

# Understanding Homelessness in Social Work – MACS

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MACS Supporting Children and Young People

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# **Awareness of Gerry Skelton's Work & HAP Events: Impact and Reflection**

Gerry Skelton has made significant contributions in the field of social work homelessness and is known for his involvement with many HAP events.

Gerry's work has inspired my understanding of the importance of an understanding of social work and homelessness and has allowed me to foster a deeper sense of social responsibility.

Not just this his work has also:

- ▶ Raised awareness of the crucial issue of homelessness
- ▶ He has empowered individuals by providing platforms for marginalised voices.
- ▶ Strengthened communities through collaborative and inclusive initiatives.

Gerry's events and passion has given me an awareness that has led to personal realisation, action taken and changes in thinking.

It highlights the importance of recognising the work of individuals like Gerry who make a significant, yet sometimes understated, impact.

The one thing I have learnt from meeting Gerry is that -

Greater recognition and engagement with initiatives like those led by Gerry can contribute to positive change in our communities and society as a whole.

# Why Studying Homelessness is Crucial in Social Work

“Housing has always been the basic need first, then you can start to establish a life. It’s the first basic need of every person if they are homeless and has nowhere to go” (Alexander et al 2000: 46).

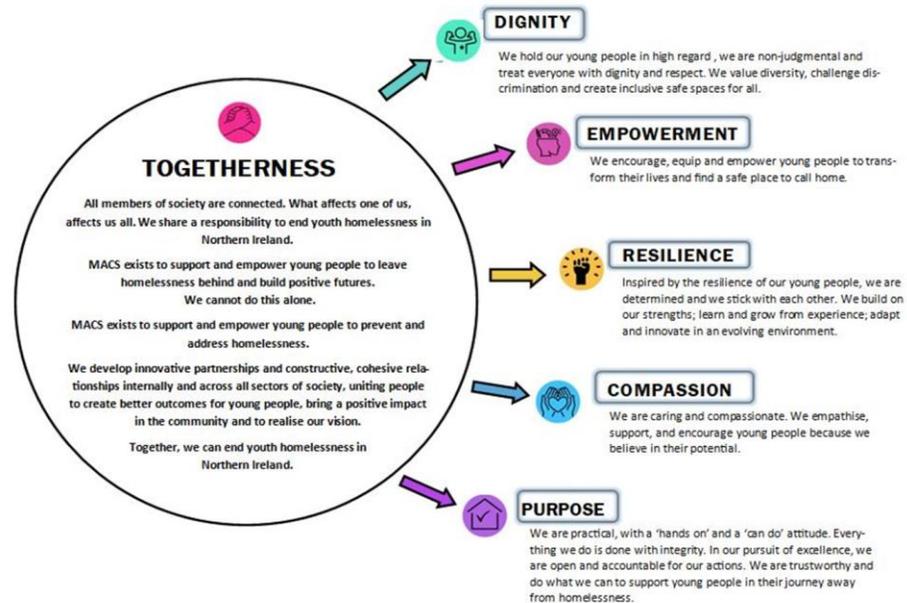
This presentation will hopefully highlight the critical importance of studying homelessness within the field of social work and provides insight into both effective strategies and areas of challenge.



▶ Vision – “ An End to Youth Homelessness in Northern Ireland”

▶ Values

# MACS - Supporting Children and Young People



“ *I had my own flat in (city location), was great but I went to Hydebank and I lost it,..... I didn't know if I could have kept it, lost all my stuff as well, I heard that people went in and wrecked it, wrecked the walls burnt my bed.. wonder if it was kept and looked after would it have been different. (Simon, 2022)* ”

# **Why is Studying Homelessness Important in Social Work?**

Understanding the Root Causes

Holistic Approach

Advocacy

Empowerment



# The Role of Social Workers in Addressing Homelessness

Direct Service Provider

Advocacy for Policy Change

Mental Health Support

Building Community Partnerships

*Tried to get help with where I would be living but had to present to NIHE on the day I turned 18 as I had aged out of my accommodation ....MACS helped me contact my ma to tell her ... she hung the phone up on me...I just wanted to go home but instead was living in a B&B at least the benefits were sorted for me so I knew I would have some money. (Phillip, 2022)*

*Dirty...holes in the mattress...covered in blood.....smelt disgusting...cried going to bed....full of rockets...would rather be back inside to be honest (Jude, 2022)*

# **Key Social Work Skills for Addressing Homelessness**

## **▶ Empathy and Active Listening**

- ▶ Building trust with those we support who may have experienced significant trauma and marginalisation.

