

# People. Project Cornwall

Photographic portraits and first-person accounts giving a voice to people in Cornwall who've struggled with housing insecurity or faced homelessness since the start of the pandemic.

[www.peopleprojectcornwall.co.uk](http://www.peopleprojectcornwall.co.uk)



St Petros

## **People.** Project Cornwall

An indoor, outdoor and online exhibition of portraits and accounts, giving a voice to people in Cornwall who've struggled with housing insecurity or faced homelessness since the start of the pandemic.

A collaboration between St Petrocs and the people of Cornwall brought to life by the portraits of social documentary photographer Gavan Goulder and community arts organisation StreetDraw24.

**08 November - 23 December 2022**

**[www.peopleprojectcornwall.co.uk](http://www.peopleprojectcornwall.co.uk) | [@peopleprojectcornwall](https://twitter.com/peopleprojectcornwall) | [www.stpetrocs.org](http://www.stpetrocs.org)**

# About People. Project Cornwall

This summer we heard over 70 people's accounts of housing insecurity and homelessness at a time where finding an affordable home in Cornwall has become increasingly hard. Many of these people also had their portrait photograph taken, refusing negative stereotypes, stigma and shame.

Each individual was asked three questions. What has been going on for you, around housing, since the start of the pandemic? What helped? And, what do you think people don't understand about the housing situation in Cornwall?

On the following pages is a collection of anonymised extracts from every one of these accounts, selected to represent the richness and diversity of experience and opinion. Alongside the accounts, the portrait photographs are reproduced. Together they offer a snapshot of a bigger systemic problem and make a statement to the world that whatever an individual's circumstances, we are all people and all people deserve a home.

As part of this project, two exhibitions will run until Christmas. The first is at the Royal Cornwall Museum, and the second is a multi-site outdoor exhibition hosted by around 40 individuals and organisations across Cornwall, reminding us of the power we possess when we support each other. The project will be archived at Kresen Kernow - Cornwall's historical archive - and the National Library, to mark the severity of the situation so many people in Cornwall find themselves caught up in right now.

More importantly, the project will start conversations and fuel convictions that in Cornwall, things must change.



# Introduction

Homelessness is a human rights crisis. It can be prevented and it can be resolved. Collectively, we must act.

It is not enough that St Petrocs is here to provide services to those people who are affected by homelessness in Cornwall. We must use our position to bring about change and ultimately end homelessness. This ambition is achievable but we cannot act alone. Through collaboration and collective effort, we all need to be part of the solution.

The **People**. Project Cornwall is a wonderful demonstration of how we are all individuals but that we are part of the collective. We are a community and what is good for one of us, is good for us all. Through listening to others' experiences as part of creating shared goals for the future, we can make sure that we work towards a fairer society.

The stories and experiences that we hear in the **People**. Project Cornwall are striking. They provide a cutting insight into the personal impact that housing insecurity and homelessness have. The collection of portrait photographs are equally striking. Our hope is that the combination of images and experiences will create a legacy which reflects a point in time. It is important that the stories are told and that the voices are heard but it is equally important that we act on them.

St Petrocs will carry those voices that have contributed to this project. They will form part of our thinking and decision making as we look to the future with optimism for the changes that are required to end homelessness.

**Henry Meacock**  
Chief Executive  
St Petrocs

# Foreword

We have yet to fully understand the implications of what the pandemic has brought upon us – whether that be youngsters missing out on education or the hospital waiting lists. We can forget that all the news, all the figures, all the policy decisions, relate to ordinary people trying to live life.

The **People**. Project Cornwall is about giving voice to people who live in the margins. It's about not being frightened of having discussions about how to do things differently, because everyone deserves a fair chance. The need to give a voice to people who live in the margins, who are on very low incomes, who aren't being listened to, is stronger than ever.

At the end of the day, everyone is just a person in their own right. Historically, people who had portraits painted of them or taken of them as photographs tended to be people who could afford it and had reasons for having a portrait done. People don't always get properly represented in terms of how they go about their daily lives. Properly representing people is pretty scarce. The portraits taken through this project will have an honesty, and more.

I think the arts bring an inclusivity. Irrespective of your background, people can be artistic and have a view. The arts are a great leveller.

All kinds of people can have all kinds of talents and skills and we should be celebrating that diversity. We should be celebrating the fact that people can contribute, in whatever way that might be. I can't think of another medium in which you could do that. People who took part in this project can go, that's me, and I'm part of this.

The first thing this project will do is start the conversation. It will start the conversation in some places that perhaps it might not have done without the project. I think it will humanise some of the issues. If I watch the news or look at a newspaper it's almost like a corporate view of what the difficulties are. We are unable to translate at times that sense of a corporate view onto the individuals who it impacts upon. And I think this project will show that it's just ordinary people trying to live a life. And that's a really powerful message. Because when we remember that policy decisions have an impact on individuals then it might make us consider very strongly whether or not our decision making is right.

I feel the best curators of those stories should come from people who are not within the system but are keen observers of the system. They have a neutrality, and an ability to observe, translate and present. It's about people understanding they are respected for who they are, irrespective of how they're stereotyped. Allowing people to be themselves. Saying it's okay to be vulnerable - we will stand with you, go with you, whatever journey you take.

I hope this project will enable the people of Cornwall to understand that everybody's entitled to a fair chance. The people of Cornwall are inherently kind, inherently generous. They don't like being lectured. They don't like people who shout. What they need is reasoned arguments. They want to be treated with decency. And I think this project will promote these aspects by enabling the arts to portray people for who they are, and widen that conversation about how we can go about supporting ordinary people.

We need more hard work. More creative thinking. A greater partnership of trust within the different professions. Because what we're all trying to do is get to a better place. But let's personalise it, because it's about people.

**Steve Ellis**

Vice President

St Petrocs







## Question 1

### What has been going on for you, around housing, since the start of the pandemic?

**Interviewer:** Basically, I'm going to ask you three questions. The first is, what has gone on for you around housing over the last two-and-a-half years? You can start your story wherever you want. I'm really just interested in your experience. I've got your name, would you mind giving your age, just for the recording?

**Interviewee:** I'm always 28. But maybe, if I have to do an official age, I think I'm 63. I was made homeless about three years ago. My house got repossessed, because I'd come to the end of the term of my mortgage. I'd never stopped paying my mortgage, it was just I didn't have the lump sum I needed at the end. I was scared of asking for help and I really tried to sort everything out, but it just wasn't happening. Since my husband died, I was on less money, so I couldn't get any loans anywhere. It was a complete nightmare.

**Interviewer:** And were you working at the time?

**Interviewee:** I wasn't working at the time because my husband was very ill for quite some time before he died, so I was caring for him 24/7. I didn't get carers allowance simply because I didn't know I could, you're not made aware of it. So he was very ill and I wasn't getting any sleep at all. Trying to deal with all that and then being made homeless. Well, it was a complete nightmare. My mental state wasn't great after all that I can tell you.

**Interviewer:** And when you realised that actually you weren't gonna have your house anymore, you weren't going to have anywhere to live...?

**Interviewee:** When I knew I was going to be made homeless I didn't know what I was going to do. I wouldn't know how to cope on the street. I would have had to have given it a go but I wouldn't have known where...

I was even Googling on my phone, where do homeless people sleep? Questions like that, that don't get answered. I know they sleep on the streets and things, but I'm thinking where, where do they sleep? Where do they go to the toilet? Where do they wash their hands, you know?

\*

**D**uring the pandemic, all the places we could normally go to get some food were shut. It was hard. We were going in bins and checking them for leftover food, or even going into shops and asking if they had free food. Obviously I don't like going into shops asking, but if we had our own places, you wouldn't have to spend out for food and bits and pieces. I think that's why people turn to drink and drugs - obviously, it gets us down. Putting up a tent, taking it down every morning, and then walking in and getting your breakfast... it just gets to some people.

\*



**I** was homeless when I was 14 years of age. That's just how it all first started, just living out on the road. I did have a place in Truro for a bit. I felt secure there because if anything went wrong with the rent and all that, I knew all my stuff would be safe. Because over the past, I've lost everything through associations and councils and that, you know, personal stuff. But then I've always wanted to be that traveller. Even my uncle was saying to me, 'You've got to go, you need to go, because it's not you, being stuck in, not being outdoors.' And as soon as I've gone out and started being myself, I've become more healthier. So I feel that I need to be out on the road. I need to see nature, so that's what I've become. Just travelling around for where I need to go. Yeah. That's how I feel comfortable.

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**I**'ve been homeless since I'm 14. Say, 20 years I've been homeless. Because it's easier to be homeless than it is to pay bills and rent. It's just easier that way, because everything is just increasing the whole time, it's just constant pressure. And it doesn't get any easier. The longer you live in your house, it actually gets harder. Like, the price of energy is going through the roof. I'm trying my best to avoid it. Don't get me wrong, I'd love to live in a house, properly, full-time for ever more, you know. But you go there, you get so far, and then the pressure gets too much and anxiety kicks in. So what's the point? What's the point in trying to live like that?

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I'm so thankful for having a roof over my head but sometimes I still feel like it might be easier being back on the street. I don't really understand why, but sometimes I feel like being on the streets is like it's home? I'd spent so long on the street, I was so scared of everybody. I didn't want to be seen, I didn't want to go near anybody. It was a lot to deal with. But I felt like that was what I was used to. I can't explain it.

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On the first night I didn't have my place anymore, I just found a shop doorway. Got a bit of cardboard out of one of the shop bins, and that's where I sat all night. I didn't sleep. I got soaking wet. I was freezing cold. The only warmth I had was my dog, you know?

So that was the start of it. I spent a lot of time sofa surfing with friends. I slept in allotments and people's sheds. One time I found an open shed and got out of the rain, and the gentleman caught me there one morning. I said, 'Look mate, I've not touched any of your stuff, I'm not interested in that. I'm on the streets. I'm just in here to get out of the rain and the weather.' But he said, 'No, that's fine. You stay there as long as you like.' And every other morning he used to bring me a flask of tea, and a sandwich, and some treats for the dog. So yeah, that was really nice. Like, there's still some decent people in this world, you know? Because the majority of people would have been like, get the fuck out my shed, or would have called the police, or said I'm trying to rob the shed, or I'm a druggie or whatever. No - I'm just a normal person trying to survive.

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I'd not been homeless before. That's why it's all been quite a shock to me. At least when I was sleeping in my car, when me and my wife first split up, I didn't feel homeless because I still had somewhere. I could lock my car door, I could go somewhere. I could still feel safe. But at the moment, I'm very aware that I'm out in the open. I wake up five or six times a night, just because anybody could walk up on me at any time.

I get up in the morning around about 7.00am, when people start coming to work and I can hear the cars and things like that. I'll walk down and get a coffee at Costa and I'll stay there 'til about 9.30am, when St Petros opens, and then I'll go there to have a shower, something to eat and drink, and take part in whatever activities are on. When it closes at 1.00pm, I head down to the Job Centre and send a few emails, try and sort out something out. And then, I don't know, around about sort of 3.00pm, 4.00pm, I'll head to Wetherspoons and I'll sit there on my phone and keep trying to arrange something using their internet. I basically try and go to places with free WiFi because my mobile data has run out. And then I just sit in Wetherspoons 'til 9.00pm, 10.00pm and then walk back up and go back to sleep.

And then it starts again the next day. Everything's very regimented, but that doesn't make it right. Just because I've got somewhere I can go, it doesn't make it right. I could be sat in a house or a flat or a room or whatever, working from home, working on my laptop. But at the moment, that just seems so far away. It just seems like there's no light at the end of the tunnel.

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I stayed with my sister and her boyfriend for quite a while, but we just got on top of each other. It wasn't working. I didn't want them to split up so I opted to go. And that's how I found myself homeless. It's very daunting when you haven't got anything, and you just sort of like find yourself wandering around. All you've got to do all day is walk.

