessness' (Palmer 2018:1). This empowering language is important as it helps build self-esteem and autonomy.

Participation in service delivery is also important – as is involvement in providing feedback. At U-turn there are work spaces for those on the third phase of the programme at the drop-in centres where the first phase of the programme takes place. This participation provides a motivating role model for those just starting out on a journey of change. The feedback on how to improve service provision is provided to management by those on the third phase who have experienced homelessness and know how the services can be improved.

The antithesis to a therapeutic space is a system that is set up and provides hope but then cannot follow through or does not provide sufficient support or for a long enough time – for example, the 3- or 6-month limit in many Cape Town shelters, or services that are substandard such as shelters with flea infestations (Stent 2020). This then becomes disempowering, making it harder to work with someone again in the future and leads to people 'choosing' the streets over shelters.

A final aspect of creating a therapeutic environment is that participation should be voluntary, not forced. Services offered as the next step should be so enticing and achievable that the person chooses to take the next step, that is people are pulled

through the programme. The alternative to this is the very destructive ‘forced participation’ where individuals are rounded up from the streets, being told that they have to attend a specific programme and that failing to participate will lead to punitive measures. Such push systems are utterly destructive. They operate on fear, remove a person’s choice and free will and fail to recognise what the person’s perceived needs are and their confidence levels are to attempt new things. All of these greatly increase the chance of failure or even outright rebellion leading to long-term challenges in addressing homelessness.

## ■ **Systemic level – Standing up for the rights of people experiencing homelessness**

To create a healthy ecosystem it is vital to report the policies, programmes and practices that systematically exclude, stigmatise and marginalise people experiencing homelessness.

While the rights of people experiencing homelessness are still being violated daily, there are examples of some push-back. One example is the case *Gelderbloem versus the City of Cape Town*, where 11 people experiencing homelessness took the City to Court for ‘unfairly’ fining them for by-law infringements. The order from the Western Cape High Court prohibited City of Cape Town authorities from fining and confiscating property belonging to people living on the streets and ‘prohibits the City from harassing or abusing homeless people’ (Kretzmann 2019:n.p.). A review of whether the City’s by-laws affecting homeless people are unconstitutional is set to be heard sometime in 2021.

A second example is the *Inkathalo Conversations*, which are both trying to give a voice to people experiencing homelessness and also trying to change the narrative. These conversations ran from August to November 2020 and created a space for caring conversations to take place, where ‘we listen with care, we speak with care, we ponder with care [...] in order to advance and deepen who we are as a people, as a country and as a democracy’ (Inkathalo Conversations 2020:n.p.). The aims of the conversations

included facilitating dialogue on homelessness in Cape Town among diverse stakeholders, and specifically those who live on the street, and providing raw data on and recommendations for the City's Street People Policy review processes and the design of a strategy.

There is still much more to be done, but these are developments in the right direction to overcome the systemic and institutional disempowerment faced by people experiencing homelessness.

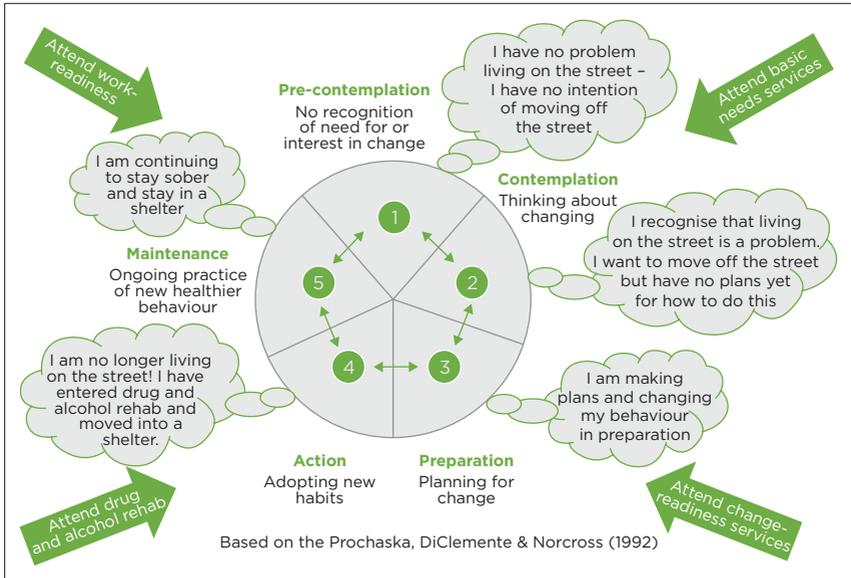
## ■ Building autonomy and agency

Being able to make your own decisions is at the core of empowerment (FEANTSA 2009:11). 'Personal autonomy is the capacity to decide for oneself and pursue a course of action in one's life' (Dryden n.d.). This section looks at some key principles that need to be in place within any programme in order to successfully build lasting autonomy and agency.

## ■ Preparing for change

Many programmes with people experiencing homelessness launch straight into an activity, such as job readiness classes, referral to a rehab or life skills sessions. However, assuming someone is ready for change just because an opportunity is offered, or even because they say they are, often leads to high drop-out levels. This is damaging as repeated 'failures' make it harder over time to work with the chronically homeless as they get 'stuck' in what they see as a hopeless and interminable situation (Farrell 2010). Experience at U-turn has shown that it is important to prepare people experiencing homelessness – especially the chronically homeless – for change.

In order to prepare people for change, it is important to understand some behaviour change theory such as the stages of change model (see Figure 7.4) (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross 1992).



Source: Adapted from Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross (1992).

**FIGURE 7.4:** U-turn's adaptation of the stages of change model.

The first stage is pre-contemplation – referring to an individual who has no intention to take action in the next six months and is generally unaware that change is possible. At U-turn, the majority of people experiencing homelessness who walk through the door are after food or clothing and are in survival mode. Through engagement with them in a safe, stable and therapeutic environment and using an empowering way, as outlined in the previous section, individuals can be moved to the contemplation stage, when they become aware that a problem exists, but have not yet made a commitment to take action. They realise change is possible, but that it requires commitment and hard work for lasting change to occur. At this point, the process of change has started and, with support, the individual can transition to the preparation phase then to action and finally maintenance where the individual is continuing to work to maintain the change.

While this model can be used for many different areas of behaviour change, the example given in Figure 7.4 is one

frequently seen at U-turn as over 75% of service users have a substance use disorder and this acts as a barrier to them leaving the streets. U-turn does not prescribe that service users should give up their substance use, but they need to overcome their substance use disorder – whether through sobriety or a harm-reduction approach – in order to effectively proceed through the rest of the programme.

Given the complexity of homelessness (Salhi et al. 2018), there can be many cycles of change happening concurrently as well as consecutively. For example, as soon as an individual is in the maintenance phase of overcoming a substance use disorder, other cycles of change are needed, for example, in the sphere of employment.

## ■ Task-person fit

One of the most important principles in building autonomy in the U-turn work-readiness programme is the concept of grading, also known as task-person fit. Task-person fit refers to the situation where each task provided to the Champion is attainable but a challenge, for example, requires them to be equipped with new skills to attain achievement (Law et al. 1996). A simple example is that there may be a problem with a Champion's accommodation and they need to find somewhere else to stay. At the very basic level is a therapist-directed approach where the case worker calls different shelters and finds new accommodation for the Champion to stay at. This is not empowering but confirms dependence on the case worker. Alternatively, if assessment shows that the Champion is able, the case worker could provide the Champion with a list of shelters and a phone, and facilitate the process of the Champion calling around to find a new place to stay. At the most independent level is a service-user directed approach where the case worker could simply tell the Champion to find somewhere else to stay and then the Champion has to figure out how to do this.

The most important thing about task–person fit is not making the challenge too difficult, but assessing the appropriate level of challenge (Law et al. 1996). It is also important to recognise the fact that the Champion needs to be challenged in many different areas at the same time, from work, to home, to finances, to family etc. To support this, the U-turn work-readiness team consists of occupational therapists, a counsellor, a social worker and a life coach, to allow for a multidisciplinary approach. Also, there are ingrained goals throughout the programme to provide challenges, opportunities and growth. This is then coupled with the Champion’s own goals, which allows them to be suitably challenged, which in turn results in growth and improved capacity or capabilities.

## ■ Client-centred practice

For the task–person fit approach to work, the programme needs to be based upon client-centred practice. Every person has a different history, challenges, needs, desires and goals. Therefore, even while having a standard progression through the work-readiness programme, it is heavily individualised with occupational therapists formulating tailored individual intervention plans. Occupational therapists are uniquely prepared to deal with the intricate interaction of motivation, habituation and personal causation (Boisvert et al. 2008).

Part of this client-centred practice is assessing readiness for the work-readiness programme. This is achieved through the Creative Participation Assessment (CPA) from Vona du Toit’s Model of Creative Ability (VdTMoCA). The fundamental principle of creative ability is that motivation governs action and the quality of an individual’s motivation can be observed through their action or activity participation (Van der Reyden et al. 2019). The CPA enables the occupational therapists to assess a Champion’s level of participation in day-to-day living by looking at specific occupational performance areas, such as personal management, social participation, work and leisure. This allows

the occupational therapists to assess whether or not the programme is suitable for the individual, or if a further referral is required. If it is suitable, they can then use the results of this assessment to assist with forming an intervention plan.

## ■ Positive feedback systems

The work-readiness programme makes use of a positive feedback system whereby Champions are rewarded for growth and improvements by way of an incentive system. Each Champion is scored on a range of criteria – from being on time at work, to showing a positive attitude – and at the end of each month the two Champions with the highest scores receive an extra day's leave from their work site as a prize. This system is complemented with regular feedback from their team leader, support towards goal accomplishment and being equipped with the necessary skills to maintain and improve their independence through group sessions with an occupational therapist and individual sessions with their case worker or counsellor. Taken together, this directly impacts on their level of motivation and drive, which also builds increased confidence and self-esteem. Adults can be motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically by being placed in appropriate challenging environments and understanding the meaning behind the learning (Collins 2004).

## ■ Support systems

A support system is vital for individuals overcoming homelessness – especially as a breakdown of support systems was identified as one of the leading causes of homelessness. This includes family reconciliation; however this is not the only aspect as sometimes the family environment can be particularly toxic. Individuals are encouraged and assisted to explore different environments to build up their support network. This can be in the form of support groups, churches and sporting groups, to name a few. Empowering individuals to take a share

of control over their immediate environment within the community helps them to reshape their perception of themselves and their ability to influence their own lives and the lives of others (Boisvert et al. 2008).

## ■ Resilience

Resilience is defined as the ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events (Hurley 2020). When working with people who have experienced homelessness, resilience is important as it is common that one or a series of events have led to a person ending up on the street, and so to avoid this happening again, not only is healing needed but also resilience to ensure it does not happen again.

Resilience is a multi-dimensional construct and, according to Taormina (2015), is made up of four dimensions: determination, endurance, adaptability and recuperability. These dimensions are all internal characteristics that every person possesses to some degree and this personal resilience can be increased by strengthening any one or all of these characteristics (Taormina 2015).

The entire U-turn programme from start to finish is facilitated in a way that encourages the development of each of these dimensions of resilience. At the start, the service user leans heavily on the support provided by the U-turn ecosystem. Using the techniques discussed earlier, such as task-person fit, skills development and client-centred practice the individual is assisted to develop and realise their capabilities, their growth areas and their potential. The team is there to support them and to facilitate the establishment and strengthening of an extended support system. Through this learning cycle, each Champion is then better equipped to face challenges, ask for assistance and to recover from difficulties once they leave U-turn. In so doing, the programme not only provides the initial 'support network' but also assists the individual to cultivate a healthy support network and resilience of their own.

## ■ Long-term rehabilitation

Many programmes developed for people facing homelessness stop as soon as an individual is placed in a shelter, or sent back to their family. As is clear throughout this section, building autonomy and the resilience to maintain that autonomy takes time. It is not something that can be accomplished in a matter of weeks. The average length of time for the whole U-turn journey through Phases 1-4 is approximately 2.5 years, with the majority of this time – 18 months – spent in the work-readiness phase. However, as the programme is client-centred and tailored to each individual, the length of time for completion varies, with some Champions taking 12 months to complete the programme and others taking more than 2 years as they need more time to adopt certain behaviours or skills in order to increase their independence and resilience. The therapeutic team encourages and facilitates this long-term growth and also ensures that continual change and progress are taking place, lest the safe environment becomes a basis for complacency or comfort. Only once a Champion shows mastery and has built a strong level of stability and resilience, do they graduate into open labour market employment. In other words, an individual is purposely set up for success throughout the programme.

## ■ Providing opportunities

Creating the therapeutic environment and building autonomy are both key to an effective empowerment approach to support those who want to overcome homelessness, but it is also important to provide the correct resources and opportunities at the right time – especially to a group that has been systematically excluded and marginalised. Key to this is the concept of experiential learning and the provision of suitable occupational activities.

## ■ Enabling engagement in the programme

Many skills-training programmes in South Africa have a high barrier to entry. At the highest level are full-time paid courses –

such as a university degree – that require the participant to have the financial resources to pay the course fees and have the resources not to have to work while they are completing the course. The next level down is full-time courses with no course fees, such as job-readiness courses. While these courses are ‘free’, they still require an individual to have the funds available to travel to and from the course location and also be able to cover food and accommodation expenses while they are doing the course (or have someone within their social support network that can cover these costs for them).

For people experiencing homelessness, these barriers to entry automatically preclude them from accessing either opportunity as, even with a free course, they need to ensure they are earning enough money through informal employment or begging each day to buy food or pay for shelter fees. In order to allow people experiencing homelessness to access opportunities for work-readiness and skills training, it is essential to also provide a stipend. As already mentioned, consistent provision of basic survival needs such as food is a precursor to change. In the same way, the stipend enables them to participate because it is used to cover food, accommodation and transport to their place of work or training.

## ■ **Experiential learning**

The model used to achieve skills development is on-the-job training in supervised work environments. The Champions are immersed in the world of work (retail, distribution and e-commerce) and supervised and guided by team leaders. They attend weekly training sessions where they have the opportunity to attend occupational therapy sessions, counselling sessions, life skills groups, computer skills, literacy lessons etc. The Champions are then encouraged to take what they have learned at the training site and apply it at their work site. This system of learning and applying continues throughout the programme.

The work-readiness programme follows Malcolm Knowles’s (1970) principles of adult learning, which include the following

features: autonomous and self-directed; accumulate a foundation of experiences and knowledge; goal oriented; relevancy oriented; practical and need to be shown respect (Knowles 1970). An environment conducive to learning, growth and change is created by encouraging independence and Champions setting their own goals, having on-the-job training and developing practical life skills and work skills in groups as well as in individual sessions. These are all key components highlighted in the empowerment and capability literature mentioned earlier. This does not mean the Champions are immune to failure, but does mean that there is an opportunity to use failure as a learning moment. It also models what will be expected of the Champions once they graduate into the open labour market. Having built up resilience, equipped themselves with skills and built a solid foundation when it comes to their self-awareness, the Champions are able to face challenges head-on and bounce back if things do not work out the way they intended.

## ■ Suitable occupational activities

The work-readiness programme currently utilises the retail sector. Although Champions have different interests and not all are planning to continue in a retail profession after completion, the retail sector offers a broad variety of transferrable skills (Nägele & Stalder 2017), including work skills, such as professionalism and punctuality, as well as people skills such as customer service, teamwork and even team management for those who are training to become store supervisors.

Another reason why retail has been chosen is that there are a large number of jobs in retail or related sectors. The first occupational activity U-turn tried was graffiti removal. This did not provide as broad a variety of transferrable skills and also did not have a large number of possibilities for obtaining work after leaving U-turn.

The work-readiness programme also provides vocational skills training that help a Champion to secure employment. These

include computer skills training and opportunities for Champions to get their learner's and driver's licenses. These are all increasingly vital components on a CV. Other opportunities also exist with partner organisations where Champions can elect to engage in short course or studies, such as barista training, welding, addiction counselling, photography or studying at night school for either Grade 9 or Matric.

Choosing the area of work is therefore essential because the ultimate goal is not merely keeping people busy, but imparting valuable skills which will assist each individual to earn an income in the open labour market. In so doing, the programme prepares the participant to 'Earn an income'.

## ■ A need for scale

As highlighted above, the U-turn phased model, led by occupational therapists has consistently provided a pathway off the street for people experiencing homelessness with more than an 80% success rate on completion of the programme repeated each year since 2017. U-turn, while one of the larger organisations working with people experiencing homelessness in Cape Town, is still working on a scale that is too small to provide the change needed at a city-wide level. At the end of 2020, there were drop-in centres in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town and Mitchells Plain, while the work-readiness programme had 34 work spaces which is due to grow to 45 by the end of 2021 (U-turn 2021:9). The geographical spread and programme size is currently too small to provide effective pathways off the street for the 14 000 people currently experiencing homelessness in Cape Town. U-turn posits that if the number of work-readiness spaces were to increase to between 250 and 500 spaces, only then will the city start to see a noticeable reduction in street homelessness. To provide individuals for these work-readiness spaces, the number of drop-in centres providing phases 1 and 2 of the U-turn model will need to spread across the City, coupled with an increase in accommodation and substance rehabilitation services.

## ■ Conclusion

Homelessness in Cape Town and in South Africa is not inevitable. It can be solved. The solution is taking a multi-dimensional long-term empowerment approach to enhance the capabilities of people who are living on the streets to help them overcome homelessness. The U-turn approach combines the key elements of an empowerment approach. A healthy ecosystem is created through the use of occupational therapists who create therapeutic spaces and monitor readiness for change. Autonomy is built through preparing someone for change and then using task-person fit to grade the jobs and grade the tasks so people are set up for success and not failure. In order to get the grading right, occupational therapists are used as they are specifically trained in this area and the process is repeated over a long period of time until resilience is achieved. Opportunities are provided in a carefully designed sequence to people who are optimally poised to make use of that opportunity through experiential learning.

Approaches such as these need to be scaled up if homelessness has to be ended in Cape Town, but an organisational or individual-level approach alone is not sufficient. More concerted efforts are needed to address the perpetual disempowerment of people experiencing homelessness as a result of unhealthy ecosystems and institutional injustices that leads, for example, to the fining of people for sleeping on the street because they have nowhere else to go.

It is clear how to solve homelessness in Cape Town. The question now is: Do we have the desire and political to scale this sustainable solution?

# Sharing the table: Reflections on the engagement of faith- based communities with homelessness in three South African cities

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## ■ Introduction

The option for the poor is a substantive theological concept, i.e., it is scripturally located, developed in the tradition, and systematically conceived in modern theology. It challenges theology to dislocate itself from its abstract universality and find a locus theologicus in the concrete realities of our time. This preferential love for the poor is both personal and social. The option for the poor only becomes real when it is concretized in history in the lives of people who are poor and impoverished, roofless and homeless. (Regan 2019:29)

Most religious beliefs have at their foundation the guiding principle to live not only for one's own wellbeing but also for that of others. The sacred texts of many religions offer the adherent guidelines on how to respond to inequality with acts of mercy and justice. Actors of faith across the globe can be found located at all levels of society relating to the most vulnerable members of their society in diverse ways. These acts of mercy, justice or solidarity often fill the societal gaps in providing for basic humanitarian needs. Sometimes, however, religious institutions participate in the systems that entrench poverty and oppression (or even enact these very structural oppressions). At other times, they may be impassive or attempt to remain neutral in the presence of injustice. Either way, religious commitment finds itself in some form of relationship with issues of inequality and injustice, not least of all in the relationship between people and communities who are homeless and the religious communities with whom they share a neighbourhood.

A book that seeks to address the challenge of street homelessness in post-apartheid South Africa must take into account two prominent features of our context: the entrenched

structural racism, inequality and socio-spatial injustice that is the legacy of colonialism and apartheid and the reality of religious belief and practices in all parts of our national consciousness. Some South African theologians and religious communities have a history – albeit sometimes as a voice in the wilderness – of bringing the politics of the struggle against injustice into conversation with religious communities. The Kairos document, for example, launched by South African theologians, clergy and activists in 1985, called any theology that supported apartheid, or ignored its evils, a heresy. Vellem (2010) asks us to imagine that the Kairos document (alongside the Belhar Confession) was like a:

[B]low of a home-grown liberation theology, a decisive irruption of a voice in the burning townships and a powerful wave that ruptured the approach of doing theology in South Africa from the colonial and neo-colonial assumptions that captivated the churches in South Africa for centuries. (p. 2)

He also described as a prophetic voice the Accra Confession, issued by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 2004 that affirmed the commitment towards global economic justice (Vellem 2010:5).

