

Report

Homecoming and homelessness

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SUPPORTING HOMELESS
SCOTS IN LONDON

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Shelter

Acknowledgements

Thanks to staff at Borderline, and the clients who have kindly contributed their stories to this report.

All photographs are courtesy of the Shelter Scotland photo library¹.

¹ To protect the identity of clients, names have been changed and models have been used in photos.

Foreword

In this Year of Homecoming I am pleased to be back in Scotland. When I left in 1979 Scotland was suffering from a deep recession and unemployment was rising at an alarming rate, a striking parallel to the economic gloom that we face today. In London I was working with young people many of whom were sleeping rough in the West End and Soho, many of them young Scots. So, the difficulties faced by James, Graham and John which this report describes are all too familiar. So, what has changed and why am I pleased to be back home? Well, despite the problems we face I see a positive change in Scotland. We are facing up to and tackling the challenge of homelessness. The Scottish Parliament has introduced the groundbreaking legislation, which states that everyone who is homeless will have the right to a home by 2012. However, as the homelessness statistics and stories in this report show, many Scots are still homeless and many have left Scotland due to the lack of affordable accommodation and support. The 2012 commitment **must** be met and I look to the Scottish Parliament and Government to provide the funding to build more affordable homes.



Graeme Brown, Director of Shelter Scotland

Photo credit - Sophie Laslett

Homecoming Scotland 2009

At the beginning of this year the Scottish Government launched the Homecoming Scotland 2009, with celebrations for the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns' birth. The celebrations involve 'a year-long programme of events across the country incorporating celebrations for Scotland's great contributions to the world such as: golf; whisky; great minds and innovations; and Scotland's rich culture and heritage'².

Homecoming, as a theme, is one which is easy to caricature. It could be argued that it dwells excessively on well-worn images of Scotland which do little to reflect the characteristics of a complex society in the twenty-first century. Its messages seem designed to appeal to a wealthier diaspora; particularly those in North America or other developed countries.

However, caricature is not our purpose here. We believe that Homecoming is and can be a positive message at a time of some economic gloom. We believe that a Homecoming theme can be enriched by recognising that there are many less fortunate Scots who cannot celebrate Homecoming Scotland 2009, because they have no home, or have had to leave Scotland and cannot return. For homeless households in Scotland, those in temporary accommodation and the many homeless Scots living elsewhere, the homecoming message may ring a little hollow.

So, in this brief report we take 'Homecoming' as a starting point to discuss another diaspora: people who have left Scotland and found themselves homeless and facing housing problems elsewhere in the UK. We focus on London because that is where our partner organisations, Borderline and Scotscare are located. Staff at Borderline and Scotscare have worked with Shelter to provide the clients' stories for this report³. We also know that, historically, Scottish people have moved to the UK capital, not all of them finding that its streets were paved with gold. However, we do recognise that this issue might be true of other parts of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Scotland leading the world on homelessness

From enlightenment thinkers to engineers, Scotland has contributed hugely to the modern world and this is rightly celebrated in the year of Homecoming. Since 1999, and devolution, it has also been recognised that Scotland has led the rest of the UK in

² <http://www.homecomingscotland.com>

³ Borderline works with homeless and insecurely housed Scots in London, supporting them in their search for a secure tenancy and a healthy, independent life.

ScotsCare is a Charity which helps Scots in London suffering hardship or seeking to rebuild or improve their lives. The charity improves lives through financial assistance, training, social events and housing.

groundbreaking social policy, with, for example, the smoking ban and free care for older people.

Scotland is less often celebrated for its work on homelessness. Yet, a Homelessness Task Force was the first major announcement by the new Scottish Executive after devolution. Its conclusions, published in 2002, included wide-ranging recommendations. But at its heart was a commitment to give all homeless people the rights which had hitherto only been held by some. By 31 December 2012 all homeless people in Scotland will be entitled to a home.