It's the basic things that you take for granted when you haven't got them. Like water, you know? That's the most fundamental taken-for-granted thing. You're sat there trying to think where you're gonna get water from, bar knocking on someone's door and asking them for a bottle, which you don't like to do anyway. But I had a bit of a brainwave. I thought, graveyards - because they always have a tap, don't they, to water the flowers and wash the gravestones and stuff like that. So I thought I'd go and have a look. And yeah, sure enough, there was a holy water tap, thank goodness.

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Yeah, I didn't expect to get mentally ill, I didn't expect to have a breakdown, end up in a period of heavy drinking, depression. I didn't expect to go to rehab. I didn't expect to not have a home. I didn't expect to be divorced. We were together 25 years, but it just happened and it happened very quickly. Within six months really. My stepfather died and I was in rehab.

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About 12 years ago I was diagnosed with stage 3 cancer. I had a major breakdown, got divorced, lost my job, then Covid hit. I had to sell my car. You name it - it's been an ever-decreasing cycle.

I've been a care worker for nearly 30-odd years. I came from the East Midlands down here, about three-and-a-half years ago. It's always been my dream to do something like this, move to Cornwall, but I never had the guts to do it before. I'm in my 60s now. I was thinking I'd got my flat, I'd got this care job all lined up, I'd done all the training, but then I never heard nothing back from them. But by that time, it was too late, because I'd had to give up my flat because I couldn't pay the rent, and you can't work if you're homeless.

So I ended up living in my car for three-and-a-half months. I had to get rid of everything I had. Luckily I had a neighbour, a young girl that was struggling, so I gave all my stuff to her. Obviously the weather was changing and it was getting so, so cold by November time. I really thought I was going to die in my car. And obviously on benefits you've got to be careful what you spend. Petrol is expensive, but I had to keep putting my car on to give me the heat to keep me warm.

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I was trying to throw a rope around the tree to end my life because I was just sick of being homeless and having nothing. I wasn't addicted to drugs at this point, it was just simply the homelessness that I couldn't deal with. I was by kind of a dual carriageway, but it's slow moving. And a police car was driving quite slowly down the carriageway and must have seen what I was trying to do. The car doubled back, put its lights on and I was like, 'Argh, quick, quick, quick.' I sort of dropped to my knees and just as everything was fading out, I remember them picking me up, cutting me down. They took me to a psychiatric hospital where they said I wasn't ill enough to be admitted, even though I'd just tried to take my life. They didn't know where to take me, so they took me to St Petrocs where there happened to be a 'help for the homeless' GP there at the time. They released me into the care of St Petrocs.

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**I** did four months in prison and I was released homeless. I'd been on to resettlement and let them know when I was due to be released, but they did nothing for me. I had a probation interview the day I came out and they said, there's nowhere for you. There's no supported accommodation, there's no halfway houses, there's no pre-release houses. Literally, you're gonna have to sleep on the streets.

And so that's what I've done since I left prison. I'm rough sleeping. I found myself a... not really a shed, it's more a little room where the workmen have left their tools and their bricks and stuff. I've got a piece of cardboard, I use a bag of clothes for a pillow, and I sleep there. My worrying thought is that I'm starting to get some good night's sleep out of it. I feel like I'm getting used to being homeless, getting used to rough sleeping, and I don't want that to happen. I've said to my probation officer, 'At least if I'm in prison I've got a bed and I get fed twice a day.' So it means that my risk of reoffending is higher. I mean, I haven't and I don't want to. But I can understand why other people would. Some of the guys I've met here seem to have embraced homelessness. I just can't do that.

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**I** suffer bad anxiety. So when I was homeless, I tried to go onto Homechoice and sort out the things for being homeless. But they're all asking me for ID and stuff. Instantly, I just shut down. I just... I can't do it. I don't know what's wrong with me. I just can't. I can't bring myself to do stuff like that. It's really hard. I get really flustered, really anxious, and then it gets me mad. And I end up not doing it. I find it really hard to try...

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I'm not actually homeless, but it feels like I am. I'm housed, but it's not a home. It's just a room and it's the smallest room of the lot. It's right next to the kitchen, which is used 24/7. The washing machine is on 24/7. It may not sound that bad. I've got a roof over my head and some people haven't - some people are actually on the streets, which is a hell of a lot worse. I've been there myself, I know what it's like. But I'm a very sensitive quiet person, and this sort of pressure I'm under, 'cos I'm not used to it, has caused me to feel the way I feel. There's no peace. There's no peace.

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Sofa surfing was horrible. You feel like you're putting yourself on people all the time. You feel awkward. I don't tell many people about my situation because I don't want people to be like, 'Oh, come and stay, what are you doing?' I've got so many mates who would do that. They say that because they feel like they need to, but after two days or something it gets weird. You know you're in people's way. So I just keep it to myself.

When I have done it, I felt like I wasn't wanted there. So that's a horrible feeling, you know, feeling like you're not wanted constantly. I've got a bad back and sometimes you're on a two-seater sofa and it is just brutal, like. That's why I got the tent so I could get a blow-up mattress, have somewhere actually nice for my back. Else I'm always in pain and I can't handle that. I'm just happier in my tent.

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**I**moved down because - well, basically, I was a two-bit drug dealer and a crook with a job as a carpet fitter up country. And that life sort of fell apart. All me mates are dead or in prison. And then a very good friend got killed. He was the last one of the lads from school, if you like. When he died, I just thought, either very soon I'm going to end up with him, in a box, or I'm going to end up in prison for a long number of years because I've put somebody else in a box and not got away with it. At that point, I thought, you've got to stop.

Then due to Covid, I lost my job. Me Dad had a massive heart attack. He'd been nagging at me for years to get out of that life and come down and just be closer with him, live a real life. So when I lost the job, I gave up that life. I moved down, was on Dad's sofa for a year, and then I moved in to a council flat through Homechoice. It was a great deal of work and it required a great deal of proactivity on my part to make sure it got done. But that was the plan from the moment I moved down here. I made it happen.

I get emotional telling you about it because I've moved away from it. I suppose it's just a sense of self-pride in how far I've come? And I think about the lads that didn't make it. Because, alright, we were two-bit crooks, but we didn't necessarily choose that life. A lot of us got sort of forced into it.

Now, I don't recognise myself when I look in the mirror. I really don't. And that's all because of being with St Petrocs the last 18 months. It's been a relatively quick but emotionally long journey of self-reflection and realising, that was who you were because you needed to be, but you don't need to be that guy anymore. So don't. Be a nice guy.

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**I**t all started over three years ago. I was just a normal human person, plodding along through life. I had my own garden and property maintenance business which I'd started, had a little bit of work coming in. And then, unfortunately, Covid hit, which meant I couldn't work. Which meant I couldn't afford to pay my rent, so I ended up losing my flat. There was no grace from the landlord, he wasn't interested in saying 'All right, well, I'll give you a little time.' It was, you can't pay your rent, get out. That's how I ended up on the streets for two years.

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**D**uring the repossession, my roof fell in and basically my house fell apart. I had rain, there was rain everywhere. I'd been there over 20 years. So I lost a lot really, a lot memories. My dogs are buried there, my cats are buried there, and my husband died there. It had been a really hard time. When he was ill in hospital, they were trying to say that he was fit to work. I said he's in the hospital bed, but still they made me go to court to fight for his benefits and get a letter from the consultant or surgeon, just to confirm that he was actually ill and not skiving off the court date.

So it was quite a wrench to leave. But I knew I stayed there too long. I should have left before it got so bad, but I didn't know... I wasn't very good at asking for help. And in the end I did ask for help, and the council said you can't live here anymore and put me in temporary accommodation in the middle of nowhere. I was only there three months, and I sort of quite liked it there. It was full of druggies and all kinds, but you just have to get on with life.

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**W**e were in the private rented sector but we fell behind with the rent because we had to wait months for the Universal Credit to come through. And when it did come through it was wrong, so everything was all up in the air. They did give us a bit of breathing space, the letting agency and the landlords. But pretty much that's when the arrears started mounting up, so then you're forever trying to chase to get on top of that. And then our relationship broke up. So I found myself in the position of having to look for somewhere else. The landlord had given us a section 21 notice, two days after my ex-partner had vacated the property. I think it was supposed to allow for two months' notice, but then the landlord changed the locks.

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**W**hen my partner and I couldn't afford anywhere to rent, I had to stay with my parents. My brother and his family had to move in too - they had been living up country and couldn't find anywhere when their landlord decided to sell. So there was seven of us living in my parents' three-bedroom house; me and my little boy in a small box room. When the council was finally going to do something for me and my boy, they were going to put us in temporary accommodation. They told me that I was likely going to end up in Cardiff, or Exeter, or somewhere like Bristol. I said to them, I'm not comfortable with that. I don't know the area, I don't know anyone, it's miles away from my family. The council say they will do whatever they can to keep you in your area, but they don't really care. It felt like out of sight, out of mind, out of county, technically not our problem anymore.

They finally got me into a mum and baby unit in Cornwall. But I had postnatal depression after moving out... it was difficult. So I wasn't able to do the things that I needed to do. So my parents ended up with my little boy. And then, because it's a mum and baby unit,

I couldn't stay in there anymore. The council wouldn't do anything so I had no option but to move in with my sister up north because I was about to be homeless. While I was at my sister's, I was speaking to the council, saying look, I've come up here for emergency accommodation. I'm technically homeless, I'm sofa surfing at the moment. I need you to try and get me somewhere back down in Cornwall because my son's down there.

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**W**hen I got the eviction notice I went to the council, as well as keeping looking for private rentals. I had to go through Homechoice on the council and had been bidding for months. Nothing was coming up. And so when we were evicted, everything had to go into storage. We were put into a homeless B&B. We were in this one room - very grotty, black mould, wet walls. We had to eat and prepare food on the bed because there was no table or chairs.

So I'm in this room with two children, and we're doing the best we can. And it was the loneliest time, the minute they went to sleep. I felt that I had failed the children, and I would cry about it for hours and hours alone. It shames you. You feel the stigma. It gets to you. So I wouldn't tell people what was going on. With the children, you have to be dead honest. All I've ever done is promised them that I will get them a home where they feel safe, where they feel nobody can take it away from us anymore. And they've had to grow up very, very quickly. It's a life lesson they've had to learn.

To put an adult through what we're going through just shouldn't happen. But to put children through it? It's unforgivable. To have our children being sick with stress at such a young age - where on earth did that come from? It should never have happened. Children should feel safe.

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**W**e'd lived in that rented house for four years, and everything was fine. The children had done everything there, from when they were a month old to four years old. And then, just before the pandemic happened, they called and said they wanted to sell the house. So I was looking, but I couldn't afford the prices of the rental market. Some were upwards of £2,000 pounds a month, for a property similar to what we had.

I must have applied to over 100 houses privately and just got the same response back, like, so sorry, we've had loads of interest on this - or just no response at all. We couldn't get help from Cornwall Housing because they said you have to have actually moved out and not found a place. And you need to prove that you tried to find a place, or we'll find you to be intentionally homeless and we won't help you. It was consuming my life. I was looking at least five times a day, sometimes more.

Eventually we moved out. We were supposed to move out a couple of days before, but the council hadn't sorted us out anywhere to stay so we had no stuff in the house for two days, apart from one mattress on the floor and a duvet. And then they put us into a Travelodge. And they said we might have to be there for up to six weeks.

Before we'd been in the Travelodge a week, I was like - we can't do this. It was just me and these three children inside the room. I was still working at the time. One of my sons was really struggling with his emotions and the situation. We all were, but he was becoming quite violent and was saying, 'I hate Travelodges. I hate holidays if this is a holiday.'

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I've private rented for 10 years and never missed payment. I've got a good reference from each and every one of my landlords. I've never had trouble finding a new house, I had a deposit, I had a guarantor. I had everything behind me. And I still couldn't get anything. I still couldn't get anything.

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The letting agents don't have to care about your living situation. They can just get rid of you and replace you with someone else, whatever's in the contract. They'll find a way because they can. It's all on them. But we have to jump through hoops to get a place, even if it's terrible. Our entire lives were vetted before we got this place - my job, my life, my family, who I am... it made me feel so vulnerable having to say, 'I have a zero-hour job. I have three zero-hour jobs.' And because I can't find a full-time job, which are really rare, I have to get someone else to vouch for me and say, 'No, she's a good person, she pays the bills.' You go through all that judgement for them to say, 'Oh, our property is really good, you better take care of it when you move in.' And then the contract says, 'If you don't leave the place how it was, you'll lose your deposit.'

And I swear to God, all the door handles were broken. Some didn't have handles at all, we'd get locked in rooms a lot of the time. There's holes in the carpet, there's holes in the door. There's water inbetween the window panes. In the bathroom there are mushrooms growing out of the wood. There's mould all over the back room, and when we try to get rid of it, it just grows back a week later. We can't use that room because it's so hard to breathe in there, so my partner sleeps on the sofa and I sleep in a single bed. The front door opens straight into our living room and if it's really windy, it just blows open and

then water comes in. Nothing was fixed. And we're meant to keep this house non-mouldy. The estate agent was like, 'Oh, it's just the Cornish air,' and carried on. And I just felt so angry, because she didn't need to care. Like, I've been too ashamed to have friends over, you know, for dinner, to watch Netflix - all that kind of normal, simple stuff. I've never been able to do it because I've always been so ashamed of where I've been living. It feels almost like a judgement on you not doing well in life. You feel like it's your fault.

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**S**o during Covid, we were renting a property. Me, my partner, and my stepson, who was 16 then. And it was in a lovely little row of old fishermen's cottages and at quite an affordable rent, for the area. Then Covid hit and so did the housing boom. Very quickly, the landlady decided that she would like to sell. The estate agents who marketed the property actually marketed it as an investment opportunity, 'a great holiday let' - that was my first gripe. Because I was like, it's a great little first home for someone. Not me, I couldn't afford to buy it. But it's been a great family home for us the last few years.

Now, I've rented for a long long time and it's never been a problem - you find somewhere, you just move on. But we couldn't. I think our rent had been about £750. Affordable. But when we had to start looking, rents were up to £1200/£1300 a month. We've got a cat, but everything was 'no pets allowed'.

Then we mentioned kids. This was the biggest shocker, because one place we looked at was actually marketed as a three-bed family home. 'Oh no, we don't want children.' So I was like, 'He's not a child, he's 17 and starting university next October.' 'Oh no, we don't take students.'

★





**W**e don't know if we're staying, day to day. I'm not very good at coping with that. This is why I was just honest with the landlord straight away about having to move Mum in. I just need to know if she can stay - tell me yes or no and then I can deal with it. But just don't wait... he takes forever to get back. And he makes really unusual requests. Like, we're not allowed pot plants in the garden, because he just doesn't like them. I'm not really sure you can request that, but okay, I'll do whatever you say at the moment for you to allow us to stay - but that's not really a reasonable request.

★

**I** value Cornwall as my home. We moved down for Dad's work when I was twelve, so I can't really remember much from up north, there's nothing I can compare it with. I've got all my friends here, my family, my work - everything, all my memories. I managed to get a shared-ownership property four years ago, my own gorgeous little one-bed flat. I wouldn't say I was comfortable, but I was managing to pay my bills, I was never late with anything. And I had quite a bit of savings, because I was hoping eventually to buy a house.

And then Covid hit and it just completely destroyed me, because I'm self-employed and I couldn't work. It floored the business. I managed to get Universal Credit, but it was only £200 pounds a month which covered absolutely nothing. So after pouring all my savings into trying to keep my flat, I had to give it up. Now I'm sleeping on my friend's sofa.

A part of you just feels, 'Oh, am I getting under her feet? Am I in the way?' I contribute to the bills as much as I can, but it's just not your own. And I feel like - I'm almost 35, I really shouldn't be in this situation.

★

I live with my ex-wife at the moment, and our daughter. We decided to break up during the lockdown. I think, like a lot of people, everyone got on everyone's nerves and we just decided that we didn't want to stay together any longer. Neither one of us can afford to stay in our current rental by ourselves, and neither one of us can afford to move out. So I'm almost in a sort of self-made house share, which makes life very tricky as a whole. You can't really go out dating or invite anyone around because it's just incredibly awkward.

Thankfully my daughter knows we're just friends, me and her Mum, although I don't think the penny's quite dropped yet because we're all still living together. But I've been very lucky... when we do go our separate ways, my daughter will probably go with Mum. So although we're going through a divorce, I've had this extra time with my daughter. But I'm touching wood at the moment because I have a feeling we're gonna get told soon that we have to move out or take a hefty price increase again - at which point I'm not sure what we'll do, to be honest.

✱

So I'm still living with my sister at the moment. Luckily, she lives on her own with a dog and some parrots. I'm quite happy to be there, but I don't know how happy she would be if it was permanent. We've been rubbing along well at the minute, but it was just a 'come and stay with me until you sort yourself out' kind of thing.

But sorting myself out is becoming very difficult to do. I'm finding that places are just really expensive. And they're dingy, and sometimes they're just not what you see on the advertisement in the estate agents or letting agents. They're overpriced. They want a lot of money up front. And they're not in the most desirable areas. There's that many people looking, the appointments are all booked

up and the flats are just snapped up. And if you do get a chance to view, half the time it's a disappointment. So I'm leaving it for the time being, until I've saved some money up.

★

**I**t's crazy, really, because myself and my husband work. We're not outrageously rich, but we both work. And we're both in our 30s. And it's slightly depressing that we can't actually afford to live where we've always lived. I'd say it's always been expensive, but it's just sort of slipped out of our reach now. Obviously, staying with my parents is supposed to be a bit of a short-term solution, but it's turning into something where I don't really see how we're going to get out of it. The only thing that we can think of at the moment is moving somewhere else, and we don't want to do that. Our friends are here, my family's here. But yeah, let's face it, I don't think anything's gonna go down is it?

★

**W**e had a rented property which we could quite easily afford between the two of us - we were both working full time. Since the breakdown of the relationship, obviously we've decided to go our separate ways. But it's easier said than done. You make these decisions, and you think okay... but there's nothing available, it's horrendous. You apply for everything - waiting lists, housing associations, but they can pick and choose. There's nothing being built. And for the ones that are available, the rents are astronomical.

At the moment, because of the strain of the relationship, I've moved out. I'm currently staying in a friend-of-a-friend's back room. It's not ideal. I've worked all my life and I shouldn't be in a back bedroom.

★

**I** totally feel embarrassed, you know, a failed marriage and in a shared flat at my age. I'm totally embarrassed. And as much as I would love to go out and talk to people or do physical exercise, I can't afford to do that. I work in hospitality and I have to work as many hours as I can just to make ends meet. I can pick up shifts at the moment but when the season dies away I won't be able to pick up the kind of money I can in the summertime. So I just see the future is very pessimistic. My quality of life is very poor. It's very very stressful. It's just work work work to make ends meet at the moment. So I'm in this vicious circle, and yeah, I'm completely embarrassed of my situation.

✧

**B**ecause I'm a single person, and my income isn't great, I can't actually afford to rent, particularly around here. I think being single has a lot to do with it. If you didn't buy a house here when houses were affordable, then unless you're on an incredible wage - which Cornwall doesn't tend to offer up - there's nowhere you can afford to rent. You're left with summer lets, winter lets; you're always having to pack up and move, and where to? I'm renting a caravan at the moment so in a sense I'm not completely homeless, but I am homeless. It's only seasonal, so I'm constantly moving. And that doesn't allow for me to take the next steps in my business.

The reality is that I do not have a choice at the moment. But as a single woman, of my age, I should be able to choose. I understand that I have the best friends who give me extraordinary support. And people who know me are totally going out of their way to help, and it shows this incredible side of humanity. But our society is fucked. It's not looking after so many people. It's looking after the 'haves'. The villages that I grew up in, they're dead. They're empty homes. They're not even homes. Empty cottages for a lot of the year. I mean, they look lovely. But when I was growing up, they were all working cottages. Working villages.

✧



I've lived in this parish my whole life, nearly 30 years. I know that's not a lot compared to a lot of other people, but it's my whole life. And it kind of feels like we've reached a bit of a boiling point down here with the housing crisis in Cornwall. I know a lot of other people feel the same way. It seems that I walk around the village where I grew up and I don't see as many faces anymore. And I see a lot more cold empty houses in the winter.

I'm in an okay position. I was lucky enough to be able to convert a double garage into a flat, and I love it there. That's helped me stay where I want to live. So personally, I feel lucky. But sadly, a lot of people that I grew up with have had to leave and move out of Cornwall, not because they wanted to. I had a good friend that lived in a caravan for five years just so he could stay in the parish where he grew up. He was paying the same amount of rent on that as you would do on a house elsewhere in the country. But it shouldn't be the norm. And I don't know that I should feel as lucky as I do to live in a garage.

✱

Basically, I've lived down here for ten years now. I came down from Manchester to be near my two sons and my two granddaughters, who are eight and 10. That was the plan. And I've been very happy down here, made lots of friends and have a nice little rented property. I thought it was sort of my 'forever' home. But unfortunately, my landlord needs to make more money so he wants to convert the house to an Airbnb, which seems to be the market down here. Obviously there's some building work that needs to be done for that, so I need to leave.

You can't blame people for wanting to make extra money, you know, we're all trying to survive on what we have. But I don't really know where the next step is. Both my sons have offered to accommodate me, but that's not ideal. My younger son's wife is expecting her first baby.

So it's difficult... as much as they probably need my support, you don't want to encroach on your family's lives.

★

I've been on Homechoice, constantly, every week. It's crap really. You're only allowed to bid on one property. And you're only allowed to bid once a week. And it's very slow going. And the website itself isn't exactly ideal as it freezes a lot and yeah... more of a pain in the ass. You have to bid cos if you don't bid for about a month, they take you off and you have to redo it all again. I'm only looking for something that sleeps a single person.

★

We've been renting here for four or five years. Got through Covid; I had to work right through because we were so important, key workers, even my part of the job. And now the landlord has decided he wants to change our home into a house of multiple occupation because he can earn more money renting individual rooms out.

We're getting close to retirement and our kids are up Bristol way. We had been considering moving closer to them and the grandchildren when we retired, but we'd decided that really, we didn't want the stress and anxiety of having to move at our stage of life. Unfortunately, it looks like that is what will have to happen now.

We were given the impression that we could settle here, and as time goes on you sort of put it out of your mind and you think it will go on and on. But obviously it doesn't, which is the downside of renting - the lack of security. It's not practical to buy at our age, but you could buy the damn place and pay less on the mortgage than you'd be paying to rent it.

★





**T**he house we owned, me and my wife, we sold at the end of 2018. And the intention was, because it was a detached house, to wait a bit and, because we're approaching 60, maybe get ourselves a bungalow. So we rented about three-and-a-half years ago and that's been the case since. But what's happened recently is the landlord of where we live has put a 'for sale' sign up. And the thing is, although we made money on the house that we sold three-and-a-half years ago, now it's not enough. What we should have done was go straight into buying instead of renting. Since we sold it, our old house has been sold again for another £140,000. Once you're on the property market, you should always stay on it. It's hit us hard. It's really bad timing. We're in this situation where we've got money, but we haven't got enough to get what we want. Prices are now basically double what we were paying.

I look more or less every night on sites to see house prices, and there's nothing we want that's affordable. In four years' time I should be retiring. There's no chance to get a mortgage at my age. And I think, in four years' time, what's going to happen? The state pension's not going to be enough to live on. I do manual work, will I need to still be doing that? It's very stressful and mental health is going to come into it.

★

**I**'ve been looking at buying. But to buy, on a 35-year mortgage, I'd be 72 by the time it's even paid off. I'll be looking at about £800 to £900 a month on a mortgage, and I'd still need over £20,000 deposit. And then there's the fees and the costs and everything. And also, what with interest rates going up and things, that could shoot up. So even if I had the £20,000 deposit, I still couldn't afford the £800 a month beyond retirement. And that's for a small mid-terrace.

★

**I**t's quite a strange one because I do feel like purchasing a house is something that every young adult should be doing, right? There's like a few things on your ticklist: you have a kid, you get married, all these things that as a human, you're told and programmed to think that you're supposed to do. But it's just not the way anymore.

So I think I'm just coming to terms with the fact that I'm going to be only renting now. I'm just gonna try and achieve and live with something that is just mentally not much of a good thought process for me. I'm going to try and be comfortable with the fact that I've got a nice little two-bed house that the rent's currently stable on, and I've got enough of a garden to throw an inflatable pool up when the weather's good, you know?

★

**A**s well as it being the pandemic, 2020 was a huge year for us because we had our daughter. That's a huge life-changing event in itself. Then my husband got a new job, but his new job was working from home. So our whole housing situation has completely changed because where we were once really comfortable in our two-bed flat, we now don't have enough space. My husband needs space for his office, and what was our guest room is our daughter's bedroom now. And we really, really want to move to somewhere bigger, but we're just finding it impossible because of the house prices.

I absolutely loved growing up down here, and my husband grew up down here as well. We just want the same for our little girl, but we're really feeling that it might be worth looking elsewhere. We just want to find that perfect family home.

★

## Question 2

### What has helped?

**Interviewer:** The second question I wanted to ask was, with all of this going on, what's helped you cope? Has anything happened that helped? You mentioned your mates before - do they understand, do they get what your situation is?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And is that because they face similar things?

**Interviewee:** They don't, nah, they're not in my position. But it's quite funny, on the network I use to talk to them, I livestream going on to Homechoice sometimes, just so I can be comedic about all the stuff they see. Like, all right, so here you go, I'm going to click this. Then we all just sit back and watch the screen for about 20-30 seconds while it fails to load.

**Interviewer:** A bit like some sort of weird reality TV programme?

**Interviewee:** Yeah. So they get that it's a terrible website that doesn't work half the time. It refreshes once a week, every Wednesday at midnight, so I go on then. Even then it's slow because loads of other people are trying then too. So you've waited a whole week to look, only for the flats that appear on your personal page to be marked 'don't bid if you're not over 50'. Apparently the more you bid, the more willing it shows you are, but it's against the rules to bid on a place that you are too young for. So I don't do it. It will either say 'for the elderly' or 'preference given to locals'. That's okay because locals are locals, but they never give preference to young people. Like, we need houses too.

**I**t was heaven. It was only a room, but it was absolute heaven. Being able to get up in the morning, have a shower when I want. Just the basics, but being there and having my own room... it made me feel, 'No, I'm not worthless. I'm not just a statistic living on the streets.'

It gave my life purpose. It made me feel like a person again. And that's what started my journey. I was like, 'Right, let's get out of this slump we're in. Let's try and progress forward.' And that's what I did, with St Petros' help.

★

**I** explained I was homeless and she was like, you're not allowed to camp here, but she was lovely about it. Because she's not really allowed to help me or do anything, her job is basically to sort out any troubles on the estate, she's not supposed to try and house you. But she seen my situation, and I told her I couldn't do the Homechoice stuff with my anxiety and stuff, and she was like, no, I'm gonna help.

When I first made my claim for Homechoice, my daughter wanted to move in with me, so I put her down. But then she changed her mind, and that just messed everything up because then I couldn't get her off the system. So, this lady rang them and said, 'He hasn't got his daughter, he hasn't got any ID, he can't do any of what you're asking, so could you please just sort his Homechoice thing out.' So now I'm able to bid, because of this lady who helped me, even though she wasn't supposed to.

★



**M**y dog helped. Obviously my sister did too, but mainly my dog. Because there were times I went to a really dark place and thought, you know, enough. Enough is enough. I can't do any more. That's it. But the only reason I didn't is because I was thinking, what's going to happen to my dog? So yeah, she saved me. Just like I saved her. She's a rescue. She's absolutely beautiful.

✧

**J**ust my kids really. It's really helped knowing I can have my kids on the weekends. That kind of helped me carry on, if you know what I mean. Have the will to keep trying.

✧

**A**ctually having decent, understanding roommates definitely helps. Because back at my old house, it was nothing but screaming, fighting, disagreements, all the time. Here, it's such a different atmosphere. It's like people talk to each other. We don't get too riled or rowdy, it's like... it's just such a completely different atmosphere. We all kind of understand each other as well, because we're all in kind of like the same boat, you know?

And the St Petrocs staff keep coming up with ideas and solutions, trying to help me with looking after myself. I've suffered with depression and anxiety for a really long time. I'm willing to bend over backwards to help anyone else out, but as soon as someone says, you should do this for yourself, I'm like, no, no, no... so they're helping me to see and value myself a bit more.

✧

**A**t first I was worried that if I spoke up something bad might happen. But it didn't. I didn't want to go to a food bank, but I swallowed my pride and I went. There are so many working families out there that don't believe that food banks and those sorts of services are for them, they think they're not entitled to it. But there is a lot of help out there. If you can't afford to feed your children this month - whether you were able to do it last month, or you might be able to do it next month - there are services that can help you to feed your children.

It is having the guts to turn up and say, 'I'm really in trouble now.' And that's a big thing, to try and ask for help. The fear of it. But then I think, what's the worst thing that's ever happened to me for standing up and shouting?

\*

**T**he ones that get given opportunities and tents and things like that are the ones that are going out and looking for help. If you don't go looking for help, help will never happen. You have to take that first step.

If I never accepted the help of one person, which I wouldn't have done before, I wouldn't be here right now. I wouldn't be in this accommodation. I'd still possibly be living in a tent. In order to achieve where you want to be in life, you have to take away your pride a little bit and ask for help.

\*





**B**eing only 18 and losing where I was living at 17 made it ridiculously difficult to find anywhere that would take me. I couldn't apply to the youth places because I was turning 18. I was handled differently because I was in the weird age between being a child and being an adult, and it was difficult to project my voice - people think you don't know what you are talking about.

And I didn't have a lot going for me. Private rent was off the table, I was not making the money even with work, because the minimum wage for 18- to 21-year-olds is not sustainable. The only thing I had supporting me was college. They were a massive help - the staff and the pastoral team. They are genuinely incredible, caring and loving people.

★

**T**he school has really helped. Yeah. My daughters' school is just around the corner. And they know - well, everyone around here knows what happened to us - ended up homeless because the flat we were living in was damaged by the storm and the roof came off. We were put in temporary accommodation for a bit, but a week after we'd moved in there, I got an eviction notice to say that the landlord was selling the flat so we wouldn't be going back there. The council wanted me to go to miles away, out of county. But obviously, after everything we've been through, I didn't want to take the kids out of their school because the school were helping. I went in to talk to them about my daughters, and they said, you've done the right thing staying and keeping them here. I said, 'Well, we lost everything. They can't lose everything and then lose family and friends and all of that as well.'

★

I did try and kill myself quite a few times. One time, before breakfast, in the summer, I just went down to the front. I can't swim, so I just chucked myself in the ocean. Before I did that, I was just screaming and crying because I had nobody to say goodbye to. So I was just getting all my emotions out, preparing for it a little bit.

When I was screaming and crying, I think somebody must have heard me. I jumped in, but it wasn't deep enough. I was trying to get out deeper. As I started struggling, an older woman just jumped straight in. Gave me a hug, gave me her number, and said I was always welcome to have a cup of tea round hers. That really helped a lot. It was nice to know that somebody else really cared. And they didn't know me. I felt like I was a little bit understood.

★

Alcohol obviously helps, when you're living rough. It just helps you go to sleep, you know, when you're sleeping on the ground, it just softens your bones a little bit, so to speak. A lot of people use heroin and crack and everything else, but thankfully, I don't have to go that far, you know what I mean?

And the people on the street help, if you can understand what I'm saying. Street people stick together. They're a very, very strong community. Even if you see them fighting and all that, at the end of the day, they always come back to each other. When everyone's poor, right, everybody's rich. Do you understand where I'm coming from? Everyone's poor, everyone's equal, which makes everybody rich. So that's the way I see it.

★

**T**hey were going to section me, but they released me into the care of St Petrocs. Obviously they assess everybody that comes through the doors because there's limited housing that they can offer. And they assessed my needs and my disabilities, and they housed me within two months.

And just that feeling of being handed that key. It just made me break down really, just opening the door, just looking at that single bed. Bear in mind, I had been married before and, you know, had a very large business. But it all collapsed and caused me to be homeless.

Seeing a single bed in a small room would normally trigger off a negative response in a fully grown man who's had a family. But I was so desperate that I saw that single bed and burst into tears. It's just nice to have a bed.

★

**C**urrently I live in rented accommodation with my ex-husband. Well, he's not 'ex' yet; we've not officially divorced, but we've split up. Due to financial reasons, neither one of us can afford to leave the other and the rented accommodation, nor can we find anything that either of us could afford as single people. So we're stuck in a very horrible situation. I've actually had to go on anti-anxiety tablets, because my current living situation is horrific and I don't see light at the end of the tunnel coming very soon. So that's what's getting me through it - anti-depressants.

★

One lady gave me £30. She said, 'Would you be offended if I offered you some money?' 'Well,' I said, 'No, I wouldn't be, because in my situation at the moment, I don't have anything. So yeah, that would be absolutely wonderful.' So she gave me thirty quid and said, 'Go get yourself some food and stuff'

If you're pleasant to people, they'll stop and they'll talk to you. So you're not always stereotyped, but you do get the people that look down their noses at you and think, 'What the hell are you doing in our park? Move on.'

✱

At the start of lockdown, the council sent me round all sorts of places. One where a crackhead kept knocking on my door. Then I was sent to a hotel that wasn't a hotel. A guy with a tattoo, naked, barged into my room and collapsed onto the floor, he was full of heroin. I had two diabetic hypos and the landlady threatened to call the police.

I called the council and they sent me somewhere else, and everyone there was on crack and the dealer was there. I got threatened with a knife, and that's when I went to St Petrocs. It was St Petrocs that gave me the time and space to be calm enough to sort things out. They were different to the council. They listened, they were interested. They cared.

✱



**S**t Petrocs as an organisation is just brilliant. Everything about them, from the outreach team that go out and engage with people on the streets, right through to what is now the Vocational Development Programme. It's just helpful in every way. I haven't yet met a member of staff that works here that isn't willing to bend over backwards to help you out.

They're not going to do it for you, and this is a great thing I find about St Petrocs. They're not here to sort your life out for you, but what they are here to do is give you every opportunity to sort it out for yourself. And if you seize those opportunities, and you are proactive in doing so... look where it gets you.



**I** think the thing I like the most about St Petrocs is they've got something other supported accommodations don't have, and that's the Vocational Development Programme.

So far I've done jewellery making and I loved that. I've done their first aid course and I really enjoyed that. Because of the vocational development, I've decided I'm gonna take up metal clay working with the jewellery making. I'm going to take that up properly as a hobby.