Regan (2019:31), in a specific focus on homelessness and Catholic social teaching, reminds us of the questions raised during the 1987 Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace: ‘the homeless poor were “waiting for a concrete answer and [...] for a bold social policy”’. However, today, they are still waiting as homelessness has become a major global human rights crisis with the various categories of those at risk ever expanding.

In recent months, as we have watched the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty and inequality, the faith communities of South Africa have been ushered into another moment that – if we heed the call – could echo Belhar, Kairos, Accra and the many other faith movements that align themselves with social justice. Of course, as with prophetic moments that have happened earlier, no religion or faith group embraces such

commitment to justice across all its expressions. This moment and this focus on the multi-layered societal injustice of homelessness is no different. When a national lockdown was announced in March 2020, with the clear instructions to citizens to 'Stay at home', people across South Africa without homes could not help but ask: 'Where?'. In this chapter, we will attempt, through stories, theological reflections and self-critique, to describe something of the current relationship between homelessness and faith in each of the three cities mentioned and ask in light of what has surfaced in 2020: 'What could we become?'

We three authors - Raymond Perrier from the Denis Hurley Centre in Durban, Caroline Powell from The Warehouse Trust in Cape Town and De la Harpe le Roux from Towers of Hope in Bloemfontein - are immersed in our cities through the work of organisations rooted in the Christian tradition and through ecumenical, interdisciplinary and in some cases interfaith initiatives. Our individual voices are reflected in the first person under each city story in order to offer our personal experiences, reflections and viewpoints to this vast conversation.<sup>30</sup>

## **■ Faith-based interventions through the lens of Korten's four generations of development**

Perhaps because of the visual nature of the suffering of homeless people in society, responses are frequently associated with charity, mercy and relief. Religious organisations are criticised when their responses remain at this level of intervention. A far greater spectrum of response is necessary, requiring greater levels of interdisciplinary collaboration and organisation. A theoretical framework, outlining four generations of development, offers us a

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30. The content under each city section reflects the unique voice and style of each writer, while the introduction, framing and conclusion to the chapter reflect the combined voices and reflections of all three authors.

helpful lens through which to read the stories coming from our different cities, as we seek to face homelessness together. Korten (1990:113) suggests that development agencies operate with four primary areas of focused action, calling them four generations of development: (1) first generation: delivery of relief and welfare services to alleviate immediate suffering; (2) second generation: community development interventions to build capacity for self-help action; (3) third generation: policy and institutional change in support of more just, sustainable and inclusive development outcomes; and (4) fourth generation: facilitation of broadly based people's movements driven by a social vision.

Korten's framework was interpreted for religious organisations in South Africa by Swart and Venter (2000:449-464), using a case study of development programmes in a few Cape Town churches. Through their research with churches, the authors estimated that of all social interventions after 1994, all but one of the programmes remained at the level of relief and welfare (first generation) and none progressed beyond community development (second generation). Nearly 20 years later Bowers du Toit and Nkomo (2014:7-8) found the same trend in religious organisations as they explored congregational expressions of welfare, development and restitution through research with church leaders in Cape Town. They observe that building relationships across divides supports the movement from charity to development as well as the possibility of movement towards restitution and reconciliation, stressing that a theological understanding of poverty and injustice led by an engaged clergy should be at the heart of such a movement.

Swart and Venter (2000:461) remark that for religious organisations to embrace a movement towards the third and fourth generations of development, this would need to take place 'on the basis of an extended dialectical, reflexive, cooperative, collective and political framework' and that they 'would have to exchange existing absolute religious, theological and ideological identities for new ones of solidarity'.

As practitioners facing the daily challenges and complexity of both homelessness and religious organisations, we do not interpret Korten's generations as steps on a ladder requiring graduation from one to the next, but more as parallel commitments that require equal attention, especially if we are to act in solidarity with those who are homeless in our cities. Our stories show that it remains a challenge even in 2020 to bring equal resources to these ideological, even theological, commitments. To truly honour these commitments equally we do require, as Swart and Venter (2000:461) suggested, an exchange of absolute identities for solidarities that require radical revisiting of our beliefs and sacred texts. We believe, and see in our stories, that 'facing homelessness' in our cities has the potential to aid such a transformation in religious organisations. In bringing our stories together, we also recognise that actors of faith and religious organisations bring something unique to these multi-layered conversations and urban ecosystems. In our imperfection, we can tend to the souls of our cities, with and beyond these developmental paradigms.

## ■ Durban: A table in the city where all are welcome

A Christian NGO serves breakfast for 1500 homeless people, a Hindu corporate provides lunch, Muslim community groups deliver supper – and the Jewish club provides refreshments for all the workers. (Bhengu 2020:n.p.)

The above comment appeared in several newspaper stories in April 2020 reporting on Durban's response to protecting homeless people during the COVID-19 lockdown. We have a well-founded reputation for interfaith collaboration – not just the churches, mosques and temples but also NGOs, corporates and community groups. This part of the chapter reflects on Durban's successes and shortfalls in collaboration, and how we have made some progress through Korten's generations of development.

The Denis Hurley Centre, in Durban's city centre, is named after the man who was the Catholic Archbishop for 45 years and celebrates a rich Catholic history and current praxis (Denis Hurley Centre 2020). However, as close as the Cathedral is to us on one side, the historic Grey Street Mosque sits on the other side. The sound of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer mixes with hymns coming from the Cathedral.

This interfaith collaboration is expressing something that has been true of the city since its founding. Durban is not a Christian city that the Muslims came to but rather is a place where all religious groups arrived within a few decades of each other and which they thus created side by side.

Funding for the Denis Hurley Centre comes from all the faith communities. This includes not only the interfaith partners but also all parts of the Christian community, even those not traditionally involved in ecumenical work. What explains this interfaith and ecumenical collaboration? It would be good to be able to say that this is a defining feature of people of faith: an extension of Tertullian's famous remark: 'See how these Christians love one another!' But clearly the history of Christianity, let alone its relations with other religions, has rarely been one of cooperation and mutual respect. All faith traditions motivate their followers to do good works for the poor. But they usually see this as something to be done separately, not in partnership. In fact, while the Qur'an discourages rivalry between people of faith, it encourages it when it comes to charity: 'Compete with one another in good works' (Quran 5.48).

My own Catholic faith tradition has a good record of serving people of all faiths, but a bad record of serving with people of all faiths. The 1989 vision statement for the Catholic Church in South Africa was 'Community Serving Humanity'. The openness of 'serving Humanity' is rightly applauded - but what is not remarked on is the emphasis that it is a particular (Catholic) Community doing the serving.

In Durban, it is different. The presupposition is that, however, much one community might be able to achieve, it can do much more when that community is working with other communities to serve humanity. This happens partly because no one faith dominates in the history of the city. But it is also part of a general culture of collaboration in Durban across all areas. In larger cities, institutions are usually big enough to succeed on their own. In smaller cities, there just are not enough institutions for much networking to take place. But in a larger city (3.5 million people), the institutions all do better by working together than by competing with each other or ignoring each other.

Membership of the Durban Homeless Network exemplifies this. It includes NGOs, corporates, academics and homeless people themselves. But equally interestingly, its members come from a wide gamut of faith traditions: Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Evangelical, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish. Thus, prayers at meetings draw on the range of traditions but seem to be able to inspire everyone. We each draw sustenance from our different roots but, by working together, our branches are broad and strong.

So with all these resources and collaboration, how well do we do in equal commitment to Korten's four generations?

Much of the work that is done by religious organisations is at the first-generation level – relief and welfare – and that is where the need is most visible. The HSRC conducted a comprehensive survey in 2016 about homelessness in Durban (Timol et al. 2016). It substantiated what is very clear from a drive through the city – that the vast majority are young South African men (of all colours) who came to the city looking for work, did not find work and ended up on the streets.

So, as in all cities, we need to balance relief with sufficient work at the other levels. At the Denis Hurley Centre, we have had some success with this. Our nutrition and healthcare programmes look initially as if they are classic first-generation activities – and

in so far as they are, we are not ashamed of that. But we have been able to move towards the second generation: community development interventions to build capacity for self-help action.

For example, a Catholic Church in an affluent neighbourhood had many volunteers coming to us to serve food and so thought that they should do something at their own church site. At first, they handed out sandwiches through the fence to people, who sat on the kerbside to eat. But after a while, they saw that they could do more and opened the gate and invited them in. Strengthened by this experience, they started putting out tables and chairs; now they plan to spend R1 million to remodel part of their site to provide a permanent place for the dignified serving of food and access to ablutions. They have prioritised employing homeless people to do jobs on their site. And once a year, they bring a small group of teenagers to us to spend the night sleeping alongside the homeless and then getting up and preparing lunch for them. Step by step, their undeniable Christian generosity has been matched with courage; the community has overcome its fears and inertia to act with greater mercy.

Self-help action has also been evident in successful economic models for homeless people to become financially self-sufficient. I stress 'successful' as we have tried and failed with a host of projects: eco car washing, casual manual labour, newspaper selling. The one that has worked is called Street Lit in which homeless people become self-employed booksellers. The whole system relies on community connections: churches promote and facilitate the collecting of books (usually in middle-class suburbs); volunteers help sort and store the books and also train homeless people to take over this task; the entrepreneurs then build rapport with selling venues (art events, schools, shopping malls and churches) and sell the books to make money! The story of one of our booksellers, Richard Nzima, was featured in the Daily Maverick (Perrier & Shoba 2019).

Another example: from the outset, our kitchen has been staffed with homeless volunteers who work alongside the housed

to prepare meals. Thus, homeless people are given a chance to be more than just recipients – not victims, but agents in their own welfare. That regular volunteers serve alongside the homeless has an element of advocacy in it. Our centre is not in a place that middle-class people come to very often, but we have acted as a bridgehead that gets them back into the city centre. In this way, we are challenging perceptions of the city. And when they then find they are working alongside the people they came to serve, we are challenging their perceptions of homeless people.

This is an indirect example of operating at the level of the third generation of development. If we want to change public and private institutions, we need to change the perspectives of the people who run those institutions. Changes of policy about ‘the blacks’ or ‘the gays’ came about not just because of political pressure but also the effect of people meeting – and not being terrified by – individual black and LGBTIQ+ people. So, we want to give the people who come to us the opportunity to meet homeless people – not as needy victims but as empowered individuals.

I recall an older, middle-class white woman who had been volunteering to feed homeless people and who confessed to me that she had initially been anxious. I asked her why and she explained that she was nervous of ‘the homeless at the robots’. ‘But’, I asked her, ‘are you nervous of Vusi? (a young man from the streets who had been working alongside her that morning)’. ‘Of course not’, she immediately replied. ‘I don’t see him as homeless, I see him as Vusi’.

So, we encourage groups from companies, private schools and government departments to come in and volunteer – not for their willing hands but to help open their minds. For those who cannot come to us, we provide a virtual experience using traditional and social media to give people a chance to see to ‘meet’ homeless individuals and have their preconceptions challenged. Story-telling programmes like this have, for example, been carried by the Daily Maverick: one already mentioned

features the Vusi just described (Perrier & Shoba 2019); another was carried more recently during the COVID-19 lockdown (Chapman 2020).

These, of course, are background steps in bringing about sustainable systems development, the goal of the third generation. The foreground is harder as you need to be invited to be part of that conversation. Here the impact of our interfaith partnerships shows its strength. eThekweni Municipality is the government unit that runs the city of Durban, and its attitudes and policies towards the homeless have been dismal. At best, they completely ignored the homeless. But sometimes they introduced policies that unintentionally disadvantaged the homeless (such as closing 24-h toilets). And at worst, they funded specifically harmful activities – such as night-time raids to pick up people off the streets and dump them outside the city.

We pursued a relentless strategy of drawing media attention to these human right violations, which finally culminated in a television exposé (Carte Blanche 2018). The political impact of this led to the proposal by the then Deputy Mayor for the creation of a Homeless Task Team bringing together government with civil society. With a multi-sectoral and interfaith network of people already working on the issue of homelessness, the city got the Task Team it needed. This group – under the leadership of a much more compassionate and effective Deputy Mayor during COVID-19 – was able to implement eThekweni’s response to the lockdown, providing humane emergency shelters for 1500 homeless people in just 4 days. We even ensured that we had an interfaith team of chaplains to attend to the spiritual needs of the homeless in the shelters.

We are also taking some steps towards achieving the fourth generation of development. Bongani Madida, also profiled in the Daily Maverick stories (Perrier & Shoba 2019), has many years of experience of living on the streets. He came to the Denis Hurley Centre looking for food and became a volunteer in the kitchen. When the Homeless Task Team was being set up, he took the

initiative to bring dozens of homeless people to the public meeting at City Hall (ensuring that they accounted for about a quarter of the 200 people there). At that meeting, he was elected as the homeless representative on the Municipality Task Team and for over 2 years has attended meetings at City Hall at par with NGO workers and government officials, as well as attending, with other homeless people, two of the 'National Conversations' organised by the National Homeless Network. During the lockdown, he was employed by the Municipality to work as a site manager for one of the 12 emergency shelters. This is not yet 'a broadly-based peoples' movement driven by a social vision', but it is certainly moving in that direction.

Let me end by describing an annual event, which is a culmination of our vision as an organisation. In South Africa, 16 December is a day that was laden with divisive symbolism; since 1994 it has been promoted as a unifying event: the Day of Reconciliation. Most faiths have at their core a meal as a symbolic act of reconciliation – the Christian Eucharist, the Jewish Passover, the Muslim Ifthaar during Ramadan. But, by definition, these meals are all reserved for people within each religious tradition. None of them offers the heavenly vision of a meal in which all the righteous join together in one communal gathering. So for the Day of Reconciliation, we have established an annual Meal of Reconciliation. This is not a meal in which the rich serve the poor; this is a meal where the rich and the poor are served together and share the same meal at the same table.

We are not yet in heaven, so it is far from perfect. The conversation is awkward. Housed people want to run around and help – partly to be useful, but also to avoid talking to others. Homeless people, so used to 'eating and running', need to be encouraged to stay for a dinner party. Differences of faith are usually not a problem but, this being South Africa, differences of colour are the least to begin with. But, each year the atmosphere is more relaxed, and 'reconciliation' becomes not a big theological act but a small human gesture of a shared conversation or song

or dance. We are not disguising the differences that exist between people but, we hope, providing a context in which those differences do not get in the way and people discover what they have in common.

We are each nourished by our own faith roots – but the tree that we all inhabit has wide branches, big enough to accommodate even those who thought they had no place to call home. ‘The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain’ (Is 25:6).

## ■ Cape Town: Seeking the heart of the ‘Mother City’

When walking through the centre of South Africa’s oldest colonial city, you might think you were in a city that has addressed street homelessness. It is no secret that Cape Town puts her best foot forward for the nearly 2 million visitors that travel here annually. But the relatively low visual presence of homeless people in the heavily policed inner city belies the truth of the numbers of people living without shelter in greater Cape Town. The city published data in 2019 estimating that around 4800 people were homeless, but this number is contested by service providers in the sector, with many claiming the number to be at least double that, calling for different solutions and greater cross-sectoral collaboration (Viljoen 2019).

These reflections explore the relationship between homeless people, churches and faith-based NGOs in Cape Town as experienced through my work with the Warehouse Trust, an NGO that assists churches (both theologically and practically) in their responses to injustice and inequality. These stories also come into conversation with this current moment: the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the homeless communities of Cape Town. When South Africa went into full lockdown in March 2020, the City of Cape Town, took more than a fortnight to announce and implement plans for their safe shelter: the relocation of

approximately 1500 homeless people into a tented mega-camp on the Cape Flats far from the neighbourhoods where most were living. It was an action that felt reminiscent of forced removals during apartheid. In a time where inequalities were exposed through the injustices suffered by homeless people, religious organisations needed to intervene as a matter of urgency.

In research on suburban churches in Cape Town, the ministers I listened to grappled with what it means to be a neighbour to and with homeless people. Ministers expressed feeling tensions between their theological beliefs and teaching and the practice of their churches. Teaching 'love your neighbour' on a Sunday is challenged on a Monday when confronted with the contested narratives from diverse voices in the neighbourhood: property owners, developers and other housed residents, church-goers themselves and the homeless people living in or near the church property.

So how does the church in Cape Town respond? Several churches run initiatives that have grown out of sometimes awkward and even conflictual relationships with their homeless neighbours into quite substantial interventions. A group of churches based in affluent neighbourhoods close to the bustling Main Road run a small outreach initiative. People from these churches go out late at night once a week to connect with and offer prayer and support to sex workers, many of whom live on the streets in the neighbourhood of the churches. Once a month, a dinner is hosted at a church where space is created for a quiet meal, arts and crafts, a message of hope, counsel and prayer. Those of us involved dedicate time to assist with pathways out of homelessness. When a person decides to leave their street-based work, dwelling place and relationships, a new kind of homelessness can be faced, especially when seeking permanent and affordable accommodation. And so our journey has become one of becoming friends, within the family of the larger church, as we together seek homes and employment with those who have left the street. This has required constant networking with the City of Cape

Town shelters system, 6–12 month stays in places of safety or faith-based community houses, attempts at communal living in church buildings for women and their children and in a few cases families from churches offering a bedroom, a seat at the dinner table and a welcome into their family life.

Faith-based NGOs addressing homelessness in Cape Town can often trace the genesis to church-based initiatives such as the one just described. A small group of church-goers who start assisting their homeless neighbours initiate a venture that quickly expands. Before long it is deemed necessary to transition into a more organised structure. Perhaps this stems from a desire (in both the giver and recipient of relief) to move – in light of Korten’s generations – from relief and welfare to the development of the individual. U-turn Homeless Ministries in Cape Town’s Southern suburbs, for example, was founded by a woman from a church who, according to their website (U-turn 2020), ‘wanted to make a difference to the homeless in her community. With a simple offer of food and a weekly bible study, she started the ministry at her home’. As numbers grew and her neighbours complained, the weekly gathering moved to her church. The church helped to nurture this ministry into an organisation that eventually expanded into a multi-site facility across several suburbs. U-turn has retained its faith-based roots, incorporating Christian devotions and discipleship into their work-readiness programmes and actively attempting to partner with churches where they can. Their most recent partnership is with a church that has made available at no cost one of their large properties for use as a residence for men on their work-readiness programme. It is the only affordable accommodation available to previously homeless people in the suburb.

There are many examples of faith-based NGOs that have followed a similar pathway and are providing essential services to homeless people in Cape Town. Each has its own unique identity, often undergirded by doctrinal and theological commitments. This can sometimes help and sometimes hinder collaboration

with other entities that hold different values. Over the years, various coalitions have formed to attempt better collaboration in the sector and faith-based NGOs are well-represented in these spaces.

Local church congregations or denominations, however, are not directly represented on homelessness forums in Cape Town and we need to grapple with this disconnect. Do churches undermine the work of NGOs with ad hoc responses to homelessness? Do they outsource their compassion to external organisations? In a study undertaken with Cape Town churches, Bowers du Toit (2017) identified factors that helped and hindered congregational responses to inequality and while responses to homelessness were not cited directly, the words of one church leader in the study, do stand out:

It's hard for NGOs [...] [*which*] are full of activists by definition; so, there is always going to be a drift of let's fix the problem rather than let's equip the church to fix the problem. (p. 4)

As a practitioner who is focused on equipping churches to act, I recognise this dynamic, especially when it comes to homelessness. We acknowledge that a wide definition of 'church' includes the work of faith-based organisations. But one wonders whether valuable relational, financial and spatial resources remain tied up in the running of institutional churches, while NGOs, in many cases started by churches, now cannot access those resources to address what is needed to overcome homelessness. In a city that is crying out for affordable housing, for instance, what must we make of the vast quantity of under-utilised spaces and properties owned by churches across the length of the peninsula?

Groups of churches have over the years opened their doors for a few nights at a time during winter storms. While such initiatives have been reactive and under-planned, they have enabled better connections between the churches and the homeless people in their suburbs. These temporary moments of shelter have given rise to discussions about a more formalised

winter shelter initiative, but in the absence of enough champions, and church-goers and NGOs having other commitments, we are yet to see this dream become a concrete reality.

At the start of the COVID-19 lockdown as citizens of Cape Town watched authorities moving people out of their neighbourhoods, while others retreated into hidden spaces in the suburbs to avoid being relocated, many wondered if churches no longer gathering in their buildings might open their doors to offer shelter. In time, we might better understand what hindered the vast majority of churches from responding in this way, but this opportunity did generate some inspiring initiatives. In two cases, small suburban churches partnered with faith-based NGOs to make their buildings available as full-time shelters for groups of 10 people each. A church with empty buildings from a youth development NGO that had been non-operational for a few years opened the buildings to host 60 homeless people, and the Community Chest headquarters opened their buildings and board rooms to host nearly 100 people. As the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic increased in the Western Cape and winter arrived, several other churches started to run temporary shelters, opening their doors for the duration of a storm, with NGO support. At a time when the plight of homelessness has regularly made headlines in the media, these spaces have attracted attention as civil society longs for creative, proactive solutions. It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will spark courage and creativity in other churches and religious organisations to keep the momentum of hopeful praxis.

