Peter McVerry Trust

Opening doors for homeless people

Educational Gaps and Future Solutions

A study of the holistic educational needs and experiences of a sample of homeless men in Dublin aged 18-38 Years

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DCU

An tIonad Míbhuntáiste Oideachasúil
Educational Disadvantage Centre

About DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre

Located within DCU's Institute of Education, the Centre's purpose is to highlight the implications of social and economic exclusion in education across education and related sectors in Ireland and internationally.

The Centre's mission is to promote equality in education and to contribute to the shaping of teacher education, so that the cycle of socio-economic and educational exclusion is broken. The Centre aims to contribute to best practice in national and international policy and practice regarding social inclusion and equality in education.

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• Continuing Professional Development

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Abbreviations

ABC	Area Based Childhood initiative
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
GP	General Practitioner
HAPS	Housing Assistance Payment Scheme
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
JLO	Juvenile Liaison Officer
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PE	Physical Education
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate course
PMVT	Peter McVerry Trust
SCP	School Completion Programme
Tusla	Child and Family Agency
WHO	World Health Organisation

SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Introduction

The objectives of this study were to review the educational experiences of young men aged 18-35 years who are currently living in Peter McVerry Trust homeless accommodation. The age range was later expanded to 18-38 years. While there has been significant research on the experiences of homeless children and families, there is a relative dearth of information available about the experiences of this cohort of young men. That is in spite of this age group and gender making up the single largest cohort of homelessness in Ireland. This demographic also constitutes the main group accessing Peter McVerry Trust's homeless services in Dublin.

Figures from The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Homelessness Report for July 2019 details record levels of homelessness in Ireland, with a total of 10,275 individuals living in emergency accommodation, including 6,497 adults, 1,721 families and 3,778 dependents.

Data provided in the Homeless Quarterly Progress Report and July Report on homelessness (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2019) indicate that rates of homelessness for adults, not living with dependents, has increased by over 50% from December 2014 to July 2019. Within this group, adults aged 18-24 experiencing homelessness in Ireland has increased by over 93%, from 477 to 905 individuals within the same period. Current figures suggest that 64% of young people, aged 18-24 years, who are officially accessing homeless accommodation, are within the greater Dublin region. However, rates of homelessness for young adults continues to steadily increase across Ireland, with homelessness figures for those aged 18-24 years and living outside the Dublin region doubling since December 2014.

While current figures and demographic data provide an indication of the alarming extent of the homelessness crisis, there is a need to understand the childhood experiences and current contexts of young men who are at risk of and experiencing homelessness in order to inform coordinated supports and preventative strategies across Ireland.

Research Aims and Objectives

This study considers the diverse voices and lived-experiences of young men aged 18-38 years who are availing of homeless supports provided by Peter McVerry Trust. It explores and provides insight into their historical experience of schooling, in terms of educational access and participation, and supports or lack thereof their learning and development needs, as well as considering their current training and educational needs and barriers and challenges in relation to these.

The research aims and objectives are:

1. To review evidence-informed research that supports positive educational experiences as a preventative factor for those at risk of homelessness.
2. To consider the lived experiences of young homeless men aged 18-38 years availing of emergency or temporary accommodation with Peter McVerry Trust.
3. To document participants' experiences of the education system and how it responded to their educational and social-emotional needs.
4. To provide clear recommendations and achievable solutions that will inform existing supports and preventative strategies for young men at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in Ireland.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach and comprised of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gain information on the educational experiences of men aged 18-38 years currently living in Peter McVerry Trust accommodation who had attended primary and secondary school in Ireland.

Sample

The study was conducted in the Dublin region, and recruitment was supported by staff from Peter McVerry Trust. Recruitment was supported by engagement and with service users supported by key-workers. This included conversations, provision of information leaflets and posters displayed in day services and accommodation sites in Dublin. Convenience sampling resulted in a non-probability sample of 51 male participants, aged 18-38 years, who were interested in the study and available to participate in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. While the sample does not claim to be representational of the total cohort, it accounts for 29.6% of 172 male service users aged 18-38 years currently availing of temporary or emergency accommodation with Peter McVerry Trust.

Key Findings

The key findings of this report are:

- Reduced access and participation in education with high rates of early school leaving, suspension, expulsion, practice of detention and school transition

- Significant differences between reported experience of participants' time at primary and secondary school

- High levels of adverse childhood experiences across the sample including significant over-representation of adults who have experience as children in care and the need to consider the holistic educational needs of children and young people in care

- Lack of adequate emotional counselling and therapeutic supports in and around schools

- Experiences of social isolation, bullying and poor relationships with peers and school staff

- The need for more integrated supports at community level to address educational and other needs, including emotional supports

- The impact of teaching, both in supportive relational and alienating authoritarian roles, on participants' educational and overall school experiences

- Limited access to assistance and additional support for special educational needs

- Appeals for supportive school environments that respond to the holistic and learning needs of children and young people

- Ongoing interest and commitment to future training and education opportunities and identification of challenges and barriers to education and employment

Reduced access and participation in education with high rates of early school leaving, suspension, expulsion, practice of detention and school transition

42.9% of participants reported never having been excluded from school; 24.5% said that they had been temporarily excluded in the form of suspensions; 12.2% had experienced multiple or 'rolling' suspensions; and 18.4% reported having been permanently excluded or expelled from school. According to the latest national figures, there were 167 expulsions nationally for the 2016-2017 period, amounting to 0.048% of the population. There were 35 expulsions nationally in primary school in 2016-2017, up from 19 in 2014-2015 (Millar, 2018). In terms of reasons for exclusions, 65.5% of permanent exclusions were due to non-violent behaviour; 37.9% were due to difficult relationships with teachers; 27.6% were due to poor attendance and 27.6% were due to violence towards others in school. Sixteen questionnaire participants experienced detention after school or during break almost every day or once a week at primary school. At secondary school, 21 questionnaire participants experienced after-school detention almost every day or once a week.

Significant differences between reported experience of participants' time at primary and secondary school

When asked about their overall experience of primary school, 72% said that it had been excellent, very good or good and 28% fair or poor. Participants cited sports, friends, play time, learning and one to one time with teachers as their favourite things about primary school. When asked about their overall experience of secondary school, there was a marked decline in perceptions with 46.9% saying that it had been excellent, very good or good and 53.1% saying that it had been fair and poor. There was a similar decline evident in participants' perceptions of their learning and achievement, their ability to complete homework, their attendance, their parents' involvement and their relationships with teachers between primary and secondary school.

High levels of adverse childhood experiences across the sample including significant over-representation of adults who have experience as children in care and the need to consider the holistic educational needs of children and young people in care

A total of 34 of 50 questionnaire participants indicated that they had experienced 'traumatic childhood events'. As mentioned in the section on literature, there is an increasing acceptance in research of the significance of the experience of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), in particular multiple experiences of ACEs, resulting in heightened risks for issues in later life, including homelessness, as well as lowered outcomes for children and young people. While the questionnaire did not ask participants to identify the nature or frequency of trauma, a number of participants offered examples including; domestic violence, exposure to suicide, bereavement, family breakdown, living in persistent poverty and parental separation. These experiences were often linked to educational difficulties and risks behaviours including; difficulty concentrating, drug and alcohol use and reduced school attendance. 14% of participants had been in residential or foster care and spoke of significant adverse experiences which had negatively impacted on their education and capacity for learning and concentration. Increased transitions between schools can also be an issue for this vulnerable group. A further 4% of participants were raised by extended family.

Lack of adequate emotional counselling and therapeutic supports in and around schools

It was clear from the questionnaire and interview data that emotional supports in schools had not been sufficient to their needs and this is an area that needs significant development and investment.

Experiences of social isolation, bullying and poor relationships with peers and school staff

Thirteen questionnaire participants experienced bullying almost every day or once a week at primary school. Eighteen questionnaire participants experienced verbal abuse almost every day or once a week. Ten questionnaire participants experienced isolation every day or once a week. While at secondary school, 22 questionnaire participants said that they had experienced depression; 23 had experienced anxiety; 30 had experienced difficulties in concentrating; 18 experienced feelings of isolation or loneliness; 32 had experienced traumatic childhood experiences, including parental separation, bereavement or trauma; 17 experienced bullying and 15 had a learning difficulty.

Integrated support needs

There is clearly a key role for One-Stop-Shop Community Lifelong Learning Centres to address difficulties and challenges of engaging in education, maintaining employment and accessing services.

The impact of teaching, both in supportive relational and alienating authoritarian roles, on participants' educational and overall school experiences

Participants mentioned teachers as having the potential to create a positive experience for them at school and conversely also shared stories of difficult relationships with teachers. As mentioned above there was a marked decline in participants' perceptions of their relationship with teachers once they transitioned to secondary school. In particular, there were issues raised about cultural awareness training for teachers and the need for enhanced conflict resolution practices in schools, especially at post-primary school level, which equip teachers to look at the circumstances of the child or young person to develop tailored and appropriate responses.

Limited access to assistance and additional support for special educational needs

Participants reported a lack of access to additional support for special educational needs including learning difficulties, social and emotional development, and behavioural needs within school and community settings. The data from the questionnaire and interviews also indicates a lack of support for children regarding homework. There is significant research to suggest that provision of wrap around services such as homework clubs and after-school improve children's attendance, sense of belonging and academic achievement (Cemalcilar, 2010; Morrison et al, 2000).

Appeals from participants for supportive school environments

Participants called for more social, emotional education, relevant, meaningful drug prevention education about the consequences of using drugs, and a life skills curriculum which would include more practical learning and life skills.

Ongoing interest and commitment to future training and education opportunities and identification of challenges and barriers to education and employment

79.1% of participants in the questionnaire said that they would be interested in further education or training. When asked about the barriers that they face in terms of participating in future education or training participants cited their current lack of permanent accommodation as the main barrier, including their physical environment and having to share with others, which was not conducive to studying or maintaining a normal routine for training and employment.

Participants also mentioned addiction and drug use as a barrier, as well as physical and mental health issues and communication difficulties, including depression and autism, and a lack of qualifications and sufficient financial resources to obtain these.

The above findings are discussed in the report in terms of current policy, strategies and service provision.

Recommendations

Recommendations for policy makers are informed by the findings from the lived experiences of these men and their reported experiences of education in Ireland. The seven key recommendations of this report are as follows:

1. Provide a distinct funding strand for adequate emotional counselling and/or therapeutic supports in and around schools to support children and young people experiencing trauma and adverse childhood experiences to support the mental health needs of these vulnerable students

For the Department of Education and Skills to provide a distinct and dedicated funding strand for adequate emotional counselling and/or therapeutic supports in and around schools to support trauma, mental health needs of vulnerable students, including students at risk of early school leaving, homelessness, family bereavement, suspension and expulsion, bullying victims and perpetrators, as well as children in care.

Doing so will need to address the significant gaps on this key issue across a range of Department of Education and Skills' National Strategies and Action Plans, such as DEIS 2005 and 2017, Wellbeing and Anti-Bullying Strategies. Strategies for prevention and early intervention should include a coordinated response to children and young people at risk of exclusion from education, both temporary and permanent, as well as early school leavers. Specialist psycho-social and emotional supports for children must be provided by appropriately trained and accredited emotional counsellors and therapists. These specialist emotional counsellors and therapists are required for this level of complexity of emotional needs and sustained supports, as part of an early intervention strategy to prevent problems amplifying.

2. Provide additional Multidisciplinary Team Supports in and around schools to provide alternatives to suspension and expulsion

For the Department of Education and Skills to:

   i)   Set a target that no school suspend or expel students but instead provide
          Multidisciplinary Team supports for these students.

This increased funding needs to occur at primary school level, as well as post-primary, given that many students are experiencing issues at primary school and the instance of suspension and expulsion at primary school level. This strategic acceleration of focus and investment on Multidisciplinary Team supports in and around schools as alternatives to suspension or expulsion is to recognise that the high prevalence of suspension and expulsion from school for this vulnerable group at risk of homelessness is displacing and accentuating one problem to other levels. It is vital to recognise that the current national rates of suspension and expulsion, though decreasing slightly, are unacceptable.

ii)   Provide increased funding for Multidisciplinary Team supports in and around schools as alternatives to temporary or permanent exclusion. This should include enhanced funding for the National Council for Special Education [NCSE] to support the inclusion of children and young people at risk of marginalisation owing to behavioural or emotional needs and needing emotional counselling and/or therapy supports in and around schools.

3. Provide and lead a strategic commitment to enhanced focus on conflict resolution skills for secondary teaching in Initial Teacher Education and continuing professional development to upskill schools in responding to children's social, emotional and behavioural needs

For the Department of Education and Skills to provide and lead a strategic commitment to enhanced focus on conflict resolution skills for secondary teaching in Initial Teacher Education and continuing professional development. This should also include the development of whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing and strategic commitments to trauma-informed practice and conflict resolution skills in primary and secondary schools, particularly in areas of socio-economic marginalisation. This will require ongoing collaboration between the DES, the HEA and the Teaching Council in further developing this reform agenda across Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Providers, as part of the Teaching Council's review of ITE provision and its Cosán framework for teachers' learning.

4. Establish a distinct funding strand to develop Community Lifelong Learning Centres, integrated with Multidisciplinary Teams, as one-stop-shops for meeting diverse holistic educational needs, including for young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness

For the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills to develop a distinct funding strand to develop Community Lifelong Learning Centres, integrated with Multidisciplinary Teams, as one-stop-shops for meeting diverse holistic educational needs in an integrated way, including complex needs of young people and adults who may be vulnerable and marginalised.

Benefits of these community spaces for homeless men and women include:

- Offering space to study that is not available in PMVT accommodation, in environments to provide privacy and a sense of security with flexibility as a 'drop in' space. A homeless liaison officer for public libraries to encourage people to use these services for study could also be considered in this regard

- Supporting pathways to education, training and work, including individually tailored career advice and planning

- A reduction in social isolation and expansion of social networks that bolster self-esteem and motivation, and reduce the difficulties of boredom, sadness and isolation identified by study participants

- Keep people's confidence and morale higher if not successful in gaining work through mentoring supports and also to challenge fatalism that is associated with risk behaviours generally

- Supports for siblings at risk of homelessness as part of an integrated support approach

- Opportunities to improve self-confidence, efficacy and self-care while addressing negative self-perception and low self-esteem associated with homelessness and risk behaviours

- Family support for those experiencing homelessness, including the provision of safe, stimulating spaces for visitation, parent-child play and interaction, as well as integrated supports for family members who may also be experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness

- Availability and accessibility of advocacy, advice, emotional counselling and therapeutic supports, including screening and referral pathways for healthcare needs such as access to addiction and mental healthcare services

One pathway for such a distinct funding strand for these Community-Based One-Stop-Shops is through expanding the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Initiative, funded by the DCYA, to include a stronger anti-poverty focus and sustained system supports approach for complex needs beyond simply pre-packaged programmes. A further rationale for these Community-Based One-Stop-Shops is to address fragmentation of service provision supports and minimise costs of increasing rents in Dublin by placing these services as co-located with a common framework of goals.

5. Establish an Interdepartmental National Expert Advisory Group to develop a National Strategic Action Plan for meeting the holistic educational needs of children and young people in care

For the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills to immediately establish an Interdepartmental National Expert Advisory Group to Develop a National Strategic Action Plan for meeting the holistic educational needs of children and young people in care.

Adults who have been children in care are clearly overrepresented in the population of homeless men in Dublin and this requires consideration as part of this national strategic response across the DCYA and DES**.** With no DES or DCYA national strategy in place for this group, there is a glaring gap in strategy at national level for schools to meet the range of holistic educational needs of children in care. The State, as corporate parent to children in care, has a responsibility to ensure that supports are prioritised to facilitate these children and young people to reach their full potential (DCYA, 2004). At present there is a clear and pressing need for the immediate establishment of an Interdepartmental National Expert Advisory Group, jointly led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills, to identify, document and provide a meaningful response and supports to the social, emotional, educational and housing needs of children and young people (aged 0-24 years) with experience of state care.

6. Increase focus on Social, Personal, Health Education (SPHE), in particular social and emotional development education, meaningful drug education and life skills

For the Department of Education and Skills to develop and devote more time on the primary and post-primary curriculum to SPHE (Social, Personal, Health Education), including an increased focus on social and emotional education, relevant, meaningful drug prevention and education and life skills. The Department of Education and Skills should request the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] to examine the experience and reality of Social, Personal, Health Education [SPHE] curriculum delivery in primary and post-primary

schools across different age levels. Given the repeated appeals of this sample for these issues to be addressed in school, this must include an awareness and understanding of local and national issues related to social and emotional wellbeing, the development of meaningful life-skills and evidence-informed approaches to drug education and prevention. All actions and activities must be aligned with the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018) especially the new key competence Personal, Social and Learning to Learn, which highlights the importance of this curricular dimension internationally and aims to develop quality, future-oriented education and training tailored to students' needs.

7. Explore ways of providing accommodation for young men which addresses the heterogeneity of this group and is conducive to studying and maintaining employment, as well as the provision of education and training opportunities where appropriate

For Peter McVerry Trust to explore ways of providing accommodation for young men which addresses the heterogeneity of this group and includes provision of accommodation conducive to studying and maintaining employment, as well as education and training opportunities where appropriate. This could include accommodation with individual rooms or lower numbers of men sharing rooms in smaller units with access to internet facilities and quiet, communal spaces which could be used for studying. Particular consideration should be given to accommodation and communal spaces for those who are co-parenting, seeking a return to education and employment, as well as those seeking support for drug and alcohol addiction.

In relation to the current study, a significant number of participants expressed an interest and commitment to further education, training and employment. It was reported that at times it was difficult to maintain employment or continue education when living in emergency and temporary accommodation owing to; a lack of availability of affordable and accessible public transport to and from work or college, a lack of dedicated spaces for study, and disruption to restful sleep owing to shared accommodation spaces and required safety checks throughout the night. Where possible, Peter McVerry Trust should consider developing temporary accommodation and supports for the diverse needs of their service users, including needs relating to education and employment. This approach could potentially be further developed to include families experiencing homelessness to cater to the educational needs of children in homeless accommodation.

SECTION **1**

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 National context

Figures from The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Homelessness Report for July 2019 details record levels of homelessness in Ireland, with a total of 10,275 individuals living in emergency accommodation, including 6,497 adults, 1,721 families and 3,778 dependents. While there has been significant research on the experiences of homeless children and families, there is a relative dearth of information available about the experiences of this cohort of young men. That is in spite of this age group and gender making up the single largest cohort of homelessness in Ireland. This demographic also constitutes the main group accessing Peter McVerry Trust's homeless services in Dublin.

Figures provided in the Homeless Quarterly Progress Report and July Report on homelessness (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2019) indicate that rates of homelessness for adults, not living with dependents, has increased by over 50% from December 2014 to July 2019. Within this group, adults aged 18-24 experiencing homelessness in Ireland has increased by over 93%, from 477 to 905 individuals within the same period. Current figures suggest that 64% of young people, aged 18-24 years, who are officially accessing homeless accommodation, are within the greater Dublin region. However, rates of homelessness for young adults continues to steadily increased across Ireland, with homelessness figures for those aged 18-24 years and living outside the Dublin region doubling since December 2014. While current figures and demographic data provide an indication of the alarming extent of the crisis, there is a need to understand the effects and potential impact of homelessness and other risk factors on young men currently experiencing homelessness.

While Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (2016) details commitments to increase the supply of stable housing as the solution to homelessness, there has been little progress in the provision of suitable, sustainable housing, particularly for single adults. In addition to housing-led solutions, there is also a pressing requirement to develop preventative measures, particularly for young people at risk of adult homelessness. This includes careful consideration of individual risk and protective factors including childhood experiences that increase vulnerability to homelessness, with a focus on the holistic educational needs of this group.

1.2 Policy commitments

In 2014, the Government set a child poverty target as part of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures policy framework for children. This target is "to lift over 70,000 children (aged 0-17 years) out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level" (DCYA, 2014: 12). In 2016, there were around 141,700 children in consistent poverty, 34,700 more than when the target was set. The poverty target under the **National Action Plan for Social Exclusion 2007-2016**, also stated that the 'national social target for poverty reduction', was to "reduce consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 as an interim target and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.2%". This was followed by the **Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017**. Based on the commitment in the 'A Programme for a Partnership Government 2016', the government has committed to 'developing a new integrated framework for social inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty'.

The **Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)** was launched in May 2005. This, together with the DEIS 2017 National Action Plan, is the main Irish policy initiative to address early school leaving and educational disadvantage. The DEIS review process identified a gap in terms of supporting vulnerable groups and the DEIS Plan 2017 has a renewed focus on measures to improve attendance, participation and

retention of Travellers, Roma and other students at particular risk of poor engagement with education and early school leaving.

The promotion of wellbeing is outlined in the **Action Plan for Education (2016-2019)** which aims to "improve services and resources to promote wellbeing in our school communities to support success in school and life" (DES, 2016: 16). The government has committed to a target that all schools and centres for education will have embedded a **Self-Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process** by 2023, with the development of a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 to direct this process.

1.3 Overview of relevant literature

Previous research on homeless youth in Ireland has noted that within the highly heterogeneous cohort of individuals' experiences homelessness, there are shared experiences of poverty and social exclusion. This includes, family homelessness, experience of state care and residential care units, and consistent experiences of childhood poverty (Mayock & Parker, 2017; Parker & Mayock, 2019).

Access and participation in education is acknowledged as a powerful mechanism through which the cycle of cumulative disadvantage can be broken (Power, Whitty and Youdell, 1999:130) and schools have the potential to provide safety, stability and care for children living in poverty and adverse circumstances (Masten, Sesma, Si-Asar, Lawrence, Miliotis, & Dionne, 1997).

At present, there is a growing body of literature which identifies the mediating effect of academic and educational resilience. These studies highlight the importance of protective factors such as school climate (Moore et al., 2018), supportive relationships (Clemens et al., 2018), parental involvement (Masten, 2012) and social competence (Haskett et al., 2016). Careful consideration of such evidence and the individual context and experiences of children, young people and school leavers experiencing homelessness can offer meaningful insight to inform educational provision and supports for those at risk of homelessness.

International research tends to distinguish structural and individual dimensions to homelessness (Shinn, 2010). Homelessness in Dublin operates against the backdrop of a structural housing crisis in Dublin. It also occurs against the background of exceptionally high levels of child poverty in Ireland. The AROPE indicator is defined as the share of the population in at least one of the following three conditions: 1) at risk of poverty, meaning below the poverty threshold, 2) in a situation of severe material deprivation, 3) living in a household with very low work intensity. From 2008 to 2011, the AROPE for children rose in 21 EU Member States. According to Eurostat, the largest increases in the AROPE since 2008 were in Ireland (+11.0 percentage points (pp) up to 2010) and Latvia (+10.4pp). They were closely followed by Bulgaria (+7.6pp), Hungary (+6.2pp) and Estonia (+5.4pp). Child poverty in Ireland was the fastest increase in the EU between 2008 and 2011 and it has increased significantly since then between 2011 and 2014 (see Fig. 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Official National Statistics on Child Poverty Rates 2008-2015 (Department of Social Protection)

Diagram 1: Progress on the child-specific social target

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Children ('000s)	68	97	99	107	125	151	152	139	0	0	0	0	37
Children (%)	6.2%	8.7%	8.8%	9.3%	10.7%	12.8%	12.7%	11.5%					
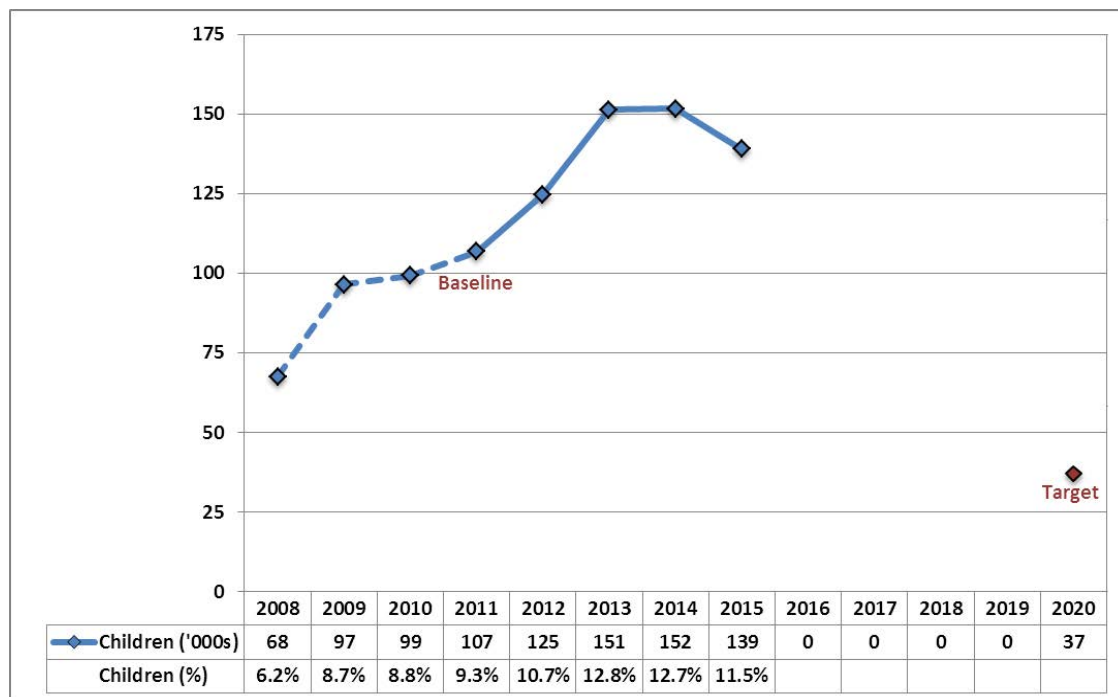
Source: SILC, various years

While recognising the historically unprecedented housing crisis in Dublin, driving up rents and making finding accommodation more difficult than ever for a range of groups and not only groups at higher level of need, together with the child poverty impact on vulnerable children and families across Ireland, the focus of the current study is on the holistic educational needs and experiences of men in homeless accommodation in Dublin. The focus of this report will be to analyse individual needs of the sample of homeless men between 18-38 from a systemic perspective. In other words, this systemic interrogation seeks to overcome the structural-individual divide through examining where systems can be changed to better prevent support vulnerable individuals and groups at risk of homelessness. Building on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems approach, it will examine system failure and system blockages (Downes 2014) in and around school and education providers, as well as systemic solutions. In doing so, it recognises that this is a multi-dimensional issue of need and there is no one size fits all set of needs, risks and solutions.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

This study considers the diverse voices and lived-experiences of young men aged 18-38 years who are availing of homeless supports from Peter McVerry Trust. It explores and provides insight into their historical experience of schooling, in terms of educational access and participation, and supports or lack thereof their learning and development needs, as well as considering their current training and educational needs and barriers and challenges in relation to these.

The research aims and objectives were agreed as the following:

1. To consider the lived experiences of young homeless men aged 18-38 years availing of emergency or temporary accommodation with Peter McVerry Trust.

2. To document participants' experiences of the education system and how it responded to their educational and social-emotional needs.
3. To consider the findings within the context of evidence-based research that supports positive educational experiences as a preventative factor for those at risk of homelessness.
4. To provide clear recommendations and achievable solutions that will inform existing supports and preventative strategies for young men at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in Ireland.

1.5 Outline of the report

The outline of this report is as follows:

Section Two outlines the methodology and research approach, describing how participants were recruited to the study and the ethical principles that informed the research strategy. It provides an outline of the approach to data collection methods and data analysis procedures.

Section Three presents the key findings from the questionnaire and subsequent interviews with participants, including demographic information on family composition, current accommodation and pathways into homelessness, educational experiences, educational risks and supports and aspirations for future education and training and participant recommendations for schools and the government. This section also includes 13 case studies that share the experiences and voice of participants who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Section Four discusses the findings and identifies the commonalities and key themes emerging from an analysis of the questionnaire and interview findings from a systemic perspective. This informs recommendations that may alleviate the negative effects and potential long term impact of homelessness and other risk factors on educational experiences.

Section Five details seven policy level recommendations that can guide a coordinated approach to the educational needs of children and young people at risk of homelessness in Ireland and concludes this report.

SECTION **2**

Section 2: Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

The study is qualitative in design, adopting a phenomenological approach to explore the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of homeless men aged 18-38 years, with respect to their historical experience of education and current learning and training needs. The approach recognises the highly heterogeneous nature of the homeless population and considers the individual 'lived' experiences and unique educational trajectories of participants as well as potential commonalities and collective views on schooling that can inform educational provision and guide the work of agencies and services that support those at risk of, and experiencing homelessness.

2.2 Recruitment and Sampling Procedures

The study was conducted in the greater Dublin region, and recruitment was supported by key-workers working directly with service users, whereby they shared study information and participation requirements through conversations, provision of information leaflets and posters displayed in day services and accommodation sites in Dublin. In addition, two members of the research team attended a 'breakfast morning' at an information and advice centre, to meet and consult with service users and respond to any questions or concerns prior to commencement of the study.

The research team employed a convenience sampling strategy inviting participation from men, aged 18-38 years, who had attended primary or secondary school in Ireland, currently availing of homeless supports provided by Peter McVerry Trust. Service users who expressed an interest in participation were informed of the aims and objectives of the study by their key-worker They were also provided with a plain English statement (Appendix 3), details of participation requirements and the availability of support as required to complete the questionnaire online or in hard copy. Participants were required to confirm their understanding of the study and complete an informed consent form prior to participation in the questionnaire (Appendix 1) and interviews (Appendix 2).

Convenience sampling resulted in a non-probability sample of 51 male participants, aged 18- 38 years, who were interested and available to participate in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. While the sample does not claim to be representational of the total cohort, it accounts for 29.6% of service users aged 18-38 years availing of temporary or emergency accommodation with Peter McVerry Trust. This demographic constitutes the main group accessing Peter McVerry Trust's homeless services in Dublin.

2.3 Data Design and Collection Methods

Prior to the development of the data collection tools, the research team met with three keyworkers and eight men currently availing of homeless supports to discuss the study design and data collection. The discussion asked the service users and key workers to provide feedback on the aims and purpose of the research and make recommendations for the questionnaire design, content and format with respect to their educational experiences and current educational aspirations and training needs. At this focus group, service users made recommendations as to questionnaire completion time and the availability of both online and paper copies of the questionnaire. In addition to their individual perceptions of educational risk, users also indicated that questions related to an explicit measure of childhood adversity (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2015) could result in potential distress to participants, and it was decided not to include such a measure in the questionnaire.

2.3.1 Questionnaire

An 89-item questionnaire (Appendix 4) was developed and administered to 50 participants between 13 May 2019 and 15 August 2019. Twenty-two participants completed the questionnaire online using Google Forms, with access was provided via an email link provided to participants by their key-worker. Twenty-eight participants opted to complete a hard-copy form, with assistance as requested by participants provided by key-workers working within the homeless accommodation sites. The questionnaire took between 25-45 minutes to complete, and included requests for demographic information as well as open-ended questions and Likert Scale ratings of educational access, participation, school climate and learning aspirations. Participants were asked to describe any current or future education and training needs, as well as advice they would offer to the government and key decision makers to improve the lives of young men experiencing homelessness. Finally, participants were asked if they would like to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview to further discuss their educational experiences, with 36 participants expressing an interest in taking part.

2.3.2 Interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 5) was developed as a result of the themes that emerged from the consultation and questionnaire responses from 13 May to 30 June 2019. A total of 13 participants were purposefully selected to represent a sufficient variety of backgrounds and childhood experiences. This included; experiences of government care, addiction, the juvenile justice system. The sample also included participants engaged in employment, or undertaking further education and training, as well as those who are co-parenting while living in homeless accommodation. Twelve of the 13 participants had completed the questionnaire, with one additional participant who had not. Participants were available to attend the interviews between 5 and 23 July 2019. Interviews were completed in a private room at a Peter McVerry Trust advice and information centre and lasted from 11-45 minutes, with an average interview time of 28 minutes.

The interview asked participants to describe their current experience of homelessness including their current accommodation, daily routines, health and wellbeing and supports and services available to them. Using open-ended questions, the interview then explored the participants' experiences of childhood with a focus on educational experiences across primary and secondary education. Key discussion themes included; factors that supported or inhibited academic learning and support, teacher-child and peer relationships, wider school participation and educational aspirations. Participants were asked to consider supports and services that schools should offer to children who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. Finally, participants were asked about their goals and aspirations for the next five years, and the supports required to achieve them.

2.4 Data Coding and Analysis

2.4.1 Questionnaire Analysis

All 50 questionnaire responses were analysed using Google Forms and Microsoft Excel to collate demographic data and provide descriptive statistics of the participant sample. Open-ended questionnaire questions were filtered and manually analysed to identify trends and commonalities in childhood and educational experiences that would be further explored in the semi-structured interviews. Given the significant heterogeneity of the sample it was not deemed appropriate to undertake statistical analysis of responses.

2.4.2 Interview Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. QDA Miner software was used to facilitate re-reading, sorting and retrieval of themes and codes to ensure high levels of agreement among the research team. Analysis was completed, drawing from the six phases of thematic data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Themes were selected based on relevant literature pertaining to educational risks and supports. These included international literature focusing on the links with childhood adversity and intergenerational transmission of risk with adult homelessness (Cutuli et al, 2014) and other qualitative investigations of homelessness (Morell-Bellai et al, 2000). Irish research in this area was also reviewed, including the recent study by Cork Simon on adverse childhood experiences and the connection between early trauma and later negative life events (Lambert and Gill-Emerson, 2017) and research on young people's pathways to homelessness (Mayock et al, 2008).

1. Recording and transcriptions were read and re-listening to by two members of the research team, with ongoing discussion and documentation of key themes, commonalities and areas of divergence.
2. Initial coding of comments and features related to participants' childhood and educational experiences, current training needs and recommendations were applied by both researchers.
3. Comments were collated into proposed themes focusing on thematic mapping of education-related risks and supports, as well as current challenges and needs. A corresponding code-book was developed and jointly agreed by the research team.
4. Initial codes were applied to four interviews by two researchers, with ongoing review and refinement of codes, with use of text retrieval and coding frequency to ensure clear distinction between framework themes.
5. The reviewed and agreed codes across the four thematic areas were then applied to the full data-set of 13 interviews with secondary coding within the four thematic areas and across the different types of educational provision; early childhood settings, primary schools and secondary schools.
6. Finally, coded and categorised text was retrieved and sorted, with export to Microsoft Excel to allow for final analysis alongside demographic information and selection of illustrative examples.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics approval was obtained from the DCU Research Ethics Committee that exists to promote the highest ethical standards in all research at Dublin City University and to ensure all research participants are respected and their rights promoted.

Consideration was given to the protection of participants' physical, social and psychological well-being and researchers were cognisant of the possible poverty, exclusion and trauma that participants' may have had experienced. All methodologies were developed and delivered in such a way as to not further traumatise or stigmatise participants engaging in the process. Within the ethical principles of conducting research with vulnerable populations, an 'ethics as process' approach (Ramcharan & Cutcliffe, 2001) was adopted and remained central to the methodological approach throughout the research. This approach afforded participants the ongoing opportunity to contribute to the data collection methods, negotiate consent to participate, take breaks when and where required and an opportunity to withdraw from the interview any stage.

2.6 Limitations

The sample for this research has been limited to 51 men. The study was not intended to necessarily be representative of either the male residents in Peter McVerry Trust homeless accommodation or the male homeless population in Dublin generally. The sample accounts for 29.6% of 172 male service users aged 18-38 years currently availing of temporary or emergency accommodation with Peter McVerry Trust. As mentioned above, this demographic constitutes the main group accessing Peter McVerry Trust's homeless services in Dublin.