This ambitious aim has caught international imagination with Scotland winning awards across Europe and attracting the praise of the UN. Other developed countries have shown a close interest in what is happening in Scotland – including the USA, Canada and Australia. France has followed the example of Scotland and set its own '2012' target.

So, as part of the Homecoming message is about celebrating Scotland's role in the world, our continuing work on homelessness is certainly worth highlighting

But the 2012 commitment is, of course, much more than an internationally-acclaimed ambition. It matters most because it aims to assist those many people who have fallen through the net in the past; who have been let down by services and whose plight has worsened in the absence of timely help.

Many of these people have remained in Scotland. Some have drifted out of the country. Not all of those who end up homeless elsewhere in the UK have done so because of housing and homelessness problems in Scotland. However, during the 1990s Shelter and Borderline established that 'push' factors very often lay behind the decision to move⁴. Poor housing, chaotic lives, lack of employment or access to training led people to move from Scotland, only to find these problems replicated wherever they went.

These are the other 'diaspora'. Can Homecoming mean something to them too? In this brief report we tell some of their stories and argue that Homecoming, fully understood, can redouble Scotland's efforts to end the blight of homelessness. If we can do that we can put an end to the need for people to move elsewhere simply because there is nothing for them in Scotland⁵.

⁴ When the Bright Lights Go Out. Young and Homeless Scots in London 1995. Shelter and Borderline.

⁵ Of course, none of this is to say that people who have been affected by homelessness will or should remain in Scotland. Homeless people, like everyone else, have aspirations for improvement and relationships form and dissolve. The point is that people should not feel pushed into leaving or staying away from Scotland simply because they cannot get help here.

Homeless Scots in London

London has a population of over 7 million, and is Europe's largest and most densely populated city with 4,679 people per square km (Office of National Statistics 2002). There is a severe shortage of decent, affordable housing in London and this is reflected in the high numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation in London.

During Quarter 4 of 2008 (October – December) 2,930 people were accepted as owed a main homeless duty in London with 49,960 people in temporary accommodation⁶. This dearth of affordable housing, of course, also impacts on people who have come from Scotland and have found themselves living in hostels, temporary accommodation or on



the streets. Between 10 to 14 per cent of London's homeless population are estimated, by homeless agencies, to have Scottish origins.⁷ Borderline continues to see a steady increase in new clients from Scotland who need assistance with finding affordable accommodation.

Throughout most of the last century Scotland has seen large numbers of people leaving and heading to London, other areas in the UK and overseas. The most recent migration data shows in 2008, 157,955 people migrated from Scotland to England and Wales⁸. While many will have left for positive reasons, some will have left Scotland due to push factors such as the state of the economy, lack of affordable accommodation, access to support services and jobs.

Of course, research and statistics only give part of the picture. The stories in this report from three very different people illustrate how easy it is to become homeless and how difficult it is to rebuild one's life once this happens.

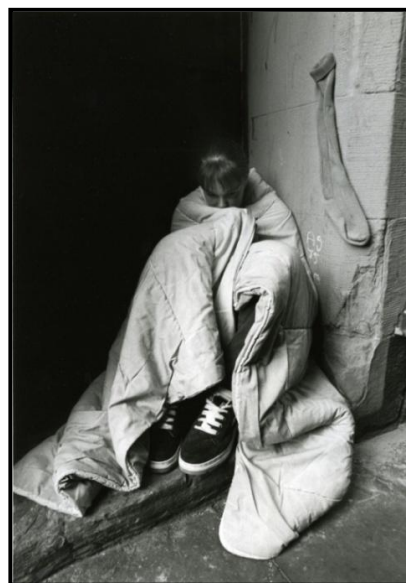
Understanding why people leave Scotland is important, as their experiences will influence what happens to them and what support they will need to find and sustain tenancies elsewhere. There are often complex push factors which can include: childhoods affected by family disruption, breakdown of family relationships, violence in the home, physical and sexual abuse, mental health problems, alcohol abuse, drug addiction and debts, which can all lead to homelessness.

