

Lost and Found

Faith and spirituality in the
lives of homeless people

Carwyn Gravell

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'Men are not machines... they are men – a tautology that is sometimes worth remembering.'

Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*

'It is not the greatest of modern scientists who feel most sure that the object, stripped of its qualitative properties and reduced to mere quantity, is wholly real. Little scientists, and little unscientific followers of science, may think so. The great minds know very well that the object, so treated, is an artificial abstraction, that something of its reality has been lost.'

C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

“Lost and Found brings to our attention ground breaking research into the faith, spirituality and profound insights of homeless people. It is a timely reminder to everyone working to alleviate the plight of the destitute that those whom we serve are made in the image and likeness of God. Lost and Found shows that faith is not a problem to be solved, but a gift to be discovered. Sincere thanks are due to all who contributed to the report. I am especially gratified that, recognising it to be an authentic search for truth, the Diocese invested in the project through the St. John Southworth Fund. May the findings of Lost and Found encourage all our communities of faith to reach out afresh to the homeless with compassion after the example of the Good Samaritan.”

The Archbishop of Westminster, The Most Revd. Vincent Nichols

“Lost and Found raises timely and important questions about the fundamental nature of support for long-term homeless people and how faith and spirituality should play a part in a more person-centred approach within the sector. It is required and challenging reading for anyone involved in commissioning or providing services, regardless of personal beliefs or attitude towards religion.”

Colin Glover, Chief Executive, The Connection at St Martin’s

“We know from a number of our grants in support of people at risk or members of vulnerable minorities at the margins of British society, what an important factor people’s faith and spirituality can be in helping them come to terms with their past, find their identity, and re-build their lives with a sense of aspiration and purpose. Lost and Found makes it clear that what we have seen in the experience of prisoners, ex-offenders, people coming out of gangs, refugees and teenage runaways, is no less true for many homeless people. This concise and balanced report persuasively argues that all mainstream providers and commissioners – not just faith-based organisations – should respect the importance of faith and spirituality for homeless service users, not further marginalizing them by dismissing it, and treat it as a chance for common cause, and a strength to build on.”

Mark Woodruff, The Monument Trust

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Foreword

Revd. Richard Carter

Three years ago I was approached by Colin Glover, the director of the Connection at St Martin's to consider how faith and spirituality could be included in the service offer to homeless and vulnerable people at the Connection at St Martin's. The request had come from the service users themselves. Together with Kaz Mayes, The Deputy Day Centre Manager, we formed a weekly group called "The Spiritual Space" open to all faiths and none. The first week it was as though I, as a priest from St Martin's, was on trial. Surrounded by about ten people, who were either homeless or who had been homeless, I was grilled on everything from the hypocrisy of organised religion, to the failure of God to answer prayers or prevent suffering. For me it certainly proved that faith and spirituality was a live issue. It also proved to me that if the group was going to have any value it was not about trying to convert anybody but about listening to one another. In the weeks to come the participants would be my teachers and over and over again, it would be true to say, that those who have taken part have come away with a sense that all have been heard and that we have been given a deep insight into the struggles and wisdom of others. Those who come to the group may not formally identify themselves as "religious" or people of "faith" yet the discussions that we have had, as we seek to reflect upon our lives, have been about the very things that are at the heart of our humanity and are of the essence of spirituality and faith: hope, joy, forgiveness, suffering, anger, pain, loss, death, grief, longing, creativity, love, community, healing, life. What has had the most profound impact is the way the spirituality, the wisdom, the care, the faith has come from members of the group themselves towards one another.

Kaz Mayes who facilitates this group with me, and has many years of experience working in this sector, was justifiably unsure when we started whether this was something that was going to work or have any life of its own. Recently she wrote: "Being part of this spirituality group alongside the clients gives me a chance to surround myself with people who demonstrate kindness, show compassion to each other, and struggle to live their lives in a positive and healthy way. I have witnessed acts of empathy and kindness, of shared understanding, of trying to live a life that is centred on positive action, of treating others as you would wish to be treated and of caring about the feelings of others. The group has given a voice to those who often feel powerless. After the group I return feeling relaxed, happy and feel my soul has been fed and the burden of the last few days has been lifted." I can agree with Kaz, I come back feeling I have been closer to the meaning of real faith than sometimes when I am in church.

And yet faith and spirituality has often understandably been treated with suspicion in the homelessness sector. In this report, Carwyn Gravell approaches this theme dispassionately and with clarity and balance. In the first chapter he looks at some of the benefits that religious belief and practice can bring for homeless people - a sense of belonging and motivation, order meaning and purpose, charity, comfort and peace of mind. In his second

chapter he details with the same balance and discernment the indoctrination, the mistrust, the sense of dependency, judgment and paternalism that faith approaches in the past have so often been guilty of instilling and the reaction against that religious approach. That suspicion has caused divisions and mistrust that are still painfully felt. Faith is a subject, this report shows, that is rarely approached or discussed with homeless clients.

The second part of his report is based on 75 in-depth interviews with homeless people which are illuminating. The interviews are disarming because they for the most part dispel the stereo-types and fears we have on both sides of the divide and reveal clients as individuals seeking to make meaning of their lives, for themselves and in dialogue with others. While some may do this through "faith" based understanding and some may have rejected faith and others may be unsure, what cannot be denied is the importance of living those questions and discerning one's own response. What also comes across is the common search for integrity, authenticity, and a sense of what can only be described as the human ability to seek a path which transcends our own struggles and limitations and become more fully human, and someone of faith may say more of God. *Lost and Found* is an important report in helping to bring the questions of faith out of the closet and into the public domain in a way that sets aside any divisiveness or prejudice, and is both helpful and empowering.

Revd. Richard Carter

St Martin-in-the-Fields, London

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt thanks to the homeless people who were interviewed for this report, for sharing their experiences, their reflections on life, and their beliefs, so honestly and openly. My thanks also to the practitioners who arranged and conducted the interviews: Kaz Mayes, The Connection at St Martin's; Ryan Allain, St Mungo's; Imam Ramathan, Thames Reach; Corin Pilling, Cardinal Hume Centre; Tom McDonald, West London Mission; Gill College, Housing Justice and Whitechapel Mission; and Mark Brennan, Caris Islington. Particular thanks to Tom and Kaz for letting me visit and to participate in their spirituality discussion groups; and thanks to the participants in those groups for their welcome, insights and good humour.

Thanks also to everyone I spoke to at the early stages of the project and who encouraged us to develop our thinking and ideas, especially to Mark Woodruff from the Monument Trust and Colin Glover from The Connection at St Martin's. And thanks to people with whom I shared emerging findings and conclusions in the course of writing – in particular to Val Keen, Liz Harper, Giles Goddard and Revd Richard Carter.

As ever, thanks to my colleagues at Lemos&Crane – to Alex Beuselinck for transcribing the interviews, to Amy Dunnigan for careful coding and analysis, to Ellen Kythor for background research and to Paul Crane and Gerard Lemos for thoughts and guidance.

Lastly, many thanks to those who funded the work, daring to tread where other funders feared to, including Edmund Adamus who supervised the St. John Southworth Fund on behalf of the Archdiocese of Westminster.

Responsibility for the views expressed, and for any errors, remains with me.

Carwyn Gravell

Lemos&Crane, London

March 2013

Summary

Part I. Theory And Context

1. Fruits of faith – benefits of religious belief and practice for homeless people

Religious belief and practice have given and continue to give many people significant psychological, social and emotional benefits. These include a sense of belonging and fellowship within a community of co-believers, where a positive identity is shared. Religion can bring order, meaning and ethical direction to people's lives, often centred on notions of charity and acts of kindness to others. Faith and belief can bring consolation and comfort to alleviate the sadness of loss and loneliness. Rites, rituals and spiritual exercises can bring peace of mind to combat feelings of guilt and extreme anxiety. Places of worship and faith-inspired works of art, music and writing evoke a sense of beauty, mystery, wonder, euphoria and self-transcendence.

Similar benefits can be achieved by means other than religious belief and practice – the practice of mindfulness, for example, being a therapeutic intervention in mental health services that aims to achieve the peace of mind associated with spiritual and religious contemplation. For many people, faith and its fruits will always remain out of reach, impossible to digest, though particular aspects might appeal to some who see themselves as spiritually 'curious', mixing and matching aspects of different faiths in a questioning fashion. But for people with faith, religion bestows benefits in an integrated and internally coherent package, honed and cultivated through practice over hundreds of years.

For homeless people – both those with faith and those who are not conventionally religious but see themselves as spiritually curious – religious belief, practice and doctrines can help them come to terms with a past that is often characterised by profound emotional and material loss, enhance and give structure to the present where time hangs heavy for many, and create a purposeful future built on hope, fellowship, and sense of purpose.

Homeless people, however, are hardly ever asked about faith and spirituality by service providers, let alone encouraged to engage with their religion and attend places of worship if they have faith, or to explore and nurture spiritual insights and curiosities.

2. Absence of faith: secular orthodoxy in mainstream service provision for homeless people

Religious groups have always helped the poor and homeless as part of their mission, and many continue to do so through soup runs and night shelters. Some of today's providers of housing and advice for homeless and disadvantaged groups have deep religious roots. However, from the 1960s and in response to public concern about rising homelessness, the state began to fund social housing, hostels and high-end support services for homeless people. In the spirit of the times, these services adopted a secular and mechanical approach

(inspired in particular by the achievements of National Health Service and the part it played in activating a historical shift from spiritual care to medical science), seeing the homeless person as someone who could be 'signed up' for material support - a flat, help with benefits, job training and treatment for addiction if needed. A rights-based approach replaced religiously-motivated notions of charity for homeless people, which aimed at alleviation of misery, at comfort and consolation, rather than outright cure. The shift in approach also sought to banish proselytising, the promotion of religion to service users. New secular organisations emerged to deliver these services but older faith-based organisations were also commissioned, having first removed religion as a defining and visible element of their service.

With the mainstream service model for homeless people having evolved to focus almost exclusively on meeting physical and material need, and with many faith-based organisations having removed religion as a visible and defining element of their work in order to be funded by public money, faith and spirituality are largely absent from the register of services on offer to homeless people. Further, religion is regarded by many in the sector with atheist views as a subject to be avoided with service users – too personal and intrusive for the client, too difficult to handle for the support worker, coming with the risk of being misunderstood as an attempt to proselytise and unlikely to yield anything of value.

Part 2. Real Lives And Services

3. Out of the silence – talking to homeless people about faith and spirituality

Despite the doubts and reservations of interviewers who feared that asking homeless people about faith and spirituality might be too personal or intrusive, the vast majority of those interviewed found the experience to be stimulating and thought-provoking – further, some felt that being asked about their lives in depth, about their past, their religious beliefs and spirituality validated their identity in the eyes of service providers as people in their own right not just service users with problems.

The interviews highlighted the importance for people of coming to terms with the painful experience of loss in the past in order to move forward in their lives; a few people had arrived at a profoundly spiritual perspective on their loss, regarding their present situation free from material ties as being the happiest time of their life, with no desire to return to the world of work and money. The interviews also revealed that people's present circumstance (cash-poor but time-rich) was the spur in many cases for a rich array of interests, pastimes and blues-beating activities that also had a strong and timeless spiritual dimension: reading, music, walking, art and helping others. Recourses to oblivion through drink, drugs or sleeping pills were far less frequently mentioned. This array of life-enhancing and spiritually-fulfilling pursuits is rarely promoted by service providers and commissioners in the official roister of meaningful activity that can strengthen and support resettlement and the achievement of stability and ultimately contentment in life.

Fifty-two per cent of people interviewed described themselves as religious in the conventional sense – most of these people had been born into their religious identity

and had an intrinsic or extrinsic faith. A further nineteen per cent of people described themselves as religious or spiritual in a broader sense, sampling different faiths. Only a third of people describing themselves as religious had recently attended a place of worship (suggesting an opportunity for places of worship to engage with the other two-thirds). But where they had done so, they described their experience in overwhelmingly positive terms, in particular the sense of welcome and belonging it generated.

Only five people had ever been asked by the organisation about their religion, faith or spirituality, confirming its 'out of bounds' status in the mainstream homeless sector. However, the majority thought that service providers should at the very least have an open conversation with service users about spiritual matters; some had practical ideas and suggestions as to how service providers could incorporate faith and spirituality into their service.

4. Into the mainstream – making faith and spirituality a part of services for homeless people

Findings from interviews with homeless people show there is little to fear for service providers in talking with their clients about faith and spirituality. On the contrary, couched as 'life interviews', the discussions are welcomed and reveal insights, interests and aspirations that can be incorporated into support plans. Organisations need to find a place for and to prepare their staff to undertake these life interviews as part of the service offer, once presenting crises have abated and an element of trust has built up between the service user and the support worker.

Where interviews reveal an active interest in an organised faith or religion, service users should be matched up with local churches, faith groups and places of worship. Service users themselves can play a bridging or buddying role in this respect. Books, websites and other resources on spiritual themes should also be made freely available at service locations, and staff encouraged to share knowledge on religious matters where appropriate.

In addition, it is recommended that all homeless providers set up spirituality discussion groups. The groups should be advertised for people of 'all faiths and no faiths' and should seek to present a wide range of religious beliefs and practices and spiritual exercises such as meditation to satisfy the incipient demand and curiosity among many homeless people for fruitful discussion about purpose and meaning in life; these groups would have the additional benefit of creating a community of inquiry, a fresh expression of fellowship that established religions have offered for centuries.