In a city that still operates along the dividing lines that were set by colonial and apartheid spatial planning, are religious organisations able to act as curators of spaces, spiritualities and practices that foster interdependence regardless of the social and economic location of the people involved? In some Cape Town churches, there are spaces where a more mutually humanising praxis is being discovered through community-fostering initiatives where relief and development efforts are not

the point of departure. One such community was the focus of a research study. The researcher followed the course of a weekly church community supper at St Peter's Mowbray, where a diverse body of people met together once a week to eat a meal and celebrate Holy Communion. Nell and Aldous (2019:7) describe it as 'a community practising being human together, corroding the toxic divides of apartheid and genuinely performing the faith free from religious acquiescence' and as a space that reveals 'the power of eating together, sharing a meal and being a place of welcome and hospitality'. In its ninth year of existence, this meal is a moment in the week where being together is emphasised over relief efforts. On a regular basis over a 100 people gather, and the majority of both guests and volunteers are long-term homeless people.

Fostering such an alternative culture comes from deep theological reflection and intentional practice. In the case of St Peter's, those who attend are invited to follow commitments that include mutual transformation, shared story-telling, inclusive welcome of all, mutual encouragement and equalising power (Nell & Aldous 2019:4). This small church was the first of the few in Cape Town that made its buildings available to an NGO to host homeless men during COVID-19. It became a residential community based on the same commitments as the supper; it continued throughout the pandemic and is evolving into something permanent. I have heard some who are involved in the life of this residential community describe it as 'real church'.

Members of the St Peter's community describe the relief of being human together at the church against the backdrop of life in a city that dehumanises them on a daily basis. Public taps across the city have been turned off since the 2017/2018 Cape Town drought and remain turned off in 2020 even as the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for self-protective hygiene. Belongings of homeless individuals (often including identity documents and life-saving chronic medication) are regularly

confiscated by law-enforcement officers, and fines are issued for contravening municipal by-laws. And as 2020 progressed, these injustices did not abate.

Where then, are the religious institutions when dehumanising acts are being carried out against Cape Town's homeless citizens? In 2019, the opportunity to answer this question arrived. Responding to media reports that homeless people were fined for contravening municipal by-laws, a meeting was held that was attended by representatives of 16 organisations, many of them faith-based. They unanimously agreed (Davids 2019):

The decision to issue fines under the current City of Cape Town by-law to the most vulnerable and poorest citizens was a betrayal of the essence and values of our Constitution. Making the homeless community invisible to society is not the appropriate way to deal with the challenges they face. This action has the potential to drive them underground and increase their vulnerability and stereotyping. (n.p.)

An attorney who was distressed at the unconstitutional actions of the City of Cape Town attended that meeting. Through contacts made at the gathering, he started to pursue a legal action to represent those who had been fined. Knowing the attorney to be a person of faith, I asked him to reflect on the process. What he shared resonated with much of what I hear from people who find meaningful practices of faith in spaces outside of formal religious institutions.

He emphasised that the case was not a 'Christian fight' but was based purely on a legal case to highlight an unjust application of the law. To build a case, he interviewed people and organisations involved in the sector and found that many were either explicitly faith-based or had clear religious convictions undergirding their praxis. This had a profound impact on his own ecclesiology as he describes feeling that he 'met with Jesus' more authentically amongst those involved with this case than he did attending church. I sensed a tension in him as he grappled with what he perceives as an absence of

the church in the struggle, a societal preference for preserving the status quo (and even sometimes active intimidation of those seeking justice with homeless communities) and a passion and activism in the homelessness sector that he longs to see alive in the church.

As the day in court approached, we invited religious institutions to become involved by highlighting their objections to the City of Cape Town and joining protest action outside the court on the day of the trial. This call to engagement had several objectives. We wanted Cape Town churches to engage with the story and use their respected leadership to advocate for the rights of homeless people. We hoped to raise awareness, link the case with belief systems and theology and highlight prejudices regarding homelessness. We were also interested to know whether religious organisations have a collective muscle that could be used to hold authorities to account for their unjust actions towards vulnerable communities. Only a handful of people joined to show their solidarity. But this small advocacy campaign started a conversation that seems to be stretching the imagination of some regarding how they can operate not only with mercy, compassion and community building but also with justice and advocacy.

The atrocious treatment and increased vulnerability of homeless people in Cape Town during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the relative silence and apparent paralysis of religious communities at this time, have exposed the rifts that exist and the shifts that are required. If Cape Town's faith communities are to be significant contributors to addressing homelessness, many more will need to build with courage on the foundations of what is being attempted by a few. We may yet see that this time has produced heightened awareness, pierced our collective conscience and fostered connections just enough to generate a stronger ecumenical, cross-sectoral movement with homeless communities in Cape Town – a city that we pray will one day find herself worthy of being called 'the mother'.

## ■ Bloemfontein: A difficult journey from exclusivity to inclusivity

On the night of 10 January 1952, a homeless person broke into the Two Tower Church in Bloemfontein and made a fire in front of the pulpit. Luckily someone saw the flames and the fire was doused before the whole building could go up in flames. However, the pulpit was beyond saving (Britz 2000:144). And the homeless person? He was probably arrested and never returned to the space.

This part of the chapter is a reflection on this issue of homelessness and the engagement of the Dutch Reformed Church in Bloemfontein.

Completed in 1880, the Two Tower Church functioned for most of its existence as a space that proclaimed the dominating hegemony of the White Afrikaner. This was the space where the presidents of the Boer Republic of the Orange Free State<sup>31</sup> were sworn in and buried from.<sup>32</sup> It was also here that on 04 February 1939 the Neo-Nazi movement, the 'Ossewa-Brandwag', was founded as an act of defiance against the British Empire (FAK 2015). It was a space dedicated nearly exclusively to honouring the upper echelons of White Afrikaner society.

However, during these years of exclusion, there were a few occasions where the light of new dawn shone through. One was the 1952 incident when a homeless person nearly caused the church to burn down. The other occurred during the 1870s, when Chief Sipinare, the local Barolong Chief, donated £5 to the building fund of a church 'for the white people' (Britz 2000:56), a space where he was at the time excluded from.

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31. There is still a church pew marked '*Mev Pres Steyn*', that is designated for the wife of President MT Steyn, the president of the Free State Republic during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902.

32. The state funeral of the first President of the Republic of South Africa (1961-1967), C.R. (Charles Robberts) Swart, was also conducted from the Two Tower Church (July 1982).

In October 2008, I was sent by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Free State to the Two Tower Church, at a time when this small White Afrikaner faith community was struggling to survive, to initiate a ministry to the homeless and vulnerable people of the inner city of Bloemfontein. This process culminated in 2010 when the Towers of Hope Leadership Foundation came into being as an NGO, and a new faith community was planted in the old congregation. The old Two Tower church was being transformed from a space of exclusivity and exclusion into one of inclusion and reconciliation.

On any given Sunday, church services are attended by people of different cultural and social groups. Some are women who are trapped in abusive relationships, poverty and prostitution; others are struggling with addiction or psychiatric issues, while some are economic refugees from African countries. There are also a few white Afrikaners, like a farmer and his family. Others come from the suburbs, the traditional townships, and there is even someone from a wealthy gated community. But most attendees (about 85%) come from a background of poverty, living on the streets or in informal settlements. Together, they form a new inclusive faith community, Towers of Hope, which has adopted a slightly adapted version of Colossians 3:11 as its motto: Here there are no Afrikaners or Sothos, rich or poor, homeless or homeowner, men or women. But here Christ is all and in all.

On Sunday 26 September 2011, exactly 25 years after the Confession of Belhar was accepted by the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church (Plaatjie van Huffel 2014:315), this motto led to the dedication of our Cross of Remembrance. In line with the Belhar Confession's dictum that 'God is in a very special way the God of the poor and downtrodden' (Cloete & Smit 1984:9), we wanted to honour those who have died unloved and alone on our city streets. They must not be forgotten. Thus, every time one of the vulnerable members of the wider street and homeless community dies, a plaque with their name is added to the Cross.

This focus was to be taken further by the Towers of Hope Leadership Foundation, incorporating the faith community into a larger vision centred on the homeless and vulnerable of the city.

Based on Korten's framework of generations, Towers of Hope's vision<sup>33</sup> and mission<sup>34</sup> found practical expression in the five focus areas: (1) serving (the immediate needs of the vulnerable), (2) embracing (welcoming vulnerable people into the community), (3) empowering (creating confidence), (4) living (taking responsibility for your world) and (5) partnering (transforming the city together).

Moving an existing soup kitchen to the church premises, this daily action of serving the vulnerable and homeless with a hot meal, has grown to become a major activity at Towers and has seen numbers grow up to 148<sup>35</sup> per day.<sup>36</sup> Together with handing out clothing, blankets, shoes and facilitating a basic First Aid station and medical referral system, this emergency relief work has taken up a major portion of our time, capacity and funding. At times, it has also threatened to consume us to such an extent that other focal points of our work were neglected. A point in case is the emergency relief work during the COVID-19 crisis, where there have been periods where we have felt swamped by the continuous sourcing and distributing of food parcels.

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33. In obedience to the Triune God, communities are transformed from vulnerability to ability.

34. To develop and manage a variety of processes and interventions whereby vulnerable people can realise, through the grace of God, their God-given dignity.

35. Numbers go through a monthly ebb and flow. This is most probably because many are 'temporarily homeless', that is they come from the townships and informal settlements to look for 'piece-jobs' and live on the streets for the middle of the month. But when the SASSA grant pay-outs are made, they go 'home' to receive their money.

36. This highest was on 28 April 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown, when the SAPS closed us down for 'contravention of the regulations'. That was in spite of a neatly organised system and ample social distancing. We legally re-opened the soup kitchen on 25 May after a court order (not brought by us) prevented the SAPS from interfering (High Court of South Africa 2020).

Severely lacking in enough beds, the few existing shelters in Bloemfontein did what they could to accommodate as many people as possible – mostly to their own detriment. Only two permanent shelters cater to the street homeless. The others are primarily focused on serving as cheap boarding houses for specific vulnerable groups.

When the COVID-19 lockdown struck and other major South African cities showed some engagement between faith-based NGOs and government regarding the plight of the homeless, Bloemfontein had nothing. Although most faith-based NGOs have some connection with one another, there is no formal structure, nor input from the homeless community itself, to engage with the city structures. Trying to figure out if and what the city was going to do did not get us anywhere. The city's plans were seemingly one 'big state secret'. Apart from rumours on the streets that the homeless were to be taken to an undisclosed location, we knew nothing.

It was only after some time that we got wind of where these government COVID-19 shelters were opened. One was a well-run setup run by a Christian businessman with government connections, while two others, managed by the Department of Social Development, were established in township community halls. However, in spite of the good intentions of some officials, the shelters administered by the government were not doing much more than relief and welfare work.

Although laudable, just doing relief and welfare work is the 'easy way' out. The provider meeting the needs of the homeless and vulnerable remains in control and makes decisions for those seeking help. Challenging questions around agency and the equality of all are easily bypassed, especially during emergencies, because 'people are in need'.

We learnt this in the autumn of 2010. We were concerned that Molefi, who had been surviving on the city streets for many years, might not survive the coming winter. Eventually we found a place

just outside the city willing to take him in. With great effort, we convinced Molefi to go. But just as we dropped him, he became very animated. I asked my Sotho-speaking colleague as we were leaving what Molefi was saying. 'No', he laughingly replied, 'He was just talking nonsense. He said he had to be in court next week, but he's confused'. We laughed and I felt great as we returned to the city, believing that we had just saved Molefi's life. However, that night as I reflected on the day, the thought struck me: Did we ever ask Molefi if he wanted to go? Or did we just decide for him? If one's engagement with homeless people is to be more than 'welfare and relief', they and their right to determine their own lives must be taken very seriously.

While all this is true, it is imperative that the second generation in Korten's framework be negotiated. It is not only crucial for those whose own development is being addressed and also so 'the helpers' realise that they are journeying together with the ones who are being helped in a complementary relationship of mutuality. Tom Smith (2014) says:

[7]he journey of the rich [*i.e. the helper*] is to learn that they are not God and have something to receive. The journey of the poor [*i.e. the helped*] is to learn that they are made in the image of God and have something to give. (p. 135)

Community development is a lifelong challenge. At Towers, we speak of it as embracing or welcoming vulnerable people, best expressed on Sunday mornings when the faith community comes together. This is a journey where both homeless and non-homeless, poor and non-poor need to change and be transformed through interaction with one another. But it is not an easy road.

While members of this diverse faith community greet one another on a Sunday morning and in settings outside of Sundays wherever their paths cross, there is still a long way to go in achieving real relationships. For the first year of this new faith community (2010), we invited these divergent members to a monthly meal after the Sunday service. Although the non-homeless really tried hard to enlarge their personal space, it was

ultimately too difficult. At the end of that year, we had to shelve this initiative for another day.

With regard to agency, I am challenged as we struggle to make our leadership representative of the whole community. It has taken us a long time to begin transforming the leadership from an all-white, male-dominated group to a more inclusive one. At present, we have two African male leaders. However, neither of them is formally a member of the denomination. Also, we have not yet been able to co-opt any of the homeless into a leadership position as no candidate with the required capacity was forthcoming. But we persevere, trying in all possible ways to create a community where everyone is treasured.

Our regular celebration of Holy Communion embodies this. With the emphasis on inclusion instead of exclusion, our Holy Communion celebrations have become events where homeless and non-homeless can participate and rejoice in the fact that they are included. This occurs against the prevailing custom and understanding in the Dutch Reformed Church, which at times devotes more attention to those who are excluded than those who are included.

According to Korten's framework, community development as the second generation implies developing the community in the direction of self-help. At Towers, this forms our third programme focus on enhancing confidence amongst our homeless friends. The Proud Clean Bloemfontein work teams, launched in 2012, is a public cleaning service with a social conscience. Supported financially by sponsorships, the teams clean designated areas of the city, contributing to a cleaner city while earning a small stipend. Concurrently, they have to attend a weekly life skills session. The idea is that they will be better prepared to step out and become employed when an opportunity arises.<sup>37</sup>

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37. Unfortunately, this process is in real terms not as clean-cut and straightforward as it looks on paper. At least we are able accelerate the progress of those who want to work and find a job. Yearly we have around three to four guys who can transition to a formal job.

Similar life skills sessions are also facilitated for a group of older, mostly township residents who have become part of our community. The monthly NGO Forum meetings at Towers, consisting of leaders from various upcoming NGOs in the townships, are another terrain where project management and community self-help are supported by Towers.

The third generation in Korten's framework, sustainable systems development has been 'translated' in our context under the heading 'living', with the by-line, 'taking responsibility for your world'. For a long time, the only practical action was public clean-up campaigns. In these events, vulnerable and homeless people participated to an extent, motivated by an incentive afterwards. Recently I have become more involved with advocacy, accelerated by the opportunities brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. The National Civil Society Response and Recovery Forum, of which I am part, seeks to enable the vulnerable sectors of our community to recover and begin to address the dangerous injustices in the South African society. However, at present, the seats for the homeless around these tables are still empty.

Korten's fourth generation, people's movements, has at Towers been giving flesh as working in partnerships to transform the city together. We have been able to build up different networks amongst other NGOs, churches, businesses, universities and individuals, but we still lack the presence of previously homeless persons who can come alongside our network and take the lead in the transformation of our society. The one sector that is at present still painfully absent is government - local and provincial.

The dream is still that one day, through all these relationships, homeless people will be able to sit at the table as full and equal partners so that we can deliberate together on how our city is to be transformed from vulnerability to ability. May this difficult journey from exclusivity to inclusivity come to full fruition in our city of Bloemfontein.

## ■ Tending to the soul of our cities: A theology of the table

In complex cities such as Durban, Cape Town and Bloemfontein, there will be religious organisations operating with greater or lesser emphasis on the different generations of Korten's framework. Our mosaic of stories from across these cities clearly shows that. If we as religious organisations hope to sustain an equal commitment to the four generations, a conscious shift needs to occur to enable us to embody these commitments, transforming even the agenda of the religious organisation itself. For those of us who engage, for example, with both Jewish and Christian sacred texts, there is a theological basis for a holistic approach to homelessness. Note, for example, the instructions from the prophets speaking on behalf of God in the Jewish scriptures (the Christian Old Testament):

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them [...]? (Is 58:6-7)

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Mi 6:8)

These prophetic instructions do not describe mercy, justice, the undoing of oppression and being charitable in terms of generations through which to move, ignoring a commitment to any one in particular. Rather they assertively describe ways of living the spiritual life faithfully in such a way that all human beings are recognised and treated as equal and where the structures that prevent this from happening are addressed.

Across our case studies, we sense the struggle as religious organisations, trying to transform and allow our different entry points to shape us into new identities and actions. We recognise that sometimes a single focus is necessary and those cases

highlight the importance of working with all the role players in the sector rather than trying to do everything ourselves. Religious organisations need to be careful not to exclude potential partners on the basis of not sharing a specific faith commitment. For example, the reflections from Cape Town on the challenges faced in the street people's forum highlight that key role-players (those who are faith-based and those who are not) often act in silos. Similarly, where an attempt to shift gears and grow in a new direction fails, as reflected in the attempted meals at Towers of Hope in Bloemfontein, we must be ready to ask ourselves deeper questions and include homeless persons as members of these conversations. We have all understood the immediate need for homeless people to be an integral part of what shapes responses to the issues that affect them directly. In Durban, there seems to be the start of such emerging leadership - what will become of this movement and what will it take to nurture it?

Lacking in many of our faith traditions is a clarity of theological focus and definition when facing homelessness. It is here that the ongoing commitment from the global Catholic Church to keep grappling with this can serve as an example to others. Regan (2019) states:

Catholic Social Teaching, with its rich and relational understanding of human rights, has a role to play: (1) in addressing the paucity of attention to homelessness as a violation of a universal human right; (2) in advocating with those who are 'duty bearers' to meet their obligations; (3) in empowering the 'rights holders' to claim their basic right to a home. A rights-based approach does not provide the whole ethic contra homelessness but it is a fundamental reminder of human equality. (p. 27)

We noticed a common thread that runs through the stories from our three cities and diverse religious traditions that cannot be located neatly in any one charitable, developmental or advocacy approach, namely the table. In all three cities, across houses of worship and faith-based NGOs, there seems to be this yearning to at least attempt to sit and eat together, to reflect the communal, visceral, shared humanity that the spiritual life should invite us to.

The tables described in our stories are more than a place where a hungry person will find sustenance although they are that too. Christians pray together 'give us this day our daily bread'. The 'our' implicates the human family and we cannot pray this together with integrity if we remain separate from each other, divided by unequal tables. The tables we set seem to be trying to embrace what Katangole (2011:186) describes as 'a spirituality that includes everything'. From observing Eucharistic practices in communities committed to social justice and inclusion in various African countries, he explores both the practical and symbolic nature of the Eucharist, an element in all of our stories. He continues that the Eucharist is a 'way of saying no to hatred and yes to love, which includes everything in life – food, health, spirituality, relationships, community, identity – everything' (Katangole 2011:186).

As practitioners, we recognise that, despite economic inequality, we can all come to the table hungry and in need of redemption. In Bloemfontein, a pastor chooses to persevere past theology of the Eucharist that could exclude a person who does not yet identify as a Reformed Christian, holding a holy moment every week with a community that seems fragile yet steadfast in its diversity. In Durban, the table that hosts an annual feast includes people from all faiths and is recognised as a moment pregnant with the possibility of reconciliation. In Cape Town, small communities of people trying to be different kinds of churches and even trying to become family together defy the status quo of an intimidatingly divided city.

Visions of a lifestyle where acts of mercy, love and justice are supported by interdependent communities living together in society have been described in many sacred texts, as well as by spiritual leaders over the centuries. Coming from the perspective of the Christian faith, feminist theologian Lettie Russel (1987) rejects the notion of a dominant and authoritarian religion and introduces the term 'Households of God' describing it thus:

The presence of Christ among those who confront the authorities of domination creates the possibilities of a new household of freedom

where persons are able to relate to one another in an authority of partnership. (p. 82)

Such a vision, where all are welcome and power is confronted, describes something beyond what development theories have to offer. Perhaps closer to a spiritual vision of the world, Korten (2006:17) describes in a later work a 'movement from empire to earth community' - a concept based on respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, social and economic justice and democracy, and non-violence and peace. Is this vision not what the presence of faith communities in our cities should help us to imagine and pursue? The stories we have shared of small communities of faith sharing meals are an attempt to share more of life (some even in living spaces arising in religious communities during the crucible of a global pandemic). They might be a far cry from this full vision of a new society, but we wonder whether they can be a foretaste of a just city? A place where there is not only an absence of homelessness, injustice and indignity but also the presence of communities of reconciliation, home-making, space and a home for every citizen. Perhaps if there is a hope of ever finding a way to that city, we might find the road to it around these tables - breaking bread, sharing the cup and being human together.