And the Vocational Development Programme has turned my other half into a functioning member of society. He's now got 14 qualifications through it. He's been working with St Petrocs on something called the Championship. It's basically, instead of leaving St Petrocs and then having to wait two years to be able to get a job with them, you work with them as a volunteer for six months, and then you can apply for a job in St Petrocs.



**I** came down from London after two divorces, down to my brother 'cos he lives down here. And I got a job and was paying rent and all that. And when the Covid came in I couldn't work, so I tried to get benefits, but they wouldn't give me nothing. My brother brought me here to St Petrocs, 'cos he remembered staying here when he first moved down. So I've ended up here and it's been happy days ever since. I'm 62, I ain't got many, many years to go. The people running it are brilliant. Anything they can do for you, they do it. I'd like to work but they've told me I'll never be working again. But they keep me busy in the garden here. Been weeding. There's a lot of it!

★

**I** like to help people out anyway, it doesn't matter who they are - if I can help then I will. I do it with the people in the St Petrocs house. I've always been a friendly, outgoing type of guy. It's why I fix people's cars, because I like to know I've done a good job, and they go away happy and I feel good about that.

Here, we're all out doing the garden at the minute. One girl who never comes out of her room normally is joining in a bit. Stuff like that. I just like people to be happy in where they are and not miserable. And I feel like I've got up and done something with the day, I'm not just wasting it.

★

**I**'ve actually found my experience with the Job Centre really positive. I feel like there's a lot of compassion and understanding from the people I've dealt with. Other people I know have not had the same





experience, so maybe I was lucky. But the people I've dealt with have been really kind. I do wonder if it's because I go in and I'm just quite honest - I lay my bank statements out and I'm like, this is literally the situation. I was on Jobseekers for a while, but obviously I can't have that now because I'm registered as self-employed, trying to build a business. That's its own struggle.

★

**I** think you need to lean on friends and people that you know. And that can be difficult, you know... men historically bottle things up: 'the alpha male, we'll sort it out'.

So I think you need to speak to people, but as well as talking, you need to have other ways of letting go of the pressures. You should have a balanced work life, and a balanced home life. You can have one out of kilter, but not both out of kilter at the same time, else your life is one big ball of stress. So you need to have a bit of an escape mechanism. I'll go to the gym, I'll run. I do physical activity just to give my mind a bit of a breather.

★

**P**ersonally, I go out for a walk. We live in a beautiful place in the world, so just walking on the beach or something helps to clear your mind. Because it does affect your mental health when you're hitting a brick wall and you can't do anything about it. You're paying rent that's sky high, and you're trying to save, and you just haven't got a chance really. It feels like there's no end to it really.

★

**F**amily and friends have helped. Yeah, my friends have lent me money, like a few hundred quid here and there, and then said, 'Look, don't pay it back.' And normally, I'd refuse that. But I'm also in a situation where I'm like, 'Okay, thank you,' because I really just don't know how I'm ever going to pay it back.

★

**N**obody likes to go begging do they? I mean, I've got a family, but I don't want to live with the family again. I'm used to my independence. I can't see myself homeless. I can't. So I might have to go to family, temporarily. What's helping me though, is seeing everybody else that is in a similar position to the one I'm in, to understand there are other people with similar problems to me. It's nice to know. This is where we can help each other.

★

**I** helped myself. I didn't have anyone else to help me at the time. Honestly, like, I hadn't really even set foot on a train on my own. Not further than Camborne. So it would shake me up a bit, having to go further on the train, to where I had been offered accommodation. But I just kept doing it, because that's better than sleeping on the street. And having my camera with me made it like a holiday. I just love my camera. It makes me feel confident and I know that I have some talent.

★

**S**o a homeless person will have very little self-pride. And I mean that as a positive. Humility. I'm humble, me, and I think we develop the right characteristics then.

Me and my dog, we've walked thousands of miles over the last seven years, criss-crossed Somerset, Devon, been around Cornwall about six times. Rather than those sort of just carrying on stubbornly, striving for a higher position within society. Everyone's fighting to stay in something that they're finding increasingly difficult to stay in, because everything's sort of fighting against them. So they're on a very slow, slow spiral.

But we learn patience, because we are patient. The whole world is going 100 miles-an-hour, so we don't get involved in that, and that's very liberating. To let go is frightening because you're giving up everything, like your banking, your identification, all of these things. Once you give them up and you're walking out there, you're either going to find God or you're gonna die. That's what you're thinking when you do it. So yeah, it's a humbling experience. But it's for that reason. It's on purpose, to change us into a better character.

★

**I**guess what has helped is this sort of blind tenacity, really. Like, yeah, fuck it. Which is weird, because I was never like that. Not really. I don't know how to explain it. It's like, that's what I've got to do now. It will fall into place. Just take the next step and the road will meet you. It is some sort of belief and faith. Belligerence maybe?

★

I went on benefits two years ago for the first time in my life. I didn't even know I could go on benefits. But there's nothing I can do about that at the moment because I am self-employed - or was, before Covid & my breakdown. So I don't know what helps me cope. Just taking every day as it comes, I think. I'm not panicked. That's the bizarre thing. I'm not panicked about it, because I'm not going to be sleeping on the road. Because surely that can't happen to two people? Though I know it does...

✧

I'll be really honest, we kind of just go, 'Lalalalala it's not happening until it does.' What else can you do? As it stands, we can pay our bills, we can pay our rent, it's all absolutely fine. Even if we got a little bit of a rent hike, we could still pay it. But the moment our landlord goes, 'Oh, actually, if we sold this house, we could really rake the money in,' that's the moment we've got a problem. We're quite prepared for them coming to us in the not-too-distant future, saying, 'We're going to put your rent up.' But if they ever decide they want to sell, that's when we're stuck. So yeah. 'Lalalalala not happening,' until it happens.

✧

I struggle the most with the insecurity. Just the insecurity of having somewhere now but not knowing what might happen. I'm at the stage where it's really hard to put into words, to be honest, because it's always in the back of my mind, that I might have to move out,



and that I won't be able to afford anywhere, and I'll be going back to the same place, again, where I've got to live in a summer house or a caravan. I think I'd feel more secure in a council house because they're not going to sell it. But it's so hard to get a council house. Private renting isn't a secure, long-term thing anymore.

So not a lot helps. It's always the negative coming into my head rather than the positive. Until I get something that's rock solid, that's always gonna be there and that's just the way it is. So even though the negative thoughts come into my head, I just try and push them back and carry on. There's nothing you can do about it. A lot of landlords turn you down as soon as you say, it's me and my dog, they don't even let you view houses. But I'm not going to give up my dog because she's the one that's there for me, all the time like. So, yeah, that's kind of where I'm at. You're either gonna go downhill and start going on a downer, or you've just got to keep trying to think something will come along, and you know, just be positive.

✱

I'm proud now, to see how we're getting through it. I want people to look and go, wow, she's done all that, and she's still smiles at the end of the day. She still feeds her children and her children are still getting to school. Simple things that everybody finds easy, every day. Try going through this and still doing those same things. You go through every emotion under the sun with this, it's quite a shocker.

But seeing how hard I fight for it, I know now that I haven't failed anybody. I've worked my backside off. I need people to believe in themselves, that they fought as best they could, with their head held high. The system just didn't work for them.

★

**T**he thing that has really helped in trying to find somewhere stable is knowing the charities that help the locals that have nowhere to go. Knowing where to find them, and just explaining the situation you're in and saying - look, I need your help. Soon, I've got a parenting assessment with social services coming up, so I'll find out if they're comfortable for my little boy to come back with me or if he has to stay with my parents until he is 18.

It's difficult knowing that that's going to be happening. But I'm trying to keep my head up, keep the fight going. Work on who I am, as myself, find who I want to be and what it is that I want to be, and take it from there. And hopefully, get my little boy back and get somewhere that's secure and stable, for him to be with me.

★

**I** think communities seem to be rallying around and supporting each other, which is great to see. We've got charities and organisations, like St Petrocs in Truro, and the food banks in Camborne and stuff like that, that are really making a hugely valuable contribution.





I can't say enough good things about the communities that are helping support each other, donating time and money that they don't really always have to help support people that are in even more desperate situations than themselves. It brings a tear to your eye, to be honest, it's a beautiful thing to see. And it shows the true nature of what community can do. This is why we need to see if we can get some legislation and some actual government focus on these issues. Because otherwise communities just end up dying.

★

**I** think the other thing that's helped is being back where I grew up. There's something really nice about that for me right now. I wouldn't want to be in this position if I was somewhere I didn't know anybody, or didn't have that understanding or that connection to the place. That would be a different thing entirely. So I guess I was very blessed really to grow up somewhere that I could return to, and feel connected to, even though it has been sold way out of anybody's price range.

★

**A**s much I disagree with a lot of local politicians on things - and that's fine, it's part of living in a democracy - the fact is that we're all agreeing that this is an issue. All across the political spectrum in Cornwall, we're all agreeing on this. One MP was saying that a good way of approaching it would be to make owners of

second homes, holiday homes, homes that aren't lived in for the vast majority of the year, apply for change-of-use permissions with parish councils. So you're giving the parish councils and therefore the local communities a say about how many empty properties there are in their villages and towns around the county.

That kind of legislation, and good-quality affordable housing that's prioritised for people that live here, could really help. Just better investment in general, because we're one of the poorest areas in western Europe. I don't know. Let's hope something changes...

✱

**I** get whatever people are saying in terms of speaking to people for help, and charities and stuff, but who, from like a legislative or government perspective, is leading on this?

There's seven of us on this interview. We're all from Cornwall, we all want to live in Cornwall. There's probably hundreds or thousands of people in the same boat as us in Cornwall.

So what is actually being done about this? I don't know. We hear all the bad press and we all know what's happening in terms of house prices and rental prices. But is there anybody actively working on our behalf to try and help this? I don't know, I'd just like to understand who that point of contact would be?

✱

## Question 3

# What do you think people don't understand about the housing situation in Cornwall?

**Interviewer:** So my last question is, what do you think people, either from inside or outside Cornwall, don't get about what's been going on?

**Interviewee:** That it's got really bad, really fast? Within, like, 12 months, all I keep hearing about is people getting kicked out. And I'm like, really? Another lot of people that's gonna be... it's been quite shocking, talking to people. And it's families being kicked out, which makes it worse really.

Like, mine was different circumstances, but the Airbnb thing... I think that's just wrong. They shouldn't be allowed to just kick people out, especially if they've been in there a certain amount of time. I did hear the other day that the Airbnb thing is starting to be not as good as it was... not as many people wanting to come down anymore, now they can go abroad again and it's cheaper. I hear people seem to be selling a lot at the minute. But still, looking on private rents, I can't afford them, especially with the bills now. I'd have to try and make this much money, it's just impossible.

Right now I'd take anything with a proper roof. When it starts raining here the kids sleep through it, but I can't. I'm awake, checking the caravan to make sure there's no water coming in. I'm traumatised by dripping water.

People don't see the real Cornwall. They see beaches, blue sky, and sand, but that won't pay your mortgage or feed you. Really, I think we are heading for a very nasty recession, and there's gonna be a lot of people experiencing homelessness and a lot of homeless people that have never been homeless before. It's awful.

\*

I think from outside of Cornwall, people just don't get it. You don't hear of people really struggling in Cornwall because you just see the scenery. 'You're so lucky, you live by the beach.' Like, how could you possibly struggle when it's so beautiful? How could you have anything to complain about? But they come down and they've got money already. They don't have to worry about the Cornish work. With Cornish wages, it's minimum wage. Or, there's lots of small independent businesses, which you really want to support, but some people can take you for granted as well and essentially get you to work for free, and you don't even realise you're doing it. And they can take advantage of young people, because the younger you are, the less they can pay you.