These recommendations can be applied in any support setting – whether faith-based or secular – and require minimal training or resources (though clear codes of conduct will need to be established to manage the risk of inappropriate promotion of religion). What is required however is strong leadership to find space within current practice to accommodate new approaches, and to communicate their nature and value to staff and stakeholders, overcoming unease or ideological reluctance and framing the relevance of faith and spirituality within the context of 'person-centred' services and approaches.

Introduction

Context

In 2008 I organised a conference for Lemos&Crane on innovative approaches to meeting the needs and aspirations of vulnerable people with mental health problems. Among the invited participants was the Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health Partnership who at the time had a choir for service users called Sing Your Heart Out, led by the team's senior psychiatrist. For Lemos&Crane conferences I suggest to speakers that they 'show not tell' wherever possible. So I asked the Sing Your Heart Out team to explain briefly *what* they did, but then to spend most of their time showing *how* they did it – by getting delegates to sing. Despite initial reservations (people had paid good money to attend and were not expecting the anguish of audience participation) the approach was well received. Soon, everyone was singing. Some, admittedly, more enthusiastically than others. Songs had been carefully selected to present increasingly challenging harmonies. The delegates grew in confidence; the good will and enjoyment was palpable. And then we moved on to *Michael Row the Boat Ashore*, a Negro spiritual song. The bubble of good will promptly burst. One delegate, a support worker from a homeless agency, stormed out of the conference room. Her feedback form afterwards said the singing session had spoiled her enjoyment of the conference. In angry capital letters she accused Lemos&Crane of questionable judgment and of 'shoving religion down her throat'.

This incident, though seemingly trivial, comic almost, captures in microcosm the origin of the insight that led to this report: the suspicion, bordering on hysteria, with which faith and religion is held by many people who work in the homeless and supported housing sector. In the course of Lemos&Crane's work over a number of years researching the needs and aspirations of homeless and vulnerable people, we spoke to people from the sector, sometimes quite senior people, who felt that religion was a 'no go area' (other than being a routine question to ask at assessment stage for 'monitoring purposes'). Discussing faith with service users they felt would 'open up a can of worms'. These feelings were given organisational cover in some instances where 'promoting religion' was explicitly prohibited, but personal ideological objections seemed just as much at play. On the other hand we also spoke to people in the sector who said that they were privately motivated by their faith to do the work they do; however, sensing professional unease on the matter, they said they felt reluctant to disclose their beliefs at work for fear of alienating colleagues, choosing or being tacitly expected to leave it behind them 'at the door'. But most significantly, we spoke to homeless and vulnerable people who described faith and spirituality as being a significant aspect of their personal lives and identity, contributing to their wellbeing, helping them to recover from mental health or drug and alcohol problems or to pursue a future free from offending.

There seemed therefore to be a fundamental misalignment at play between the 'secular orthodoxy' of the homeless sector that avoided or prohibited talk of faith with service users, and the real lives and feelings of service users for whom faith was important and for whom the practice of belief could play a part in the support they felt they needed, if it were offered and explored. Further, it seemed that this misalignment was symptomatic

of a general rift between public and private attitudes towards faith in the UK: that faith was best kept personal, not talked about, and certainly not something that the state and its service providers should get involved with and promote. Britain was far too modern and rational for that.

To share and explore further these insights (admittedly based on rather informal conversations and chance encounters) Lemos&Crane organised a seminar with the help of Mark Woodruff from the Monument Trust, a long-standing supporter of our work with homeless and vulnerable people. We approached The Connection at St Martin's, a leading provider of homeless services in London, to host the meeting. The choice of location it turned out was highly symbolic. The Connection at St Martin's is situated in the heart of central London in Trafalgar Square, next to the famous church, St Martin-in-the-Fields, and to the 'cafe in the crypt'. Colin Glover, its director, speaking at the seminar said that despite its close proximity and historical association with the church and despite the fact that the church sees the work of The Connection at St Martin's with homeless people as being at the heart of its life and mission, faith was not on the menu for its clients. He described with characteristic irony the organisation's guiding philosophy over the years as "muscular secularism", seeking to distance itself ideologically from its neighbour. However he said that his attitude to faith and its relevance to his organisation changed when service users approached him with the suggestion of setting up a spirituality group; they pointed out how odd it seemed that faith was absent from what the service had to offer given its location in the shadow of the church. The spirituality group has since been formed to inspiring effect and an account of my visit there to see it in action is given in Chapter 4.

Others assembled for the meeting included representatives from faith groups, service providers for homeless and vulnerable people (some with religious roots and others not), commissioners and charitable trusts and foundations. Having shared ideas, anecdotes and impressions there was general consensus on the suggestion that faith had gone underground in British public life – and that it was particularly hidden in the world of homeless and supported housing services for a variety of historical reasons (to be explored in Chapter 2) though its relevance lived on in older institutions such as prisons and hospitals where chaplains still have a role to play. But more investigation was needed, it was felt, into the assumed relevance of faith and spirituality to the lives of homeless people before a case could be made for its value to mainstream service provision.

Purpose of the research

Out of this meeting grew a proposal to conduct action research with The Connection at St Martin's. The purpose of this initial research was two-fold:

- Firstly, to talk with long-term homeless people about faith and spirituality in the context of their lives in general, their past experiences and their present circumstances
- Secondly, to begin to consider whether and how service providers should proactively engage with and nurture their service users' faith and spirituality.

Lost and Found is a report on this research. It considers the lives of a group of people (the long-term homeless) who in many ways are lost to mainstream society, its comforts and

beguiling beliefs in the possibility of universal attainment of success and achievement, but who have found remarkable resilience in the face of loss and hardship, supported in many cases by a strong faith and profoundly spiritual outlook on life. It seeks to make the case to mainstream providers and commissioners of support for homeless people that faith and spirituality has value for people and therefore has a valid place as an item of service for its clients. It is also hoped that the report will lead to further work to explore how faith and spirituality can be incorporated (and its value measured) into services for homeless people, as well as in services for other groups of vulnerable people.

Methodology

To conduct the qualitative, biographical research we invited practitioners from a range of organisations to form a working group. This included representatives from both 'secular' and faith-based organisations: The Connection at St Martin's, Cardinal Hume Centre, Caris Islington, St Mungo's, Thames Reach, Whitechapel Mission and West London Mission. The group met three times over nine months firstly to devise and then to pilot a semi-structured interview for talking to service users about their lives in general, significant events in the past and about their religion, faith and spirituality. The interview also asked service users whether support workers had talked to them in the past about religion or faith, whether they thought such a conversation would be helpful, and whether they had any practical ideas as to how religion, faith and spirituality could be incorporated as an item of service by organisations. Seventy-five people were then interviewed by representatives from the organisations. I also visited spirituality groups being run by The Connection at St Martin's and by West London Mission to observe and to speak to participants.

Structure of the report

Part One of the report sets out a theoretical context. The opening chapter, The fruits of faith, considers how religious belief and practice can benefit people, with a particular focus on the benefits of faith for homeless people given their lives and current circumstance, characterised by material and emotional loss and hardship. Chapter 2, The absence of faith, considers the mainstream service model for services to homeless people, how this is informed by a materialist and mechanical worldview, and by the influence of atheist dogma within the sector. Part Two of the report looks at real lives and services. Chapter 3, Out of the silence, sets out responses to interviews with homeless people about their life, faith and spirituality. Chapter 4, Into the mainstream, makes recommendations for providers of services to homeless people on accommodating and nurturing service users' faith and spirituality.

Motivation

A final word on Lemos&Crane's motivation for undertaking this research and on my views as an author. Lemos&Crane is not a faith-based organisation. We have no axe to grind or flag to fly. As an author, I would describe myself as an atheist, though I was

brought up to regularly attend Tabernacl, a Methodist chapel in Trimsaran, South-west Wales. However, our work at Lemos&Crane is concerned with an understanding of what constitutes 'the good life' for everyone including homeless and vulnerable people. Our assumption is that there's more to wellbeing than work and money. Over 500 years ago the philosopher Benedict de Spinoza set out the following recipe for living well with which we would concur.

"It is the part of the wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theatre, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. For the human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature and hence, so that the mind may also be equally capable of understanding many things at once."

Part I.

Theory and Context

1. Fruits of faith – benefits of religious belief and practice for homeless people

In this chapter I describe the value, in theoretical terms, of religious belief and practice for individuals, and for long-term homeless people in particular, given their life histories and current circumstances. In describing the benefits I hope to make the case for faith to be taken seriously by providers of services for homeless people as a source of social, emotional and spiritual fulfilment that can work alongside and add value to mainstream support. In the spirit of William James and his peerless study *The Variety of Religious Experience*, I will consider the fruits of faith (in James's phrase) from the perspective of purely subjective experience, without regard to the question of their objective 'truth'. Some people are born into faith as part of their social upbringing, some discover it in solitude through deeply personal experience, a moment of epiphany, some are converted during their lifetime through the influence of others. Whatever the source of faith, the substantive point is its 'truth' or reality for the believer.

My main religious point of reference in this chapter is Christianity though I will also refer to the world's other major faiths.

Community, belonging and identity

The practice of religious belief mostly happens in congregation with others at a place of worship. This experience of community bestows the pleasures and benefits of fellowship and companionship. It includes acts of communal participation, of reading, praying or singing together, which have proven psychological benefits. Congregations bring together people who, though sharing a religion or belief, may be from very different walks of life and backgrounds. This is an increasingly rare occurrence in modern life where most people make friends and spend time with others very much like themselves and where strangers are feared. Seeing and spending time with others unlike ourselves helps us gain perspective on our own life and problems, which might create a stimulus to help others and their problems. On the other side of the coin, to be accepted by a community without prejudice as an equal is a very real comfort, particularly for homeless people. Religious believers will often have an ethos of forgiveness and never giving up on anyone, whatever they have done in the past. Religious communities can therefore be places where people who may feel extremely shameful and embarrassed about their past and about their situation and appearance, as homeless people often do, can be made to feel accepted and welcomed. Some places of worship go one step further – every few weeks at St Luke's church in West Holloway, London, one of the readings in its morning service is taken

from the 'Gospel of its own community', giving voice to members of the congregation and their challenges in life. Twelve of these stories have been published as *The Gospel According To Everyone*.

Many religions have at their heart the notion of the 'commonality of man' – the idea that we are all born equal and share the same traits, possibilities and failings. In Catholicism, the doctrine of original sin as set out by the Catechism establishes human nature as being "deprived of original holiness and justice... not totally corrupted but wounded in its natural powers". Though baptism erases original sin and turns the person back to Christ, the inclination to sin, error and misjudgement that persists requires that man be in a constant, spiritual battle; everyone therefore is constantly in need of guidance and support in their lives. This worldview will resonate and come as some consolation to homeless people who, in losing all they once had, may feel alienated and marginalised in the modern world where achievement, self-sufficiency and material success are prized so highly and promised so freely and unfeasibly to so many.

Belonging to a faith group and regularly attending a place of worship also gives people a sense of identity – being able to say "I am a Christian", or "I am a Muslim". This is significant in the lives of homeless people who all too often and easily are labelled or who label themselves in a negative way as being a 'homeless person' or a 'drug addict'. They can also feel a sense of belonging as part of a group of rough sleepers where they are 'a face', well known and with an identity, that is lost when they move into a hostel or supported housing setting, becoming a small fish in a big and sometime hostile pond. Finding another way of describing themselves, and belonging to a new group of friends and acquaintances, is important for homeless person to help them regain self-esteem and to see for themselves an alternative future. Belonging to a faith community can help in doing that. (For more insight and approaches on the significance of identity in the lives of homeless and vulnerable people, see *Steadying the Ladder* by my colleague Gerard Lemos.)

Order, meaning and purpose

Most of the world's religions have at their core stories or narratives that describe the origins of humanity and of the cosmos. As literal explanations of where the world has come from they have been superseded by science, a fact that is acknowledged by many religious people including religious leaders who see science as adding to their understanding of the wonder of the created universe. But these stories of creation have an enduring poetical, metaphorical value and allegorical meaning, making us think of our relation to others, our world and to history. The framework for these stories is often a hierarchy of being, with humanity's relation to nature, other animals and the cosmos set out in a unified way. David Bohm, the theoretical physicist, says in *On Creativity* that religion is like art and science in fulfilling a universal desire for order and harmony.

Religion also gives people ethical guidance, rules on how to live, how to see themselves and how to behave towards others and the wider world. Sharing this code of conduct with others makes the sense of community, belonging and identity referred to above all the stronger. Some religions such as Islam and Judaism are highly prescriptive in the codes of

conduct they set out for people to follow. *In Religion for Atheists* Alain de Botton argues that one of religion's greatest insights is that people need and value moral and ethical guidance, the clearer the better, and that this guidance needs to be reinforced, repeated constantly, such is everyone's tendency to forget and be distracted. The Christian Ten Commandments, the five pillars of Islam, Buddhism's four noble truths and the eightfold path, all break down profound and complex insights into memorable and digestible messages – PowerPoint for the soul.