The research has been limited by the fact that participants in the consultations were self-selecting or recruited by Peter McVerry Trust support agency. Convenience sampling has been applied Peter McVerry Trust key workers selected on the basis of participants' willingness and capacity to engage in completing a questionnaire which would take approximately 30-45 minutes. Where there were literacy difficulties key workers were available to assist participants. In this sense, participation in the consultations has been determined by the availability and willingness of participants to share their experiences and it is likely that those with more acute needs or without the necessary concentration to participate are not included in the sample. Given the qualitative nature of the consultations, limitations relating to self-reporting and subjectivity apply, while recognising the importance of subjective perceptions to influence behaviour. Finally, this study has not included consultations with schools and this presents a need for further research.

SECTION **3**

Section 3: Questionnaire and interview findings

This section details the analysis of data from the questionnaire and the one to one semi-structured interviews and presents the findings from these consultations in terms of demographic information, educational experiences, participants' aspirations and suggestions made for young people at risk, supportive schools, and decision makers.

3.1 Introduction

The educational experiences of the men who participated with this study, as well as their wider experiences of homelessness, are extremely diverse and vary significantly in terms of their demographic profile, family composition, social and economic backgrounds, periods of homelessness, and the type and stability of their housing and homeless accommodation. The findings presented below, reflect the responses of the men to questions in both the questionnaire and the interviews which asked them to provide demographic information and invited them to share their experiences of homelessness where they felt comfortable doing so. It should be noted that it was not the purpose of the study to determine length of homelessness and investigate reasons for homelessness. The questions in the questionnaire ask men about the age at which they became homeless and how long they have been living in their current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation. In the interviews men were asked to give more information if they wished to do so, this included elaborating on their history of homeless, how long they had been homeless for and why this had initially happened, as well as their experiences of different accommodation since they became homeless. In many cases, men had stayed with family and friends for a period of time and not considered that they were in fact homeless.

3.2 Findings

This section of the report has been divided into four sections:

1. Sample description including demographic information.

2. Interview case studies compiled from the transcripts of the thirteen interviews with participants.

3. Questionnaire and interview findings discussed under thematic areas.

3.2.1 Sample Description

A total of 50 men, from 13 Adult Emergency Accommodation sites participated in the questionnaire. This was the intended number of participants and men were recruited through Peter McVerry Trust staff. As detailed in the methodology, questionnaire questions were designed in consultation with the target group and a focus group discussing potential questions was carried out with residents in Peter McVerry Trust accommodation and key workers to assess acceptability. Relevant changes were then made to the questionnaire and it was finalised. Training was also provided by the research team to key workers who would be potentially assisting men in filling out the questionnaire where required. It was originally intended that ten case studies would be included in the research with ten participants who had completed the questionnaire. Thirteen men were willing to take part, including one additional participant who did not complete a questionnaire.

3.2.2 Overview of demographic characteristics of questionnaire sample

A summary of demographic characteristics of questionnaire respondents are detailed in the following table. Further information regarding participants' place of birth is included below.

Table 3.2.2: Overview of Questionnaire Participants

Demographic Variable		Frequency	Percent
Age			
	17-24 years	13	26
	35-30 years	14	28
	31-38 years	21	42
	Not stated <38 years	2	4
Ethnicity			
	Irish	40	80
	Irish Traveller	3	6
	African (Nigeria, Somalia, Zimbabwe)	5	10
	White European (UK and EU)	2	4
With whom participant resided as a child			
	Mother only (Single-parent household)	17	34
	Mother and Father	24	48
	Extended family (grandparents and relatives)	2	4
	Residential and/or foster care	7	14
Current Marital Status			
	Single/Never Married	45	90
	In a long-term partnership	1	2
	Married	0	0
	Not stated	4	8
Dependent Children			
	Yes	11	22
	No	39	78
Highest Level of Education Completed			
	Primary Education	2	4
	Secondary Education (Junior Certificate) including out of school provision (Youthreach)	12	24
	Secondary Education (Leaving Certificate)	12	24
	Post-Leaving Certificate Course or Equivalent	19	36
	Vocational or Work-based training inc Fás & Tús	4	8
	Degree or Masters Programme	0	0
	Not stated	1	2
Age at which Full-Time Education Completed			
	14-16 years	18	36
	17-19 years	19	38

	20-22 years	3	6
	22-24 years	5	10
	25 + years	0	0
Current Employment Status			
	Full –time or Part-time employment	6	12
	Student or work training programme	10	20
	Not currently employed (Job Seekers)	28	56
	Not employed due to disability	1	2
	Did not respond	4	8
Age at which participant first became homeless			
	0-18	21	42
	19-24	13	26
	25-30	9	18
	31-38	6	12
	Did not respond	1	2

Table 3.2.2: Overview of Questionnaire Participants

RN= 50 RR=47

Respondents birth place	Number of participants
Dublin 1	2
Dublin 3	1
Dublin 5	2
Dublin 8	3
Dublin 9	2
Dublin 11	11
Dublin 12	4
Dublin 13	1
Dublin 15	1
Dublin 24	2
County Dublin	1
Dublin (area not stated)	8
Connaught	1
Latvia	1
UK	1
Australia	1
Nigeria	1
Somalia	3
Zimbabwe	1

3.3 Interview case studies

Below are case studies from the thirteen semi-structured interviews carried out with men following the completion of the questionnaire. To protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used.

3.3.1 Aidan (Participant 1)

Aidan, aged: 27 years

Aidan is 27 years old and is a father to one six year old child and expecting a baby with his partner. He has been **living on his own since the age of 16 years** due to family breakdown.

At sixteen, I was living in a boarded flat, in the flats…I was living with my family before that, yeah…My mother and father split up, it was just, bad, yeah. Moving, that's what it was, there you go again, moving can break up, can disrupt things.

Since then he has been living in relatives' homes, in hospitals and on the streets. He has been homeless since 2012 and has been living in Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for the last three months.

I went through homeless (accommodation), with my ex-girlfriend, for sixteen months, in a B&B. Living in a B&B, probably, twice the size of this room. Disgraceful…We got through it… but still. You're crammed up in a small place, it's not good for you, mentality wise.

Aidan has completed **training** in IT FETAC levels 3 and 4 and achieved merits. He began studying for spoke of the difficulties in completing this due to being homeless:

I passed, got my merits and all that. Then I followed it up in Marino, went to level 5 and it was through homelessness, I couldn't do it. Doing my studies, living in that box room, with my ex-girlfriend and child, I couldn't deal with my studies. I ended up leaving after six months, which was a waste, after me learning to build websites, HTML, I learned it all, but I never finished it, because I couldn't. The stress.

He has been **working** on and off and has had **approximately ten different jobs in the last two years**. He has been finding it **difficult to keep jobs due to being moved to different services** and spoke of having to recently leave his job due to being moved and having an hour commute with travel costs he could not afford:

It's hard to keep a job, when you're homeless…When you're moving around all of the time. I'm after moving…this is the third different hostel I'm in the last three months.. It's very disruptive. That's why I haven't worked now in about three or four weeks, because since I've moved here, it's just out of my way. I was working in town, now I'm in (another area), it's hard getting in when (before) I'd walk around the corner to my job. I can't even get a bus

He has been working in construction jobs and in manufacturing. He is currently looking for work daily:

Basically, general warehouse work, anything that will take you on.

Aidan left school at 15 years after completing the Junior Certificate. While he enjoyed primary school and enjoyed the social side of second-level school, he lost interest and spoke of getting into trouble through messing and being punished by exclusion:

I just, I don't know, I just lost all interest. It was more messing…It didn't seem to help that teachers used to grab me and put me sitting that way, facing the desk, the board, where all the (others) were behind me. That was in the majority of the classes. That was for about a year, I got that treatment. Then I left, just after my Junior Cert.

Aidan mentions getting additional support in primary school which wasn't continued into second-level.

From growing up, up till second class, I was great...I think at the age of 8, 9, I started to lose interest a bit. I don't know what that was. Just before my confirmation, I started

losing a bit of interest. The teachers took a keen hold of me in sixth class and put me in an extra maths class, to help me. Done that, an extra English class to help me, put me in music to try get my head straight and get me focused on certain things. Had me singing in my confirmation and all so, they had me building up to this, for a year. They kind of helped me in that way…

Aidan said that the teachers in primary school had put him in a photography class for a year and he had really enjoyed this and managed to capture a key event in his community when a tower in Ballymun was demolished:

That's it they just (helped me) with everything. They put me in a camera class…I took pictures of the…tower coming down. The Herald came out to the school and all. They wanted to take them, but my father wouldn't let them, because it was my own pictures. I wouldn't even give them to the school, I still have them framed in the house. Whatever way it came down, in fifteen spots, I got it from starting to (finish)…They were shocked how I got it, I don't know how, it was a real small camera. I was just clicking and it was going brilliant. I still have that in my house, that's there since 2002, 2003…I'm going to hold onto that for years…I loved photography. I love the whole process of going through, taking your own picture, putting them in the red rooms and all that… it was good. There wasn't much that was interesting in secondary school, that was it. That was only for a year, in primary school. There was no follow on to that in secondary school.

Aidan said that in primary school, teachers had expressed concern and that the one to one relationship with teachers had helped this whereas this did not continue to second-level:

In primary, the teachers loved me, in secondary, the teachers hated me. Every teacher.

When asked if school had been a supportive place for him, Aidan said that primary school had been and second level had not been:

Well school can cop, they can see these things, they can notice these things. In myself, teachers probably noticed it, as much as I can remember, I can remember a teacher coming over and asking me was I all right some days. That's good teachers would notice, in primary school. In secondary school, there's no care. There's a group of you. A teacher can say it to the five, six of you, rather than single you out. Do you know what I mean? So I fitted in groups. I got away with things in groups, basically. I got away with a bit of trouble in groups…now, primary school was (supportive), because they could understand you, they're sitting there every day looking at you, one to one, it's broken up then in secondary school. It's too much.

Aidan spoke of being regularly **suspended** during his last year in school, approximately every month, for three days at a time and not having access to home tutoring in that time.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Aidan called for more choices for students in terms of subject choice, more guidance letting young people know of their career options and more parental involvement in schools:

Well they should keep an eye on their students, basically and make sure they're keeping up to date with all the homework. Whereas, no one…had a look at what I was doing but...They should ask. They should bring parents in and actually be out straight…for the child's welfare it should be asked…Me and my ex-girlfriend are split up and my child is going through problems in school. Where she's wetting herself in school, because she's thinking of the trauma that she is going through at the moment, or what she's been though, I don't know yet. I haven't got to the end of it yet, I'm only experiencing this. So…yeah, there

should be more guidance…especially asking parents. Linking in more with parents. You see parents once a year, at parent teacher meeting. There should be three, four, five times a year; keeping on top of things.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Aidan mentioned finding it difficult sharing a room with three other men and that there was often **fighting and stealing** within the house due to a lack of security and the inability to lock their own rooms, despite the fact that he is living in high threshold accommodation free of drugs and alcohol.

Four alpha males in the one room, there's trouble. There you go, the young fella smashed a telly in my room, the other day. He went off the head because people were robbing…someone walked into our room and robbed the Chromecast, that we were only after buying… People who are living in the house are actually robbing us. As I said, it's going backwards…In a high threshold, you think it'd be different…last night I had a packet of crisps on the table. I walked out of my room for five minutes, I came back and the packet of crisps were gone missing on me. I was more angry at the fact that I didn't see who took my crisps. I didn't even check the cameras for a packet of crisps, I'm not going to. So I just left that, but it's still, someone can walk in and pick up anything… Now don't get me wrong in our room, we would share whatever we have. No matter what, anything that comes in, we would share, but we'd ask for it. Whereas, you're leaving stuff down, people are just coming along and swiping it, if they see it. I left my charger plugged into the kitchen yesterday; I came back an hour later to see if it was there, it was gone. Chargers don't cost much…if someone had have asked I'd have given it to them.

Aidan said that he feels like he is living in a prison due to the lack of privacy and the living conditions:

We all feel like we're in prison. There, that's more to add to your study, the house feels like a prison. It's like an open prison, the routine we're in is categorised like a prison. You have your hourly checks, they're coming in, having a look at you every hour. To just check, obviously to check if everyone is in, or everyone's all right, but still, it's like prison. It's what they do in prison, they do hourly checks. And, now the food, you get in a bigger house, is being sent over a day early.

Aidan said that he finds it difficult to cook for himself in a situation where he feels obliged to share what he has with others and for this reason he opts to eat out most of the time:

I haven't ate a proper dinner, in probably about a year and a half, two years. I go out with my girlfriend, now…I haven't actually sat down and cooked my own (food)…We have facilities for it, but you want your own facilities. You want to be in your own place, you don't want to be sitting there cooking and you have someone starving behind you, going can I get some, and you feel sorry for them, you're going to do it, which I've a big heart like that, so I will do that. You don't want to be doing that every day, people feed off your kindness…people take your kindness for weakness, I understand that. So I eat takeouts and stuff.

Aidan said that his experience of being homeless and the stress associated with it had impacted negatively on his **physical and mental health**:

My weight difference. I used to be a lot heavier, than what I am now. I'd weigh, what, about eleven stone whereas, I used to be fourteen stone, before I went homeless…I'm after losing a lot of weight through stress… Through walking the streets. Before I got my hostel, I'd walk the streets…I'd get up at 9, 10 in the morning and you'd be walking the streets until 10, 11 O'Clock at night, just until it gets dark then, to go home, sleep in a tent or whatever…You're out every day. (Even if you're) in a B&B, you're still going out every day, just to pass time. You're out walking all day, because you're sick of sitting in a small room. That's draining, alone, but so is sitting in a room. There's no winning…catch 22. I hear it a lot through the homeless…From where I am now, it's stable accommodation,

but it's not, in, like the right type, you're sharing a room with three other people, I am. There's four men in the one room. It's not an idealistic room, to be living in…Yeah, it's mentally draining. Physically, as well.

Aidan mentioned the **stress of being a parent and maintaining contact with his child** when she cannot visit Peter McVerry Trust accommodation due to the fact that visitors are not permitted in order to protect the confidentiality of other residents:

I'm physically stressed. As well as my child. I try to think of my daughter, I'm only starting to see her again now, because I'm only coming back around to myself, through stress. I couldn't deal with seeing her. I'm starting to get back to a routine of seeing each other again

He also mentioned that his six year old was experiencing difficulties as a result of her experiences of homelessness and the breakdown in his relationship:

She's going through her own problems. She's starting to go the toilet in herself. Starting to cry at night, she's going through nightmares. I've only been told this last week. She's going having nightmares, crying for her father, this isn't a lie. It killed me, hearing this last week, so I took her for the weekend, out to my girlfriend's now. I had a good talk with her and told her. Since then, she's been, coming around a bit. Still she's a six year old girl, to be going through stuff like that. It's not right. She understands…She went through the homeless with me, and then she sees us split and understands. It's hard there, thinking about your kids, that's more problems to add to your homelessness. It's not an easy task.

Aidan also spoke of the need for more **play facilities and spaces for children** in emergency accommodation:

In the B&B we were living in there was no adequate space for kids to be playing in. We had a hall, where the kids could sit out and play with their toys, it was heartbreaking to watch the kids… With a baby as well, yeah, the baby was, she was only one. She knew what was going on. It was a small room, there wasn't much (space) for her to run. If she opened the door, she would have a little landing, that was it, you know what I mean?

Aidan has had **addiction issues** in the past and is now in recovery. Aidan said that drug education should be more comprehensive in schools and more focused on the consequences of taking drugs and the dangers of addiction:

The Garda Síochána would come in (to the school) with their little suitcase of whatever drugs and say "this is bad"…They'd never actually said anything about heroin… They didn't explain the whole, the main big picture, the problems it can bring. The addiction side even…They wouldn't explain the addiction side to you, they wouldn't break it down…enough… (addiction is) the main part...the main addiction problem, they wouldn't explain that to you…(or have) like drug counsellors, who've been (there), (who) know themselves.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Aidan said that there should be more houses built:

I can't say nothing to this government. There is nothing you can tell this government, they won't listen to it. They need a change… There's building going on, but it's all for the private sector, there's nothing. Dublin City council have a lot of land, that they could develop on and they're just selling it away. It's a disgrace. There's not many people know about all of this stuff. They won't open their eyes to it.

Aidan mentioned the water protests and the difference in public support for that issue compared with homelessness:

I done the protest for the water. We shut O'Connell Street down for the water protest. In my eyes, we won, because water is a human right. In my eyes, we won, because no one is paying their water anymore…I'd

love to see it happening again. I've been to a few protests for homelessness, which just aren't as big, we had two thousand people. Whereas, for the water we had nearly sixty thousand people on O'Connell street… it was brilliant. It was like we all came as one, whereas, nowadays there's not many people that's helping in the homeless situation. It'd be more the homeless people helping...It (water charges issue) affected everyone, whereas homeless isn't affecting everyone, so you're not going to have everyone out there, maybe you get some families out helping, but it's not going to affect the general population, who's already in housing. They'd sit there and watch it on the news, rather than come out and protest… (But homelessness is) in every family basically nowadays. It can happen through the banks even, you could be a rich person and they'd take your house off you. It could affect ten people in the house, it could affect six people, it could affect your grandkids and then…you're in a situation like me. It's not only me, it's becoming a thing that's happening, it's becoming the norm, basically.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Aidan said that he would like to be in five years, Aidan said that he would like to be living out of Dublin with a stable home and a stable job:

In the next five years, I want to be out of Dublin…That's my main priority, is to get away from Dublin…The inner city Dublin, the renting it's a crisis…So that, have a stable home, a stable job…My priority is my child.

3.3.2 Michael (Participant 2)

Michael, aged: 24 years

Michael is 24 years old and has been homeless on and off since he was 16 years old.

He has been living in Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for the last six months and before that he was living in other hostels and emergency accommodation in Dublin.

Michael experienced trauma at an early age, losing his mother at four years of age and his father when he was six years old. Both of his parents were addicts and he was born addicted.

I didn't have a happy childhood, family lossage, I lost my parents 20 years ago. Me Da when I was 4, me Ma when I was 6…I was a heroin baby

My family…are very poor. We lived a poor life when me Ma and Da were addicts. All the family were addicts. I'm an addict since I was born. I'm addict the last 24 years. I say I'm 24 years, I'd say 20 years out of the 24 years I'm an addict. It's not nice

He said that this has affected his whole life, including his educational experiences. He was told that his learning difficulties are a result of the trauma he has experienced.

That's why I behaved like I did at school… Like it still affects me like my education now…I still have difficulties. I'm 24 now and still having difficulties. Like I was told by a doctor that I will have lifelong difficulties with learning like the trauma I'm after going through…I can't sit in a class without switching chairs every 5 minutes

Michael completed the LCA. He wanted to be a chef and trained and worked as a chef for two years before leaving due to stress. He has been volunteering as an outdoor pursuits instructor. He has done a Level 3 course in outdoor pursuits and is due to start a follow-on Level 5 course in this area in September.

Michael said that he had one close relationship in primary school, with his SNA

and none in secondary school and that it had not been a supportive place for him. SW spoke of being expelled in primary school due to anger issues and sent to a special school. He was diagnosed with dyslexia.

It was, (at a) very early age the dyslexia and it sort of takes time to build up, like I could be 40 or 50 by the time I get to read properly.

At one stage I just turned around to a teacher and…kicked the chair and knocked her clean out of the chair. I was kicked out of school. I was sent to a special school, all my friends called it a handicapped school. Yeah I was kicked out of school for kicking a chair

Michael found the level of education to be behind the level that he was at and that he became bored and stopped listening.

I didn't like it. I didn't like starting in it… cause the school was slower than the school I was in already that is when I started pulling myself back and not listening…I was in 5th class and the work they were doing was 1st class work. ABCs you know…I was bored… I was miles ahead of people

(Be)cause I have special needs like, cause I know, I know I have like special needs. I need help with my reading and writing but I learn quicker by looking at things being done…I'm a visual learner

He then went to a mainstream secondary for which he was unprepared due to the teaching in the special school. He was put into the **LCA class even though he felt he was capable of studying subjects at higher level** and he wanted to study more subjects. He also wanted to do Transition Year but was not allowed.

I was back…I should have done a normal Leaving Cert but no they put me into an LCA Leaving Cert…I should have done Higher Level Maths in the Leaving…I should have and I wanted to do more subjects…You

never got a say. I wanted to do 4th year but we couldn't do 4th year. I had to skip 4th year.

Michael spoke of not being able to receive any one to one support from teachers and that teachers did not have time to discuss problems that he was having. He had anger issues as a result of his frustration with this and was regularly suspended.

In school if I wanted to go and talk to somebody you'd always get "oh I'm busy, I can't speak to you now, I have to go to a meeting". It was always like I was always (being) refused talking to people…

Like if I was to ask the teacher say if I was to ask you like say Ms. can I go, have free time go out, go to the library or sometime, no, you have to wait. Miss can I have the hall pass to go to the toilet? The hall pass is not there, it's gone. Here's the hall pass there, can I go to toilet? No you've to wait until the class is empty. I was always refused things I wanted to do.

(I was suspended) loads of times. For flipping out. Like asking a teacher could I have help with a Maths question or something like English question or whatever question, Geography or something like that and no cause there is only one teacher in the class no. I'm doing work with the others…

Michael was **bullied** in primary and secondary school. This was linked with not having parents and experiencing poverty but feeling uncomfortable about asking relatives he was staying with for money:

I experienced trauma and bullying. I didn't have a Ma and Da on my side…I was always bullied, told that you don't have a ma, you don't have a Da at home to talk to. You can't go home and ask your Da for money or you can't go home and say to your ma, ma I need a tenner cause my friends are going out to the disco I need a tenner…

Like even nowadays when I go to a friend's house, Ma give us money like will ya? For fuck sake you don't need poxy money.

Respect your ma. If you have a ma, don't go home and ask for money. I don't have that anymore. I barely have a sister at home to talk to.

Yeah. I am sick of saying to all my mates, my mates treat their father and mother with some much little respect. I walk to my friend's house and he was battering his ma, and I was like fucking hell. I had to walk out. I was traumatised. Keep me away from that story cause that's too low.

Michael said that his **attendance** was very poor as he did not want to go to school.

In 6th year I missed 166 days, in junior I missed 200 days. Very poorly. Just never liked school.

In relation to extracurricular activities, Michael said that he used to do street performance:

I can still do fire breathing, fire juggling…

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Michael called for more choices for students in terms of subject choice, teachers who have time to speak with students, more flexibility to help students who have problems and counselling based in schools:

What school should have, they should have more like more ways of dealing with you to help you out. If you have a situation that you need someone to go talk to you should always have the opportunity to go to somebody. Go to your principal and say get a, like I'm after having a bad morning, I don't want to sit in that class. Can I sit out, can I do another class like computers or whatever the next class is? I always said that to him and he was like no…you need to go back in the Maths class. But I don't like (the teacher)…why? Because she's a fucking eejit, she doesn't listen to me. When I ask her for help with a Maths question she is like go try yourself, get a calculator. But I don't know how to calculators. I'm slow in the head. Did you not think of that?

Like schools should have open counselling sessions to do. Like talk to your local counsellor in your schools, sits there for a day, go in and a chat, back out and you feel fresh as a daisy and back in your class.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Michael mentioned having his own room but having people constantly calling in and that there was a lot of fighting and loud noise in the centre which made sleeping and focusing difficult.

Like a lot of people shouting and screaming and banging doors and everyone is going across landings and stupid shit going on… You can't focus. You can't keep your mind settled

You have your own space (room) but people are always on top of you, running into room

Michael said that his experience of being homeless and the stress associated with it had impacted negatively on his **physical and mental health**. He said that his sleep patterns are not what he would like and he mentioned struggling with stress and anger issues:

Routine at the moment is AWOL like cause I sleep until 4/5 in the morning, wake up at 6/7 in the day… Like I'm out of the family, like I'm out of my comfort zone…living in emergency accommodation.

Physical and emotional health is not right at the moment cause the last couple of days I've been really hectic. Like my emotions as well, my emotions are gone up the wall.

Stress levels are high.

I have gone through loads, loads of stress outs like. You know higher stress levels, all it takes for it to happen is that thing just to snap and I see red and I can't stop myself. Happened me on Saturday, on Friday, there was an incident on Facebook that was happening all day but I just can't, cannot, hold my temper back whatsoever…I kick chairs, I boot walls, I punch walls…

Michael said that he had been doing counselling for ten years:

I'm doing counselling about 10 years now. Since I was 14 I'm doing counselling… Like they (the school) would get proper counsellors in and some of them would be…there was one…she'd be alright, but the counsellors at Youthreach, they look like they're listening to you but they're just looking through a pane of glass at you.

Michael has had **addiction issues** and estimates that he has been addicted for 20 of his 24 years. He mentioned a cycle of going on and off drugs consistently.

I am using drugs all my life…like I was a heroin baby when I was young and then ever since knowing what life is I have been using

Ever since I became homeless my life has gone downhill with the drugs. I went off drugs, went on drugs, went off drugs…like a ferris wheel…I step off for a few months and I keep going back to them again.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Michael said that there should be more houses built to get homeless people off the streets:

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Michael said that he would like to have a job working in outdoor pursuits, a house, a girlfriend and kids:

I want to see myself in a property of my own. A house like, working…in the outdoors… probably have a child or two and a girlfriend…a house, settled down and have work.

3.3.3 Conor (Participant 3)

Aged: 19 years

Conor is 19 years old and has been homeless since he was 16 years old. He had been couch surfing for years and spoke of not understanding that he had been homeless:

I didn't even know what homeless was.

He has been living in Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for over a year.

He was abused by his mother and is only in contact with his younger brother and sister now. He does not have any children and spoke of now having to watch his younger siblings suffer and reliving the trauma that he had experienced:

(I) wouldn't have kids after the life I have.

Having seen what's happening to me, what's happened to me…I'm having to relive that life. Watching my little brother grow up, so she's doing what she did to me to him. So it's like reliving the same life twice…and my little sister as well…she's hiding them from me…like any time I go to my ma's to collect something, she's in bed, or she's gone to my dad's, or she gone out to the shop, or a friends or she's never there. My ma always makes sure she's gone by the time I get there. She's evil. I'm telling you she's an evil, evil woman. I'm telling you. I hope she rots where she sits.

I'd never, I wouldn't step foot in that house again…Ever. I'm not going to go near her funeral. Nothing. I'll piss on her coffin. That's what I'll do. That's how much I hate that woman and what she's done to me and what she's doing to my bother. She, here's another thing, she sent them to rehab for six weeks to go off cannabis and coke and other things because she fucked them up. She's the one that's driving to all this. Giving them lies when drunk and then saying, "Oh, I'm going to my friends for the weekend. You go out and find somewhere to stay." Do you know what I mean?..."Go out and find yourself somewhere to stay". And he always goes

out and, where all the lads from (Dublin area) are, like they're out of their head on E and coke and ketamine. You name it…And he's taking it…And he went down to rehab, got out of rehab, moves back in…He's 16…He moves back in with her and what's he doing two days back out? Smoking this straight away. Straight away. Because of the stress… You get dirty looks, you get names thrown at you, you get fucking objects throw at you when I'm making something to eat…I would dance on her into the ground, I'd love that, I'd fucking get pleasure out of it. That's how much I hate her.

Conor wanted to be an architect in school and was skilled at woodwork, drawing and technical graphics.

Conor said that he had **one close relationship in secondary school** with a teacher he describes as a mentor who prevented him getting expelled for some time.

I had a mentor teacher…this teacher was brave, like he stopped me from getting kicked out…Like he'd talk his way around it…He was like a mentor more, he was a teacher when I first joined but then he turned into a mentor when I got higher in the school. But it was nice, he kept me in the school. I would have been fucked out early, long ago.

He was funny he was, he was class…You know what was good about that teacher? He never talked about school. He always talked about something funny, from his life, something about him. Then he'd bring in school work, do you know what I mean, had to have a nice little chat…He had to keep the classroom enforced, get everyone going, get everyone interested in what he's saying and then start bringing out school work.

He was an **excellent student until fourth year**, doing all his homework and doing well in school. As mentioned above, he **wanted to be an architect while at school**.

I was a straight A student till like fourth year.

I was brilliant at drawing, at building, brilliant at practical work…Drawing and woodwork…I got an A in woodwork…I got B in ordinary level tech graphics.

I did my homework by myself because I was great at homework…But I stopped doing it then.

Conor spoke of smoking cannabis before doing his Junior Certificate exams and still passing them:

I was standing on my head for every exam, every exam I smoked a joint before I went in…And I passed so, I was like, that's our education system, I'm going to smoke drugs and I'm passing…(others) sniffing drugs, and swallowing drugs and they're all passing as well…It's a load of bullocks… A person with a disability could pass...Not a bother.

Conor was **suspended a few times in fourth year, including spending half the school year on in-house suspension.**

For fourth year I was on an in house suspension for half the school year...It's an in school suspension…You write lines…You write thousands of words. You're given like five thousand words and you have to write it out.

He was then expelled in fifth year for fighting which he links to the difficulties at home with his mother:

My mother was driving me mad…Like they (the school) knew she was driving me mad, that's why they stretched it out for as long as they could.

Conor was **bullied** from an early age in primary and then began to bully other students in secondary school which he now regrets.

I was bullied, I was bullied from a young age. Bullied all the way up until secondary school and then when I got to sixth class I was sent to with a hurley by my uncle and he told me to batter him…the one that was bullying me…and I smashed his head in…It haunts me to this day…I know he bullied me but I guarantee it was something behind him bullying me…The bully always gets bullied… His dad could have been beating him or his ma or something, do you know what I mean? I never wanted to hit him but my uncle… (then) I bullied during secondary school…I changed the aspect, I bullied through secondary school. I know I was a bully. I've called people, and texted people, and rang people crying, "Hey mate, I'm really, really, fucking sorry because -" I have a very bad conscience, I think. A guilty one. A guilty conscience, if I have done something, I wouldn't be able to live with myself without telling someone, you know what I mean? It's karma…I'm not that person. I'm not a bully…That's the one thing I hate in the whole world is bullies…I was one myself. But everyone is a bully at one stage…Everyone in this world has been a bully…Or been bullied.

In first year (of secondary school), I was a little bully, I'm not going to lie, I was a little bully in first year, but second and third year, I wisened up and I was like "What are you even doing?" Like poor youngest coming into school terrified coming into school, and I'd always think "That used to be me." I'm not doing that, like I was like "Get the fuck . Walk our your man's school and goes "Yeah, I'm not even going to go near you anymore." I go "Do you want to be friends?"…My way of saying it was "Do you want to come outside for a joint?"…And I'm friend with that one till this day…because it'll (bullying) fuck with people's heads.

Conor said that his **attendance** was very poor from fourth year as he did not want to go to school.

(It was) paltry because I never went in… Because I'd be angry going to school and what's the point, you know? Going to go in and get suspended anyway.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Conor called for more practical options for young people to pursue their particular strengths; real life skills relating to finding somewhere to live, buying a car, etc.; a mental health class where students could release anger; naptime for students, potentially at the beginning of every day to reduce stress levels; less homework; and better drug education delivered by people with real life experience who can discuss the consequences of drug taking with students.

How to mortgage a house…In a school they'll be teaching you and they're teaching you stuff for the fantasy world…Teaching you, "Follow your dreams, you'll get your dreams." No you won't, you're not going to become an astronaut, mate. You're not. Stop thinking that. You're going to end up a fireman or a fucking police man. Get over it, you're in Ireland, you're not in America. NASA is not in Ireland…You're not going to be a footballer, because nobody in Ireland gets to be a fucking footballer…let them dream when they're in little school, but secondary school should be different. Mortgages, fucking how to rent houses… Cars…Social welfare

Like you should be working at a young age, like the age of ten…Working. What's the point going through all this school, just put them in the situation. Let them learn. Imagine being able to brick lay at age ten. By the age of fifty you'd be fucking a stone mason, perfect. Do you know what I mean?... No ones talking about building buildings… Like say a little dog house…Let them build a dog house, do you know what I mean, or a shed. Somewhere small. Not building, not big skyscrapers and then as they get older let them move on to the houses and then they can move on to apartment blocks. Do you know what I mean? Wean them in slowly…more practical…(focus) where the child is good, let's say I was good in tech graphics...I should have been put in a job like that, do you know what I mean.

There should be a mental health class… Where people get to release anger. Do you know what I mean? And nap time as well… More sleep…Yes because see when people get up in the morning like…they're all angry. I just hate it. But see you have an half an hour nap and you get up and you'll be all right…Even at the start of the day. Like see that tutor class that we have, getting stuff thrown at you, the homework for the day and everything…That should be, the tutor class shouldn't be there… It's stressing you out…what you should have is a nap time… say you went in, not even a little sleep, just put your head down, rest your eyes for half an hour, wake up fully and then boom.

Homework is a bad thing altogether. Homework is just putting pressure on the kid.

Idiots. The HSE are idiots. Idiots…The HSE have no clue about drugs, they need to get someone that's done drugs…To write about drugs…Not fucking some douchebag, wears a pair of glasses, and sitting in an office all week thinking he knows about drugs because he read about drugs or some other idiot that thinks he knows…They need to get someone who actually took drugs. Has done them, has went through a whole lifetime… of doing drugs, to write something…they'll tell you the consequences. See you have kids, tell your kids drugs are deadly. They're brilliant. Everyone loves them. They're great. They are, they're great. But, but, there's a huge but, they'll ruin your life. Look at me in the eye while I say this to you. This is serious, like, know what I mean? Drugs will ruin you. You may feel great when you do them but see months down the line, they will destroy your body…They will mess with your head.

Conor also called for **bullying to be dealt with more firmly** in schools:

They need to crack down on bullying. If you're caught bullying, you're thrown out of school. Boom, gone. Bullying needs to be cracked down on. It does…Because they're cracking down (on it) in the workplace, and cracking down on it in football teams, do

you know what I mean? If you get caught on a football team, you get kicked off the team. They're caught at work, they're kicked out of work. So what's the difference with school?... People are down at the school living in fear of another student. I don't care if that student's education is ruined, he's out there bullying someone but he's trying to ruin someone else's education. I don't care if his education is gone now, that's his own fucking fault for bullying someone else and trying to ruin their education. Do you know what I mean? There a punishment for everything you do in this life. And there should be in primary school and I don't give a flying fuck.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Conor expressed his frustration with the two daily room checks and that his room had been robbed three times and he was unable to obtain a key from the centre to lock his door.

My room got robbed three times, three times in the hostel. Not once did I get anything back, did I get refunded money, nothing.

Didn't have a key, didn't have a key for half that time. I asked (staff) for six months, every day, six months every day I asked him for a key. "Get me a key for my room. My room is getting robbed." Broke my hand up, broke my knuckle from punching a sign out the front because I got robbed and he tried to blame me, he tried to blame me on robbing my own stuff. I punched the sign and broke my hand with it. I headbutted the sign as well, I went head to head with him and I wanted to kill him and I just had to run out of the building I was that angry.

Imagine being robbed three times and getting told "We can't do anything. But check in the counters." You get told to check the counters and then, nothing gets said to you. You walk around the building, you could walk 100 times the just forget about it. They won't come back to you about it.

Conor said that his experience of being homeless and the stress associated with it had impacted negatively on his **mental health**. He spoke of suffering from insomnia and not sleeping due to cannabis use and that he was often woken by room checks. He said that he had recently tried to obtain a psychiatric referral from a GP to get help with his mental health:

(My) mental health is fucked.

But if you smoke it (weed) for too long it gets rid of your sleep, you see they smoke weed for too long. When you first start smoking it, it's like weed helps you…then six months later, you have insomnia. Do you know what I mean? You don't realize the insomnia coming…I don't sleep…Staff see me walking around my building at three and four in the morning, five in the morning.

