

‘HOMELESSNESS: MOVING FROM ‘TEMPORARY’ TO PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION’, IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION, TRAINING, PRACTICE, AND GOVERNANCE’.

HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS PANEL EVENT: NI SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL, DEC 2ND 2024.

PRESENTATION BY ***PORTIA MSONZA***;

2

LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF (X4)

- A resilient and determined woman shaped by life's challenges.
- Committed to supporting family and friends, guided by a principle to always seek improvement
- A devoted mother of 3 children, striving to ensure their well-being despite significant hardships.
- A daughter, mum, sister, and a friend to many.



3

BECOMING **HOMELESS**. (X4)

- 2003-2016: Stable; living with my ex-partner and children in private rented housing.
- 2016: Family breakdown left me unemployed and vulnerable.
- 2020: Contracted COVID-19 which worsened financial struggles-unable to afford rent or food!
- Forced to accept hostel accommodation from NI Housing Executive, as no other options were available.



HOSTEL LIFE

IMPACT ON ME AND FAMILY

- Witnessed 3 family's housed ahead of me, despite arriving later, raising questions of fairness.
- But no one ever explains!
- So I waited on another four bedroom house becoming available.
- Curfew rules and bans on visitors disrupted family dynamics.
- My older son (who has autism) struggled to share the bedroom with his brother.
- Daughter's behavioural changes increased family stress.
- Struggles with parenting worsened by restrictive hostel environment.
- Overall impact on mental health: feelings of defeat, isolation and helplessness.

5 THINGS THAT HELPED

- My faith and church - it became my pillar of emotional and spiritual support.
- Friends offered help and companionship, though limited due to hostel rules.
- Finally getting a 4-bed house early this year (2024) and we're still settling in.

6 WHERE WAS SOCIAL WORK?

- Neglect in addressing my daughter's needs -10 phone calls no action taken.
- Responded after I took action!
- I asked for help regarding my housing issue – 'Outside our role'!
- Left alone to navigate complex and overwhelming challenges.
- Felt abandoned by the system designed to provide aid in times of crisis.

7 MY KEY MESSAGES FOR SOCIAL WORK BASED ON MY EXPERIENCE.

- The absence of proactive intervention worsened an already difficult situation.
- Calls for change to ensure no family feels unsupported or abandoned.
- As Gerry keeps telling everyone (and I agree) Homelessness is a social work issue!

8 TALKING ABOUT GERRY...

- I only heard of Gerry Skelton in September (from Finn) and then met him in October;
- He accepted my invitation to meet me in my home;
- WOW! He's tall!
- He listened to my story;
- Then he gently persuaded me my story was valuable and could help others do better;
- So he invited me to do this!
- I've now getting to know Gerry better;
- He's already corrected me in referring to myself as 'homeless person / family'!
- He openly shared lots of his resources and I got to hear about the other HAPs, etc.
- I truly appreciate Gerry's confidence in me, including this opportunity to share with you.
- I wish Gerry could do more events like these, giving others a chance to share their stories.

9 CONCLUSION (X3)

- Despite my struggles, I remain hopeful and committed to building a better future for my family.
- Thank you for taking the time to be here and listen to my story...AND;
- Now I hope you will go and make things better!