# Homelessness and South Africa's smaller cities: Unique opportunities to end street homelessness?

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## ■ Introduction

There is a lack of a large body of work on street homelessness in South African cities. What is even further absent from the literature or research is a reflection on the prevalence of street

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homelessness in smaller South African cities, and smaller cities' responses, either by local municipalities or by civil society at large. The absence of such research or information does not indicate the absence or non-existence of street homelessness.

This chapter is an attempt to describe the reality of street homelessness and responses to it in what has become known in the literature as secondary cities. For this chapter, we will focus our attention on five specific secondary cities with populations ranging between 100 000 and 588 000 people. We engaged city officials and homeless sector leaders, as well as media reports, in the cities of Mbombela (Nelspruit), George, uMhlatuze (Richards Bay and Empangeni), Stellenbosch and Kimberley.

Against the conceptual background of secondary cities in South Africa and their potential unique developmental role, we explore whether these cities are not uniquely positioned – in terms of both size and strategic importance – to mediate a lasting impact on street homeless persons through relatively small but highly strategic interventions.

Drawing from examples of global good practices, with particular reference to similar-sized cities in the global North, we consider the role of secondary cities in fostering a larger national homelessness agenda, with reference to peer-learning networks, and the sharing of effective policies, strategies and practices across cities.

In conclusion, we make particular recommendations that we hope could contribute to framing possible solutions for street homelessness in these and other similar cities.

## ■ **The phenomenon of secondary cities in South Africa: Their strategic significance**

In terms of urban hierarchies, a distinction is often made between primate cities, secondary cities, towns and villages

and rural settlements. These distinctions are made in terms of demographics (population size and densities), economic strength, income levels, employment and public finance (John 2012:9). These criteria are further differentiated by considering a city's attractiveness to investors or tourists and regional or global impact in terms of innovation or knowledge industries (John 2012:4).

Although secondary cities are smaller and often lack the economic differentiation or visual prominence of larger metropolitan areas, they are nevertheless increasingly significant. Secondary and smaller cities tend to have smaller revenue bases, limited capacity and result in financial handicaps (Mashayamombe 2018). Furthermore, intrinsic differences along geography, markets and potential render a 'one-size-fits-all' approach ineffective to address deprivations they face (UNICEF and UN Habitat 2020). Thus, increasing strategic spending from the government to trigger the multiplier effect remain central to stimulating the second economy and increasing the revenue base (Atkinson 2012). Small and secondary cities therefore remain important for efforts to address inequalities, housing shortages, unemployment and promote economic growth with equity. Small cities and secondary cities have become more theorised in South Africa over the last decade (cf. Donaldson, Marais & Nel 2019:121-137; John 2012; eds. Marais, Nel & Donaldson 2016; Visser 2013:75-93; Visser & Rogerson 2014:1-11), acknowledging the strategic role of a cluster of cities not always adequately taken into account, but of great significance in 'playing a supplementary role' in terms of certain functions they fulfil.

Some of these functions are highlighted by Sithole Mbanga (2012) in his Foreword to the document on secondary cities in South Africa, published by the South African Cities Network:

Secondary cities play a distinct and fairly specialised role in national life, often acting as catalysts for development in their regions, alleviating demographic pressure from a country's metropolitan areas and, arguably, offering a better quality of life than densely populated urban conurbations. (p. 3)

This is elaborated upon further later in the report (John 2012):

Secondary cities are seen as important catalysts for more balanced and dispersed growth across the country. As alternative urban centres, they relieve pressure from the country's primate cities, which is especially important in countries where most demographic and economic activity has historically occurred in just one city. They are also catalysts for surrounding areas, acting as markets for agricultural produce, as administrative and service centres, and as links to the primate cities. (p. 9)

What is important to note is how secondary cities are significantly underrated, both in terms of government support, research focus and even self-understanding. That is why Mbanga (2012), in setting the context for the report on secondary cities, takes time to assert 'the role of secondary cities in South Africa's future development trajectory', urging the importance for further research and policy considerations in relation to how such cities are supported:

Many governments have designed specific national policies aimed at nurturing secondary cities. Indeed, the international spotlight today is on secondary cities because they have the fastest population and economic growth. (p. 3)

Dimmer (2020) speaks of secondary cities as 'a sleeping giant', which is 'home to more than 15% of the population' and already contributing around 27% to South Africa's GDP in 2016 (cf. also Marais et al. 2016).

As secondary cities are not as economically diversified as larger metropolitan centres, Dimmer (2020) acknowledges their relative vulnerability, still often relying substantially on 'primary (raw materials) or secondary (manufacturing) sources', which – if any of these sources fail – could have devastating effects. Yet, if such sources can be sustained, and the economy further diversified, secondary cities hold the potential of 'employment and a better quality of life' dissimilar to the larger metropolitan areas. The proximity between people and economic sources is both a huge asset, if managed well, but also renders such cities vulnerable, if the primary or secondary sources are depleted. Dimmer (2020)

suggests as one example of economic diversification increased 'localised production or transport hubs, for people or goods to and from the major cities'. Furthermore, an inability to raise enough internal funding through rates and taxes from commercial and residential properties threatens the self-sufficiency and existence of secondary cities. Enwereji and Kadama (2018) aver that payment of rates and taxes by property owners and leaseholders remains a big challenge in South Africa. This is true in the context of where the poor are unemployed, rely on government social grants and cannot afford to pay their rates. The situation becomes difficult in instances where a secondary city's economic activities are not diversified and over-rely on external funding from the national government grants, bank loans and donations.

In this chapter, we seek to contribute to the debate already articulated in the South African Cities Network's 2012 report on secondary cities and often reiterated after that, but here we make specific reference to street homelessness. We suggest that secondary cities can play a significant role to address street homelessness, not only nationally through building robust local economies that will prevent perpetual large-scale migration to metropolitan areas for want of economic opportunities in smaller cities but also locally through mobilising diverse local role players and resources to help overcome street homelessness for the relatively small numbers of people who are homeless in secondary cities through collaborative, appropriate, tailor-made and innovative interventions.

In focusing on the bold objective of ending homelessness in secondary cities, the prospect is that such cities will indeed contribute significantly to 'South Africa's future development trajectory', demonstrating the possibility of inclusionary cities through transforming our urban imaginaries (cf. John 2012:7).

In 2011, the National Treasury listed 22 secondary cities in the Cities Support Programme, which includes all provincial capital cities not currently regarded as metropolitan municipalities. It is these cities that we focus on in this chapter.

## ■ Homelessness in South Africa's secondary cities: A case study of five cities

For the purpose of this chapter, we restricted ourselves to four secondary cities with populations smaller than 340 000 people and one secondary city with a population of 588 000 people.

After a brief description of the face of homelessness in these cities, we describe municipal and civic responses in terms of policies, strategies, budgets and practices seeking to address street homelessness. We chose these specific cities partly through random selection but also through follow-up small leads as to possibly the right people to engage with in each of these cities.

We submit that none of these cities has a large homeless population. We furthermore submit that, with the moral and political will, broad-based collaborative actions and evidence-based interventions, secondary cities such as these five have the potential – because of the manageability of the challenge – to showcase viable and sustainable pathways out of homelessness, to the point of ending street homelessness for the most part.

Successful models in secondary cities can help reduce the burden on larger metropolitan municipalities and provide clues as to viable strategies for replication elsewhere. Each of these cities is small enough to care well and to intervene decisively through building strong collaborative approaches. We now turn to the municipalities of Stellenbosch, George, Sol Plaatje, uMhlatuze and Mbombela. The data in this chapter were drawn primarily from the ongoing Pathways out of Homelessness Project, desktop research as well as online survey interviews that were completed by the selected participants.

## ■ Stellenbosch

Stellenbosch is a university town situated on the Eerste River. It is also called the City of Oaks and is internationally renowned for its wineries and wines. The population of the Stellenbosch Local Municipality was estimated to be 173 197 in 2016, including smaller towns and villages, such as Franschhoek (Municipalities of South Africa 2021). At this point, Stellenbosch showed a 11.2% annual population growth rate, up from 155 728 people in 2001, and estimated at around 192 600 people by 2021 (Statistics South Africa 2018:8).

Being a tourist destination and university town, Stellenbosch is very protective of its image. Street homelessness is not contributing to the image the city ideally wants to convey. According to an official tasked with street homelessness in the Stellenbosch Municipality, there were only an estimated 200 persons sleeping on the streets or in public spaces at night.<sup>38</sup>

It is one of the only smaller cities – if not the only one – in South Africa with a homelessness policy (Stellenbosch Municipality 2020). Stellenbosch has one overnight shelter and a number of smaller initiatives aimed at supporting homeless persons off the streets and with access to appropriate social services. This is not necessarily a rights-based approach, and it is arguable how effective their strategy is to end street homelessness in the city.

One could ask if the policy is aimed at burnishing the city's image or at ending street homelessness. There seems to be close collaboration, however, between the municipality, service providers and even the university, which provides a good foundation for launching a more decisive strategy to end homelessness, should the city so decide.

The Stellenbosch Night Shelter (n.d.) is the most prominent facility providing care and shelter for the homeless population.

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38. From a survey completed by a municipal official in the Stellenbosch Municipality tasked with addressing street homelessness.

It first opened on 17 October 1991 and since then has provided ongoing support to 30 men and 12 women per night, on condition that they have an ID document, contribute between R7 and R12 and are sober and drug free when they want to access the shelter. On 17 September 2007, they opened a second shelter facility called The Annex, where people can enter without being sober; 29 males and 4 females are welcomed here.

The Stellenbosch Night Shelter (n.d.) provides access to:

[A]ccommodation and ablution facilities [...] two meals per day [...] social work services [...] various training programmes for skills such as gardening and cleaning [...] talks on how to get and keep a job [...]. (n.p.)

As they (Stellenbosch Night Shelter n.d.) put it:

These actions as well as the compulsory admission fee are designed to help people take responsibility for themselves. The Shelter is not a permanent home or cheap boarding house but aims to be a conduit to a better life. (Stellenbosch Night Shelter n.d.)

In addition to the Stellenbosch Night Shelter, the Stellenbosch Municipality launched a coupon system, whereby coupons can be purchased by Stellenbosch residents and handed to homeless persons they meet on the street. These coupons can be redeemed for a warm blanket, a hot meal or a night's shelter (Vivier 2019). This project is run collaboratively by the City, HeartFlow, Straatlig and the Stellenbosch Night Shelter. HeartFlow has successfully been running a coupon programme for some time, encouraging people to hand out coupons rather than money or food. Straatlig works with the homeless and destitute in Stellenbosch through mentorship, workshops and offers to counsel those in need (Vivier 2019).

During the hard lockdown, the Stellenbosch Municipality provided additional bed spaces at the Van der Stel Sporting Grounds. This had some support from the Stellenbosch University and community members in Stellenbosch (Setzer 2020).

Survey responses from Stellenbosch show that there are around 200 homeless individuals in and around the town.

However, the absence of a registration platform for the street homeless makes it difficult to ascertain the exact numbers. This makes it difficult to plan, coordinate and mobilise resources. The absence of a registry and documentation makes it difficult, for instance, to know how many people were assisted during the COVID-19 lockdown. This therefore calls for a platform or facility to register the homeless.

Stellenbosch Night Shelter indicated that they have around 75 overnight beds in their shelters, leaving a shortfall of more than 100. There is a need for more permanent beds to cater for the homeless.

Stellenbosch is fortunate that it has a policy document on homelessness and also funding from local government. Although this seems positive, more can be done in terms of dealing with root causes such as poverty, joblessness, housing shortages and substance abuse. The introduction of the coupon system is a welcome intervention in that it assists in dealing with substance and alcohol abuse because of the availability of cash.

## ■ George

George is the hub of the Garden Route, famous for tourism, beaches, indigenous forests, forestry and mountains. With an estimated population of 217 057 in 2020 (Western Cape Government 2017:2), it connects various cities and towns on the famous Garden Route of South Africa.

It is a city of grave inequalities; there are pockets of deep poverty in Thembalethu, Pampierstad and Pacaltsdorp, with pockets of great wealth in the predominantly white suburbs of George. Although 63% of the population is coloured and 9% black, recent years have seen an in-migration of white retirees from Gauteng province to places like George and other towns on this coastal strip (Frith 2011).

Over the years, a steady narrative has unfolded in the local newspaper, the *George Herald*, reflecting the reality of

homelessness on the streets of George (cf. De Beer 2019; Pienaar 2019). Ranging from narratives making homelessness punishable and dealt with by the city's anti-invasion unit to articles showing some concern about the many 'lost souls' on the streets of George, the ambiguous nature of cities' responses to homelessness is captured well. This is no different in George.

In September 2018, the People Living on the Street Forum was launched in George, committed to 'promote cooperation, service delivery and solutions to the plight of the homeless - including children living on the streets of George' (*George Herald* 2019). Stakeholders in this Forum include the George Municipality, the provincial Departments of Social Development, Health, Education and Justice, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), the South African Police Services (SAPS) and non-governmental organisations such as Cremhog, Kidstop, George Night Shelter and the South African National Council on Alcoholism.

The leading organisations addressing street homelessness every day are the George Night Shelter and Cremhog. George Night Shelter is subsidised by the Western Cape provincial government and provides overnight shelter to 87 homeless persons (it has the capacity to host 124) (cf. Western Cape Government 2020). People must pay a small amount per night. According to some, they cannot access the shelter because they cannot afford it. The manager of the shelter argues that a support programme was created - 'Men by the side of the Road' - where people should register to get themselves on a database that qualifies them for the municipal skills programme. Once in this programme, the municipality covers the small daily rate that is payable to stay in the shelter (cf. Pienaar 2017). It remains to be seen how many people signed up for the support programme and, if not, why not. An official at Cremhog who participated in the survey noted that the registration process is ineffective as few homeless people sign up.

A second facility is currently being developed as a halfway house for homeless people by an organisation known as Cremhog

(Christian rehabilitation ministry to homeless of George) (Cremhog 2020). This is being developed on city-owned premises and will include accommodation, offices and skills training spaces. Two congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church in George are involved in supporting this project. The aim of the project would be to support homeless persons with rehabilitation and work towards re-integration into society (Rabinowitz 2014).

During the hard lockdown for COVID-19, the George municipality opened the Rosmoor Stadium for 98 days, accommodating 82 people in a temporary shelter (Isaacs 2020); 25 000 meals were provided along with medical care and other social support up to the end of June 2020. After the period, some people were reintegrated with their families, where possible, or placed in other existing shelters in George or the Southern Cape. However, more than 75% of the people who had been housed in temporary shelters returned to the streets because of harmful substance use and lack of coordinated support. Furthermore, the absence of an official strategy in the city weakens attempts to address homelessness.<sup>39</sup>

## ■ Sol Plaatje Municipality

The Sol Plaatje Municipality includes several towns and villages, including the diamond-mining city of Kimberley, where the capital of the Northern Cape is located and now also the Sol Plaatje University. This municipality in 2016 had a population of 255 041 people (Municipalities of South Africa 2021a).

Beangstrom (2018), in an article in the *Diamond Fields*, reported on the proliferation of makeshift shelters in the central business district of Kimberley, partly as a result of the lack of the formal shelter facilities for homeless persons. In citing the city's spokesperson, Sello Matsie, homelessness was spoken of in conjunction with criminality, drug use and such, without considering

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39. From survey responses completed by Cremhog's General Manager in George.

that a large percentage of persons could be homeless because of poverty, mental illness, family situations or unemployment. Criminalising homelessness results in stigmatisation and alienation.

And yet, in the absence of official statistics, a board member of the only non-profit organisation engaging street homelessness and an official of the Northern Cape Provincial Government, responsible for dealing with street homelessness, reported that there were only between 100 and 200 people sleeping on the streets of this municipality per night<sup>40</sup>.

In 2019, the city's first shelter for homeless persons was opened by a newly established female-led non-profit organisation, Re Aga Lefika (Mothibi 2019). The shelter also offers a drop-in centre and soup kitchen and found support from both the Office of the Premier of the Northern Cape and from some private sector organisations. Their vision is to support more women across the province of the Northern Cape to establish similar initiatives. During the first lockdown in 2020, the Northern Cape Department of Social Development operated six district shelters, including the AR Abass stadium for homeless individuals. The Department's spokesperson, Gamien Abrahams, indicated that the shelters were for the period of lockdown and the Department of Social Development provided bedding, food and other hygiene products.<sup>41</sup> However, homeless individuals were reportedly reluctant to utilise the space in these shelters, a similar trend in the whole country. Also, some local enterprises, like Sweet Science Combat gym, opened up their facilities to homeless children after being granted permission and permits by the Department of Social Development to temporarily house the homeless during the COVID-19 lockdown period.<sup>42</sup> Our survey

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40. From surveys completed by a board member of Re Aga Lefika and a provincial government official responsible for social development in the Northern Cape province.

41. See <https://www.dfa.co.za/news/nc-dept-runs-six-shelters-for-the-homeless-a8fa8bdb-3a23-50d0-97b9-55d270c75c50>.

42. See <https://solomonstar.live/kimberley-residents-lend-a-hand/>.

results show that the youngest age of homeless individuals is 13 years, while the oldest is 60 years; 80% tend to be men across the surveyed small cities.

Despite all these interventions, they are temporary and not sustainable. They do not directly deal with the challenge of homelessness and how to address it. It is only recently that a new non-profit organisation (NPO) shelter was opened in Kimberley that specifically accommodates the homeless. Yet there are no accurate statistics on the homeless and no designated budget or policy for homelessness. This is further compounded by the fact that there is no inter-sectoral collaboration based on clearly defined roles in terms of addressing homelessness in Kimberley and the Northern Cape as a whole. For instance, the provincial government argues that homelessness is an issue to be addressed by district and local municipalities, while there is no budget or policy to guide and sustain such interventions.<sup>43</sup>

## ■ uMhlathuze

uMhlathuze is the name of a local municipality located on the north-east coast of the province of KwaZulu-Natal and 180 km from the city of Durban. It incorporates Richards Bay, Empangeni and other smaller towns and villages. It is named after the Mhlathuze River and in 2016 had a population of 410 465 people (Municipalities of South Africa 2021b). uMhlathuze is home to Africa's deepest harbour, a number of lucrative industries and some of the most pristine nature reserves in South Africa.

Street homelessness is a reality in this municipality, yet before the COVID-19 pandemic no formal shelters or transitional housing facilities were offered to assist people to come off the streets. A number of churches and non-profit organisations provided social services through outreach and food programmes, but shelters were activated only during the lockdown. Once again,

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43. From a survey completed by the provincial government and local NGO officials familiar with homeless issues in Kimberley.

numbers seem rather manageable, with an estimated 350 people living on the streets of uMhlatuze.<sup>44</sup>

This move also did not seem to come easily as non-profits apparently had to lobby hard for the City to support such activities (Harry 2020). Eventually, two temporary shelters were opened – Veld & Vlei Hall in Richard's Bay for men and the Empangeni Civic Centre for women, accommodating about 100 persons per night (cf. City of uMhlatuze 2020; My Zululand 2020). This had the support of different non-profit organisations, notably Hope on the Streets, Open Doors and Freedom Generation.

Though the uMhlatuze municipality activated emergency shelters and other resources such as food and blankets for homeless persons during the COVID-19 lockdown in partnership with local NPOs and the provincial Department of Social Development, the city does not have a policy, strategy or budget allocation to address homelessness. It was reported that the municipality spent R21.6 million on COVID-19 matters during the hard lockdown, including provisions and the costs for dealing with the homeless.<sup>45</sup> However, it can be argued that they acted only in response to pressure from local NPOs and the national government, that this was just for the short-term, and even how the funds were spent raised eyebrows. A local newspaper, the *Zululand Observer*, reported that the need for a homeless shelter in and around Richards Bay has been a hotly debated topic for decision makers but without reaching a consensus.<sup>46</sup> Part of the contestation has been related to funding, the location of that shelter and the unwillingness of stakeholders to assume responsibility for the place. This is also tied to the absence of any policy and strategy to address homelessness. Failure to find a solution results in the

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44. From a survey completed by a local pastor and civic leader who is actively engaging homeless issues in the uMhlatuze Municipality.