In a secular world without faith that underpins this moral guidance, people are free to do as they please (within the confines of the state's laws). But this freedom is a burden. Modern man is "condemned to be free" in Jean-Paul Sartre's famous phrase. The modern search for meaning involves multiplicity, complexity and contradiction, more means less, with too many books to read and too much to remember. Boris Groys in *An Introduction to Antiphilosophy*, writes, "People today are equipped simultaneously with two basic convictions: that there is no truth, and there is too much truth."

The sense of order, meaning and purpose that religion gives must surely be amplified (and its absence most acutely felt) in the case of homeless people, who in losing all that they hold dear, materially and emotionally, are left perhaps with a stronger need than most for purpose and direction in life, and also with more time than most with which to reflect - on the street, looking up at the city's night sky in search of stars to steer by. The faith of many homeless and vulnerable people (sometimes gained through a powerful conversion experience) also gives them the strength and sense of purpose that helps them in their battle to get off drugs or alcohol and out of chaotic behaviour.

Charity and the pleasures of kindness

An important source of meaning and purpose for religious people is the duty of care and kindness to others. The Muslim code of behaviour, for example, is based on the belief that all life is created by Allah and should therefore be respected. Charity and the duty to help others is central to the teachings of Christianity, with the example set by the figure of Jesus himself and that of Mary, his Mother, and her role as helper of the oppressed and the marginalised. From the time of the middle ages, many Christians in emulation have committed to their fellow men and women, especially to the weak and marginalised, the hungry, strangers, the sick and those in prison. This practice continues under many forms to this day within Catholicism in the male and female religious orders, lay apostolates and the many local structures of Caritas.

Critics of religion point out the dubious morality or indeed the hypocrisy of helping others for what is in the end a selfish reason, for the promise of salvation or for being seen to do good in the eyes of other believers. But motivations are impossible to discern and arguably irrelevant if the result is action which leads to help for others. Findings from behavioural economics show that acts of charity are most consistently followed through where there is an audience to witness them, and this witness can include God. For Christians the mandate from Jesus according to the Gospel of St. Matthew says "that which you did to the least of my brethren you did unto me".

It is a humbling fact that homeless people frequently volunteer to help others within homeless services - the sense of reward gained from acts of kindness and helping others is often felt keenest by those who themselves have been recipients of charity. This notion of reciprocity is a crucial component of resettlement and recovery, the strength and self-belief that people gain from giving something back and helping others.

Consolation and comfort for loss and loneliness

The idea of an afterlife that is shared by many religions – a realm in which an essential part of an individual's identity or consciousness continues to reside after the death of the body in their lifetime – has been much derided by the critics of religion as being the ultimate infantile fantasy of believers (though it is perhaps no more fantastic and fanciful than belief in a world of endless economic development and rising prosperity as many secular humanists adhere to). However, belief in the afterlife, and specifically the Christian belief in heaven, has consoled millions of bereft people – giving them the belief that it is only a matter of waiting before being re-united with those they have loved and lost.

A related belief is in the immateriality of existence – that the things of the world are transient and that a spiritual and eternal realm exists as a true reality. Buddhists believe that all life involves suffering, caused by desire and attachment to material things, which can only be overcome by focused effort on cultivating the spirit. As we will see in Chapter 3, the experience of loss, be it of money, a house, a job, the death of someone loved, or the loss of health and vitality is a constant feature of the lives of homeless people. Recognition of the temporality of all things must also come as consolation to them, and a validation of their experience.

Faith can also help to alleviate the anguish of loneliness. I have already set out the benefits of belonging to a community of believers. In addition, people with faith often believe they have a relationship with divinity itself where supernatural deities are personified – for example, the Christian God is Our Father. When people have forsaken and withdrawn from the world as many long-term homeless people have done, they still need relationships and religious figures can provide the objects of affection. As well as father figures, many religions have feminine figures who represent maternal tenderness – the givers of unconditional love who nurtured us all and who perhaps we still need from time to time. The figure of Mary as Mother of God, the 'Theotokos' whose position is central in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, is an example as is Guan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion, revered by Buddhists as the Goddess of Mercy.

Peace of mind and serenity

In addition to collective acts of worship where communal participation in rites and services engender a sense of calm and order, religious practice can also take the form of activities undertaken by people in private (what William James described as "acts of men in their solitude where they relate to the divine") that can produce profound feelings of serenity and contentment.

Meditation is a practice to train the mind to induce a heightened mode of consciousness that is most strongly associated with Buddhism, though appears in some form as a practice in most of the world's religions. Its essential benefit lies in enabling the mind to free itself from the constantly fretting ego, an endless well-spring of doubt and troubling thoughts and to concentrate on the present. The practice should not be thought of as constituting an easy 'letting go'; it can be the subject of intense struggle. Influenced by Quietism, the great 16th century Spanish mystics Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross both cautioned against a simple-minded 'don't think anything' (*no pensar nada*) approach to meditation and contemplation. In a similar vein T.S. Eliot in *Burnt Norton* wrote of how modern society's restlessness prohibits the concentration required to achieve spiritual peace, how people are "distracted from distraction by distraction". The practice of meditation has taken a modern and secular incarnation in the form of 'mindfulness'. The idea is not just to be aware of thoughts and feelings, but to be totally conscious of those thoughts and feelings, being able to observe and classify them and therefore to manage them. It is proving increasingly effective in treating mental health problems, which many homeless people suffer from.

The act of prayer is also common to many religions. Like meditation, it allows people to create distance between their problems and their own agency. This may be harmful in cases where people need to take greater responsibility for their lives rather than relying on others, but in today's society where the doctrine of self-agency is all pervading, it must surely be a source of relief to abandon self-sufficiency, even for a moment. Prayer is hope in the benevolent agency and care of others, something we all hold on to in greatest fear and anxiety - even the most assured captain of their soul ¹. For homeless people, prayer is unlikely to result in a miraculous answer to their immediate material needs (though one person interviewed and quoted in Chapter 3 felt it did) but it might provide momentary relief from the pressing sense of hopelessness and crushing sense of responsibility.

Religious leaders, priests and vicars have given people for generations an outlet for confessing sins, admitting to wrong-doing or more prosaically for sharing and halving problems. This has resulted in peace of mind for countless numbers. In modern life with religious figures less visible or credible, people in direst need (and with problems they feel that cannot even be shared with family and friends) turn to the Samaritans or to the Internet. For the sadness that stems from the vicissitudes of life, such as divorce or bereavement, people turn increasingly to their GP for palliatives. For homeless people, the support worker is the origin and co-ordinator of desperately needed practical support, a secular guardian angel. However, as I will explain in Chapter 2, there are limits to what they can and feel able to deal with, with spiritual matters – the traditional province of the priest and religious leader – largely out of bounds.

Beauty, mystery, wonder, self-transcendence

Religious belief and practice is often associated with art forms that evoke a sense of beauty, mystery and awe. Places of worship for most religions are architectural wonders, where great care has been taken to achieve beauty so that they are felt to be worthy of the

¹ William Ernest Henley's *Invictus*

faith and that they encourage both praise and contemplation (though some religions see ornamentation and flourish as distraction from words and meaning), places that are worthy of pilgrimage and that occasion transport and wonder. Places of worship can also be the place of beneficial experiences when they are empty, their larger than life structure being an acoustic setting that amplifies peace and tranquillity as well as music, song and the spoken word.

Music has been included in religious services and ceremonies across centuries (though some religious groups disapprove of music and dancing because physical pleasures are thought to distract from the spiritual). Music helps to create an atmosphere in which people can feel and express emotions such as awe and joy. Many famous pieces of music such as Bach's *Passion* have been composed to reflect and inspire religious belief. The musician Brian Eno sees Gospel music as a powerful source of feelings of 'surrender', a loss of self and control that can swell to feelings of euphoria and that he regards as a vital ingredient of religion. (Eno is a cradle Catholic who became in his own words an 'evangelical atheist' but who recently describes himself ² as a 'lapsed atheist' partly on account of his enduring love of Gospel music.)

Similarly, many great works of art (painting and sculpture) now based in museums were originally produced to inspire faith, with artists commissioned by religious institutions. In London's National Gallery, a hundred yards or so from The Connection at St Martin's where I started this report, over a third of the exhibition pieces are motivated by religious belief or stories (see the Reverend Nicholas Holtham's *The Art of Worship* for an inspiring commentary on these pieces.) Religious art can also express the abstract aspects of faith, the insights felt to be beyond words or literal representation. In Islamic art, which forbids images of any kind to be made of Allah, the arabesque form uses complex geometric forms or vegetal designs to symbolise the transcendent, indivisible and infinite nature of God.

One of the defining features of all religious art forms is scale, physical size but also larger-than-life subject matter. This scale evoking a sense of wonder and of being part of something much bigger than ourselves provides relief from the feeling that our ego, shattered, cowed and broken (an acute feeling for many homeless people) is all there is. The beauty of these art forms also provides aesthetic relief from the grim urban settings (characterised by concrete, white noise and neon) occupied by homeless people.

Summary

Religious belief and practice have given and continue to give many people significant psychological, social and emotional benefits. These include a sense of belonging and fellowship within a community of co-believers, where a positive identity is shared. Religion can bring order, meaning and ethical direction to people's lives, often centred on notions of charity and acts of kindness to others. Faith and belief can bring consolation and comfort to alleviate the sadness of loss and loneliness. Rites, rituals and spiritual exercises

² www.theonewaytolive.com/2011/11/brian-eno-evangelical-atheist-gets-into.html

can bring peace of mind to combat feelings of guilt and extreme anxiety. Places of worship and faith-inspired works of art, music and writing evoke a sense of beauty, mystery and wonder.

Similar benefits can of course be achieved by means other than religious belief and practice – the practice of mindfulness being a secular means of achieving the peace of mind associated with spiritual and religious contemplation. The happiness and wellbeing manifestos presented by the likes of Sir Richard Layard are attempts with a secular foundation to achieve similar outcomes to those of religious practice – for example, the New Economics Foundation's Five Ways to Wellbeing are Connect (with other people), Be active, Take notice (of beautiful and unusual things), Keep learning, and Give. For many people, faith and its fruits will always remain out of reach, impossible to digest, though particular aspects might appeal, even to the extent of some describing themselves as spiritually curious, mixing and matching aspects of different faiths. But for those with faith, religion bestows benefits in an integrated and internally coherent package, honed and cultivated through practice over hundreds, indeed thousands of years.

For homeless people – both those with faith and those who are not conventionally religious but who see themselves as spiritually curious – religious belief, practice and doctrines can help them come to terms with a past that is often characterised by profound emotional and material loss, enhance and give structure to the present where time hangs heavy for many, and create a create a purposeful future built on hope, fellowship, and sense of purpose.

However, homeless people are hardly ever asked about faith and spirituality by service providers, let alone encouraged to engage with their religion and attend places of worship if they have faith, or to explore and nurture spiritual insights and curiosities. In the next chapter, I explore the reasons for this 'absence of faith' in the mainstream homeless sector.

2. Absence of faith: secular orthodoxy in mainstream service provision for homeless people

As findings from research for this report will later show, homeless people are hardly ever asked about their faith by service providers (other than for routine 'monitoring purposes'), let alone encouraged to engage with their religion, attend places of worship, or to nurture their spirituality more generally. It is a dimension of life that is largely ignored within the philosophy of mainstream service provision, regarded as irrelevant, or a private matter best avoided, and even perceived by some in the sector with suspicion and outright hostility. As Alastair Campbell put it when describing the last Labour Government's stance on faith, the homeless sector "doesn't do God".

People with religious beliefs have always been concerned for the suffering of the poor, committed to their fellow men and women, especially to the weak and marginalised, the hungry, strangers, the sick, those in prison, and the homeless. In the great Victorian age of philanthropy and since, many charitable organisations were created with religious motivation to help the poor and dispossessed, including homeless people. Many still exist to this day. The vast majority of basic services for homeless people such as night shelters and soup runs and drop-in centres continue to be run by faith-based organisations – delivered in the main by religiously-motivated volunteers and non-professionals, funded from charitable sources.

However, publicly-funded and high-end support for homeless people in the shape of firstly social housing and then day centres, hostels with specialist services and supported accommodation only emerged from the 1960s onwards. And they emerged with a distinctly secular ethos, at a time when faith and religion were fast losing ground in its perceived relevance to modern life in the face of multi-culturalism, rising prosperity, improved standards of living, individualism and consumerism. (As John Wesley, the architect of Methodism, said: "I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion"). In this chapter I attempt to describe the secularising influences that went into shaping mainstream services for homeless people, how they are currently delivered by both secular and faith-based organisations (but in an indistinguishable way), and the attitudes towards faith within the sector where atheism (sometimes of a rather militant kind) has a dominant influence.

The welfare state, the health service and its secularising influence

The professional homeless sector was born into the proud family of the welfare state, and as is ever the case in family life sought to emulate and copy its siblings. The welfare state was created to eradicate what its architects described as the five giant 'evils' of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. It was a confident secular response to deep-rooted social problems that the church and charity had previously tackled almost exclusively in society. Driven by worthy utilitarian ideals and ambitions (the state's goal

and purpose being to achieve the greatest material good for the greatest number) its achievements have been considerable though today it could be said to be running out of steam, and money. Access to education, employment, social security, housing and health services has improved material life for millions.

Improvement in health care is perhaps the most significant of all of the welfare state's achievements, making accessible for free and all the benefits of advances in medicine and technology. The massive reduction in infant mortality is just one example of how human misery has been alleviated by developments in medicine and medical practice. To read a few nineteenth century novels is to understand how common and heartbreaking an occurrence was the death of a baby, and sometimes of the mother as well. Life in general during this time was often under threat, and often physically painful. Medicine to relieve the pain was beyond the reach of most people. Religion provided "an explanation for calamity and a treasury for consolation" as described by Frank Prochaska in *Historical perspective on religion and health in the UK*. God was considered as the 'Great Practitioner' and Jesus as the 'physician of the soul'; body and soul, health and religion, were treated together, as healing and preaching were linked in the Gospels. When state medicine and the National Health Service came into operation, everything changed. It introduced a materialist conception of health based on science and technology. In less than a century, hospitals were transformed in ideological, professional and administrative terms. The sick, no longer treated as souls in torment but as machines that have broken down. Why pray when you can pop a pill?

Despite this overarching historical shift in emphasis to a materialist approach to health care, however, faith and spirituality have not been completely erased from the NHS. Chaplains still have a strong presence (as they do in prisons, another institution that pre-dates the formation of the welfare state where religious influence has survived). Spirituality also features in approaches to the treatment of mental health problems, and to wider approaches to promote well-being and the prevention of ill-health.

Scientific materialism and the mechanical world view

Fuelling the achievements and ambitions of the health service and the welfare state in general was faith in the power of science and technology, the "white heat of progress" as described by Harold Wilson. To this day we are in awe of science, the material comfort and security it has brought us, but also its ethos and the discipline underpinning its practice. We all aspire in our working lives to its reputed objectivity and clarity and to its fearless pursuit of knowledge. The scientific standard has greatly influenced Government thinking on public services, with 'evidence-based policy making' being a recent mantra, further developed by the introduction of 'payment by results' into the commissioning of criminal justice and employment services – where successful service delivery is defined and rewarded through bonus payments by 'scientifically' measuring the impact of interventions set against a control group. This aspiration for public services to achieve the status of science is of course understandable and laudable, aiming as it does to bring rigour and transparency to how public money is spent.

However, according to physicist Rupert Sheldrake in *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry*, in our admiration for science we have accepted some of its assumptions

without question and reflection; assumptions and paradigms which have attained the status of orthodoxy and dogma. One of the most significant of these according to Sheldrake is the 'mechanical' world view. This was conceived in the seventeenth century by René Descartes, and then adopted as the working principle of the scientific revolution that followed. Prior to Descartes, and according to the work of Aristotle and his Christian interpreter Thomas Aquinas, the world consisted of three entities: minds (or spirits), bodies and souls. Bodies and souls were part of nature; souls were what gave bodies life and form. Nature was thus thought to be alive, animated, driven by goals from within; even the humblest fruit fly has a soul, albeit a non-rational one, and a purpose in life according to this world view. With the Cartesian revolution, the world was seen as consisting of matter and minds only. The material world became innate, devoid of soul and integral purpose, seen as essentially clockwork; minds were an independent substance, a rational and disconnected observer. Over time, the mechanistic world view has gone one step further and removed mind as a distinct substance from the picture, leaving bodies only. All living organisms including people are seen as complex machines; minds can be understood as brain activity; and nature is purposeless.

The mechanical world view - seeing the world as atomic, subject to cause and effect, comprising inputs and outputs - has proven to be a hugely useful paradigm to understand and ultimately to change and reform the material world. But it is only a paradigm, a way of seeing the world among others. (Even within the scientific community, Sheldrake argues, new inquiries are beginning to test its assumptions – especially the fields of evolutionary cosmology, quantum physics and consciousness studies; new scientific world views that think in terms of fields and flows rather than atoms, and where the future draws the present into being, rather than the past driving and shaping the future.) Also, taken literally and to its conclusion the mechanical world view is bleakly reductionist and spiritually impoverishing. Ludwig Wittgenstein, a proponent in his early work of logical positivism, a movement that sought to bring absolute scientific clarity to philosophy, defining its scope as logical statement and verifiable fact and seeking to banish metaphysics and talk of God as meaningless, ends his *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus* with the chilling edict, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." His one-time teacher and later disciple Bertrand Russell in a similar spirit described "our growth, our hopes and fears, our loves and beliefs as being nothing but the outcome of accidental atoms". This outlook has a compelling charisma. The implication is that others who don't adopt it are cowardly and deluded: there is an implied bravery and modernity in seeing the world in this way without recourse to notions of God and spirituality. But it is ultimately a pose. Few can honestly subscribe to this worldview and its brutal values. T.S. Eliot wrote in the *Four Quartets*, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality". (In his later work, Wittgenstein revised his stark correspondence theory of truth, believing that what cannot be said in logical terms can nevertheless be shown or practiced as truth, including religious practice, and where meaning is inherent in action; he was drawn increasingly to the work of the mystics and in the trenches of the First World War where he served the one book he carried with him always was Tolstoy's version of the Gospels.³) The most hardened of materialists

³ Wittgenstein was not the only person who ultimately sought to escape the confines of logical positivism. Alan Greenspan was a young disciple who, ultimately horrified by where logical positivism took him intellectually and spiritually, was drawn into the circle of the Russian novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand whose 'objectivist' doctrine of self-mastery, creativity and the boundless pursuit of individual greatness came to influence the values of Silicon Valley, the American corporate world and the philosophy of modern capitalism, with now well-known, disastrous some would say, consequences - see Alan Curtis's TV series *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* - www.vimeo.com/27393748

find faith in some shape or form bubbling up and influencing their mood and outlook. Secular humanists, charged with the spirit of the Enlightenment, have a touching faith in the limitless achievements of science and in progress. As Sheldrake puts it, privately we believe and act in accordance with ideas that are far from rational, a division between public rationalism and private romanticism that has been part of the Western way of life for generations. He goes on to say,

“Most of us feel we are truly alive in a living world – *at least at weekends* [my emphasis]. But through loyalty to the mechanistic worldview, mechanistic thinking takes over during working hours”

In the working week of public service provision, the danger of an unconsidered and extreme adoption of the mechanical world view (especially when adopted in the guise of bravery, of being ‘cruel to be kind’) is to see people, citizens and service users as numbers, outputs and the passive recipients of treatment, as machines essentially, and not as we see ourselves in the private realm at least alive with dreams, hopes, fears, eccentricities, superstitions and sometimes irrational beliefs.

The mainstream service model for homeless people

The mainstream service model for homeless and supported housing service that emerged from the 1960s onwards was shaped by the significant achievements of the welfare state and the health service in particular, and by the prevalent notions of scientific materialism and by the mechanical world view outlined above. Put in its simplest material terms, the solution to homelessness as understood in the 1960s was to provide more accommodation and housing. New legislation in 1977 established this as a statutory obligation for local authority housing departments. And with this foundation, the lives and circumstances of many families and vulnerable individuals was unquestionably improved.

However, over time there has been a realisation that the route to homelessness and rough sleeping particularly for adult individuals (as opposed to families and young people) often involves a complex array of problems – including mental health problems, drug or alcohol addiction, the loss of a job, the breakdown of relationships, or a combination of many factors. Simply finding a flat for people with these underlying problems is not enough to prevent abandoned tenancies and a return to the street. Additional support is required. The nature of this support as conceived by the state and the mainstream service model in its basic form is also decidedly materialist and mechanical: treatment for drug, alcohol or mental health problems, and job training being the prescribed medicine. What’s more, receiving this ‘treatment’ is often seen as the condition for receiving core support – with the support plan being the contract for this relationship.

Underpinning this approach is a belief in the ability of services to ‘cure’ people of the problems that led them to homelessness, and ultimately in the ability to reintegrate them into society, defined as move on to stable accommodation and employment. This is very different to the ethos of preceding faith-based charity which sought only to alleviate the misery of being homeless and hungry, charity and consolation more than cure. This shift in emphasis (and ambition) is analogous to the shift from spiritual care to a medical model described above.

New organisations with a firmly secular foundation emerged to deliver this mainstream high-end support model for homeless people, but older faith-based organisations made the change as well. According to a recent study by the Centre for Housing Policy at York University, *The Role of Faith-Based Organisations in the Provision of Services for Homeless People*, faith-based organisations play a significant part in mainstream service delivery today. In order to be commissioned they have removed or diminished the faith dimension of their service. They are also scrupulous in ensuring and in stating that they prohibit evangelism of proselytising of any kind⁴. As the authors of the study say.

“It is now not always easy to tell whether a project has a faith affiliation. The visibility and practice of religion in most project programmes has diminished significantly over time.”

According to the authors, the only defining feature of faith-based services is the extent to which some of them regard their service as ‘non-interventionist’. That is to say, secular service providers more often insisted on service users undertaking some treatment (say drug treatment) or intervention as a condition for a hostel space, than faith-based services, who were more likely to offer bed spaces or food unconditionally.

“The key axis differentiating contemporary homelessness projects is not so much whether they are faith-based or secular, but rather providers’ stances on service user engagement and the conditionality of service receipt. These stances range from firmly non-interventionist (with no expectation of change) to highly interventionist (with expectations regarding commitment to defined support plans). The interventionist end of this continuum is dominated by secular organisations, and while FBOs [Faith-Based Organisations] can be found throughout this spectrum, they are clustered at the non-interventionist end.”

Purpose of support for homeless people

The mainstream service model, delivered in an increasingly professionalised fashion, has met the pressing and practical needs of many homeless people. A question remains, however, as to the support needed by people once they have been found a flat and a job (if they are lucky), the support needed to help them lead and sustain as full a life as possible. In the philosopher Isaiah Berlin’s famous formulation: once people are free *from* hardship, what are they free *for*? The mainstream service model has no explicit answer – or perhaps doesn’t see it as being any of its business, falling it as it does outside the materialist and mechanical view.

Equally, there is a question over the nature of support available to long-term homeless people, for whom the mainstream model has not provided a ‘cure’, and for whom purpose and life enhancement might be a more pertinent aspiration than work and money.

Many providers and commissioners of services for homeless people instinctively recognise the need to add colour and texture to people’s lives (as well as the need to provide a new frame and blank canvas), and represent a proud and pioneering history within the sector of developing person-centred approaches that acknowledge in particular the importance

⁴ A point echoed in Jonathan Birdwell’s report for Demos, *Faithful providers*

of developing service users' relationships. A range of highly imaginative, life-enhancing and spiritually-uplifting projects (including creative art, yoga, singing, gardening, to name a few) are delivered by the sector, often instigated by the personal passions and interests of individual staff members, granted a degree of freedom by enlightened directors and chief executives. But these projects are located at the fringes of the service model, funded separately (frequently from one-off grants) and regarded as 'added value' and therefore inessential. They are also becoming increasingly vulnerable in the context of budget cuts.

And even within this service category where life-enhancement is an objective over and above material support, projects specifically to do with faith and spirituality are few and far between. Their absence – and the absence on the part of service providers in any official interest or curiosity about their service users' faith and spirituality – can be explained by sometimes explicit prohibition of the promotion of religion, a very British reserve and reticence to talk about what is regarded as a private matter, but also and arguably by prejudicial attitudes towards faith and religion shared by some in the sector.

Atheist orthodoxy within the homeless sector

Exploring attitudes towards faith within the homeless sector in a thorough and systematic way was beyond the scope of the research for this report. The following section is therefore based on conversations with people within the sector, including some organisational leaders, over a period of time. I am also indebted to the York University study (alluded to above).

Attitudes towards faith and religion within the homeless sector can be located along a spectrum, from strong faith through to proud and strident atheism, with people on opposite ends of this range often working alongside each other, equally committed though from different ideological or moral starting points, in helping those in need.

Within the atheist camp there is also a spectrum of opinion. Some atheists recognise the reality, validity and value of faith for others, though they may find its premises impossible to accept and understand intellectually. They may also find its language baffling and impenetrable. Some may even be envious of the faith of others (as was one of the homeless people interviewed, appearing in Chapter 3). They may also describe themselves as 'spiritual', curious about different religions and their quest for meaning. (Spiritual is a word that many atheists feel comfortable with as it seems for them to be cleansed of what the arch-atheist Nietzsche described as the "bad odours of religion".)

There are others with atheist views who perhaps would be less respectful, privately at least, and would regard religious views and language as harmless though slightly risible, judging at least by the tone of a comment made by one chief executive of a secular organisation interviewed for the York University study:

"I cannot get my head round people seriously thinking that the Holy Spirit being with you could in any way substitute for a good risk assessment."

But there are other atheists – very much in the minority but vocal and influential nonetheless - who hold a more militant, anti-religious position. In the spirit of atheist writers such as Richard Dawkins, they not only deny the existence of God but see religion and its influence on society and individuals as harmful. The focus of their attack is on literal belief in creationist accounts of the universe that have been disproved or superseded by science and on fundamentalist adherence to extreme ethical judgments and codes of moral conduct, leading to acts of violence and cruelty. (Dawkins and advocates of this view have a point, albeit a blunt one. The atrocities committed under the banner of religion cannot be denied and are beyond any justification. The crusades, inquisitions, witch trials, terrorist attacks - the charge-sheet against religion is densely typed in bold black letters. Some of its institutions have also been exposed as tightly-lidded cauldrons of spite, hate and unspeakable cruelty. (Although it can be argued that this is more a critique of the nature of institutions and power rather than of the nature of faith.)

The militant atheist may also regard age-old acts of charity for homeless people such as soup runs and food banks as harmful anachronisms that perpetuate the problem, motivated more by the feel-good of giving rather than a modern-day response to a serious social problem. They may point to the dangers of proselytising those who are vulnerable and of bible-bashing a captive audience, referencing George Orwell's famous passage in *Down and Out in Paris and London* where he exposed the Salvation Army practice of offering beds on the condition of having to pray. They may also point to outdated and outmoded views on gender and sexuality attributed to religious leaders as being entirely contrary to modern notions of diversity, running counter to the hard-won achievements of the equal-rights movement. At an individual level, and influenced by Freud, they may see religious expression as neurotic, infantile and therefore as an obstacle to progress and personal development; or in more extreme terms they regard it as psychotic (for example, seeing a mystical vision as a schizophrenic hallucination). They regard the thought of religion being practised in the work place with great discomfort - the image of one of their support workers praying with one of their service users being a recurring nightmare.

Ultimately, extreme proponents of this atheist world view are fundamentally opposed to the idea of talking to service users about faith and religion. They fear it would be seen as prying into private (and largely incomprehensible) matters for little purpose and at the risk of being seen to push religion on people and to proselytise (a risk that of course exists but which needs to be properly managed as is the case with any risk). Little would be revealed they feel of material interest to the substance of the service they provide.

Summary

Religious groups have always helped the poor and homeless as part of their mission, and continue to do so through soup runs and night shelters. Many of today's providers of housing and advice for homeless and disadvantaged groups have religious roots. However, from the 1960s and in response to public concern about rising homelessness, the state began to fund social housing, hostels and high-end support services for homeless people. In the spirit of the times, these services adopted a secular and mechanistic approach (inspired in particular by the National Health Service and its historical shift from spiritual care to medical science), seeing the homeless person as someone who could be 'signed

up' for material support - a flat, help with benefits, job training and treatment for addiction if needed. A rights-based approach replaced religiously-motivated notions of charity for homeless people, which aimed at alleviation of misery, of comfort and consolation rather than outright cure. The shift in approach also sought to banish proselytising, the promotion of religion to service users. New secular organisations emerged to deliver these services but older faith-based organisations were also commissioned, removing religion as a defining and visible element of their service.

With the mainstream service model for homeless people having evolved to focus almost exclusively on meeting physical and material need, and with many faith-based organisations having removed religion as a visible and defining element of their work in order to be funded by public money, faith and spirituality are largely absent from the register of services on offer to homeless people. Further, religion is regarded by many in the sector with atheist views as a subject to be avoided with service users – too personal and intrusive for the client, too difficult to handle for the support worker, coming with the risk of being misunderstood as an attempt to proselytise and unlikely to yield anything of value.

As a consequence, homeless people are hardly ever asked about their faith. As we will see in Chapter 3, however, service users welcome the opportunity to talk openly about their faith and spiritual lives, and see an active role for service providers in helping people like themselves to engage with their faith and spirituality.

Part 2.

Real lives and Services

3. Out of the silence – talking to homeless people about faith and spirituality

In this chapter I present findings from in-depth interviews with 75 homeless people about their lives - their reflections on the past, how they spend their time in the present, and their attitudes to and experiences of faith and religion. Most of those interviewed were long-term homeless, some still sleeping rough, others recently resettled in flats and hostel accommodation. Despite initial reservations on the part of the interviewers, fearing the questions were too personal or intrusive, those interviewed found the discussion to be enjoyable, beneficial and stimulating. As well as revealing rich personal insights and reflections, the interviews also elicited highly practical ideas for organisations and support workers on how to engage with service users' faith and spirituality.

Conducting the interviews

Interviews were conducted and participants recruited in a variety of ways. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. At Cardinal Hume Centre people with a long-standing relationship of trust with the organisation were asked to take part. At West London Mission the people interviewed were members of an established discussion group. At Thames Reach, service users with mental health problems at the Camden Day Centre were interviewed. At Whitechapel Mission, people attending a drop in centre were asked to take part. At Caris Islington, the people taking part were given questions in advance and invited to talk about them when they were ready. At The Connection at St Martin's people were picked at random to take part with volunteers recruited to conduct the interviews. At St Mungo's, people were also selected at random.

Structure of the interview

The interview template was developed by practitioners in collaboration with Lemos&Crane and then piloted with service users. The final version was structured to start with general questions about people's personalities, interests and ways of spending time, and about key events in the past. The intention with these opening questions was to provide a warm up between interviewer and service user, but it also gave an opportunity for the service user to describe their 'life narrative'. More personal questions followed about good and bad times and how people dealt with feeling low on a day-to-day basis. Finally, the interview turned to questions of faith and spirituality, whether people considered themselves religious now or in the past, and whether and how they thought organisation could include faith and spirituality as an item among its range of services.

Impressions on being interviewed

The overwhelming response was positive. The vast majority of the 75 people interviewed valued the experience of having a conversation with the interviewer about important and identity-defining aspects of their life – a stimulating contrast perhaps to the needs assessment process and interview with its emphasis on physical and practical support.

“Thank you for allowing me to open up at last [my emphasis].”

“It has made me think in depth a bit more. I will go away tonight and think how I need to know myself a bit more and get back to myself a bit more.”

“It’s good to talk...keeping things in doesn’t really help.”

“Thank you for reminding me about spirituality which was very uplifting.”

One person regarded the interview as an indication that the organisation was taking them seriously as a whole person (and not just a mechanical service user).

“I thought it was interesting and it should happen more often as it shows people are interested in us and what we think.”

Only a few people confirmed some of the interviewers’ fears that the questions were too personal or saw the faith aspect as off-putting. One person said that they weren’t interested in anything religious, describing themselves as “totally atheist”. Another person’s comments suggest that placing the interview in the right context was important to avoid it being seen as an attempt to proselytise.

“I thought the interview was good but the questions were too religious-based and makes me wonder is someone trying to convert me?”

Identity

We asked people to describe themselves, and how others saw them. Most regarded themselves as extrovert and out-going, remarkably resilient in the face of serious difficulties and hardship.

"Friendly, easy to approach."

"I would say bubbly, though I have great highs and lows."

"Full of beans, chatty and fun."

Some reflected on their identity and how this had changed from the past.

"I am an ex-drug user, happy (and engaged to be married)."

One person saw their faith as a defining element of their new identity.

"Before I got myself sorted out I kept myself to myself, a lot of addicts do...

Now I am clean and with my faith I am extrovert."

Others saw themselves in a more private light, withdrawn and reflective.

"A single person, a religious person."

"A bit quiet."

And a few described a more fragile, fractured and isolated personal situation.

"I am sick and forgetful."

We also asked people how they thought others perceived them. One person said that they'd never been asked or even thought about that perspective before. Given the modern obsession with peer approval and heightened self-awareness this seems tantamount to a form of social exclusion.

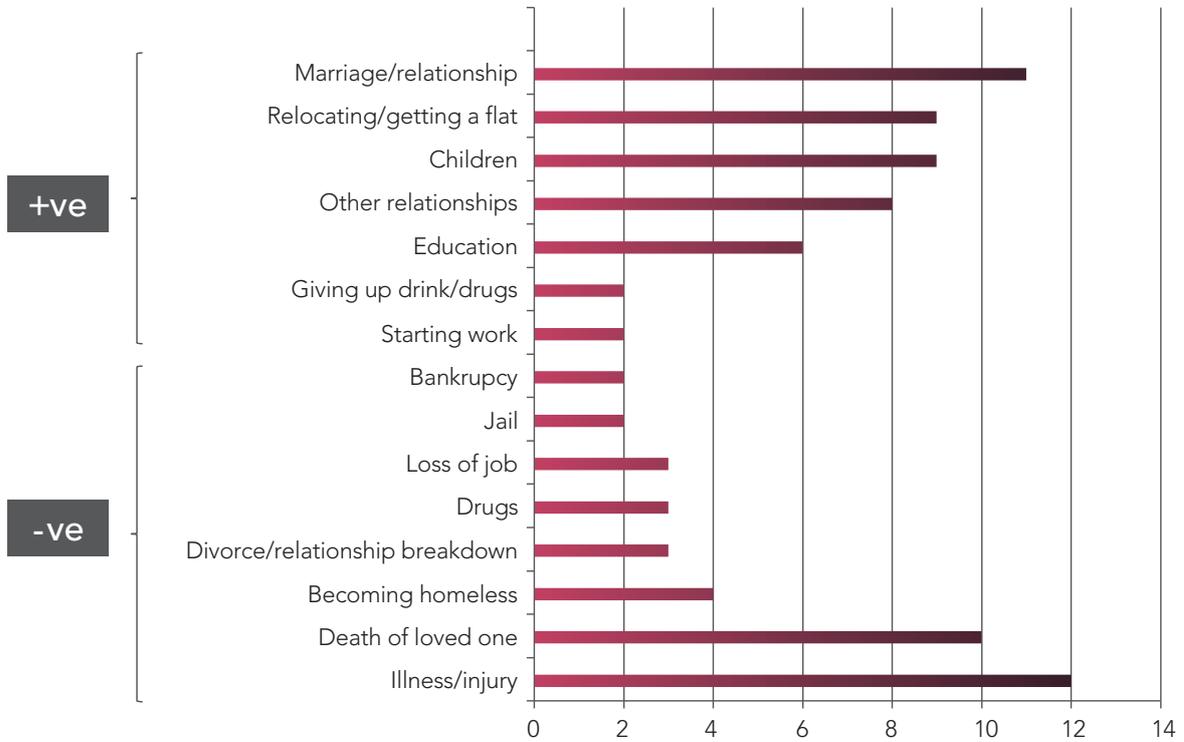
Reflecting on the past

The interview then asked people about key individuals and three key events in their past. Family members and partners perhaps unsurprisingly were frequently mentioned as significant and influential figures; religious leaders were also mentioned from time to time.

In terms of life events, the table below sets out what people identified.

Interview findings

Key events in the past



The life story of many people tells of happy landmarks and commonplace joys (marriage, children, achievements at work) subsequently scarred by tragedy, illness and the very worst misfortune. For some, the past amounts only to a blunt and brutal telegram.

“Death. Jail. Drugs.”

Loss is the defining characteristic of most of the negative experiences described by people. The experience of loss - of family, money, the prestige of work – that leads to homelessness and rough sleeping is perhaps the closest that those living in modern Britain can come to the worst privations of previous ages, against which faith and religion were a consolation.

Some people have come to terms with this loss and made peace with the past, having lived through what must doubtless have been periods of intense bitterness and resentment.

“I feel content now but I wish I hadn’t thrown away my flat, my job.”

“Although I am not married now, largely due to my depression... if my wife walked through that door now, I wouldn’t have a word to say about her – it was just circumstance.”

A few people, remarkably, have to come to value their current situation more than what they once had and lost, embodying the Franciscan ideals of poverty, humility and simplicity. Like King Lear – the fond, foolish old man made homeless by his daughters – they have learned the value of nothing, of being the “thing itself” that “owes the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume”.

“Never been happier than now. Had thousands of pounds and it didn’t get me anywhere. Had more money than sense and I felt so alone.”

But for others the wounds of their misfortune are still fresh, and the present is a living hell.

“Nothing seems to be getting better – only worse.”

And for one person, the experience of sleeping rough brought precious little insight only misery.

“When I was sleeping rough for about 4 years, I thought life wasn’t worth living.”

Dealing with the present

After talking about the past, people were then asked how they spent their time day to day, and particularly to describe what they did when they felt low. Homeless people have an asset denied to those who lead busy working lives: time. Spending time wisely is a challenge. To be fully appreciated and valued spare time needs the counterpoint of work; scarcity stimulates and channels demand, while abundance can lead to careless consumption.

In describing their pastimes, some were honest enough to admit to vices, self-destructive activities, and the pursuit of oblivion – conforming perhaps to the stereotypical image of the ways of rough sleepers.

“I have a tendency to drink which is the wrong thing to do.”

“I take my medication and sleep.”

“Get drunk and fall asleep.”

“I don’t really have a strategy, but I find myself going out and taking drugs. And for that period of time it works. It’s instant...”

Most people, however, described a range of positive activities and rich interests, ways of spending time that were focussed on making the most of the moment and not as a means to end – what Aristotle described as virtuous action (*praxis*) as opposed to product (*poiesis*). As explained in Chapter 2, such a range of activities is rarely promoted in an official capacity by the mainstream service model to homeless people as a way of achieving meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life over and above the alleviation of material discomfort and the pursuit of job skills and training, important though these are. Here are some of the activities described by people.

Reminiscence

The value of memory is important to us all; and for obvious and poignant reasons it is particularly significant for many of the homeless people interviewed.

“I think about the good times...”

“I’ve had a great life and memories cheer me up.”

“Reflect on my experiences and the experience of my ex-soldiers.”

Reading

Many homeless people are avid readers. One person I spoke to was an expert on the Dorset writers Thomas Hardy and TF Powys, whose book *Mr Weston’s Good Wine* (where God visits a sleepy Dorset village in the guise of a wine merchant) is recommended as an intriguing spiritual fable. Another person sang the praises of the third floor of Waterstone’s in Picadilly as a place to spend time undisturbed with an excellent selection of books on spirituality and religion. In difficult times, one person turned to two Edwardian writers.

“I read *Wine, Water and Song* by GK Chesterton and Rudyard Kipling’s poems.”

Making and appreciating art

Art and other creative pursuits were frequently mentioned by people as a way of spending time and beating the blues. Art classes are offered by many service providers though it is an activity that constantly needs to justify itself within the sector as a worthwhile use of time and space. Like meditation, drawing and painting makes people concentrate on the moment; it can also be a way of engaging people who are reluctant to open up in other ways.

“I like art and drawing.”

“I like poetry and bell ringing.”

London also provides an unrivalled opportunity to see the world’s great works of art

“Walking around seeing London... has wicked places to go and see.”

“I love the museums.”

Walking

Many people walk as a means of dealing with troubles and sorrows and as an aid to meditation, treading in the footsteps of countless pilgrims over the years⁵. The Danish

⁵ Labyrinths were a feature of many medieval cathedrals - one of the best remaining examples is found in Chartres Cathedral in northern France. Unlike a maze they have only one path - there are no dead ends. People walk the labyrinth slowly, as an aid to contemplative prayer and reflection, as a spiritual exercise, or as a form of pilgrimage.

philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote, "I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it... if one just keeps on walking, everything will be all right".

"I walk very early in the morning for at least half an hour before stopping – to clear the mind."

"Walk till it wears off."

"I am a long distance walker. Started walking in 1989 – have been walking ever since."

Spending time with others

People seek out friends and companions to share burdens or fix a problem, or to seek distraction through conversation and laughter.

"I have a lot of friends... I keep very busy."

"I try to be around people that are fun that are having a laugh."

Music

The poet John Dryden asked, "What passion cannot Music raise and quell?" Listening to music in private – or attending free concerts - plays a strong role in the lives of many homeless people.

Animals and Nature

Many people enjoy spending time with animals and pets. It is almost a stereotype to think of a homeless person with a dog on a lead made of string, but pets are friends and companions and dogs in particular are objects of love that return this love unconditionally. They place obligations of care on the person who looks after them and in return that person receives affection and companionship.

"Puppy trainer for the blind. Involved with anything that has to do with animals."

"I take my dog for a walk, or play with my kitten ... You learn to do other things other than take a drug."

Appreciating the grandeur of Nature as a whole had similarly therapeutic benefits for one person interviewed.

"I have got spiritual beliefs. I believe in Nature, animals, mountains... I regularly go to the countryside, that's where I feel most at peace with my inner self."

Positive thinking and self-healing

Others said that putting their current situation in perspective, by saying that 'it could be worse' or 'there are others worse off', helped them to deal with feelings about the past. A few people were able to draw on a remarkably deep well of resilience, a capacity for self-healing that was movingly described by one person.

"When I heal my heart. Deep inside me I have feelings that are beyond thoughts.
When I heed those feelings, that cheers me up..."

Helping others

Despite extreme hardship and poverty, and humbly for the rest of us, some of the homeless people interviewed found the strength to help others, and feel they gained immeasurably from doing so.

"Listening, helping others."

"Making good."

"Helping others helps me feel most alive."

Prayer, meditation and acts of worship

Finally, a few people also described more conventionally spiritual activities and practices.

"I try meditating sometimes."

Expressions of faith and spirituality

In the next stage of the interview, we asked people whether they would describe themselves as religious. Over seventy per cent described themselves as religious or as having been religious at some stage in their lives. Fifty-two per cent of people described themselves right now as being religious in the conventional sense. A breakdown of people's expressed religion is given in the table on the following page.

| Religion | % |
|--|------------|
| Roman Catholic | 32 |
| Church of England | 11 |
| Christian (no specific denomination specified) | 11 |
| Muslim | 7 |
| Buddhism | 3 |
| Rastafarian | 3 |
| Baptist | 1 |
| Church of Scotland | 1 |
| Ethiopian Orthodox | 1 |
| Seventh Day Adventist | 1 |
| Mormon | 1 |
| Unitarian | 1 |
| No religious denomination specified | 27 |
| Total | 100 |

Some people described themselves as religious or spiritual in a broad sense but didn't have affiliation to a specific denomination or organised religion.

"I am a pagan, believing in many gods. Used to go to church about 20 years ago (Russian Orthodox) and then just decided to become a pagan. No specific trigger."

"No specific religious beliefs but I have a deep spiritual outlook."

A few people described a 'sampling' approach to their religious identity.

"I do not believe in formal religion. I pick and choose... bits of Sufism with Zen Buddhism."

This consumerist and highly personalised approach to spirituality is undoubtedly an increasing trend in society as a whole, with Buddhism – based on practice and free from any underpinning belief in a deity - in particular being an attractive choice for many people including atheists. Kierkegaard warned however of too individualistic an approach to spirituality. In the absence of a congregation of fellow believers, he wrote of the solipsistic dangers of ending up as a 'king without a country'.

Source of faith

The social influences on people's religious identities are well recognised. Many of the people interviewed who described themselves as religious (especially those coming from African- Caribbean, Eastern European or Latin American backgrounds) were clearly brought up with faith.

"Believe in God, majority of my life have believed in God. Got baptised at 18..."

"I have been Roman Catholic all my life. We believe when we die we go to heaven. We are destined for heaven not purgatory or hell."

"I was brought up in the same faith. I grew up in Barbados. Every day I pray."

Social influences can also count against faith, however. In a British university environment, an atheist world view is more often the social norm.

"Baptised and confirmed Anglican faith then challenged by science and university. A Methodist minister has brought me back to faith. Science hasn't got all the answers."

While some were born into faith, others had a moment of discovery, or epiphany, stemming from the hardship and challenges of their homeless experience.

"When I was in my darkest place it [faith] made me believe there is good."

"Getting on drugs – was 13 when I got on Heroin. Smoked cannabis from 9. Being kidnapped and raped, that was in 2005 and then finding my faith again. I reaffirmed in April and gave my life to Christ again..."

These powerful conversation experiences are clearly extremely important for some homeless people, giving strength and motivation to help them turn a corner, which service providers should harness and support not turn a blind eye to or worse, tacitly discourage.

Type of religious expression

As well as different ways of acquiring faith, there are different ways or types of faith or religious expression. In *Religion and the Individual* by Daniel-Batson et al, a socio-psychological study of religion, three types of belief are identified – extrinsic, intrinsic, and questing. We found clear examples of each type of faith in the interviews.

'Extrinsic religion' is belief or faith for ultimately self-serving ends. This is the type of faith that is most frequently derided by anti-religionists, though nonetheless is genuinely felt by many people.

"To believe makes things easier in life."

"When I came out of hospital I felt my prayer was answered."

"I prayed then went back to the cash machine and despite not having money, it deposited some cash."

'Intrinsic religion' is devout or fundamentalist belief in a set code of conduct or doctrines where a single end or purpose has been identified, a form of belief felt by some anti-religionists to be harmful and socially dangerous in its blinkered approach to life and people, though clearly consoling, motivational and life-affirming for believers, and the source of strength and purpose for some to combat the lure of drink, drugs or other chaotic behaviour. Expressions of intrinsic belief can also often be the most difficult behaviour for secular service providers and practitioners to accept and work with.

"I believe in Jesus and Catholicism. To feel good and to act good. Follow the God's law."

"I believe when I die my spirit goes to heaven. I believe in the unity of man, the angels and heaven and life ever after."

"Believe in Jesus Christ. He has power over us. He is the first and the last. If you are Christian you will abide by the laws of God."

Finally, 'questing religion' is where people pursue existential questions related to the purpose of life, and where they may feel that they never arrive at definitive answers, in the way that intrinsic believers do. The mystery, the lack of certainty, and the delight and euphoria that this can engender was described by Einstein: "To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious."

Many people described themselves as 'questing' in this way without describing themselves as religious in the conventional sense.

"I know I need more wisdom. I am still on my spiritual journey."

"I read a lot, religion and philosophy. I think about my self and wonder why I exist, like this. Who am I? If I die where will I go?"

Significance

We also asked people to describe what their faith meant to them.

"It's food for the soul."

"It opens my eyes to life."

One person though not a believer themselves recognised its appeal and value for others.

"I have Christian friends who seem happy... I am jealous of them."

Attending places of worship

We asked people whether they had recently attended a place of worship. Of those describing themselves as religious, only a third had done so.

The reasons given for not attending included a perceived lack of opportunity or accessibility. A few people said that while in prison (where faith and religion has greater visibility than in mainstream homeless services) they attended religious services regularly. People leaving prisons can often relapse as a result of losing the faith community that they had built up in prison.

“When I was in prison I went every week. Wasn’t put off one bit.”

“I was baptised in Seven Days Adventist Church – in Wandsworth Prison (the first person to be baptised there).”

Another person was reluctant to attend services for reasons of social embarrassment.

“I feel that if I am to go to the church locally they will try and put me into a slot! Like here comes the homeless old man.”

Where people had recently attended a place of worship, however, they described an overwhelmingly positive experience. People appreciated in particular the feeling of belonging and identity, of being welcomed and accepted without judgment.

“Wonderful and uplifting...food and fellowship...supportive community.”

“Peaceful, I feel relaxed and I feel comfort. People accept me for ‘who I am’.”

“The experience was uplifting and fulfilling.”

“Others made me feel welcome.”

“Not judgmental.”

“Was nice, peace and quiet people seemed quite spiritual. Felt happy after praying and definitely feel like going back again.”

“I got respect from people in the church. Lots of nice people I met. Peace of mind out of them.”

Only one person attending a place of worship said they felt as if they were “having their brain washed”, the standard critique that anti-religionists would apply to religious communities.

Talking about faith with support workers

We asked people whether staff from support-providing organisations had ever talked to them about faith or spiritual matters. Only five people said they had. And in the case of one of these, the conversation had been initiated by the service user themselves.

“The conversation started when I asked my support worker about his religious beliefs.”

One person reported hostility on the part of the support worker to religious discussion.

“People seem to want to convince you that you shouldn’t do it [don’t want to hear your experiences about God].”

Another tried to engage their support workers but to little avail.

“I quote the verses of the Bible to my keyworker occasionally to make a point in my conversations.”

Others from countries outside the UK picked up on what they felt to be a curiously British reticence to talk about faith matters.

“Here [UK] if you speak about God you might be breaking the law...”

“In this country there is a problem about religion. In Italy we are all Catholics.”

The politics and ideals of multiculturalism has greatly, though unintentionally, contributed to this reticence: in seeking to diminish and dampen the dominant role of Christianity in British public life with the worthy intention of comfortably accommodating new migrant communities and their beliefs, multiculturalism has stifled religious expression for *all* faith groups, especially those black and minority ethnic communities with deep religious roots that it sought most to protect; for fear of putting a foot wrong in the perceived minefield of a multi-faith environment we freeze, clam up and stay mutely rooted to the spot.

We then asked whether people would welcome having a conversation about faith with their support worker.

Some said they would welcome it personally, or see its value for others.

“Would lift me up when I am going through a sticky situation...”

“Would like to have a conversation with staff to know more about faith especially when I needed it most.”

“Not me personally but I think some might appreciate it and benefit from it...”

Others advocated more caution, though this caution was mainly directed at *how* to have conversations, rather than *whether* to have them at all. Some thought it should be left to the 'experts', or that staff would need some initial training or knowledge in order to have conversations with confidence.

"This is a homeless centre not a 'religious' centre."

"You need to know the history of religions for you to be able to do something. I think the staff will not be ready."

"It is about religion and I think the religious leaders have to do this not the support worker."

One person responded by saying that the issue of faith raised the larger question of the values and commitment of service commissioners and providers, implying that their practice would be enhanced and informed by religious ideas and standards.

"People who are homeless have lost their faith because of the way they are treated. The people who need to learn about religion are the officials who deal with the homeless."

Suggestions on engaging with service users' faith and spirituality

Finally, we asked people how organisations providing support for homeless people could engage with their service users' faith or nurture their spirituality.

Some said that support workers should ask people openly about their faith and spirituality.

"General open conversations...sometimes about faith and religion or sometimes just about life."

"More open conversations... sometimes people have a lot of feelings they need to express."

"Talk with them. Ask them what they want. If they want to talk about religion then call the pastor to speak to them."

Others thought that resources to help people practice their faith, or information on different religions, should be made available.

"Prayer room."

"Leaflets on different faiths."

"Give basic knowledge of the variety of religions...some information that would stimulate the mind."

"If there are courses available you could help people access these."

One person suggested visits to places of worship.

"Visit monasteries, abbeys, Canterbury Cathedral... would enlighten some of the residents."

Some thought that organisations could proactively facilitate connections with religious leaders, fellow believers and places of worship.

"1 to 1 with vicar"

"Matching people with other clients with similar (faith) profile."

"They can ask them if they need transport to their local church on Sundays. They can point them in the right direction."⁶

"Maybe get someone to come in on a regular basis to talk about God."

"Visits and conversations without prayers. Free sandwiches and tea from the local church would be nice."

Others suggested faith-based events and rituals

"Grace before meal."

"Discussions and celebrations, rituals and rights."

Finally, and most imaginatively, some people suggested setting up groups for spiritual practices and discussion.

"Perhaps a religious or spiritual group that people could attend..."

"Meditation group."

"A club where people can have meals, a chat and where their problems are understood."

"If they put on a spiritual group I will attend...it is interesting to do new things. It opens one's mind."

⁶ One person interviewed said that he had requested help to visit a religious service but was told that the organisation was too short-staffed to assist.

Summary

Despite the doubts and reservations of interviewers who feared that asking homeless people about faith and spirituality might be too personal or intrusive, the great majority of those interviewed found the experience to be stimulating and thought-provoking – further, some felt that being asked about their lives in depth, about their past, their religious beliefs and spirituality validated their identity in the eyes of service providers as people in their own right not just service users with problems.

The interviews highlighted the importance for people of coming to terms with the painful experience of loss in the past in order to move forward in their lives; a few people had arrived at a profoundly spiritual perspective on their loss, regarding their present situation free from material ties as being the happiest time of their life, with no desire to return to the world of work and money. The interviews also revealed that people's present circumstances (cash-poor but time-rich) were the spur in many cases for a rich array of interests, pastimes and blues-beating activities that also had a strong and timeless spiritual dimension: reading, music, walking, art and helping others. Recourses to oblivion through drink, drugs or sleeping pills were far less frequently mentioned. This full array of life-enhancing and spiritually-fulfilling pursuits is rarely promoted by service providers and commissioners in the official roister of meaningful activity that can strengthen and support resettlement and the achievement of stability and ultimately contentment in life.

Fifty-two per cent of people interviewed described themselves as religious in the conventional sense – most of these people had been born into their religious identity and had an intrinsic or extrinsic faith. A further nineteen per cent of people described themselves as religious or spiritual in a broader sense, sampling different faiths in a 'questing' fashion. Only a third of people describing themselves as religious had recently attended a place of worship (suggesting an opportunity for places of worship to engage with the other two-thirds) but where they had done so, they described their experience in overwhelmingly positive terms, in particular the sense of belonging it generated.

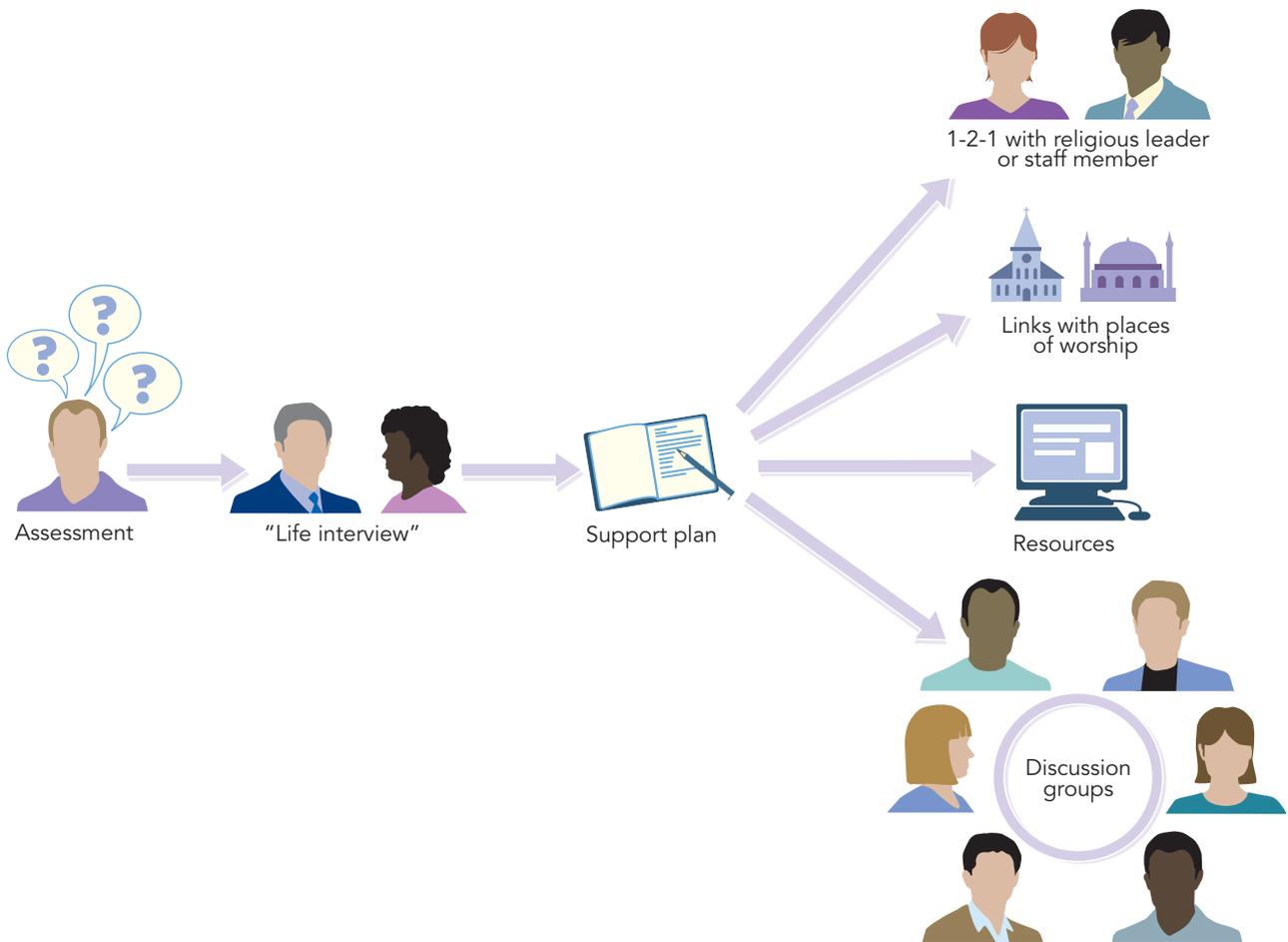
Only five people had ever been asked by the organisation about their religion, faith or spirituality, confirming their 'out of bounds' status in the mainstream homeless sector. However, the majority thought that service providers should at the very least have an open conversation with service users about spiritual matters. Some had further practical ideas and suggestions as to how service providers could incorporate faith and spirituality into their service. These ideas and suggestions are now developed in Chapter 4.

4. Into the mainstream – making faith and spirituality a part of services for homeless people

In this chapter I set out how and why providers of support for homeless people could incorporate faith and spirituality into their service offer, building on the practical suggestions put forward by the homeless people interviewed.

The proposed service model (summarised in the diagram below) is intended to identify service users with religious belief and to encourage them to practice their faith, and also to engage people who though not religious in the conventional sense describe themselves as spiritual and who would benefit from discussion and ideas about different faiths and about routes to spiritual fulfilment more generally.

Fig. 2 A model for incorporating faith and spirituality into service delivery



1. Conducting a 'life interview' with service users

When homeless or vulnerable people first present themselves to service providers, it is often a time of crisis. The priority for the service provider is to identify support needs – the assessment process is understandably dominated by practical concerns (access to health

services, entitlement to benefits, etc) and there is little time to discuss other aspects of life. Neither, it should be added, are service users necessarily ready to talk about their lives in general; they too have urgent and pressing priorities. However, once sufficient time has elapsed, post-crisis and post-assessment, and once an element of trust has built up between the service user and the support worker representing the service provider, a 'life interview' should be conducted.

The topics of this life interview need to include self-perceptions, interests, key people and events from the past, as well as previous and current expressions of religion and faith. The template that was used in conducting the research (and which is included as an Appendix to the report) can be adapted for this purpose. Though no specific training is required for conducting the interview (other than a general understanding of the interview process, how to ask open questions, demonstrate active listening, etc) it is suggested that staff conduct the interviews with each other to practise. The interview might uncover difficult experiences for the person being interviewed, though this wasn't the experience from conducting the pilot and actual interviews for the research. In which case, line managers should be available for a 'de-brief' session. It does not necessarily have to be staff who conduct these interviews – volunteers can also be used (as was the case with The Connection at St Martin's for the research).

2. Recording information in the support plan

The support plan is an integral part of the relationship between service user and provider. In supported housing, services increasingly need to be personalised as they are paid for from individual (personal) budgets. Service users' individual needs and aspirations therefore need to be elicited and responded to. The 'life narrative' interview provides an opportunity – with its questions about interests and hobbies – to add personal touches to the support plan and to identify action points and interventions that would be additional to core services such as mental health, drug treatment, or benefits. Lemos&Crane has previously developed resources and approaches (see Lemos&Crane reports *Dreams Deferred* (2002); *Steadying the Ladder* (2006; 2010) and *Blue Salmon*, an online support planning tool led by the service user) for service providers to use to ask service users about their social and emotional aspirations. Providers using these resources and approaches have told us that they elicit aspects of people's lives that they previously knew little about – such as interest in bird-watching or cake-making – that have been incorporated into service plans.

As well as information and insight about people's pasts and current interests to inform the support plan, the interview will ask about faith, religion and spirituality and elicit information and responses that can be recorded on the support plan for action planning (see below for types of action that are recommended).

3. Links with places of worship and faith groups

Perhaps the most straightforward way for a service user's faith or religion to be nurtured once it has been identified is by signposting them to places of worship or faith groups. The interviews revealed that only a third of those people describing themselves as religious have recently attended a place of worship (suggesting an opportunity that is being lost

with the remaining two-thirds). They found the experience to be extremely positive and beneficial, as it introduced them to a community of people that was welcoming and non-judgemental. Service providers, whether secular or faith-based, should therefore have an up-to-date list of places of worship and faith groups of all denominations in their local area. Barnet Borough Council's Faithbook website is an excellent example of this, providing a directory of activities going on throughout the borough by different religious organisations. Telephone contact at the very least (if not an actual face-to-face visit) with leaders and representatives from these places and groups should be established. Practical information such as addresses, transport routes and times of services should be researched, routinely updated and communicated to service users.

On the other side of the coin, local faith groups should also be trained in how to engage and make connections with homeless people, building on the work of several local church groups providing support around London, for example the Manna Centre near London Bridge, St Patrick's Soho providing meals and a befriending service alongside a spiritually-orientated drug rehabilitation programme, and the Robes Project which offers nightshelters in church halls in South East London.

4. One-to-one sessions with religious leaders or staff members with knowledge

As identified in Chapter 2, unlike prisons or hospitals, chaplains are rarely present in homeless service settings. In their absence, and once an initial relationship has been formed between the service provider and local faith groups or places of worship, leaders or representatives should be invited to visit the service and if appropriate to offer one-to-one discussions and guidance. This would enable service users to build on initial interest expressed in the interviews and to have a more in-depth conversation or consultation with someone with relevant knowledge and expertise.

It might be the case that staff within the organisation would have interest, skills or knowledge that could be used for this purpose. Often, it is the particular interests or passions of individual staff members that form the basis of an innovative service – be this yoga, painting or mountain climbing. The challenge for organisations is to identify these interests and passions and bring them into the organisation if appropriate, instead of leaving them 'at the door'. Organisations should conduct staff surveys to identify personal interests, passions, skills and knowledge, including religious belief or practice. This would then enable a service user to be 'buddied' with a staff member with a similar faith or belief (though clear codes of conduct will need to be established to manage the risk of inappropriate promotion of religion). By extension, this could also apply to other service users. Once all this information is recorded systematically, it should be straightforward to match or 'buddy' people.

5. Make books and other information resources available

Another practical and relatively cheap action would be to have resources available in communal areas at drop-in centres and hostels. Books and DVDs on faith and spiritual matters can be bought second-hand online. Information leaflets summarising different faiths could be made available. Finally, the Internet provides an obvious galaxy of

clubs, texts and videos that people can be encouraged to access. There are also online churches that are becoming increasingly popular.

6. Develop a spirituality discussion group

Many people who were interviewed suggested, independently from each other, setting up groups to practice activities such as meditation or to discuss and explore faith and spiritual matters more broadly. In addition to the core service offer, many (though far from all) support providers offer an increasingly diverse range of activities for service users to engage with – from IT classes or CV writing workshops through to art classes. Though valuable in their own terms, these clubs and sessions tend to focus on individual activity conducted in a group setting with limited opportunity for discussion, reflection or self-expression. Taking their cue from wider social trends, a few homeless services such as Crisis Skylight London have established discussion-based book clubs⁷, where a reading from a book provides a springboard for wider reflection and discussion where service users are encouraged to find a voice and to reflect on their experience and views.

The spirituality discussion groups that are proposed should aim to appeal to a multi-faith audience and to people with no professed faith, agnostic or proactively atheist. This is essential as Chapter 3 shows that in considering the ethnic diversity of people presenting themselves as homeless (especially in London) and the fact that many people increasingly see themselves as spiritual consumers, a group with a single faith denomination might alienate some and not attract the optimum numbers of people. A programme of content needs to be planned in advance to ensure a range of activities and subject matter relevant to different people with different beliefs and world views. A staff member could facilitate the group, a leader or representative from a local faith group or place of worship, or a volunteer.

In the longer-term, service users themselves could be encouraged to facilitate these groups, to give them on-going life particularly where a relative degree of stability has been achieved in their lives – this would be particularly true for services provided in a hostel setting, for example, more than a drop-in centre. Several self-sustaining groups could eventually be formed stemming from a single origin. The idea here is similar to that of a 'cell church', a Christian church structure centering on the regular gathering of cell groups (also called home groups, home friendship groups, home care groups, house fellowships, or life groups). John Wesley used a form of cell group structure which he called Class Meetings as he formed his Methodist societies into a national movement, first in Great Britain and later in the United States in the 18th Century.

Two organisations involved in the action research group – The Connection at St Martin's and the West London Mission - have already embarked on running groups and I was fortunate enough to visit both and to spend time with their highly enthusiastic membership (and my observations are set out below). Each group adopts a different approach. The Connection at St Martin's group lasts for an hour and is highly structured with set components; the West London Mission's group lasts for 2 hours and is more topic-based, discursive and free-ranging.

