

HOUSING AND HEALTH STOKE-ON-TRENT



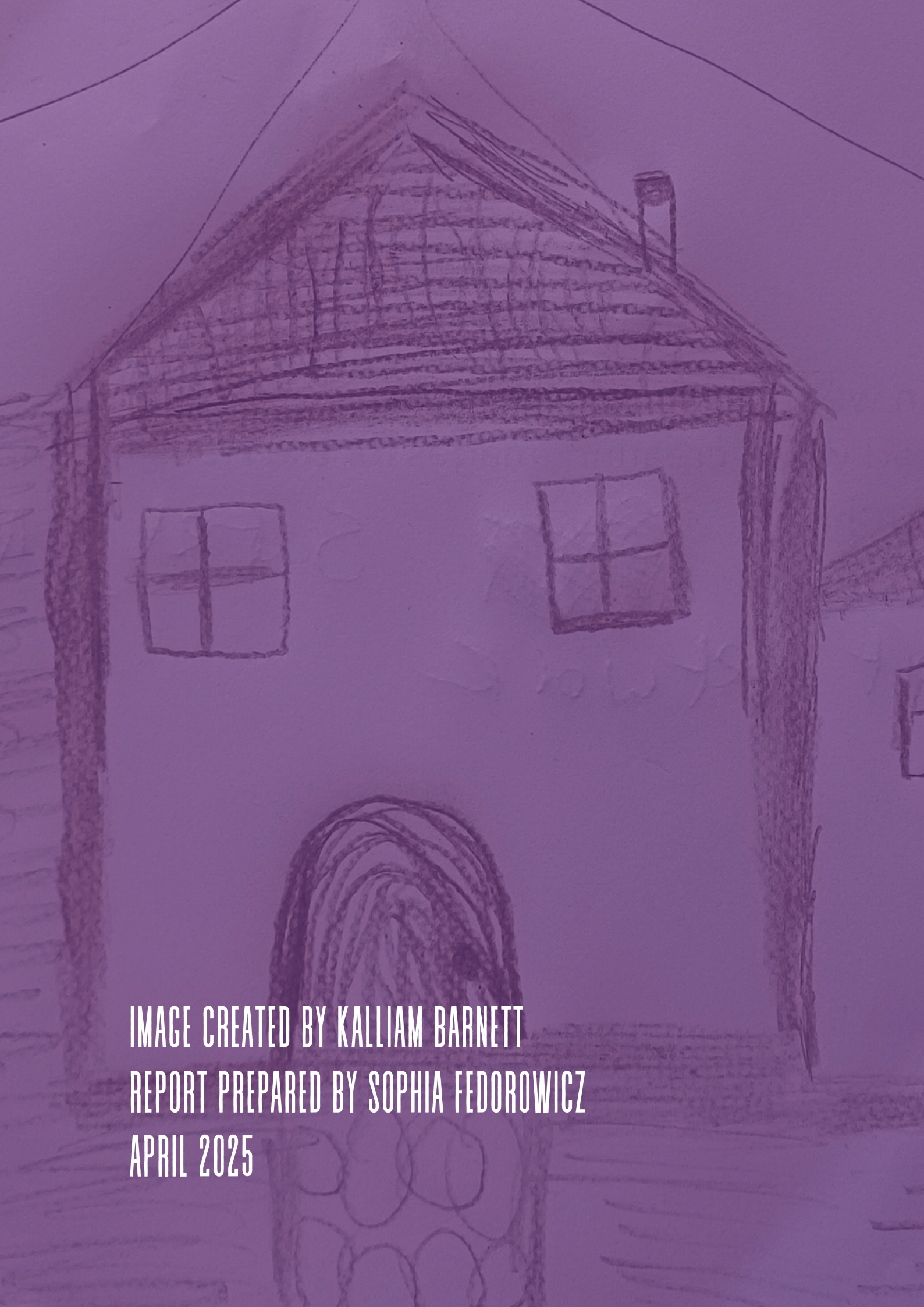


IMAGE CREATED BY KALLIAM BARNETT
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QUICK FACTS

358,370

Households in England who contacted their local authority for support after being threatened with homelessness 2023-24*

126,040

Households in England living in temporary accommodation September 2024*

12,210

Households with children assessed as homeless and owed a relief duty in England between July and September 2024*

75%

Of people experiencing homelessness who took part in a Homeless Link Survey** reported a physical health condition

80%

Of people experiencing homelessness who took part in a Homeless Link Survey** reported a mental health condition

4,667

The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2024***

*[MHCLG's Statutory homelessness in England: July to September 2024](#)

**[Homeless Link's The Unhealthy State of Homelessness 2022](#)

*** [Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024](#)

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HEALTH BEGINS AT HOME

THE IMPACT OF HOUSING ON HEALTH

Health and housing are deeply connected, with safe, stable housing being essential for good health.