They need to stop fucking room checks.

Two a day.

I went to a woman doctor…and she had less than a five minute conversation with me…I was asking her to refer me for a psychiatrist because I want to know what's wrong with my mental health and they're the best people to talk to, aren't they?...And she said she wouldn't even refer me. She goes "I wouldn't refer you" and I go "Who are you to say that? Who the fuck are you to say that to me? You had a five minute conversation with me". That's just a woman suppressing a man's mental health. She suppressed mental health from me.

Conor said that his school had encouraged him to do counselling but that the counsellors had been biased and had taken his mother's side.

They (the school) were asking me to go to counsellors and all but counsellors just chose my mother's side all the time…Just biased.

Conor has had **addiction issues** and spoke of currently smoking weed all day every day, partly due to boredom and partly to control his anger.

(I) Smoke weed, all day, every day…

To keep myself from killing people.

Conor appealed for a peer support approach for staffing in homelessness services:

People want work, people that are homeless that want to work in homeless shelter should be allowed…There should be no disallowing of that, you know what I mean? Because they know more about homelessness than anyone else.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Conor said that he would like to get a house and a job. He has previously worked in a hospital and in retail and has been trying to find work, submitting hundreds of CVs but has not obtained work and is experiencing a lack of confidence as a result.

There's not a lot of confidence in myself. To be honest with you. Because I just feel like anything that I'm doing is going to get told no or - anything I've done so far

I just want a job…If I got a job hand to me, I wouldn't fuck up, I would slap anyone's hand that got me the job…I'm putting out about a 100 CVs online and offline, know what I mean? If I got a job given to me by somebody, I would not slap the hand. Do you know what I mean? But I'm not even getting that chance. I'm not even getting that chance…I want to get a job.

3.3.4 Jack (Participant 4)

Aged: 30 years

Jack is 30 years old and has been homeless for the last three years as a result of the breakdown in his relationship with his partner. Following this, he moved out of where he was living with his partner and moved in with his father who then did not have enough space so he went to a hostel.

Basically I broke up with my partner. And then I moved out…Lived with my father but

then he didn't have room…So I just had to go into a hostel.

Young men that getting thrown out their own home? The folk here that I talk to they had a break up (in their) family…That's why they're homeless.

He has been living in the current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for eight weeks and was in four other hostels before that.

Jack has been estranged from his parents for some time and has recently started to speak with his father again. He is close with his brother. He has one child who is seven years old.

Jack completed his Leaving Certificate. He wanted to be a carpenter in school and he did woodwork in school and worked as a carpenter for two years after leaving school.

Jack said that he had **one close relationship in secondary school** with a teacher who was also his hurling coach. He played hurling for Dublin from 16-19 years.

Jack was **suspended between three and five times for messing. During these times he was allowed to attend after school study.**

Jack spoke of doing his homework himself as he did not have someone at home to help with it.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Jack called for better drug education and a gym for students.

If it had some sort of a gym facility or something for the kids…Because most young people are into the gym now. It (exercise) can make the day easier.

We didn't really get taught about drugs in school. They should nowadays yeah…I think

the children are a lot worse nowadays, they start a lot earlier.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Jack said that he is currently sharing with three other men but that it is not so bad as he knows the other men well. He is currently working as a scaffolder. He has to work for the next six months to be fully qualified. His routine involves getting up at 6.30am and returning to the accommodation at 4.30/5pm approximately. He spoke of the difficulty in motivating yourself when others are not working but that it has been a positive thing for his mental health

(You need) willpower enough to work...living in hostels…Because when you're going off to work you see a lot of people staying in bed and all…And losing interest…And you're like oh fuck it like, I'll just stay in bed today or...Yeah it's very hard like…Yeah it's (working) good for your own sanity like to be honest with you.

In relation to his **mental health**, Jack said that the experience of homelessness gets him down.

It's like, it sort of drags you down at times you know like being in the situation I'm in… But you basically just have to get on with it… Live your life like.

He said that he is frustrated in relation to the housing list as people who are not working but who have addiction problems seem to be given priority and women are fasttracked over men.

You can't really set yourself up for homeless can you? Because you don't know what's going to happen.

It's funny like because, they see you're working, they just leave you alone. Yeah there's people not working and all and some people that with addiction and all. And they're getting places, and then you're working and you have to wait…You're not getting anywhere.

It's supposed to be equal nowadays isn't it? I checked the (housing list the) other week it says like one hundred and three on it or something…And three weeks later I went up and it was one hundred and seventeen or something.

He spoke of the **stress associated with spending time with his child** with regard to a suitable location for this. He said that he recently went on a holiday for a week out of Dublin to be able to spend time with his child. Previous to that he had been paying for hotels and B and Bs to keep his child with him overnight which had been very expensive.

Because I have a mobile down there so at least I can keep her over for a week…Before that like, I'd have to book hotels and B&Bs and all just to keep her…So it's kind of a nightmare isn't it?

Jack spoke of using drugs after he had finished school but not while he was at school.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Jack spoke of the need for more accommodation and suggested that more use be made of derelict buildings in and around Dublin.

Look around town, even just down the road there at St. Mary's, there's, there's a block of flats across there and they're all boarded up…There's so many places boarded up around Dublin…Even if they built a set of flats or something just to give to people in homelessness.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Jack said that he would like to have his own house, be qualified and working as a scaffolder and have access to his child.

I'd like to have a place of my own…Doing scaffolding, be qualified…Working for myself…Yeah and I'd like to have, just access to my daughter.

3.3.5 Anthony (Participant 5)

Aged: 29 years

Anthony is 29 years old and has been homeless for over three years as a result of the breakdown in his relationship with his mother. This was linked with relationship difficulties with his mother's new partner and Anthony's addiction issues. His mother had moved out of the family home and Anthony had been paying the mortgage for four years until he had to move out. He was living with friends at the start and since then in homeless accommodation. He has been living for four months in his current accommodation, before that two other stays in other hostels of two years and six months. His hobbies at the moment include going to the gym and hiking.

He has not been in touch with his mother for some time but has a good relationship with his father and siblings.

Anthony left school early to work in a pub and then trained to be an electrician as an apprentice but did not get his qualifications due to the bankruptcy of the company he was working for.

(I was) working in a pub, and then I wanted to go on and do electrical…(he) went bankrupt. But I done two years of it, and no papers to stand for me…So I'm back to square one…no papers, no paperwork. I just have the time I spend with the company.

Anthony said that he had **one close relationship in secondary school** with a guidance counsellor teacher:

That's the guidance counsellor. I talk to him because I did have like aggressive issues. I'd just get really pissed off if I was to tell you. Not fighting, not fighting with people in the school. It was getting angry and maybe throwing things and breaking things. So he was the one who sat down and kind of chilled me out a bit.

Anthony was **suspended** around five times

due to anger issues. This was for a few days each time and during these times he missed out on work and got extra homework on his return. When asked if he felt this had impacted on his education he said that it had:

Kind of, because you're not there. You're not seeing it, you don't know what's going on.

Anthony spoke of having his aunt to help him with some homework.

I had my auntie, she helped me with studying my Irish…that helped me pass.

Anthony mentioned smoking cannabis in secondary school and that it helped him with difficulties in concentration. He said he found practical learning based on demonstrations easier to follow and learned better this way:

That's my thing, because I don't, as I said I can't learn from just reading a book. If they give you a leaflet and say read that, most of the time it's going to get thrown away. But if somebody showed me…A demonstration… It just sorts in my head a bit better, I don't know why

At the time, I was kind of... I don't know, I was just, I wouldn't pay attention. I would be over here talking and it would be…distracted too much. And then that (cannabis) kind of held me just sit there and focus….I could sit there and listen like, just focus a bit more.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Anthony called for **more practical life skills and information and better drug education**:

Because they tell you not to do this and not to do that. They don't give you the options…They don't expand beyond the whole reason why not to do it…All you get told is it's bad, don't do it…Not (how) to deal it or anything…Not (how) to grow up around it, you know what I mean? The temptations of it are…a bit more in-depth…

the influences everyday of growing up. You've got to really know what it's all about, about what happens.

Anthony spoke of having **dealt drugs** at one point to make money once his apprenticeship to be an electrician had fallen through.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Anthony said that he is currently sharing with three other men.

In relation to his physical health, Anthony said that he had been hospitalised last year and had to have surgery but he was regaining physical fitness.

He said that he is frustrated in relation to the housing list as people who are not working but who have addiction problems seem to be given priority and that it should focus on who is in a position to maintain a house:

Like a lot of people will probably think that all the homeless people are the same, you know, but it's not all down to drug abuse. It can be anything…So, maybe there should be the priority list regarded to those that are able to sustain a house really.

I never look down on people, but if you see somebody that's sitting there smoking heroin everyday, and then you have another person that's clean, who are you going to weigh the option to give the house to?...that makes me question like… I don't know, I just think it's a bit backwards at the moment.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Anthony spoke of the need for more accommodation, that the Government should look more at the causes of homelessness and that resources should be spent more wisely, mentioning specifically the money spent on building the spire.

Oh Jesus, I don't know really. They need to kind of look more into it, because it's been brushed under a bit more. Well not a bit more, it's been recognised a bit more now.

But when it all started, it was kind of just brushed aside. Like, to pay five million for a spire, could have been put into something else.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Anthony said that he would **like to have his own house and be working**:

Just get in (to construction) and learn about more about it. Start off at the bottom and just keep at them I suppose, because there's a lot to learn in it, so…get my own place… once I get back to work, if I can get the HAPS going and then pay the extra on a place…I've got to apply for a forklift training then…I wont to go for a crane because I can't deal with heights…So, I'll just stick to the ground works.

3.3.6 Jason (Participant 6)

Aged: 28 years

Jason is 28 years old and has been homeless for the last five years as a result of family breakdown in his relationship with his mother when she remarried.

He has been living in the current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for nine or ten months and before that he was living in other hostels.

Jason was asked to leave secondary school when he was 14 years. The school said they would keep it off his record. He then went to another school from which he was **expelled** the following year. They allowed him to stay on for the last few weeks to complete his Junior Certificate.

I liked school, it was okay. I like learning and stuff, but there's always distractions and stuff like that. So I was always getting into trouble. Teachers just couldn't handle me.

None of that was for fights or anything like that, no violence or nothing…Maybe I disrupted the class a couple of times, and then they'd gave me one of these conduct

sheets.. And once you get nine of them, that's an expulsion…Then in the other school they had something that was called a referral sheet. So it was the same type of system. (I had) problems with teachers, yeah. Problems on the playground then problems with the teachers then after. Like I did get into fights but that was like after school and stuff, that wasn't really involved in the school. But you can get them (conduct sheets) for just like stupid things that you should be getting detention for. So I didn't really think that system was fair.

Jason said that he had problems with teachers in school and did not have any **close relationships with teachers in** school. He was giving some counselling but this did not last.

They did get me counselling, but it didn't last for long…I think they just wanted rid of me out of school.

Jason spoke of being **bullied from an early age in primary school**, partly due to being overweight. His parents complained but the issue was not addressed by the school and he began fighting with other students to defend himself:

I was bullied a lot when I was younger. So then I started sticking up for myself so I was in fights most of the time after school because I was overweight and stuff.

Yeah, like even my parents went up to the school lots of times because I told them I was being bullied and things like that… They (the school) couldn't really do anything about it.

Jason spoke of his mother helping him with homework but that she had left school early as well.

When I was younger my mam did help me. Then like my mam didn't have an education in secondary school either, she had to leave early so I was kind of my own in secondary. But I was fine like...by then I could learn

myself anything from a book so, I didn't really need help.

When Jason was nineteen he went back to complete his Leaving certificate but he then became homeless so he couldn't complete it. He has done an apprenticeship in industrial installation and has also taken part in Level 7 IT training though he has not completed this.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Jason called for schools to **handle misbehaviour differently and look more at the issues and why young people might be acting out**. He also called for better drug education.

Well obviously, they could do a lot of things better, getting people ready for the real world. So, I don't know, they can just handle the situations a bit better. I mean, I don't think I should have been kicked out of school at 14. I always blamed my parents but then now I'm thinking maybe it is down to the education system, like teachers and stuff like that…Instead of dealing with the problem, they just suspended, and suspend and suspend and then expel me.

Especially for dealing with bullying, and if a child is acting out, it's probably not because the child wants to act out. So obviously... yeah, there's something else going on.

Obviously, drug education should be a big thing nowadays. There's no point in just hiding people from it, it's out there. People should know the dangers, the risks and whatever.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Jason said that he is currently sharing with three other men and that this has made it difficult to keep jobs as people have different timetables and it is **hard to get enough sleep**. He also mentioned that he has been moved several times from hotels and that this has been disruptive and made it more difficult to keep jobs also.

(I need) a house at least. Somewhere to live…Because that's the main hurdle I have. Everything I do, in the time I've been homeless, I've had so many different jobs, like so many…I've been working while they're sending me round to different hostels all the time and I just wasn't able to do it.

Then even if I was to be working now, there's four in a room including me. Some lads wouldn't go to bed till late, and I might be up early. It's just very hard.

In relation to his mental health, Jason said that it has been up and down due to the experience of homelessness.

When asked what advice he would have for his younger self, Jason said:

Maybe just stay in school then, finish your Leaving Cert at least. Go on to the college then. Don't let anybody push you around.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Jason called for more funding for housing.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Jason said that he would like to have his own place and be starting to pay off a mortgage. He said that he would like to go back and finish his IT studies and get a well-paid job in IT.

I'm more IT minded So I want to go back to college and finish the IT…I have done some IT training...I have went on and done some Level 7 stuff but I didn't... I have been doing IT since I'm young, web developing and stuff like that. I've worked in IT technical support as well. Yeah, so I have to do an IT based (training), (have) an IT skills based CV to start applying for new jobs because I have the skills…My CV is just very generic, like I've worked in security, I've worked in lots of different things.

He stressed that sorting out his accommodation was his first priority and that he needed stable accommodation

before going on to pursue training and employment:

Before everything, the accommodation. That's the only thing that's ever stopped me with education and with work is the accommodation.

3.3.7 Stephen (Participant 7)

Aged: 30 years

Stephen is 30 years old and has been homeless for the last thirteen years as a result of family breakdown. Both of his parents died when he was between 15 and 17 years old.

Growing up…I came from a rough part…you know you had to be tough to get it on you know. I got into fights and all…Me mother and father died at the age of 15 and me Da died when I was 16…You know I'm trying to pick up all the pieces, coming here and I'm putting plans in place.

Before he was living in his current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation he was living in other homeless accommodation and hostels.

Stephen left school at 15 years. He did not complete the Junior Certificate.

Stephen enjoyed school and was liked by teachers. He played football in school and keeping pigeons was a hobby of his as a child and young person. He had learning difficulties and was sent to a special school when he did not pass a secondary school entrance exam. He was also suspended at one point before leaving school. He was involved in the juvenile justice system when he was a child and was later temporarily detained by the Gardaí.

I would have kept pigeons for years I would have. That was my thing growing up. Pigeons, loved animals…keeping their bed and things and all. Had a pigeon loft in my back shed and had them fly to me and all.

We were getting our pigeons and all…I seen all people robbing and doing all these things and I got involved in that. I started doing that and then that took that hobby away from me. I'd love to chase that hobby back up I would. I really would.

Stephen has experienced **addiction** over the years and he is currently waiting for a place in a detox facility. Her spoke of using drugs to numb his grief when his father died:

I remember when me father died I was heavy…I was taking Benzos…feeling like they were covering everything, I was able to relax, I wasn't worried about anything…I chased drugs and in and out of hostels you know.

He has also been on disability allowance because of head injuries he experienced through being in fights. In relation to his health, Stephen said that drugs had impacted negatively on his health.

In terms of where he would like to be in five years, Stephen said that he would like to be off drugs and have a fresh start. He said that he would be **interested in working with sick animals in the future.**

Just want a fresh course. You know. Get me head together. You know what I mean… I'd like to be working, I'd look after sick animals… I'd like to work with the RSPCA.

3.3.8 David (Participant 8)

Aged: 38 years

David is 38 years old and has been homeless for the last several years as a result of addiction. While he has been clean for four years he is still on low doses of methadone and is waiting for a bed in a detox facility to get off methadone but he needs to be on a lower dose of methadone (50 mls) before he can enter.

It was more due to drugs really than, I am here because of choice, I made no one else. I'm clean four years but it is just a fact of getting back, getting back on track, jobwise, rent wise and… Compared to where I was five or six years ago I'm totally different. You know I thought I would die

He has been living in the current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for four months and before that another hostel for a month and a half. He moved to his current accommodation because it was more stable, is higher threshold with less drugs.

David said that he has a close relationship with his family and has a lot of support from his family.

David wanted to be an archaeologist when at school and history was his favourite subject:

I wanted to be an archaeologist… I have always loved history. History was my favourite subject… I used to collect a bit of rocks and stuff like that.

David was **asked to leave school when he was 14 years**. He said that the school's teaching style was **authoritarian** and that he was bullied by teachers. He described being treated unfairly and his work being compared with that of other students who had higher grades in science. This situation reached the point where he feared going into school and was having panic attacks and not being able to breathe.

I was bullied by teachers…my mother just

went up and raised hell because I was coming home in the evening like I couldn't breathe and it was all due to cause I wasn't good at science and the science teacher was putting me down in front, but it's a long, but that had an impact on me. He put me down the front…*

He mentioned that he still gets anxious speaking about this experience:

Still to this day I get (panicked) it if I think about it. I even got it there just thinking about it…it's just rare that something like that long ago like… And like we were only kids you know you don't treat kids like that.

After leaving school, David went to work on construction sites when he was 14 years old.

I left after first year…at 14. Going on 14. Cause you could walk into a site in a pair or runners and no safe pass, just the way it was back then.

When he was 17 almost 18 years he went back to another school for older students to do his Leaving Certificate and completed it. He had a positive experience at this school and said that there were teachers that he could speak with if he had a problem and that it was a supportive place:

It showed me that like the teachers there were down at your own level like. The other school where I was very militant, you know you do this and they took the enjoyment out of everything as well. I liked (the second school) a lot...I actually still speak to some of the teachers to this day.

They really supported you. There was a nice chap there

He went on to do an apprenticeship as a roofer and is a qualified roofer.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, David called

for teachers to behave in a **more respectful way towards students**. He also suggested that skate parks would be welcome in schools and that they could help students identify with their schools more. He also called for **better drug and sex education** for students.

You might think that's a bit of a stretch but like America schools have skate parks. A small skate park at the side…maybe if there had been one of those, maybe I wouldn't have felt a little bit ostracised from things you know.

Teachers and students more on a level. Not putting (teachers) on a pedestal you know.

We didn't see any sex education, nothing about drugs. There might have been a poster in school or something… Other than that, that was it, it was never raised, it was never an issue like even though it was an epidemic in the 90s the heroin you'd want to talk, I suppose they were learning the process…how (to) deal with it.

In relation to his health, David said that he had epilepsy but that it was under control. In terms of his mental health, David said that he was stressed and depressed but that this was due to his circumstances and surroundings.

I get down…But I think maybe that's just due to…my surroundings or maybe what's going on in my life. I think if I wasn't here and I was working I don't think there be any stress… you know what I mean?

When asked if homelessness had affected his health he said that it had:

Ah definitely, definitely. Mentally and physically. Whether it be my fault that I'm here or not, yes it does affect you totally you know

David's addiction experience occurred later after his education. In school he did not drink and smoked cannabis occasionally David mentioned his **frustration that he had been on methadone since he was seventeen and that all the emphasis by GPs had been on increasing the dosage**

rather than decreasing and that he felt that this was due to commercial incentives:

This is like for me, this is the most important thing in my life you know at the moment which is getting myself back into society not to be dependent on it (methadone)…I don't want any more. I'm sick of it…like I took the methadone this morning. I don't know if you think I look like someone on methadone but I feel (I do), someone said this to me before…when you're sober and you look back methadone does nothing but keep you comfortably numb. That's what it does. It keeps you numb. You're numb to whatever, I haven't cried in a couple of years you know, it just numbs up everything, it's an opioid. So you're numb to the world you know. I don't mean I'm walking around like a zombie. It feels like it's costing me…you're just masking something you know and it's just like the government are just throwing it out and saying ah yeah listen like you know but it's not just nothing...When I go to my doctor's…everything is about going up (in dose), not coming down or detoxing but going up because that's what keeps them in business. I can personally say, the doctor gets €150 just for me and he has 35 patients on it so 35 x €150 and then that's just his methadone patients and then he has his normal patients. So it's a huge industry…

I've been on methadone nearly 21 years… Started at 17 and then only a few months…I was like pleading to get on detox. So then I went on the detox, I was going to detox on methadone, only meant to be for eight weeks and then the doctor was like oh I think we'll give it another month or two on this and I was like I don't think I really need it, and my parents (too)…and he said oh no I'm the doctor I know best here now. 20 years later you know. It's like Mammy's little helpers you know Valium… (It's) so addictive. Methadone is harder to come off than heroin. Stays in you for six months after.

When asked what advice he would have for young people now he said:

Stay in school, stay in school and don't go, just don't grow too quick. Enjoy school, go

to college and just don't try and grow too fast.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, David spoke of the need for the Government to prioritise social housing for Irish people:

I think…the government what they should be doing is they should stop investing all money into luxury apartments for students… or people that are coming in from other countries, and try and look after the problem at hand because this problem is just going to escalate and get ten times worse. They're (the government) just thinking about bringing money in, they're not thinking about the long term cost and like everywhere you go in the city now there's just a homeless person on the streets…and no matter how bad they are or how good they are, because everyone has their own story, no one should (be homeless)…(It's about) resources. Totally.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, David said that he would like to be drug free, have his own place and be working:

The next five years, I'd like to be, I'd like to have my own place obviously but the most important thing is to be able to wake up and not to have to depend on methadone…and I will be working, I know I will be working because if I want something I will get it. I'll work for it. Hopefully working at something I like that will set me up, maybe a printer or something to do with prints something. I'll take it one step at a time. I do have a plan like.

3.3.9 John (Participant 9)

Aged: 31 years

John is 31 years old and has been homeless for the last six years since his father died. He has been in homeless accommodation for a year and a half, living in the current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for a year and a week, before that he was in two other places, and before that he was living with his sister. John had been working full-time in retail and construction since he was seventeen years old and experienced a break-down when his father died when he was twenty-five and he lost the council house he had been living in with his father.

When my father died, the council took my house off me and evicted me, it left me homeless, that's how I ended up homeless… Yeah, it was a two-bedroom flat. They said I wasn't on the rent long enough to their criteria, or something. I was trying to fight the case that, if they had have counted, from when I sent the application in. I would've been there long enough. They didn't take that, they only take it from, when they get it…I was told I hadn't got a foot to stand on...There was nothing I could do.

His mother died when he was twelve years and he was **in state care from the age of three years until seventeen years.** He currently has a child abuse case ongoing with the first care facility he was in as a young child. He described attempting to live in a car and then a caravan to keep himself and his younger brother from becoming homeless:

I've hit rock bottom. I hit rock bottom when my Da died, that was it, I hit rock bottom. I literally hit the deck, I went where I had nothing. I quit my job, I lost my house, I was living in my sister's. I had nothing, whatsoever, absolutely nothing. I was there one day, I broke down. My younger brother was homeless at the same time. So, I was like, right, how can we sort this out? I bought a car, thinking I can get him off the street, I can get me off the street. I'll buy a car, we can stay in that, out of the cold. We got that, the police took that away.

So I bought a mobile home. I put it down in, there was Travellers living down in Area X. I went down, I said "listen, I bought a trailer. Can I put it with yours?" They were like, yeah. They put it in, we were living there. The police came down and took that. Living on the streets, bang took it. They were summonsing me to court for the caravan, so I was like, I'm not going; crushed it, gone, two of us left on the streets then. Then I was like, right, stayed with my sister for a few months. My sister was like "listen, I know I'm your family and I'm supposed to support you, I've supported you for long enough. You need to do something and get a move on." I said "listen, do you know what, I'm thinking the same thing." I packed my bags and I went to Area X and then straight into Area Y, six month bed. I was there for three weeks and then, on I went and now, I'm here.

Yeah, it was a rough one. I was trying to carry me, but I was trying to carry my younger brother as well. Trying to keep him... I was more worried about him than myself. He's younger than me, you know what I mean? He's homeless as well. He's down in a B&B, he doesn't get food down there. He doesn't get anything. It's basically, you get your room and you support yourself from there. For me, looking at him like that, kills me. That's heartbreaking. Every time I see him, it's heartbreaking. Even still to this day. Even when he's doing well

You get that gut feeling now, when you're like, it's not a good feeling. It shouldn't be like this, you know. It was weird, it was like the family, all the girls got the good end of the stick. And, all the boys ended up on the bad end of it. My older brother ended up homeless, I ended up homeless, my younger brother ended up homeless. All the brothers ended up homeless and all the sisters ended up, on the right end of the stick, you know what I mean? It was kind of like, is this family cursed with the men or what? That's just the way life goes, isn't it? It's rough on, some people get it worse than others. I can guarantee there's other people out there, who have it worse than me. The way I see it is, I don't have it that bad.

John described being very close to his sister:

Well, to be honest, my sister is like my mother. The way I see that one sister, she's everything for me, you know what I mean? If I have a problem, I go there. If I have this, I go there. If anything happens, I go there. She's the only one that's close. I grew up with her, she was in that care home with me as well. There was boys and then there was girls. She was in one, I was in the other. We grew up together. We grew up in school, same school, everything. She is my rock, basically. She takes the mother's place…If I didn't have her, to be honest love, I don't know what my life would be now. I think it'd be a hell of a lot wilder than it is, to be honest with you.

John has an eight year old child but does not get to see her much to difficulties in the relationship with his child's mother:

I do, but, I wouldn't say it's very regularly, occasionally, ye know? It was regular but then, me and the mother had a little bit of, we're not so pally with each other anymore. Here and there.

John **moved primary school due to changing the care facility he was in** and then went to secondary school while in care. During secondary, he moved back with his father and continued to go to school. John was suspended a few times, sometimes for months at a time. John was then **expelled** or asked to leave at the end of fifth year. The school was closing down and he decided not to take his studies any further. He describes the reason for getting expelled as his lack of concentration and difficulty in paying attention though he was never diagnosed with an attention deficit disorder:

I was suspended a few times. I was suspended for months on end.

That (being expelled) was attention disorder, basically. Couldn't concentrate properly in class, acting the bollocks. Fidgety, wasn't

a big fan of school, didn't like it… I don't know if I didn't like school or if I just, I just couldn't concentrate properly. I was always fidgeting…I don't know what it is.*

John said that he had **one close relationship with a teacher in primary school and none in secondary school** and that primary school had been a positive experience whereas secondary had not been.

My primary school teacher was, one of the best teachers I had, to be honest with you. I liked her, she was very good.

I liked primary school, secondary, I didn't like at all… I got more out of primary than I did out of secondary.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, John called for a specific drug education class for students to teach them about the dangers and consequences of using drugs:

Drug addiction courses. A drug addiction class. See the way you have art class, maths, Irish. A class actually on drug addiction. So they explain heroin. What happens. If you take heroin, what's going to happen? What has happened to other people, the consequences, the damage it can do. They're types of things that didn't, we didn't get anything like that in school…In general, I think that's the main thing that people, that never got brought up in any school, I was ever in.

As mentioned above, John has worked full-time since he was seventeen years old in jobs ranging from retail to construction:

To be honest love, I worked most of my life. I worked when I was old enough to work, until (year ago)

I started working in the retail sector first. I was doing all sorts. I was working in (hotel), doing wholesale deliveries. Then I was

working in (retail store), doing shopping deliveries. Then I worked in (another retail store) for ten years. That was a bit of everything in there, all shop floor, tills, manager, everything…Loads of experience in that. Then I went onto the sites for something, I done that for ten years so I went to the sites for something new, you know what I mean. I done that for six months. Yeah, then it just got a little too much pressure. I was getting very stressed and I was like, right, that's enough.

John mentioned the boredom of his daily routine and that he tries to stay outdoors as much as possible:

I try and get out, if I can get out, I'll get out. Sitting around, just drives me crazy.

In relation to his health, John said that he had been hospitalised last year in relation to weight loss:

Well, to be honest, my physical health, it's been genuinely good, but it the last year, my health has deteriorated slowly. It's going back up. A couple of months ago, I was going into hospital, I was thirteen and a half stone, I dropped to nine stone…I suffer from stress

He said that he suffers from **mental health** issues, including stress anxiety and other issues relating to his childhood and his experiences in care.

Everything, I suffer from stress, anxiety, all that stuff. I had to go see a doctor and I had to go the hospital and all about that… Stress and stuff like that. I have a lot of other problems, from when I was a kid as well.

He spoke of the importance of having a child as an incentive to stay positive:

To be honest love, I have to keep myself with a positive outlook. If I don't, I'll fall into a rut and I'll never get back out of it. That's not happening. The only thing up here is my child. To be honest, if I didn't have that child, I'd probably be dead now and I'm not messing with you. I had nothing to live for at that time, when my Da died and with the child, I was kind of like, she was just on the head constantly. She stopped me from doing

stupid things, going doing stupid stuff. It was kind of a godsend that I had the child, you know what I mean and it was keeping me strong. Still to this day, it's still keeping me, like rock solid. I can only go up. That's the way I see it, I can only go up the ladder now. I can't let myself go back.

John said that he had used drugs and alcohol before because of trauma as a result of the abuse he suffered at the care home and on losing his father but that he did not have addiction issues himself.

When asked what advice he would have for young people now he said:

Keep your heads in the books. Stay away from drugs, don't act the bollocks. Try not get expelled. Finish school, all the way. Just when you get out of school, get a job. Stay away from drug dealing and shit like that. And, trouble.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, John spoke of the need for more funding for accommodation to support people in homelessness and that less resources should be invested in student housing. He also suggested that houses should be conditional on people being in a position to maintain a house:

Well, to be honest, they need to sort the housing situation. It's the biggest problem ever. That's the main target of homelessness…(there are) big block of apartments…hundreds of apartments in it; students. Straight across the road from it, another one; students. Then you walk down, by Smithfield. There's another block there; students. There's about six to eight blocks of apartments around the area, that I've seen, all student apartments…Listen, maybe we can get people that are, have their self together and are getting on their way to getting a house. We put them somewhere like this, to help them along, so they get used to living on their own and then bang, then they can go to their own house.

The likes of what McVerry has. You're getting on well, you're doing well. The likes of my

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brother. He got moved from a hostel, he was in the hostel, Jesus Christ, he could've been in it twenty years. Then he got his own house. He's in one of them houses, you know where the key workers come down and they check…Since that's happened him, he's a new person…The day he got them keys. I never seen my brother smile, in my whole entire life, until he got them keys. That was the biggest thing that could've helped him. And, to be honest, when he found out he was getting it, it made him want to do more for himself. Do you get me? It's like the government. They're like, right, we have hostels, we can do this to help them, we can do that to help them. But, they're just not, giving it enough.

Yeah, pretty much. It's more, assistance… People that are, have their heads together and that seem like they're doing well for their self, they should be placed into things like that and if they fuck up? Back to the way they were. Do you get me? And, then if someone else is doing well, right, move them into there instead. It's not fair. In general, in that hostel I'm in, there is a lot of people in there that have heads on their shoulders. A couple of them may use drugs and stuff, but there is a lot of them there that I could genuinely look at and say, "right he could do well on his own, he'd do brilliant in a house on his own."

He mentioned that he **could not live in certain areas due to gang violence** relating to where he had previously lived:

They asked me to move to (area X)…I couldn't go to (area X). First of all, I used to live in (area Y). There's a lot of drugs and gangland up there in (area X) and (area Y)…so I couldn't go there, because of all the gangland. It's threat against life… where I'm from. I told them I wouldn't go there personally, because it's a danger to life up there. I will look for accommodation anywhere else, but not (area Y)…Other than that, I'm willing to go look for houses and get a job, not a bother. That's the main priority.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, John said that he would like to have his own place, have a job and have access to his daughter:

To be honest, hopefully in five years time I'll have a job, I'll have my own house. And, life is back on track. Pretty much, that's where I want to get.

He said that he does not yet feel able physically for full-time work and hopes to get part-time work initially.

I'm doing job searching. I went in to your man the other day, we were searching for full time work. I said to your man "listen, I said, at these circumstances, it's not a very good time for me. I don't physically see myself fit for doing full time work at the moment. I'm only getting myself back to my full self. But, I will consider part-time work, until I get full time work." And, your man was like, listen that's fair enough, that's great. At least you're considering. You're not just saying, listen I don't want to work right now. That you're willing to do something. I was like, listen if I do part-time work, that means I can work and I have time to try work things out, house, my daughter, things like that.

I'm going home now to ring a house and see if I've got a viewing for it…I got an email last night for a viewing so, she told me to ring them up…I'll go back now and I'll ring her and see what happens. With a bit of luck, I'll get a viewing in (area Z) and maybe, might be out of that house by the end of the week, if I get luck.

3.3.10 Simon (Participant 10)

Aged: 22 years

Simon is 22 years old and has been homeless for almost two years as a result of the breakdown in his relationship with his family. He lived with a friend briefly during this time.

He has been living in the current Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for four months and was in other hostels before that.

He has not been in touch with his family for over six months.

Simon completed his Leaving certificate. He went to work in for a company that manages car parks after he finished his exams and since then he has worked in a range of jobs in construction and in hospitality in bars and hotels. He was working in a hotel until a month ago when he was unable to work due to illness. He spoke of being bored not working:

Well up until maybe a month now I was working in a hotel so my routine when I was working was wake up, have a shower, have something to eat, get ready for work, out to work and that was it. That was it every week. Now that I'm not working it's wake up, that's it, just wake up, look at my phone. So yeah it's pretty shit.

I finished school in 2014 and I got my first job two months later so. I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do but there was a job there so I'm only 17 I'll take it, need some money.

Simon had a **positive experience in primary school**, where he had some close relationships with teachers, but not in secondary school. He spoke of there being a home school community liaison teacher but that he had not benefitted from this and felt that it was tokenistic:

That was more or less for show kind of like you know. It was just ah yeah we do have

one of these but she never actually really, for me anyway, she never really (did anything), that's just my experience.

He was **suspended twice** during secondary school. Once for laughing at a friend's joke and not explaining the reason to a teacher and the second because of conduct sheets due to misbehaviour. He was forced to attend counselling for **anger management**.

Me and one of my mates were in class and he said something funny and I thought it was funny so I laughed and she was like so what are you laughing at? I didn't want to say it in front of the class as it wasn't appropriate and she was like right if don't tell me you're going to get suspended. I was like fair enough. And the second time I was something called a conduct card or something…A conduct card, a teacher writes, if you're late to every class… Something to do with a conduct card they suspended me over.

It (anger management) made me more angry if you ask me to be honest. I didn't think I needed it and that's why it's pissed me off… Like obviously something to do with anger. I'm not going to deny that and say ah like there was nothing wrong but I don't know. I think things got blown out of proportion or whatever I don't know.

Simon spoke of doing his homework himself.

I was a bit more mature so I kind of would do it myself or I'd ask my mother or something if she could lend a hand or whatever.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Simon called for more teaching of life skills and practical information such as how to get a mortgage.

All the shit I've learned in school I can't, I haven't used any of it once in any of the jobs I've had…It would be a lot better if they actually taught you life skills for after education. How to, mortgages and stuff like that, I know people, loads of people will probably say it but they should teach you actual things that are going to be useful

in your life not fucking 5x and this is 5y, stupid…

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Simon said that he is currently sharing with three other men with serious addiction issues and he finds this difficult and would like to be moved to other accommodation. He estimated that he is one of 6 or 7 out of 60 men in his accommodation who is not taking heroin. He also spoke of the difficulties in keeping a job and not getting enough sleep with some of the men watching television loudly in the bedroom until dawn. This is particularly an issue as he was working in a hotel until recently, he would work until 2am approximately and then need to sleep and this was not possible given his situation sharing a room and the varied timetables and habits of the other men. He also spoke of his frustration that he has not had serious addiction issues but has ended up homeless.