⁷ Annette Less from Crisis Skylight London runs the book club for its service users in collaboration with Rosie Allen-Jones from World Book Night, which supplies the books for participants for free. (See www.literacyactionnet.org.uk for more information). Some participants have told Annette that their motivation for joining the group and for improving their literacy skills more generally was to be able to read the Bible.

Soul Food at The Connection at St Martin's

The idea for the spiritual group at The Connection at St Martin's came from service users as a result of a routine feedback survey. They were puzzled by the fact that, despite the service being located practically in the shadow of the famous St Martin-in-the-Fields church, faith and religion was not an item among the range of services on offer. Kaz Mayes, Deputy Manager Day Services, at The Connection at St Martin's, was given the task of seeing how to get it going. She approached Revd Richard Carter, priest at St Martin-in-the-Fields, to see if he would be willing to facilitate the group and he agreed. The group would be for people "of all faiths and of no faith". One principle agreed very early on by Kaz and Richard was that no food was to be offered as an incentive to attend, unlike many other activities and services that the organisation provides. And I soon realise on my visit that it is nourishment of a very different kind that the group has to offer.

The Group meets every Tuesday in the Art room sandwiched between the art class and a session on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. I meet the participants and wait for the arrival of Revd Richard Carter, the facilitator. There are 8 or 9 core attendees who have mainly been re-settled by The Connection team and live in flats or reasonably secure accommodation; others come and go and mainly sleep rough.

Revd Carter finally arrives - with a ghetto blaster, the likes and dimensions of which I haven't seen in years. Intriguingly, he's also carrying a bell and some handouts. The session starts with introductions and a request for people to say something good that has happened to them over the last week. Responses from participants include being reunited with a friend from Sweden and the warmly received announcement (from Steve, who's just returned from duty in Afghanistan) that he's been allowed by his ex-wife to see his daughter. This is then followed by 5 minutes of meditation. With a soft voice, Revd Carter asks us to breathe in and out. With each inhalation he asks to think of peace, life, joy, kindness and goodness – simple but profound words that don't get spoken out loud very often in busy central London – and to exhale worry, doubt and fear out of the open windows. The mystery and purpose of the Ghetto blaster is then revealed as we listen to some Gregorian chant.

We then turn to a theme for discussion, which is a continuation of the exploration of the five precepts of mindfulness based on Buddhist teachings. This fourth precept – the subject of the handout – considers the use of language. Everyone takes turn in reading out a sentence, cued by the bell.

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering I vow to learn to speak truthfully, using words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticise or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

This act of reading aloud is itself a meaningful activity, as it gives everyone a voice and feeling of pride from contribution. The words are savoured. This then leads into a discussion about how people use words or have had words used against them. "Words can build you up or pull you down" says one person. Others talk about the importance of honesty, "telling it as it is but with kindness". We finish the session with a prayer.

I ask Richard and Kaz about their overall impressions of the group. Richard says that the fundamental ethos of the group is to get people to talk and to open up, to share their experiences, adding "I haven't met anyone yet who doesn't want to share their experience". Often he says that this experience tells of a journey through forgiveness, anger, and hope. Reflecting on what have people have gone through on these journeys, Richard says that he is humbled by the "spiritual wisdom that comes from loss."

Kaz who always attends the group as a participant says it is special and different to everything else that the service offers because of the way that people behave – calmly, respectfully and with consideration for others. Kaz says that the regular attenders are particularly welcoming to new people, even when they are in crisis or "meltdown". A warm welcome is also given to newcomers – of which I was one. I felt the group exuded a genuine sense of brotherhood and fellowship.

Hot Topics at West London Mission

When I visit the West London Mission drop in centre they're clearing up after a busy morning. Over 100 visitors had attended – over half of these have English as a second language including many Eastern Europeans. Central London is blazing hot this summer afternoon and the place is alive with Olympic Games fever.

The Spirituality Group meets weekly in the basement of the drop in centre, well-stocked with books and videos. In addition to regular meetings, there are get-togethers once a season at the local church complete with musical performances. The group started over 10 years ago by a vicar in waiting; it's still going strong and the founder still drops in from time to time. There is a core attendance and some people who come and go.

The format of the group sessions is varied. Sometimes the group watches a video that sparks conversation, sometimes there's a talk from a visitor, sometimes a theme is discussed. Today the topic is the Olympics though it doesn't stay on message for very long - we cover the evils of corporate sponsorship, the inevitable dominance of capitalism, the magic of Muhammed Ali, and the Methodist movement all over the course of two hours – a marathon of opinions, like a free-flowing pub discussion beloved of students everywhere though fuelled in this instance by tea and biscuits.

The discussion reveals distinctive voices and interests. There's a rich cast of characters – including Ben, an Irishman, who has an extensive knowledge of the contractors responsible for new buildings across London including the Olympic cable car ride over the Thames (built by Emirate Airlines, which Ben has tried out); he also knows the turnover of different McDonalds outlets across the city. Then there's Dave from Dorset who introduces himself

as an atheist. He is also an Elvis fan, a regular auction goer, avid reader and skilled debater, soon to be delivering a lecture on the links between the Tolpuddle Martyrs and Methodism. Dave is recently settled in supported accommodation but still returns to visit the group. He now also regularly re-visits Dorset to see the places where he grew up. Camelda, resplendent in gold hat and sunglasses, quiet but nodding and smiling thoughtfully throughout, has to leave early but says to everyone that she has had a wonderful time.

Richard, an Australian, arrives with news that one of his photographs ('Sea of Umbrellas at Buckingham Palace') has been chosen for exhibition at Christie's. A keen photographer whose hobby has been made cheaper in recent years through digital cameras is an expert at snapping celebrities (he shows me a picture of John Terry, care worn but victorious after his recent court case, held just across the road). He offers long-term homeless advice to Derek who's lost his keys – "buy shirts with chest pockets" (double preferably). The group talk about Robert who is absent having decided to go walking over the summer months. An Oxford graduate he walks over 40 miles a day. He returns to Britain in the autumn and over the winter. Trevor has been doing his ironing during the conversation. Asked about the importance of the group, he says people are afraid of big words and ideas - like religion and politics - but they're important.

The value of this group? It provides a platform for expression and dialogue far from the business of assessment and provision. It's about voice and expression of a very fluid sort. There's respect – "we debate but never argue", says Dave - and peace and space for conversation and reflection.

Summary

Finding from interviews with homeless people show there is little to fear for service providers in talking with their clients about faith and spirituality. On the contrary, couched as 'life interviews', the discussions are welcomed and reveal insights, interests and aspirations that can be incorporated into support plans. Organisations need to find a place for and to prepare their staff to undertake these life interviews as part of the service offer, once presenting crises have abated and an element of trust has built up between the service user and the support worker.

Where interviews reveal an active interest in an organised faith or religion, service users should be matched up with local churches, faith groups and places of worship. Service users themselves can play a bridging or buddying role in this respect. Books, websites and other resources on spiritual themes should also be made freely available at service locations, and staff encouraged to share appropriate knowledge on religious matters.

In addition, it is recommended that all homeless providers set up spirituality discussion groups. The groups should be advertised for people of 'all faiths and no faiths' and should seek to present a wide range of religious beliefs and practices and spiritual exercises such as meditation to satisfy the incipient demand and curiosity among many homeless people for fruitful discussion about purpose and meaning in life; these groups would have the additional benefit of creating a community of inquiry, a fresh expression of fellowship that established religions have offered for centuries.

These recommendations can be applied in any support setting – whether faith-based or secular – and require minimal training or resources (though clear codes of conduct will need to be established to manage the risk of inappropriate promotion of religion). What is required however is strong leadership to find space within current practice to accommodate new approaches, and to communicate their nature and value to staff and stakeholders, overcoming unease or ideological reluctance and framing the relevance of faith and spirituality within the context of 'person-centred' services and approaches.

Conclusion

Faith in its traditional form is felt to have lost much of its public status and influence in British life, though it continues to give many people including homeless people significant psychological, social and emotional benefits. The absence of faith from mainstream support for homeless and vulnerable people is an acute example of its wider demise, brought about by a range of factors including multi-culturalism, improved standards of living, the rise of individualism and consumerism, bad press for the corruption and reactionary nature of some of its institutions, and vitriolic attacks on its intellectual foundations by an evangelical anti-religious lobby. And also, I argue in this report, by its hegemony over truth and social action being taken over by scientific materialism, as administered by the state.

However, despite the significant achievements of scientific materialism (and the mechanical worldview) in driving improvement in the basic standards of living for millions of people, its practical and philosophical limitations are increasingly being felt. There are diminishing returns on investment in scientific discovery, particularly on our emotional investment, itself a form a faith, in ultimate atomic knowledge of who and what we are in bio-chemical terms and how our lot can be improved indefinitely (the anti-climactic launch of the interim findings of the human genome project being a case in point); there have been no radical breakthroughs in medicine since the great discoveries of vaccination and penicillin – the current emphasis in health care is on promoting healthy living and on preventing ill health particularly the diseases of prosperity: stress and mental illness. But perhaps most significantly of all, and as argued by Sir Richard Layard in work that has become hugely influential in the UK recently in the shaping of social policy, scientific materialism and the economic wealth it has brought about has not made us happy.

With basic needs met for the vast majority of people, even accounting for the current economic climate and the age of austerity, the question now for society is how to achieve wellbeing, to live 'the good life' in spiritual terms. The answer put forward by Layard and other advocates of the happiness and wellbeing movements will have a familiar ring to readers of this report: it prescribes quality relationships, the systematic practice of kindness, meaning and purpose in life, gratitude to others, counting your blessings, and exploiting your strengths rather than attacking your weaknesses. These are the fruits of faith under different headings; old (communion) wine in new bottles some would say. As Layard himself acknowledges: "People who believe in God are happier".

Finding a place for and acknowledging the value of faith and spirituality (alongside other person-centred endeavours and interventions) in services for homeless people is not, therefore, a maverick or reactionary step. Rather, it is an approach that is aligned with this wider social challenge of enhancing happiness and wellbeing. In this report I argue for the need to elicit and listen to the inner voices of homeless people individually and collectively, to see beyond and beneath their presenting needs, to engage with their faith and spiritual identities and to facilitate their development wherever possible through discussion and action. Everyone involved in this endeavour will benefit in doing so. As the Revd Richard

Carter in his Foreword to this report says, there is much that we can learn from homeless people (without wishing to romanticise their experience of loss, tragedy and misfortune). They know from experience that the material comfort and security that so many of us enjoy cannot be taken for granted: they have felt the ground beneath their feet quake, and seen the roof above their head cave in. Many have come through this experience with their faith intact or new-found, or with profound spiritual insights; some have learned to live on less, on next to nothing, in as full a way as is possible to imagine. They have found what the rest of us have lost.

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Appendix.

Interview template for speaking to homeless and vulnerable people about their religion, faith and spirituality

| Part 1: About You | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Theme | Key questions (bold) and prompts / follow-up questions | Person's responses |
| Background / introduction to yourself | 1. How would you describe yourself? (eg introvert / extrovert) | |
| | How do other people see you? | |
| | 2. What are your interests / hobbies? | |
| | What are you passionate about? | |
| | What are you good at doing? | |
| | 3. Who do you spend time with? | |
| | 4. How do you spend your time? | |
| | Describe a typical day | |
| | Describe a perfect day for you | |
| | 5. Looking back on your life, who would you say have been the most important people to you? | |
| | 6. And what would you say were the two or three key events? | |

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Key people and events | 7. When in your life would you say you have felt happy and content? | |
| | 8. And when would you say you have felt less good about yourself, that you are not getting what you want, or that people and life in general is letting you down? | |
| | 9. When you feel low, are there any specific things you do to make yourself feel better? | |
| | Anyone in particular you talk to? | |
| | Any particular thoughts that go through your mind which might cheer you up a little or at least make you feel not so bad about the situation? | |
| The past | 10. At any time in your life, have you had religious beliefs of any kind? | |
| | If yes, could you tell me a bit more what you believed? What was the experience like? If you have stopped believing, perhaps you can tell me a bit more about why and how that happened? | |
| | Were you brought up as a member of a faith or religion? If yes, which one? | |
| | Were your parents or family at all religious? | |
| | Have you ever regularly attended a faith community or a place of worship? | |
| | Have you known any religious people or leaders personally in the past? | |
| | Would you say they made an impact on you, positive or negative? | |

| | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| The present and the future | 11. Would you describe yourself as at all religious now? | |
| | Do you have what you would describe as religious or spiritual beliefs? Tell me a bit more about them, if you don't mind... | |
| | Do you attend a place of worship or a faith group currently? | |
| | When did you last go to a place of worship? | |
| | If you have attended a place of worship, what was the experience like? What were the people like? Did you get anything out of it? Did you feel like going back or were you put off at all? | |
| | 12. Are there any particular moments or experiences in your life that make you think about religion or religious beliefs? | |
| | Do you ever talk about religion or religious belief to anyone? | |
| | Would you mind telling us whom? Could you describe the sort of conversations you have | |
| Close of interview | Finally, is there anything else you'd like to say? | |
| | Can I ask you what you thought of the interview? What did you think of the questions... were they clear, interesting...? | |

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