Since 2010, life expectancy in England has stalled, while time spent in poor health has risen, especially in deprived areas. Inequalities in education, income, housing, and work conditions drive these health disparities. The worsening housing crisis, marked by homelessness and unhealthy living conditions, has amplified these challenges.

Tackling health inequalities requires addressing social determinants of health through equitable housing policies that foster trust, transparency, and accountability. Affordable, secure, and good-quality housing is foundational for creating healthier, fairer communities.

“WHEN YOU LOOK AT OTHER PEOPLES STORIES, AND HOW THEY ARE PUTTING PEOPLE IN SUCH BAD CONDITIONS, IT’S CHANGED HOW I THINK ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HOUSING AND HEALTH”

PROJECT VOLUNTEER

“We have known for a long time that where someone lives has a huge impact on their health and well-being. People living in more deprived areas or poor housing conditions tend to have worse health than those living in better conditions. And at the most extreme end, people who find themselves homeless and sleeping rough often have many health problems and life expectancy over 30 years below the national average. Much of the research we have done around multiple disadvantage has pointed to housing as a fundamental need that is not being met - either people do not have a stable place to live, or they have some where to live, but it is having a detrimental impact on their health (e.g., unsafe neighbourhood, poor quality housing). Having a home will not solve all their problems, but it might create the conditions in which other good things can happen, and without it, the path to good health is so much harder. That is why Housing First has gained so much attention and, in some countries, become a key part of the solution to improve health through housing.”

Christopher Gidlow
Professor of Health Services Delivery
School of Medicine
Keele University

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'HOMELESSNESS' AND 'HEALTH'?

When we say health, we mean that in its broadest sense. We mean physical health, mental health and social wellbeing. Health is not just the absence of disease or infirmity; it's about promoting overall quality of life.

We are using the Crisis UK definition of Homelessness for this project which includes experiences of:

- Rough sleeping
- Statutory homelessness
- 'Hidden' homelessness which includes hostels, squats or B&Bs, living in overcrowded accommodation or 'concealed' housing, such as the floors or sofas of friends and family
- Being at risk of homelessness (People in low paid jobs, living in poverty and poor quality or insecure housing are more likely to experience homelessness)



“I FEEL VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT HOMELESSNESS AS I HAVE BEEN HOMELESS, I CONSIDER MYSELF STILL HOMELESS. IT’S A MASSIVE PART OF YOUR LIFE AND RECOVERY.”

PROJECT VOLUNTEER

“THE PROJECT HAS HAD A BIG IMPACT ON ME. REALISING I HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN HOMELESS. I DID HAVE A SECTION 21, AND I HAVE SOFA SURFED. YOU DON’T REALISE BECAUSE YOU THINK ‘I’M OKAY TODAY’ AND JUST FORGET ABOUT YESTERDAY”

PROJECT VOLUNTEER

THE WISDOM OF WALKING THROUGH IT

LISTENING TO LIVED EXPERIENCES

Listening to people's lived experiences of insecure housing, homelessness, and health is essential for understanding the real impact of policies, services, and societal attitudes.

By centering people's experiences, we move beyond statistics to create meaningful, person-centered solutions that promote dignity and systemic change. Hearing directly from those affected challenges stigma, and ensures that interventions are grounded in reality rather than assumptions. True progress in addressing homelessness and health inequalities starts with listening to and acting on lived experience.

**"WE'VE LEARNED A LOT
FROM DIFFERENT PEOPLE.
SOME OF IT HAS BEEN
SHOCKING BUT AS LONG AS
THE RIGHT PEOPLE ARE
LISTENING WE CAN MAKE
SOME CHANGES"**

PROJECT VOLUNTEER

"Housing insecurity and homelessness has profound effects on individuals, couples, and families. There are various potential causes at a personal level linked to people's social, physical, mental, and economic wellbeing. These personal day-to-day struggles are often driven by socioeconomic and structural inequalities. For instance, a relationship breakdown can lead to homelessness, causing further psychological, physical, and economic trauma, making recovery from crisis more problematic. Such negative feedback loops make housing insecurity not only a significant personal challenge but also a pressing national crisis.

Expert Citizens emphasises that resolving the housing crisis requires an integrated multi-agency approach, addressing individual needs as well as local and national policies to reduce structural inequalities, recognising housing's profound impact on all aspects of our lives and wellbeing."