I want somewhere where, where it's not cluttered with drugs, heroin, stuff like that. Like I know I smoke a bit of weed, that's still…a drug yeah but…I don't like being around class As or anything like that…There is 60 people in there. I don't want to talk meself up but I'd say I'm one of five or six people that's not on heroin.

One of those (men), every night the telly doesn't go off until it gets bright out in the morning

I had an idea in my own head not to, drugs are not really a good thing because my uncle was a heroin addict so kind of seen from him first hand that it's not exactly the road to go down…But here I am now.

Simon said that homelessness has negatively impacted on his physical and mental health.

Definitely. Yeah. There is no worldwide doubt about it. Yeah.

It's (my health) been better I can assure you of that.

Stress, you wake up especially if you haven't got a job, you're like what am I going to do today? Why am I in this hostel surrounded by I don't want to use the word but junkies

like I just smoke weed and then when you're waking up and there's people doing heroin beside you like…

When asked what advice he would have for other young people he advised them to take education seriously as it is helpful in life:

Take it seriously because I remember (someone) had said this to me that you'll miss it one day and to be honest, I never thought I'd admit it, but, not that I miss it, but if I had the opportunity again I'd go back in and take it a lot more seriously cause as much as people say ah the Leaving Cert is this, that and the rest, it's only a piece of paper but it's a piece of paper though, (that can) set you up if you use it right, get into the right places…You may want to get out of school if you're in your last year, sixth year, you have your Leaving Cert and all but just take it seriously. I wouldn't say I did a great Leaving Cert but if I could do it again I would yeah.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Simon called for Irish people to be prioritised for housing:

I'm not a racist person but…asylum seekers and immigrants, they're getting houses as soon as they step on Irish soil from what I've seen and heard so…it should be Irish people in general that should be looked after first. Like I said…I've nothing against different races or anything like that but what I do have a big problem with is the homelessness… It's not going to get any better if they keep going on the way they're going. It's just going to get worse…And it's just going to piss a lot of people off…look after your own before you start looking after everybody else but that's not going to happen.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Simon said that his main priority was not to be homeless and that he would like to have his own place and be working in a bar or a hotel:

Not homeless. That's the main goal. As long as that's out of the way in five years' time I don't care about anything else…I'd probably like to go back into the bar…pubs, bars, hotels.

3.3.11 Colm (Participant 11)

Aged: 34 years

Colm is 34 years old and has been homeless for the last ten years, staying with friends and family, and in homeless accommodation for the last five months.

Ten years sofa surfing, living in people's place, never my own house

He has two children who are ten and four years old.

Colm left school when he was 14 years to be a butcher. He worked as a butcher for seven years. While working as a butcher, Colm wanted to train as a plumber.

I wanted to be a plumber and I almost got there, I was doing gas boiling and working for nothing for about three years and then a law came out that you had to be qualified plumber to do your GID, gas installation safety and domestic and I couldn't do it…I was 15 and I couldn't do it because I needed to pay and it just fell apart…(it was) really frustrating.

Colm said that he had **close relationship in primary and secondary school** with teachers. Colm spoke of doing his homework himself as he did not have someone at home to help with it.

In relation to his mental health, Colm said that it was currently at one or two out of ten. He said that the experience and boredom of homelessness gets him down as well as stress related to his children and not being able to see them enough.

Some days I look for housing…going for appointments, going to see friends, going to my sister's, that's pretty much it, just trying to keep busy and trying to see one of the kids.

He is currently in touch with one of his children and sees them in public places as he cannot bring them to his accommodation. He is currently in the process of taking one of his ex-partners to court to gain access to his child as she has blocked him from seeing them:

I'm in the middle of bringing one to court at the moment for access… She has me blocked on everything, I can't get through to her phone…Facebook messages completely blocked…I've seen (the other child) just over two weeks ago now, so it was good.

Colm spoke of **using drugs before he left school at the age of fourteen** and when asked what advice he would have for young people in school now he said:

Yeah, I would have stayed away, I would have kept far away from the bad crowd of people because they lead you down the wrong roads. I got stabbed nine times over drugs and bad crowds and (stay) away from silly people, you know, kids aren't stupid, you know what I mean? So, that's my advice now would be keep with the positive people and not the negative people.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Colm spoke of the need for more housing and that Irish people should be prioritised. He said that he is frustrated in relation to the housing list as he has been on it for fourteen years and he is seeing people arriving in Ireland and being housed after a few months:

I think they should help to get more houses because I've been on the list over 14 years now and there's people down on the list and there's three, four, five months and they're getting houses and I've got two kids and it's not fair on them, you know?

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Colm said that he would like to have his own house, be working again as a butcher and have access to his children.

In my own house, back to work and just try and do everything…I'm a qualified butcher…So I'd just go back to that. I worked for seven years.

3.3.12 James (Participant 12)

Aged: 20 years

James is 20 years old and has been homeless for the last three years since he was 17. This is due to addiction and the breakdown in the relationship with his family. He is in recovery and is in drug-free accommodation. He is not in touch with his family at the moment, with the exception of his grandmother. This is due to breakdown in relationships from when he was using drugs and also due to the fact that they have problems themselves.

I'm still close with my Grandma, but the rest of them are sort of in their own problems.

James **completed his Junior Certificate and left school in fourth year when he was 14 years old. This was due to addiction**.

See, they (the school) tried to keep me, and they kept on trying to tell me, 'You can't leave,' and all this sort of stuff, and I knew I could but they were just trying to keep me back in. I used to talk to the principal, he kept on asking me what drugs I was taking and I was telling him. He'd go on about staying, 'If you don't stay, you're going to regret,' and all, but it wasn't a priority. I was dealing with so much bigger things than coming into school every day, which is sort of sad but it's the truth of it.

I would have loved football and all when I was younger, but...I got into really bad things when I was really young, so I wasn't interested in going and playing football on the weekend…(I was) 14, 15. But see it was well before that, that I was involved in it…Growing up with who I grew up with, I always sort of knew it…It was like I was in the mindset of it before I was involved.

James was also **diagnosed with ADHD, dyspraxia, social anxiety and clinical depression between the ages of 11 and 14 years**:

I had ADHD, dyspraxia... I had motor tics…

It's like twitches and stuff like that…All that sort of stuff…It's sort of like... Social situations, they terrify me…I was diagnosed clinically depressed, as well (at) 14.

James said that teachers in secondary school had tried to help him but that he could not trust them or accept help at the time.

Yeah they were sound...I gave teachers a serious amount of trouble, but now that I'm older I understand that they were coming in to us to try help me, and I couldn't take it. I couldn't take people being... How do I put it? Nice, and trying to help you, I didn't know it. I thought there was a loophole round it. (I thought) 'What does she want?' Now, obviously, I'm more understanding of it, but...They tried their best. Even the school tried to support me through what I was going through…like drug wise…they were trying to support me through it all. I just couldn't handle it…My head was sort of gone from a young age.

He spoke of one particular **close relationship with a teacher in secondary school**:

There was one…he was actually sound, he was nice, and he'd sort of go out of his way to make you a cup of tea even though it wasn't allowed and he'd talk to you and all, but...My sort of thing was, he'd try to understand, I don't know if he did or not, but it's really hard to understand unless you've sort of...done it. I don't know, but then again at that age I didn't really want to listen to anyone…I don't know how many times people said to me, 'I think this is going to happen to you, you're going to end up like this,' and then I'm like, 'Yeah, whatever.' And then I expect, say, my little brother to listen to me when I say it to him. It doesn't really work like that…(you need to) figure it out yourself.

James was **suspended while at secondary school for messing:**

(For) giving cheek and just slacking. I had no sense of respecting people that had some sort of authority over me.

James spoke of doing his homework himself as those at home would likely not have been able to help:

No. I would say I could have, if I really wanted to, but they wouldn't have been any better than me trying to do it.

When asked what he had wanted to be when he was in school James said that whenever he had ideas about goals for future careers it seemed stupid given his home and family circumstances:

You sort of think of these things, 'I want to be this, that, and the other,' but then straight away you're sort of, 'How am I going to be that? I'm in this situation, how am I going to do that?' I found it stupid to think of (it)

James said that he attended the Lucena Clinic for support with mental health issues from the age of 11 and that there had been one psychologist who he felt he could speak with and trust:

I actually first was there when I was 11…for everything. Anxiety, Tourette's, motor tics, ADHD, everything, all that sort of stuff. Then, I was going there until, I'd say 14. I went back because, the girl I used to see, she was a psychologist and she was cool, I liked going there because when I went there, I'd sit with her for an hour or two hours and she was sort of like... You'd feel comfortable with her, she was cool. Then when I was 14…I had to go see a different doctor who was just, you walk in, weighing scales, check your pulse, 'How's your medication? Grand, right, go on, I'll see you in two months.' That was me, I wouldn't like trusting people at that age, I just didn't do it…I do understand now, they have so many people coming in that they can't see them all. But when I was a bit younger, it was easier that I had someone to talk to that sort of understood, it was cool. And she wasn't just throwing all these types of medication at me, so it was good. But then I ended up just doing that with him

for a while, and just said, 'Fuck that, I'm not going in just to get weighed.'

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, James called for better drug education, more practical education about how to cook and clean and suggested that teachers should be more respectful to students and not shout at them:

They need to start teaching people how to manage money, cook, clean, do you know that sort of practical stuff?

I don't think there's any way that they can steer people away from addiction, but they can try…I didn't know anything about drugs in school. As in, education wise…I learned absolutely nothing…But then again, I was sort of deluded in a way, that I never thought I was going to end up like my family…But there was zero drug education, nothing.

Some teachers, as well, they like to scream at fucking kids and all, and I didn't agree with it…They just like power, do you know what I mean? I could never... I still struggle with people shouting at me, or telling me what to do…I'd be ten times more likely to do something if you ask me to do it, rather than shout at me…I had a problem with going back at teachers, I just wasn't one to take people shouting at me, I didn't like it.

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, James spoke of the experience of homelessness as not having an emotional connection with the people that you are living with:

There's no emotional connection with whoever you're living with…So it's different to a family environment.

In relation to his mental health and whether homelessness had impacted on it, James said that it definitely had and that in particular he finds the insecurity of being homeless hard to deal with:

100%, definitely…Because the unsurety of everything...There's so much about it, you're not settled, you don't have your own place… You're not settled as in, (with) the people you know 100%.

When asked what advice he would have for young people**,** James emphasised the **importance of talking to people and recognising that it is ok to be struggling, whether with mental health issues or addiction**:

Talk to people. It doesn't matter if there's no support in your school, there is support somewhere, but it's just more so that people need to be aware that it is all right to be struggling. Not that it's good, but it's not as if no one knows what you're going through, people do. It's just about asking. I don't think it's talked about enough, because it goes on…depression, anxiety, drug addiction, alcohol, suicide, whatever. I think nowadays, in the past year or two…There's less stigma, but also people are all right about coming out about it, but a lot of people aren't. I know people that have killed themselves, do you know what I mean? But people just don't want to say anything, which is sort of understandable, but I think schools need to be saying, 'These opportunities are here, it's all right to be like this, we have people that will support you through it,' instead of geography, history, do you know what I'm trying to say? Because people get sick of it. And even say with the Leaving Cert, I know loads of people that are doing it and they do be stressed out to bits.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, James spoke of the need for **more support for people experiencing homelessness in the form of training schemes and learning programmes to give them hope and encourage them about their prospects.** He spoke about how the problem was being ignored and mentioned attempts to hide the problem during the Pope's visit:

The one thing would be, just more support around it. Support, because if there's support around it, that at least they (homeless people) know if they do certain things they'll get somewhere. Do you know what I mean? Most of them are just sitting there, wishing. Do you know what I'm trying to say? Or even more schemes or programs to get them ready for it, or something like that. Training schemes, or just learning, do you know what I mean, for people that are going through it, or just that they're aware that they could possibly get somewhere at some point…Give them hope, because they've nothing, no hope at all. And I know that's not the government's fault, or anything like that, but it's just... It is a serious, serious, serious problem.

And see, do you know when people end up homeless, 80% of people, it can go one of two ways. It's like, 'Right, I'm going to keep going doing what I'm doing, or I'm done taking drugs and I'm going to change, but if I change I'm still going to be homeless, so what's the point in changing?' That's what a lot of people are caught up in and people are just dying in sleeping bags. Do you know what I mean? And it's sort of ignored, homelessness, it is. They're just sort of blowing past it. Do you remember when the Pope came over? And they put all the homeless people into hostels and all, to get them off the street for one night while the Pope was going through, and throwing them straight back on the street after. Do you know what I mean? Obviously I don't think it's the government's fault necessarily that people are homeless, but surely we're a country, they run all the money, something could be done? Do you know what I mean? If they have the money to be building all sorts, surely something can be done. It doesn't seem like something that's impossible, it seems like something that should be extremely possible, if they really wanted to do it…But I don't know. It's not affecting the people that are in the government, so I don't think they really care…That's my thought, anyway…And it's sad.

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, James said that he would like to have a steady job, his own house, and feel

secure. He is starting an **apprenticeship as an electrician** in September.

A Steady job…I just want to be sort of secure…I'm starting an apprenticeship as electrician in September…So that should be good. Also me own place to live, a job, probably a car, and just happy…I've said it to people, I could be dead…Because I was literally clean with nowhere to live. Do you know what I'm trying to say? So if I went back out there, I was just going back on drugs. Do you know what I mean? And everything I've asked for help with, with Peter McVerry Trust, I've got. I've been supported through everything…And I always know that there's continued support. Do you know what I'm trying to say? I know I'm not on my own.

3.3.13 Peter (Participant 13)

Aged: 33 years

Peter is 33 years old and has been homeless for the last two years as a result addiction. He has been living in the current drug-free Peter McVerry Trust accommodation for seven months and was a detox facility before that. Peter grew up in Connaught. He spoke about relationships with his family members having been damaged during the time that he was using drugs and that he is in the process of reconciling with them.

(I'm) kind of more building bridges now that were destroyed years ago.

Peter's brother died when he was 12 years old and he describes this as influential in his experience of addiction that follows and his disengagement from life, including his education. Peter had enjoyed primary school and had been a bright, academic child. Peter has two children who are eleven and nine years old.

My early childhood was good. My brother died in an accident when I was 12…And I was hanging around on the back road at the time so I kind of went head first into drink and drugs. So my teens were chaos…I enjoyed primary school…just once my brother died I gave up on life. I didn't push myself at all. I would have been in the top percentage of all the classes in primary school.

Peter completed his Leaving certificate. He wanted to work in aircraft maintenance and has been trying to get into it since getting off drugs. He passed the aptitude test and did not pass the interview stage. As applicants had generally gone to college Peter was advised to do a PLC course in engineering and reapply. He is starting this course in September 2019 and it will run until June 2020. He is currently working in a warehouse as a supervisor.

Peter said that he **did not have any close relationships in either primary or secondary school**. He was very involved in sports which was mainly, he said, to get out of going to class.

I would've played every sport going just to get out of class.

Peter was **suspended a few times during secondary school. He was dealing drugs in school.**

Peter spoke of not doing his homework or studying in school. He said his mother would have helped if he had asked but he pretended to her that he was working.

I just didn't do anything when I was there (at school). I didn't want to be there, so...I just kind of like showed up and went on, I didn't do homework or studying…my mother was very supportive if I ever looked for help...I used to just hide everything from her and tell her I'd done all the work.

In relation to what he would like to see in schools to support young people who might be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness, Peter called for **better drug education and support for people using drugs in school and more real life skills.**

Some information. They knew that I was using, but they didn't know what to do, didn't have any options, there was no "go and talk to this person"

In terms of **privacy and the physical environment** of his accommodation, Peter said that he was sharing and has recently moved into a single room which is important given his current working routine. He is working early morning and late evening shifts at a warehouse as a supervisor and his hours would make sharing a room difficult:

It's going to be mornings one week and evenings the other week, so six to two in the morning and two to ten in the evening…I'm going to be up at 4 o'clock in the morning and up in the evening.

In relation to his **mental health**, Peter said

that the experience of homelessness had negatively impacted on his mental health and that he was in the process of trying to register with a GP in Dublin so that he could access mental health supports.

Mental health, definitely…Mental health, some days are better than others. I suffer with depression and anxieties. Yeah, I definitely need mental supports, here. I'm in between doctors at the moment. I'm trying to transfer up here. She (doctor) said that I need to be a patient of hers before she can refer me…But she said that my medical card needs to be in her name before she can refer me.

He said that he had been **offered some bereavement counselling in school when his brother died** but that he had not been ready to participate in it:

Initially when my brother died…I just wasn't ready, I didn't understand what it was about. I remember he said to me that I didn't have to talk if I didn't want to, so I just sat there.

He spoke of currently going home approximately once a month to see his children.

When asked what **advice he would have for young people in school now,** Peter said to remember that it is a short time and to make an effort while you are there and stay away from drugs and negative people who might be on that path:

It's a limited amount of time and you kind of need to push yourself while you're there rather than regret not because I still have nightmares about not doing well in leaving cert…Thinking I should have done this and I should have done that. (I have) loads of regrets about it. I thought it was never going to end while I was there. But looking back now there was a very short time now and I'm sorry I didn't put the effort in then. The main thing for me was the drugs, the drinking and drugs, and hanging around with those people that I could drink and use with...and avoiding all the people that were studying…

what I needed, you know it was kind of to hear what can happen with drugs and not pushing myself in school and turning to drink and drugs, becoming homeless and addicted to heroin…I didn't think it would ever happen to me. I thought I was able to control whatever...It was only when I tried to stop that I really noticed how bad it was.

When asked what advice he would have for the Government to better support homeless men, Peter spoke of the need for **more accommodation, temporary accommodation and mental health supports.**

He also mentioned the lack of detox facilities in Ireland outside of Dublin and that this was why he had initially come to Dublin.

There's no support anywhere outside Dublin. There's no detox (outside of Dublin) and treatment is kind of 28 days and they let you out, there's no aftercare, there's no more supports or housing or anything like that…I got clean and I realised that you can do it, and then the supports up here, that's the reason I want to stay here now for the next few years…the more supports the better, really. There's no options (outside of Dublin).

In relation to where he would like to be in five years, Peter said that he would like to have his own place and be working in aircraft maintenance.

I have a plan in place at the moment, I want to do a PLC course in December in engineering…And I'm going to reapply for the aircraft maintenance.

3.4 Questionnaire and interview findings

This section discusses the findings of the questionnaire and interviews under the following subsections:

1. Current context of study participants including; demographic profile, experiences of homelessness, health and wellbeing and educational and employment status

2. Educational experiences of Primary and Secondary School

3. Educational supports and risks

4. Current challenges and future aspirations

5. Advice for young people and key decision makers

3.4.1 Characteristics of Study Participants

As mentioned in Section 3.4.2, the study consisted of a total of 51 men, aged 18 to 38 years currently living in temporary and emergency accommodation across 13 sites participated in the study. There was fairly even distribution across the age range; however, it is notable, that 13 participants were aged 17-24 years, falling within the policy context and government commitments to children and young people as defined in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014). The majority of participants (86%) were born in Ireland two participants identifying as members of the Traveller Community. Three men were born in Africa; one was born in Europe and another in the UK, with all five men completing their education in Ireland. Forty-one of the participants grew up in the greater Dublin region, with a number coming from areas of deprivation and socio-economic disadvantage including; the North-Inner City, Ballymun, Finglas and Crumlin. The majority of participants grew up in parental care with two parents (48%) or within a single-parent family (34%). **Seven participants (14%) had experience of state care.** This is a significant over-representation given a national rate of 51 per 10,000 (0.51%) children under 18 years in the care of Tusla in December 2017. Eleven men indicated that they are fathers, with a collective total of 37 children, with one participant expecting to become a father in December 2019. None of the participants had ever married.

First Experience of Homelessness and Current Accommodation

While the questionnaire did not ask participants to detail their housing history; however, twenty-one participants (42%) indicated that their first experience of homelessness had occurred in childhood (birth-18 years).

Almost all interview participants spoke about their history of homelessness. In terms of the **age at which they became homeless**, the majority became homeless in their twenties. However, four of the thirteen became homeless under the age of 18 years, two of these were sixteen and two were seventeen. One participant became homeless at 20 years. Their periods of homelessness ranged from two years to thirteen years.

In terms of current provision, questionnaire participants in the study indicated relatively high levels of transition within and across homeless accommodation. Only 9 (18%) of participants had remained in the same accommodation for over a year, with the majority (32 participants) having lived in their current site for less than 5 months.

Table 3.4.1 Time in current accommodation

Time in current accommodation	Number of participants
<1 month	15
1-5 months	17
6-11 months	7
1 Year +	8
2 Years +	1

In addition to **time spent living in emergency or temporary accommodation**, a number of interview participants indicated that they had spent time living with friends, family and insecure accommodation (sleeping in a car and a caravan) before realising that they were homeless and 'officially' presenting to their local authority as 'homeless'.

I'm ten years sofa surfing, living in people's place, never my own house. (James)

I've lived in council flats my whole life and I feel like I've never left them. Couch surfing for years, for like four years or five years. Yeah and I only signed up with them (local authority) when I was 18, stupidest thing I've ever done in my life. But I'm homeless since 16 and I didn't even know what homeless was. (Conor)

Regarding the **time interview participants had been living in their current accommodation**, six had been living there for less than six months; three between six months and a year; and two for over one year. All thirteen participants had lived in several other homeless accommodations previously and many had been on the housing list for several years.

Perceived Pathways to Homelessness

In Ireland, the rates of homelessness are the result of structural factors and the most vulnerable members of society continue to bear the burden of austerity measures including ubiquitous cuts across health, education, social services, and most notably, public housing (Fitzgerald, 2012; Robbins & Lapsley, 2014; Ruane, 2016). Between 2007 and 2014 new build local authority homes plummeted from 4,986 to almost complete cessation, with just 102 local authority homes built during 2014 (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2015). The failure to provide social and affordable homes has coincided with exponential increases in homelessness since 2014. Despite commitments under Rebuilding Ireland, progress on social housing has been slow and there continues to be a chronic shortage of properties to rent that will accept individuals in receipt of housing assistance payments.

In addition to structural factors, individuals may experience personal risk factors including addiction, mental illness, bereavement, disability or relationship breakdown that can result in housing instability and homelessness.

Within the study, interview participants spoke of personal experiences that they believed had attributed to their experience of homelessness. In terms of the **reasons for their homelessness**, participants cited family and relationship breakdown; bereavement; and addiction as factors that had contributed to their homelessness.

Family and Relationship Breakdown

Eight of the thirteen interview participants indicated that the breakdown of family relationships had contributed to their experience of homeless and two mentioned separating from their partners as a contributing factor:

Basically I broke up with my partner and then I moved out. (I) lived with my father but then he didn't have room. So I just have to go into a hostel. (Jack)

I had my own home before all of this, with my ex-girlfriend. That broke down so, back on the streets, back through it all. I was on the streets for a year and a half, I was. Back and forward, staying in mates' gaff or staying on the streets. It just got messy. Then I was listening to McVerry. McVerry asked me to come along and stay in one of his, start working. (Aidan)

For others, the breakdown of family relationships, including parental separation and difficulties in parent-child relationships were identified as difficulties that resulted in homelessness;

When I was 16, I was living in a boarded flat, in the flats out in Ballymun. I was living with my family before that, yeah, but my mother and father split up, it was just, bad. (Aidan)

I became homeless when I was 19. My mam had kicked me out. (Jason)

It was the family home. Me Ma moved out. She moved in with her boyfriend and I continued to pay the mortgage for her on the house. So I was there for about four years. (Anthony)

Death of Parents

Three participants spoke how death of their parents has resulted in housing insecurity and homelessness.

I lost me Da 20 years ago, I lost me ma 28 years ago. Me Da when I was 4, me Ma when I was 6. Ah yeah, my housing was always insecure. We lived a poor life when me Ma and Da were addicts, all the family were addicts. I've always lived with different sorts of family with sisters, me Ma, me Da, aunties and uncles, friends' families. (Michael)

Me mother died at the age of 15 and me Da died when I was 16. I'm homeless say from 17. In and out of hostels cause I remember when me father died, I was heavy now, I was taking Benzos. (Stephen)

I was in care from the age of three until seventeen. I got out at seventeen, I moved back with my father. My father got sick, he died when I was twenty-five. My mother was already dead, she died when I was twelve. So, then when my father died, the council took my house off me and evicted me, it left me homeless, that's how I ended up homeless. (John)

Addiction and Substance Abuse

Experience of and exposure to drug and alcohol addiction in childhood was a prevalent theme across the interviews, mentioned by four participants:

It was more due to drugs really than, I am here because of choice, I made no one else. I'm clean four years but it is just a fact of getting back, getting back on track, jobwise, rent wise. (David)

Current Health and Wellbeing

When asked to rate their current **physical health**, 36 respondents (73%) described their physical health as excellent, good or very good; 8 fair and 4 (8.2%) reported poor physical health. Conditions reported on the questionnaire included physical conditions such as stomach ulcers, COPD, nerve damage and Chron's disease. Five of the thirteen interviewees said that their physical health was poor, with three saying it was OK. Two reported having lost weight due to poor health and one was on disability allowance due to acquired brain injury and another had a diagnosis of epilepsy. Two participants said that they had been hospitalised in the last year due to poor health and stress.

My weight difference. I used to be a lot heavier, than what I am now. I'd weigh, what, about eleven stone whereas, I used to be fourteen stone, before I went homeless…I'm after losing a lot of weight through stress…Through walking the streets. Before I got my hostel, I'd walk the streets…I'd get up at 9, 10 in the morning and you'd be walking the streets until 10, 11 O'Clock at night, just until it gets dark then, to go home, sleep in a tent or whatever…You're out every day. (Even if you're) in a B&B, you're still going out every day, just to pass time. You're out walking all day, because you're sick of sitting in a small room. That's draining, alone, but so is sitting in a room…Yeah, it's mentally draining. Physically, as well. (Aidan)

When asked to rate their current mental health, there was a decline in the ratings with 10.4% of questionnaire participants saying that it was excellent; 18.8% very good; 29.2% good; 22.9% fair and 18.8% reporting poor mental health.

Participants of the questionnaire and interview referred to homelessness as the primary cause of their poor mental health, with three parents detailing how difficulty spending time with their children has impacted on their wellbeing.

I'm depressed and in need of a change. (Participant 36)

I'm not happy that I am in homeless accommodation. (Participant 40)

I've no home to call my own or somewhere for my kids to come. (Participant 46)

It's like, it sort of drags you down at times you know like being in the situation I'm in, but you basically you just have to get on with it, live life. (Jack)

Respondents also detailed difficulties with diagnosed mental health conditions including; depression, stress and anxiety, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress, anger and drug-induced psychosis. Eleven men indicated that they are receiving medical supports from their GP or a mental health support team. Sixteen men reported that they were not accessing services for a diagnosed mental health difficulty. There were also comments included about the lack of mental health supports for men and lack of supports for men who have been abused.

Previously prescribed anti-anxiety/depression medication, stopped taking medication 3 months ago. (Participant 19)

No supports. Previously in psychiatric. (Participant 20)

None. Previously on anti-depressants stopped them after a couple of months. I also went to counselling for a short while. (Participant 27)

None at present, curious about attending anger management classes. (Participant 33)

They did not help me; no one is helping me. (Participant 38)

No supports for mental health as of yet. (Participant 43)

I'm depressed and in need of a change. (Participant 41)

Self-harm thoughts. (Participant 47)

Stress, trauma, depression, anxiety, anger, drugs. (Participant 36)

Twelve respondents indicated that they are currently experiencing drug and alcohol withdrawal symptoms, with four receiving medical support. Twelve respondents also indicated significant difficulty with sleep, including insomnia. There were also comments from participants who are parents about stress relating to parenting:

I get stressed every now and again with the kids wanting to stay with me. (Participant 14)

No home to call my own, somewhere for my kids to come. (Participant 21)

Interview participants spoke of mental health issues and that homelessness had impacted negatively on their mental health. Six spoke of experiencing stress. Three others mentioned anxiety, depression and anger issues.

It's like, it sort of drags you down at times you know like being in the situation I'm in…But you basically just have to get on with it…Live your life like. (Jack)

Three interview participants with children also spoke of being stressed about parenting and situations involving custody and the challenge and financial burden of spending time with their child while in homeless accommodation where it was not permitted to have children visit or stay:

I'm physically stressed. As well as my child. I try to think of my daughter, I'm only starting to see her again now, because I'm only coming back around to myself, through stress. I couldn't deal with seeing her. I'm starting to get back to a routine of seeing each other again…She's going through her own problems…She went through the homeless with me, and then she sees us split and understands. It's hard there, thinking about your kids, that's more problems to add to your homelessness. It's not an easy task. (Aidan)

Because I have a mobile down there so at least I can keep her (daughter) over for a week…Before that like, I'd have to book hotels and B&Bs and all just to keep her…So it's kind of a nightmare isn't it? (Jack)

Two said that they had poor mental health and one said his mental health was "up and down". Two participants were waiting for referrals from their GP to mental health supports.

Mental health, some days are better than others. I suffer with depression and anxieties. Yeah, I definitely need mental supports, here. I'm in between doctors at the moment. I'm trying to transfer (doctor). (Peter)

Four interviewees spoke of problems with sleeping, both due to insomnia and stress as well as

due to their physical environment which is discussed further below under challenges.

(My) mental health is fucked…I don't sleep. (Conor)

Current Employment Status and Level of Education

The education and employment status of participants varied significantly. In terms of the highest level of education completed, two participants had not commenced secondary education, with an additional 14 leaving school prior to completion of the Leaving Certificate. 24.5% completed the Leaving Certificate; 22.4% the Junior Certificate; 14.3% a post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) course; and 18.4% had some college education. Regarding employment status, sixteen participants are currently employed or enrolled in education or training programmes while 29 men (58%) indicated that they are not currently employed and are in receipt of jobseekers or disability allowance.

Two of the thirteen interviewees spoke of leaving school early to obtain paid employment. Three completed their Leaving Certificate. Two additional participants went back later to complete their Leaving Certificate. One completed it and the other became homeless at nineteen and did not complete it but opted to do an apprenticeship.

Of the thirteen interview participants, two were currently working and eleven were unemployed. Of those that were unemployed, eight participants were looking for work. Four participants had been working until recently. One mentioned that he had been working in construction until a year ago and that his stress levels had caused him to stop. He is currently looking for part-time work:

To be honest…I worked most of my life. I worked when I was old enough to work, until (a year ago). (John)

One participant had been working in informal employment as a scaffolder until the previous week and one had recently lost his job in a hotel due to illness. The men had a range of work experience and qualifications across the construction industry, services and hospitality sector and retail. Many discussed the challenges of finding and maintaining employment while living in homeless accommodation. These difficulties were associated with difficulty in the prohibitive cost and unreliability of public transport. Participants also discussed how living in shared accommodation can bring instability and can negatively impact daily routines and disturb sleep, making it difficult to get a keep a job. One participant expressed his frustration that he had been moved from his accommodation to another accommodation centre which meant that his commute to his job had gone from a few minutes to over an hour. He could not afford the transport and had had to leave. The area he was now living was out of the city centre and had less job opportunities.

It's hard to keep a job, when you're homeless…When you're moving around all of the time. I'm after moving…this is the third different hostel I'm in the last three months.. It's very disruptive. That's why I haven't worked now in about three or four weeks, because since I've moved here, it's just out of my way. I was working in town, now I'm in (another area), it's hard getting in when (before) I'd walk around the corner to my job. I can't even get a bus. (Aidan)

I need a house at least, somewhere to live because that's the main hurdle I have. In the time I've been homeless, I've had so many different jobs, like so many. I've been working while they're sending me round to different hostels all the time and I just wasn't able to do it. Even if I was to be working now, there's four in a room including me. Some lads wouldn't go to bed till

late, and I might be up early. It's just very hard. (Jason)

Despite this, some participants felt that working was beneficial for their physical and mental health and made the experience of homelessness easier to bear:

You need willpower enough to work living in hostels because when you're going off to work you see a lot of people staying in bed and all and losing interest and you're like oh fuck it like, I'll just stay in bed today or, yeah it's very hard like. Yeah, it's (working) good for your own sanity like to be honest with you. (Jack)

One participant was waiting to enter a detox facility for a six week period of treatment and was planning to look for work after they completed that. Another participant was waiting for a Safe Pass to begin working in construction. Past employment experience mentioned by participants included work as a chef, in manufacturing, in construction, scaffolding, roofing, butchery, retail, hospitality and working in a hospital. Four participants mentioned plans for further study and three of these had enrolled in courses in outdoor pursuits, electrician training and aircraft maintenance due to start in September 2020.

One participant said that they had submitted CVs and had not been successful in obtaining work:

I just want a job…If I got a job hand to me, I wouldn't fuck up, I would slap anyone's hand that got me the job…I'm putting out about a 100 CVs online and offline, know what I mean? If I got a job given to me by somebody, I would not slap the hand. Do you know what I mean? But I'm not even getting that chance. I'm not even getting that chance…I want to get a job. (Conor)

Summary

There was significant variance in the demographic characteristics and current contexts across participants in the study. This further highlights that the causes and individual experiences of homelessness are highly complex. Despite the heterogeneity of the group, it was noted that 42% of questionnaire respondents' first experience of homelessness had occurred in childhood (birth-18 years). The data from the questionnaire and interviews also indicates that for a significant number of the young men, homelessness has occurred alongside other forms of loss including breakdown of relationships and family and bereavement.

3.4.2 Educational Experiences

The purpose of the study was to consider the educational experiences of men currently experiencing homelessness with a view to identifying supports which could assist young people currently at risk of homelessness as well as education and training related supports currently needed by participants.The questionnaire and interviews asked participants to reflect on their experiences at primary and secondary school and related issues, as well as subsequent education or employment. The questionnaire and interviews also asked participants to share information about their current aspirations in terms of education, training or employment and their advice for more supportive schools, for young people who are at school now, and for the government to better support young men experiencing homelessness. Similar to the degree of variation in the demographic data, there was significant variation in the educational experiences reported. This section includes information about educational experiences at primary school and secondary school, as well as more detailed information regarding attendance and participation; learning and achievement; homework and parental involvement; and relationships with peers and teachers.

Overall Experiences of Schooling

When asked about their overall experience of school, the majority of participants reported that their experience of primary school has been positive.

When asked about their **overall experience of primary school**, 14% said that it had been excellent; 26% very good; 32% good; 22% fair; and 6% poor. Participants cited sports, friends, play time, art, learning and teachers as their favourite things about primary school.

Art class – freedom of expression. (Participant 12)

Learning about myths like Cu Cullainn. I had friends. I loved it. (Participant 5)

Four questionnaire participants mentioned teachers as their favourite thing, in particular one to one interaction with them:

Small, lots of one to one time with teachers. (Participant 4)

Teachers – one to one interaction. (Participant 7)

They mentioned homework, teachers being strict or violent and bullying as among their least favourite things. Again, four respondents mentioned teachers as their least favourite thing, in particular strict and violent teachers:

Strict Teachers. (Participant 9).

Teachers violent if arrived late. (Participant 17).

In comparison, when asked about their overall experience of secondary school, there was a marked decline in perceptions with 10.2% saying that it had been excellent; 10.2% very good; 26.2% good; 34.7% fair; and 18.4% poor.
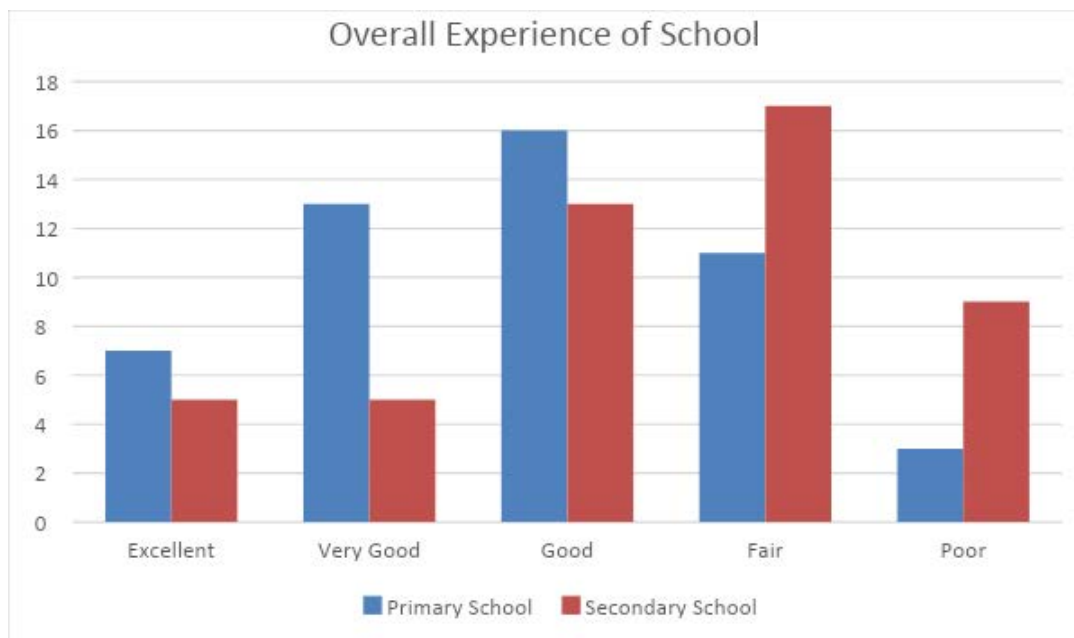

Participants cited sports, friends, breakfast club, woodwork and trips away as their favourite things about secondary school and bullying and poor relationships with teachers as their least favourite things. One participant cited their relationships with a "select few teachers" as their favourite thing about secondary school. Many identified difficulties and poor experiences related to learning difficulties, completion of homework and poor relationships with teachers (6) as their least favourite thing, in particular pressure they felt from teachers.

School Attendance and Participation

Participant reports of their school attendance varied between primary and secondary school. In terms of attendance at primary school, 20% of participants said that they had never missed school; 36% said that they missed on average one or two days per term; 18% missed school once a month; 12% missed school weekly; and 10% missed school multiple times a week. 60% (27) said that lack of attendance in primary school was due to illness and 29% (13) because they did not want to go to school.

Participants reported a reduction in regular school attendance at secondary school as compared with primary school, with more than half (57%) reporting weekly school absence. The primary reason for weekly school absence was 'I did not want to go' (22 participants) followed by illness (13 participants).

More than half of respondents (29 participants) reported involvement in the wider school community in secondary school, with participation in extra-curricular activities, including; homework clubs, sports teams and school language trips.

School Attendance
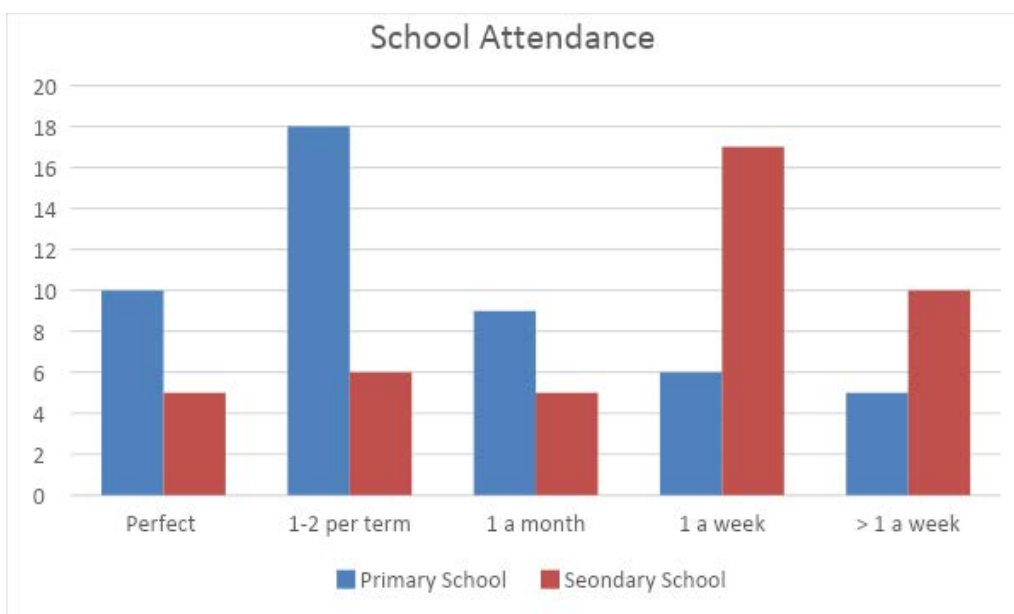
Parental Involvement and Support with Homework

With regard to their parents' or guardians' involvement in primary school, 74% of participants said that their parents or guardians attended all or most parent-teacher meetings; 8% about half of the meetings; 10% less than half; and 8% never attended parent teacher meetings.

Reported levels of parental involvement in school meetings was lower with regard to secondary school, with 67% of parents attending all or most parent-teacher meetings while 17% (8) reported that their parents did not attend any school meetings during their time at secondary school, over double the comparable figure for primary school.

Homework was identified as a school-related challenge in primary and secondary school across the questionnaire and individual interviews. Fifteen participants indicated that their mother or father would support them to complete their homework when in primary school, with 25 participants (52%) rating their ability to complete homework as fair or poor. Within this cohort, five participants reported that no-one at home or in school helped them to complete their homework when in primary school. Seven participants indicated that homework was their 'least favourite' thing about primary school.

Participant reports of ability to complete homework declined in secondary school, with 25

participants (52%) reporting their ability to complete homework in secondary school as fair or poor, and 20 participants reporting that there was no one available to help them complete their homework.

**Chart 3.4.5: Ability to complete homework in primary and secondary school**
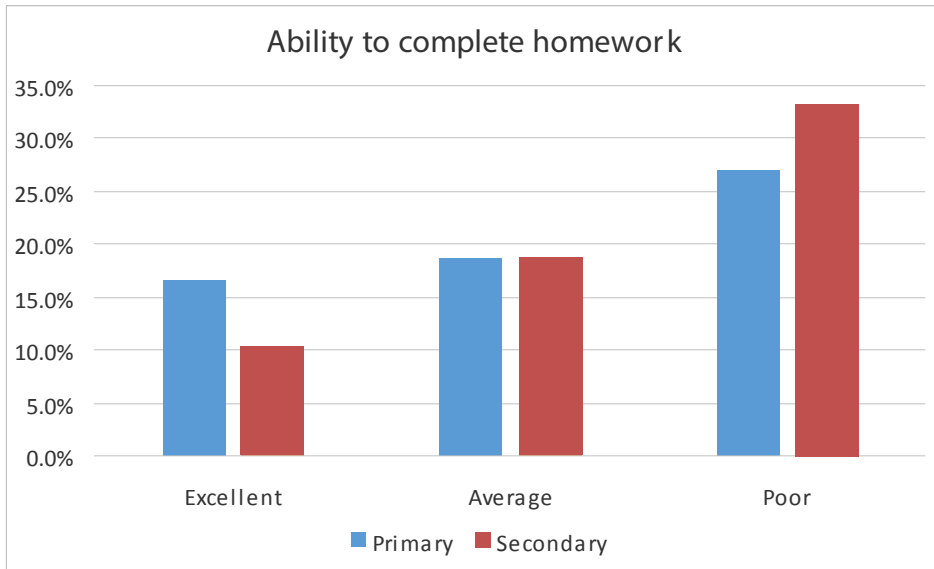
Some interviewees mentioned that their parents had not completed secondary school and that this had meant that they could not help them with homework:

When I was younger, my Mam did help me. Then like my Mam didn't have an education in secondary school either, she had to leave early, so I was kind of my own in secondary. But I was fine like, by then I could learn myself anything from a book so, I didn't really need help. (Jason)

Learning and Academic Achievement

All 50 participants answered the question regarding rating their **learning and achievement at primary school**, with 35 participants (70%) rating their learning and achievement as excellent, very good or good and the remainder indicating that it was fair or poor.

Participants rated their learning and achievement at secondary school, with only 27 participants (56%) rating themselves as excellent, very good or good, and 21 (44%) indicating their learning and achievement as fair or poor. This data indicates a decline in participants' perceptions of their learning and achievement between primary and secondary.

Learning and Achievement
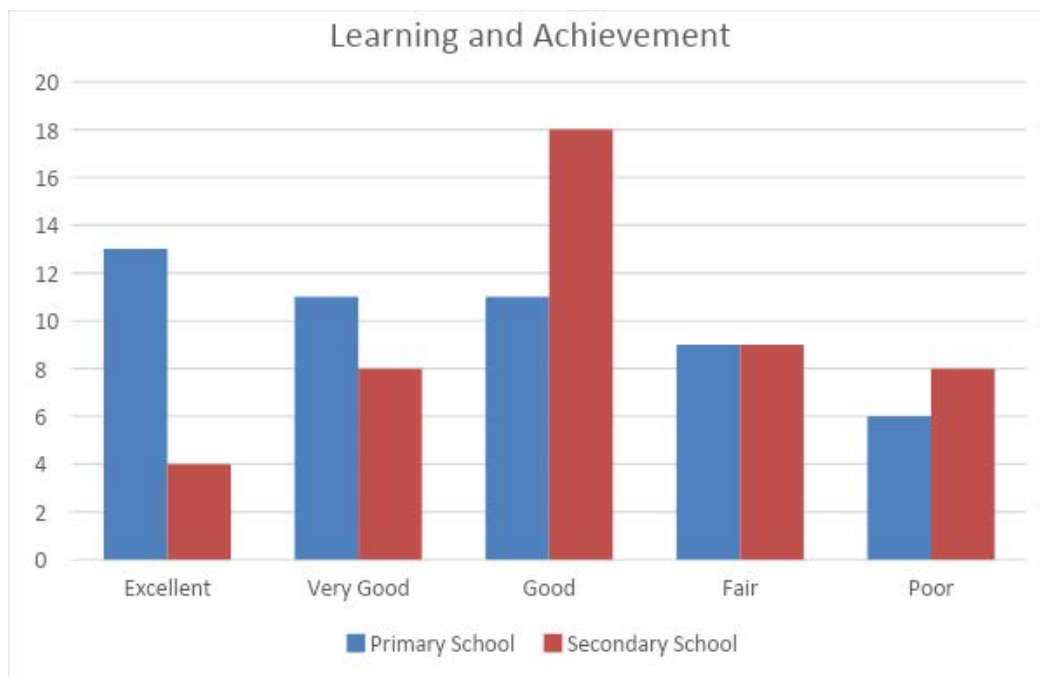
Interview participants spoke of doing well at school until they began to lose interest or have difficulties:

I was a straight-A student till like fourth year. I was brilliant at drawing, at building, brilliant at practical work. Drawing and woodwork, I got an A in woodwork, I got B in ordinary level tech graphics. I did my homework by myself because I was great at homework, but I stopped doing it then. (Conor)

I enjoyed primary school…just once my brother died I gave up on life. I didn't push myself at all. I would have been in the top percentage of all the classes in primary school. (Peter)

Participants were asked how important they considered academic achievement at secondary school. Thirteen participants (27%) rated it of importance, 14 (29%) indicated that it was some importance; and 10 (21%) participants indicated that it was not important at all.

Educational Goals and Aspirations

Participants were asked about their **early aspirations and what they wanted to be when they grew up** while at primary school. They mentioned the following professions: doctor, vet, barrister, scientist, zoologist, archaeologist, fireman, astronaut, pilot, carpenter, mechanic, train driver, cartoonist, writer, singer, artist, soldier, businessman, teacher, professional footballer and boxer. One participant said that he wanted to be a "good father" and another that he had wanted to be a "normal Joe". Others (4) said that they did not know:

(I) never had any thought of what I wanted to be. (Participant 41)

I never thought of that, I wanted to be me. (Participant 27)

Interview participants spoke of their aspirations while at primary school:

I wanted to be an archaeologist… I have always loved history. History was my favourite subject… I used to collect a bit of rocks and stuff like that. (David)

When asked about their aspirations for further study or paid work when they were in secondary

school, participants mentioned wanting to go to university to pursue further education and also mentioned apprenticeships in the area of construction and trades. They stated that they had aspired to careers as a barrister, pilot, journalist, professional footballer, IT professional, mechanical engineer, member of armed forces, accountant, electrician, builder, carpenter, and musician. They also mentioned aspirations to earn a good living and have their own place to live.

To get a good job. (Participant 17)

To earn enough money to get my own place. (Participant 21)

Paid work – anything. (Participant 12)

Twelve participants indicated that they did not have any aspirations for further study or paid work when in Secondary School.

None - lost interest. (Participant 9)

I did not have any plan for my life. (Participant 20)

One interview participant said that educational aspirations and goals for future careers were limited given his home and family circumstances which included substance abuse and addiction:

You sort of think of these things, 'I want to be this, that, and the other,' but then straight away you're sort of, 'How am I going to be that? I'm in this situation: how am I going to do that?' I found it stupid to think of (it). (James).

When asked whether they believed that their experience of secondary school had prepared them for further education or paid work, only 12 participants indicated that they believed it had, stating that school had supported with the development of academic skills and life experiences to support time and money management, as well as the ability to speak English. However, the majority (73%) did not feel that school had prepared them for further education or paid work. Eight participants stating that school did not equip them with relevant life-skills and real-life experience that could be applied to the workplace;

I always felt school prepared us to work in a factory. I was always aware of systems and apparent systemic power. (Participant 32)

School is a waste of time. The majority of what you learn is useless. Why would I need to know five different poems by five dfferent poets when I don't know how to open a bank account or how to sign on to social welfare or how to vote or how to do different type of tax forms. (Participant 48)

School never gave me guidance and knowledge about real-life experiences. (Participant 17).

One person mentioned that their **self-esteem had suffered as a result of their school experience**:

I felt like I was a worthless piece of shit. (Participant 24)

Peer relationships

Participants reported positive peer relationships while at primary school, with 33.3% saying that they had five friends or more at primary school; 6.3% had four friends; 22.9% had three friends; 14.6% had two friends; 14.6% had one friend, and 8.3% reported not having any friends. 79.2% said that they saw their school friends outside of school hours several times per week while at primary school.

Participants' reports of positive peer relationships in secondary school were comparable with primary level, with 42.6% saying that they had five friends or more at primary school; 14.9% had four friends; 14.9% had three friends; 14.9% had two friends; 4.3% had one friend, and 8.5% reported not having any friends. 76.6% said that they saw their school friends outside of school hours several times per week while at secondary school.
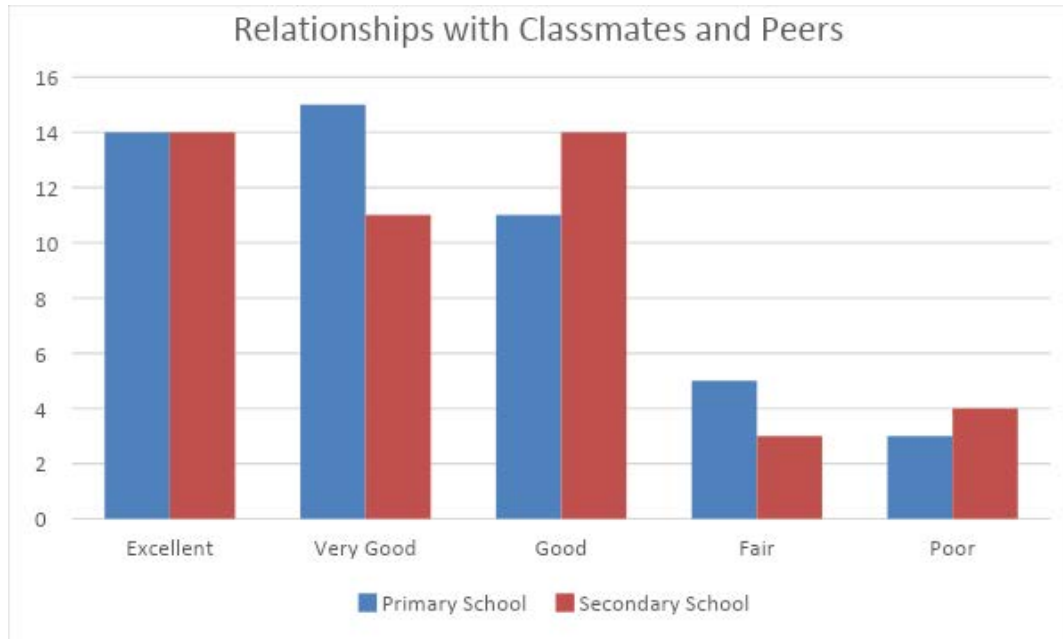
A number of participants reported frequent experiences of **bullying** while in primary school, with six participants experiencing bullying almost every day, seven weekly and eleven sometimes. This included experience of: physical abuse (26 participants), verbal abuse (28 participants), loss or damage to personal belongings (16 participants) and feelings of social isolation (17 participants) while in primary school.

Seven questionnaire participants experienced isolation every day in primary school; three once a week; and eight sometimes. Two questionnaire participants were embarrassed by a teacher almost every day; eight once a week; and eleven sometimes. Five questionnaire participants experienced detention after school or during break almost every day; eleven once a week; and ten sometimes.

In the comments section of this questionnaire question, participants gave more detail about their experiences of bullying, including reporting that they were bullied by teachers:

I was very thin and people used to bully me because of my weight. (Participant 13)

Some teacher actually hit me with a whiteboard eraser. (Participant 27)

School…was where I was bullied. (Participant 6)

Three of the thirteen participants in interviews said that they had been bullied and that it had started in primary school. One said that this had been due to being overweight and another due to that fact that he had lost his parents when he was a young child and did not have enough money to take part in school activities. One participant said that he had reacted to his experience by becoming a bully himself in secondary school which he now regretted.

I experienced trauma and bullying. I didn't have a Ma and Da on my side…I was always bullied, told that you don't have a ma, you don't have a Da at home to talk to you. You can't go home and ask your Da for money or you can't go home and say to your ma, ma I need a tenner cause my friends are going out to the disco I need a tenner. (Michael)

I was bullied, I was bullied from a young age. Bullied all the way up until secondary school and then when I got to sixth class…(then) I bullied through secondary school. I know I was a bully. I've called people, and texted people, and rang people crying, "Hey mate, I'm really, really, fucking sorry because -" I have a very bad conscience…I'm not that person. I'm not a bully… That's the one thing I hate in the whole world is bullies…I was one myself. But everyone is a bully at one stage…Everyone in this world has been a bully…Or been bullied. (Conor)

One participant described having been bullied by his peers as he was overweight, which then led to fighting with others and his own bullying behaviour:

I was bullied a lot when I was younger. So then I started sticking up for myself so I was in fights most of the time after school because I was overweight and stuff. (Jason)

Reports of difficulty with peers and incidents of bullying were comparable for secondary, with 28% of participants reporting that they had experienced forms of bullying and peer group isolation in secondary school daily, weekly or sometimes. This included; physical bullying (15 participants), verbal abuse and name calling (10 participants), social isolation (8 participants), damage to personal property (7 participants), threatening behaviour (15 participants).

Despite this, within secondary school, 10 participants reported that their friends, peer group and opportunities for team participation were their favourite part of schooling, with two participants reporting the value of having friends from primary school attend their secondary school.

Relationships with teachers and school staff

49 participants answered the question regarding rating their **relationships with teachers at primary school**, 74% (36) rated them as rated them as excellent, very good or good and the remainder as fair (6) or poor (7).

There was a deterioration in participants' perceptions of their relationships with teachers between primary and secondary school, with 18 participants reporting their relationship with staff to be 'fair' (9 participants) or poor (9 participants).
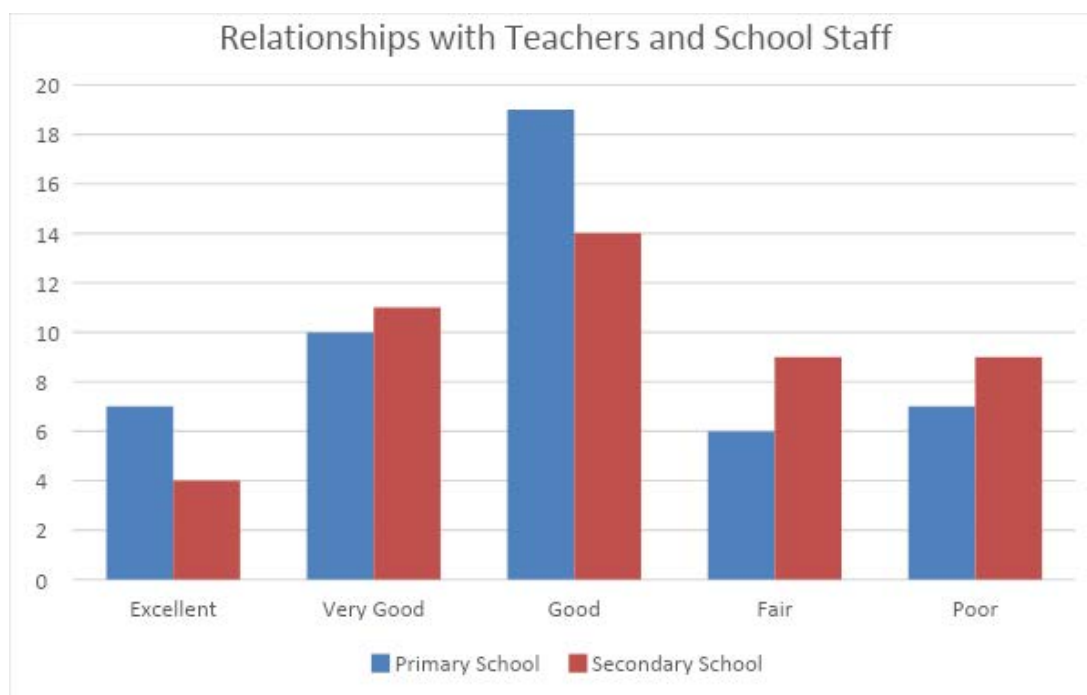
When asked how their teachers may have described them as primary school children, participants generally believed that teachers thought positively of them;

A loveable rogue. (Participant 9)

Bright but easily distracted. (Participant 11)

That I was energetic bright with a good perspective and a bit fidgety. (Participant 15)

A genuine fun person that had the craic him his class and staff. (Participant 25)

A good well behaved student. (Participant 32)

Approximately half of participants identified a favourite teacher or staff member from their time in primary (52%) and secondary school (62%). They described the attributes or supports that made this person memorable. These included reference to teachers who were 'funny' and used humour to connect with them, were 'easy to get on' with, as well as those who understood and listened to them, treated them fairly and respectfully, explained things clearly and believed that they were smart:

She knew I was acting out over my parents splitting up. (Participant 9)

(He) made me tea in the morning. Understood my background and he had no reason to help me but he cared about me. Talked to me. (Participant 47)

He was sound and he never spoke down to us, he respected us as who we were if we done the same for him. (Participant 31)

He was a nice person said positive things about me and believed in me. (Participant 11)

Five of the thirteen participants in the interviews spoke of having positive relationships with teachers in secondary school and discussed times when sports coaches, special needs assistants and guidance teachers had provided them with additional support:

There was one…he was actually sound, he was nice, and he'd sort of go out of his way to make you a cup of tea even though it wasn't allowed and he'd talk to you and all, but... My sort of thing was, he'd try to understand, I don't know if he did or not, but it's really hard to understand unless you've sort of...done it. (James)

I think at the age of 8, 9, I started to lose interest a bit. I don't know what that was. Just before my confirmation, I started losing a bit of interest. The teachers took a keen hold of me in sixth class and put me in an extra maths class, to help me. Done that, an extra English class to help me, put me in music to try get my head straight and get me focused on certain things. Had me singing in my confirmation and all so, they had me building up to this, for a year. They kind of helped me in that way. That all changed when I went into secondary school. (Aidan)

There was one. He was actually sound, he was nice, and he'd sort of go out of his way to make you a cup of tea even though it wasn't allowed, and he'd talk to you and all, but my sort of thing was, he'd try to understand. I don't know if he did or not, but it's really hard to understand unless you've sort of done it. (James)

One participant described school staff attempting to support him, but that he had not been ready to fully access the supports that were offered:

Yeah they were sound. I gave teachers a serious amount of trouble, but now that I'm older I understand that they were coming in to us to try help me, and I couldn't take it. I couldn't take people being…How do I put it? Nice, and trying to help you, I didn't know it. I thought there was a loophole around it. I thought, 'What does she want?' Now, obviously, I'm more understanding of it, but they tried their best. Even the school tried to support me through what I was going through, like drug wise, they were trying to support me through it all. I just couldn't handle it; my head was sort of gone from a young age. (James)

Some participants considered their relationships with teachers and school staff to be 'fair' or 'poor', in primary school (11 participants) and secondary school (18 participants). Participants reported negative experiences including experiences where they had been embarrassed by teachers in primary (20 participants) or secondary school (19 participants), with almost half of participants reporting that they had received unfair criticism or treatment from teachers or school staff. This included exclusion from classmates, after-school or break-time detention and feelings of embarrassment when made to sit at the back or front of the class which was reported to result in anxiety. Two interviewees reported that they had been bullied by teachers, one to the point of having panic attacks which still affect him on remembering his time at school.

It didn't seem to help that teachers used to grab me and put me sitting that way, facing the board, where all the classrooms were behind me. That was the majority. (Aidan)

I was coming home in the evening like I couldn't breathe and it was all due to cause I wasn't good at science and the science teacher was putting me down in front, but it's a long, but that had an impact on me. He'd put me up the front and compare me to (other students) you know. (David)

Some teachers, as well, they like to scream at kids and all, and I didn't agree with it. They just like power, do you know what I mean? I still struggle with people shouting at me or telling me what to do. I'd be ten times more likely to do something if you ask me to do it, rather than shout at me. I had a problem with going back at teachers; I just wasn't one to take people shouting at me. I didn't like it. (James)

3.4.3 Educational supports and risks

This subsection looks at educational supports and risks mentioned by participants in questionnaire responses and the subsequent interviews, including health, wellbeing and adverse childhood experiences, traumatic childhood experiences, drug and alcohol use; experience of the juvenile system, early school leaving, exclusion, suspension and punishment, authoritarian teaching practices, and transitions between schools.

The transcripts from interviews were coded according to **factors mentioned by participants which had both supported and posed risks to their education**. Regarding the supports or positive experiences at school reported which had supported their education, **positive relationships with teachers** was the most prevalent, this was followed by **positive aspirations and academic self-concept**; **access to supports in or around their school** was also mentioned, and finally **feelings of connectedness and participation**. Of the risk factors or negative educational experiences discussed, those that were mentioned most often were **lack of access to school-based supports** which were mentioned 28 times across the 13 interviews; the **incidence of ACEs** which were mentioned 23 times; **exclusion and punishment**, also mentioned 23 times; **difficult relationships with teachers** which were mentioned 21 times; and finally the **young person's own low expectations and aspirations for themselves** and their education and career progression or the **low expectations of their teachers** for them.

Health, Wellbeing and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Forty-six questionnaire participants responded when asked to describe their overall health and wellbeing while at secondary school, 23.9% (11) rated it as excellent; 21.7% (10) rated it as good, 13% (6) as fair; and 8.7% (4) rated it as poor. While participant reports of general health and wellbeing in secondary school were found to be generally positive, questionnaire respondents indicated significant experience of educational risks that have been associated with homeless and highly mobile school-aged populations (Cutuli, Montgomery, Evans, Chase, & Culhane, 2017; Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, & Neemann, 1993).

While at secondary school, 22 questionnaire participants said that they had experienced depression; 23 had experienced anxiety; 30 had experienced difficulties in concentrating; 18 experienced feelings of isolation or loneliness; 32 had experienced traumatic childhood experiences, including parental separation, bereavement or trauma; 17 experienced bullying and 15 had a learning difficulty.
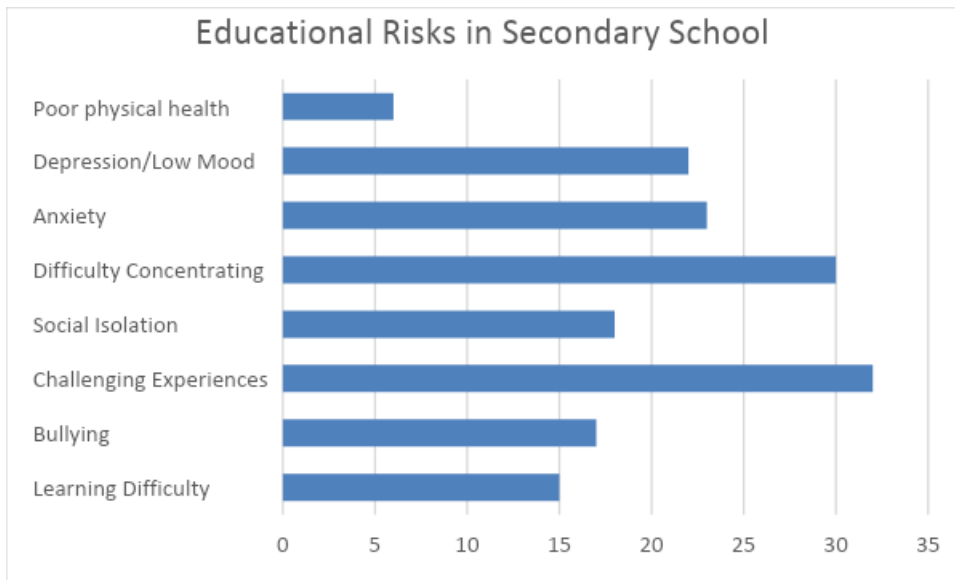
Regarding bullying, five questionnaire participants experienced this almost every day; three once a week; and six experienced bullying sometimes. Nine questionnaire participants experienced verbal abuse almost every day; four once a week; and seven sometimes. Five questionnaire participants experienced isolation almost every day; three once a week; and ten sometimes. Seven questionnaire participants were excluded from class activities almost every day; five once a week; and nine sometimes. Eight questionnaire participants were embarrassed by a teacher almost every day; two once a week; and eight sometimes. Twelve questionnaire participants experienced after-school detention almost every day; nine once a week; and ten sometimes.

Questionnaire respondents indicated that these experiences negatively affected their ability and capacity to fully participate in school life and learning;

Difficulty concentrating and learning difficulties made it tough to get all my work done. (Participant 22)

Parents separated and caused low mood, which then caused poor concentration. (Participant 45)

They also said that it had **negatively impacted on their enjoyment of and attendance at school**:

I never liked school. (Participant 14)

Not attending class every day. (Participant 27)

I did not want to attend due to addiction, childhood trauma. School was not a priority due to involvement with drug dealing and poor mental health. (Participant 20)

I didn't like going to school. So I didn't want to go. (Participant 19)

Started missing school more. (Participant 17)

Participants said that they had been caused **stress and anxiety and they reported feeling isolated from and fighting with their peers and being treated unfairly by teachers**. In some cases, this resulted in **increased use of drugs** and in **expulsion or leaving school early**:

Health and wellbeing poor, I was raging in school but no one helped me. (Participant 19)

Having no confidence and poor self-esteem. (Participant 12)

Resulted in a lot of fights at school. (Participant 14)

I was expelled as a result. (Participant 19)

(My) parents' separation caused extra worry for me. (Participant 16)

I learned not to let it phase me, which became a bad habit of not caring at all. (Participant 18)

Forced to leave school as I was getting into fights with the other kids and teachers. (Participant 20)

I was constantly worrying. (Participant 11)

Picked on by teachers for lack of concentration. (Participant 8)

What happened to me as a kid really messed me up big time. (Participant 6)

Traumatic Childhood Experiences

A total of 34 or 68% questionnaire participants indicated that they had experienced 'traumatic childhood events'. As mentioned in the section on literature, there is an increasing acceptance in research of the significance of the experience of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), in particular multiple experiences of ACEs, resulting in heightened risks for issues in later life, including homelessness, as well as lowered outcomes for children and young people. While the questionnaire did not ask participants to identify the nature or frequency of trauma, a number of participants offered examples including; domestic violence, exposure to suicide, bereavement, family breakdown, living in persistent poverty and parental separation. These experiences were often linked to educational difficulties and risked behaviours including; difficulty concentrating, drug and alcohol use and reduced school attendance.

Family, domestic violence led to anxiety; if I was not high on drugs I could not attend school. (Participant 13)

(I) experienced exposure to suicide at 16 and increased my drug use as a result. (Participant 4)

Parents separated and caused low mood which then caused poor concentration. (Participant 47)

As mentioned above, in addition to the questionnaire responses, interview participants also made reference to a range of adverse childhood experiences including; homelessness in childhood (4 participants), death of a parent or sibling (4 participants), family breakdown, exposure to suicide during childhood (1), exposure to drugs and alcohol, and experience of

abuse in childhood (2). Two participants mentioned having grown up in **consistent poverty**. One participant mentioned family separation and one participant was **placed in state care** from the ages of three to seventeen where he reported he was abused as a child. One mentioned having experienced **trauma** as a young child. One participant reported having had **mental health issues** as a child. Two participants reported having been **abused**. Regarding **addiction**, two reported having grown up with **family addiction** and two reported having **addiction issues themselves under the age of 18 years**. One participant reported having been born addicted to heroin as a baby.

While interview participants were not asked to identify the frequency of traumatic or adverse childhood events, their narrative and explanation indicated that they experienced multiple adversities, at times, resulting from an initial crisis such as a family breakdown or bereavement.

(Childhood) was a bit fucked up…It's like if you grow up in that, you're sort of set with a different set of morals and values…it's sort of like, you learn things you shouldn't learn, and you use them...I grew up with a family that were using drugs, so I learned what they were doing. (James).

Two interviewee participants said that they had been bullied by teachers, one to the point of having panic attacks which still affect him on remembering his time at school. Another participant mentioned that teachers had shouted at students.

In relation to questionnaire participants' participation in extracurricular activities in secondary school, there were 41 responses. Activities listed included football, GAA, music, Judo, basketball, table tennis, and orienteering. Four said that they had not been involved in any.

Drug and alcohol use at school age

Participants were asked to consider their experience of drugs and alcohol as teenagers aged 13-17 years. Tobacco, alcohol and cannabis were the substances most frequently used by participants, with 18 young people using cannabis on a daily basis. 28 drank weekly; and two drank every day. One participant indicated that he used heroin on a daily basis during adolescence.