⁶ Communities and Local government

⁷ Homeless Scots in London. Experiences, Needs and Aspirations. S Fitzpatrick, R Goodlad and E Lynch. Borderline June 2007.

⁸ http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/migration/ruk_mig_flows_scotland_1991_to_dec08.pdf

Often these factors have meant that people will have experienced intermittent or continued homelessness in Scotland before moving to London to try and make a better life for themselves. However, research from Borderline has shown that if they have been homeless in Scotland, once they reach London they are likely to end up sleeping rough there too⁹. Often they will have additional support needs, for example to help with drug or alcohol problems and will find it increasingly difficult to cope once they are sleeping rough in London.



Many Scots who are homeless in London do want to return to Scotland, but find it very difficult to do so for a variety of reasons which can include: the lack of resources; affordable accommodation and support.

Figures from Borderline illustrate that those they have helped in London do wish to remain in touch with family in Scotland and many wish to return. Borderline helped 111 Scots return home to visit family and friends and attend interviews and also helped 2 people return home to live in Scotland **every month** during 2007. There are many more homeless Scots who would benefit from this support to return home. A Scot who is originally from Glasgow and is now living in London said:

‘Since I have been made homeless, I’ve thought about what it would be like to go back to Scotland..... I do like the idea of going back to Glasgow to get a nice job....I do miss Scottish people.’¹⁰

The following stories highlight the difficult and often intolerable situations which people face.¹¹ Without access to affordable accommodation and the right support in Scotland, people will continue to leave hoping to find work and accommodation elsewhere. When in cities like London, it is vital that we continue to see organisations like Borderline and Scotscare funded to provide support to homeless people.

James

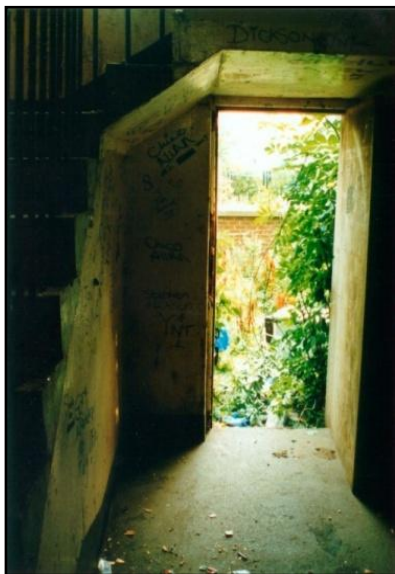
For James, the path to homelessness was a complex and very quick process. From having had a lifestyle which he enjoyed and allowed him to travel the world he ended up living on the streets in London. The journey to homelessness started with James’ marriage breaking down. He then experienced mental ill health and drinking problems, which led to him losing his job and his home. If it hadn’t been for Borderline staff in

⁹ Homeless Scots in London, Experiences, needs and Aspirations 2000. S Fitzpatrick, R Goodlad, E Lynch. Borderline. page 10

¹⁰ Homeless Scots in London, Experiences, needs and Aspirations 2000. S Fitzpatrick, R Goodlad, E Lynch. Borderline. page 17

¹¹ **All names have been changed in the case studies and the photos do not relate in any way to the case studies.**

London who never gave up on him, he would probably still be homeless, trying to deal with his ill health and problems on his own. His story illustrates how important it is to have affordable housing and on-going support which works towards a solution which suits each individual.



After a difficult childhood coping with physical and verbal abuse, James, at the age of 17 left the west of Scotland for London and worked as a security guard. He later returned to Scotland to study. He successfully gained his qualification and worked for a large engineering company for 10 years.

‘I enjoyed my job as it allowed me to travel around Europe for up to 6 months at a time’.

However, things started to go wrong once James’s marriage broke down. He left his job and worked in various other companies. He then started to drink heavily and eventually lost his job, which led to periods of homelessness and numerous suicide attempts.

‘It was the worst time in my life and it all happened so quickly’.