## **▶ Advocacy and Policy Knowledge**

- ▶ Fighting for systemic change and ensuring that those who are experiencing homelessness have their rights respected and their needs are met.

## **▶ Crisis Intervention Skills**

- ▶ Providing immediate assistance and support to individuals in acute distress.

## **▶ Providing Resources**

- ▶ Helping those experiencing homelessness to access necessary community resources such as healthcare, housing, employment services, and social services.

# **What Works Well in Social Work with Those Experiencing Homelessness**

- Comprehensive Holistic Services
- Strength Based Approach
- Collaborative Approaches
- Trauma Informed Care

# What Does Not Work Well in Addressing Homelessness

## ▶ Fragmented Services

- ▶ Lack of coordination between housing, healthcare, mental health, and employment services leads to gaps in support.

## ▶ Criminalisation of those experiencing Homelessness

- ▶ Arresting or penalising people for being homeless (e.g., loitering, sleeping in public) exacerbates their situation and doesn't address the root causes.

## ▶ One-Size-Fits-All Solutions

- ▶ Not accounting for the unique needs of those experiencing homelessness (e.g., families vs. single adults, young people vs older people) can lead to ineffective interventions.

## ▶ Short-Term Solutions

- ▶ Emergency shelter that don't provide pathways to permanent housing or long-term stability.

*“ I had MACS and Housing Rights before I went to Hydebank ...they kept me right on keeping my flat.. housing benefit and stuff ...made sure it was secure for me... so they helped me with that .. meant I was able to go back to my flat which was sweet ...I still get help from MACS I’m not that mad I know I can’t do it on my own (James, 2022 I had MACS and Housing Rights before I went to Hydebank ...they kept me right on keeping my flat.. housing benefit and stuff ...made sure it was secure for me... so they helped me with that .. meant I was able to go back to my flat which was sweet ...I still get help from MACS I’m not that mad I know I can’t do it on my own” (James, 2022*



# Temporary vs. Permanent Solutions in Social Work

## ▶ Temporary Solutions:

- ▶ Emergency housing
- ▶ Crisis intervention
- ▶ Short-term rental assistance
- ▶ Transitional housing programs

▶ **Limitations:** Often fail to provide long-term stability and may not address underlying issues.

## ▶ Permanent Solutions:

- ▶ Housing First initiatives
- ▶ Long-term supportive housing
- ▶ Preventative initiatives - Upsteam
- ▶ Access to permanent mental health care and addiction treatment
- ▶ Job training and education programs to enable self-sufficiency

▶ **Benefits:** These solutions offer a lasting exit from homelessness and focus on long-term well-being.

***“ What do I want? Dunno, a home that's safe, (David”, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)***



# Learning from MACS

Homelessness is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive, compassionate, and systemic approach.

Social workers play a vital role in providing both temporary and permanent solutions to homelessness.

By addressing the immediate needs of individuals and advocating for long-term systemic change, social workers can significantly reduce homelessness and improve the quality of life for those affected.

The issues of long-term disruption and emerging housing difficulties are paramount.

Support must have appropriate timing.

Preventative work must be completed.



A hand is shown interacting with a large, complex geometric structure made of light-colored wooden blocks. The structure is laid out on a grey and white patterned rug. The hand is positioned on the right side, with fingers spread, appearing to be in the process of moving or adjusting one of the blocks. The structure consists of several interconnected rectangular and square frames, some of which are partially completed or being assembled. The overall scene suggests a hands-on activity or a demonstration of a geometric concept.

**Thank you!**