45. See <https://www.umhlatuze.gov.za/index.php/media-manager/news-updates/243-city-of-umhlatuze-council-sets-the-record-straight-on-covid-19-expenditure>.

46. See <https://zululandobserver.co.za/120601/hot-debate-on-shelter-for-homeless/>.

denigration and stereotyping of the homeless as they occupy greenbelts and empty houses (*Breed 2016*). Some of the reasons that were put forward for not establishing a homeless shelter were that homeless persons were 'drifters' who do not like working. Towards the end of lockdown, the local authority in uMhlathuze started to close down the temporary shelter but without offering a tangible long-term solution to address homelessness and demonstrating a lack of commitment to the issue.

## ■ Mbombela

Situated on the Maputo Corridor, Mbombela – the capital city of Mpumalanga province – connects South Africa to the border with Mozambique and is situated very close to the well-known Kruger National Park. Being the central hub of the Lowveld region, Nelspruit is the largest urban concentration in the Mbombela Municipality. Mbombela has a population of 695 913 people as of 2016 (Municipalities of South Africa 2021c).

The most prominent response to street homeless people in Mbombela is facilitated by the Nelspruit Community Forum (n.d.), a non-profit organisation partnering with other NGOs, churches, businesses and the city to offer services to the city's most vulnerable populations (cf. also CharitySA n.d.).

The most important programmes of the Nelspruit Community Forum include the Men on the Side of the Road project, assisting unemployed men with skills training and access to economic opportunities; the Damascus Work Farm providing accommodation and work opportunities to 20 individuals and families; the Bethel-Nelspruit Overnight Facility, offering 28 bed spaces for temporary short-term accommodation to newcomers to the city; Amakhaya or Ons Huis, providing accommodation to six children from vulnerable families while the parents or guardians re-establish themselves and the Grace Community House, a five-bedroom house providing as an exit programme, offering low-income accommodation to people who have found employment and are ready to leave the streets.

This cluster of programmes offers an important continuum of care combining shelter, psycho-social support and vocational preparation.

During the national COVID-19 lockdown the Nelspruit Community Forum, with the Mpumalanga Leadership Foundation, provided 20–30 additional bed spaces as temporary crisis accommodation (Fourie 2020).

In the Mpumalanga province, 25 temporary shelters were prepared during the lockdown with the backing of the provincial government, accommodating almost 500 people (Mkhaliphi 2020). This was not only in Mbombela but in the entire province. The politician responsible for social development in the province, Ms Thandi Shongwe, was quoted as saying (Mkhaliphi 2020):

We are just there to look for the homeless people, we're taking them into shelters and they will stay there for the whole 21 days declared by the President as a lockdown. We want everybody to comply because we want them to be safe. We don't want anyone to die of the coronavirus; whether you've got a home, whether you are homeless, the government must take care of you and make sure that you are safe. (n.p.)

## ■ Critical reflections

Findings from these case studies reveal a number of issues that require interrogation, as outlined further.

*Firstly*, the rhetoric from many officials, citizens and even the media in the smaller cities we engaged often tended to blame homeless persons for their homelessness, discriminate against them and even criminalise them. Homeless persons are viewed as criminals who invade properties and green zones and rob people of their valuables. This is problematic because the condition that homeless people find themselves in is mostly not out of choice but because of circumstances such as unemployment, mental health issues and family problems. Criminalising homeless persons or discriminating against them for being homeless leads

to alienation and has a societal ripple effect of animosity.<sup>47</sup> It also erodes empathy and humanity that results in greater neglect.

We identified a number of other discourses or practices that prevent finding sustainable solutions for homeless persons. These include the insistence on returning homeless persons to their 'homes', without a grasp of the push factors causing them to be homeless; the temporary nature of relief services or shelter and the conditionality of services, rewarding people for good behaviour, instead of ensuring people's right to dignified care and housing in an unconditional manner.

*Secondly*, although the provision of funding, resources and shelters for the homeless during the lockdown should be commended, none of the cities studied seems to have clear and sustainable solutions for how they intend to deal with the challenge of homelessness. With the exception of Stellenbosch, none of these cities has a formal policy, strategy or budget to deal with homelessness, which illustrates our concern.

There seems to be a general lack of political and bureaucratic will to address the challenge of homelessness from a policy, financial and logistical perspective. Part of the challenge emerging from these cities is the lack of clarity about which sphere of government has the primary responsibility to address homelessness. Provincial governments might argue that homelessness is the responsibility of local governments, while local governments decry the lack of budgets and support from provincial governments, therefore having unfunded mandates.<sup>48</sup>

*Thirdly*, the incoherencies at the level of policy-makers and government negatively affect implementation on the ground and impede the optimal impact of non-profit organisations and communities. During COVID-19, in some of the cities investigated,

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47. See <https://zululandobserver.co.za/136717/hobo-homes-cause-problems-richards-bay/>.

48. These reflections are based on responses from the survey forms completed online by research participants.

such as uMhlathuze, close collaboration was forged between the local and provincial government and non-profit and faith-based groups. This was also the case in Stellenbosch and in Mbombela. The challenge is to sustain such collaboration beyond a pandemic and to create appropriate vehicles for collaborative, coordinated interventions. One would think that smaller cities would display a greater sense of collaborative action, as there are fewer role players than in larger metropolitan municipalities. The survey forms indicate that this has not necessarily been the case in most cities pre-COVID-19 and only in a limited way in most of the respondent cities during COVID-19.

*Fourthly*, shelters provided during lockdown were temporary. Once the lockdown came to an end, most of the temporary shelters closed down, returning homeless persons to harsh, squalid spaces on the streets. In uMhlathuze survey findings show that post-lockdown, there is no overnight shelter for homeless persons. In George, the temporary shelter, a sports stadium and related psycho-social support services were provided from April to June 2020. Some people were connected with their families, while 75% of those who had been assigned to an overnight shelter returned to the streets. General support from the public dried up. At the same time, however, temporary shelters themselves often deal only with symptoms and not with the sources of homelessness. Shelters are not by themselves sustainable long-term solutions in the absence of affordable and adequate housing or access to employment opportunities.

Table 9.1 indicates the state of street homelessness in four of the five cities we investigated. We were unable to receive any direct information from either government officials or civil society leaders dealing with street homelessness in Mbombela, after repeated attempts over a period of more than six months. The information for Mbombela was retrieved from websites, media coverage and other documents.

*Fifthly*, from what we could establish, in the respondent cities, there was a lack of centralised mechanisms to register homeless

**TABLE 9.1:** Homelessness overview in four secondary cities.

City	Estimated number of street homeless persons	Ages	Gender <sup>48,49</sup>	Race	Origin	Shelters during COVID-19	Permanent shelters
Stellenbosch	200	18–60	16% W 84% M	All races	Local and non-local	2	2
George	200	21–60	15% W 85% M	All races	Local and non-local	2	1
Sol Plaatje	200	13–50	Mostly Men	Black and Coloured	From other towns	1	1
uMhlathuze	350	13–45	16% W 84% M	92% Black	50/50 local and non-local	1	0

persons in their cities. This is the case also in larger metropolitan municipalities but could be addressed with greater ease and impact in a small city. Without such mechanisms, decision makers and service providers are unable to properly comprehend the nature, scale and extent of homelessness. This also impairs the most appropriate interventions, because reliable data might simply be lacking. One of the respondents in the survey noted:

[We need a] broad national or provincial strategy as guidance for local government. Clear role definition of Government on National, Provincial and local levels. Provide for homeless shelters and social rehabilitation and temporary housing through housing department and budget as in North American countries.<sup>51</sup> (Cremhog General Manager, in George, date unspecified)

In the absence of such reliable, in-time data, homelessness can easily become invisible (again) and responses often remain inappropriate in their lack of diversity, rendering them unable to

49. See <https://zululandobserver.co.za/120601/hot-debate-on-shelter-for-homeless/>.

50. These gender descriptions fail to account for persons who might self-identify as transgender and would then experience difficulty in accessing shelters, as we are unaware of any shelters in the respondent cities, offering accommodation that does not follow hetero-normative criteria.

51. From survey responses completed by the General Manager of Cremhog in George.

match the diversity of the homeless population. Marquardt (2016:304) avers that 'the statistical neglect of homelessness can be linked to a governmental disinterest to visualise and thereby acknowledge homelessness as a structural problem'. The absence of data and reliable figures on homelessness generates ignorance, sometimes deliberately, and reduces the moral responsibility to take care of the city's most vulnerable populations.

*Finally*, a cynical view could argue that the provision of health and psycho-social services before and during lockdown was primarily designed to 'sanitise' spaces and protect other citizens from homeless persons, instead of genuinely embracing homeless people in their vulnerability. It is indeed a question why access to shelters and safe spaces is secured (something seems to be missing) only during a pandemic, while the reality of street homelessness existed before and persists afterwards.

The economic challenges of COVID-19 and large-scale shedding of jobs might contribute to the kind of conditions that will increase the incidence of homelessness. We have not been able to establish yet whether this has indeed been the case in the respondent cities.

Should the cynical view be accurate, and a lack of sustainable post-lockdown collaborations be evidence of that, does this then demonstrate a general lack of empathy, will or responsibility towards homeless persons in particular and vulnerable urban populations generally on the part of government, citizenry and even faith communities?

Again, the relatively small numbers of homeless people in small cities, as compared to the large homeless populations in metropolitan municipalities, would make one think that small cities would engage homelessness not only more collaboratively, as suggested before, but also more decisively. We found that not to be the case.

If COVID-19 does not kill homeless persons, then poverty, hunger, unemployment, lack of secure housing tenure, lack of access to water and sanitation and violence on the streets all

remain life-threatening factors to be considered. The final verdict is not yet out on how small cities will respond to street homelessness.

## ■ **Large impact through strategic interventions: Can small cities end street homelessness?**

In this section, we ask whether small cities, or secondary cities in this case, can end homelessness, proceeding from an assumption that strategic interventions in smaller cities are easier to implement to achieve a significant impact.

Secondary cities are small enough to encompass their entire homeless populations in strategic, caring, inclusionary and transformative ways. Secondary cities, though smaller than metropolises, are big enough in terms of infrastructure, social service systems and financial resources – if not from local government, then from the private sector or the general population – to ensure significant interventions that could go far beyond merely charitable or piecemeal approaches to engage street homelessness. The unique characteristics of secondary cities make them ideal spaces for experimenting with bold solution-driven interventions with the potential to become replicable prototypes in larger metropolitan regions.

## ■ **Ending homelessness**

For a very long time, the notion of ending homelessness was absent from the discourse on homelessness, almost taking for granted the fact that homelessness is an inevitability of life. Perhaps the dominance of this aspect of the discourse also shaped many of the interventions undertaken, mostly by civil society or faith-based groups and sometimes by municipalities.

The relative manageability of street homelessness in secondary cities in South Africa, because of the infrastructure and resources available in these cities, on the one hand, and the relatively small numbers of street homeless persons, on the other hand, suggest

that ending street homelessness in secondary cities should be given serious consideration, to be matched by appropriate will, policy, strategy and investment.

The work of the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) at DePaul University in Chicago has helped give momentum to a shifting paradigm in this regard. Through their Vanguard Cities programme, they asked 12 large cities across the world to select one of the following goals to be met by the end of 2020:

- to end street homelessness across their city
- to end street homelessness in a particular neighbourhood or within a certain subpopulation in their city
- to achieve a specified reduction in street homelessness in their city of 25%, 50% or 75% (Busch-Geertsema & Fitzpatrick 2018).

These ambitious goals required close monitoring in terms of the progress made and entailed:

- a clear definition of what it means to 'end street homeless'
- a reliable means of measuring trends in street homelessness and therefore progress towards the specified goal.

In the case of the USA, it is particularly in smaller cities (who were not Vanguard Cities of IGH) where real progress has been documented in recent years in terms of addressing one or more of the goals above. Through the clarity of definition of the street homeless population and what was meant by 'ending street homelessness', through daily collaborative actions and through ongoing measuring of specific, clearly defined indicators, these cities are starting to achieve major impacts. This should be a real possibility in South Africa's secondary cities.

## ■ Leadership and innovation

What is becoming abundantly clear is that ending homelessness in particular cities requires a certain kind of leadership that is committed to collaborative, inclusive and transformative city-building processes. Cirolia and Croese (2019) state that such leadership is not widespread in urban Africa, but in places like

Senegal, Kenya, Ghana or South Africa, there are sporadic examples ‘of municipal leaders who are developing innovative policies and partnerships with local actors and stakeholders for local development and service delivery’ (Cirolia & Croese 2019).

Ending homelessness in secondary cities will require such leadership, and ‘developing innovative policies and partnerships with local actors and stakeholders’ (Cirolia & Croese 2019) to ensure appropriate and strategic interventions that can bring about real change.

Secondary cities in particular provide opportunities for infrastructure development and quality of life investments that might be more elusive in megacities because of the sheer magnitude of the challenges faced in the larger cities. This is echoed by Cirolia and Croese (2019), who note the importance of smaller urban centres as ‘places where experimentation is very possible’. Smaller cities can imagine and incubate solutions that might be more complex to facilitate in larger cities. This is partly because ‘it is often easier to work with the communities and officials of these municipalities’ (Cirolia & Croese 2019).

However, secondary cities also face challenges ‘such as lack of capacity, limited finances and provincial bureaucracies’ (Cirolia & Croese 2019), which larger metropolitan municipalities do not always have to contend with in the same way. However, with the right kind of innovative leadership, these challenges should be navigated to build replicable local models of good practice for ending street homelessness.

## ■ **Broad-based collaborative approaches**

The relative smallness of secondary cities should enable easier collaboration across various boundaries. In the five cities cited above, it is clear that there are only a handful of serious role players engaging homelessness. This is not to say that other sectors and institutions should not be mobilised, but this indeed makes collaboration more practicable.

The importance of 'non-state actors' in Africa's cities cannot be overestimated. These actors provide services 'to the most local level' (cf. Cirolia & Croese 2019). They include faith-based organisations, churches, mosques, NGOs and CBOs and voluntary groups of people wanting to do good. These actors often provide safety nets that otherwise would not have existed in many cities. Sometimes it is because of the apathy or lack of political will of those tasked with caring for the most vulnerable populations politically; but sometimes it is also because of the overwhelming challenges of social deprivation and exclusion many (South) African cities face.

The real challenge, though, is that civic role players either go unrecognised or worse are actively undermined or disallowed to do what they often do best (Cirolia & Croese 2019):

[O]ften the role of these actors is not recognised, supported or regulated. It is very important that this change. Given the importance of the informal sector in African cities, it is necessary to recognise the role and contributions of all stakeholders and optimise them through partnerships so that they can contribute to development. (n.p.)

Especially in secondary cities, because of the more manageable nature of the challenge, solid collaborative approaches connecting the city, civil society, the private sector, homeless persons and research institutions, if present, could go a long way towards reversing the dominant narratives that depict street homelessness as inevitable.

## **Strategic and appropriate interventions – Data based, evidence-based, collaborative and by-name**

Henley (2019) shows how individual cities end homelessness. While national strategies, important as they are, often fail to make the kinds of impact desired to end homelessness, individual cities developing tailor-made approaches aimed at ending homelessness for individuals – who have names and faces – are starting to be identified across the United States.

Henley (2019) refers to the ground-breaking work introduced by Community Solutions, involving 85 cities and counties in their ‘Built for Zero’ programme. Through this programme, 11 cities reached an objective of “‘functional zero” for chronic or veteran homelessness, meaning people in those populations now become homeless only rarely or for very short periods’.

Systems and programmes were introduced to address and end chronic homelessness in these cities. In another 47 cities, the measurable reduction has been achieved, either in the general homeless population or in significant homeless populations. These results emanate from Community Solutions’ conviction (Henley 2019):

that homelessness is not just a housing, public health or policy issue, but a complex problem that requires everyone working on it to collaborate in counting down, individual by individual, to zero. (n.p.)

They advocate for rather sophisticated systems, breaking down the challenge of homelessness to the level of by-name data of individuals, with interventions also being tailor-made and individualised.

What is implemented is really a ‘centralised, command-and-control approach’ (Henley 2019), similar to ‘coordinated, community-wide surveillance systems’ that were used before to eradicate smallpox and used today to manage COVID-19 or any other pandemic. It is an approach that is informed by comprehensive, detailed, real-time and by-name data of every person in the community who is homeless (Henley 2019):

Only this depth of data will allow communities to really know their homeless people, find appropriate solutions for each one, optimise their resources, develop a successful strategy and share what works with other cities [...]. (n.p.)

As Jennifer Jaeger of Rockford, Illinois, says: ‘Every person who is homeless in our community that we are aware of goes on our by-name list’ (Henley 2019). Rockford became the first community in the United States with a zero rate of homelessness amongst military veterans and the second city to end street homelessness for chronic homeless persons.

What has become clear in Rockford and other similar cities is that their achievement of zero rates was not only about resources. It was really about 'devising a faster, smarter, more coordinated system'.

A combination of good, by-name data, a fast, smart and coordinated system and investment of resources in solution-based interventions is what turned the tide.

The numbers provided by the five cities reflected on above, range between 100 and 350 persons being homeless. These are rather small numbers, which could, through a coordinated system such as the one Community Solutions advocates, generate 'comprehensive, detailed, real-time and by-name data of every person in the community who is homeless' (Maguire 2018).

Instead of ad hoc approaches, mostly informed by welfare-minded thinking that puts plasters on sores instead of designing systemic changes, this approach would allow for local governments and service providers to conceptualise, design and implement more strategic and evidence-based interventions based on real-time data. In doing so, the possibility of eradicating street homelessness altogether or at the very minimum managing it in such a way that incidents of homelessness will be very rare (or, if they occur, for very short periods) as viable and sustainable alternatives would exist in the city.

## ■ **Specific solutions for specific challenges**

It should now be clear that a 'one-size-fits-all' solution does not work in addressing street homelessness (cf. De Beer & Vally 2015). And yet in most South African cities, and particularly in secondary cities, dominant approaches still deal with street homelessness as if every person who finds themselves on the streets is there for the same reasons, with the same characteristics, requiring similar pathways out of homelessness.

Individuals, as seen in the Rockford example above, differ greatly, and the causes of their homelessness, as well as possible

solutions, are very different. In secondary cities with smaller homeless populations, differentiating even further to establish the different causes for street homelessness might assist greatly in devising tailor-made and appropriate strategies for mediating pathways out of homelessness.

A remarkable example worth considering is the story of mental health support in the small city of Trieste in Italy (Henley 2019). Today it is recognised by the World Health Organization as global best practice for mental health care and considered by large cities around the globe for its successful impact. A city of 240 000 people, it used to have a psychiatric hospital with 1200 beds, which was closed down in 1978. This was replaced by 'informal, home-like communal houses', with high levels of personal support and ongoing accompaniment once they leave the care homes. Local employers are encouraged to hire people with mental illness and are supported when they do so, and families are being involved, where possible, in aiding in the recovery of their relatives.

In South African contexts, when a homeless person is in a severe condition on the street, it becomes a policing issue to get the person admitted to a hospital. In Trieste, psychiatrists attend to the matter and not the police. In South Africa, de-institutionalisation from psychiatric hospitals is actively promoted. Yet the absence of community-based care homes such as the ones in Trieste leads to high numbers of homeless persons being people living with chronic mental illness.

In secondary cities, one clear strategy could be to establish the number of homeless persons living with chronic mental illness and then to create community-based care homes where such individuals could live (semi-) permanently. With the right kind of support, therapy and adherence to medication, some of them might be able to reintegrate into their families or into local employment. Similarly, the number of older homeless persons needs to be established, as they need to be provided for through access to social grants and permanent housing solutions, should they not have family resources to fall back on.

## ■ Housing-led approaches

A strange irony is how street homelessness in South Africa is hardly approached as a housing issue. It is generally dealt with as a social, pathological or crime problem, disavowing the deeply systemic reasons for street homelessness in many cases. Secondary cities could quite meaningfully experiment with housing-led approaches to address and overcome street homelessness, in close conjunction with provincial governments and local civil society.

As the Trieste example showed, appropriate special needs housing facilities in the community tailored for dealing with the specific challenges of a particular vulnerable population, prevents institutionalisation, on the one hand, and street homelessness, on the other hand. It provides community-based housing solutions supported by the government.

Santa Barbara is a smaller city on the west coast of the USA. Since 2011, it has seen an annual reduction in street homelessness, probably through their consistent approach to secure new affordable housing units for 150 homeless persons per annum since that time (Wheeling 2017).

Chuck Flacks, Director of the Central Coast Collaborative on Homelessness, states (Wheeling 2017):

It's not an unsolvable problem of enormous cost. It's really about getting to know each of the people on the street, getting to know their needs, getting them into housing, and getting them the services they need to keep them housed. (n.p.)

It is about access to housing and support to keep people housed. If, for example, a city like George or Stellenbosch or Mbombela, has a population of only 150–200 homeless persons, what would it take to house them sustainably over a period of 2–3 years? Granted, these might be cities with smaller budgets than Santa Barbara. But these cities all have concentrations of wealth, not always at hand in the coffers of the local municipality, but available in provincial governments, the private sector, faith-based organisations and individuals.

It should become politically and morally offensive to a city if year by year the same people and the same number of people remain homeless, instead of the city incubating long-term solutions such as the ones in Trieste or Santa Barbara. What is not necessarily advocated for here is free housing, but rather the exploration of housing-led approaches to end street homelessness that will combine affordable and appropriate housing solutions with innovative funding mechanisms, combining government capital subsidies, private investment, a percentage of individuals' government social grants, a percentage of income earned or rental payments.

It is about discerning, developing and providing dignified solutions for homeless persons, instead of continuously treating people in patronising, less-than-human ways.

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, advocates for affordable housing solutions to address street homelessness at a European level (Fehér et al. 2016:2). In considering during their conferences what 'housing-led' or 'housing first' homeless policies and strategies in eastern European cities might look like, they concluded the following (Fehér et al. 2016):

'Housing-based' programs such as supported apartments, facilitated access to social housing and personal capacity building should be considered the most important innovation improving the situation of people experiencing homelessness in Central European countries. Such programs, together with an increase in the number of affordable housing stock, are seen as very important by major players engaged in homelessness provision namely non-profit service providers who run the majority of services. (p. 9)

Such an approach places a high priority on the dignity of homeless persons and on long-term solutions. It is a critique against the general condition of shelters often marked by overcrowding, underinvestment and low physical standards (cf. Fehér et al. 2016:9). In most contexts in the world, there is also a gap between shelters and affordable social housing. Even when people are relatively stable and very able to maintain their own housing arrangements, they often remain

stuck in shelters as housing both in the private rental market but even the social housing market is simply unaffordable (cf. Fehér et al. 2016:9-10).

Housing-led approaches, moreover, entail an element of self-critique, recognising that most current solutions in Central Europe have 'homeless people stuck in a dead-end staircase system, in a structure where social housing is basically not an option for most service users' (Fehér et al. 2016:10).

'Housing', in this context, but definitely in South African cities (Fehér et al. 2016):

[/]s not treated as a prerequisite for solving problems experienced by people who are homeless on a policy level, but is a scarce and costly resource that has to be earned and deserved. (p. 10)

Well-meaning service providers even design elaborate mechanisms to assess who are 'deserving' of housing or who are 'housing ready', instead of upholding secure tenure as a basic human right to be accessed by every individual.

Whereas current housing options in Europe do not provide for everyone, resulting therefore in the reality of homelessness, urbanist Laura Colini (2019) asserts that housing all homeless persons is indeed possible. She argues that the challenge of housing all homeless persons has to be taken up by local governments, focusing on issues such as measuring homelessness, preventing homelessness, reutilising vacant buildings and considering Housing First approaches (Colini 2019). This helps to ensure people's quicker transition into safe and secure housing, instead of the more protracted 'staircase systems' whereby people first have to prove their 'housing readiness'. It therefore considers housing as a basic right to be accessed.

In secondary cities of South Africa, with the relative small scale of street homelessness, housing-led approaches to address and end street homelessness need serious consideration.

## ■ Investing right: Cost-effective, impactful interventions

Homelessness is extremely costly. Ignoring homelessness carries a cost. The cost could be human, social or financial. People die or become unhealthy on the streets (Henley 2019):

Homelessness is, demonstrably, many times more expensive to ignore than it is to solve. For the most vulnerable in society, it is also a matter of life or death – homeless people die, on average, 17 years earlier than those living in proper housing. (n.p.)

A report compiled by Hopkins, Reaper and Vos (2020) on the cost of homelessness in Cape Town to develop and strengthen best practices shows that the city spent R286.6 million on humanitarian assistance, R286.7 million on reactive or punitive steps and R121.9 million on developmental costs. These costs are significant and not sustainable for the city's finances. These costs also depict the large numbers of homeless individuals in big cities like Cape Town. These figures can be instructive to smaller cities in reflecting on their own cost ratios, especially in the absence of sustainable and effective solutions to address homelessness.

At the same time, the lack of intelligent policy-making – that is research- and evidence-based – often perpetuates costly interventions without demonstrable impact.

A study by the Rand Corporation (2019) found:

Creating a municipally funded team to provide intensive services to chronically homeless people who use a large amount of public services can help the individuals get off the streets, while also reducing spending on services such as police services and emergency medical care. (n.p.)

Their study explored a programme based in Santa Monica, focusing on a small group of chronically homeless people. It was found that a dedicated focus on getting this population of homeless persons into housing helped not only to facilitate people's re-entry into communities but also 'reduced their use of public services' and reduced the city's spending on homelessness by 17% (Rand Corporation 2019).

## ■ Secondary cities and a national homelessness agenda

A National Homeless Network was established in South Africa in 2017. Most participants came from larger metropolitan areas. During COVID-19 participants from uMhlatuze, Kimberley and Buffalo City also participated in our weekly conversations. During the online annual meeting of the National Homeless Network, more than 250 participants from various cities across the country – metropolitan municipalities, secondary cities and smaller towns – participated.

The National Homeless Network (n.d.) has articulated four clear objectives:

- Advocating for the homeless with national government and supporting advocacy at provincial and municipal levels.
- Liaising at all levels with government departments and institutions.
- Sharing information on best practice, policies from across SA and the world.
- Sharing research and developing a common research agenda.

The agenda of the National Homeless Network was probably largely shaped by participants from metropolitan municipalities, and less attention was given to the unique challenges – but also possibilities – of secondary cities to animate really innovative solutions for street homelessness.

This possible lack of sufficient emphasis on the role and significance of secondary cities is also reflected in the South African Cities Network – a platform for eight cities that are all described as metropolitan municipalities, sharing good practices, learning together and developing an annual report on the Status of Cities. Perhaps this network should consider more deliberate support of secondary cities in their own self-understanding and future developments.

What could serve secondary cities well, perhaps – in the context of this chapter – might be a peer-learning network comprised

those who are committed to address and solve street homelessness in smaller cities both from local governments but also from civil society and other stakeholders. Such peer-learning networks could share good practices, consider global lessons learnt from smaller cities and set targets to which they can hold themselves accountable through innovative peer mechanisms. Collectively, such peer-learning networks could also support each other in the drafting of policy, strategy and investment plans, which could be replicated and adapted in cities across the country.

Aligned to the objectives of the National Homeless Network, specific research on homelessness in secondary cities might be important to feed into the deliberations and reflections of a peer-learning network, ideally contributing to local knowledge, policy formation and strategic interventions.

As was seen in the examples from Rockford, Trieste and Santa Barbara cited earlier, smaller cities have an opportunity to incubate innovative solutions because of the relatively smaller scale of the challenge, which can then serve to inform, educate and catalyse similar replications in larger metropolitan areas. This should be actively encouraged and could contribute in very valuable ways to the National Homeless Network in South Africa.

## ■ Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter helped arriving at a number of conclusions, based on which it seeks to make some concrete recommendations.

Its conclusions highlighted:

- The general significance of secondary cities.
- The possible contribution secondary cities could make to address and end street homelessness, considering the relative smallness of the challenge of homelessness in these cities and the relative size of infrastructure and resources such cities possess.
- That strong narratives exist in small cities elsewhere, showcasing the possibility to end street homelessness, or at the very least to manage it effectively, and serving as prototypes of good practices to be emulated contextually.

- The importance of (1) leadership and innovation; (2) broad-based collaborative approaches; (3) centralised, data- and evidence-based interventions; (4) specific solutions for specific challenges; (5) housing-led approaches; and (6) right investments for cost-effective, impactful interventions.
- That the National Homeless Network in South Africa had to place greater emphasis on supporting secondary cities in how they addressed street homelessness.

Based on the above conclusions, we make the following recommendations:

- That a peer-learning network be developed between a number of secondary cities that are interested in and committed to address street homelessness in more decisive ways to share good practices, policy and strategy concerns and research goals.
- That clear, bold goals be formulated for ending street homelessness or at least reducing it significantly in these cities and in specific populations.
- That participating cities develop clear and implementable policies, strategies and investment plans for reaching their boldly conceived goals.
- That broad-based, collaborative task teams be created to drive the above in each of these cities.
- That these cities participate in the National Homeless Network to share learning and help shape future conversations.
- That the lessons learned by secondary cities be documented in ways that can continue to inform future interventions, with a view of ending street homelessness in all South Africa's secondary cities.

Secondary cities are small enough to collaborate and care well and big enough to ensure strategic, decisive and well-resourced interventions; they are capable of incubating innovative and lasting solutions for street homelessness, one person at a time.

# Building inclusive communities: Street homelessness, COVID-19 and radical trans-disciplinarity

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## ■ Introduction

From one perspective, one could argue that homelessness is the result of a breakdown in and of community. If communities cared

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equally about all of their members, with particular sensitivity to those amongst them who are most vulnerable, then, arguably, nobody should be homeless.

The reality is different though, and one needs to ask about the role of community in causing, preventing or helping to overcome human suffering. People who became homeless were once members of communities. Everyday there are thousands of people who find themselves on the streets of South African cities – and cities around the world – all seeking a place to lay down their heads, but, as importantly, a place of belonging.

We accept the fact that community is a fluid concept with various definitions, covering many dimensions. Taking our cue from Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*, we argue that a powerful and practical imaginary of inclusive communities should be fostered – an imaginary that chooses to embrace all populations instead of displacing the most vulnerable amongst us to marginality. COVID-19 and the various responses to street homelessness, for example, have demonstrated that where all are affected by a common threat, we are able to find innovative and strategic ways to join hands to foster the common good.

## ■ COVID-19 and street homelessness: Collective responses

Not only did COVID-19 surface with greater clarity and visibility and reveal some of society's most paralysing fault lines and most vulnerable populations, but it also generated innovations and collaborations worth learning from as we consider the emergence of a 'new normal'. It has demonstrated that political will, if mobilised in the right direction, could go a long way towards transforming the realities of homelessness (cf. De Beer 2020a, 2020b; Marcus et al. 2020; McCulloch & Cooper 2020; UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence 2021).

Some of the most innovative and transformative responses resulted from radical trans-disciplinary collaborations, where

innovative pragmatism, constructive activism and engaged scholarship combined their respective forms of expertise. The COVID-19 crises made this abundantly clear: the success of creating protection against the virus depended on ensuring access to safe spaces and treatment, regardless of class and prior access to resources.<sup>52</sup> Small windows opened up into new expressions and possibilities of socio-spatial justice, where civil society, the academy, vulnerable populations and local governments found ways to collaborate, contributing their respective strengths, wisdoms and experiences, instead of competing for the perceived scarcity of space and resources.

COVID-19 brought the importance of collective actions and decisions into relief. Whereas neoliberalism, the excesses of capitalism, the protection of individualism through surveillance and securitisation and the gods of the market all conspire to destroy community, in the face of COVID-19, a boldly prophetic and alternative imaginary needs to be articulated, embodied, celebrated and replicated. Whereas the neoliberal capitalist demonstrates success through social differentiation, the response to COVID-19 demands a diametrically opposite course of action, employing an inclusive social approach that builds strong bonds of community across barriers, and that is imagined and practised as an antidote to exclusionary social differentiation as well as to the devastating effects of the pandemic.

We contend that street homelessness, which is the ultimate form of social exclusion, can be ended, one person and family at a time, through slowly and carefully building radically inclusive communities, with tailor-made solutions based on one-on-one relationships, inviting those formerly excluded to now be participants in, contributors to and agents of a new society. Such a vision requires social, health, psychological and institutional catch-nets that will not only facilitate pathways out of

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52. Though, of course, those with medical aids and resources could aspire to treatment against COVID-19 sooner, the welfare of the entire world was premised on a different reality: that herd immunity was dependent on protecting all against the virus.

homelessness, but in many cases would also help to prevent people from falling into cycles of homelessness.

In addition, through the lenses of a critical study of street homelessness, the institutional collaborations we forge and the viable alternatives to homelessness we start to witness, we can suggest that clues can be found not only for pathways out of homelessness but also for how we can collectively engage in more transformative ways with other forms of urban vulnerability.

## ■ **The visibility of street homelessness during COVID-19**

When most South Africans were under lockdown, and even in informal settlements, people tried to stay safe and physically distanced from each other – however, impossible or unrealistic that proved to be – two of the most visible realities that were on display were street homelessness and hunger.

The national imperative to social distance and remaining indoors was not equally applicable to all. Only people with homes could do so. Very soon after the announcement of the restrictions, the question of homeless people had to be addressed – especially as they too had to be confined, if the risk of spreading the virus was to be contained. On the Sea Point promenade, for example, the only people left when Capetonians stayed indoors were homeless persons. In public parks all over the country, this also was the case. Moreover, the reality of hunger became evident in the mile-long queues of people waiting for small food parcels to keep hunger at bay for yet another day. In a country with South Africa's resourcefulness, the twin realities of homelessness and hunger should be addressed institutionally.

What made street homelessness more visible too was the President's requirement that temporary shelter had to be provided to all homeless persons during lockdown level 5 (cf. De Beer 2020a). This prompted local municipalities – even in places where no shelters were ever provided for homeless persons – to

act in creating temporary facilities. In some cities, elaborate partnerships developed between local and provincial government departments, civil society, the non-profit sector and even academic institutions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 for homeless populations. Street homelessness received attention in the Disaster Command Councils of municipalities and daily reports had to be submitted on how homeless persons were cared for.

This stands in stark contrast to what had happened prior to COVID-19 but also with what is occurring in the aftermath of the initial months of hard lockdown. In some cities, temporary shelters were phased out, collaborative approaches were not sustained and local municipalities went back to the pre-COVID-19 'normal'.

In order to address – and end – street homelessness, the reality faced by homeless individuals must remain visible. Homeless persons, activists working on issues of homelessness and the media generally need to ensure its ongoing and disruptive visibility, vigilantly so, as homelessness is indeed a matter of life and death.

## ■ How South African cities responded to homelessness during COVID-19

In response to President Ramaphosa's national call to provide temporary shelter to homeless persons during the period of hard lockdown, different municipalities responded differently (cf. De Beer 2020a; cf. also Centre for Faith and Community 2020).

In the City of eThekweni (Durban), more than 1500 people were accommodated in eight different temporary shelters within a couple of days (*The Smart City Journal* n.d.). This was a remarkable process, implemented through close collaboration between local government and progressive civil society and faith-based institutions. It does not mean everything was smooth sailing, with internal organisational politics, lack of clarity on how government spent the funds and reduced bed spaces after the hard lockdown all part of the picture.

In Cape Town, a very different narrative from the one in eThekweni played itself out. After initially crafting a collaborative plan between the city and the non-profit sector dealing with homelessness in Cape Town, the city abandoned this joint plan and embarked on relocating homeless persons from all over the city, often against their will, to one large space in Strandfontein, providing temporary shelter to 2000 people (cf. Williams 2020).

This generated great opposition, not only from homeless residents in Strandfontein who challenged the social and health conditions, and the involuntary nature of their relocation there, but also from non-profit organisations and human rights activists, questioning the rationale for the city's decision, and the way in which it dealt with homelessness, primarily as a security issue rather than as a social or health concern. Even the local community of Strandfontein rallied against the establishment of this site, and suddenly brought 2000 new people into the community without proper consultation or prior planning with them as the local hosts.

Eventually, the Strandfontein site was closed amidst various legal processes, and alternatives had to be found for all the people who had been moved there. A positive outcome was the formation of the Strandfontein Homeless Action Committee, which gave voice to the homeless community themselves, articulating very clearly their own concerns, aspirations and proposals for better alternatives.

Another positive outcome was the City of Cape Town mandating a 'pre-participation process' to make recommendations towards a policy and strategy on street homelessness for the City of Cape Town. Led by two civic leaders – Lorenzo Davids, CEO of Community Chest Western Cape, and Melene Rossouw, Executive Director of the Women Lead Movement – this strategy became known as the first of a series of caring (and daring) conversations 'to advance and deepen who we are as a people,

as a country and as a democracy’, known as the Inkathalo Conversations (2020–2021).

In Johannesburg, the response from the city was rather lethargic, and five temporary shelters were opened in a city with arguably the largest population of street homeless people in the country. Although there was not a similarly ambitious response as in eThekweni or Tshwane, at some point during 2020 – after the initial hard lockdown had already ended – a new Johannesburg Homelessness Task Team was created that has the potential to now start developing a more dedicated policy and strategy on homelessness for the City of Johannesburg. Civil society and non-profit organisations, researchers and city officials are participating in this new Task Team.

In Mangaung (Bloemfontein), there was no pre-established network or platform for dealing collaboratively with street homelessness. When lockdown announcements came into force, different stakeholders sought to initiate responses to the crisis in rather disorganised and disconnected ways. Provincial and local government took the lead, creating three temporary ‘camps’ and smaller shelters, working with local NGOs and FBOs. Part of the challenge in Mangaung also seemed to be the lack of strong collaborative action from civil society, and less engagement from the academic community, even though Mangaung hosts two large universities.

A false start marked the response in the City of Tshwane when an abandoned soccer stadium was opened up for homeless people (cf. De Beer 2020b; Marcus et al. 2020). Within days, 2000 people congregated here, but tents, mattresses and food were prepared for only 200 people. At some point, almost 500 people who used substances went into withdrawal simultaneously, threatening a humanitarian crisis, unless something substantially different was done. The Tshwane Homelessness Forum – a civic forum made up of NGOs, homeless persons and researchers – pressurised the City, and a

joint Risk Reduction Plan was adopted on 29 March 2020 to guide a roll-out plan for temporary shelters.

Subsequently, within a 21-day period, 25 shelters opened up accommodating more than 2000 people. In most of these shelters, residents were further offered psycho-social support and the development of life goals. A harm-reduction programme was implemented supporting homeless persons using substances, and PHC was made accessible to 2000 people, unprecedented for homeless persons in the city.

The availability of shelter enabled better adherence to medication regimes for those using chronic medication and the access to PHC facilitated proper diagnoses of various chronic illnesses, sometimes going unnoticed for years, which then ensured proper treatment for many homeless individuals, often for the first time in their lives.

A result of this process was that some of the temporary shelters were converted into permanent shelter space. Two new permanent housing facilities opened up for older homeless persons. New collaborations were forged during this time between various stakeholders. An effective Homelessness Task Team worked together for the duration of the hard lockdown, and this was converted into the Pathways Operational Centre,<sup>53</sup> a central coordinating body for supporting the homeless sector and the implementation of the Tshwane Homelessness Policy and Strategy.

Various secondary cities and smaller municipalities also embarked, with varying degrees of success, on creating safety nets for homeless persons in this time. Whether the momentum

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53. The Pathways Operational Centre was launched as a continuation of the Tshwane Homelessness Task Team, that provided a central coordinating function during COVID-19, to house and support homeless persons. It is hosted in a new Unit for Street Homelessness at the University of Pretoria but working closely with the City of Tshwane, the Tshwane Homelessness Forum, participating NGOs, homeless communities and others in the homeless sector.

of these efforts assisted in catalysing new approaches, everywhere is doubtful.<sup>54</sup>

## ■ Global lessons

COVID-19 stopped everyone in their tracks and in many places responses to homelessness radically changed, even if only in response to the immediate crises of lockdowns. The challenge has therefore arisen to build on the gains made during this time, and to refuse a return to the pre-pandemic status quo.

Peter Mackie, in a short video clip titled ‘Housing policies and the COVID-19 pandemic: homelessness’, speaks of radical changes in how all sectors seemed to have responded to homelessness in the United Kingdom, including local authorities, national government and faith-based organisations (UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence 2021). Mackie says: ‘We’ve seen action at a scale and a pace not previously seen’. Optimising the results and learning from this time, he then poses a challenge: ‘this is a juncture [...] to work together to get things right for the future’.

McCulloch and Cooper (2020), also with reference to the United Kingdom, reflect on how government policy distinguished for years between so-called deserving and undeserving homeless persons, decided through a rather sophisticated tool to assess eligibility. During COVID-19, however, an inclusive policy approach was adopted, and this distinction was not used, at least not during this period. What McCulloch and Cooper (2020) deduce from this, however, is that such an inclusive approach demonstrated that ‘legislative intervention can prevent thousands of households from free falling into homelessness and can save lives’ and then they ask, provocatively, ‘so why stop now?’

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54. In Chapter 9 of this volume, the focus is on small or secondary cities and their potential to end street homelessness.