And people don't realise that the houses being built are for millionaires. No one can buy a house. There's no affordable housing, there's no council houses anymore. We've got whole streets where no one lives - houses that are empty for entire winters that people can't live in. Or, you can be living in a house all winter, and then it comes to summer and you get kicked out because they can make more money from Airbnb than from rent.



People can say you're ungrateful. I get that sometimes from family. I'll say, I'm really struggling, you know? I'm working all the time, and the house that we're paying rent into, it's just this mouldy, damp hovel that's probably going to make us really sick when we're older. And they just say - but the view! And we do have a really nice view. And we can go to loads of beautiful places. So we tell ourselves that all the time. In our heads we're like, well, yeah - but the view! It's just so complicated. It's so exhausting.

★

I've been here like 25 years now and I feel the second homes have destroyed it. Where I am from, up north, everyone owns their own home. But obviously the price of a house there is like 20% of what it is in Cornwall for the same property, so it's well overpriced. We're talking London prices.

I've heard of people here who've got property in St Mawes and they're here two weeks of the year; Helford River, they're here four weeks of the year. I know they're bringing money in, but at the end of the day, it's your local people who are being trodden on. They haven't got a leg to stand on because they can't get the sort of salary that these people are bringing in. It's a very vicious circle at the moment.

And on Cornwall Live they were saying there's a lady, probably about 32, three children, and she's lived in a Travelodge for the last three months. There's no cooker there, there's nothing. She's on the list for sheltered housing. She was in a rented property, the landlord sold the property, and basically she was kicked out so Cornwall Council put her in one of these Travelodges. At the end of day, what chance has that woman got?

★

**U**nless people are in the situation where they're looking for a home and finding it difficult, I don't think they're always all that aware of what an impact people with second homes are having.

I think everybody understands that tourism is important and brings money to the county, which we all want. But tourism needs to be somehow regulated because of the housing situation, the second homes for the wealthy people. Certainly, or particularly, on isolated or village communities, it's having an impact on those that actually live and work there. Because it's just pricing out the locals and the youngsters who are trying to build a life of their own, and are doing all the right things and earning.

We have quite a strong work ethic in our house. I do not want to be living off benefits. But I am part time at the moment because of our housing situation. Part of why I'm on part-time benefits now is because I'm not functioning as well as I could, because of all the stress. So I don't think people always understand the shortage, or the need to regulate second homeowners. The shortage of affordable homes for young people in particular. I'm saying young people in particular because that's how it affects my family. But I know friends whose marriages have broken up, and there are single women, and single men, of 50, 60, 70, who work and are struggling to find affordable places for themselves to live.

★

**B**asically, everyone, especially youngsters that are trying to move out, is having to move away or just stay at their parents because they can't afford anything. Even one-bedroom flats are extortionate nowadays. Landlords are finding it cheaper and more profitable to





make them into Airbnbs, because they know people will come down and stay in them. They're not thinking, 'Well hang on, why can't I do this up and rent it to a family? They could be in my property for years, if I keep them.'

And that's another thing - people being kicked out left, right and centre for absolutely no reason. I do feel bad for some landlords, if they're having to take their properties back due to whatever circumstances they're in. That's fair enough - it's their property. But because there's nowhere for their tenants to go, they're making their tenants homeless. And that's really difficult on a human level - 'I've got to make these people homeless to be able to have my own house back.' I've had a few friends of ours that have gone through that, they've had to move out of county because that's the only private place they can find. The council either won't help them because they're on a certain income that's too high, or won't help them because the list is too big.

★

I think to a large extent people coming down on holiday don't really care what the housing situation is down here. They're probably leaving similar situations in their home areas, and when you come down on holiday the last thing that you want to do is contemplate what the housing situation might be in the holiday area you come to. But for Cornish people, and they know full well, it's a low-wage economy. There seem to be two main areas of employment down

here and that's tourism and social care. And both, historically, are low paid. So it's just the sheer amount of people now and the lack of social housing. And it seems to be have been exasperated after the G7 - that highlighted what a fantastic place Cornwall is at the height of summer. There was a rush of enquiries, I think, for Airbnbs and holiday homes and from people who could work from home. That became more apparent during Covid. If you're going to work from home, why do it in the city, why not do it from Cornwall?

★

**T**he way it's going in the housing market, it's just destroying these communities. You're just getting random people coming down and buying them. They're not interested in being part of the community. They're not there to chat to, or to become part of a neighbourhood, or part of anything. They've got no sense of being with any of it, or any sense of identity. They just see it as a holiday home.

I got told that there were loads of people from up country and stuff, buying more houses down here as investments because of the way the stock market was in the pandemic, it wasn't a worthwhile fruitful thing. So they were investing in property down here and then renting it out as holiday lets, or just using it as a way of investing money that was just kicking around that would have otherwise gone into stocks and shares.

★

**I**t's not a great situation, is it. It's almost like the locals have to move away to rent, which isn't ideal. People say, you need to rent, so why are you trying to live in a seaside town?

Well, this isn't a seaside town to me, to us - it's home. And we're being forced out. Compared to up country, house prices here were pretty good. So people from up country are buying here and making £2000, £3000 a month with Airbnbs, and there's barely any rental properties left. So yeah, it's looking dire. I really don't know what we can do about it. We can't exactly tell all the second homeowners to just sell up, because that is never gonna happen.

★

**T**he homelessness is everywhere. You just have to look around you. But people don't see it. They just don't realise it. So it's a tale of two cities really, isn't it? There's the rich people who come down here to have holidays and enjoy themselves but us local people are the ones who are suffering because of it, because we're not earning the big salaries that all these people from places like London are earning.

★

**I**f someday I ever have a kid, I would like the idea that the kid can go to the same school that I went to, and grow up where I had the fantastic opportunity to grow up. I love it here. It's such an amazing place to grow up. But to be honest with you, I don't really see a route out. And that's not me being sad, or feeling sorry for myself. I just don't. We're all in a situation where, dark as it sounds, we're waiting for our parents to die to be able to afford anything. I don't want to wait for my parents to die to be able to afford property. It's silly. It should be a human right. In my opinion, it shouldn't be a luxury to have a house.

★

I guess what people probably don't understand is that there's just no affordable rentals. I can understand that it just got too much for our old landlord, who's in his 70s. But if it had happened just five years ago, he would have just given us some notice, and we would have moved somewhere because we could have then, there were more properties. Now, there's just nowhere to go. So there's quite a lot of people saying tenants are being awkward and they're not moving... we would have, there's just nowhere to go.

And last summer, we overheard were some very posh people on the beach, and they were moaning about the cafés being closed in St Ives. They've come down on their holiday and they couldn't go in because they were all closed. But this is a knock-on effect that's happening, because local people can't live in these places to work in the cafés. Normally, that's where you start as a teenager, you go and get a summer job. But if your parents can't live there, and the communities are so isolated, and public transport is so rubbish... as a young person, it's really difficult to get a job because you can't walk to the café to go and open it.

★

I think the obvious answer is to build more houses. It doesn't seem hard to me - there is a shortage of houses. And I think you've got to say, right, we're not gonna have any buy-to-lets or whatever, we're gonna make these affordable for people to buy and make them



reasonable, not boxes. I don't see why houses have to be so expensive. It's just pure greed. Why do we have to spend our whole life saving and working just to buy a house to live in? It just seems obvious, if you build more houses the price will come down. It's like anything. If I made cars and I built more of them and sold them, the price would come down. That seems quite simple to me.

★

I just don't think people realise that there is such a basic need for more social housing and more affordable housing. There are a lot of empty houses in Cornwall. I mean, I think it's hard not to know that. But I think maybe when people come on holiday, they don't realise that the majority of holiday cottages really do sit empty for a huge amount of time. They're not occupied constantly. I've cleaned holiday cottages, as I'm sure many people in Cornwall have, as a little sideline. And you do get some that are booked out repeatedly. But then there are others that can go months and months without a booking, which makes you wonder whether it is really necessary, or whether it would be just better to rent it long term to somebody and have that income coming in every month?

Where I live, the best houses and the nicest houses in the village are empty. And I think it's happening all over Cornwall. My village is lucky, it's still got the shop and the pub, it's still alive. But it's dying with every eviction. It's dying. We're not the first family in the village to be forced out. There was another young family, with kids in the school, that lived just down the road, less than a five-mile radius. And again, they were evicted for Airbnb.

★

People might be surprised to hear that I've got money in my bank account but I still can't find anywhere to live. I can't find anywhere to buy, I can't even find anywhere to rent. So that's where I'm at. I'm considering buying a van and living in that and waiting to see what happens in the housing market. There's too many people in Cornwall that can't afford an affordable home. Wages are low, work is seasonal, too many second homeowners. Too many people are Airbnb'ing their property. Local people are left in the gutter to some degree. And I'm born in Cornwall, grew up in Cornwall, worked most of my adult life in Cornwall. I had a lovely home but when things go wrong, they go badly wrong. So, that's where I'm at really.

★

I randomly looked the other day at this part-buy part-rent scheme. And it all still added up to the same as what we're paying now - well, before it goes up in the autumn. It's actually on a housing estate that is supposedly affordable housing. We've literally got no hope in trying to buy. Even like the 5% deposit schemes, they're still ridiculous.

I get worried renting as well, obviously. Because you hear all these stories, like, families who have lived in their rented homes for years, since they were a kid or whatever, and then their landlord just tells them, 'You've got to get out now,' because they want to sell it to someone up country. I'm lucky to have my family to fall back on, I can go back there. Because not everyone has that either.





One of my friends lives on a new housing estate near Truro, and the house next to them was put up for sale. So it's quite a newish house and it was put on sale for double what it was worth. I said, 'There's no way they're gonna get that.' Then someone from up country damn paid it, like double what the people selling it paid. It's ridiculous. That's why people know they can advertise their houses for more, because they know people up country are gonna pay it. We've got no hope.

★

**T**here's also that feeling of you don't know what more to do. If I worked full time to earn more money, I'd have to pay more money out on childcare, so there's a vicious cycle in that sense as well. You feel helpless, because it's like, how do I improve this for us? How could we get something better? And I really don't know.

It's really time-consuming as well. The time it takes... everybody's short of time, we're all working really hard, we've all got busy home lives, and then to also have to sit down to try and trawl the internet to look for actual other options. That's why it's more stressful again, because where do you get that time from? So it's not just money, it's time too.

★

**T**he majority of the people that face homelessness are just regular people who can't afford to pay the rent because of how low the wages are and how high housing prices are. You go to the nearest estate agent, and there are places on there for like £1700 a month. I'm like, who can afford to pay £1700 a month in rent?

And the places that have the most affordable rent, they tend to be out west. And out there, the bus services aren't great. Like really, if you want people to be able to afford housing, you've got to have a decent bus network as well so that they can get to work. Otherwise, you're forcing people to live on benefits for their entire life. I'm pretty sure the majority of people don't want to do that. I want to work but how am I going to get there? It's like, Cornwall's got a lot of issues, and they are all kind of intertwined in a way.

★

I think people believe the whole issue comes from just one situation. But there are so many factors. When you talk about the housing problem in Cornwall, everybody goes, 'Oh, it's all those second homes.' Yes, there are second homes that possibly people who can afford to get on the ladder might otherwise have been able to buy. But generally, they're not places that somebody like me could afford to buy. I've got no means of getting on the ladder. So don't build 'affordable housing' for people to buy, because most of them can't.

And some people think, why are you trying to get something for nothing? They think that you've just got to work more hours to make more money. I'm 52 years old, and I've worked since I was 14 years old. I can't work more hours, because the more hours I work, the less Universal Credit I get, so it balances out like a scale. Unless I can get a job that's gonna give me £30,000-£40,000 a year, I can't get off benefits. It's the way the system works.

Unfortunately, there are people who do suck the life out of the system. But there are very few people that do nothing. That's not the people that are in the housing crisis. We are working families. We need more houses for low rent that normal working families are able to afford.

\*

What people don't understand about this housing situation in Cornwall is that there is no housing in Cornwall. Not even for the Cornish. I can understand people who sell houses, they want to make money on it. They've got plans for themselves, they might want to move elsewhere, out of Cornwall, which is fair enough. But I do think they're more interested in selling their property than thinking, 'Hang on, yes I can sell my house, but I want to sell it to someone who's Cornish so it keeps the Cornish in Cornwall.'

Because at the moment, that's not what's happening. There's people buying up properties as investments. And it is literally taking houses away from the people that need them. The council is not doing anything about it. They come up with these little ideas - a few pods in a car park, stick the homeless in a container, we've done our bit - but there's an awful lot of properties that are vacant in virtually every single town you go to which could be utilised.

Unfortunately, it's all about money and not about people. And until somebody steps up and says no, this is wrong, it's never going to change. Because money talks.

\*

**W**e have companies that are based 300 miles away, spending six figures over the asking price for houses that are two-bed cottages, three-bed cottages, and using them as investment properties. It seems like investment for out-of-county businesses is now trumping livelihoods, communities and people's homes. It's hard to see.

★

**I**'ve got this friend, he lives in a big new-build block of lovely houses. And he's the only one. His house is the only house in that whole block that is lived in and the rest of it is Airbnb. So sometimes there's nobody there. And it's just an empty block of like, lovely new houses, and then sometimes they fill up with like 10 young people having a stag do. But quite often now, because it's colder, it's just empty. I've said to him, can't you get in touch with the landlord and just say, 'Let us move in for a bit,' or something? That will give him rent, he'll get the same money but... they're not really interested, some of them. Some of them can afford to have it empty, and then they just fill it up when it fills up.

★

**N**ot long ago, I actually wrote to my local MP and basically just explained my situation: I've been released from prison homeless, I've been rough sleeping, I suffer with my mental health issue, I suffer with my foot pain - I just basically said to her, 'I'm not entirely sure you can grasp the situation... like, I did my time



in prison, but this feels like an extra punishment.' It's difficult not to take it personally. I'm not saying she can just click her fingers and something should happen, but certainly I think there's enough homelessness in the UK for MPs to want to do something about it? There's enough land to build houses on. There's enough empty houses and abandoned houses to be able to fix up and let out. I just think there's not enough being done at all. I've read somewhere that Cornwall has the highest homelessness rate in the UK. I don't know how true that is, but Cornwall's not the biggest area in the UK, so I'm guessing that the homelessness-to-size ratio is quite high?

★

**O**ne problem with the housing situation is that there is an awful lot of red tape involved, so many forms to fill in at every stage. They're all asking for the same information. I don't think half of them talk to each other. You get passed on from one association to another. And they're asking for the same documents, your bank statements and all this kind of stuff, which I don't mind giving, but you've just given it three weeks before to some other person.

I understand there's got to be some separation between them. But you'd think they could say, 'Have you got number 33's details?' And they could just go, 'Yes, we have, here's a copy of the file,' without every time having to ask us to photocopy everything again and send them off. I know things change but all they've got to say is, 'Everything the same as the last time you filled in the form?' Not ask you 50 questions that you've been asked before.

★

**K**eeping us four in this house is costing the council £6,000 a month. Just unbelievable. When I first moved in here and I saw the paperwork, I couldn't get my head around that, just how much they were paying for me to be in here per week. It was as much as my rent was in my house before. And there's these companies I've heard of, getting in on this charity type of thing, buying houses to rent rooms and stuff. I heard about one of these houses up in the Midlands, and one of the guys in the house, he had real bad suicidal problems. And the house majors are supposed to help with that - that's why you're in a sheltered house, so you can get the help that you need. Well, he went off and drowned himself because he got no help. They showed the house where he'd been living and it was just horrendous. So yeah, I count myself really, really lucky that I'm here.

★

**T**here was a big difference between us and the other holiday park residents. And this applies to other temporary accommodation like Travelodges as well. The stigma is real, and you get treated differently if you're not a holidaymaker booked in. And I'm thinking, but you're getting the money, aren't we the guests here?! This holiday park was getting almost £3,000 pounds a month for us being there. It's just bonkers.

★

**I** stood up for my country and my people and served them. And I'm not getting much pay back when my head falls to pieces. They talk about the military covenant. What does that mean?





It means we're supposed to get at least superior, if not advantaged, access to housing. We're supposed to get medical people that understand us. I was seen five, six years ago by a psychiatrist from Combat Stress, and his diagnosis was chronic depression, moderate to severe anxiety, plus the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. And he advised me to change my name to Lucky.

★

**Y**ou can lose everything within a couple of days and don't realise what you can lose. You're lucky if you get good landlords. I'm still going through the process of 'I can't believe I've lost everything.' That's why I'm going to counselling, because I just can't come to terms with it all at the minute.

★

**T**he Cornish have to go away to work. The jobs and the wages have never been here, or the careers; it's always jobs, never careers. This is a much bigger problem and I think it needs to be acknowledged. And I think that we need to separate who's who on that. I think that we need a wealth tax. I think that we are tumbling into a situation which we're only going to see get worse and worse. We need systemic change at all levels. Because quite frankly, this isn't working. Any society should be looking after the most vulnerable members of its community. And I'm not saying I'm one of them, but even I've ended up homeless. And that's crazy. That's crazy.

★

I think the council have a duty of care to the people that live here. I think there should be a huge premium on second homes, third homes. There should be tax breaks for landlords who let responsibly to responsible people. That could be at a local level, or it could be through council tax - here's a massive premium on your council tax because you've got more than one home and you make money off it, but guess what, if you've got a low-income family in your property, and it's in decent nick, and the rent's reasonable, and you don't mind if the council pay it - we'll knock it in half, or three quarters off it.

Another thing that the council could do is provide camps. Campsites with amenities - toilets, showers, waste disposal places. That's what they could do, but they don't. Instead they make half the places we could stay unliveable and paint double yellow lines on everything.

★

The council have emergency housing, but it seems to be for people from elsewhere, like Birmingham or wherever they're from. I've seen it, they come and the council will have this brand new house for them, and they'll furnish it all out and everything. And they're not even from Cornwall. They've never lived in Cornwall before. They've never had a job here. And I've been working here, I've been here most of my life. It's just, yeah, you can't get anything. I don't know exactly how it works. I just know that there's a lot of people not from Cornwall. And then when you're looking for places, you can't get anywhere. There's empty houses all over the place but you can't get anything. I had nine months looking for somewhere, and all these places were going to other people. And they weren't even from Cornwall. It just frustrated me.

★

**I**t's the culture now, or the accessibility maybe, of people being able to work from home more. I hear about people, and I do know someone who has a London wage but only needs to go to the London office once a month. With that sort of money, they can move to Cornwall and have a property here, and local people just can't compete with that financial clout. It's just becoming more and more common now.

My wages should be good enough to get somewhere. I've lived in Cornwall for 10 years and been able to raise two kids, but now, looking for a property that's a suitable three bed, it's just out of my price range. Maybe MPs could get involved, and if a house goes on the market or a house goes up for rent, there's priority viewing for local people or something like that? I'm not sure how it would work, because people own the house and they can do what they want with it. But maybe, like, a certain amount of houses have to go to local people. Maybe with the viewings, you try and get local people in first before it's gone to someone who's not from around here.

★

**I**don't think people outside of Cornwall realise that there is no work. There's no transport. There is some mental health help, but not enough. And people don't know how to access that help anyway. And they're building houses, but there's no work, there's no transport, and the doctors and dentists are overrun. And the schools. I do not understand where they think these people are gonna go. I don't even know where they think they were gonna park.

It's just phenomenal. A couple of years ago, when Covid first started and people were getting thrown out, you'd see your friends asking, 'Has anyone got a farmhouse, has anyone got a free property...?' All the time. And I used to think - God, all these families. Like, my landlord's put the rent up, I can't afford to stay here, I've got a dog, I can't get a house. I don't think, unless someone's been in that situation, or they've got friends in that situation, that people can really empathise with it.

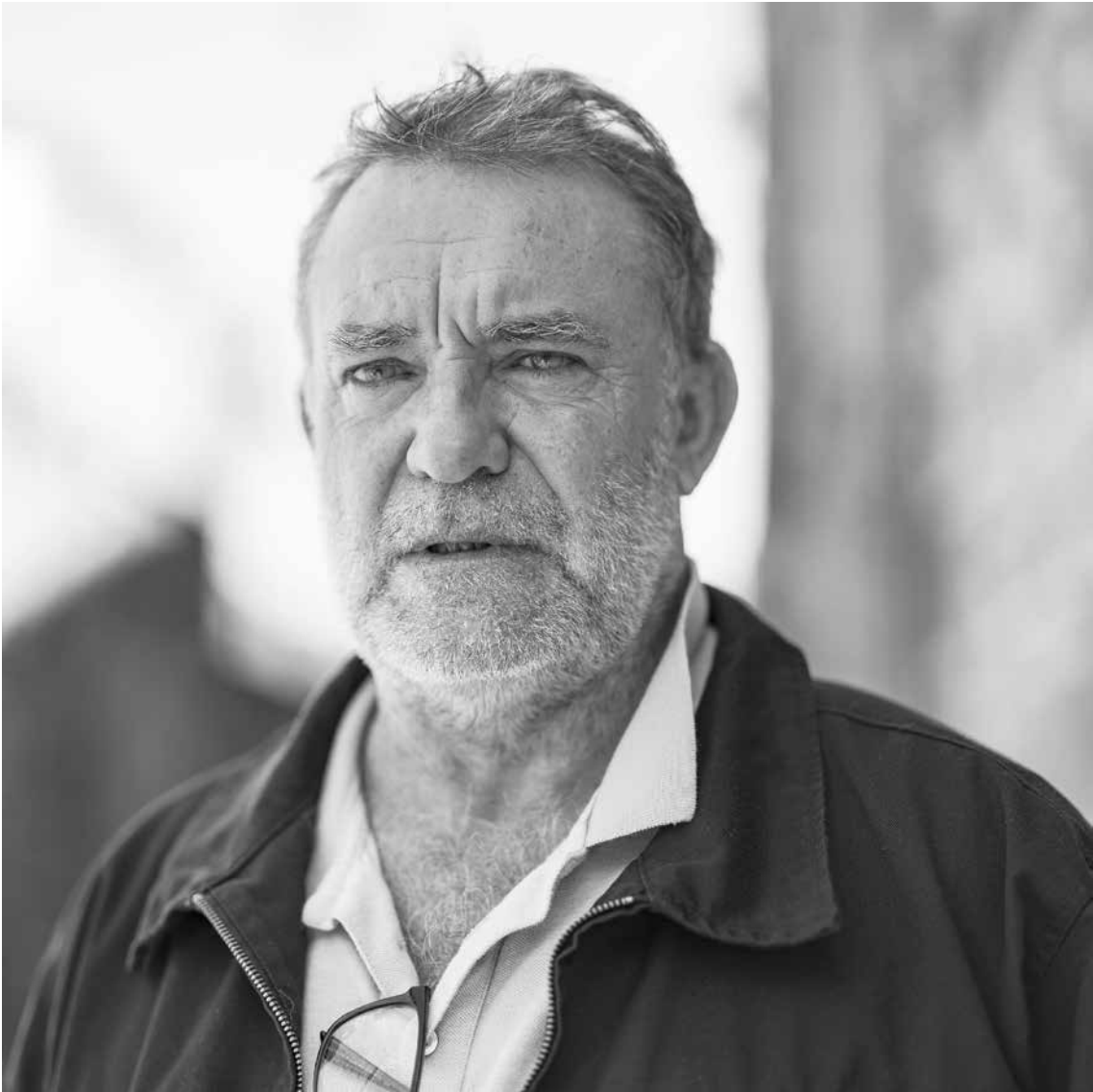
★

**A** lot of people mistake homelessness as a result of mental illness or drug use. And it's true that those are a factor when it comes to some people. But for most people that have faced homelessness, their mental illness is usually anxiety and depression. If you're unsure of where you're going to, whether or not you're going to have a roof over your head, I'm sure you'd be anxious and depressed as well.