James then moved to London and eventually came to see Borderline, as he was living rough on the streets and having been homeless for a while, he desperately needed support and accommodation. Borderline referred him to a hostel, but he didn’t do well there. It was later established that he had mental health problems that he desperately needed help with. He was using alcohol as part of his self-medication, which along with the mental health issues, was causing many of the problems he was having, as he tried to settle into the hostel.

Over the years Borderline has continued to help James, and has placed him in four different projects. He now seems to have settled into the most recent hostel where is he doing well. James called to thank Borderline for their help, saying:

‘I couldn’t have got where I am today without Borderline being there for me over the years; I really appreciated that you never gave up on me and that you dragged me out of the gutter’.

Graham

The second story is from Graham, who had originally moved to England to find a job. Graham did manage to find a good job in the south of England. Unfortunately he subsequently lost it and in order to find more work he decided to go to London. However, he underestimated the difficulty he would have in finding a job and affordable accommodation.

When Graham moved to London he found himself isolated, without work, money or family and friends to turn to. Without work, he couldn't afford the rent on his accommodation and this led to him becoming homeless and sleeping rough on the streets of London.

Graham is an older man, a quiet person trying to help himself despite the incredibly difficult situation he has found himself in. Eventually he found his way to a local day centre, and staff referred him on to Borderline, as they knew he had Scottish connections.

Luckily Borderline had just managed to obtain referral rights to affordable private rented accommodation through a homeless charity called St Mungo's in Victoria. At that point they were looking to help people who were trying to get back into work. Borderline made an immediate referral and Graham was accepted very quickly.

Not long after Graham moved into the accommodation, he managed to find work. One of the key factors which helped him is that the rent is affordable and he has therefore been able to keep the accommodation and remain off the streets.

Graham has worked hard and been very appreciative of the help he has received, as without it he may not have been able to get his life back. In fact he is now volunteering for St Mungo's at the 'Putting Down Roots' gardening project. He is teaching people how to grow food at the allotments. Graham said:

'I feel like I am getting my life back on track'.



John

John, our third story, has had a varied career in the army and has also run his own business. John had served in the Black Watch for four and a half years. Once he left the Black Watch he set up his own business in London and was successfully running the business when he was involved in a bad car accident.

Following the accident John suffered a nervous breakdown, and due to this breakdown his business failed and then his relationship ended.

John was evicted and forced to sleep rough in London for six months. Finally, severely depressed and suicidal, he heard about and contacted Borderline. As John had served with the Black Watch regiment Borderline introduced him to Veteran's Aid, an organisation which helps homeless veterans by providing hostel accommodation, financial assistance support and advocacy.



John was keen to leave London and return home to Scotland. Veteran's Aid was able to offer him a place in a hostel in Edinburgh, which is specifically for veterans and he managed to get himself sorted out and moved up to Scotland within 10 days.

Nine months on, John was back on his feet and said:

'This has happened because of the support I received and the move I was able to make back to Scotland'.

Moving forward

The year of Homecoming is coming to a close. Scotland is already looking beyond it. On the horizon lies the achievement of the 2012 homelessness commitment. In this report we show that the problem of homelessness for people in Scotland extends beyond our borders. But if we can get our response to homelessness right then we can help to prevent many people leaving the country only to find homelessness accompanying them on the journey. That is, Homecoming is an opportunity to amplify the commitment to provide all homeless people with a home by 2012. That, in turn, should be a cause of congratulation across the developed world, one to rank with our historical reputation on engineering, universal education or literary prowess.

Of course, the homelessness commitment needs to be backed by firm action. As the year of Homecoming slips past we look to the Scottish Government to provide the necessary funding to:

- build 30,000 more affordable homes for rent by 2012 – not only for those on house waiting lists or stuck in temporary accommodation; but also as a lifeline to a building industry gripped by recession.
- ensure that those at risk of homelessness, and those who are already homeless are fully supported to find and sustain tenancies.

Getting these things right would give the Year of Homecoming a legacy for decades to come.

Further information on homelessness is available at: <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/>
Email: policyscotland@shelter.org.uk

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