Andy Meakin
Director
Expert Citizens CIC

“It is really important that people from different communities have the opportunity to participate in research to ensure that treatments, technologies and services reflect the needs of our diverse population.

The Research Engagement Network Development Programme (REN) aims to increase diversity in research participation through the development of research engagement networks with communities who are often underserved by research, and by ensuring diversity in research is considered across the healthcare system. The REN programme is providing funding to the Housing and Health participation project. This project aligns closely with the ambitions of REN, ensuring the voices of lived and living experience are right at the heart of this piece of work, central to decision making and designing the next steps to ensure the work can be as impactful as possible for the local community.”

Nicki Evans
Research and Innovation Project Manager
Midlands Partnership University NHS
Foundation Trust

**“I THINK THIS PROJECT
IS REALLY EXCITING.
IT’S AN OPPORTUNITY
TO HAVE MY
EXPERIENCES
ACKNOWLEDGED
INSTEAD OF
OVERLOOKED”**

PROJECT VOLUNTEER



SEEING THE STORY

CO-CREATING MEANING

Participatory, creative methods allow people to have greater control and choice around how they share their lived experiences and perspectives. This approach can build relationships, challenge assumptions and promote social change.

Participatory approaches emphasise collaboration between communities, researchers, and organisations, seeking to share knowledge, skills, and solutions. Together, people taking part can create the conditions to empower each other by working together as peers, building stronger partnerships and identifying actionable outcomes.

Participatory drawing and collaging are creative, inclusive methods that enable individuals to express experiences, emotions, and perspectives visually. These approaches foster collaboration, storytelling, and reflection. By engaging participants in meaning-making, they reveal personal and collective insights, challenge dominant narratives, and inspire social change.



THE PATH WE TOOK

OUR PROJECT

Expert Citizens collaborated with partners from:

- Keele University
- Centre for Health and Development (CHAD, University of Staffordshire)
- Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust

To involve people with lived experience of homelessness and being at risk of homelessness in a public engagement project using creative methods to explore how housing impacts on health.



PROJECT AIMS

Involve

To involve people with lived experience of homelessness and being at risk of homelessness in a public engagement project about housing and health

Guide

To let this process guide us to what the priorities should be for our partnership and what the next steps should be for our work together

Explore

To explore using creative and participatory methods to grow our understanding of how housing impacts on our health

WHAT DID WE DO?

Twenty-one people from Stoke-on-Trent took part in this public engagement project.

Over eight sessions spread across three months, Expert Citizens supported people taking part in the project to develop their ideas for visual story telling using photographs, found images, collages, drawings and model making to represent our feelings and experiences of housing and health.

Expert Citizens hosted:

- Six participatory creative sessions with people with lived experiences
- Two workshops with people with lived experience and partners from Keele University, Centre for Health and Development (CHAD, University of Staffordshire) and Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust

Activities included:

- Capturing our experiences with photographs and found images
- Drawing representations of our 'Blue sky' homes and communities
- Collaging elements of the home that are important to us
- Making a models of our ideal neighbourhood

PROJECT METHODS

Who

21 people with lived experience of homelessness and being at risk of homelessness

3 researchers and 2 project managers

What

6 creative sessions involving photography, collage, modeling and drawing

2 workshops looking at themes and sharing experiences

How

Using creative, participatory approaches, in a nonjudgmental, flexible and trauma conscious space

OUR COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

This section presents community insights on housing and health. These images and stories highlight personal realities, uncover hidden challenges, and amplify experiences often unheard, offering a deeper understanding of how housing shapes health and well-being.

At the heart of these insights are two deeply felt themes: the need for safety, and the importance of access to essentials, services, and spaces that help to support our health and wellbeing. Together, these stories invite us to see housing not just as shelter, but as a foundation for dignity, connection, and the chance to thrive.

THEMES FROM STOKE-ON-TRENT

Safety

The importance of psychological and physical safety. To be able to control your own front door, and to *know* that you are safe.

Access

To have access to cooking and laundry facilities, showers and privacy in the place where you live. To be able to access your loved ones and community.

