

Gerry Skelton's
'Homelessness: Moving from 'temporary' to permanent accommodation', in social work education, training, practice, and governance'.

Monday December 2nd at the NI Social Care Council

Additional 2024 HAP contributors:





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Gerry Skelton MBE: Independent Lecturer, Trainer, Consultant, Counsellor, and Justice Campaigner.



Additional 2024 HAP contributors:



**Dr Gerry Marshal
(QUB) video piece.**

Gerry's opening comments



- ❑ Gratitude Attitude 😊
- ❑ Gerry INTRO (INC: '85%'; 'walking miracle'; pivoting);
- ❑ Today's inputs will be made available via SCC 😊
- ❑ **WOW...**what a title I've given my final **HAP** event!
- ❑ I want to extend the warmest of welcomes to...
 - Those who have been reared in good (Family, Foster, Residential) homes...and not;
 - Those who are living in good homes OR not!
 - All who have / are homeless!
- ❑ It is my assumption that many of us have or will experience home-less-ness; and we MUST...
 - Remove its associated Stigma, Taboo, Labelisation, ETC! from Children, Adolescents, Adults and Elders!
- ❑ This has been my mission over MANY years, and I'm delighted YOU are here to share in it 😊
- ❑ Welcome to NI's HAW; and theme 'Time for a change';
- ❑ 10th October was?
 - ❖ 'World homeless day' (Only started **10-10-2010**):
 - I don't like it because of wording and it is also 'World Mental Health Day'; conflating the 2 issues and dividing attention to 2 important themes!
 - Another example of 'hidden homelessness'!
 - So I'm pleased NI has a HAWeek.
- ❑ Traffic lights: measuring amount and pacing of sharing; and protecting yourself!
- ❑ Phones on **silent**, **out of sight**; and **no photos**, please!



Contextualisation / Establishing a broad context

□ Gerry Skelton's positive provocations:

1. Homelessness can happen to anyone, anytime!
2. Social work doesn't take homelessness seriously!
3. Social care is immersed in homelessness (among other areas, of course), and often does this well; unlike social work (with some exceptions, but more often working for charities, HAs, etc.);
4. Often the involvement of service users (carers, too!) isn't meaningful and often tokenistic! This is not limited to SW / SC, but housing, homelessness, HAs, etc.!
5. My 'pennies' and 'dots' analogies;
6. I'm tired of people saying there's no teaching / training resources!
7. I will highlight the formal / informal ways I've addressed homelessness and challenged...everyone, everywhere!
8. There's an old Croatian proverb: **'Tell the truth and run like...'**!

□ Social work and Homelessness have always intersected.

- And there were a plethora of good practice SW initiatives; albeit not mainstreamed!
 - But, in the latter part of the 20th century this 'relationship' became distant and, in the current 21st century, appears almost non-existent!
 - And, once again, there have been exceptions (and exceptional SW and related practitioners) demonstrating how they have taken homelessness seriously but often in isolation!
- Today is yet another Skelton & Co attempt, supported by loving, powerful voices in this room, to get this relationship restored!

□ *"The myriad issues confronting the Social Work, Social Care, Health and related professions generally, and practitioners specifically, can be readily viewed through the prism of homelessness. Indeed, arguably homelessness is not simply a practical reality but goes to the very core of one's physical, psychological, emotional spiritual and social identity, and resultant self esteem."* (Gerry Skelton 2007 HAP address);

□ *"Homelessness is not a homogenous experience, with a single causal factor, but results from a complex interplay between the personal and the social"* (Skelton, 2020: 81).;

□ *"I wish to challenge a prevailing stereotypical orthodoxy that "street homelessness" is the dominant manifestation of homelessness. It is not. In reality, the vast majority of homelessness is "invisible," including those in care, shelters or "sofa surfing." Those on the streets generally represent a smaller, yet public, expression of homelessness (albeit some countries are worse than others)." (Skelton, 2020: 85).*

□ *"Its simply about...joining the operational, strategic and relationship dots"* {Skelton, 2016} ☺



The history of Skelton's HAP events, campaigns, etc.