Figure 3.4.3: Drug and Alcohol Use (13-17years)
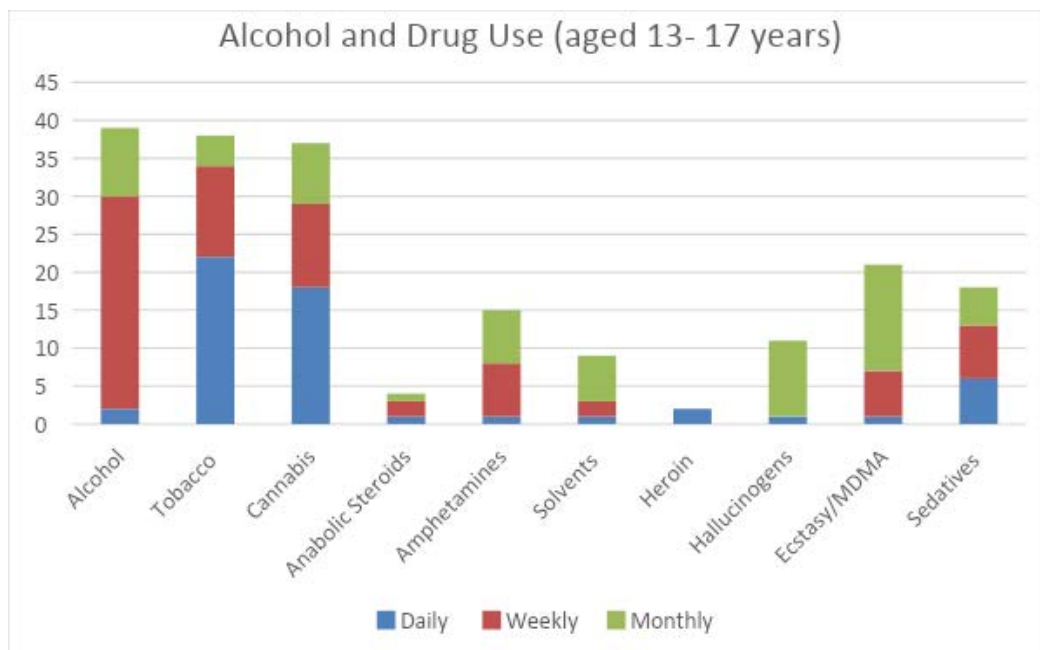
When asked if their secondary school offered support, advice or education in relation to drug use and/or addiction, 18 participants indicated that this was part of the school curriculum.

Experience of the Juvenile Justice System

In addition to risks to educational access and participation, participants were asked if they had experience of the **juvenile justice system**. Twenty-two participants (44%) indicated that they had experience of 'caution, arrest or detention'. Where specified, this was largely related to minor offences managed by Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLO), with two participants indicating serious offences; arson and assault, and one respondent indicating that he was placed in detention at age 16 years. When asked whether this had an impact on their school experience, 10 respondents indicated that it had an impact on their school experience. One interviewee mentioned having been temporarily detained while at school for trespassing.

Highest level of educational attainment and early school leaving

Thirty-seven participants (74%) completed a minimum of Leaving Certificate or equivalent, with two participants leaving school following completion of primary education, and eleven participants following completion of the Junior Certificate. Those who left school at primary level and following completion of the Junior Certificate indicated their reasons for early school leaving as: exclusion, not permitted to return to complete the Leaving Certificate (three participants), family difficulties that required the participant to stay at home (three participants), learning difficulties (two participants), move to take up paid employment (two participants) and illness (one participant).

School exclusion, suspension and punishment

42.9% of participants reported never having been excluded from school. 24.5% said that they had been temporarily excluded in the form of suspensions (12); 12% had experienced multiple or 'rolling' suspensions (6); and 18.4% reported having been permanently excluded or expelled from school (9). The average age that questionnaire participants were temporarily or permanently excluded from school was 14.9 years.

Table 3.4.3: Exclusions from school

RN= 50 RR= 48

Have respondents ever been excluded from school	Number of participants
No	**21**
Yes, temporary exclusion (suspension)	**12**
Yes, Multiple or 'rolling' temporary exclusions/suspensions	**6**
Yes, a permanent exclusion (expelled)	**9**

According to the latest national figures, there were 167 expulsions nationally for the 2016-2017 period, amounting to 0.048% of the population. There were 35 expulsions nationally in primary school in 2016-2017, up from 19 in 2014-2015 (Millar, 2018).

In terms of **reasons** for exclusions, 65.5% of permanent exclusions were due to non-violent behaviour; 37.9% were due to difficult relationships with teachers; 27.6% were due to poor attendance and 27.6% were due to violence towards others in school.

I got suspended every couple of weeks due to fighting. (Participant 5)

It was down to constant fights with my mother I could never go into school with a clear head. (Participant 14)

It's hard to have no home at 14 to try to get to school. (Participant 8)

The **average age** that questionnaire participants were temporarily or permanently excluded from school was 14.9 years.

Exclusion and punishment was the joint second highest issue raised by interviewees in terms of the challenges they faced in their education and it was raised 23 times across the course of the thirteen interviews.Twelve of the thirteen interviewees reported having been suspended; the majority had been suspended several times. Eight mentioned having been suspended several times. Two interviewees spoke of having been suspended five times and another reported being suspended on a monthly basis before leaving school after his Junior Certificate. One interviewee mentioned being suspended in-house for half of fourth year and made to repeatedly write lines. Others said that they had been suspended several times and that they could not remember how many. Five of the thirteen interviewees spoke of having been expelled; one of these was in primary school. Three interviewees said that they had been asked to leave their school. This is further discussed below in relation to processes for punishment and exclusion.

Once a month I'd be suspended, at least…I'd be suspended for three days every time. It was always the maximum, three days. (Aidan)

Interviewees reported they had received punishment for a variety of reasons, including angry behaviour, sometimes caused by lack of attention or refusal of requests for help from teachers, messing in class, not being able to concentrate, and taking and dealing drugs.

Loads of times…(for) flipping out. Like asking a teacher could I have help with a Maths question or something like English question or whatever question, Geography or something like that and "no, (be)cause there is only one teacher in the class, no. I'm doing work with the others…" (Michael)

I actually got the boot out of school, at the end of fifth year…I got the kick…I got kicked out of school, yeah…That was attention disorder, basically. (I) couldn't concentrate properly in class, acting the bollocks. Fidgety, wasn't a big fan of school, didn't like it. Things like that. I got more out of primary than I did out of secondary. (John)

I was suspended a few times. I was suspended for months on end (for) acting the bollocks. Just disorder. Not concentrating, acting the bollocks in class. Throwing things around. No, I wouldn't say fighting…No, still to this day, I don't like fighting. I'm a quiet person, you know that way. (John)

This is actually a true story. We were, me and one of my mates were in class and he said something funny and I thought it was funny so I laughed and she was like so what are you laughing at? I didn't want to say it in front of the class as it wasn't certainly appropriate and she was like right if don't tell me you're going to get suspended. I was like fair enough. And the second time I was something called a conduct card or something…A conduct card, a teacher writes, if you're late to every class and mine wasn't exactly the best so they suspended me but I think I did get a sign or something like that or my parents got something like that you know. Something to do with a conduct card they suspended me over. (Simon)

I used to talk to the principal, he kept on asking me what drugs I was taking and I was telling him. He'd go on about staying, 'If you don't stay, you're going to regret,' and all, but it wasn't a priority. I was dealing with so much bigger things than coming into school every day, which is sort of sad but it's the truth of it. (James)

As mentioned above, sixteen questionnaire participants experienced detention after school or during break almost every day or once a week at primary school. At secondary school, 21 questionnaire participants experienced after-school detention almost every day or once a week. Interviewees expressed a **lack of understanding regarding systems and processes for exclusion and punishment**. They mentioned conduct card and conduct sheet systems and that it could be confusing as some teachers would give conduct cards or sheets for things that other teachers would not. Interviewees mentioned being unsure of how systems to punish behaviour worked and that often it had been down to the discretion of individual teachers and that some made decisions that they considered to be unfair:

Well I was having problems with teachers and stuff. In the school they have a system where you get nine of these sheets and they're called conduct sheets…And once you get nine of them, that's an expulsion…But you can get them for just like stupid things that you should be getting detention for. So I didn't really think that system was fair. (Jason)

As mentioned above, three interviewees said that they had been expelled before clarifying that they had been **asked to leave** by their school. This was often presented as aimed at improving the chances of the student finding a place at another school. This can raise some procedural issues however given that the normal exclusion processes are not adhered to and there was a lack of closure expressed by interviewees about being expelled, why this had happened and

whether it had been fair.

They didn't expel me, they asked me to leave…So they said they'd leave it off my record…And then I got into another school and they did expel me, but they kept me for the last few weeks before the Junior Cert exam. (Jason)

I left at 14 because I was asked to leave. They said "it would look better for you if you left instead of us putting you out". (David)

Participants were asked whether their **experience of exclusion and suspension had impacted on their educational experience**. None of the interviewees who were suspended or expelled spoke of receiving home tutoring. One said that he had been allowed to come into school for afterschool study. One interviewee who was suspended five times said that he felt that it had impacted negatively on his education:

Kind of, because you're not there. You're not seeing it, you don't know what's going on…I used to just get the extra homework. So if you weren't in that day, you'll get it the next time… (Anthony)

Participants spoke of also being **excluded from sports and other school activities because of behaviour:**

Yeah, until I act up and then they would tell me that I couldn't do any activities and stuff like that. (Jason)

Authoritarian teaching practices

Interviewees perceived that they had been treated unfairly by teachers and excluded by classmates, forced to sit at the back or front of the class.

It didn't seem to help that, teachers used to grab me and put me sitting that way, facing the board, where all the classrooms were behind me. That was the majority of the classes. (Aidan)

One interviewee mentioned being put up the front of the class and his work being compared to other students and that it caused him to suffer with anxiety and have panic attacks:

I was coming home in the evening like I couldn't breathe and it was all due to cause I wasn't good at science and the science teacher was putting me down in front, but it's a long, but that had an impact on me. He'd put me up the front and compare me to (other students) you know. (David)

Some teachers, as well, they like to scream at fucking kids and all, and I didn't agree with it… They just like power, do you know what I mean? I could never... I still struggle with people shouting at me, or telling me what to do…I'd be ten times more likely to do something if you ask me to do it, rather than shout at me…I had a problem with going back at teachers, I just wasn't one to take people shouting at me, I didn't like it. (James)

Interviewees criticised a perceived **lack of effort to work with students and look at causes or circumstances relating to behaviour issues**:

Well obviously, they could do a lot of things better…I don't know, they can just handle the situations a bit better. I mean, I don't think I should have been kicked out of school at 14. I always blamed my parents but then now I'm thinking maybe it is down to the education system, like teachers and stuff like that…Instead of dealing with the problem, they just suspended, and suspended and suspended and then expelled me. (Jason)

One interviewee spoke of being offered counselling but that it was short-lived and that it had not felt to him like a genuine effort on the part of the school to help him:

They did get me counselling, but it didn't last for long...I think they just wanted rid of me out of school. (Jason)

Transitions between schools

In terms of **transitions between schools**, 30 questionnaire participants attended one primary school only; 14 attended two; three attended three primary schools; and two attended four or more primary schools. There were fewer transitions reported for secondary school, with 33 questionnaire participants attending one secondary school only; nine attended two; two attended three primary schools; and one attending four or more secondary schools.

Table 3.4.3 School Transitions

RN= 50 RR= 48 (p.ed) 45(s.ed) 21 (H.ed)

How many schools have respondents attended	1 School	2 Schools	3 Schools	4 + Schools
Primary School	30	13	2	2
Secondary School	32	9	2	1
Higher or further education	15	5	0	1

Participants gave a range of reasons for moving school, ten said that moving house had been the reason, in some cases, due to their parents separating; two participants moved school because they were expelled; one participant due to homelessness; one due to being hit by a teacher; one because they were in state care; and one because they were not doing well at school.

Principal hit me with a cane in the first school, moved house the second time. (Participant 10)

Bullied in Primary school. Expelled in Secondary school. (Participant 8)

Parents got divorced. (Participant 14)

One interviewee spoke of changing schools in primary school and three changed schools in secondary school, in some cases following being asked to leave as outlined above.

3.4.4 Current challenges and future aspirations

When asked about their aspirations for the next five years, **79.1% of participants in the questionnaire said that they would be interested in further education or training**. When asked in which areas, they mentioned the following: IT, business, fashion, culinary arts, healthcare, science, engineering, SafePass, construction training including scaffolding, law, social care, politics, metalwork, hairdressing, finance, aircraft maintenance, spray-painting, plumbing, training to be an electrician, training to be a mechanic, training to teach music,

security work, training to work in addiction services, training to work in the homelessness sector, training to work with animals.

Homelessness sector. The whole country should be talking and studying about it, housing is a human right. (Participant 11)

When asked about the barriers that they face in terms of participating in future education or training participants cited their current lack of permanent accommodation as the main barrier, including having to share with others which was not conducive to studying or maintaining a normal routine for training and employment. Eight participants mentioned addiction and drug use as a barrier, four participants mentioned mental health issues and communication difficulties, including depression and autism, six mentioned a lack of qualifications and sufficient financial resources to obtain these, one participant mentioned poor physical health and back problems impacting on their ability to work in construction in which they were trained, and one participant mentioned their criminal record as a barrier.

It was very tough on me that I was in a four (person) shared bedroom room while I was doing my PLC course in 2019. Hopefully that won't happen to me this September when I'm studying my course. (Participant 4)

Hard to see while homeless. (Participant 7)

My living conditions which are unstable. (Participant 14)

I'm a roofer my back is bad but anything else I'd be willing to do. (Participant 30)

Addiction, ASD, mental health, financial problems and criminal record. (Participant 21)

Participants in the interviews mentioned access to supports and services, including housing, as the main challenge they faced currently. This was followed by challenges relating to their mental health and physical wellbeing; difficulties maintaining employment and/or education, and challenges pertaining to personal relationships in their lives. Regarding their physical environment, interview participants mentioned having problems with a lack of privacy due to sharing a room, often with three other men.

Like a lot of people shouting and screaming and banging doors and everyone is going across landings and stupid shit going on…You can't focus. You can't keep your mind settled…You have your own space (room) but people are always on top of you, running into room. (Michael)

Where participants had their own room, frustration was expressed with the number of room checks.

Fighting and noise was mentioned as an issue in the accommodation and as mentioned above, participants spoke of having difficulty relaxing and getting sufficient sleep. Two participants also spoke of having their personal belongings stolen, one participant reported his room being robbed three times in the last year.

Four alpha males in the one room, there's trouble.There you go, the young fella smashed a telly in my room, the other day. He went off the head because people were robbing…someone walked into our room and robbed the Chromecast, that we were only after buying…People who are living in the house are actually robbing us. (Aidan)

My room got robbed three times, three times in the hostel. Not once did I get anything back, did I get refunded money, nothing. (Conor)

One participant said that he did not feel comfortable cooking as he always felt an obligation to share with other residents and this had made cooking in the accommodation expensive:

I haven't ate a proper dinner, in probably about a year and a half, two years. I go out with my girlfriend, now…I haven't actually sat down and cooked my own (food)…We have facilities for it, but you want your own facilities. You want to be in your own place, you don't want to be sitting there cooking and you have someone starving behind you, going can I get some, and you feel sorry for them, you're going to do it, which I've a big heart like that, so I will do that. You don't want to be doing that every day, people feed off your kindness…people take your kindness for weakness, I understand that. So I eat takeouts and stuff. (Aidan)

Eight interview participants spoke of having experience with addiction and the relationship between this experience and their homelessness; two of these spoke of using drugs while at school. One participant spoke of having been born addicted to heroin as a baby and another said that he had been on and off drugs over several years. Three participants said they smoked cannabis, one participant saying they did so all day. Two participants were currently in recovery and two were waiting for beds in detox facilities.

It was more due to drugs really than, I am here because of choice, I made no one else. I'm clean four years but it is just a fact of getting back, getting back on track, jobwise, rent wise and… Compared to where I was five or six years ago I'm totally different. You know I thought I would die

Another interview participant spoke of the importance of the support and aftercare he has received:

I could be dead…Because I was literally clean with nowhere to live. Do you know what I'm trying to say? So if I went back out there, I was just going back on drugs. Do you know what I mean? And everything I've asked for help with, with Peter McVerry Trust, I've got. I've been supported through everything…And I always know that there's continued support. Do you know what I'm trying to say? I know I'm not on my own. (James)

Questionnaire participants were asked **where they would like to be in the next five years**. There were 41 responses. They said that they would like to be working, with some specifying careers as pilots, nurses, IT professionals, scaffolders, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, hairdressers, football coaches, social workers, supervisors in a warehouse. Others said that they would like to be running their own business. Four people said that they would like to be involved in social or charity work to help people who are struggling. Three participants said that they would like to have a college degree and one said that they would like to be going on to study for their master's degree in five years' time.

I am going to be running my own restaurant.

Fully employed.

Degree then masters hopefully.

I would like to be a social worker.

Help(ing) people that are struggling life.

Participants were asked if they needed any **practical supports** in order to achieve this. There were 38 responses. Participants said they would need further education (11), financial support to fund education and equipment, including tools and laptops, stable accommodation (6), counselling (2), mental health supports (2), support with addiction (1), support with training, preparing CV and gaining employment experience and internships (1), and support linking in with services (1). One participant said that they would need help with their English and another said that they needed "peace".

Recovery housing, financial support. (Participant 17)

Funding for a laptop capable of running the software required for the course. (Participant 15)

None, just what I put my mind to I can achieve, although counselling would be good. (Participant 14)

Inclusion, speaking to people. (Participant 9)

(My) own place. (Participant 11)

More stable accommodation. (Participant 19)

When asked where they would like to be in five years' time, all thirteen interview participants said that they would like to be working and twelve of thirteen said that they would like to have their own place. Two participants said that they would like to have access to their children and one participant said that they would like to be in a relationship and have children. Two participants said that they would like to be off drugs. One participant said that they would like to have a fresh start:

Not homeless. That's the main goal. As long as that's out of the way in five years' time I don't care about anything else…I'd probably like to go back into the bar…pubs, bars, hotels. (Simon)

I want to see myself in a property of my own. A house like, working…in the outdoors… probably have a child or two and a girlfriend…a house, settled down and have work. (Michael)

3.4.5 Recommendations

This section includes advice that participants had for young people, suggestions for more supportive schools and advice for decision makers to improve the lives of homeless men.

Advice for young people

Questionnaire participants were asked what advice they would offer to their 14 year-old self in terms of Secondary School experiences. Their responses included to stay in and attend school and to concentrate on their learning to pursue a career or further education, to continue with sports, to do yoga, to have good relationships with teachers and other students, to appreciate life more, to ask questions, to find support and speak about problems and to not get involved in drugs or with negative people:

Appreciate life more. (Participant 6)

Don't do drugs. (Participant 14)

Put the head down and work in school get the work done and once the works done do what you want. (Participant 17)

Ask about anything, always seek for knowledge. (Participant 23)

Learn as much as you can while in school. (Participant 36)

To try and have better relationships with the teachers. (Participant 41)

Do not smoke hash during school hours. (Participant 45)

To continue with sports because it keeps you busy. (Participant 16)

Focus on the positives and keep your head down. Stay true to yourself. Ignore what other people say to you. (Participant 24)

Advise myself to stay away from certain people. To focus on my goals and what I want to achieve. (Participant 26)

To cop on and stay in school, do my homework and enjoy it more. (Participant 13)

Think before you act. (Participant 19)

Stay in school and learn. (Participant 14)

Stay focused and achieve your goal of going to college. (Participant 20)

Not to listen to the big boys. (Participant 19)

Keep your head in the books and stay away from drugs. (Participant 31)

Always participate even if you are no good. Respect other people even if you dislike them. (Participant 49)

Just put your head down study be positive and responsible. (Participant 39)

Be honest about what is going on in your life. (Participant 19)

Relax a bit more. (Participant 46)

Keep your head in the books to get a good job and travel. (Participant 31)

I would tell myself to stop messing and get my work done, it will be worth it in the end. (Participant 5)

Good man. Keep doing what you're doing. (Participant 28).

One participant advised his younger self to leave his school:

Go the a social worker or speak to someone about your circumstances at home and leave that school, the people in it are bringing you down kid. (Participant 15)

Interview participants were asked what advice they would have for their younger self or for young people at school now. Eight of the thirteen participants said that they would advise young people to stay in school and focus on and complete their school education; five participants said they would advise young people not to do drugs; three participants advised young people not to be led astray by negative people; one participant's advice was to go to college; one participant advised young people not to let themselves get pushed around; one participant's advice was not to grow up too fast and one participant advised young people to find someone to talk to and be honest about what they are going through:

Stay in school, stay in school and don't go, just don't grow too quick. Enjoy school, go to college and just don't try and grow too fast. (David)

Yeah, I would have stayed away, I would have kept far away from the bad crowd of people because they lead you down the wrong roads. I got stabbed nine times over drugs and bad crowds and (stay) away from silly people, you know, kids aren't stupid, you know what I mean? So, that's my advice now would be keep with the positive people and not the negative people. (Colm)

Talk to people. It doesn't matter if there's no support in your school, there is support somewhere, but it's just more so that people need to be aware that it is all right to be struggling. Not that it's good, but it's not as if no one knows what you're going through, people do. It's just about asking. I don't think it's talked about enough, because it goes on…

depression, anxiety, drug addiction, alcohol, suicide, whatever. I think nowadays, in the past year or two…There's less stigma, but also people are all right about coming out about it, but a lot of people aren't. (James)

It's a limited amount of time and you kind of need to push yourself while you're there rather than regret not because I still have nightmares about not doing well in leaving cert…Thinking I should have done this and I should have done that. (I have) loads of regrets about it. I thought it was never going to end while I was there. But looking back now there was a very short time now and I'm sorry I didn't put the effort in then. The main thing for me was the drugs, the drinking and drugs, and hanging around with those people that I could drink and use with ... and avoiding all the people that were studying…what I needed, you know it was kind of to hear what can happen with drugs and not pushing myself in school and turning to drink and drugs, becoming homeless and addicted to heroin…I didn't think it would ever happen to me. I thought I was able to control whatever...It was only when I tried to stop that I really noticed how bad it was. (Peter)

Recommendations for more supportive schools

As mentioned above, the majority of participants in the questionnaire, 72.7% did not believe that secondary school had prepared them for further education or paid work.

When asked what skills, training or experiences secondary schools should offer young people to prepare them for paid employment or further education, questionnaire participants suggested that there should be a broader range of subject choices available and more real life skills, including budgeting, accessing services and social skills, more work experience placements and information on and preparation for apprenticeships, more information about homelessness and drug and addiction awareness classes, yoga classes, more tailored supports for students and more tailored guidance counselling, links with local ETBs and local people sharing knowledge with students about options and paths open to them and funding for further education.

They should focus more on individual students. (Participant 9)

They need to teach people things that they will have benefit off in their future life, i.e. how to mortgage a house, how to do taxes and how to make bank accounts also all schools should have a safe pass and manual handling class or course. (Participant 7)

More supportive approach, compassion when teaching children. I was left behind due to not understanding subject matter. (Participant 15)

Work placement and addiction awareness programmes. (Participant 30)

Help with not going on drugs (and) on homelessness. (Participant 42)

More business classes, not just financing, specific classes for different areas in business and teaching kids to learn to make money. (Participant 40)

Structure, practical life skills. (Participant 49)

How to open a back account or how to sign on to social welfare or how to vote or how to do different type of tax forms. How to change the tyre on a car, basic life skills. How to visit a doctor or dentist. (Participant 34)

Budgeting and social skills. (Participant 26)

Guidance counsellors should pay more attention to their students and to take their ambitions

seriously. (Participant 16)

More information on how to get a job interview, tactics etc.

I think students should have a broader range of subjects in school like Law, Criminology, Journalism etc. (Participant 29)

Safe pass so a person is prepared if they did not want to go to college. Manual handling also. (Participant 21)

A link with the local ETBs for people who school's not for. So they can get a trade and not fall into a bad cycle. (Participant 23)

People from the community coming in to give talks about their experiences and other alternative ways to get to where you want to be. Local heroes and stuff. (Participant 14)

Training and funding by giving support in future fees for training courses. (Participant 10)

63.6% of participants in the questionnaire reported that their school did not offer students any support, **advice or education about drug use and/or addiction**. This was a suggestion that was made by participants in the questionnaire and in the interviews. Forty-seven of the fifty questionnaire participants made suggestions as to how schools should be educating children about drugs, possible effects and addiction. This question, of all the open-ended questions provoked the most significant response. This included recommendations to develop weekly opportunities to talk, listen and discuss experiences with children and young people, including teachers and counsellors. Participants also suggested the need to inform children and young people about the consequences and potential negative outcomes, including addiction, homelessness and loss of friends and family. In particular, a number of participants talked about the importance of sharing real-life stories with those who have used drugs and experienced addiction. Respondents called for a weekly class on drug and sex education, the use of videos and the use of small groups, more support and counselling for students experiencing addiction issues, including looking at the causes of their addiction, mindfulness, meditation, having people with real life experience of addiction speak with students, more education for teachers about the impact of drugs and childhood trauma. Finally, two participants referred to the need for supports including mindfulness and motivational speakers for young people who may be considering alcohol or drug use:

Be real about the effects on family and friends around and especially your own life. Not just pictures saying drugs are bad etc. (Participant 13)

They should have a drug class like they do with sex education, maybe motivational speakers in from time to time. (Participant 20)

Don't just punish them if they are using drugs. Try to discuss why and help them with recovery. (Participant 32)

Support and counselling, have people going in to talk about drugs and their effects. Taking small groups of the class out to talk to them about drugs and the effects. Also teachers need to be educated on the effects of drugs and childhood trauma. (Participant 33)

Seven of the thirteen interview participants called for **better drug education about the consequences of using drugs, including that it should be delivered by people with life experience of addiction**.

Some information. They knew that I was using, but they didn't know what to do, didn't have any options, there was no "go and talk to this person". (Peter)

Five interview participants called for **more practical learning and real-life skills** to be included in the curriculum, including how to cook, clean, take out a mortgage and access services. Two interview participants called for **counselling in schools** which could look at the reasons and circumstances behind young people's behaviour and three participants called for **teachers to have more time to speak with young people, to not shout and to handle situations with students in a more balanced way**.

(Teachers and students more) on a level. Not putting (teachers) on a pedestal you know. (David)

Well obviously, they could do a lot of things better, getting people ready for the real world. So, I don't know, they can just handle the situations a bit better. I mean, I don't think I should have been kicked out of school at 14. I always blamed my parents but then now I'm thinking maybe it is down to the education system, like teachers and stuff like that…Instead of dealing with the problem, they just suspended, and suspend and suspend and then expel me. (Jason)

Two participants called for a **mental health class** which could help students with relaxation and expressing emotions. One interview participant suggested that this class could also offer students an opportunity to have a nap.

There should be a mental health class…Where people get to release anger. Do you know what I mean? And nap time as well…More sleep…Yes because see when people get up in the morning like…they're all angry. I just hate it. But see you have a half an hour nap and you get up and you'll be all right…Even at the start of the day. (Conor)

One interview participant called for schools to be firmer in the way that they **address bullying** and two called for more **sports facilities**, in particular a gym for young people and a skate park.

You might think that's a bit of a stretch but like America schools have skate parks. A small skate park at the side…maybe if there had been one of those, maybe I wouldn't have felt a little bit ostracised from things you know. (David)

Advice for government and decision makers to improve the lives of young men experiencing homelessness

Questionnaire participants (39 responses) were asked what advice they would have for the Irish government and decision makers to improve the lives of young men experiencing homelessness. They called for more housing to be built and made available (8); more social housing and equal treatment of men and women and single fathers on the housing list (3) with suggested potential preference given to those who are drug-free (1), access to private rental accommodation made easier, rent rates to be lowered and maintained at affordable levels (2), more development of homeless accommodation and hostels (3) with reduced numbers of people sharing rooms (1) and more drug-free housing, including using derelict buildings (3), more work opportunities and opportunities for gaining work experience (1), more addiction and after care support (5), more mental health supports and support for men experiencing abuse (5), more support to find housing (2), more support focused on obtaining employment and work experience (3), including grants for tools (1), more support for people to develop their education, including financial grants and priority for men in training or education programmes (6), and more investment in youth programmes to support young people through sport and education (2).

Men and single fathers are treated differently compared to women and families. All should be treated equally. Sometimes the number on housing list goes up and back down feel like it's pointless being on it when this happens. (Participant 22)

Smaller amount of people in the room sharing in hostels. (Participant 19)

Invest more money into homeless services like PMVT, 24 hour services, all the derelict abandoned buildings should be taken and given to people to live in - they should be doing more to provide properties and to get people off the street - more hostels. (Participant 35)

To prioritise clean young men when it comes to housing and to put them in a safe environment. (Participant 22)

More support for education access. Education is the main thing. To make it easier for men to get housing / HAP / council (housing). (Participant 17)

(Have) keyworkers in homeless services, CV writers, support from psychiatric nurse, support from a team of people, housing officer, support with HAP, friendly staff to talk and chat with them, staff that you can open up to, having people that care. (Participant 34)

End the homeless epidemic in Dublin by building more units for people in homeless accommodations who are involved in employment or study programmes. (Participant 31)

Create more schemes for young men to get themselves active in academia or sports which help keep them away from trouble. (Participant 27)

More Youth work projects and better foundations for getting housed. Opportunities and guidance to get housed, HAP does not work need more social housing. (Participant 19)

(More) supports for drug addiction and abuse. Highlight that males can be the victims of abuse from women also more help here needed. And mental (health) awareness would be (the) main thing. (Participant 33)

To lower rent prices and keep the wages high. Make rent affordable. (Participant 23)

Put young men into recovery not prison. (Participant 24)

Maybe to give those who actually deserve a house a chance to live. (Participant 44)

Some rebate on those with mortgages to assist the increase in the amount of social housing. Selection process for this so everyone in the right situation gets a shot. (Participant 38)

More treatment opportunities for men who want to stay free of addiction. (Participant 26)

Develop more supports for mental health and after care. (Participant 4)

One participant called for the government to "actually try" and another suggested that the government should "stop wasting millions on hotels".

Eight interview participants called for the government to build more houses, including using derelict buildings in Dublin; three participants called for Irish-born people to be prioritised in housing lists; one called for more social housing and one participant said that decisions to allocate social housing should be conditional and could be based on people being drug-free or in permanent employment. One participant called for more homeless accommodation. Two participants called for more supports for homeless men, including mental health supports and one called for more detox and aftercare facilities outside of Dublin. Finally, one participant called for the government to spend more wisely and to look at the causes for homelessness in Ireland.

I'm on the housing list ten years…I'm just saying for the people that are trying and they don't seem to be getting anywhere, the Irish people, it is very frustrating. It's kind of like I've been left behind, it's kind of like this isn't Ireland anymore, it's the EU and why don't they start looking out for us. (Colm)

SECTION **4**

Section 4: Discussion

This study aimed to explore the educational experiences of young men aged 18-38 years experiencing homelessness. A total of 51 men shared their lived-experience of formal schooling in order to inform understanding of possible educational risk and guide current and future provision of supports and services for children and young people who may be at risk of homelessness. The study provided insight into supports and provision made by schools, teachers and communities, as well as highlighting areas of unmet need. This included requirements for social and emotional supports, mental health services, wrap-around school-based facilities and support for learning and career guidance. The men that participated in the study varied significantly in terms of their early childhood experiences, periods of homelessness, type and stability of accommodation as well as the educational settings that they. Despite this heterogeneity there was significant convergence on their perceived education-related needs and exposure to educational risks that may impede educational access, participation and school success.

This section will summarise and discuss the main findings of this report under the following seven thematic areas in light of current policy, strategies and service provision:

- School attendance and participation

- The prevalence of suspension and expulsion from school

- Adequate emotional counselling and/or therapeutic supports in and around schools

- Integrated support needs: Key role for one-stop-shop Community Lifelong Learning Centres

- Holistic educational needs of children and young people in care

- Supportive relational and alienating authoritarian role of teachers

- Appeals for a more relevant and meaningful school curriculum, including more social and emotional education, relevant, meaningful drug prevention education and life skills curriculum

4.1 School Attendance and Participation

In 2014, it was reported that the percentage of overall student/days lost through absence in a school year in Ireland was 5.4% in primary schools and 7.5% in post-primary schools (Millar, 2016). While participant responses are both subjective and retrospective, they offer insight into poor levels of school attendance, indicating significantly higher rates of school non-attendance than that of the general population. More than half of participants reported weekly school absence, stating the primary reason was that they did not want to go, followed by illness. Given accepted links between school attendance and academic outcomes, as well as a negative impact on psychosocial functioning and development across the lifespan (Knollmann, Knoll, Reissner, Metzelaars, and Hebebrand, 2010), support for improved school attendance it is an important factor related to positive educational outcomes that should be considered and supported for vulnerable populations. Data from the questionnaire and interviews also indicates a lack of support for children regarding homework. There is significant research to suggest that provision of wrap around services such as homework clubs and after-school improve children's attendance, sense of belonging and academic achievement (Cemalcilar, 2010; Morrison et al, 2000).

4.2 Prevalence of Suspension and Expulsion from School

A strongly pervasive theme in the interviews is the experience of suspension and/or expulsion of many from school. As outlined in Section 3, 24.5% of questionnaire participants said that they had been temporarily excluded in the form of suspensions; 12.2% had experienced multiple or 'rolling' suspensions; and 18.4% reported having been permanently excluded or expelled from school. This is a problem of system blockage and system failure. These interviewees illustrate the need for emotional counselling/therapeutic supports rather than a policy of expulsion.

I was a straight A student till like fourth year. For fourth year I was on an in house suspension for half the school year...It's an in school suspension…You write lines…You write thousands of words. You're given like five thousand words and you have to write it out. (Conor)

This interviewee was then expelled in fifth year for fighting which he links to the difficulties at home with his mother:

My mother was driving me mad…Like they (the school) knew she was driving me mad, that's why they stretched it out for as long as they could. (Conor)

I don't think I should have been kicked out of school at 14. I always blamed my parents but then now I'm thinking maybe it is down to the education system, like teachers and stuff like that…Instead of dealing with the problem, they just suspended, and suspend and suspend and then expel me. Especially for dealing with bullying, and if a child is acting out, it's probably not because the child wants to act out. So obviously...yeah, there's something else going on. (Jason)

One interviewee described having been expelled against the backdrop of maternal bereavement, being taken into care and potential abuse:

I was suspended a few times. I was suspended for months on end. That (being expelled) was attention disorder, basically. Couldn't concentrate properly in class, acting the bollocks. Fidgety, wasn't a big fan of school, didn't like it…I don't know if I didn't like school or if I just, I just couldn't concentrate properly. I was always fidgeting…I don't know what it is. (John)

Me and one of my mates were in class and he said something funny and I thought it was funny so I laughed and she was like so what are you laughing at? I didn't want to say it in front of the class as it wasn't appropriate and she was like right if don't tell me you're going to get suspended. I was like fair enough. And the second time I was something called a conduct card or something…A conduct card, a teacher writes, if you're late to every class…Something to do with a conduct card they suspended me over. (Simon)

Jason was asked to leave secondary school when he was 14 years. The school said they would keep it off his record. He then went to another school from which he was expelled the following year. They allowed him to stay on for the last few weeks to complete his Junior Certificate:

None of that was for fights or anything like that, no violence or nothing…Maybe I disrupted the class a couple of times, and then they'd gave me one of these conduct sheets.. And once you get nine of them, that's an expulsion…Then in the other school they had something that was called a referral sheet. So it was the same type of system. (I had) problems with teachers, yeah. Problems on the playground then problems with the teachers then after. Like I did get into fights but that was like after school and stuff, that wasn't really involved in the school. But you can get them (conduct sheets) for just like stupid things that you should be getting detention for. So I didn't really think that system was fair. (Jason)

Some interviewees with special educational needs even reported expulsion from primary school. One interviewee spoke of being expelled in primary school due to anger issues and sent to a special school. He was diagnosed with dyslexia.

I didn't like it. I didn't like starting in it…cause the school was slower than the school I was in already that is when I started pulling myself back and not listening…I was in 5th class and the work they were doing was 1st class work. ABCs you know…I was bored… I was miles ahead of people. (Michael)

School suspension and expulsion in Ireland is not only a historical issue of system failure but a current issue. As mentioned in Section 3 of this report, according to the latest national figures, there were 167 expulsions nationally for the 2016-2017 period, amounting to 0.048% of the population. There were 35 expulsions nationally in primary school in 2016-2017, up from 19 in 2014-2015 (Millar, 2018). According to the Annual Attendance Report, for 2014-15 (Millar, 2016) in respect of post-primary schools, 133 students were expelled from post-primary schools in 2014/5, a slight decrease of 13 on the previous year. The number of suspensions also saw a decrease, from 4.5% in 2012/3, to 4.1% in 2013/4, and falling again in 2014/5 to 3.8%. Nevertheless, there were still a sizeable 13,000 suspensions of children and 145 expulsions during the 2013/14 academic year.

Such a policy approach of school suspension/expulsion is strongly criticised in a US context. The American Academy of Paediatrics' Policy Statement (2013) on this issue recognises that 'the adverse effects of out-of-school suspension and expulsion can be profound' (p.1001); such students are as much as 10 times more likely to leave school early, are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system and 'there may be no one at home during the day to supervise the student's activity' (p. e1002) if the parents are working. The policy statement continues, 'They can also be very superficial if, in using them, school districts avoid dealing with underlying issues affecting the child or the district, such as drug abuse, racial and ethnic tensions, and cultural anomalies associated with violence and bullying' (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2013, p.1002).

Findings of the current study indicate that intensive, multidisciplinary supports to work with young people at risk of suspension and expulsion are needed. While the NBSS Interdisciplinary Support Service Team now incorporated into the NCSE, offers a multidisciplinary team approach, with policy commitment in the 2017 DEIS Action Plan to extend this to primary school, it is evident that this is significantly underfunded, given the large numbers of students still being suspended and expelled from schools.

A notable study on supports for students at risk of suspension and expulsion to prevent early school leaving, relevant also in this context, is Markussen et al.'s (2011) longitudinal study following a sample of 9,749 Norwegian students over a five-year period, out of compulsory education (which ends at age 16) and through upper secondary education (age 16 to 19). Markussen et al (2011) found that students with high scores on an index measuring seriously deviant behaviour were in fact less likely to leave early than students with relatively lower scores on this index. This last finding is explained by the extra resources, support and attention these students are provided with, making it less likely that they will leave. In other words, system level supports for inclusion can minimise early school leaving for those at highest risk. The need for a broader set of skills than those available to teachers to engage with the complex needs of students through alternatives to suspension also emerges from research on the key role of multidisciplinary teams for early school leaving prevention (Downes, 2011), where multifaceted problems require a multifaceted (Edwards and Downes, 2013) and coordinated response (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013, p. 1005). Alternatives to suspension and expulsion need to be developed on the school site, as part of a structured individual education and health plan for the individual involving a multidisciplinary team in some cases; in other cases, a mentor or mediator may be needed to engage with the system

problems in the school, which may also include authoritarian teaching alienating students and leading to conflicting responses that bring sanctions such as suspension and expulsion.

4.3 Adequate Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports in and around Schools

As indicated in the findings, the men that participated in the study experienced significant levels of social and emotional difficulties in childhood. This included reports of depression, anxiety, isolation and reports of challenging childhood experiences including bereavement by suicide and loss of their parents. A number referred to unhappy and impoverished childhoods, as well as substance use and abuse at an early age to quell feelings of loss and anxiety. The findings of the study illustrate a clear need for sustained emotional counselling and therapeutic supports in and around schools.

The findings illustrate a clear need for adequate emotional counselling and therapeutic supports in and around schools:

In school if I wanted to go and talk to somebody you'd always get "oh I'm busy, I can't speak to you now, I have to go to a meeting". It was always like I was always (being) refused talking to people… (Michael)

If you have a situation that you need someone to go talk to you should always have the opportunity to go to somebody. Go to your principal and say get a, like I'm after having a bad morning, I don't want to sit in that class… Like schools should have open counselling sessions to do. Like talk to your local counsellor in your schools, sits there for a day, go in and a chat, back out and you feel fresh as a daisy and back in your class. (James)

Talk to people. It doesn't matter if there's no support in your school, there is support somewhere…I don't think it's talked about enough, because it goes on…depression, anxiety, drug addiction, alcohol, suicide, whatever. I think nowadays, in the past year or two…There's less stigma, but also people are all right about coming out about it, but a lot of people aren't. I know people that have killed themselves, do you know what I mean? (James)

There is a need for **sustained** emotional counselling supports:

They did get me counselling, but it didn't last for long…I think they just wanted rid of me out of school. (Jason)

Another interviewee (Peter) spoke of counselling being provided to him by the school when he was twelve as his brother had been killed in a car accident. He said that he had been doing well at school and this changed following this traumatic event:

My early childhood was good. My brother died in an accident when I was 12…And I was hanging around on the back road at the time so I kind of went head first into drink and drugs. So my teens were chaos…I enjoyed primary school…just once my brother died I gave up on life. I didn't push myself at all. I would have been in the top percentage of all the classes in primary school. (Peter)

He describes not being ready to talk and being told that he could sit in silence and so he did. This is an instance where more follow up was required and more innovative strategies considered to best suit the child or young person's needs. This interviewee spoke of going on to become addicted to heroin.

Initially when my brother died…I just wasn't ready, I didn't understand what it was about. I remember he said to me that I didn't have to talk if I didn't want to, so I just sat there. (Peter)

While 35/50 describe their learning and achievement in primary school as either excellent, very

good or good, 15/50 or 30% describe it as fair or poor. It is notable that 14/50 or 28% reported that the highest level of education that they completed was either primary school or Junior Certificate. In a US context, early reading scores in first grade are associated with higher risk of subsequent homelessness (Herbers et al. 2012). This may be an issue for at most a third of our sample, though other factors have been identified as part of their early school leaving. A more pervasive factor than academic need is that of trauma and mental health needs in secondary school, with almost two thirds of respondents (64%) identifying trauma such as bereavement, parental separation or other traumas, 22/50 identifying depression 22/50, 23/50 experiencing anxiety, with 30/50 having difficulty concentrating, which may be due to other wider factors, such as lack of sleep (Hargadon & Downes 2019), hunger, as well as mental health needs.

Adequate emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools is a significant gap in a range of recent DES national strategies and action plans. It is absent from the DEIS Plan 2017, the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018-2023), and the Anti-Bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools (DES 2013).

It is of real concern that the **Anti-Bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools (DES 2013) omit emotional counsellors/therapists from the list of key professionals for supporting students with complex emotional needs**:

> "In certain cases, however, it may be necessary for the school to seek the assistance of other local persons and formal agencies such as NEPS, HSE social workers, community workers, Gardaí etc." (Department of Education and Skills, 2013: 24)

A limited behaviour management vision underpins this strategic document, with little on emotional supports. Even where psychological support is referred to it involves NEPS psychologists who are not therapists and do not have the time or resources to offer intensive one to one emotional counselling:

> "6.8.11 In cases where a school has serious concerns in relation to managing the behaviour of a pupil, the advice of the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) should be sought."

This is exacerbated by the lack of national strategic approach for meeting the holistic educational needs of children in care.

A guidance counsellor is not appropriate for this level of complexity of need:

That's the guidance counsellor. I talk to him because I did have like aggressive issues. I'd just get really pissed off if I was to tell you. Not fighting, not fighting with people in the school. It was getting angry and maybe throwing things and breaking things. So he was the one who sat down and kind of chilled me out a bit. (Anthony)

Goodwill of teachers is important but not enough or a replacement for emotional counselling or therapeutic support to engage with complex needs:

See, they (the school) tried to keep me, and they kept on trying to tell me, 'You can't leave,' and all this sort of stuff, and I knew I could but they were just trying to keep me back in. I used to talk to the principal, he kept on asking me what drugs I was taking and I was telling him. He'd go on about staying, 'If you don't stay, you're going to regret,' and all, but it wasn't a priority. I was dealing with so much bigger things than coming into school every day, which is sort of sad but it's the truth of it…I had ADHD, dyspraxia... I had motor tics…It's like twitches and stuff like that…All that sort of stuff…It's sort of like... Social situations, they terrify me…I was diagnosed clinically depressed, as well (at) 14. (James)

This interviewee said that teachers in secondary school had tried to help him but that he could not trust them or accept help at the time.

Yeah they were sound...I gave teachers a serious amount of trouble, but now that I'm older I understand that they were coming in to us to try help me, and I couldn't take it. I couldn't take people being... How do I put it? Nice, and trying to help you, I didn't know it. I thought there was a loophole round it. (I thought) 'What does she want?' Now, obviously, I'm more understanding of it, but...They tried their best. Even the school tried to support me through what I was going through…like drug wise…they were trying to support me through it all. I just couldn't handle it…My head was sort of gone from a young age. (James)

The **quality of counselling, especially regarding cultural competence training**, to ensure listening from the perspective of the client needs to be considered:

Since I was 14 I'm doing counselling…Like they (the school) would get proper counsellors in and some of them would be…there was one…she'd be alright, but the counsellors at Youthreach, they look like they're listening to you but they're just looking through a pane of glass at you. (Michael)

They (the school) were asking me to go to counsellors and all but counsellors just chose my mother's side all the time…Just biased. (Conor)

These strategies largely lack the well-recognised public health model of need (Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017) that distinguished universal, selected and indicated prevention system supports. Differentiated prevention strategies can be universal (school wide for all), selected (for some, for groups, or for those at moderate risk) and indicated prevention (for few, for individuals, for those in chronic need at highest risk).

Fig. 4.3: Public Health Model of Differentiated Need
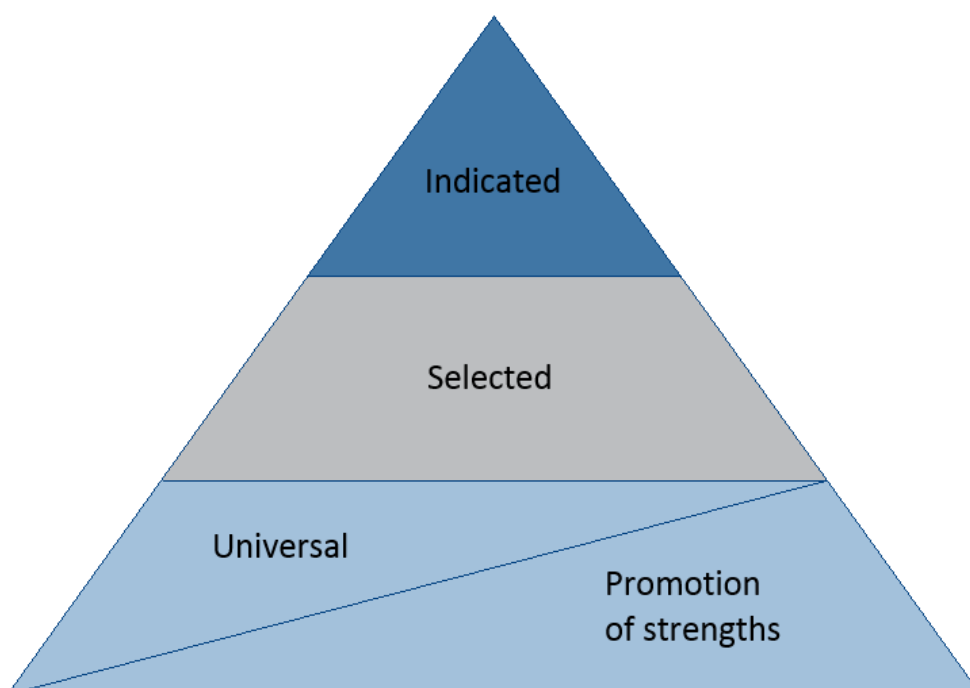
These three levels are already well-recognised in drug prevention approaches at a European level (Burkhart, 2004), as well as in parental involvement levels in education for early school leaving prevention across 10 European city municipalities (Downes, 2014a) and in some mental health approaches in the US (Suldo et al., 2010). While the DES Wellbeing Policy Statement

and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 at least acknowledges such a three-tiered model in its framework on a continuum of support (DES 2018, p.14), these different levels of complexity of need are far from adequately addressed in its subsequent statements of effective practice for some and few in its key areas. Most significantly, it states:

- "Efforts are made to build positive relationships with children and young people who are experiencing challenges, and with their parents. They may have a 'named staff member' allocated to them to act as the 'one good adult'."
- "Children and young people have access to one to one meetings with qualified members of staff to support their personal and social, educational and career development, and at moments of personal crisis."
- "If applicable the school completion programme (SCP) incorporates initiatives such as breakfast clubs, mentoring programmes and therapeutic interventions" (p.37)

These DES policies are inadequate both in conceptualisation and in practice. The proposed one good adult of a teacher is not an emotional counsellor or therapist. It brings a duality of roles, it does not occur for students' emotional needs at university where no one would suggest the lecturer becomes the one good adult counsellor. Previous research in Dublin DEIS schools consistently highlights a reluctance of students to confide in teachers about emotional problems as distinct from academic problems (Downes 2004, Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006, Downes & Maunsell 2007), especially those students who may be already marginalised and alienated from school, such as the many in this interviewed sample. The commitment of the School Completion Programme to therapeutic interventions is a welcome one but this has been retreated from in recent proposed SCP reforms where local SCPs have been given instructions not to provide therapeutic counselling. This is not only a retrograde step from the Wellbeing framework commitment, and a glaring strategic gap in the DEIS 2017 Action Plan, it is exacerbated by the ceasing of the role for schools to refer students to CAMHS (Courtney 2015) and the complete lack of strategic commitment across all of these strategies to provide school-based emotional counsellors/therapists, or even ones closely linked to schools, where students could self-refer.

The lack of commitment to school-based emotional counsellors in the wellbeing strategy is of particular concern as a system gap for groups with complex emotional needs, such as many of the interviewees regarding experience of trauma, including abuse by family, personal experiences of addiction and family addiction, and bereavement, with five (10%) having been taken into care.

I didn't have a happy childhood…I lost my parents 20 years ago. Me Da when I was 4, me Ma when I was 6…I was a heroin baby. My family…are very poor. We lived a poor life when me Ma and Da were addicts. All the family were addicts. I'm an addict since I was born. I'm addict the last 24 years. (Michael)

Me mother and father died at the age of 15 and me Da died when I was 16…You know I'm trying to pick up all the pieces, coming here and I'm putting plans in place. (Stephen)

I've hit rock bottom. I hit rock bottom when my Da died, that was it, I hit rock bottom. I literally hit the deck, I went where I had nothing. (John)

The need for emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools requires recognition that, while some at risk of or experiencing homelessness may be experiencing mental health difficulties at the clinical level of need of a psychological disorder (see Seymour & Costello 2005 and Hwang et al. 2012 for this issue in Irish and Canadian contexts), many may simply be experiencing trauma or stress and be in need of support, though not at a clinical level of psychological need. Moreover, these emotional counselling/therapeutic supports may help prevent trauma and stress impacting so mental health problems mushroom into being at the level of a clinical disorder.

Regarding bullying, some revealed a victim-perpetrator cycle which is associated with highest risk of detrimental long-term outcomes according to international research.

I was bullied, I was bullied from a young age. Bullied all the way up until secondary school and then when I got to sixth class I was sent to with a hurley by my uncle and he told me to batter him…the one that was bullying me…and I smashed his head in…It haunts me to this day…I know he bullied me but I guarantee it was something behind him bullying me…The bully always gets bullied…His dad could have been beating him or his ma or something, do you know what I mean? I never wanted to hit him but my uncle…(then) I bullied during secondary school…I changed the aspect, I bullied through secondary school. I know I was a bully. (Conor)

I was bullied a lot when I was younger. So then I started sticking up for myself so I was in fights most of the time after school. (Jason)

People are down at the school living in fear of another student. (Conor)

I experienced trauma and bullying. I didn't have a ma and Da on my side. I was always bullied, told that you don't have a Ma, you don't have a Da at home to talk to you. (Michael)

Victims of bullying are likely to experience low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Gladstone et al., 2006; Klomeck et al., 2007; Nansel et al., 2004; Radliff et al., 2015; Juvonen and Graham, 2014; Ttofi et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012; Biereld, 2014). Victimisation (i.e. being bullied) has also been linked to lower academic achievement and other behaviours such as disengagement, absenteeism and early school leaving (Fried and Fried, 1996; Glew et al., 2005; Nakamoto and Schwartz, 2010; Brown et al., 2011; Green et al., 2010). Victims are more likely to experience worse concentration in class (Boulton et al., 2008) and more interpersonal difficulties (Kumpulainen et al., 1998). This all highlights the urgency of the need for emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools, where students can access a qualified professional in a flexible, timely manner as someone who can listen to, empathise and engage with the complexity of their emotional needs and lives.

A related issue is the quality, continuity and intensity of the emotional counselling supports. The guidance counsellor cannot be the main emotional/therapeutic support for complex needs. Moreover, reaction to critical incidents such as bereavement (see interview on death of brother as a teenager) is the stated policy domain of NEPS. However, NEPS cannot provide intensive one to one counselling that is needed on a sustained basis. The need for establishing trust also requires that emotional counselling supports are ongoing rather than brief interventions which may do more harm than good as the discontinuing of the therapeutic relationship may re-enact prior issues for the individual of loss and lack of trust. There is a need to go beyond an *ad hoc* emotional counselling support strategy that is a hallmark of a range of the major national initiatives in this area: DEIS 2005, 2017, wellbeing, bullying

Given that 21/50 became homeless as children, under 18 years, and 13/50 became homeless as young adults, between 19 and 24 years, there is a need to a two-pronged strategy of system supports for emotional counselling – one based in schools for the younger group still in school and one based in an accessible, welcoming community setting for the young adults as well as those who are under 18 years but have left school early. This is not to state that all such children or young adults fitting this profile of need require emotional counselling but rather a notable proportion.

4.4 Integrated Support Needs: Key Role for One-Stop-Shop Community Lifelong Learning Centres

A plethora of interrelated needs arise from the interviews that invite integrated supports from one-stop-shop community lifelong learning centres. These include:

- A space to study and maintain employment

- Maintaining confidence and morale in gaining work

- Supporting pathways to education, training and work

- Wider social networks

- A safe and inexpensive space for visitation and interaction with their children

- Supports for siblings at risk of homelessness

- A bridge between non-formal and formal education and advocacy, advice and mentoring

4.4.1 A space to study and maintain employment

A space to study and one that is conducive to maintaining employment was mentioned by interviewees as something they are not currently enjoying in their accommodation. One stop shops provide these spaces in environments which provide privacy and a sense of security with flexibility as a 'drop in' space.

You're crammed up in a small place, it's not good for you, mentality wise…Doing my studies, living in that box room, with my ex-girlfriend and child, I couldn't deal with my studies. I ended up leaving after six months, which was a waste, after me learning to build websites, HTML, I learned it all, but I never finished it, because I couldn't. The stress…We all feel like we're in prison. There, that's more to add to your study, the house feels like a prison. It's like an open prison, the routine we're in is categorised like a prison. You have your hourly checks, they're coming in, having a look at you every hour. (Aidan)

You can't focus. You can't keep your mind settled. You have your own space (room) but people are always on top of you, running into room. (Michael)

4.4.2 Supporting pathways to education, training and work, including individually tailored career advice and planning

Given that 79% of questionnaire participants are interested in further training, it is vital to support pathways to education, training and work, including individually tailored career advice and planning. This desire for further training was highlighted in the interviews:

I'm more IT minded so I want to go back to college and finish the IT… (Jason)

Just want a fresh course. You know. Get me head together. You know what I mean…I'd like to be working, I'd look after sick animals… I'd like to work with the RSPCA. (Stephen)

I know I will be working because if I want something I will get it. I'll work for it. Hopefully working at something I like that will set me up, maybe a printer or something to do with prints something. I'll take it one step at a time. I do have a plan like. (David)

I wanted to be a plumber and I almost got there, I was doing gas boiling and working for nothing for about three years and then a law came out that you had to be qualified plumber… and I couldn't do it…I was 15 and I couldn't do it because I needed to pay and it just fell apart…(it was) really frustrating. (Colm)

4.4.3 Maintaining confidence and morale in gaining work

One stop shops can keep people's confidence and morale higher if not successful in gaining work through mentoring supports and also to challenge fatalism (Kalichman, 1999) that is associated with risk behaviours generally.

There's not a lot of confidence in myself. To be honest with you. Because I just feel like anything that I'm doing is going to get told no or - anything I've done so far. I just want a job… I'm putting out about a 100 CVs online and offline, know what I mean? (Conor)

4.4.4 Wider social networks

The need for a wider social network to bolster self-esteem and motivation, and to provide stimulation to overcome the named problem of boredom was expressed:

(You need) willpower enough to work...living in hostels…Because when you're going off to work you see a lot of people staying in bed and all…And losing interest. (Jack)

I try and get out, if I can get out, I'll get out. Sitting around, just drives me crazy. (John)

This need is resonant with international findings on homelessness and poverty bringing a loss of social networks and belonging (Sharam & Hulse 2014). It is notable that the large majority of this sample report having had strong peer relations in both primary (16/48 had five friends or more; 3/48 and four friends; and 11/48 had 3 friends) and secondary school (39/46).

4.4.5 A safe and inexpensive space for visitation and interaction with their children

One stop shops also provide a safe and inexpensive space for visitation and interaction with their children. This was raised by interviewee participants who shared their difficulties around seeing their children, especially over night as it is not permitted to bring children or visitors to their homeless accommodation. This was a considerable source of stress for parents interviewed (5/13). One interviewee (Colm) mentioned being currently in touch with one of his children and sees them in public places as he cannot bring them to his accommodation. Another spoke of the financial burden of using B&Bs:

Because I have a mobile down there so at least I can keep her [his child] over for a week… Before that like, I'd have to book hotels and B&Bs and all just to keep her…So it's kind of a nightmare isn't it? (Jack)

This is a key issue given that 22% of those who responded to this questionnaire confirmed they had dependent children.

4.4.6 Supports for siblings at risk of homelessness

Supports for siblings at risk of homelessness need to also be incorporated as part of an integrated support approach:

Yeah, it was a rough one. I was trying to carry me, but I was trying to carry my younger brother as well. Trying to keep him... I was more worried about him than myself. He's younger than me, you know what I mean? He's homeless as well. He's down in...a B&B, he doesn't get food down there. He doesn't get anything. It's basically, you get your room and you support yourself from there. For me, looking at him like that, kills me. That's heartbreaking. Every time I see him, it's heartbreaking. Even still to this day. Even when he's doing well. (John)

You get that gut feeling now, when you're like, it's not a good feeling. It shouldn't be like this, you know. It was weird, it was like the family, all the girls got the good end of the stick. And,

all the boys ended up on the bad end of it. My older brother ended up homeless, I ended up homeless, my younger brother ended up homeless. All the brothers ended up homeless and all the sisters ended up, on the right end of the stick, you know what I mean? It was kind of like, is this family cursed with the men or what? (John)

4.4.7 A bridge between non-formal and formal education and advocacy, advice and mentoring

One stop shops can offer bridges between non-formal and formal education, as well as accommodation advocacy, advice and mentoring:

When my father died, the council took my house off me and evicted me, it left me homeless, that's how I ended up homeless…Yeah, it was a two bedroom flat. They said I wasn't on the rent long enough to their criteria, or something. I was trying to fight the case that, if they had have counted, from when I sent the application in. I would've been there long enough. They didn't take that, they only take it from, when they get it…I was told I hadn't got a foot to stand on...There was nothing I could do. (John)

The importance of advocacy is recognised in an international context where homeless adults face discrimination from State services, for example, health services in Canada (Skosireva et al. 2014).

The folk here that I talk to they had a break up (in their) family…That's why they're homeless. (Jack)

It is to be noted here that family breakdown need not heighten risk of homelessness if State policy provides appropriate supportive systems. For example, whereas family breakdown is associated with homelessness in the US, in Belgium which has the same rate of family breakdown as the US, there are half the homelessness rates (Toro et al. 2007). This is attributed to policy choices made by government (Shinn, 2010).

One stop shops can provide emotional counselling and therapeutic supports combined with practical advocacy advice to address more complex needs and deal more holistically with multifaceted difficulties experienced by individuals:

I hit rock bottom when my Da died, that was it, I hit rock bottom. I literally hit the deck, I went where I had nothing. I quit my job, I lost my house, I was living in my sister's. I had nothing, whatsoever, absolutely nothing. I was there one day, I broke down. My younger brother was homeless at the same time. So, I was like, right, how can we sort this out? I bought a car, thinking I can get him off the street, I can get me off the street. I'll buy a car, we can stay in that, out of the cold. We got that, the police took that away. (John)

Other key features of a combined model as a One Stop Shop recognised by the Lifelong Platform Europe (2019) are:

- Continuity of support over time, flexibility of levels of support, tailored to levels of need and not simply pre-packaged programmes
- Outreach: Reaches groups missed by pre-packaged programmes, including through home visit family support outreach
- Drop-in dimensions
- Peer supports over time
- Going beyond 'passing on bits of the child' (Edwards & Downes 2013) so that referrals of families and children can take place within a team based approach in a common location to help address the fragmentation of the existing support services
- A focus on establishing relational spaces

This approach to promoting environments as relational spaces of trust can help reduce stigma in accessing, for example, mental health and emotional counselling supports and can help bridge the divide between services and groups who may tend not to access such services. Word of mouth recommendations from peers can help open alienated communities to services in a climate where there may be much distrust of 'the system'. These community-based centres offer a key opportunity to engage those more vulnerable adults with services meeting their needs, in an environment where they already feel at ease and a sense of belonging.

In communities experiencing high levels of social and economic exclusion, there needs to be neutral spaces where a range of groups can feel comfortable; professionals may not often be aware of local mindsets, territories and divisions with regard to location. Key benefits of this gateway and co-location approach for such one-stop-shops is to:

- Overcome the fragmentation of services
- Prevent individuals "falling through the net"
- Help individuals in need to build up trust
- Strengthen families and communities' role and contribution in education
- Ensure accessibility (e.g. for minority groups)
- Provide Flexibility (to select support services needed) (Psifidou 2017)

Funding for such one-stop-shops will require more joint strategic planning between DES, health and DCYA. These will provide safe, relational spaces for engagement in education and pathways to work. A policy imperative for such community-based lifelong learning centres integrated with multidisciplinary teams for complex needs such as trauma, emerges directly from the identified needs of those interviewed for this study. This complements further strategic benefits for such one-stop-shops identified internationally and in Dublin 7 (Murphy, 2018).

A national strategic commitment to provision of community lifelong learning centres combined with multidisciplinary team supports is increasingly being recognised as good practice at an EU level. The 2019 Romanian EU Presidency organised by Cedefop identified further key benefits of such centres generally.

4.5 Meeting the Holistic Educational Needs of Children and Young People in Care

With 18% of the questionnaire sample having resided as a child either in residential/foster care or with extended family, children in care are clearly overrepresented in the population of homeless men in Dublin. This brings to the fore the issue of the current lack of DES strategy for meeting the holistic educational needs of children in care. Changing schools is an issue affecting children in care generally and it was also an issue for substantial numbers of this sample, including many who were not in care. Over one third (19/50) attended more than one primary school, with almost a quarter (12/50) attending more than one secondary school. This strategic issue is also related to the previous themes of emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools and alternatives to suspension, as it has also been recognised in other research such as Cairns & Stanaway (2004) in a UK context that teachers report challenging behaviour as the biggest issue in working with children in care in a school context.

The Care Leavers Network Ireland specifically recommends a high level national working group to address the cross-departmental responsibilities of the State to children in care. Their submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills (2018) seeks a national policy for school admissions for children placed in State care, similar to that of the UK Department of Education. With 6,051 children in State care in Ireland in 2017 (Tusla & Care Leavers Network Ireland), lack of a DES strategy for meeting the holistic needs of children in care attending school is a glaring policy gap in an Irish context.

4.6 Supportive and alienating role of teachers: Relational versus Authoritarian teaching

It is of systemic concern that 38.2% (18/47 responses) of questionnaire respondents rated their relationships with secondary school teachers and staff as fair or poor. This is illustrated by interviewee accounts such as the following:

I was bullied by teachers…my mother just went up and raised hell because I was coming home in the evening like I couldn't breathe and it was all due to cause I wasn't good at science and the science teacher was putting me down in front, but it's a long, but that had an impact on me. He put me down the front…Still to this day I get (panicked) it if I think about it. I even got it there just thinking about it…it's just rare that something like that long ago like…And like we were only kids you know you don't treat kids like that. (David)

Some teachers, as well, they like to scream at fucking kids and all, and I didn't agree with it… They just like power, do you know what I mean? I could never...I still struggle with people shouting at me, or telling me what to do…I'd be ten times more likely to do something if you ask me to do it, rather than shout at me…I had a problem with going back at teachers, I just wasn't one to take people shouting at me, I didn't like it. (James)

I just lost all interest. It was more messing…It didn't seem to help that teachers used to grab me and put me sitting that way, facing the desk, the board, where all the (others) were behind me. That was in the majority of the classes. That was for about a year, I got that treatment. Then I left, just after my Junior Cert. (Aidan)

Like if I was to ask the teacher say if I was to ask you like say Ms. can I go, have free time go out, go to the library or sometime, no, you have to wait. Miss can I have the hall pass to go to the toilet? The hall pass is not there, it's gone. Here's the hall pass there, can I go to toilet? No you've to wait until the class is empty. I was always refused things I wanted to do. (Michael)

Participants also described their school punishment, as well as suspensions and exclusions from school as linked to problems relating to teacher-child relationships. These experiences are in stark contrast to the national strategic policy commitments, such as the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 key area statement includes "Relationships between teachers, children and young people and parents/carers are characterised by openness, respect and listening" (DES 2018, p.37) and Anti-Bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools (DES 2013):

"6.1.1 A cornerstone in the prevention of bullying is a positive school culture and climate that is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity and respect"

"6.1.2 Central to a positive school culture is respectful relationships across the entire school community. This encompasses…relationships between groups (e.g. teachers and pupils, parents and teachers etc.)."

This raises questions of the quality of preparation of secondary school teachers in initial teacher education with regard to teachers' conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness. This is an international problem recognised by the WHO (2012) student wellbeing questionnaire conclusion for teachers not to publicly humiliate students. This is also a policy issue raised at EU level by a range of documents on early school leaving prevention. This not to seek to place blame on teachers (Hyland 2002; Downes 2013) but rather to recognise that this is a systemic problem of developing their classroom management and communication skills, allied to adequate multidisciplinary team supports in and around schools to prevent the other system failure of such high prevalence of school suspensions and expulsions nationally and in the sample of the current study. It is also to be recognised that such authoritarian teachers found in students' accounts also previously in Dublin DEIS school contexts (Downes, Maunsell & Ivers

2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007) is from a minority of teachers and many secondary teachers also offer key supports to vulnerable students. This is evident in this research also:

There was one…he was actually sound, he was nice, and he'd sort of go out of his way to make you a cup of tea even though it wasn't allowed and he'd talk to you and all, but…My sort of thing was, he'd try to understand, I don't know if he did or not, but it's really hard to understand unless you've sort of...done it. I don't know, but then again at that age I didn't really want to listen to anyone…I don't know how many times people said to me, 'I think this is going to happen to you, you're going to end up like this,' and then I'm like, 'Yeah, whatever.' (James)

My primary school teacher was, one of the best teachers I had, to be honest with you. I liked her, she was very good… I liked primary school, secondary, I didn't like at all… I got more out of primary than I did out of secondary. (John)

4.7 Appeals for a more relevant and meaningful school curriculum

The findings illustrate appeals for more supportive schools, including more social and emotional education, relevant and meaningful drug prevention and education and life skills curriculum.

4.7.1 Mental health

There was an appeal for a broader curriculum to focus on 'a mental health class' such as SPHE, recognised as a core key competence in the revised European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning as Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence (EU Council 2018),

There should be a mental health class…Where people get to release anger. (Conor)

However, this is best done at an individual counselling level than at a whole class level.

While the SPHE curriculum is a core strategic feature of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary schools (DES 2013) "6.5.9: There are a number of curriculum components…which are particularly relevant to the prevention of bullying...The SPHE curriculum makes specific provision for exploring bullying as well as the inter-related areas of belonging and integrating, communication, conflict, friendship, personal safety and relationships.", questions arise as to the intensity of time given to this subject area and ethos in a crowded curriculum, especially at primary level in light of the national literacy and numeracy strategy (Ó'Bhreachain & O'Toole 2013). While the Wellbeing Framework commitments to SPHE are to be welcomed: "Throughout primary schools, and in post primary school up to Junior Cycle, the SPHE curriculum is implemented on a mandatory basis. There is a whole school and coordinated approach to the provision of CSPE, PE and SPHE as part of the Wellbeing Programme at Junior Cycle Level (post primary only)" (p.35), they evade the key question of curricular time to be given to this area.

4.7.2 Relevant, meaningful drug prevention education

There was a recommendation from participants that drug education be improved, with more of a focus on the consequences of using drugs and that it be delivered by people with actual life experience of addiction and its outcomes:

The Garda Siochána would come in (to the school) with their little suitcase of whatever drugs and say "this is bad"…They'd never actually said anything about heroin…They didn't explain the whole, the main big picture, the problems it can bring. The addiction side even… (or have) like drug counsellors, who've been (there), (who) know themselves. (Aidan)

They need to get someone who actually took drugs. Has done them, has went through a whole lifetime…of doing drugs, to write something…they'll tell you the consequences. (Conor).

There are international evidence-informed approaches for drug and alcohol awareness and education which could be considered, including the Planet Youth programme from Iceland (planetyouth.org).

4.7.3 Life skills and practical learning

Finally, participants discussed the issue of the curriculum not being fit for purpose in terms of life skills, some mentioned enjoying more practical subjects such as wood work and PE. They also mentioned a lack of career and guidance and support that was sufficiently tailored to their aspirations. There was a recommendation from participants that schools involve more practical life skills, including financial literacy:

It would be a lot better if they actually taught you life skills for after education… mortgages and stuff like that. (Simon)

Sleep needs, both currently and when in school, are important to consider in the context of education and wellbeing at school. There is a complete lack of a sleep health education strategy in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. This is despite that fact that this is not only a vital dimension for education and health but also a potentially malleable behaviour once awareness is raised with children, young people and parents (Hargadon & Downes 2019). Sleep deficiency is interwoven in complex ways with substance abuse (Loureiro et al., 2014) and aggressive behaviours (Lemola et al., 2012).

SECTION **5**

Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations

Recommendations for policy makers are informed by the findings from the lived experiences of these men and their reported experiences of education in Ireland. The seven key recommendations of this report are as follows:

1. Provide a distinct funding strand for adequate emotional counselling and/or therapeutic supports in and around schools to support children and young people experiencing trauma and adverse childhood experiences to support the mental health needs of these vulnerable students

For the Department of Education and Skills to provide a distinct and dedicated funding strand for adequate emotional counselling and/or therapeutic supports in and around schools to support trauma, mental health needs of vulnerable students, including students at risk of early school leaving, homelessness, family bereavement, suspension and expulsion, bullying victims and perpetrators, as well as children in care.

Doing so will need to address the significant gaps on this key issue across a range of Department of Education and Skills' National Strategies and Action Plans, such as DEIS 2005 and 2017, Wellbeing and Anti-Bullying Strategies. Strategies for prevention and early intervention should include a coordinated response to children and young people at risk of exclusion from education, both temporary and permanent, as well as early school leavers. Specialist psycho-social and emotional supports for children must be provided by appropriately trained and accredited emotional counsellors and therapists. These specialist emotional counsellors and therapists are required for this level of complexity of emotional needs and sustained supports, as part of an early intervention strategy to prevent problems amplifying.

2. Provide additional Multidisciplinary Team Supports in and around schools to provide alternatives to suspension and expulsion

For the Department of Education and Skills to:

    i)   Set a target that no school suspend or expel students but instead provide Multidisciplinary Team supports for these students.

This increased funding needs to occur at primary school level, as well as post-primary, given that many students are experiencing issues at primary school and the instance of suspension and expulsion at primary school level. This strategic acceleration of focus and investment on Multidisciplinary Team supports in and around schools as alternatives to suspension or expulsion is to recognise that the high prevalence of suspension and expulsion from school for this vulnerable group at risk of homelessness is displacing and accentuating one problem to other levels. It is vital to recognise that the current national rates of suspension and expulsion, though decreasing slightly, are unacceptable.

    ii)   Provide increased funding for Multidisciplinary Team supports in and around schools as alternatives to temporary or permanent exclusion. This should include enhanced funding for the National Council for Special Education [NCSE] to support the inclusion of children and young people at risk of marginalisation owing to behavioural or emotional needs and needing emotional counselling and/or therapy supports in and around schools.

3. Provide and lead a strategic commitment to enhanced focus on conflict resolution skills for secondary teaching in Initial Teacher Education and continuing professional development to upskill schools in responding to children's social, emotional and behavioural needs

For the Department of Education and Skills to provide and lead a strategic commitment to enhanced focus on conflict resolution skills for secondary teaching in Initial Teacher Education and continuing professional development. This should also include the development of whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing and strategic commitments to trauma-informed practice and conflict resolution skills in primary and secondary schools, particularly in areas of socio-economic marginalisation. This will require ongoing collaboration between the DES, the HEA and the Teaching Council in further developing this reform agenda across Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Providers, as part of the Teaching Council's review of ITE provision and its Cosán framework for teachers' learning.

4. Establish a distinct funding strand to develop Community Lifelong Learning Centres, integrated with Multidisciplinary Teams, as one-stop-shops for meeting diverse holistic educational needs, including for young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

For the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills to develop a distinct funding strand to develop Community Lifelong Learning Centres, integrated with Multidisciplinary Teams, as one-stop-shops for meeting diverse holistic educational needs in an integrated way, including complex needs of young people and adults who may be vulnerable and marginalised.

Benefits of these community spaces for homeless men and women include:

- Offering space to study that is not available in PMVT accommodation, in environments to provide privacy and a sense of security with flexibility as a 'drop in' space. A homeless liaison officer for public libraries to encourage people to use these services for study could also be considered in this regard
- Supporting pathways to education, training and work, including individually tailored career advice and planning
- A reduction in social isolation and expansion of social networks that bolster self-esteem and motivation, and reduce the difficulties of boredom, sadness and isolation identified by study participants
- Keep people's confidence and morale higher if not successful in gaining work through mentoring supports and also to challenge fatalism that is associated with risk behaviours generally
- Supports for siblings at risk of homelessness as part of an integrated support approach
- Opportunities to improve self-confidence, efficacy and self-care while addressing negative self-perception and low self-esteem associated with homelessness and risk behaviours.
- Family support for those experiencing homelessness, including the provision of safe, stimulating spaces for visitation, parent-child play and interaction, as well as integrated supports for family members who may also be experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness
- Availability and accessibility of advocacy, advice, emotional counselling and therapeutic supports, including screening and referral pathways for healthcare needs such as access to addiction and mental healthcare services

One pathway for such a distinct funding strand for these Community-Based One-Stop-Shops is through expanding the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Initiative, funded by the DCYA, to include

a stronger anti-poverty focus and sustained system supports approach for complex needs beyond simply pre-packaged programmes. A further rationale for these Community-Based One-Stop-Shops is to address fragmentation of service provision supports and minimise costs of increasing rents in Dublin by placing these services as co-located with a common framework of goals.

5. Establish an Interdepartmental National Expert Advisory Group to develop a National Strategic Action Plan for meeting the holistic educational needs of children and young people in care

For the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills to immediately establish an Interdepartmental National Expert Advisory Group to Develop a National Strategic Action Plan for meeting the holistic educational needs of children and young people in care.

Adults who have been children in care are clearly overrepresented in the population of homeless men in Dublin and this requires consideration as part of this national strategic response across the DCYA and DES**.** With no DES or DCYA national strategy in place for this group, there is a glaring gap in strategy at national level for schools to meet the range of holistic educational needs of children in care. The State, as corporate parent to children in care, has a responsibility to ensure that supports are prioritised to facilitate these children and young people to reach their full potential (DCYA, 2004). At present there is a clear and pressing need for the immediate establishment of an Interdepartmental National Expert Advisory Group, jointly led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills, to identify, document and provide a meaningful response and supports to the social, emotional, educational and housing needs of children and young people (aged 0-24 years) with experience of state care.

6. Increase focus on Social, Personal, Health Education (SPHE), in particular social and emotional development education, meaningful drug education and life skills

For the Department of Education and Skills to develop and devote more time on the primary and post-primary curriculum to SPHE (Social, Personal, Health Education), including an increased focus on social and emotional education, relevant, meaningful drug prevention and education and life skills. The Department of Education and Skills should request the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] to examine the experience and reality of Social, Personal, Health Education [SPHE] curriculum delivery in primary and post-primary schools across different age levels. Given the repeated appeals of this sample for these issues to be addressed in school, this must include an awareness and understanding of local and national issues related to social and emotional wellbeing, the development of meaningful life-skills and evidence-informed approaches to drug education and prevention. All actions and activities must be aligned with the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018) especially the new key competence Personal, Social and Learning to Learn, which highlights the importance of this curricular dimension internationally and aims to develop quality, future-oriented education and training tailored to students' needs.

7. Explore ways of providing accommodation for young men which addresses the heterogeneity of this group and is conducive to studying and maintaining employment, as well as the provision of education and training opportunities where appropriate

For Peter McVerry Trust to explore ways of providing accommodation for young men which addresses the heterogeneity of this group and includes provision of accommodation conducive to studying and maintaining employment, as well as education and training opportunities where appropriate. This could include accommodation with individual rooms or lower numbers of men sharing rooms in smaller units with access to internet facilities and quiet, communal spaces which could be used for studying. Particular consideration should be given to accommodation and

communal spaces for those who are co-parenting, seeking a return to education and employment, as well as those seeking support for drug and alcohol addiction.

In relation to the current study, a significant number of participants expressed an interest and commitment to further education, training and employment. It was reported that at times it was difficult to maintain employment or continue education when living in emergency and temporary accommodation owing to; a lack of availability of affordable and accessible public transport to and from work or college, a lack of dedicated spaces for study, and disruption to restful sleep owing to shared accommodation spaces and required safety checks throughout the night. Where possible, Peter McVerry Trust should consider developing temporary accommodation and supports for the diverse needs of their service users, including needs relating to education and employment. This approach could potentially be further developed to include families experiencing homelessness to cater to the educational needs of children in homeless accommodation.

5.2 Concluding remarks

This study has explored the educational experiences and future education needs of young men who are currently experiencing homelessness in Dublin. One of the key findings of this process is that this is far from a homogenous group with identical experiences, needs and plans. Rather, these men have come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and family circumstances, have had a wide range of experiences in education and training and have experienced diverse challenges, both in and outside school, which have impacted on their educational experience.

There was a distinct difference in the reported experience of participants' time at primary school. When asked about their overall experience of primary school, 72% said that it had been excellent, very good or good and 28% fair or poor. Participants cited sports, friends, play time, learning and one to one time with teachers as their favourite things about primary school. When asked about their overall experience of secondary school, however, there was a marked decline in perceptions, with 46.9% saying that it had been excellent, very good or good and 53.1% saying that it had been fair and poor. There was a similar decline evident in participants' perceptions of their learning and achievement, their ability to complete homework, their attendance, their parents' involvement and their relationships with teachers between primary and secondary school. The prevalence of suspension and expulsion from school and the extent of the practice of detention was a cause for concern.

Participants spoke eloquently of the power of teachers to significantly affect their enjoyment of school life and there is a huge opportunity to improve Initial Teacher Education to take into account perspectives expressed and gaps identified in this study in relation to conflict resolution and cultural awareness. There were also insightful and realistic suggestions made by participants with regard to the need for schools to incorporate more social and emotional education, including mental health, better and more meaningful drug education and more practical learning and life skills into the curriculum. The incidence of bullying, depression and anxiety among other experiences illustrates the need for emotional counselling, therapeutic supports and increased multidisciplinary supports in and around schools. These will help young people experiencing the adverse experiences such as trauma, abuse and family addiction mentioned by participants during these consultations. An overwhelming majority of participants, 79%, want to pursue further training and one stop shops are a key solution put forward in this report to enable these men and those like them to fulfil their potential. This study provides a first step to listening to these perspectives and aspirations with a view to instigating the change required, at both individual and systemic levels, to bring these men back into education and ensure that future young people can be better and more holistically supported.

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APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent form for questionnaire

Informed Consent

Participant Questionnaire (online- to be completed before starting questionnaire)

I.   **Research Study Title:**

Study on the Educational Experiences of Young Men aged 18-35 years Living in Homeless Accommodation in the Dublin Region

II.   **Clarification of the purpose of the research**

The DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre are conducting a study which seeks to examine the Educational Experiences of Young Men aged 18-35 years Living in Homeless Accommodation provided by the Peter McVerry Trust in the Dublin Region.

III.   **Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement**

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. It will ask you about your experience of school and education including; learning, peer relationships and teacher support. A key-worker will be available to help if required.

The questionnaire will be completed in a location convenient to you. We will not ask for your name, or any identifying information. If you would like to provide information in relation to the school/s you have attended, we will seek your permission to contact them to ask about current supports for children and young people who may be experiencing housing insecurity or at risk of homelessness. Your information will not be shared with the school.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)   Yes/No

I understand the information that has been provided   Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study   Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions   Yes/No

I understand that the questionnaire will take approximately 45 minutes to complete

                    Yes/No

I understand that if I provide the name of the school I attended, that they will be invited to participate in the research study. I know that my name or personal information will not be disclosed to them.

                    Yes/No

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.

IV.   **Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Participant confidentiality is an important issue during data collection. Participant's identity and other personal information will not be revealed published or used in other studies**.**

I understand that the research will focus on the education-related experiences of Peter McVerry Trust participants. While all participants are 18 years or older, it is important that at all times child protection and welfare is carefully considered. In the event that a disclosure of child abuse or neglect is made, including historical accounts, confidentiality will be breached in order to ensure the safety and welfare of children. Should this arise, the Child Protection Policies and Procedures of the Peter McVerry Trust will be invoked.

VI. Any other relevant information

VII.Signature: Notification of Consent

✓   I have read and understood the information in this form.

✓   My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers.

Participant:

Date:

Witness:

Appendix 2: Consent form for interviews

Informed Consent

Participant Interviews (following completion of questionnaire)

I.	**Research Study Title:**

Study on the Educational Experiences of Young Men aged 18-35 years Living in Homeless Accommodation in the Dublin Region

II.	**Clarification of the purpose of the research**

The DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre are conducting a study which seeks to examine the Educational Experiences of Young Men aged 18-35 years Living in Homeless Accommodation provided by the Peter McVerry Trust in the Dublin Region.

III.	**Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement**

You will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. This will involve a one to one conversation with a researcher including questions about your experience of school and education including; learning, peer relationships and teacher support. It is acceptable to skip questions and request breaks when required. A key-worker will be available to support you if required.

The interview will be completed in the Berkeley Street centre. We will not ask for your name, or any identifying information. If you would like to provide information in relation to the school/s you have attended, we will seek your permission to contact them to ask about current supports for children and young people who may be experiencing housing insecurity or at risk of homelessness. Your information will not be shared with the school.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes/No

I understand the information that has been provided	Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	Yes/No

I understand that the interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes	Yes/No

I understand that if I provide the name of the school I attended, that they will be invited to participate in the research study. I know that my name or personal information will not be disclosed to them.

Yes/No

IV.   **Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary**

I understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary and can withdraw at any time.

V.   **Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Participant confidentiality is an important issue during data collection. Participant's identity and other personal information will not be revealed published or used in other studies**.**

I understand that the research will focus on the education-related experiences of Peter McVerry Trust participants. While all participants are 18 years or older, it is important that at all times child protection and welfare is carefully considered. In the event that a disclosure of child abuse or neglect is made, including historical accounts, confidentiality will be breached in order to ensure the safety and welfare of children. Should this arise, the Child Protection Policies and Procedures of the Peter McVerry Trust will be invoked.

VI. Any other relevant information

VII. <u>Signature: Notification of Consent</u>

- ✓ I have read and understood the information in this form.

- ✓   My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers.

Participant:

Date:

Witness (optional and with consent of participant):

Appendix 3: Plain English Statement

The DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre are conducting a study which seeks to examine the Educational Experiences of Young Men aged 18-35 years Living in Homeless Accommodation provided by the Peter McVerry Trust in the Dublin Region. The study will involve a number of stakeholders including; Peter McVerry Trust participants, schools and agencies that support participants who are currently homeless and those at risk of homelessness in the Dublin area.

This study is funded by the Peter McVerry Trust and has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University.

What is this Project about?

The aim of this study is to provide insights into the educational history and experiences of young men aged 18-35 years who are experiencing homelessness. The study will consider the men's experience of education and the availability of supports to assist in educational access and participation during formal schooling. The study will also investigate what educational supports are currently in risk for young people who may be at risk of homelessness.

What do we hope to achieve?
The study will investigate the experiences of men experiencing homelessness in order to provide clear recommendations and achievable solutions that can support educational access and participation for young people who may be at risk of homelessness

What do we want you to do?
With support from your key worker, we would like to invite you to complete an anonymous online questionnaire and potentially participate in a follow up interview that will ask you about your experiences of Primary and Secondary School.

As part of the questionnaire and interview, you may wish to provide the names of the schools that you attended. The research team will then invite the School Principal to participate in an interview that asks about current provision and support for children experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. We will not share your personal information with the school.

Ethical Considerations for Recruitment

This study will be guided by a client centred approach which places the participant at the centre of the research. This approach affords participants the opportunity to negotiate ongoing consent and to explain how best they can be supported before, during and after the interview process.

The researchers will work with key support workers with agencies to identify participants that might be willing to participate in the research following the protocol identified above. The researchers are seeking to conduct the interviews in a supportive environment which will facilitate the needs of the participants.

What do I do next?

If you think that you might be able interested in taking part in this research but still have some questions, please contact:

Sarah Murphy

Independent Research Consultant and Research Associate, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Dublin City University

Email: sarahclairemurphy@gmail.com/ Tel: 087 **** ***

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

The online questionnaire can be accessed at this link: Peter McVerry Trust Educational Experiences Questionnaire

Educational Attainment in Young Homeless Men Questionnaire

The aim of this study is to provide an understanding of the educational experiences of young men aged 18-35 years who are living in accommodation provided by the Peter McVerry Trust. This questionnaire will ask about your personal experience of education and what supports, if any, were provided to assist you, in both primary and secondary education.

Your participation is voluntary, and no personal or identifying information will be used in the report. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I understand that this questionnaire is part of a study that looks at the school experiences of young men aged 18-35 years who are living in accommodation provided by the Peter McVerry Trust. I have been provided with and signed an 'informed consent' form and I know that participation in this research project is completely voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

Demographic Information

2. What is your year of birth? *i.e. 1980*
   _____

3. Where were you born? (Town, County). *i.e. Ballymun, Dublin*
   _____

4. Who did you live with as a child? (birth to 18 years) *Tick all that apply.*
   - ☐ Mother only
   - ☐ Father only
   - ☐ Mother and Father
   - ☐ Grandparents
   - ☐ Extended family i.e. Aunts and Uncles
   - ☐ Residential Care
   - ☐ Other: _____

5. Comment:
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Do you have any brothers or sisters, including half and step-siblings?
   _____

7. At what age did you first experience homelessness?
   _____

8. Where are you currently living?
   _____

9. How long have you been living in this accommodation?

_____

10. What is your ethnic or cultural background? *Tick all that apply.*
    ☐ Irish
    ☐ Irish Traveller
    ☐ English/Welsh/Scottish/British
    ☐ Any other White background
    ☐ Nigerian
    ☐ Somalian
    ☐ Any other Black African background
    ☐ Caribbean
    ☐ Any other Black non-African background
    ☐ Chinese
    ☐ Indian
    ☐ Pakistani
    ☐ Any other East or South East Asian Background
    ☐ Other: _____

11. What is your current marital status? *Tick all that apply*
    ☐ Single/Never Married
    ☐ Separated/Divorced
    ☐ Married
    ☐ Widowed
    ☐ In a long term partnership
    ☐ Other: _____

12. Do you have any dependent children? (birth to 18 years) *Tick all that apply*
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

13. Please specify the number of children

_____

14. How old were you when you had your first child?

_____

15. Are you currently employed or taking part in education or training? *Tick all that apply*
    ☐ I am not currently employed
    ☐ I have a part-time job
    ☐ I have a full-time job
    ☐ I am a student or taking part in a work training programme
    ☐ Other: _____

16. How would you describe your current physical health? *Mark only one.*
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Other: _____

17. How would you describe your current mental health and wellbeing? *Mark only one*
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Other: _____

18. Would you like to provide any additional information in relation to your health and wellbeing?
_____
_____
_____
_____

19. Do you have any of the following conditions? *Tick all that apply*

	Yes, with a medical diagnosis	Yes, but not formally diagnosed	No	Prefer not to say
Asthma	☐	☐	☐	☐
Diabetes	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sensory impairment including blindness, deafness visual or hearing impairment (eg. speech impediment)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Condition that limits basic physical activity including; walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drug and/or alcohol withdrawal symptoms	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning difficulty or intellectual difficulty i.e. Dyslexia	☐	☐	☐	☐
Personality Disorder	☐	☐	☐	☐
Behavioural or emotional condition. i.e. ADHD, anxiety, depression	☐	☐	☐	☐
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	☐	☐	☐	☐
Insomnia	☐	☐	☐	☐
Eating disorder	☐	☐	☐	☐

Bi-polar Disorder	☐	☐	☐	☐
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other physical illness or condition	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other mental health difficulty	☐	☐	☐	☐

20. Comment

_____
_____
_____
_____

21. At what age were you diagnosed with this difficulty/difficulties?

_____
_____
_____
_____

22. What supports, if any are you currently receiving for any of the above conditions?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Educational Experiences

This section asks you to think about your experience of education and schooling.

23. What is the highest level of education you have completed? *Mark only one.*
    ☐ Primary School
    ☐ Junior Certificate or equivalent
    ☐ Leaving Certificate or equivalent
    ☐ Post Leaving Certificate Course (PLC)
    ☐ Youth Reach or out of school provision
    ☐ Vocational Training such as a Community Employment (CE) Scheme, Fás Course or Tús work placement
    ☐ Some college
    ☐ A higher diploma
    ☐ Degree
    ☐ Postgraduate
    ☐ Other: _____

24. At what age did you complete school/full-time education?

_____

25. If you left school before completing your Leaving Certificate or equivalent, what would you describe as the main reason for early school leaving? *Tick all that apply.*
    ☐ I did not leave school early
    ☐ Lack of teacher support
    ☐ Exclusion from school (not permitted to return for Leaving Certificate)

☐ Lack of a school place in my local community

☐ Family difficulties that meant I had to stay at home

☐ I had an illness that meant I could not attend school

☐ I had difficulty with learning in the school environment

☐ I left school to take up paid employment

☐ I experienced bullying or social isolation in school

☐ Other: _____

26. If there is another reason for early school leaving, please describe below
_____
_____
_____
_____

27. Did you have any gaps in your education, for example, a time when you were not in school for more than a month? If so, can you please describe below?

_____
_____
_____
_____

28. How many schools have you attended? *Tick all that apply.*

	1 school	2 schools	3 schools	4 or more schools
Primary School	☐	☐	☐	☐
Secondary School	☐	☐	☐	☐
Higher or Further Education	☐	☐	☐	☐

29. What was your reason for changing schools (Primary, Secondary or Higher Education)?
_____
_____
_____
_____

30. Have you ever been excluded from school? *Mark only one*

☐No

☐Yes, a temporary exclusion (suspension)

☐Yes, multiple or 'rolling' temporary exclusions/suspensions

☐Yes, a permanent exclusion (expelled)

☐Other: _____

31. Comment:
_____
_____
_____
_____

32. At what age were you excluded from school? *(temporary or permanent)*

_____

33. If yes, please indicate the reasons for temporary or permanent exclusion. *Tick all that apply*
    ☐ Behavioural difficulties (non-violent)
    ☐ Violence towards others
    ☐ Threatening to inflict harm on another person
    ☐ Possession of alcohol
    ☐ Possession of drugs
    ☐ Illegal activity
    ☐ Bullying
    ☐ Difficult relationships with teachers
    ☐ Vandalism or destruction of school property
    ☐ Possession of a weapon
    ☐ Failure to complete school work
    ☐ Poor attendance
    ☐ Other: _____

34. If there is another reason, please describe

_____

35. Did you have access to any of the following supports in Primary or Secondary School? *Tick all that apply.*

	No	Yes, in Primary School	Yes, in Secondary School	Don't know
Breakfast Clubs	☐	☐	☐	☐
School Meals	☐	☐	☐	☐
After-School Activities (free)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Homework Clubs	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assistance with School Uniforms	☐	☐	☐	☐
Free school books or book lending scheme	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support for children with special needs	☐	☐	☐	☐
School counsellor	☐	☐	☐	☐
Career Guidance Teacher	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parenting Support and/or programmes	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support for mental health i.e. psychologist or access to mental health services	☐	☐	☐	☐
Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	☐	☐	☐	☐
School Completion Programme	☐	☐	☐	☐

36. Were there any other supports available in your Primary or Secondary School?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Experience of Primary School

In this section, we ask you to think about your experience of Primary School education.

37. How would you describe your overall experience of Primary School? *Mark only one*

☐ Excellent
☐ Very good
☐ Good
☐ Fair
☐ Poor

38. What was your favourite thing about Primary School?

_____
_____
_____
_____

39. What was your least favourite thing about Primary School?

_____
_____
_____
_____

40. How would you describe your learning and achievement in Primary School? *Mark only one*

Excellent
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
Poor

41. Additional comments?

_____
_____
_____
_____

42. How was your ability to complete homework? *Mark only one*
Excellent
☐1
☐2
☐3
☐4
☐5
Poor

43. Who, if anyone, helped you with homework?
_____

44. Overall, how was your school attendance in Primary School? *Mark only one*
☐Perfect attendance, I never missed school
☐I missed one or two days a term
☐I missed school once a month
☐I missed school weekly
☐I missed school multiple times a week
☐Other: _____

45. When you did not attend primary school, what were the main reasons? *Tick all that apply*
☐Illness
☐Difficulty getting to school on time
☐Transport problems or distance from home
☐I did not want to go
☐Other: _____

46. How often did your parents/guardians attend parent-teacher meetings at your Primary School?
Mark only one.
☐ Attended every meeting
☐Most of the meetings
☐About half
☐Less than half
☐Never

47. How would you describe your relationships with your classmates and peer group in Primary School? *Mark only one.*
Excellent
☐1
☐2
☐3
☐4
☐5
Poor

48. How many close friends did you have in Primary School? *Mark only one.*
    None
    ☐ 1
    ☐ 2
    ☐ 3
    ☐ 4
    ☐ 5 or more

49. Did you see your 'school' friends outside of school hours while attending primary school? *Mark only one.*
    ☐ A couple of times a week
    ☐ Once a week
    ☐ Monthly
    ☐ Rarely
    ☐ Never

50. In Primary School, did you ever experience any of the following? *Tick all that apply.*

	Almost every day	Once a week	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Physical bullying	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Verbal abuse (i.e. name calling)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Taking/damaging of personal belongings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Isolation or feelings of being 'left out'	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gossip, rumour spreading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Threatened or forced to do things you did not want to do	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Detention by a teacher during break times or after-school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Embarrassed by a teacher or trusted adult	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Unfair criticism	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

51. Comment:
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

52. Overall, how would you rate your relationship with teachers and school staff in Primary School? *Mark only one.*

Excellent

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Poor

53. Did you have a favourite teacher in Primary School? *Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

54. What made this person memorable?

_____
_____
_____
_____

55. How would this teacher have described you as a child?

_____
_____
_____
_____

56. When you were in Primary School, what did you want to be when you 'grew up'?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Secondary Education

These are the same questions, but for Secondary School. They are asked again, because for many people, their experiences of Primary and Secondary School can be quite different. We would like to know if this was your experience.

57. How would you describe your overall experience of Secondary School? *Mark only one.*

☐ Excellent

☐ Very good

☐ Good

☐ Fair

☐ Poor

58. What was your favourite thing, if any, about Secondary School?

_____
_____
_____
_____

59. What was your least favourite thing about Secondary School?

_____
_____
_____
_____

60. How would you describe your learning and achievement in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*
Excellent

☐1

☐2

☐3

☐4

☐5
Poor

61. Comment:

_____
_____
_____
_____

62. How important did you consider academic achievement in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*
Extremely important

☐1

☐2

☐3

☐4

☐5
Not important at all

63. How was your ability to complete homework? *Mark only one.*
Excellent

☐1

☐2

☐3

☐4

☐5
Poor

64. Who, if anyone, helped you with homework?

_____

65. Were you involved in any extra-curricular activities in school or local community? i.e. sports clubs

_____

66. Overall, how was your school attendance in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*
    ☐ Perfect attendance, I never missed school
    ☐ I missed one or two days a term
    ☐ I missed school once a month
    ☐ I missed school weekly
    ☐ I missed school multiple times a week
    ☐ Other: _____

67. When you did not attend school, what were the main reasons? *Tick all that apply.*
    ☐ Illness
    ☐ Difficulty getting to school on time
    ☐ Transport problems or distance from home
    ☐ I did not want to go
    ☐ Other: _____

68. How would you describe your health and wellbeing when you were in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*
    Excellent
    ☐ 1
    ☐ 2
    ☐ 3
    ☐ 4
    ☐ 5
    Poor

69. During your time in Secondary School did you experience any of the following? *Tick all that apply.*

	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Poor physical health (i.e. frequent illness)	☐	☐	☐
Depression or low mood	☐	☐	☐
Anxiety	☐	☐	☐
Difficulty concentrating	☐	☐	☐
Feelings of isolation or loneliness	☐	☐	☐
Traumatic childhood experiences including parental separation, bereavement or trauma	☐	☐	☐
Bullying	☐	☐	☐
Learning difficulties	☐	☐	☐

70. Other:
    _____

71. If yes, how did these impact on your school experience?

_____
_____
_____
_____

72. How often did your parents/guardians attend parent-teacher meetings at your Secondary School? *Mark only one.*

☐ Attended every meeting

☐ Most of the meetings

☐ About half

☐ Less than half

☐ Never

73. How would you describe your relationships with your classmates and peer group in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*

Excellent

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Poor

74. How many close friends did you have in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*

☐ None

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5 or more

75. Did you see your 'school' friends outside of school hours while attending Secondary School? *Mark only one.*

☐ A couple of times a week

☐ Once a week

☐ Monthly

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

76. In Secondary School, did you ever experience any of the following? *Tick all that apply.*

	Almost every day	Once a week	Some-times	Rarely	Never
Physical bullying	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Verbal abuse (i.e. name calling)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abuse on social media including text messaging	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Taking/damaging of personal belong-ings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sexual harassment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Isolation or feelings of being 'left-out'	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gossip, rumour spreading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Threatened or forced to do things you did not want to do	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Embarrassment because of a teacher or trusted adult	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Unfair criticism	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exclusion from class activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
After-school detention	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

77. Overall, how would you rate your relationship with teachers and school staff in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*
Excellent
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
Poor

78. Did you have a favourite teacher in Secondary School? *Mark only one.*
☐ Yes
☐ No

79. What made this teacher memorable?
_____
_____
_____
_____

80. When in Secondary School were you involved in any sports or community groups within your school or local community?

_____
_____
_____
_____

81. What were your aspirations for further study or paid work when you were in Secondary School?

_____
_____
_____
_____

82. Do you believe Secondary School prepared you for further education and/or paid work? *Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

83. Please explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____

84. In your opinion, what skills, training or experiences should secondary schools offer young people to prepare them for paid employment or further education?

_____
_____
_____
_____

85. When in Secondary School (between 13 years and 17 years), did you have experience of taking any of the following substances: *Tick all that apply.*

	No	Yes, but infrequently (less than once a month)	Yes, weekly	Yes, everyday
Alcohol	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tobacco	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cannabis	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anabolic Steroids	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amphetamines (i.e. 'uppers' such as speed)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Solvents and inhalants (i.e. poppers)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Heroin	☐	☐	☐	☐
Psychoactives (i.e. LSD/Magic mushrooms)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ecstasy/MDMA	☐	☐	☐	☐

Sedatives or tranquilizers (i.e. Xanax, Valium)	☐	☐	☐	☐
ADHD medication (i.e. Ritalin or Concerta)	☐	☐	☐	☐

86. Did your Secondary School offer support, advice or education in relation to drug use and/or addiction? *Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

87. Do you have any advice to give to schools about educating children about drug use and/or addiction?

_____
_____
_____
_____

88. When in Secondary School, did you have any experience of the juvenile justice system? This could include a caution, arrest or detention? *Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other _____

89. Comment:

_____
_____
_____
_____

90. If yes, did this have an impact on your school experience? *Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

91. What advice would you offer to your 14 year-old self in terms of Secondary School experiences? This can be anything, i.e. learning, relationships or participation in sports.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Further Education and Employment Aspirations

We would be most grateful if you would tell us about your future aspirations for employment or education.

92. Are you interested in completing further education or training? *Mark only one.*

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

93. What areas would you like to receive professional training or education in?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

94. What, if any, are the barriers to your future participation in education or employment?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

95. What education or work opportunity would you like to see yourself doing in five-years' time?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

96. What practical supports do you need to reach this goal?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

97. What advice would you give the government and key decision makers to improve the lives of young men who are experiencing homelessness?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Thank you!

We are extremely grateful for your time and input. We will make the findings of the questionnaires available to you when it is completed. We will explain the key findings, and would be interested to hear your views and opinions.

98. Would you be interested in speaking with one of the research team about your experience of education? *Mark only one.*

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

99. If you are interested, please let your key-worker know. With your permission, your key-worker will give us your details so that we can make contact with you to let you know more about the interview i.e. how long the interview takes and what type of questions we would ask about your school experience.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix 5: Interview schedule

> **Interview schedule:**
>
> **Research Study on the educational experiences of young men aged 18-35 years currently living in Peter McVerry Trust supported accommodation**

Researchers:
Prof. Paul Downes, Associate Professor and Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Dublin City University

Ms. Sarah Murphy, Independent Research Consultant and Research Associate with the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Dublin City University
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Interviews will last 30-40 minutes approximately. Participants can change their minds regarding participation at any stage during the interview. It is also acceptable to pass on questions and to request breaks should they be required.

Introduction:

Ensure signed written consent form completed.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today, as you know, we are carrying out some research for the Peter McVerry Trust into the experiences of young men who are currently experiencing homelessness. In particular, this study looks at experiences of school and education, as recent research with homeless families in Dublin suggests that schools and educational experiences can be supportive for young people who are at risk of, or who are experiencing homelessness.

We have had really helpful feedback from the questionnaire, but individual stories and experiences can be extremely important to tell people what is needed to support young men homelessness. Today, I would like to ask you a little bit about your experience of school and education, as well as the reality of homelessness for young men. I would also like to know what advice you would give for supporting young men who may be experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

You can stop the interview at any time, and if you decide you do not want to take part anymore, that is also ok. I record the interview so that I can listen properly to your story, and the interview will then be written up, and if you like, I can give you a copy. None of your private information will be shared, and all of your contributions will be anonymous. We will never use your name or details, or any information that might identify you.

Research questions

1. **Can you tell me a little bit about where you are currently living, and perhaps a little bit about your own experience of living in temporary or emergency accommodation?**

Prompts:

- How long have you been living there?

- How has it been for you?

- Have you stayed in any other temporary or emergency accommodation before this?

- Is this your first experience of homelessness? How long have you been homeless for?

- Can you tell me about a typical day for you - prompts in terms of waking, mealtimes, routines, spaces for rest and relaxation?

- And how is your current health - has this experience of homelessness impacted on your physical health or emotional wellbeing? Are there any supports available to you through the Peter McVerry Trust to support this?

2. **If you don't mind me asking, can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?**

- Did you grow up in Dublin?

- Family - brothers and sisters - would you say that you currently have a close relationship with your family?

- Do you have any children of your own? – prompt how many, age of children, opportunities for access? Spaces and places to meet with them (i.e. play centres, family rooms etc.)

- Interests or hobbies (as a child or currently)

- Where did you attend school - was that within your local community?

- Would you say that you had a happy childhood?

- Are there any happy memories or special days that stand out - what made them special?

We know that the main cause of homelessness is a lack of social and affordable housing, and that experiences of poverty and financial strain can put families and individuals at risk of homelessness. Would you say that as a child you experienced poverty? In what way? How did this have an impact on your childhood and your access to secure housing?

3. **As I mentioned, this study is interested in experiences of education, can you tell me a little bit about your own experience of education.**

- Where did you go to school?

- Leaving age

- Qualification level

- Overall experience- would you say you liked school? – pre-school (if attended), primary and secondary

Themes for each one (as below - but more open ended than the questionnaire)

- Teacher-child relationships (probe - availability of a trusted adult in school)

- Peer relationships - friendships etc (probe bullying, exclusion etc)

- Academic Learning and Support – any learning difficulties

- School participation and extracurricular activities and community involvement (attendance)

- Aspirations and goals while in school

4. **As I mentioned, a recent study with children who are homeless in Dublin found that school can be a very important place for children experiencing the stress and sadness of living in emergency accommodation. Would you say that your school was a supportive place for you?**

Prompts - in what way?

- In the questionnaires, some men felt that school did not give them enough skills for the 'real-world' in terms of future jobs such as 'a trade' or even just skills to access healthcare, or social welfare supports? What do you think?

- Some also mentioned that there was not enough proper advice and support about drugs and relationships. What do you think? When you were at school, did you us alcohol, tobacco or drugs? (Prompt to specify age and type) - was there any education or awareness about this in your school?

- Did they have any after-school or homework clubs - and who would help you with your homework? Do you think homework clubs are a good idea?

- Did your school offer free school meals? Do you think this is a good idea for schools to provide children with breakfast clubs and a school lunch?

- Did you have a teacher or an adult who you could trust when you were in school?

- Who were the people that you could talk to if you were stressed or needed help in school?

- Apart from teaching and exams, what do you think schools should offer young people who may be experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness?

- Did you access any school-based supports? Prompts: Homework clubs, breakfast clubs, school meals, CAMHS, career guidance, School Completion Programme, after school activities

- Were you ever suspended or expelled from school? If so, why?

- Did you ever experience bullying?

A School for Us - If we think about a school that supports young people who might be currently or later at risk of homelessness, what would that school have? (use a print out of the 'school picture' and scribe the ideas around it). Prompts - Transport to and from school; school meals; wellbeing, self-care and independence; teacher/educational support; after-school provision/summer camps; extra-curricular activities; homework clubs; support staff/services; community spaces; play, recreation and learning opportunities.

5. **Looking forward, say, in the next five years - tell me what you want and see for yourself in terms of work or education or housing. And if the right supports were there in terms of a home, and support- what would you like to be doing?**

- Where would you like to be in five years' time? What would you like to be doing? Do you need any supports to achieve this?

- Do you have any interest in taking part in training now or in the future? (training/ employment)

- Do you have any advice for a young person in school now?

- Do you have any advice for the government to improve the lives of young men experiencing homelessness?

- Do you have anything else you would like to say about your experience at school or your experience of homelessness?

Peter McVerry Trust

Opening doors for
homeless people