SAFETY

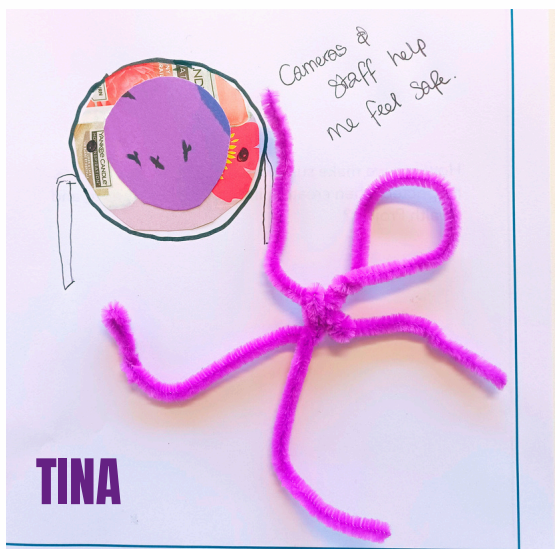
A SECURE BASE FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

People created images that represented the presence or absence of feelings of safety. Psychological safety was often linked to the certainty of being able to lock your door or knowing that security cameras and staff were watching over you, providing a sense of control and reassurance. On the other hand, physical safety was compromised by things like missing back gates or steep verges outside the home.

These images reflect the complex ways in which both psychological and physical elements shape our sense of security, highlighting that true safety is not just about physical barriers but also about the emotional and psychological space that allows people to feel protected.



“My back gate has needed fixing for years. People go round the side of my house. The pub behind my bungalow creates a lot of noise. I don’t feel safe sometimes.” BRIAN



“I feel secure in my property as I have control and can lock my door. I have warmth and space.” CAROL

TAMMIE



**“I have fallen outside my home before. The grass verges are dangerous.”
- TAMMIE**

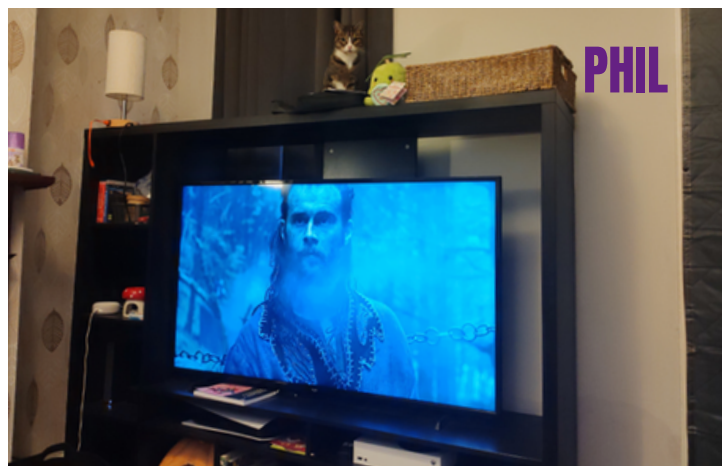
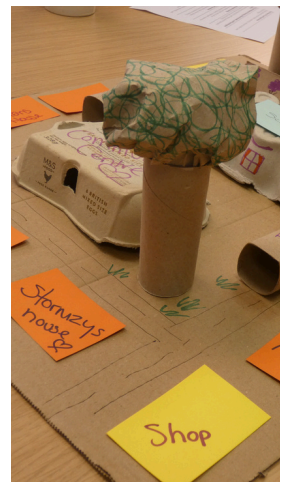
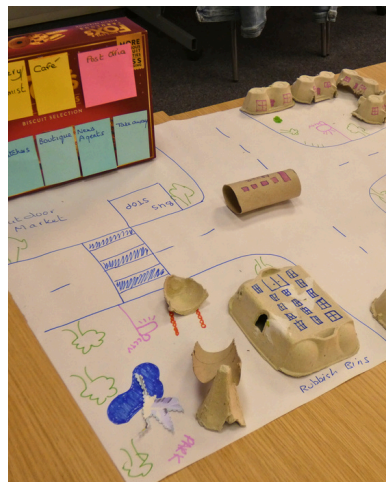
ACCESS

THE ESSENTIALS THAT SUSTAIN HEALTH AND DIGNITY

People created models of their ideal neighbourhoods, adding things they wanted to have nearby like barbers, food shops, and other everyday essentials so they could access them easily. Every model included a green space, showing how important nature and open areas are to people's sense of a good place to live.

People shared their experiences of rough sleeping and staying in hotels as temporary accommodation, where they often didn't have access to cooking or laundry facilities. These discussions, which also touched on the theme of safety, naturally led to comparisons with their current situation where they now have a place to sleep, cook, and do laundry. More importantly, they emphasised the significance of having access to, and the right to, privacy.

There were much broader concepts involved in some people's experiences, such as having access to the family home, and 'access' in terms of being allowed to see their children again.



MALCOLM

“You should be able to cook, clean and do laundry in these places. People are being set up to fail.

You can become homeless at any time. People are just a paycheck away.

I chose these pictures thinking about how much my life has changed. The influence of positive people around me. Expert Citizens have helped me to achieve what I have achieved now. They have helped me to stop using drugs and without them I would still be homeless.”