The IGH, based at the DePaul University in Chicago, researched interventions into homelessness in 12 cities globally, before and during COVID-19, to explore strategies that helped reduce street homelessness significantly. Their task is also to galvanise people into adopting the lessons learnt, to disseminate these amongst cities and to support innovative interventions aimed at reducing homelessness significantly in different parts of the world. During COVID-19, they provided online toolkits, resources and webinars to encourage rapid responses to street homelessness in local contexts, showcasing good practices from around the globe (Institute for Global Homelessness 2020). In addition, they connect cities to each other, sharing similar challenges, shaping a global community of learning.

Towards the second half of 2020, UN Habitat brought together experts from around the world who deal with homelessness in their own contexts. As part of their Urban Thinkers Campus, this group explored some of the most important lessons they have learnt during COVID-19 in relation to addressing homelessness. Sangster (2020) summarised the five most important lessons that emerged from this conversation:

1. Homelessness is a public health crisis and 'integrated health care is essential'.
2. Robust data are essential for crafting and implementing 'the right solutions'.
3. The crucial importance of 'collaboration and partnerships'.
4. Ending street homelessness is not possible without funding and action from governments.
5. Understanding the experiences of the street homeless population is key.

This conversation concluded with emphasising the importance 'to ensure that homelessness is viewed as an avoidable and intolerable outcome of a dysfunctional system' (Sangster 2020). It was not normal before COVID-19 and it is still abnormal.

## ■ Historical fault lines: How society generates and sustains homelessness

Though today we might theoretically agree that homelessness results from a combination of factors – both structural and personal – society still tends to place the blame for street homelessness squarely on the shoulders of the individual, without grasping its own complicity in creating conditions that result in different forms of homelessness. Homeless people are too often labelled as ‘sinners’ (to use theological language) and not often as the ‘sinned against’.

Narratives of homeless persons speak of personal crisis or trauma that results in homelessness, and sometimes of individuals having made poor personal decisions that eventually lead to homelessness. Yet many narratives speak not of individual failure but of political, institutional and societal failures that have systematically and sometimes, over many years, contributed to a person’s current situation of homelessness.

## ■ Intersectional systemic failures

There is a range of systemic failures that are intersectional in nature, contributing to different facets of street homelessness (cf. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2021; Fowler et al. 2019:465–586; Tait 2018).

In South Africa, a poor educational system that fails thousands of children annually, leads to high drop-out rates from school, youth unemployment and – often – perpetual precarity. Violence and abuse in families, schools or communities lead to young people running away from home, with nowhere to turn to. Local communities and institutions often fail to address the trauma faced by those affected by violence and abuse, sometimes dealing them secondary abuse for speaking up and out against those who are the perpetrators.

Deinstitutionalisation from psychiatric hospitals presumes the existence of communities that are ready to absorb people who live with chronic mental illness. However, without adequate access to community-based mental health care, once people are discharged, many might turn up on the street as they have few alternatives. Resource-poor communities generally lack a mental health infrastructure and easy access to psychiatrists, correct medication and so forth.

A lack of affordable housing forces people of different ages to make the streets their home. This is increasingly true of older persons who lack social networks of support but also of students who live precariously without proper financial assistance. This is embedded in the perpetuation of the apartheid urban structure, still retaining – to a large extent – the functional distances between places of work and residence, at least for the urban poor.

## ■ Conceptual failures

The systemic failures, in their intersectional complexity, are often not recognised by society in general, nor by those tasked to deal with vulnerable populations, such as street homeless persons, in particular. There is a serious failure at a conceptual and theoretical level in that far too little work has been done historically to understand homelessness, its causes and its effects.

The reality of homelessness is complex and multifaceted, affecting all aspects of people's lives. Any serious attempts to attend to street homelessness transformatively therefore need to be integrated, holistic and collaborative.

Some of the conceptual failures – which then allow for approaches to homelessness that are not adequately or radically transformative – include an understanding of homelessness that views it almost exclusively as an issue of individual failure and not also an issue of systemic or institutional failure. Or it is regarded as a social welfare issue and not also, and critically so, an issue of

public health, social housing or economic opportunity, or it is dealt with as an issue of crime or security instead of community and relationships.

Street homelessness is often viewed by the state as an unwelcome cost (a waste of money really) or an unfunded mandate, without grasping the cost of non-investment into solving it. Local neighbourhoods, citizens and even religious groups such as churches or mosques also too often consider homelessness as someone else's responsibility (or 'problem'). Homeless persons must be acknowledged as part of our human community and local geography. Although we may be differentiated by whether we have a home or not, the reality is that we breathe the same air and share the same vulnerabilities, which the COVID-19 pandemic has so starkly shown.

COVID-19 brought to the surface many of the historical institutional or political fault lines in clearer ways than before. Onn (2017) argues that the phenomenon of 'homelessness is not inevitable' but stems from a political choice that governments make. Farha (2016) speaks of homelessness as 'a structural and political problem'. She suggests that homelessness is the result of (Farha 2016):

[G]overnment policies that are inconsistent with human rights – neglecting or failing to respond adequately to the needs of the most disadvantaged in responses to crises of economic developments. (n.p.)

The lack of a national policy framework for street homelessness in South Africa, and the fact that only two of the nine provincial governments and three cities have street homelessness policies, tells a story of political failure to provide leadership that could address one of the most life-threatening vulnerabilities.

The announcement by South Africa's President, demanding temporary shelter for all homeless persons at the start of the hard lockdown, though potentially positive, actually revealed a possible misconception that this need for emergency shelters

could be attended to through government policies, strategies and budgets that could simply be activated for this purpose.

For far too long, a policy vacuum has existed in South Africa preventing dedicated budgets and capacity at all levels of government to address street homelessness decisively. There has been a slow shift in recent years although – still – only three municipalities and two provinces (out of nine) have dedicated policies guiding homeless interventions and investments. The Policy Unit in the Presidency is acknowledging this policy gap and committed themselves in late 2020 to help facilitate a national policy conversation in collaboration with researchers at the University of Pretoria.

This gap in public policies obviously translates into a lack of strategy as to how street homelessness should be addressed, managed or reduced. Similarly, the absence of a dedicated homeless policy means there can be no budgetary investments either to prevent or address street homelessness. Where financial support is provided, perhaps from budgets that are not specifically geared towards addressing homelessness but rather towards vulnerable or so-called indigent populations in general, it tends to be for welfare-like interventions and it is channelled through the Department of Social Development, again conveying the understanding that it is only a social welfare issue. Very few, if any, government departments outside of Social Development (where it is also rare) would have dedicated budgets for homelessness. This gap is especially problematic in the Departments of Human Settlement, Housing, Health or Economic Development.

Another serious failure is the historical inability of different societal sectors to create broad-based platforms where synergetic, coordinated responses to street homelessness can be discerned, planned, implemented, managed and evaluated. Different government departments and spheres of government (local, provincial and national) fail to collaborate or even to agree about who the leading agency should be. Different NGOs and

faith-based organisations and even different homeless action groups tend to compete for limited resources instead of building robust collaborative models. It is seldom that any respectful and equal space is created at the table for homeless persons themselves to contribute meaningfully to processes affecting their lives directly.

Neighbourhood organisations, RAs or homeowners' associations often view homeless persons as a threat to the wellbeing of the neighbourhood, failing to incorporate them into the deliberations and strategies of the organisation to build a good future for everyone residing in the area. The NIMBY effect<sup>55</sup> shapes the approach of such organisations, often 'wishing away' the 'problem' of homelessness, trying to displace homeless individuals to neighbouring communities, instead of being in solidarity with vulnerable people through opening spaces, offering services and purposefully making people part of the community.

## ■ Personal, communal and moral failures

At the core of society's complicity in giving rise to and perpetuating homelessness and its failure to end homelessness are personal, communal and moral failures. The inability to recognise every other person as a sacred human being, and our interconnectedness as a human family, allows for the kind of apathy that reduces homeless persons to street furniture or evokes a kind of venom that forces homelessness to the fringes. It is such personal and moral failure that gives rise to uncritical policies and to budgets spending disproportionate amounts to criminalise homeless persons, instead of investing the same resources in building and offering humane, dignified and life-affirming alternatives. Denying homeless persons their right to the city is to deny the universality of the human community and, in the final instance, to deny them life.

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55. 'NIMBY' is short for 'not in my backyard' and refers to neighbourhoods that are adamant that certain people or concerns do not belong in their neighbourhood.

## ■ Building inclusive communities: An imaginary embodied in concrete actions

Framing and fostering an imaginary for inclusive communities (and cities), where street homelessness is significantly reduced through appropriate interventions, is a start. History has shown that local communities are ideal spaces for embodying the sociopolitical changes meant to eliminate injustices and inequalities. For this to have the desired impact, such an imaginary has to be embodied in concrete actions, policies, processes and practices – the appropriate interventions – which could indeed prevent street homelessness as well as facilitate sustainable pathways out of homelessness. Such orthopraxy (‘right practice’) (Gutierrez 1988:xxxiv, 8)<sup>56</sup> needs to be carefully fostered in a city or town over time, instilling a number of key commitments in relevant stakeholders but also in society at large:

1. Street homelessness should be acknowledged as a violation of basic human rights.
2. Prioritising street homelessness should be seen as an expression of commitment to socio-spatial justice.
3. Every homeless person, regardless of their histories, should be viewed as a carrier of the sanctity of life and therefore be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.
4. Institutions should demonstrate the political, moral and financial will to bring an end to street homelessness, one person and one family at a time.
5. The impact of generous, proactive and right investments in interventions that can build sustainable pathways out of homelessness needs to be acknowledged.

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56. Liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, distinguishes between orthodoxy (‘right doctrine/theory’) and orthopraxy (‘right practice’). Liberation theologians are particularly interested in ‘right practices’ – standing in solidarity with the poor for their liberation and justice and prefer that over ‘right theory’ that does not embody justice or liberation.

6. The vulnerability of homeless persons, and the persons themselves, need to be embraced in local communities, as a sacred gift, instead of communities resorting to the convenience of their displacement elsewhere.
7. All relevant institutions should commit themselves to work collaboratively through a process of radical trans-disciplinarity, addressing the root causes of street homelessness while placing centre stage those who are (formerly) homeless as well as seasoned practitioners in crafting and executing policy, strategies and educational curricula.

## ■ **An imaginary of inclusive communities: Accessing life**

Inclusive communities, as imagined here, will protect the dignity and basic rights not only of street homeless persons but also of all other vulnerable people. An inclusive community will be deliberate about creating the kinds of infrastructure that facilitates access to various sources of wellbeing and to multiple forms of belonging. Such infrastructure will allow persons who are homeless to access life opportunities, without which perpetual and life-threatening marginality is often inevitable (De Beer 2020):

Lefebvre, Abahlali and others articulate the actions of the poor in claiming their right to the city as more than a demand for rights, but as a fundamental affirmation of life (Gibson 2011:xvi; Lefebvre 1992:201, 1996:158), a cry for a new way of being human in the city, and promoting the democratization of the city from below. (p. 170)

Fostering an imaginary of inclusive communities is fostering a radical way of being human in the city.

## ■ **Welcoming, affirming communities with appropriate psycho-social infrastructure**

Inclusive communities will make deliberate spaces for vulnerable citizens who have experienced trauma, live with chronic mental

illness or face social marginalisation. *Psycho-social infrastructure* will be created that is appropriate, accessible and visible, but professional care will not replace being cared for in the warmth of welcoming and affirming communities. This is also about shared spaces of belonging.

## ■ **Communities of unconditional support**

A substantial number of organisations that offer services and support to homeless communities are faith based. Not only is their orientation faith based, but often their therapeutic intervention also requires faith responses from the individuals they serve. Many homeless persons have told stories of services rendered only to those sharing the same faith or showing commitment to a certain faith before they can access the services offered.

Organisations that place allegiance to a specific faith, sobriety or abstinence as conditions before rendering services need to be challenged. In doing so, they often prolong the vulnerability of homeless persons, instead of meeting people in terms of their current conditions and needs, and making them feel welcomed in *communities of unconditional support*. The inclusivity or otherwise and the helpfulness of certain conditions placed emphasis upon people in need to be critically examined in terms of long-term efficacy and impact.

## ■ **Religious inclusion**

Religious communities often struggle to be places of radical hospitality, in spite of many of their foundational tenets requiring care of the poor and inclusion of the stranger. Instead of welcoming vulnerable people such as homeless individuals into religious communities, services are often rendered at a distance, and those receiving services remain outsiders to the religious community, except perhaps if they comply with certain requirements such as sobriety or a religious confession.

Jesus, some religious organisations should remember, identified himself in the person of the stranger, homeless and outcast. It could very well be that the first Jesus communities welcomed the homeless stranger in their midst as an expression of welcoming Jesus. How is it then that the depth of communion that (homeless) people long for is often not accessible in religious communities?

Elsewhere in this volume, the authors suggest the metaphor of a 'table' to denote radical inclusion or at least 'a foretaste of a just city'. They wonder whether the road to a new society cannot best be found around tables of deep sharing, where we learn, tentatively but deliberately, how to be human together. Such tables, instead of offering doctrinal certainties, purities and exclusions, might facilitate freedom for all who partake.

## ■ Inclusive health care systems

A priority that is becoming clearer internationally is to ensure inclusive health care systems, or innovative health systems and services that are easily accessible to homeless persons and treating homeless persons with dignity and respect. Access to PHC will help to prevent chronic disease, ensure adherence to treatment in case of chronic disease and diagnose chronic disease in cases where it has gone undiagnosed, sometimes for years.

In the South African context, a sizeable percentage of street homeless persons are also substance users. Through the introduction of harm-reduction programmes, particularly during the hard lockdown of COVID-19 in 2020, many homeless persons using substances were supported either to construct lifestyles without substance use or to manage themselves in ways that reduced harm. Similarly, many homeless persons also live with chronic mental illnesses. Community-based mental health services, particularly in geographies with a concentration of homeless persons, are crucial. If they do not exist, they should be created.

The political will and determination to root out stigmatisation of homeless persons in public health care facilities and to ensure grave consequences for those treating vulnerable persons with less than dignity and respect will go a long way in fostering health care systems that are truly inclusive, welcoming and respectful regardless of the condition of the patient.

## ■ Inclusionary housing solutions

It is perhaps at the level of housing provision that most can be done to break cycles of street homelessness to facilitate viable and long-term alternatives and – even – to prevent homelessness. Access to decent, safe and secure accommodation would normally also have positive effects on people’s psycho-social wellbeing, physical and mental health and even the possibility of securing and maintaining a job.

Yet, this is clearly not self-evident. Elsewhere, De Beer (2019) wrote:

It might seem bizarre for officials and politicians not to be able to see the obvious link between homelessness and housing; but it is shockingly true. We often de-link homelessness from housing – personally, as officials, politicians or service providers, but also at a policy level where street homelessness is absent from most significant housing policies and guidelines in the South African context. (n.p.)

In work done in cities across the world but also in South Africa, it is quite evident that appropriate housing solutions can contribute immensely to ‘mediating sustainable pathways out of homelessness’ (De Beer 2020a).

De Beer (2020a) writes about 25 years of experience with housing-based solutions to street homelessness:

We have witnessed how transitional housing programmes – providing safe, hospitable and empowering spaces, accompanied by psycho-social and spiritual care, and employment preparation – supported the re-integration into society of thousands of women and girl children. We saw how women and men, living with chronic

mental illness, thrived when provided with secure tenure in suitable, supportive housing. We experienced how creative collaboration between social service agencies and social housing developers can forge innovative housing solutions for people often excluded from mainstream housing options. In the late 1990s we were surprised that dying homeless people, living with HIV/AIDS, who lacked access to housing and medication, recovered once housed, nourished, treated, and cared for. (n.p.)

Once again, one-size-fits-all approaches do not take into account the diverse nature of the homeless population. Differentiated strategies for housing intervention need to be crafted which recognise the different realities and needs of homeless persons. In many cities, overnight and temporary shelters are the main housing interventions, assuming that people will be able to move from here to long-term affordable housing options. In the absence of such affordable housing options, many people then remain in shelters or move perpetually between shelters.

Housing policies are often failing to recognise the particular housing needs of homeless populations and fail at imagining innovative and inclusionary housing products that will provide access to decent, affordable and secure shelter that is not only temporary. Much work still needs to be done at the level of housing policy to ensure the inclusion of particular vulnerable populations, such as the diverse homeless population.

In many other contexts, mainly in the global North, an approach known as 'housing first' was developed, which makes access to secure housing the primary commitment in addressing street homelessness, while psycho-social, health and other support services are provided in conjunction. Instead of a so-called 'staircase approach' that requires of homeless persons to prove themselves before they can access secure housing, the 'housing first' approach views housing as a basic right and also as the best and most sustainable and transformative intervention possible. This approach to overcome street homelessness needs to be considered seriously in South African cities, even with adaptations.

## ■ Economic inclusion

Today the largest percentage of street homeless persons in South Africa are young, unemployed men. Their social integration is closely linked to economic opportunity. In a context where 3.5 million young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years are unemployed, the odds are stacked against them.<sup>57</sup> They are possibly the young people referred to as Neither in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) and who are a cause of great concern. Their social inclusion can hardly be separated from their economic viability as this forms the basic premise of their social and personal wellbeing. Often stigmatised, they are not necessarily substance users or people living with mental illness although some amongst them might be.

Most programmes designed to respond to homelessness fail to have a strongly developed component that facilitates access to vocational and economic opportunity. Homeless persons are often treated with unwarranted suspicion, which affects the possibility of employment. To address this entails understanding the basic requirements of the job market. A home as signalled in a home address is needed, and homeless persons cannot provide this. If we know this, we need to break this impasse by providing homeless persons with an address, even in the absence of secure housing. We need to go further and address pathways out of street homelessness as part of a larger socio-economic concern of dealing with unemployment. This can start through building coalitions with skills providers and prospective employers. Providing skills training to homeless persons and possible internship or employment opportunities are definite tasks to be embarked on in every city, collaboratively and in individual organisations. For it is only through active collaboration between

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57. This data was obtained from Lana Franks, based at the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of the Western Cape (e-mail correspondence on 01 May 2021). She compiled it from Census 2011 datasets she accessed from Statistics South Africa.

different organisations that unemployment and therefore homelessness can also be addressed meaningfully.

One organisation that made the challenge of economic inclusion their business is U-turn in Cape Town. They are carefully crafting a model of holistic empowerment that is fast becoming a practice that might be replicated elsewhere. Universities and other higher education institutions should consider innovative educational models to give access to homeless persons who were unable to complete school or access tertiary education, not necessarily through traditional degree or diploma offerings, but through vocational preparation and placement that could break the cycle of economic exclusion. At the University of Pretoria a pre-university academy is currently being contemplated. Could a 'University of the Streets' be part of such an innovative offering, bridging the gap between universities and resource-poor communities and enabling transformative learning that could facilitate economic inclusion?

## ■ Institutional integration

To build inclusive communities that fully embrace vulnerable people, including the street homeless population, every institution needs to consider integrating vulnerable populations as a priority on their agendas. Local, provincial and national government, universities and other institutions of higher learning, NGOs and faith-based organisations, religious communities, private sector and homeowner associations or neighbourhood watches all face the reality of street homelessness to a lesser or greater degree and cannot ignore its existence.

Turning a blind eye or treating it as external to them will not make the challenge of homeless persons go away. Integrating homelessness on institutional agendas – in the form of strategic imperatives, budget line items, internship opportunities, bursaries, housing provision and self-education on the causes and effects

of homelessness and possible solutions to homelessness, would be a critical and significant first step.

A second step would be to make sure that solidarity with the homeless community does not create new competitions, duplication of resources or dependencies, but gets integrated as part of comprehensive, coordinated and synergistic responses to end street homelessness. This should be based on a firm recognition that homelessness is not inevitable but can be addressed as it is caused by specific factors.

Institutional social responsibility programmes should focus on the complete social inclusion of homeless persons and other vulnerable groups as their central aim.

## ■ **Radical trans-disciplinarity**

Radical, here, refers quite literally to the (grass)roots, to consistency of methodology and to depth of change. It is not a trans-disciplinarity where academic disciplines explore homelessness in the absence of practitioners or (former) homeless people. It is consistently trans-disciplinary in the way that it conceptualises, implements and disseminates research. It proceeds from a conviction that homelessness should be ended, and instead of retaining homeless persons in welfare systems for extended periods, interventions need to be imagined which can facilitate sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

## ■ **Getting real: Beyond the facades and rhetoric**

In recent years, trans-disciplinarity has become a buzzword in academic circles, and academics are sometimes even assessed on how trans-disciplinary their scholarship is. Yet the very institutions demanding this approach from academics often fail to create environments conducive to trans-disciplinary research, programmes or appointments, contradicting their own trans-disciplinary rhetoric.

Facing street homelessness demands that we get real in every sense of the word but also that different disciplines collaborate in engaging the complexities of street homelessness. In the COVID-19 spaces medical interns from the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Pretoria, social workers, theological students, occupational therapists, homeless persons, city officials and many others joined hands to create crisis interventions and, often, to build longer-term solutions based on the day-to-day learning that took place.

Trans-disciplinarity, instead of being an intellectual buzzword that demands purity of methodology, became the ‘orthopraxy’ (right practice) of messy and imperfect collaborations demanded by the urgency of the situation. Not only did different academic disciplines have to learn how to collaborate but so did practitioners from different organisations and societal sectors, homeless and former homeless persons and government officials. This became the embodiment of the definition of trans-disciplinarity coined by Klein et al. (eds. 2001:4) as ‘different academic disciplines working jointly with practitioners to solve a real-world problem’.

New interventions, advocacy programmes or research projects – in such an approach – would be conceptualised and implemented, and knowledge shared, collaboratively, involving practitioners, academics, homeless community members and government officials.

## ■ **Going deep: Making institutional and systemic change**

A *radical* trans-disciplinary approach, going beyond mere rhetoric, will not be content with analytical or descriptive work only but will probably be concerned with emancipatory processes that could result in more substantive transformation. Such an approach would seek to engage policies, practices and institutional cultures, with a view of informing and animating deeper systemic change. In their definition of trans-disciplinarity,

Klein et al. (eds. 2001) state that it is about ‘finding solutions for real-life problems’ instead of simply learning to manage such problems better or make such problems more enduring.

Fault lines revealed by COVID-19, the President’s speech and the inability of most cities to act rapidly enough to risk for homeless populations during COVID-19 or to sustain the collaborative actions that were taking place during the hard lockdown, stem from systems and institutional cultures that have not been adequately transformed.

To be in the kind of solidarity with vulnerable populations such as street homeless people that will enable their liberation from such vulnerability would require that institutions face themselves and their shortcomings in confronting homelessness and to undergo the required transformations if they are to facilitate such liberation. They might have transformed themselves in terms of racial or gender composition and even shifts in relation to certain politically correct rhetoric. But have our institutions been able to embrace those most vulnerable amongst us as equals, placing their voices and concerns at the centre and prioritising actions and budgets to help overcome their vulnerability? How caring, humane and just are our institutions really?

Even government departments tasked with the social welfare of vulnerable communities or non-profit organisations existing for this express purpose or faith-based communities confessing care of and for the poor or scholars articulating the challenges of vulnerable communities continuously in their work need to be self-critical in terms of how well we all do in ensuring systemic changes that would enable radically inclusive communities. Such change has to start from within. It is indeed a matter of facing ourselves as we address the violations endured by homeless individuals.

It is our very institutions – and the untransformed minds and practices in our institutions – that oversee systemic failures that continuously exclude and even exploit homeless populations.

An example is the treatment homeless persons are often exposed to in government health clinics, or the general failure to be innovative in how we ensure access to PHC for very vulnerable populations, such as homeless people. Another example is the highly visible mismatch between empty government properties and homeless people's lack of access to shelter (De Beer 2020a):

As bizarre as the disconnect between homelessness as a reality and housing provision as one of the solutions, is the mismatch between available public and private land, and the number of street homeless people in the country's capital city. (n.p.)

What would enable such change is the shift in the minds of all concerned towards accepting the fact that interventions should be evidence-based, backed by good and ongoing research, in-time data and critical self-assessment, determining whether actual programmes deliver what they promise. This is not necessarily a linear process but an ongoing cycle of action-reflection-learning-action, ensuring that interventions remain appropriate and themselves undergo a continuous process of critical self-reflection, improvement and adaptation.

## ■ Upside-down academy

'Getting real' and 'going deep' require epistemological and pedagogical shifts. Turning the academy upside-down or practising an upside-down academy, would proceed from a deliberate commitment to the streets as our classroom and homeless experts as our teachers. In going beyond the captivity of the suburban classroom, new kinds of activist scholarship and organic leadership could take shape through relationships of mutual learning and collaborative commitment.

S'bu Zikode, with reference to the commitments of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the social movement he leads, speaks of the informal settlements as the university, and the struggle of informal settlement dwellers as the curriculum. He then says the challenge in building relationships between the poor and academics from

universities, is ‘to bring “our university” (Abahlali) to “your university”’, opening up possibilities for liberating pedagogies and knowledge constructs to emerge (Gibson 2011:179).

Unlike certain progressive social movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo, an equally strong movement of homeless persons with a clarity of political vision and strategy has not yet come about in South Africa. Framing engagement with homeless concerns around a ‘right to the city’ has not been a central rally cry of homeless persons or of those in solidarity with homeless communities.

Recently in Cape Town, however, someone like Carlos Mesquitas<sup>58</sup> emerged as a very articulate leader who had experienced homelessness himself. He was able to help shape a new organisational formation in which homeless leaders collaborate closely with non-profit leaders and community activists to reframe a commitment towards addressing homelessness as a commitment to social justice and the materialisation of basic rights that people are currently deprived of.

The upside-down academy acknowledges that life happens on the streets and in communities and is purposeful about retrieving knowledge from the experiences and wisdoms that are alive here.

## ■ **Constructive activism for socio-spatial justice and radical inclusion**

The upside-down academy is grounded in such a proximity of relationships between homeless communities, practitioners, activists, policy-makers and researchers. It is better able to engage in direct and constructive activism or prophetic

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58. Carlos Mesquitas was the leader of the Strandfontein Action Committee, which was a homeless initiative arising from the Strandfontein Shelter set up during COVID-19 hard lockdown in the City of Cape Town. This evolved into the Homeless Action Committee, a new formation of collaborative leadership to address street homelessness in Cape Town.

pragmatism (cf. West 1988:38) that is not only deconstructing dominant societal narratives about homelessness (which should be an ongoing task) or critical of institutional and political failures to engage homelessness (which should remain our priority). Instead, constructive activism will combine prophecy (critical, deconstructive work) with pragmatism (offering constructive proposals for viable alternatives).

Through research that is immersed in spaces of vulnerability, considering the homeless person as primary interlocutor, and evidence-based in nature, a contribution of great integrity can be made. Showcasing solutions through documenting practices that demonstrate sustainable pathways out of homelessness, or systemic interventions that allow for optimal access to services and opportunities, will help shape new narratives.

Over the years in many contexts solutions such as those described above have come into being. In the City of Tshwane, for example, thousands of women and their children found sustainable ways out of homelessness and abuse back into communities. An urgent dual task of the upside-down academy is not only to resist dominant narratives of exclusion, apathy or failure in the face of homelessness but also to broadcast solutions in ways that can enable replication and scaling of that which works.

Understanding homelessness as a form of social and spatial injustice requires an activism that transcends narrow boundaries of delineation, working closely with broader movement for socio-spatial justice. Those committed to transform homelessness would do well to engage 'in movements that bring together diverse interests in solidarity with each other, building alliances beyond narrow self-interest for the sake of the common good' (eds. Watson & Gibson 1995:260). Watson and Gibson (eds. 1995:262), 25 years ago already, spoke of the necessity for 'a new politics of alliances, partnerships and collaborations that go beyond traditional divides or binary oppositions'. If an imaginary of inclusive communities was to become a reality, collaborative

activism is required that will succeed in co-constructing glimpses of such a reality.

## ■ **Integrative collaboration: Tackling homelessness holistically**

The complexity and multifaceted nature of homelessness, as well as the urgent need for constructive solutions, demand of cities and towns to build strong local collaborations that could integrate approaches that tackle homelessness holistically. Such integration needs to occur at every level. Government, civil society, homeless communities and the research community need to find ways to complement each other, as each of these sectors brings different contributions to the collective.

The non-profit and faith-based sectors, which at least in larger South African cities, seem to be the leading agencies in showing solidarity with homeless persons. But they need to commit themselves to move beyond unhealthy competitiveness for resources and instead build shared service models through which they can pool their diverse assets, resources and knowledge, thereby multiplying the possible impact of their contributions.

Diverse academic disciplines have found ways to collaborate during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some instances, the health sciences provided access to PHC and harm-reduction programmes; theology and social work provided psycho-social support, linkages to faith communities and documentation of strategic processes; occupational therapy rolled out wellbeing programmes in various centres and sport sciences and physiotherapy offered physical education and training in shelters.

Interdepartmental collaboration at all levels of government is critical if homeless persons are to be welcomed in inclusive communities. Government departments and different spheres of government often display a gross inability to build integrated support systems for vulnerable populations. The buck is passed between spheres of government and departments, and in early 2021,

the national government department that should be the obvious lead department responsible for articulating a national homelessness policy was still arguing whether this is indeed their mandate. At a local level, critical departments such as Human Settlements often deny that homelessness might be an issue demanding their attention, planning and financial investment. Similarly, municipal policing might criminalise homeless persons and deny them basic human rights, while municipal social workers seek to advance their rights through rights-based education and access to social services.

Religious exclusivity mitigates against inclusive communities. While every religious group has the right to practise their religion and to stay grounded in their own religious confessions, services and models of care that require prior religious commitments, discriminate based on people's sexual orientation or are conditional on sobriety need to be interrogated vehemently, assessing both its constitutionality (in terms of the country being a secular state) but also whether it in fact could stand the test of time, theologically, if scrutinised not from a narrow moralistic perspective but from the perspective of protecting and enhancing the sanctity of life (regardless of different moral convictions). At the grassroot level, this might also require of people of different religious persuasions and denominational affiliations to learn how to discern the common good and to participate collaboratively towards achieving it.

The private sector, experience has shown, is often last to come to the table in dealing with issues concerning homelessness. Local businesses, in areas with a concentration of homeless persons, might either actively lobby to criminalise them or engage in charitable actions to support them but hardly assist in creating the kind of infrastructure that could provide sustainable alternatives to homelessness. Private sector and corporate social investment portfolios need to be challenged on issues of homelessness, helping them understand that their contribution should be about ending homelessness and not just comprise a charitable act of goodness.

It is at the level of the local neighbourhood, however, that an imaginary of inclusive communities will either be embodied or be contested. During the hard lockdown in the City of Tshwane, there were neighbourhood organisations that actively pressurised law enforcement agencies to remove homeless persons, not primarily for the safety and wellbeing of homeless persons, but because of a perceived threat homeless persons posed to the neighbourhood. In one neighbourhood, the Capital Park Home Owners' Association actively took a different position, identifying a public park in their area and offering to manage it as a temporary space for 50 street homeless persons. This became a model temporary shelter, and a number of persons with severe substance use problems were able to re-enter society, find secure employment and now either manage their substance use well or have quit using substances altogether. Unless local communities affirm the value of those who live amongst them as part of their own humanity, homeless persons and other vulnerable groups will remain excluded.

## ■ Ending homelessness in community

In this closing section, we propose that homelessness is ended in community. We consider community as *local geography*, as *place of belonging*, as a *medium of care* and as *networks of collaborative practice, sharing and learning*.

Ending homelessness should start in communities where people are homeless. There, inclusivity should be ensured through accepting homeless persons as part of the local community and through facilitating proper access to psycho-social and health care, housing and employment. Bessel (2019:149–169) reflects on 50 years of community-based action to end homelessness in North American cities, how responses have become more effective and collaborative over time and although homelessness has not been resolved (yet), she clearly asserts that 'communities play a critical role in efforts to solve this complex problem' (Bessel 2019:167).

Solidarity between communities is also critical, as not all communities hosting concentrations of homeless persons possess the kinds of resources to facilitate meaningful pathways out of homelessness.

Once local communities are welcoming of homeless and other vulnerable populations, the first commitment should be towards making sure there are places of radical hospitality – churches, mosques, temples, community fora, support groups, friendship circles or parks – where all people, but especially the most vulnerable in particular, are welcomed, valued, cherished and freed. In such spaces, people’s specific needs would be discerned, and the most suitable infrastructure required will be identified.

In a qualitative sense, community is not just a geographical location or a space in which access to services become possible. Belonging in a community now becomes the way of healing, inclusion and empowerment. When people find themselves in a community where they feel safe, they gain confidence to deal with their own issues but also to articulate their dreams and to work towards attaining them.

In many organisations, homeless persons and other so-called beneficiaries are treated as clients with needs instead of persons with resources. Inviting people not (only) into services but into a community is to affirm the dignity and unique value that people bring to the community, communicating to them that the community would be poorer for their missing gift. John McKnight (1989:38–41) provocatively asks ‘why servanthood is bad’, suggesting that we should substitute our vision of service with ‘the only thing that will make people whole’, which is ‘community’ (McKnight 1989:38). Communities focus not on people’s deficiencies but call forth their capacities. How many shelters and homeless organisations do we know of that focus on nurturing the capacities of homeless persons instead of focusing on their deficiencies?

Finally, community in the context of this chapter also refers to ‘communities of practice’. It is those networks of people who are

purposeful in seeking to foster a collaborative practice working to address and end street homelessness while sharing their knowledge, experience and resources and articulating lessons they learn together and separately. Every city and town needs such 'communities of practice' that will be intentionally focused on collaborative practice, deep sharing and collective learning. This will help to mature alliances across sectors and geographies, modelling glimpses of the inclusive community that we only can imagine at the moment. At the core of such collaborative practices should be the wisdom and experiences of (former) homeless persons.

## ■ The power of small communities

During COVID-19, a marked difference became notable in the ways in which small COVID-19 temporary shelters functioned in the City of Tshwane in comparison to bigger shelters. There were different factors that played a role but size and the difficulty to engage intimately and intensively in bigger shelters were definitely overriding factors.

Smaller numbers of people in a shelter enable deeper relationships, better quality programmes and personal care, unlike the impersonal nature of bigger shelters in which people often feel like numbers. In smaller programmes, it is possible to foster a sense of community in which people participate in co-constructing not only their own futures but also the future of the programme itself. People have a better chance of being agents instead of victims being cared for or culprits to be policed. People also stand a better chance of being supported to pathways beyond homelessness. This was also reiterated in a research project hosted by the IGH comparing the experiences of 12 cities globally.

Against the backdrop of cities rendering homeless persons dispensable, small, intimate communities become spaces in which people could feel included, that they belong and that their

voice matters. In considering building inclusive communities at a city-wide scale, it might make sense to pay close attention to examples of such communities intentionally fostered already. Often wrongly dismissed as small and insignificant, such communities often facilitate healing, empowerment and integration of people formerly homeless or violated in powerful and life-transforming ways. Donna Shaper (1989:120) accentuates the power of small communities in making radical change.

We would argue for the multiplication of many small but intentional communities – interconnected with each other – designed to welcome homeless persons hospitably, and radically, instead of the creation of a few large, impersonal and often overcrowded shelters. We would go even further and advocate for the creation of communities of equals instead of shelters with dependent beneficiaries. Existing shelter spaces could be reimagined in terms of how they construct communities of affirmation, belonging, healing and empowerment.

The story of Ntsako<sup>59</sup> comes to mind. He had been homeless for quite some time. Living with chronic mental illness and HIV and using substances in harmful ways could have been a death sentence for Ntsako. Yet he found a sense of belonging in a small community that saw him not as a client or a patient but as a person with capacities and gifts. He was invited into an internship programme to do voluntary work with homeless communities. He became a field worker doing research on street homelessness. Later, he became a housing supervisor in a community of frail older men. The cycle of care and dependency might have been perpetual for Ntsako if he remained a passive recipient of services. Through welcoming him as a participating and contributing member of a community, the cycle has been broken. Although he still lives with a psycho-social illness and

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59. Ntsako is a fictional name for a real person, interviewed by one of the authors (De Beer) of this chapter, during the Pathways out of Homelessness Research Project Phase I, conducted in 2015.

health concerns, community enabled resilience and gave Ntsako a new lease on life.

Not only has a movement of such small, purposeful and interdependent communities a better chance of facilitating personal change and alternatives for a larger number of homeless people, it is also better able to facilitate deeper systemic change and transformations beyond embracing homeless persons (De Beer & Oranje 2019):

Our contemporary cities need local communities of hope, acting ethically, while fostering movements of interconnected communities and intersectional themes, standing together for justice. If resistance can be practised with effect in local neighbourhoods and radical transformations be demonstrated, these movements could indeed guide and shape city-wide movements in terms of strategy and tactics, alternative imaginaries and hopeful models of 'the possible'. (p. 20)

## ■ Conclusion

Building inclusive communities that will fully include every person regardless of their vulnerability or societal status requires the inclusion, participation and investment of all sectors and citizens (De Beer 2020a):

Proper and appropriate public and private investments to irreversibly break cycles of homelessness are required. All spheres of government and all sectors of society should embrace homelessness as a priority. All South Africans should declare war on homelessness, and not on homeless people. Instead of accepting the reality of homelessness, we need to lament it as a gross indignity, a violation of our collective humanity, and a resounding call to create hopeful alternatives. (n.p.)

The diverse faces and causes of street homelessness require much more integrated, diversified and innovative interventions (De Beer & Vally 2015:45–61). An integrated approach, in order to facilitate communities of radical inclusion, would include psycho-social, health, economic, spatial and housing interventions and proper access to all of these. In addition to these interventions,

the work of shaping new and inclusive societal narratives is as, if not more, important as altering the narrative, which will go a long way towards facilitating true inclusion.

Right now this should be our collective task: to shape brave new imaginaries that will lead us beyond the current abnormalities of street homelessness and multiple other forms of social exclusion. COVID-19 showed the possibility of ending homelessness if there is political and moral will, as well as collaboration between all sectors of society.

Facing homelessness is to face ourselves as a society. The reality of homelessness is a reflection of our society. As homelessness is not an inevitability but a result of our collective failure as a society, imagining radical alternatives to homelessness should be the collective imperative we now task ourselves with addressing.

As De Beer (2019) wrote elsewhere:

It was prophet Isaiah's vision 'to house the homeless stranger',<sup>60</sup> and to restore streets with dwellings in them. Inclusive communities will find creative ways to integrate street homeless people, appropriately and viably. (n.p.)

Facing homelessness in all our communities should make us restless – unless the homeless stranger sits at the table, fully clothed with dignity and wellbeing, we are not well.

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60. This vision of Isaiah is contained in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 58, Verses 7 and 12.



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In 'facing homelessness' we face the other, and in facing the other, we face ourselves. This book contributes to an emerging body of knowledge on street homelessness in the South African context. It is meant for researchers and scholars who are committed to finding solutions for street homelessness. It offers conceptual frameworks and practical guidelines for a liberative and transformative response to homelessness. It brings together authors from a wide range of disciplines, fusing the rigour of researchers, the vision of activists and the lived experience of practitioners. In this volume, the causes of street homelessness in South Africa today, and its different faces, are traced. It critiques singular solutions, and interrogates the political, institutional and moral failures that contribute to the systemic exclusion of homeless persons and other vulnerable populations from society. It proposes rights-based interventions as part of a radical re-imagining of how street homelessness can be ended, one person and one neighbourhood at a time. The analysis by the authors steer in the direction of new ways of doing and being that could demonstrate concrete, viable and sustainable alternatives to the exclusionary realities faced by homeless persons. It argues for solution-based approaches, aimed at radical forms of social inclusion and achieved through broad-based and creative collaborations by all spheres of society. In the face and presence of street homelessness – as one expression of urban vulnerability and deep socio-economic inequality – society is confronted with a clear political, institutional, moral and personal obligation. This volume calls for a reclamation of community in its most inclusive, life-affirming and interdependent sense, asserting that we truly are well because of others, and we are unwell if others are. It is a call to reclaim our common humanity in the context of inclusive communities where all are equally welcome and bestowed with dignity and honour.

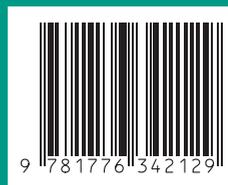
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The current book invites the intended readers to face themselves in the face of homelessness, and it seeks to provoke them about 'the disruption of systemic, political and moral failure'. Besides, it forges a new consciousness which recognises that homelessness is not a fatality, that it could be addressed and overcome through collaborative approaches 'grounded in a deeply-rooted political and moral will.' The book's content is diversified, ranging from conceptual analysis to practical guidelines, frameworks, or tools for implementing or adapting housing-led solutions. The variety of approaches derives from the multifaceted background of the contributors, including practical theology, anthropology, architecture and planning, human rights, housing and spatial justice, medical studies, politics, philosophy, economy, industrial engineering, education, social justice, interfaith dialogue, and homelessness experiences and studies. In short, this book promotes 'trans-disciplinarity', an approach through which different academic disciplines work jointly with practitioners and all the relevant stakeholders to solve a real-world problem. It simply deserves to become a scholarly book of future reference on sustainable pathways for housing-led solutions to end homelessness in South Africa and beyond.

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