★

**I**'ve become very acutely aware of the nuance of change. If I'm staying in somebody's house, it's the shift from 'Come and stay' to 'When are you going?' You're full-on alert. We become hypervigilant because anything can happen. And that's whether you're on the streets, it's whether you're in somebody else's space, it's whether you're on countdown, it's whether you're in a winter let... you are hypervigilant that at any point everything can change. And that's exhausting, and it's really bad for your health.

★



**W**hat would I want people to know... I don't know, that it's very stressful being homeless? I would imagine everybody who's been homeless has suffered from depression. But then I think that's probably a part of life in these times. I think it's the hopelessness. And I think a lot of people are not as blessed as I am with the people around me. It's only the home that's not here. My community is still here. In that respect, I'm being held. If you take that away, there's a lot of freefalling going on.

★

**M**aybe people don't think about how nice it'd be to have your own place, somewhere to store your food and stuff? You could just walk out in your clothes and come back in your clothes. But we're carrying all our bags, all our food, everything around with us. Everybody's got all their stuff on them. The bag I've got there, I've got everything in it. All your stuff in a bag - it's a house really innit.

I made a sign saying 'What would you do if you were homeless?' I don't want money for it, I just want people to come over and say, 'Well, if I was homeless, mate...' and have a chat. The other day, some chap came over and said, 'I think I'd be dead.' I mean, we all stick together, if you need things, and you've got it, you help each other out, right? But people do come over and say, 'If I was homeless, I don't know what I'd do.' Because at the end of the day, you lose your job, you lose your money, you can end up losing your house - and then you're on the streets.

★

**T**here's a lot of stigma around people without housing.

A lot of people think it's their fault because they are on drugs.

This stereotype is extremely harmful and it makes it very difficult to talk about. With people I'm friends with, I tell them I'm in supported accommodation. It's not something everyone has to live through and therefore people don't understand. The shortage of accommodation is a big issue, finding somewhere to live without there being a bunch of other people fighting for the same place. And the pay issue is difficult – it's just not enough. I'm on Universal Credit, but it's less because I'm not over 21. After rent, which is £104, I have £10 left for food. It's not enough.

The best way to get rid of the stereotypes is to think we are normal people and we just got dealt a very shit set of cards.

\*

**I** think if people have good lives, they've probably worked hard for whatever they've got. Why should they care about someone else? You can't make people care about other people. It would be nice if people did care because it would make society fairer. You probably wouldn't get so many homeless people. If you get a lot of rejection, like what I've had, you give up, or maybe you turn to drink and drugs. It's a shame there's a housing shortage. There's always been homeless people but I think it's the worst thing in the world to be homeless. If you've never experienced it, you don't know what it's like.

\*





**B**y the train station I would always see at least a couple of homeless people about and it's like, even though I'm kind of hard done by at the moment, I'm nowhere near as hard done by as these guys. And I'd ask them, 'I've got some spare food, do you want some food? I've got some spare cash, do you want me to get you anything?' You know? I always offer a hand. But I don't think there's enough people who are willing to chance that because unfortunately, there is such a stigma for homeless people. People seem to think that everyone who becomes homeless is some kind of addict or druggie, or has some kind of really terrible past, and deserve what they are getting. That couldn't be further from the truth.

★

**I**t seems weird now, and I don't want to generalise, but the homeless I think are looked on a little bit like they're scum of the earth. I was guilty of it myself, when I was living somewhere and I was with my wife. I could walk past a homeless person and not give them any money, not think twice about it. But actually now being in that situation, it's opened my eyes and changed the way I think about things.

★

**W**hen I first went on the streets down there, I'd say I knew about five people that were homeless. Comparing to when I left, now there's hundreds, hundreds of homeless people down there. A lot of that is down to drugs and drink. A percentage of it is down to the location, because it's the end of the train line. But a lot of them

it's not through drugs and drink, it's through circumstances in life where life's got so hard that they couldn't pay their bills. Especially now, with the cost of living - it's just gone through the roof hasn't it. And wages and benefits aren't keeping up with the price of things going up. So you're gonna get things going out of kilter. People aren't gonna be able to afford to pay for their heating, or gas, or electric or food. So what do they do? Do you eat, do you heat, or do you go on the street? It's just crazy.

★

**I** think people walk past a lot more homeless people in the street than they realise. We are not all wearing torn clothing sitting in the doorway. A lot of us don't have a permanent address. There's no such thing as looking homeless. People are all so different. There are people who will make a loaf of bread last a week but won't go out without a pair of Nike trainers. Maybe it's people trying to retain their identity.

And whatever someone thinks, it could be them tomorrow. It could literally happen to anyone. There's no one safe from homelessness.

★

**W**hen people see somebody on the street, they automatically think, 'Oh, he's a druggie. He's a criminal. That's why he's ended up on the streets.' It's the wrong mindset. Don't get me wrong, there are people who are on the streets because of drink and drugs and crime. But not everybody is that way. I certainly wasn't, and it happened to me.

In the current situation that we're in, it doesn't matter if you're working or not. You're just a paycheck away from losing your house, or losing your life, and it can happen to anybody. And it's sad.

So people need to understand, don't judge people on the streets. They're human. They're human beings, as we all are. Just show a bit of compassion to them if you can.

★

I'm just thinking about the fact that these portraits being taken are of normal people. I think that the homeless and people who get down on their luck are quite often discriminated against, aren't they.

And perhaps these portraits would help people to realise that there isn't a 'type' of person that's homeless, or that they look a certain way, you know? It means that it can affect anybody, and it's real.

★

I remember something that was told to me when I did my training to volunteer at a homeless shelter years ago. It was, what does the next homeless person look like? And the answer was, look in the mirror, because we're all one paycheck away from being in this situation. No way did I think then that one day I would be technically homeless.

So don't assume it won't happen to you. One decision can cause you to be in this situation. Realise that we could do everything in our powers to not be in this situation, but we are. Other areas are the same. It's not just Cornwall.

★

**W**hy do people have this stigma around homelessness that says people that ended up homeless are worthless? Just realise that these people are people. They're not just castaways to be thrown away because they've hit hard times.

Something needs to be done to highlight this because there are some impeccably intelligent and impeccably useful people to society who end up homeless. I've spoken to people that have been doctors, nurses, soldiers. And yeah, you do get the occasional junky, but it can happen to anyone.

Say another lockdown in Covid hits, because of a new variant that we can't handle and is super-resistant to all the vaccines. It could be you. Do you want people to look at you as if you're a worthless little piece of shit on the bottom of their shoe? No you don't. You'd like for people to treat you with a bit of dignity if you found yourself in that position. So just be nice and treat people with the dignity you would want to be treated with.

It's that simple. Just treat people with a bit of dignity. That's all you've got to do.

★



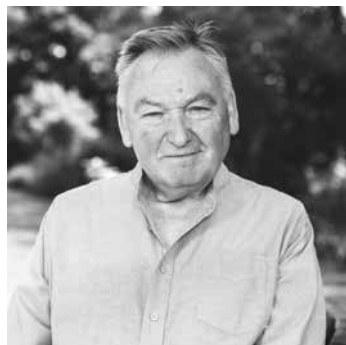
Thank you to all the people who courageously spoke to us during this project:

**People.** Debbie. Tanya. Jeff. Jonny. Samantha. Paul. Hettie. Jason. Gary. Chris. Steve. **People.** Kevin. Graham. Keda. Alice. Luke. Katie. Sam. Georgie. Steve. Andy. Gary. Kay. Tim. Pete. Mark. Philippa. Ed. Shani. **People.** Mark. Hanna. Malcolm. Steph. Dan. Ollie. Fie. Derek. Catherine. Mitch. **People.** Aaron. Alexa. Darren. Clarissa. Tony. Di. Will. Kay. Jessica. Leah. Jason. Dafydd. Dave. Helen. Phil. Melissa. **People.** Bryan. Joel. Mike. Josh. Rosie. Sammy. Katie. Anthony. Leeca. Nigel. Jackie. Nick. Martin. Dawn. Tasha. **People.**

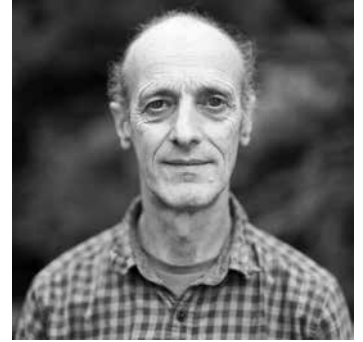
Thank you to all those who signed up to be exhibition partners and host a portrait:

**Bodelva.** The Eden Project. **Bodmin.** Bodmin College. **Bude.** Karen Monkton. **Camborne.** Create CIC. **Carbis Bay.** Melanie Frankell.

**Constantine.** Pip Barfield. **Falmouth.** Paul Ridout. Glyn Winchester. The Poly. **Helston.** Derek and Ann Wood. **Illogan.** Rosi Jolly. **Lanner.** Rebecca Knight. **Liskeard.** Liskerett Community Centre. **London.** Centrepont. **Ludgvan.** Janet Pye. **Mabe.** St Laudus Church. **Mawnan Smith.** Trebah Gardens. **Mullion.** Hannah Enever. **Padstow.** Rick Stein. **Penryn.** Institute of Cornish Studies, Exeter University. **Penzance.** Jubilee Pool. Michelle Barlow. Jon Dory's Fish and Chips. **Polperro.** Gina's Art Studio. **Porthcurno.** The Minack Theatre. **Porthleven.** Porthleven Environment Group. **Redruth.** Carefree Cornwall. Charles Green Design. Krowji. Kresen Kernow. **St Austell.** St Austell Community Bank. **St Day.** Rebecca Ryder. **St Ives.** Kidz R Us Theatre. **Torpoint.** Torpoint Library. **Tregony.** Deborah Richards. **Treliske.** Sheila Ritchie. **Truro.** BBC Radio Cornwall. Richard Lander School. Royal Cornwall Museum. Truro Cathedral.







And thank you to all the people who had their portrait taken: without your courage, **People.** would not have happened.

Our thanks and our love go also to Steve Ellis, whose vision and deep compassion for people inspired us and guided us every step of the way.



The **People**. Project Cornwall core team:

**St Petrocs** is a charity working to end homelessness in Cornwall, because every person has the right to a safe and secure home. St Petrocs provides the support required for clients to find a route out of homelessness. Services include advice, support and medical services at three resource centres and around the county through an outreach team; supported accommodation housing 150 people across Cornwall; a skills, training and employment programme to ensure that people can return to independence; and Freshfield, an in-house counselling service.

**[www.stpetrocs.org](http://www.stpetrocs.org)**

**Helen Trevaskis** is an illustrator and writer, and founder and director of StreetDraw24, a community interest company which runs art events designed to help people see where they live differently.

**[www.streetdraw24.com](http://www.streetdraw24.com)**

**Gavan Goulder** is a social documentary photographer working on social issues around climate change and community. In a career that spans over 25 years he has also worked as an editorial photographer for *Guardian Weekend*, the *Observer*, the *Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*.

**[www.gavangoulder.com](http://www.gavangoulder.com)**

**Jane Birbeck** is an editor, copywriter, designer and illustrator, and curated, edited and designed this book.

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St Petrocs is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales under number 12320784 and registered as a charity number 1187077.

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ISBN: 978-1-8384033-1-7

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**St Petrocs**