- For most of my personal and professional career, initially as a social work practitioner and the last 32+ years as a lecturer, “**...homelessness has been something of a taboo in social work education, training and, as a result, practice**” (Skelton, 2007; 2017).
 - E.G. Scarcity of meaningful attention to homelessness in social work academia (teaching, writing, etc.);
 - Or usual conflation with criminality, addictions!
- I found academic colleagues (with minor exceptions) shunned homelessness, challenged why I was addressing it; and either resisted my efforts to mainstream this theme in education or openly dismissed it. They were emboldened by SW leadership saying ‘**homelessness is not a social work issue**’!
- In response, I set about challenging and correcting this, seeking and securing the involvement of those in the housing, homelessness and social services; AND those who were or had been homeless.
- For many years I laboured in vain, and it was SO frustrating, isolating and disappointing!
- By 2005 I had had enough of relatively small measures and set about creating a positively provoking initiative; out of which the **Homelessness Awareness Panel {HAP}** Event was born.
 - From 2006 to 2016 I singlehandedly ran this, with the help of a group of volunteers that I had to recruit, that included students, service users who were or had been homeless and helpful colleagues (interestingly all outside of social work!). You will get a real feel for what the **HAP** involved in terms of presentations, colour, music, audience, etc. here:
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA3Cdw4usMM
 - www.belfastmet.ac.uk/about-us/news-and-events/news-and-events-item/?News_ID=10104&FriendlyID=Homelessness-Awareness-Panel-2016
 - The **HAP** event became so successful it ‘went on tour’ as several people humorously referred to it. This included me hosting 2 events at the social work regulator, the Social Care Council (2011; 2019), Queen’s University (2014); and a plethora of other inputs to and for various organisations.
 - The Council for the Homeless In Northern Ireland {CHINI} coordinated NI’s first Homeless Awareness Week (2006), which coincided, serendipitously, with me creating the **HAP** event. Indeed, the **HAP** was one of the bigger events that week and remained so in successive years. The CHINI was renamed Homeless Connect <https://homelessconnect.org> and here are a few examples of the December 2023 NI Homeless Awareness Week:
 - www.homelessnesspreventionforum.com/news/turning-the-tide
 - www.harmoni.org.uk/news/homelessness-awareness-week-2023-turnthetide
 - For a more detailed overview of the origins, activity, impact, and uniqueness of the **HAP**, please read: <https://simoncommunity.org/assets/pdfs/Gerry-Skeltons-A-Decade-of-Homelessness-Awareness-Panel.pdf>

Homelessness: not Housinglessness!

“Homelessness is something that can happen to anyone for any number of reasons. You don’t have to be living on the streets to be homeless. There are many different circumstances that can lead to you being defined as homeless” (NIHE 2024):

www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help/homelessness/what-do-we-mean-by-homelessness

❑ Let’s critique this statement.

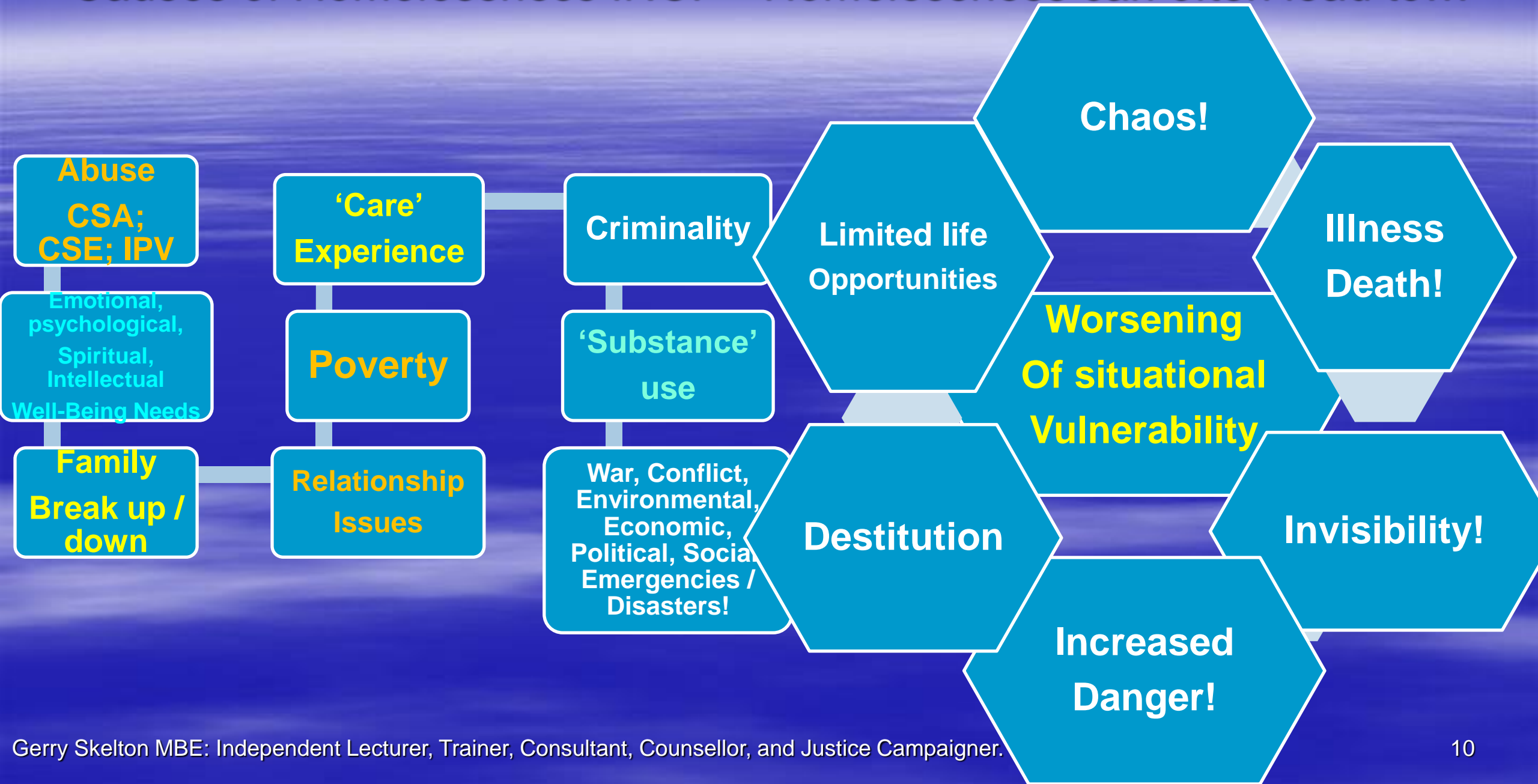
❑ Wider issues (not for today): Post-Pandemic (**hopefully!**) revealed / caused lots of challenges) and looking forward, there are a huge concerns facing homelessness and related services, including:

❖ COST!

- Available and anticipated reduced finances / budgets.
- Arguments about moving away from ‘costly hostels’!
- Homelessness prevention being championed by the few and resourced accordingly!
- Current low level of status (and resultant wages) in social care!
- Meeting increased demands, due to:
- ‘Cost-of-living crisis’!
- High mortgage rate!
- Increased rents!

- ❖ Decreased housing stock {despite boarded-up houses, buildings, ETC.}.
- ❖ Increasing burdens placed on services and staff!
- ❖ The wider need to TRANSFORM service provision, delivery, etc;
- ❖ Personalisation.
- ❖ Resistance to meaningful involvement and resourcing of lived experience!
- ❖ Self-care;
- ❖ Blame culture;
- ❖ Increasing digitisation and automation (Please stop calling people ‘**humans**’!);
- ❖ SO much more food for thought, action; or worryingly,...indigestion!

Causes of Homelessness INC: Homelessness can often lead to...



Effects of Homelessness can include:



Core systems that can **Help** / **Hinder**!



Gerry Skelton MBE: Independent Lecturer,
Trainer, Consultant, Counsellor, and Justice
Campaigner.



Homelessness impacts
Childhood; **Adolescence**
Adulthood and **Elderhood**!



It NEVER feels good!



Home-Less-Ness comes in many guises...
HIDDEN and VISIBLE!

Other images of homelessness



Now, what are social workers required to do?

- ❑ The following 'Key SW Roles' are supported by a series of '**Social Work Standards**' (which elaborate on the Roles).
- ❑ The current 6 SW Key Roles (from 2015 Framework Spec for SW Degree):
 - 1) Maintain professional **accountability**; **Social Work Standards**: 1, 2;
 - 2) Practice '**professional**' social work; **Social Work Standards**: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7;
 - 3) Promote **engagement** and **participation**; **Social Work Standards**: 8, 9, 10, 11;
 - 4) **Assess** needs, risks and circumstances; **Social Work Standards**: 12, 13;
 - 5) **Plan** for person centred outcomes; **Social Work Standards**: 14, 15, 16.
 - 6) Take **actions** to achieve change; **Social Work Standards**: 17, 18, 19 & 20.
- ❑ **SCC** (2015) 6 **Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers** (Students have '**Standards of Conduct**'):
 - 1) As a social worker, **you must** protect the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers.
 - 2) As a social worker, **you must** strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.
 - 3) As a social worker, **you must** promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm. AND?
 - 4) As a social worker, **you must** respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people. AND?
 - 5) As a social worker, **you must** uphold public trust and confidence in social work services.
 - 6) As a social worker, **you must** be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.



The social work role.

- ❑ The social work role, (in NI or across the globe), must be centred on offering a caring, compassionate and, at times, challenging! and impacting response.
- ❑ Homelessness is a need and social work MUST respond accordingly!
- ❑ The IFSW definition of SW (2015) subsumes homelessness (albeit implied):

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing”.

“That is why social workers need to understand homelessness with its multiplicity of causes and consequences. Whatever the reasons for social work involvement in a person’s life, social workers must always be prepared to use their expertise and skills, working collaboratively with others to respond to homelessness and the threat of homelessness”

(Sean Holland, Chief Social Work Officer, 2019).

- ❑ I also want to see appropriate use of **AI**...which stand for?
 - No, I argue for ‘**Actual Intelligence**’...there’s way too much artificialness in life!
 - Artifice is root of artificial!!

“Duty of care! AND Duty TO care”! (GS).

SW can offer

- ❑ Caring / care-full and not care-less response!
- ❑ SW value, principle and ethical base;
- ❑ The SW key roles, standards, etc;
- ❑ Relationship forming / building;
- ❑ Assessment (of and in ‘need’);
- ❑ Care planning;
- ❑ Writing supportive ‘points’ letter;
- ❑ Safeguarding / protection;
- ❑ Advocacy / mediation / service brokerage, etc.;
- ❑ Knowledge and understanding of housing, homelessness and related support organisations, services, ETC;
- ❑ Legislation, policy, protocols, processes, etc;
- ❑ Welfare rights, benefits, budgeting, etc;
- ❑ Addressing ‘risk’ however that is understood / manifest!
- ❑ AOP and challenging the criminalisation of homelessness etc!

❑ Overarching theory, core concepts, etc. INC:

- Poverty;
- Deprivation;
- Exclusion;
- Disadvantage;
- ‘ISM’s;!
- Institutionalisation;
- Attachment;

- ❑ Skelton (2017) talks about his new term, **The Labelisation of Homelessness**: the often dehumanising process of putting a label before a human being and judging them accordingly’!

- www.choice-housing.org/news/2017/june/homelessness-in-the-spotlight-with-hard-hitting-production
- www.choice-housing.org/news/2017/december/giving-homelessness-a-home
- Grief;
- Loss {**Home-LOSS-ness!**};
- Conflict;
- Trauma;
- ETC., ETC!



Skelton advocates an ecological approach:

Meaningful intervention will insist on an
Ecological approach / perspective!

- ❑ It's a holistic perspective that ensures:
- Intervention looks at the internal AND external: surrounding environment / circumstances / systems; and impact thereof!
- What systems are we within / surrounded by?
- Some examples INC:
- ❖ Family; education; community; housing; employment; religious / spiritual faith; friendships; culture; social; economic; political; etc., etc., etc!
- We are emotional, physical, intellectual, psychological, mental, spiritual, social, political, etc. 'beings' / 'doings'!
- A homelessness approach / assessment / intervention, etc., needs to take cognisance of all and respond accordingly!
- One example of this approach more broadly is Skelton's *Biopsychosocialspiritual approach*. *Links...*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaQHBoM_29U



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Additional positive provocation of social work ☺



- ❑ *'The 2015 Homelessness interview with Declan Morris (Homeless Prevention, SCNI), Grace Price (Homeless survivor and campaigner) and social work lecturer and campaigner, Gerry Skelton':*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Elib6rJ730>

- ❑ The **HAP** and related events have connecting social work, housing providers, housing associations, homeless services, NIHE, broader support services and support organisations across the statutory, voluntary, private and charitable sectors.

- ❑ 'Gerry Skelton hosts the inaugural Homelessness Awareness Panel event at Queen's University Social Work Department. **"...the championing on this issue by Gerry Skelton serves well to remind us of what we need to do."** [Tony Rodgers, HSCB Director of Social Work, 2014].



- ❑ It took me many years to meet with NI's Chief Social Worker, to challenge and inform his understanding of homelessness. I am eternally grateful for his humility in response and commitment to SW changing; all of which is captured in this frank, engaging and revealing **'Gerry Skelton interviews the Chief Social Work, Sean Holland (2016)'**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z14d3NdrX9Q

Gerry Skelton MBE: Independent Lecturer, Trainer, Consultant, Counsellor, and Justice Campaigner.

Morning Seminar: Where 'Homelessness' and Social Work Coalesce – NISCC

"Gerry Skelton, MBE – Social Work Lecturer and Social Justice Campaigner will host the annual Homelessness Awareness Panel (HAP) seminar on Monday 2nd December 2019 at the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Now in its 12th year, the event theme a '20:20 vision: embracing 'Home-less-ness' as a compelling concern in Social Work Education, Training and Practice' is set to once again present a challenging agenda for the social work profession. A range of speakers from social work practitioners, those who have been or remain homeless and representatives from supporting organisations will touch the heads, hearts and spirits of the invited audience and encourage them to get involved in tackling homelessness".

- The various presentations can be accessed here: [Gerry Skelton: Homelessness Seminar - 1 \(pagetiger.com\)](http://GerrySkelton:HomelessnessSeminar-1.pagetiger.com)





Part of the (2017) script from Fionnuala Kennedy's play '**Hostel**', premiered at the Baby Grand Opera House in 2012 and this follow-up in 2017.

- ❑ Picking up the play with Maria (resident) chatting about being homeless with Ciaran (keyworker).
- **Maria (Resident):** It's not too bad. I just never thought in my life I'd end up a homeless person.
- **Ciaran (Keyworker):** *Listen, a good friend of mine, Gerry Skelton, said there's no such thing as a homeless person. It's a person who is homeless.*
- **Maria :** *What's the difference?*
- **Ciaran :** *Homelessness should never and will never define you Maria. You're many other things.*



Gerry Skelton MBE: Independent Lecturer, Trainer, Consultant, Counsellor, and Justice Campaigner.



Some other notable developments:

- For many years, I have singly ensured social work students have been taught about homelessness, even when it was an unrecognised social work theme, disappointingly!
- 2010: The Social Work and Social Policy Higher Education Academy was the first external sponsor (2010) and 'commended the HAP as a piece of excellence in and across the UK'.



- 2013: I received a "Social Work Award for outstanding work in addressing homelessness".



- 2013: 'Skelton's 2013 Homelessness event for World Social Work Day, March 2013' highlighted by IFSW.
www.ifsw.org/world-social-work-day-in-northern-ireland

- 2014: Establishment of the Homelessness Prevention Forum:

"Gerry Skelton's work was a huge catalyst in the formation of the Homelessness Prevention Forum and marked a sea change in how organisations in this sector worked together. Gerry's many years of service in tackling and highlighting the issue of homelessness has been key to much of this work"

{Declan Morris, creator of the HPF and Joint Chair}.

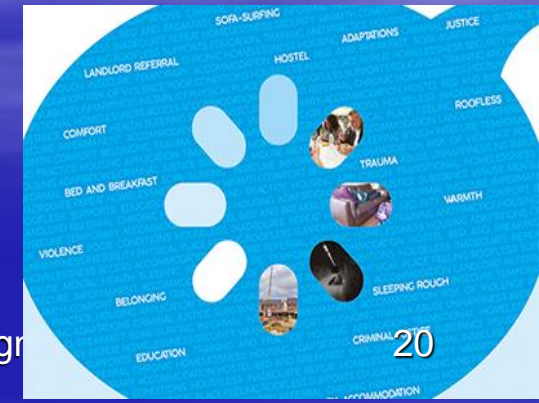
Gerry Skelton MBE: Independent Lecturer, Trainee

- 2015: agreement that Homelessness will be part of the SW 2015-20 curriculum (albeit in 3rd year!);
- 2016 Establishment of Extern Homes, "Inspired by the work of Gerry Skelton across the social work, housing and homelessness sectors".



- CSW, Sean Holland changed his mind and agreed to give homelessness profile in SW!
- Eventually (after more 'prompting'!), the Office of Social Services produced a homelessness framework (2019).
- I'm proud of getting Gerard Forrestal's 'Breathing out' song included 😊
- From September 2020, homelessness was placed on the social work degree as an explicit theme in 1st year!

Original REF Group 2018



Respecting Diversity
Through Joint Social Action



Gerry Skelton MBE 2024 Panama Presentation on homelessness: [SWSD 2024 \(opc.uy\)](#)

www.belfastmet.ac.uk/about-us/news/world-conference-on-social-work

**“These presentations are made by
national and international speakers who
are leaders in the different topics”.**

Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social
Development, Panama 2024.



The International Association of
Schools of Social Work, the
International Council for Social
Welfare and the International
Federation of Social Workers.



**‘Of no fixed abode:
An ecological approach to
Homelessness in social work
education, training and
practice (Northern Ireland)’.**

5th April 2024.

Conference speaker:

Gerry Skelton MBE

Gerry Skelton MBE: Independent Lecturer, Trainer, Consultant, Counsellor, and Justice Campaigner.



#0251 | Proposed working title for presentation: 'Of no fixed abode: Homelessness in social work education, training and practice'.

Gerry Skelton¹

¹ - Belfast Metropolitan College.

Summary

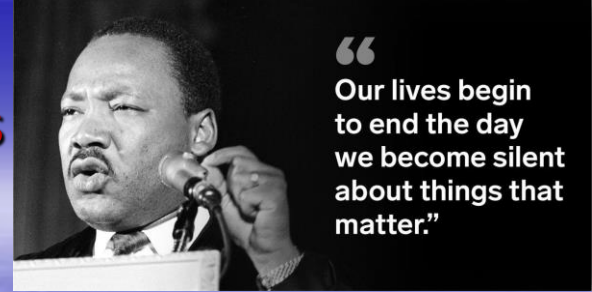
For most of my personal and professional career, initially as a social work practitioner and the last 30+ years as a lecturer, “...homelessness has been something of a taboo in social work education, training and, as a result, practice” (Skelton, 2007; 2017). There has been a scarcity of meaningful attention in Northern Ireland afforded to this human rights issue, as evidenced historically by its apparent absence in social work academia. In response, I set about challenging and correcting this, seeking and securing the involvement of those in the housing, homelessness and social services; as well as involving those who were or had been homeless. Not only was this a unique educational and training experience, it was – by design - deeply respectful of the diversity people with ‘lived experience’ brought to ensuring the authenticity of what became known as the Annual Homelessness Awareness Panel Event, starting in 2006 and, in its various guises, still going! My presentation will outline what I did to establish this initiative, the ways I secured the substantive involvement of people who have / continue to have experience of being homeless, highlight the obstacles faced and how these were overcome, and how this work eventually contributed to policy and practice changes for social work at various, significant levels.

Keywords (separate with commas)

Homelessness, service user involvement, taboo, education, training, practice, obstacles, policy.



Slow realisation about the centrality of homelessness



- ❑ Chief Social Worker (Sean Holland, 2010-2022) was on record as saying homelessness was not a SW issue!
- ❑ Candid admission from the outgoing NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), Koulla Yiasouma...
“Housing and homelessness was not a priority for NICCY during my first years as commissioner” (2023 ‘A place to call home’). She went on to say it was the children and adolescents who raised the issue, initially about their concerns regarding ‘street homelessness’.
- NICCY went on to look deeper into homelessness and this 2023 ‘A place to call home’ report is worth reading.
- Many SW academics don’t embrace homelessness as a SW issue!
- Many students haven’t been taught homelessness within academia; except regurgitating the stereotypical criminalisation, additions: conflating!
- *“For all the good work of people working within the homelessness system, a substantial number of people exit homelessness on their own initiative...Such individuals prove to be more resourceful than the system intended to help them”* (Ligia Teixeira, 2023 Centre for Homelessness Impact);
- And a broad, recent riposte to SW from Prof. Ray Jones (2023) report (into **children’s** services in NI); making 53 recommendations and a clarion call for SW to “... **reemphasise its roots in help and support**”.
- Even if it addresses homelessness, social work often defaults to stereotypical images and messages;
- Even the Social Care Council slipup; losing 2019 HAP; using stereotypical media images of homelessness!

Pictorial 'evidence-base' of involving *power* and *people* in personal and professional encounters





A BIG 'Shoutout to and for ALL the people who have helped me give homelessness a voice, platform, status, and a HOME in social work!

My gratitude to Belfast Met staff across all sectors who helped 😊



Rhetorical; so no 'shout-outs' please!

An untold story



- 1) Have you ever been in temporary accommodation?
- 2) Have you ever been evicted? Forced out?
- 3) Have you ever been totally dependant on a housing provider?

❑ Please stop using 'landlord': an outdated and often grandiose term!

❑ The 'answer' to all of the above is...**YES!**

❑ This understanding hopefully feeds our humility.

❑ Now, quick Q: who appears most in all the pictures thus far?

❑ I was:

- A child (aged 5+) and adolescent carer;
- Missed LOTS of early school (learned to write at 14!);
- Homeless as a child, adolescent, and adult;
- 'In care' of social services as a child and adolescent; with a plethora of social workers!
- Nazareth Lodge; 'farmed out' to relatives (now called 'Kinship'); Palmerston children / adolescent home.

❑ **And I've never wanted my story to be the story...or get in the way of others!**



My challenges (in collaboration with housing, homelessness, related sectors:

❑ Echoing CW Mills (1959) let's use a ***social work imagination!***

❑ **Social work profession generally:**

- Please see and embrace my title for this 2024 HAP event!
- Realise homelessness includes 'children / adolescents in care'!
- Centralising 'lived experience' AND **PPI**.
- 'Lived experience' properly integrated into SW education; training, practice; and governance (Boards, etc).

❑ **RQIA:**

- Put homelessness on its agenda and inspect service provision!

❑ **Social Care Council:**

- Ensure homelessness is taught and remains so in every curriculum review!
- Initiate mini-inspection groups to quality assure lecturer inputs; with the freedom to attend lectures across the 5 academic sites;
- Apply above to social work training and practice requirements.
- (Re)Consider why **all** homeless provision is not regulated by SCC?
- Establish a 'champion' (and platform) within SCC that understands homelessness; supported by, for example, HPForum;
- Carers & Service users' 'PP' group to address homelessness;
- Professionalise social care.

❑ **Social work education:**

- Lecturers to explicitly undertake (owning the responsibility) informed and substantive teaching (not simply seminar / tutorials!) on homelessness (and not relegating this to occasional speakers);
- Have meaningful involvement of lived experience; pre-brief; post-brief and ongoing involvement of various people!
- Conduct and encourage SW / homelessness research (not simply focussing on addictions, criminality, etc);
- Start writing textbooks about homelessness and social work interface, etc!
- Ensure the theme of homelessness is on the SW academic agenda, discussions (INC alertness to colleague and student circumstances);
- Social work students to raise homelessness.



Some 'Skelton keys'



- Amazingly, having a home is NOT a right: let's change that!
- No highlighting of home / homelessness in UN 17SDGoals!
- I care deeply about this theme and the people caught up in its spectre! Thus, I'm relentless in ensuring the issue of Home-Less-Ness is heard, seen, felt...and addressed!
- And CARING is one of the heavy prices we pay for loving and often a litmus test of meaningful intervention.
- I have campaigned for years to establish homelessness as a **legitimate, explicit** and **applied** core theme in all SW **Education, Training, Practice** and **governance**! So be encouraged in your struggle to do likewise.
- NB: Its justice [not **JUST-US!**]; and challenging silence!
- Let's remove the taboos surrounding and often concealing homelessness...and reducing implied criminalisation!
- I want residents, service users (and carers) to know that we care about their plight and will respond accordingly;
- ALL being **resourced**; then **challenged** to do better;
- "**The rhetoric of metric**" (Skelton, 2010): Please don't fall into the managerialism trap of referring to people as numbers, statistics, units, letters!, etc!
- Remember you choose a caring helping job, role, profession, etc; so help not hinder, serve rather than be served!
- I've argued for introduction of a '**Duty to Care**' not simply a 'duty of care' and 'duty of quality'!
- **Challenge labelisation** by NEVER placing a label before a person and confronting **ANYone** (regardless of status, power, etc) using wording / phrases like: 'The Homeless'; 'Homeless people'!
- Challenge media to offer accountable, dignified reporting; and realise that before and after every lazy or sensationalist headline about homelessness, there's a person / family!
- Homelessness can be a daily experience, so not simply relegated to HAP events, annual campaigns, etc!
- I never want anyone to repeat the question OFTEN asked of me: '**What's homelessness got to do with social work?**' 😞
- CV Pandemic revealed / caused a LOT of issues, but also saw examples of a more compassionate response from society and various helping organisations. We were reminded that insistent individualism is not always preferable, and communitarianism has always been a fundamental part of every society. There are seeds of hope therein.

'Heads-up': NI Audit Office {NIAO}

- www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/work-progress-homelessness

- **Work in Progress – Homelessness (20 November 2023 notice).**

“We are currently undertaking work in order to produce this publication. Details of when we aim to publish the finalised report are indicated below.

Homelessness provision refers not only to people who are ‘sleeping rough’ but also to those living in unsuitable accommodation and those using informal arrangements for housing. The number of people presenting as homeless has started to increase again, with many of the 45,000 currently on the social housing waiting list accepted as homeless.

Homelessness remains a significant social and financial issue in Northern Ireland, with expenditure on homeless services doubling to almost £60 million per annum over the last 10 years. Of particular significance is the increasing demand for temporary accommodation, with expenditure quadrupling since 2015.

- This study will consider how the landscape around homelessness services has changed since our last report was published in 2017. It will evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the approach taken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to address homelessness, and provide appropriate help and advice. In undertaking this study, we will examine a range of issues including:

- The drivers and impacts of increased demand for homeless services;
- Homelessness prevention;
- The extent of inter-departmental collaboration;
- Social housing supply arrangements;
- Governance and accountability structures; and
- Homelessness service arrangements in place in other jurisdictions.

- We aim to publish this report in Winter 2024”.

- ❑ I have contacted NIAO, but still awaiting this report...

Reference Section / Resources to follow-up:



2015 NVTV interview of Declan Morris, Grace Price and Gerry Skelton addressing homelessness: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Elib6rJ730

Gerry Skelton's 2016 Interview with Chief Social Services Officer, Sean Holland: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z14d3NdrX9Q

2016 Belfast Met's Gerry Skelton's final Homelessness Awareness Panel Event: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA3Cdw4usMM

{2017} "Gerry Skelton, in collaboration with and sponsored by Choice Housing and Simon Community, present Hostel at Baby Grand Opera House and subsequent panel Q&A to address homelessness":

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV9CqZr8xXU

Gerry Skelton's (2017) article for the SCNI: **"Giving homelessness a home in social work education, training and practice"**

www.simoncommunity.org/assets/pdfs/Gerry-Skeltons-A-Decade-of-Homelessness-Awareness-Panel.pdf

2019 "Gerry Skelton MBE Homelessness Event at the NI Social Care Council: <https://view.pagetiger.com/bkwntax/1>

Jones, R. (2023) The report of the independent review of Northern Ireland's children's social care services. www.cscsreviewni.net/publications/report-independent-review-childrens-social-care-services-northern-ireland

Skelton, G. (2017) 'Reclaiming and embracing spirituality as a legitimate facet of social work'. In Bhatti-Sinclair, K. and Smethurst, C. (2017) Diversity, Difference and Dilemmas: analyzing concepts and developing skills. London: McGraw-Hill.

Skelton, G. (2020) **The spirit of resilience through the prism of homelessness: Avoiding stigma and labellisation**. In Thompson, N. and Cox, G. (2020) Promoting resilience: Responding to adversity, vulnerability and loss. New York: Routledge.

www.swapbox.ac.uk/807/1/hs_homelessness_FINAL.pdf

OSS: 'Social work and homelessness' (Nov 2019): www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/reflections-homelessness.pdf

NI Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work, 2015)
Social Work Key roles and characteristics:

<https://learningzone.niscc.info/app/uploads/2022/08/The-Northern-Ireland-Framework-Specification-for-the-Degree-2015.pdf>

www.homelessnesspreventionforum.com/news

To conclude:

This **HAP** event will be of considerable interest to those involved in social work and social care, whether at academic, policy, practice, managerial or regulatory levels. Gerry Skelton has been **campaigning for decades** to ensure homelessness is **taken seriously within social work** particularly, and has produced a **plethora of resources** to this end (many of which are readily available from the Social Care Council website). His constant challenge is for the caring services to realise that **95% of homelessness is hidden** and that **the spectre of homelessness spans childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood**. Therefore, this **HAP** event does not focus on 'rough sleeping' generally, but on the majority of situations that social work especially has a valuable role to play; but is often ignorant of its responsibilities or the contribution it can offer. This is an opportunity to hear from **a range of quality panellists**, showcase best practice; and offer support and resources to those working in this important arena.

Commenting on the event, Gerry said: "I am absolutely delighted the Social Care Council have invited me to resurrect my HAP event, and am **grateful to the leadership of their Chief Executive, Declan McAllister** and Council staff for their support in hosting this. **I look forward to sharing a mix of personal and professional insights, challenges and opportunities, gleaned over many years championing this theme, and consistently arguing for its permanent not temporary accommodation in social work; at every level, and supported accordingly**".

Thank you