JUDE

“[This] is the wall I used to hide my booze in as my ex binned it when he found it in the house, then our garden so I had to branch out! It’s the first time I have been back since I have been sober, I really don’t know what I was thinking/doing. My youngest son who is 12 came with me and I was explaining then and now, me and him happy and seeing him at weekends and school holidays. Now I am finally allowed to see him again. What a journey”

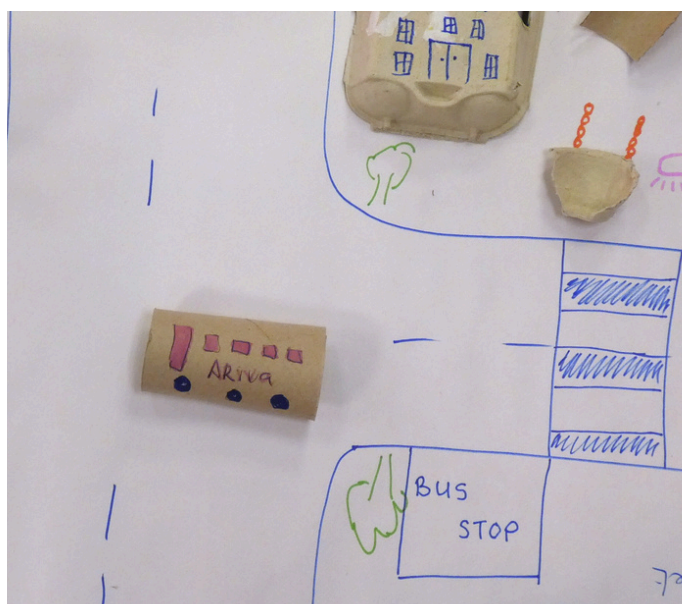
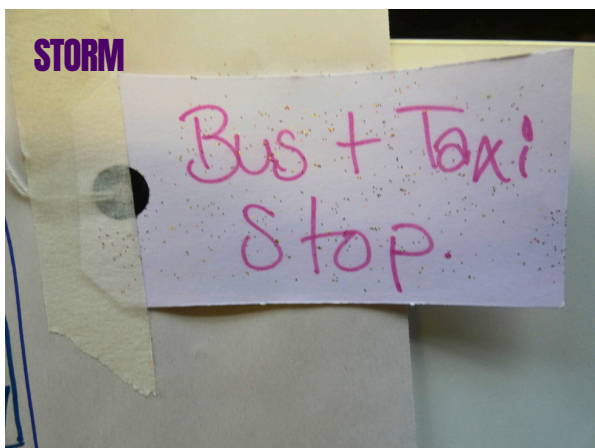


PUBLIC TRANSPORT AS A PATHWAY TO INCLUSION

Unreliable public transport caused significant stress for people who relied on it to get around the city for essential activities like accessing food shops, attending doctors appointments, and fulfilling social or work commitments. Some lived in areas where buses stopped running after 6 pm, making it difficult for them to have an active social life because they couldn't easily get home. This lack of reliable transport contributed to feelings of loneliness and isolation. When people thought about what they wanted in their neighbourhoods, transport was a key consideration. A reliable public transport system was included in every model and drawing of an ideal neighbourhood, reflecting its importance in creating a connected and accessible community.



“I have mental health issues and physical health issues. Unreliable transport means isolation, loneliness and being unable to engage with services.”
TAMMIE



A FINAL THOUGHT

This public engagement project has offered us a deeper understanding of the link between our housing and our health. Through the sharing of experiences and stories, it became evident that physical and psychological safety are essential for well-being. Accessibility to the things that we need, and the ability to move freely around our communities, emerged as central to creating a sense of connection and purpose. The need for reliable public transport was highlighted, as it allows people to thrive and remain independent. These themes are more than just points of discussion; they are the building blocks of healthier, happier lives.

It is clear that our neighbourhoods and communities are as important to our health as the bricks and mortar of our homes. As we reflect on these findings, we are reminded that creating spaces where safety, accessibility, and connection are prioritised is the key to supporting the health and well-being of all.



TAMMIE

“I think it’s vital that housing and health are integrated. The two are intricately linked”

Project volunteer



EXPERT CITIZENS CIC

Expert Citizens are a community interest company built by and for people with lived experience. We exist because we care about people and the world we live in.

Our belief is that we can make a difference and that everyone has potential. We understand that everyone has an individual experience and treat each other with respect and dignity. Everyone is welcomed with kindness, humility, and love. We challenge perceptions through honesty with ourselves and each other. Our belief is that fun is a key part of relationships and helps to build trust, creativity and openness.

Our goal is that systems are led by the people they are designed to serve for the collective interest of society.

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WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT